

RUMORS

Any communities nearby will offer players a chance to pick up rumors about the caves. All are true, more or less.

1. Something in the cliffs calls any who wander nearby to their doom.
2. On summer mornings, smoke can be seen coming from the cliff.
3. A great, colored cat once ate a hunting party.
4. Sleeping within a league of the cliffs is likely to get you eaten
5. A giant desert cat has grown a taste for wine

IN THE CAVES DWELL ONLY RICALU

After a brief time in the caves, adventurers will find their lights oddly bright, then painful, and finally blinding. Someone will then realize that the party has been transformed. The change is always imperceptible, for the sense that it is right and normal that only Ricalu exist in the caves is powerful, and suffuses everything.

Any who leave the cave system are restored, just as subtly.

FORMS OF THE RICALU

Determine everyone's new Ricalu appearance randomly (d6). Re-roll duplicates:

1. Heavy, short and hideous
2. Near-spherical torso and long, bony limbs
3. Very hairy, peg-like climbing nails
4. Tiny eyes, whip-like tongue
5. Sticky skin, a yeasty stink
6. Hairless, hunchbacked albino

Ricalu see perfectly in the dark, and cannot tolerate light.

Those who somehow magically resist the change will be attacked by the ancestral host.

Transformed adventurers will be accepted among the Ricalu without question - not even a hint of awareness that they are newcomers.

Food in the caves is plentiful but unpleasant. Hard work is expected, and petty squabbles are unfortunately common.

TODAY AMONG THE RICALU

1. Breaking discarded giant isopod carapace into chips for use as knives and other tools.
2. Drying meats for Matanaga until the eyes and throat are raw from the smoke.
3. Chewing dried fungus strips into edible gruel for the others.
4. d3 Ricalu are looking for suckers to muck out Matanaga's cavern.
5. d3 elderly Ricalu are looking for an excuse to perform the Child of Ouroboros ritual.

6. d4 feisty youngsters wanting to fight for status (for the pick of food and sleeping spot)
7. d2 amorous Ricalu looking to 'play'.
8. A tough Ricalu picking a fight to prove his worthiness to succeed Nandaleeb.
9. Azribol looking for a temporary Firekeeper so he can meet with Pitala.

NANDOLEEB THE NECROMANCER

The leader of the Ricalu is a short, wrinkled creature, with iridescent, tattooed skin.

He comports himself with a mixture of enthusiastic ferocity and compassion, and stares piercingly at everyone he encounters.

If observed quietly, he can be heard muttering lines of a ritual, practicing to himself. This is the new ritual of calling, which will bring forth the weak willed of all the nearby communities, for him to transform and embrace as fresh Ricalu blood, before leading them underground.

He carries a circlet that, when rubbed, teleports Sarcas to his side, as well as two Martoi Gargoyles.

He is unaware of his transformative powers.

AZRIBOL THE FIREKEEPER

A miniscule Ricalu of great agility, he spends half his time watching the lands beyond the crevice from the Firekeeper's Perch.

He carries with him a contraption of bronze and quartz which he can use to peer beyond the horizon to places up to twenty leagues distant.

He has been using it to spy out settlements at Nandaleeb's request. The device is fiddly, and using it properly is a feat of dexterity.

Azribol will not fight directly, but protects himself with numerous wire snares that he strings up wherever he sits for long.

PITALA THE FIREKEEPER

Married to Azribol, she is the other of Nandaleeb's two trusted firekeepers. Unlike her spouse, she is massive, easily 7' tall and of trollish proportions.

She is jolly, perceptive, and will crush a skull without hesitation when she needs to.

Birds and vermin are irresistibly drawn to her whispers, and she catches most of the food being smoked and dried for Matanaga.

THE ANCESTRAL HOST

Now mostly gone to dust, forty spirits still advise Nandaleeb through whispers and visions. It is their only wish to see the Ricalu restored to vibrancy at any cost. If they must, six have the strength to manifest as violent spectres.

ARTIFACTS AND RITUALS OF THE CAVES

RICALU RITUAL: CHILD OF THE OUROBOROS

Both a blessing and a sign of the Ricalu's desperation, this ritual is a sacred act of restoration for the subject and the community. If cast within thirty leagues of the ancestral host, it has a startling effect:

The spell's target is relieved entirely of all injury and disease, but they also become pregnant with a clone of themselves, a vessel for the reincarnation of one of the ancestral Ricalu.

The pregnancy occurs regardless of the sex of the subject. Male subjects cannot deliver, of course; the child will grow until it is removed (surgically, magically, etc.). If carried beyond term, it will die and likely kill the parent with necrotic infection.

If born, the child will gradually reclaim memories of its former life beginning in its tenth year.

DUST OF THE MARTOI

Millennia ago, the Martoi came here to mine their precious dust, the foundation of their many artifices.

It gives the cave walls a steely glint, like silver ore. It can be smelted out, for it liquifies as easily as lead. Unlike other metals, it doesn't solidify, but becomes a powder as soft and fine as flour - but dense and not easily blown about by the breath.

It is iridescent, and tends to invert the color of whatever light falls upon it:

- * The light of a cloudless sky turns it a brilliant orange.
- * Direct sunlight turns it a deep purple, torchlight turns it blue, glowing coals or a dying fire bring out a greenish lustre.
- * On overcast days, it is as black and shiny as polished jet
- * Under moonlight, it shines like gold.
- * It appears gray and lifeless under magical light of any sort.
- * To those who can see in total darkness, it gleams like pure white chalk.

If the dust falls upon the skin of someone who has consumed alcohol within the past day, it sets fast like a gleaming, permanent tattoo. When this occurs, it remains whatever color it was showing when it set, regardless of changes in lighting conditions.

It is said that legendary Zeichus prepared his magical pigments from this dust, though that secret is surely lost. (It is an easy matter to mix

it into lacquers and resins, however.)

MARTOI GARGOYLES

The fist-sized stone gargoyles found here are in fact artifacts of Martoi. The design is highly stylized and they are nearly spherical except for a tiny, open mouth that reveals they are hollow.

When dropped or tossed into the air, a gargoyle will immediately begin orbiting the nearest non-magical light source within 10', quickly settling on a radius of about 3' and as close to horizontal as possible.

Gargoyles move quickly, striking any objects in their path with the force of a hammer blow. They exert a corresponding force on the light source, and so tend to yank it around as the gargoyle whirls as if on an invisible leash. Holding such a pivot light is exhausting unless multiple gargoyles are launched in counterbalancing orbits.

The effect ends if the gargoyle is forcibly stopped, by a firm grasp or a solid object (e.g. carelessly walking too close to a cavern wall).

Orbits last up to a quarter hour, then won't move again until "fed" an ounce of pigment dust.

MARTOI RITUAL: TORMENT OF FALLEN FOES

This ritual is engraved on the pillar in the Vault of the Ancestors. It is apparently a curse to torment one's enemies (written Martoi is not easily understood), but in fact torments Kedh, one-time Martoi master of the mines and a Bright Seraph of the Martoi nobility.

A victim of the Final Queen's purges as the Martoi empire turned in upon itself, Kedh became imprisoned during an assault on the mine by royal sorcerers. Kedh is frozen in that moment, endlessly scalded by royalist sorcery.

As the ritual is performed, all present will hear Kedh's pained anguish. If the ritual is ever miscast, interrupted or left unfinished, Kedh's prison collapses and she appears in a gout of black sorcerous flame, mid-swing.

Kedh appears clad as she was on that day three millennia ago, in the battle dress of her station: flowing green silks and iridescent plate armor. She is permanently hasted, and fights with paired lightning flails. Much of her face and left hand has been burned by witch-fire.

Until she realizes otherwise, she behaves as if she is still fighting the Queen's minions.

Kedh of course knows about countless sites of the Martoi, now ruins, but her generosity is unlikely to be improved upon learning that everything she ever loved has passed into dust.