



Spirits of the Far Place

By Mikael Raaterova



I always seek to portray Glorantha as a very magical place, filled with wonder and wrought with danger. I believe that such magic should manifest not only in major campaign events but also in the everyday life of inhabitants and in the landscape itself. In my own campaign, set near Alda Chur in the Vantaros tribal lands of Far Point, there are spirits and elemental forces everywhere — spirits of field and forest, tula and town, glade and glen, gors and gallt, river and road, tree and trod, boundary and bawn, brook and bridge, hearth and home. Some of these spirits are approachable and even friendly, many are neutral or disinterested in human affairs, and a few are extremely dangerous or utterly capricious. Even if Grandfather Genert is dead, his many descendants survive and prosper.

These spirits have inhabited the land far, far longer than the human tribes that cling so precariously to Snakepipe's Edge. They are complex creatures with their own motivations, loyalties and goals. Spirits should *never* be portrayed as winsome or cute, not even **Windflowers** (who can cause extreme olfactory nausea). They can be extremely foul-tempered, and they have *long* memories — they never forget grievances or insults.

The numerous immortal spirits of Far Point are not presented here merely to be summoned or called to perform antics on behalf of player characters, but rather to create a backdrop of wonder and metaphysical awe, the feeling of a world saturated with the fantastic — not on an epic level, but in a way that is both low-key and 'realistic'.

Spirits of the Stead

Stead Sylphs, sometimes called Hearth Maidens or Youngest Daughters, protect a stead from stray draughts and cold breezes, and keep the air inside fresh and clear. They draw smoke from a fire up into the rafters, clearing the air for those below. Once out of harm's way, the smoke is woven into tiny rainbow-sheened balls of ash. Normally, such balls are deposited gently in the hearth, but if the Stead Sylph has been slighted in any way she will sling them at someone's head, (usually an important guest) in a way designed to maximise embarrassment for the hosts. In the western gors that border upon Snakepipe Hollow, smoke billowing above a stead might draw chaos across a great distance, so the Far Walkers greatly honour the stead sylph and the blessings that she brings.

The **Hearthgnome**, a servant of Mahome, is a busy fellow, working ceaselessly to keep the stead free from vermin and cobwebs. An important member of the household, he strives to keep all who dwell in a stead happy and harmonious. Families honour the hearthgnome lest they be torn apart by kinstribe. 'The peace of the hearthgnome' becomes particularly important during Dark Season, when a family may be trapped inside together for long weeks at a time.

Occasionally a bright trinket that the gnome fancies will disappear. This is his right as protector of the household. Complaining about it will only insult his pride, and can sometimes result in him deserting a stead. If you insult him in lesser ways, you may find needles in your blanket or your favourite cuk losing tail feathers.

Whenever a meal is eaten in the house, some must be shared with both the hearthgnome and the stead sylph, for they are also family members. If they are passed over, you can be sure that everyone will know about it.

Happy is the family that has **Weed Reapers** living under its fields. Reapers guarantee abundant, golden crops. These gnomes of Barntar should be given small sickles every Sea Season (following Plough Day) to allow them to get rid of weeds. Erecting a warden pole as a scarecrow will please them as well, for they worry about being carried off by birds.

Barntar will often bless a devout initiate with a family of Reapers. When such spirits are noticed at work in a field, the farmer must sacrifice the blood of a newborn calf before the next Sea Season has passed. He should then bury the calf's bones and the kettle used to catch its blood in the middle of the field, so that the hard-working gnomes can build their home therein. Reapers will flee a field if these sacrificial bones are ever disturbed. If insulted, they can curse a stead to barrenness. Reapers maintain an ancient enmity with fighting cuks, so those most favoured of birds must be kept well away from crop lands. And if you see strange lights in the fields at night, it's probably just the Reapers having a feast.

A **Well Toad** also brings great blessings to any stead it chooses as a home. It will keep well water fresh and clear, and can prevent a well from drying out. As an earth spirit, it shares the family trait of hoarding shiny oddments. Gifting it with an occasional trinket charged with magic points will let it know it is appreciated. Well Toads should also be regularly offered wine, mead or fine beer.

These shy though friendly creatures are favoured servants of both Ernalda and Minlister. At the narrator's discretion, a Well Toad may be privy to minor chthonian secrets.

A **Stead Warden** is a family or bloodline wyter. It may be an ancestral spirit, a sylph or a gnome. A Warden obtains its power and purpose from the stead's inhabitants, and so ceremonies in its honour are held each season, with burnt offerings, incense, libations and dancing. A full member of the household, the Stead Warden should be treated as an elder brother or sister, with all of the warmth and respect due to senior kin. In its turn, the spirit will keep a stead free from unwelcome visitors, untimely deaths and disease.

A Stead Warden usually dwells within some object of value hung on a wall or buried under the Hearth Stone. Such an object might be a skull (either animal or human), a weapon, shield, horseshoe, helm, distaff, musical instrument, or specially crafted hanging. Whenever fortune permits, a generous feast is held in the Warden's honour, and it is offered blood and ritual sacrifice, as well as the emotional outpourings and songs of the celebrants.

You can never have too many Guardians for a stead, and none will have stronger motivations than ancestors of your own blood. If you desire that such spirits watch over a stead, bury a ritual object associated with an ancestor under the hearth, or hang it upon a wall. And if you want ancestors to watch over your children, burn or bury an offering to them together with either a lock of the child's hair or a few drops of its blood.

The **Barngnome**, lesser cousin of the Hearthgnome and a servant of Barntar, is an invaluable asset when it comes to keeping your animals groomed and well-tended and your barn free

from vermin. No family wants the barn gnome to desert the stead, which it is more prone to do than the Hearth gnome — finicky bastard that he is. Working hard keeps him hungry, so daily offerings of sweetmeats, honey, butter or beer are essential. An occasional offering of good leather allows him to mend his worn-out boots.

Sometimes a Barn gnome will take the horses for a magical ride, leaving them exhausted the next day. And if the sheep or cows are all suddenly dry one morning, it's because the barn gnome felt thirsty. However, if you complain he'll hamstring your animals and leave!

The common enemies of both gnomes and stead sylph are the **Dust Rats** — the first tendrils of death and decay to creep into the house.

Spirits of the Storm Tribe

Breath takers are to be feared. They steal your breath and leave you a feeble weakling with the sparkle of life gone from your eyes. They suck the very life from your lungs, and they grow stronger with every breath they steal. Their approach is heralded by an eerie hissing in the wind. It is whispered that Breath takers sometimes follow Gagarth on his Wild Hunt. When manifest they resemble emaciated old men with pale translucent skin.

The Trackless Path is a daughter of Iphara, the goddess of fog. This deceitful spirit creeps forth from rivers and lakes to shroud the land in a thick, bewildering shroud of mist. Travellers easily become lost in this shroud, confused by illusions and strange echoes, and are often led to a watery grave. There the Trackless Path gleefully feasts on their spirits.

Winter Knives are children of Valind, and guardians of the palace of Inora the White Princess. Winter Knives stab you with their ice-cold nails, leaving you chilled to the bone and unable to move. They are reluctant to leave their wintry abodes, so summoning is difficult. If you ever have the ill fortune of meeting one face to face, you'll see a demonic maiden clad in swirls of blindingly snow-white mists with long sharp razors for fingers. If you survive an encounter with Winter Knives, their stab wounds will leave permanent white blotches on your skin.

Howlers never pass unnoticed. Their cries are so horrible that you can be temporarily incapacitated, able to do nothing but cover your ears against the fury. A close passage may leave you temporarily or even permanently deaf. They travel within storms and so are easily summoned in Storm or Dark Season. Some gods claim that howlers are heralds of Urox the Storm Bull. Among the Vantaros tribe they have been summoned on occasion as guardians of sacred sites.

Wind Pipers are the treacherous kin of Howlers. They are associated with the Wild Hunt, and seem to take great joy in luring travellers from their path with beautiful hypnotic song. Once entranced, victims are led by this magical keening straight into the jaws of Gagarth the Wild Hunter.

Puppeteers are playfully malevolent spirits who delight in grabbing victims and shaking them around. Trying to do anything else than break free when attacked by a puppeteer is almost

impossible. Once you do escape you'll have ugly blue-black bruises for weeks. Bound puppeteers can be useful for getting apples or trollkin out of trees.

Windflowers are gentle sylphs who emit the smell of flowers or other fragrances of the forest. Gentle Voria is very fond of these beloved spirits, as are her followers.

Stinkers are the malodorous kin of Windflowers and 'children' of Euralm the Trickster. An Orlanthi myth describes how Euralm once tricked innocent Voria to share the secret of the Windflowers. The Spring Maiden deeply regretted this when she came aware of how the Trickster had perverted her secret. Given how air-sensitive Orlanthi are, it's easy to see why Stinkers are considered bad omens.

Whirlers are children of Vadrus, feared for the wide-area havoc they can wreak. Large whirlers might devastate large areas of the countryside, so devotees of Orlanth and his kin should be careful when summoning or trying to command them. Miniature whirlers are occasionally bound into butter churns.

Cloud Horses are airy steeds that cavort and frolic in the storm clouds when not pulling the chariot of their Great Lord. These steeds have never been tamed, but will occasionally bend to the command of a devotee of Orlanth or Vanganth or Elmal. They will transport the summoner to his chosen destination, but the ride will not be a gentle one. In fact, the rider will most certainly have lots of opportunities to exercise his horsemanship in order to keep his seat. Though they may look like horses, their skin is the colour of thunder and it ripples and whirls like clouds in storm.

Black Thunderbird is the Wrath of Orlanth and one of the most fearsome of his sons. 'Its voice is the thunderclap and its wings beat rolling thunder. Its glance is lightning. It flies to cleanse the world ... to wrench from the throats of those it passes over howls of desperate joy, or terror.' (J. Delano, *Ghostdancing* #6). The ritual to summon Black Thunderbird is dangerous and costly. It is only ever performed by a group of at least seven Storm Voices or Wind Lords in order to right some major wrong. When summoned, the Black Thunderbird always appears out of the north as a thin black line upon the horizon, quickly filling the sky to manifest as a swiftly moving, violent storm of hail and icy cold hurricane winds.

The Wrath Bird was once unleashed upon Snakepipe Hollow in the second Chaos Breaking. The Unlife of the Predark was too firmly entrenched to be eradicated, but the summoning and its circumstance are recorded in both *Eiricsaga* and the *TarosKarla*.

Black Thunderbird normally resides amidst the mountain peaks of Dagori Inkarth to the north of the Cholanti River, but occasionally travels south into Far Point of its own accord.

Spirits of the Earth Tribe

Emerald Serpents are servants of Ernalda, Ty Kora Tek and Asrelia. They are the keepers of the Secrets and Mysteries of the Earth, Life and Death, and can be found in deep mountain caves and abandoned Youf ruins. These serpent spirits can sometimes be persuaded to share

their knowledge if presented with an emerald or other precious stone, and if sufficiently flattered by the supplicant. In accordance with Maximum Game Fun (MGF), their answers should be cryptic oracles to enhance the game rather than spoilers to ruin the fun. (And while Emerald Serpents don't know the God Learner Secret, some of them do know a lot about the Youf, those mysterious denizens of the Empire that once flourished where the wilderness of Far Point now stands).

Keepers are servants of Asrelia who can be summoned to hide an object within the earth. A sow's rib bone must be broken during the summoning. One part of the bone is taken by the Keeper and the other is kept by the summoner. This bone is used in the invocation needed to persuade the spirit to return the object. Because Keepers are gnomish by nature, the object does not have to be returned at the place where the summoning was performed. A Keeper will demand some offering in return for its service — the body of a small animal placed within the earth is usually enough.

Drunkards are mischievous little bastard children of Minlister and Grape Woman who delight in causing headaches and strange abdominal rumblings the day after the victim overindulges in alcoholic beverages. Because they sneak into caskets and bottles during the fermenting process, they can possess the drinker when he or she imbibes them. The Hangover is the process of (unconsciously) entering spiritual combat with the bubbly bastards. The process of exorcism is aided greatly by pure water and salt.

Spirits of the Animal Tribes

Animal Avatars, **Power Animals** and **Totem Spirits** are the spiritual epitomes of their respective animals. Animal spirits have a very special place in the spiritual and ritual life of Far Point Orlanthi. This is in part because of the widespread worship of Odayla the Hunter (who teaches worshippers to awaken their animal souls) and in part because of the heroquest of the Animal Twins, who forged the Elemental Covenant between the human and animal tribes of the land. In a wilderness where temples and formally trained priests are very rare, **Animal Gifts** are widely sought and greatly respected.

When properly summoned with correct ritual and appropriate respect, animal avatars may grant a specific temporary gift. Eagle can grant the charisma of Leadership, Griffin the surety of Battle Command, Stag the hidden knowledge of Forestways. Serpent may share a secret, Bearded Raven speak of a death, Marten whisper the magic of Snow Cloak, Bear speak of an initiation secret, Auroch grant Virility, Viper share the Poison Strike, Yinkin or Wolf the Hunters Boon, Brother Dog tenacity and resilience, Hare the Great Leap and Jumping Mouse a vision of the Sacred Mountains. More often however, the animal powers will manifest spontaneously to those they deem worthy, appearing to offer a gift or demand a service of those who share their wilderness. Hunters will often encounter animal avatars in the wilderness or during a hunt, and if they offer proper respect and propitiation, they may be guided or rewarded through dreams and visions.

Spirits of the Fire Tribe

Amber Fires are servants of Lodril. They are very easily bound within ritually-prepared jewels of amber. When commanded, they will ignite any flammable item they are in contact with. These stones are always warm to the touch.

Burning Sun Feather is a spirit hawk champion of Yelmalió. He makes his nest inside the volcanic cone of Fire Top to the west of Alda Chur, and can be summoned from any point on the Sharl Plains. The mighty talons of Burning Sun Feather will tear and rend the foe, and its piercing gaze can blind those foolish enough to meet its golden eye. Before it departs, the Sun Hawk will demand a sacrifice of the summoner to feed its young. If no suitable sacrifice is offered, the spirit will fly off with the summoner instead.

Wing feathers taken from Burning Sun Feather are greatly prized by Solar cultists, for they reveal the way home to the hearth-fire out of the wilderness, allowing a hunter to provide for his young even amidst the wild winter tumult of Storm and Darkness.

Lava Trout are the food of Lodril and not even remotely related to fish. They are very difficult to catch (you need a Fire Crystal as bait), but eating one will make you impervious to fire and acid. (However, since they dwell within volcanoes such as Fire Top, you have to be fairly impervious to fire and heat to catch them in the first place!) Undoubtedly the Lava Trout has other strange abilities as well. It is rumoured that the Lodrolite smith in Alda Chur keeps a Lava Trout in his forge, but to what effect no one knows.

Spirits of the Water Tribe

Pale Maidens are tragic Daughters of the River. Their tragedy is that they cannot bear children. Therefore, they are intensely jealous of mortal mothers who flaunt their babies by the river to mock their barrenness. (This is how the maidens see it when women conduct household chores by the river with their infants nearby.) Pale Maidens will seize and drown human children and imprison their spirits beneath the waters to raise as their own. These stream spirits may be propitiated by annual sacrifices of newborn sheep, calves or horses.

Spirits of the Moon Tribe

Moondancers are the capricious cousins of Lunes. They will possess their victims and force them to ‘dance madly backwards’ until their hearts burst from exhaustion. This is a particularly horrible way to die.

The spirits mentioned above will manifest spontaneously as well as having to be summoned — they are after all inhabitants of the Far Place as much as the humans. They are mostly seasonal creatures, and so they are more active during specific times during the year — The Pale Maidens and Windflowers during Sea Season; the Breathtakers and Wind Pipers in Dark Season as Gagarth’s Wild Hunt sweeps across the land; the Burning Sun Feather in Fire Season. However, they can be summoned any time during the year if need be — it is just more difficult.

The primary reason for using these spirits is to create a mood of magic and mystery. They are creatures with minds and lives of their own, and they have strong and distinctive personalities. I haven't done any game statistics for them, because that would take away the mystery and strangeness. I didn't want to make them paragraphs in a bestiary.

What *you* do with them, on the other hand, is entirely up to you. I had fun writing them down. I hope you have fun using them in your campaigns.

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CAMPAIGN HOOKS

- ⑥ If you have to travel through gors and gallt, those lands sacred to the Lady of the Wilds, you should make some small sacrifice both at the beginning of a journey and whenever you come across a sacred place. Your offering will ensure safe passage and protection. Sacrifices can be many and various — a gift of your soul breath, offerings from the hunt (to assure the Lady that the animal's spirit has been cared for) carved trinkets or prayer sticks, beads or small pieces of jewellery, mead, honey, fruits, or even blood from a slit vein, heartwater (semen) or menstrual blood. If you have nothing else, you should at least announce yourself, explain you are a friend of the wilderness and give the reason for your journey (for the Lady likes to keep up on the gossip). Her 'altars' are either sacred stones or trees, or significant features of the landscape like pools, springs, groves and waterfalls. Such holy places usually have a lesser spirit or nymph in attendance.
- ⑥ If you are travelling by road instead¹, make sure to leave a ritually-blessed trinket, coin or silver piece to Issaries at the first crossroads where there is a Traveller's Purse. If you do this Issaries will cloak you from the eyes of robbers, brigands, Gagarthi and one-legged duck bandits. A Traveller's Purse is a bowl on a pole, set up by Issaries priests and duly sanctified and warded against thieves. The priests collect the bits and baubles on their travels for the treasurer of their temple. And if you buy the merchant Aldor Ripoff of Alda Chur a beer, he'll gladly tell you the story of how he found a thief Glued to a Purse and made good profit of it.
- ⑥ If you wish to cross a river safely when travelling, be sure to pay toll to the White Water Woman who lurks by the ford². The Woman isn't especially hungry during Fire Season, but in Earth and Dark Seasons she is ravenous. In Storm Season she is at her strongest and most violent, directing her rage against bridges and boats.
- ⑥ If you don't want to lose your purse while travelling, a buried sacrifice to Asrelia at the start of the journey can make her hide it from would-be thieves. If you accidentally lose it, however, she'll quickly snatch it up and add it to her hoard.
- ⑥ If you decide to stay safely at home and don't want to have unwelcome wraiths visiting your stead, bury under the threshold a raven's skull together with a seal of Ty Kora Tek that has been drenched in snake's blood and sanctified with your soul breath.

- 6 If you want to safeguard your stead against fire, make bountiful sacrifices to Mahome, and charge your ritually consecrate your Hearth Stone with power so she can keep her brother Oakfed leashed.
- 6 If you want to avoid a terrible hangover after a feast, consecrate the Pearl of a Well Toad with the breath of your soul, drop it in a mug filled with clear water, recite a prayer to Minlister and quaff the contents of the mug. Don't swallow the Pearl! — if you do you'll be sorry for the rest of your life. Well Toads can sometimes be persuaded to part with a Pearl, but never cheaply. Hard-drinking Uroxi and Avenging Daughters would love (or kill) to get hold of one of these.

1. *A sensible choice in the fiend-filled Far Place. However, roads are virtually nonexistent in the wild uplands of the north and west.*

2. *Not originally a toll, but a lure to distract the Woman who feasts on human souls!*

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For additional Orlanthi and Far Place background, as well as a treasure trove of articles, sources, play aids and links for **Glorantha** and **Hero Wars**, visit the official Issaries site at <http://www.glorantha.com/>.

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