

Carion Crown



Foul Immortals

Liches—the most vile of undead monstrosities. Only powerful beings wholly dedicated to evil successfully transition to this form. The foul spellcasters who achieve this state retain the clarity of their living minds while their souls remain in stasis, allowing eternal rebirth if at any point their physical bodies are destroyed. We must be vigilant against these abominations. They are cunning foes, yet if you are reading this text, you hold sufficient strength of faith to defeat them.

The liches of legend, including Arazni—may her soul someday find rest and redemption—are spoken of with fear and horror throughout the Inner Sea, but what most do not know is that these are only the most visible, and dozens—perhaps hundreds—of liches continue to further their foul schemes every day.

—From *The Vigilant Faithful*, a text dispensed to chosen devotees of Iomedae

FOUL IMMORTALS

Power-hungry narcissists, liches are megalomania incarnate, carrying their quest for power beyond the grave. Only the most dedicated and competent spellcasters can ever hope to attain lichdom, as the precise magic involved is unique to each individual and must be discovered through personal study, yet no sane person of a good heart can attempt to suspend her soul in this manner without losing any last spark of morality. While Golarion has a few famous liches, others who risked utter oblivion to grasp at immortality sculpted the world to their whims as well. Presented here are three legendary liches and a handful of other simmering threats still active in the world.

LEGENDARY LICHES

Some stumble upon lichdom with hope in their hearts, looking to further an otherwise good cause by “sacrificing” themselves to this fate. In every known case, this misguided approach has twisted the person to foul outlooks, if the process of getting there didn’t already. Perhaps it is a natural result of divorcing the body from the soul, but those who pass beyond death in this manner invariably turn to evil as they gradually lose touch with the concerns and feelings of mortals.

More often than not, the path to lichdom is trod by those who lust for power. Some fantasize about crushing lands beneath their unwavering totalitarian might through their immortal rule, while others seek only the perfection of thought and form in undeath or endless years to continue their studies. Many liches concoct elaborate plans to shape the world to their desires—Tar-Baphon alone sculpted much of the recent history of the Inner Sea region during his long rule in northwestern Avistan.

TAR-BAPHON, THE WHISPERING TYRANT

Perhaps the most famous lich in the history of Golarion, Tar-Baphon shattered Avistan with his tyranny, beginning even before his demise and subsequent undead rebirth.

His earliest days of rising power and conquest are obscured by incomplete documents, intentional misdirection, and overblown myths. What is known is that during the 9th century AR he grew to become a powerful wizard-king, one who dealt heavily in necromancy and whose corrupting influence was so great that he eventually attracted the attention of Aroden himself.

As with most everything in his life before rising as the Whispering Tyrant, it is unclear exactly what relationship Tar-Baphon held with the Last Azlanti, or precisely what forces or opposing viewpoints pitted them against each other so violently. Perhaps it was envy and pride that ultimately fueled their mutual distaste: Tar-Baphon dared to challenge the Last Azlanti, and sought a similar level of power for himself, disdaining Aroden’s

status and the secondhand transcendence granted by the *Starstone*. Regardless, the final confrontation between the two occurred in 896 AR, when mortal tyrant and living god faced off in a terrible battle on the Isle of Terror in the middle of Lake Encarthan. As could only have been expected, the mortal lost, and Aroden left the field with his enemy broken beyond repair—yet not destroyed.

For thousands of years, Tar-Baphon disappeared, leaving those few who remembered him to presume he had gone the way of so many would-be conquerors. It wasn’t until 3203 that Tar-Baphon reappeared, this time in the nation of Ustalav, having somehow gained a new existence through lichdom and the secrets of the Whispering Way, and boasting powers far greater than even those he held in life.

Unifying the traditionally fractious orc hordes of Belkzen under his banner, the newly named Whispering Tyrant set about conquering Ustalav and the lands beyond,



Arazni

Carrion Crown

rolling over central Avistan like a dark wave. As his orcs and conscripted soldiers fell, they rose again as undead monstrosities, joining creatures of nightmare in his fell war machine. For more than 500 years, Tar-Baphon held the continent's center firmly in his skeletal grip, brooking no dissension among his ranks. At last, in 3754, Taldor launched the Shining Crusade, gathering the forces of light and goodness beneath its banners and sending them slicing their way into the heart of the dark lord's territory, earning each foot of ground with the blood of heroes. So total was Tar-Baphon's control over his subjugated territories that it took almost 50 years of fighting before the crusaders established a beachhead on Ustalav's southern shores and came within striking distance of the tyrant.

Though Aroden had long since ceased to fight his followers' battles for them, he did send his herald Arazni, summoned by the Knights of Ozem during the long siege. For half a decade she led his forces, yet it seems that Aroden underestimated his opponent. In a brutal display, the Whispering Tyrant humiliated and slaughtered Arazni, shaking many crusaders' faiths to the core and extending the conflict another 5 years. In the end, it was a mortal man—a general named Arnisant, bearing an artifact known as the *Shield of Aroden*—who succeeded in weakening the lich enough to imprison him beneath his tower of Gallowspire, where he resides to this day. Though unable to leave his stronghold, with his minions in hiding and his lands long since returned to the rule of their living inhabitants, the Tyrant still whispers to those willing to hear him, and many fear the day when he will rise for a third and final time.

ARAZNI, THE HARLOT QUEEN OF GEB

Though now ruling the nation of Geb as the highest-profile lich still active in the Inner Sea region, Arazni began her existence on a very different path. A thousand years ago, the woman today known as the Harlot Queen was Arazni, the Red Crusader, chosen herald of Aroden and patron saint of Lastwall's Knights of Ozem. A fearsome combatant, the warrior-demigoddess descended to Golarion as a champion of the warriors of light during the last days of the Shining Crusade, only to be humiliated and tortured to death by the Whispering Tyrant. When he finally tossed her broken frame into the disheartened ranks of the invading army, the demoralized knights carried her body back to Lastwall and entombed her in their citadel.

There she rested in honor and sad glory for decades, before suffering even further indignity. In punishment for a severely miscalculated attempt by the grandchildren of the original Knights of Ozem to purge Golarion of his own undead presence, the great ghost-wizard Geb reanimated several foolish crusaders as grave knights and sent them back to Lastwall to steal the herald's body. Using his extensive arcane knowledge, the undead lord reanimated

the slain herald as a lich and took her as his Harlot Queen. Over the centuries, his whispers and urgings gradually turned the risen Arazni against her former followers, and particularly her successor Iomedae, until at last there was nothing left of her former personality.

Today, the Harlot Queen rules Geb cruelly and willingly from the throne in Mechtar, leaving the ghost-king free to pursue his contemplations and studies. Enjoying her station, Arazni handles all political matters, acting as the symbolic face of the nation. She is attended by the same graveknights who “rescued” her, save for two who were put down by subsequent secret raids from the remaining Knights of Ozem. The knights claim that organs removed from Arazni while she lay entombed and kept to serve as relics still hold some control over her, but none have been used to any significant extent. If the knights could unlock these supposed powers, perhaps they would become a true threat to the Harlot Queen, and thus she quietly does everything she can to locate and destroy them. Yet for all their bluster, the forces in Lastwall and beyond have learned their lesson about challenging the chosen bride of Geb, and those who make the attempt do so knowing it for the suicide mission it is.

SOCORRO, THE BUTCHER OF CARRION HILL

Lesser known than Tar-Baphon and Arazni, but equally debased and corrupted, is Socorro, the Butcher of Carrion Hill. In the years leading up to Tar-Baphon's return as a lich, Socorro was a powerful wizard in the Ustalavic city of Carrion Hill. Though the city was half the size it is today and had a reputation for harboring bandits and mercenaries, the place still served as a central trading point, and the ruthless politics and backstabbing business conducted in the city at the time allowed the politically agile Socorro to seize control of significant factions and gain leadership of Carrion Hill.

Yet Socorro was more than just a powerful wizard and politician; in private, he was a dedicated necromancer and adherent of the Whispering Way, one who used his dark knowledge to bind many of his seemingly innocuous underlings to him in a dark veneration of undeath. Living two completely separate lives, Socorro kept his necromantic proclivities secret from the general public, even as he recruited the city's sons and daughters to the cause. While the city slept, he and his minions prowled, taking victims back to his laboratory for gruesome experiments and gratuitous torture. He ended each murder with ritualistic cannibalism, ingesting small portions of his victims in order to gain their power. This stalking of the streets might have continued in secret for a lifetime, yet in 3203, Socorro began to hear whispers in his head, the words of a new messiah risen again after thousands of years of slumber. And Socorro listened.

FOUL IMMORTALS

Thus it was that when the Whispering Tyrant finally revealed himself, binding the orcs to his cause and sweeping across Ustalav, Socorro was ready. Calling on his followers to show themselves, he led a massacre of thousands and met Tar-Baphon at the gates on his knees, offering the lich-king a willing and depraved city. In reward, the Whispering Tyrant gave Socorro the last pieces of arcane knowledge that—combined with the massive sacrifice he'd organized—were sufficient to complete the wizard's transformation into a lich. Exalted and exhilarated, the Butcher of Carrion Hill set to work animating those he'd slaughtered as some of the first undead troops in the tyrant's war machine.

For hundreds of years, Socorro and his death-obsessed underlings ruled Carrion Hill as the Whispering Tyrant's chosen, overseeing the city they had taken through murder and subterfuge. It wasn't until the Shining Crusade imprisoned Tar-Baphon in Gallowspire that Socorro finally fled Carrion Hill, and presumably has remained in hiding ever since.

OTHER NOTABLE LICHES

The lich is a favorite villain of bards and skalds, and tales of liches' depredations abound throughout the Inner Sea. The Glass Pyramids in Katapesh are said to house a pair of dwarven wizards who long ago sealed themselves inside, feeding off the erratic magic of twisting ley lines. In the River Kingdoms, an ancient cyclops lich named Vordakai threatens the territory's northern reaches, and explorers picking through Thassilonian lore mention a lich serving the Runelord of Sloth in a place called Runeforge. Below are a few of the lesser-known—but still highly dangerous—undead masters of the Inner Sea region.

Alling Third (human lich wizard 17): During the Rain of Stars, many pieces of a mysterious vessel from the sky crashed down onto Golarion. Some of these, such as the Silver Mount, remain prominent landmarks, yet others buried themselves deep underground. One of the latter lay hidden for many years in northeastern Numeria until unseasonable weather caused a sinkhole, exposing the relic to the world above. In time, the site attracted the attention of Kellid tribespeople, who kept it secret from the Technic League. However, secrets have a habit of leaking, and within a generation an unscrupulous wizard named Alling Tresorant learned of the site. He visited the buried metallic curiosity, exploring the metal chambers and passageways and becoming addicted to the otherworldly ichors within. The ruin consumed his mind and, aware he would never be able to properly comprehend the device (much less restore it) in a single human life, Alling began researching methods of life extension. Consumed by the technology he studied, and possibly instructed by voices whispering

through the metal walls, he eventually discovered his own unique formula for undead awakening.

To fuel his final transformation, Alling convinced an entire Kellid tribe to follow him into the sinkhole. There he fed them one by one, over the course of a month, to a device at its core, transferring their life energy to the machine he had built to store his soul for eternity. Rotted and mutated beyond recognition, the lich now known as Alling Third (for reasons he refuses to explain) is far from the man he once was. A glass cylinder holds his torso and head, his only biological remains. Tubes and wires stray from the cylinder and attach to gasping bellows and whirring, sparking parts. The whole contraption crawls along



Socorro

Carion Crown

on mechanical spider legs, and three mechanical arms extend from the base of his mechanical body. Unique in construction, Alling Third built his phylactery into his own body. Deep within the machine is a tiny puzzle built from the seven known skymetals. The phylactery-puzzle must be solved before the pieces can be individually destroyed.

Auberon the Drowned (human lich wizard 16): Among the shattered islands and staggering sea canyons of lost Azlant lies a place even the elves of the Mordant Spire don't dare approach. Beneath a crippled tower jutting from the crashing waves, an ancient Azlanti carries on an eternal, misguided agenda of genocide. Auberon blames the Spire elves and merfolk for the horrors brought on by the aboleths in the calling of Earthfall, and punishes them accordingly.

Prescient of the coming atrocity, this powerful Azlanti wizard, fueled by hatred and a desire for retribution, completed a quick and difficult path to unlife. As a lich, he leads an extinction agenda among the broken ruins of the once-great empire, slaughtering merfolk and sea elves, as well as any other sentient beings who impede his plans.

In the dungeons and basements of his tower, Auberon creates an endless army of undead from the remains of merfolk and sea elves captured by his scrag thralls. An elite squadron of shadows acts as his spies, flitting through the dark depths and reporting on movements of Spire elf patrols and nearby enclaves of merfolk. Auberon believes these races betrayed the Azlanti and humankind by helping the aboleths. Despite a general lack of proof, the lich is so consumed with hatred and retribution that he endlessly pumps out undead to carry out his horrid scheme.

While elves of the Mordant Spire restrict access to the ruins of Azlant, most allow adventuring groups seeking to defeat the mad Azlanti to pass unimpeded. So far, none of these doomed campaigns have ever returned to land.

Krimhilde, the Ice Lich of Irrisen (human lich witch 17): Buried in a frigid lair in the Winterwall Glacier, Krimhilde the Ice Lich of Irrisen sends her troll and giant underlings, living and undead, to demand tolls, tributes, and adulation from surrounding villages. Those who refuse to pay tribute risk utter destruction at the hands of her minions.

Often acting in opposition to the White Witches, Krimhilde serves her own goals and motivations in Irrisen. While she has no desire to rule Irrisen or usurp Baba Yaga's control, she sees the Witch Queen's daughters as inferiors, claiming she will only talk to Baba Yaga herself, and is quite patient in awaiting the Witch Queen's return. Some say she is a former White Witch who committed herself to necromancy and sought the path to lichdom to confront Baba Yaga upon her return to Golarion. A few scattered tales seem to confirm this claim.

As a component of her transformation, Krimhilde trapped 13 dryads in their trees and drained the sap, consuming it in the transforming concoction. She controls an old

white dragon named Rimetooth, sending the creature out to punish those who fail to display proper respect. In addition, she dominates an entire frost giant tribe as well as dozens of ice trolls. So far, her depredations have been local enough—and far enough from Whitethrone and the lands its rulers truly care about—that putting down the lich once and for all hasn't seemed worth the effort, but the current queen might greatly reward those who took care of the insolent border-squatter.

Locardier Eliote (human lich bard 15): A prolific composer in his time, this bard wrote chilling tunes and macabre operas long before he literally poured his soul into his music. Many modern songs descend from pieces written during his life nearly 600 years ago, though over the years most have changed significantly in their lyrical content.

It was a song, a simple repeating rhyme nestled in an ancient Taldan folk jig, that sparked Locardier's interest in immortality and led to his transformation into a lich. Through rigorous study and gruesome accomplishments, Locardier passed into a lichdom that has allowed him to write centuries' worth of music. Considered his magnum opus, the 7-hour piece called the *Procession of Despair* is a whispered legend in bardic schools throughout the Inner Sea, forbidden from ever being transcribed or performed because of the belief that at least one person dies each time it surfaces.

Locardier seeds new songs into the world by teaching them to dirge singers and bards who find his shrine and prove their worth. Each of these songs inevitably leads to murder, suicide, or madness, either for the performer or for members of the audience. Some sages postulate that Locardier weaves death into his music, yet none have a theory on how he accomplishes this.

Meyi Pahano (human lich wizard 12): Living in Lirgen before the death of Aroden, Meyi Pahano, a high-ranking seer in the Saoc Brethren, was among the fringe astrologers predicting the sweeping changes in the world. While studying a strange shrine to the stars in the Napsune Mountains, Meyi began communicating with a powerful creature that she believed to be a being from beyond the stars, consulting it in regard to her astrological interests. From this creature, she learned of the looming troubles for Golarion and was taught a path to eternal life. The price of this knowledge, however, was an unbreakable vow that she would expand upon the shrine for as long as it took to turn the thing into an interplanetary gate capable of summoning through her new master-entity.

As the Eye of Abendego formed and drowned Lirgen and her people, the Saoc Brethren dedicated themselves to ritual suicide—yet not all remained dead. Having made arrangements ahead of time with the help of her new ally, Meyi used the suicide as the final step in her transformation to lichdom, harnessing the power of her brethren's deaths to help ease her transition into undeath.

Now in her mountain observatory, this ancient astronomer still gazes upward, watching the passing of planets and stars. A planet of particular interest to Meyi is Eox the Dead, where she believes her master currently resides as one of that world's powerful undead bone sages. She believes that once the gate has been finalized, the two worlds will be joined, and she will be free to join her master even as the bone sages turn Golarion to their own purposes. Yet whether the voice in Meyi's head is a bone sage, an emissary of the Dark Tapestry, or simply a manifestation of schizophrenia is anyone's guess.

Sansisral the Bitter Poison (female aranea lich sorcerer 7): In the eastern reaches of the Chitterwood near the Aspodell Mountains, a hidden cave belches forth undead abominations to savage the already dangerous countryside. The source of this font of evil is an aranea sorcerer obsessed with necromancy.

As a magical beast, Sansisral's inhuman outlook colors her obsession, and the decision to enter the transformation wasn't a desire for immortality as much as it was an understanding that liches are the pinnacle of undeath. Her long years of study concocting necromantic poisons and breeding deadly spiders helped her on her path to lichdom, and the abundance of goblins in the Chitterwood meant subjects for experimentation were always close at hand and easy to subjugate.

After developing a poison that created zombies and other undead, Sansisral began experimenting with advanced procedures. She now creates web zombies, each stuffed with deadly spiders that burst forth in swarms when the zombie is destroyed.

Sansisral commands a vast cave lair riddled with twisting passages threading through massive chambers. It is said that deep below those web-choked passages is where she discovered the final missing key to her transition. While adventurers have penetrated the upper chambers in the past, none have confirmed evidence of this secret in the complex's core.

Wilendithas the Eternal Hag (green hag lich cleric of Gyronna 15): Nestled among the thickets of the River Kingdoms, Wilendithas maintains a lair in the southern reaches of the Narlmarches where they dip into Mivon. A powerful cleric of Gyronna in her living days, she resented her coven sisters. While she continued to excel, they remained stagnant. Eager to control all the lands the River Sellen ran through, Wilendithas sought lichdom. In dedication to her patron deity, she betrayed her sisters as part of her transformation, slaying and consuming them in a ritual that started her transition into lichdom.

After several dramatic displays, including one extremely notable attack on Mivon, Wilendithas receded back into the thick woods of the River Kingdoms. Even today, some superstitious locals whisper curses against her when

hearing of misfortune, especially betrayal and the severing of friendships, as if she were the Angry Hag herself. While most tales of her depredations exist only in rumor, some examples cannot be ignored. Strange, ghoulish dogs now haunt the region, infecting their victims with ghoulish fever. Just this year, a minor lord in Mivon had his infant son replaced by a writhing undead creature—and 4 days later, his entire family was mauled to death by a pack of ghoulish dogs in their own estate. Some say that Wilendithas's phylactery lies below the city—perhaps placed there by a hero incapable of destroying it, or an even more powerful rival who holds it as a means of controlling the hag-lich—and should she be killed, her reemergence there might be devastating for the community.



Wilendithas the Eternal Hag