



ECOLOGY OF THE
VAULT BUILDERS

STONE... INSPIRING GREAT AWE, CALLED FORTH FROM PURITY
STONE... PLANNED WITH DIVINE INTENT, HOLDER OF PERFECT SYMMETRY
STONE... POSSESSING GREAT POWER, PROVIDING THE SEED OF LIFE
STONE... GIVING WISDOM TO THE TRUE, STRENGTH TO THE FAITHFUL
STONE... REPOSEFUL DWELLING FOR THE SPIRITS OF THOSE BEFORE
STONE... UNDERPINNING WORLDS, FOUNDATION OF THE VAULTS
STONE... EVEN YOU DO NOT ENDURE FOREVER

—Translation of ancient Orvian inscription discovered in the
Vault of Iivarandin

A primordial race tracing its roots back to the earliest reaches of time, the xiomorns (the true name of the race known colloquially as the Vault Builders and the Vault Keepers) have spent the span of their existence in creation and experimentation, leaving their footprint on countless developing worlds. When discovered, the strange ruins and eponymous vaults left behind by the xiomorns never fail to prove an impenetrable mystery to younger races.

Whatever theories are put forth as to the true reason for the Vault Builders' ceaseless acts of creation—whether they are cast as timeless experimenters, accidental creators, the agents of gods, or even gods themselves—none comes close to the truth of their motives. For the xiomorns are a species of desperation-driven architects of life, and fear has been their eons-long companion.

GENESIS

Xiomorns are born of the elemental essence of earth and originally hail from the Plane of Earth itself. However, unlike earth spirits given form (such as elementals) or manifesting as living beings (such as shaitans), xiomorns are a created race, brought into being at the dawn of time with the aid of the elemental lord Sairazul the Crystalline Queen. Most xiomorns believe the advent of their race to have been a spontaneous event of elemental fecundity, for even they do not know of the guiding hand of Sairazul. While even a being as powerful as Sairazul could not have formed the xiomorns from nothing without the assistance of a more powerful deity or some primal urge of the Plane of Earth itself, it is certain that Sairazul fashioned their insectile form after her own image. Her inspiration for the xiomorns came from a supernaturally sublime crystal she found deep in the Plane of Earth, and she created exactly 65,536 of them after the perfect number of the jewel's facets, intending that exactly that number should exist, and never more.

Most xiomorns never learned of Sairazul's role because of her subsequent imprisonment at the hands of the evil elemental lords. Thus, when they first encountered the elemental lord Ayrzul, they had no reason to fear or distrust him. Ayrzul the Fossilized King came to them from the stone itself and awed them with his power and wisdom, and he then granted them a moment of awful prescience—a vision of a future in which they saw themselves as a race ceasing to exist, their entire collective conscious obliterated by a mental invasion of alien mind-swapping creatures. In the vision, these creatures, called yithians (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3* 286), translocated their minds into the bodies of the xiomorns and the minds of the xiomorns into their own bodies, abandoning them to ultimate annihilation at the hands of whatever destruction the yithians themselves faced. The xiomorns saw their fate and knew despair for the first time.

Ayrzul was not done with his manipulation of the xiomorns yet; they had something he wanted. Even Ayrzul was not mighty enough to destroy the entire xiomorn race, for Sairazul had imbued them with mythic properties, but Ayrzul craved their mythic essence and wished to add it to his own divine power. He knew that he could not hope to take their essence by force, but he thought he might convince them to turn it over to him of their own free will.

Ayrzul promised to teach the xiomorns the secret of creation, which they could use to forestall their own demise, but he lamented that he lacked the ability to do so without a greater concentration of mythic essence than even he possessed. He explained that if the xiomorns would willingly sacrifice the essence of a quarter of their number to him, it would grant him the power to teach them how to save themselves—an opportunity for the few to sacrifice themselves to save the many. The xiomorns were naturally appalled by this suggestion but believed the words of Ayrzul. In the end, they chose another option: rather than sacrificing the entire life essence of a quarter of their number, the xiomorns sacrificed a portion of the essence of half of their number. Ayrzul received the same influx of primordial power, and no xiomorns were destroyed in the process, but half of the xiomorns had lost their mythic essence, creating the differentiation between mythic and non-mythic xiomorns—the Vault Builders and the Vault Keepers (*Pathfinder Module: The Emerald Spire Superdungeon 158–159*)—as well as the first roots of schism within the species.

In return for the essence of the Vault Keepers, Ayrzul gave the xiomorns knowledge of the *Vault Seeds*—a secret actually stolen from Sairazul—each of which is a powerful artifact capable of creating an immense underground cavern and then infusing it with a magically supported ecosystem. The xiomorns decided to experiment with the creation and cultivation of life, with the hope of saving their species from its foretold doom. With their newfound power to create and the knowledge of their own destruction firmly in mind, the Vault Builders began to use the *Vault Seeds* to craft magically enhanced, cavernous vaults within the Plane of Earth in which to bring forth new forms of life and modify existing ones. The Vault Builders used their mythical power to master the *Vault Seeds*, creating vaults that supported particular kinds of life, while the now-reduced Vault Keepers were set in charge of maintaining and overseeing these vaults to ensure that the cultivation of this life did not go awry.

Though they established many marvelous works of creation, the Vault Builders soon came to realize that their creative activity on the Plane of Earth was limited, preventing them from experimenting with the different kinds of ecosystems and life-forms that were needed in order to find the salvation of their race. They used their

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elemental mastery to form powerful elemental gates that allowed travel to worlds on the Material Plane, where the diversity of life and habitat allowed them to greatly expand their vault-building activities, and they began to form vaults within the mantles of multiple planets across the multiverse.

Among the first of their experiments in crafting life on the Material Plane was the harnessing of benign fey earth spirits that they found deep beneath the crust of certain worlds. To these they gave form and purpose, creating the race of pechs (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2* 206), which the Vault Builders then produced in great numbers on many worlds. They soon determined that the pech race did not hold the secret of their salvation and quickly moved on to new experiments. The Vault Builders gave the pechs to the Vault Keepers as laborers to assuage the

loss of mastery that resulted from their great sacrifice to Ayrzul. The Vault Keepers all but enslaved the pechs, and many still live in servitude on worlds where the xiomorns continue their work. On some worlds, the race of derro spawned from degenerate descendants of pechs that fled to inhospitable caverns to escape their overbearing masters.

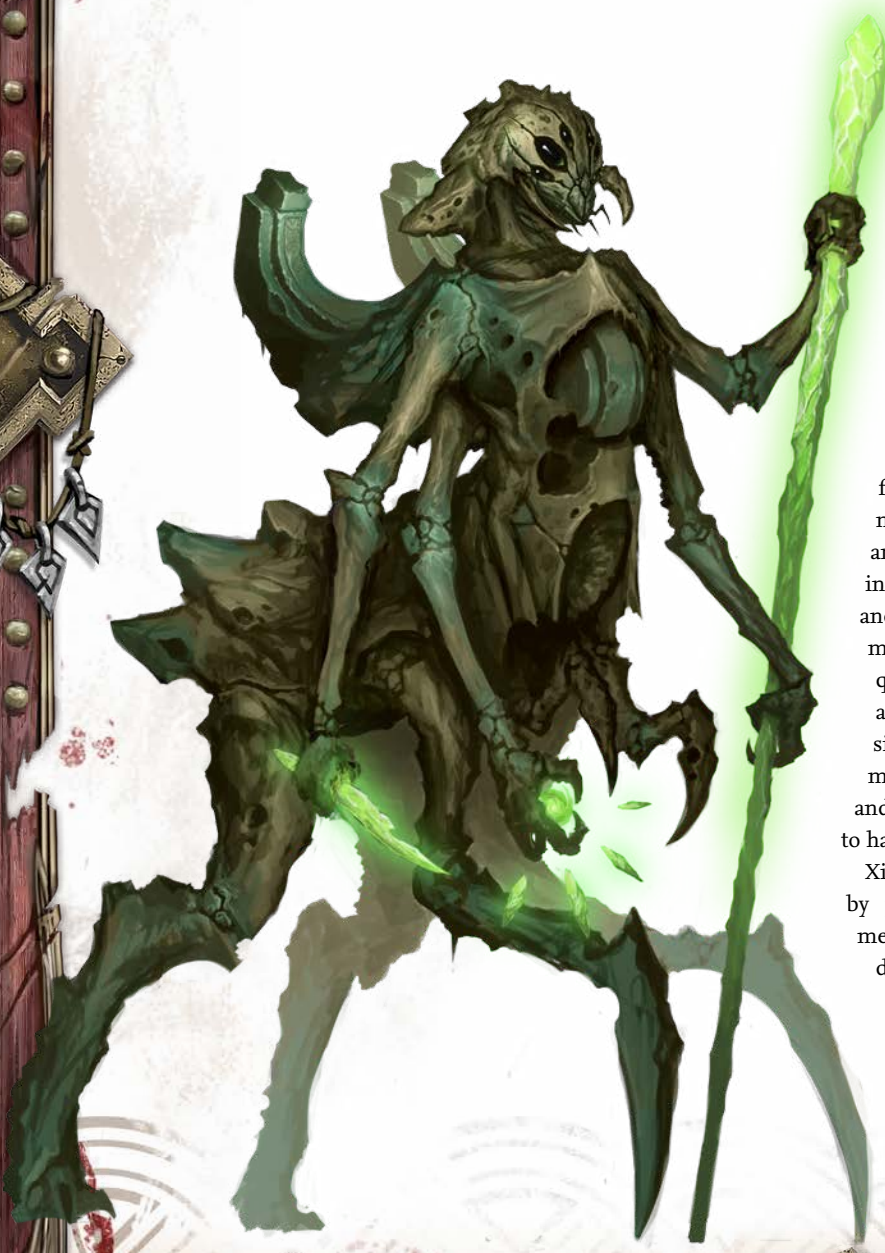
For countless years the Vault Builders have continued to seed planets across the multiverse with their vaults, creating entirely self-contained and magically sustained ecosystems where they can support the myriad forms of life and conditions with which they experiment. Even though the Vault Builders sometimes build vast cities or entire artificial geographies in these vaults, all tend to follow the same pattern; after a few millennia, the

Vault Builders and Vault Keepers deem a given experiment a failure and move to another world to create new vaults and begin the experiments anew. The few races aware of the existence of the xiomorns are often perplexed by their seemingly capricious practices, but in a unified front, the entire race of xiomorns has refused to divulge the details of what they are attempting to do and why, for fear of tipping their hand to the distant yithian menace too early.

ECOLOGY

Xiomorns are a primordial race of elemental outsiders and are one of the oldest races in the multiverse. Though they exist in two separate forms, the mythic Vault Builders and the non-mythic Vault Keepers, they remain a single species and share a similar ecology. Both share some insectile characteristics in the shape of their head and thorax and the structure of their upper limbs. The mythic xiomorns are physically larger and possess a quadrupedal lower body, whereas the Vault Keepers are smaller and have a bipedal lower body. The most significant difference between the mythic and non-mythic xiomorns, however, is in their relative power and mastery of earth magic—especially in their ability to harness the power of *Vault Seeds*.

Xiomorns are genderless and do not reproduce by procreation. They live exceptionally long lives measured in the thousands of years before natural death overtakes them. However, even in death a Vault Builder does not necessarily truly die. During the last few months of a Vault Builder's natural life, a calcification forms within its heart. After the Vault Builder's death, this crystalline formation can be retrieved and, if properly cared for, stored indefinitely while the body itself crumbles to dust. Such crystals are called *Generation Stones* and hold the entire



personality and experiential existence of the deceased. Vault Builders can use their mastery of elemental earth to fabricate a new Vault Builder body, and if a *Generation Stone* is placed within the abdomen of such a body, a new Vault Builder arises with all of the memories and knowledge of the previous Vault Builder. In this way, if a Vault Builder's remains are recovered and properly tended, it can essentially live forever through a series of new bodies. Generally, after a Vault Builder dies, its *Generation Stone* is stored until there is a need for more Vault Builders to be active, at which time a new Vault Builder form is constructed and the *Generation Stone* implanted to create anew the dead Vault Builder.

Vault Builders that die a sudden death by violence or misadventure do not have the time to properly form their *Generation Stones* and are truly dead. In this way, the total number of Vault Builders in existence has slowly but surely diminished over the eons. In addition, because of the loss of their mythic essence, Vault Keepers do not possess the ability to form *Generation Stones*. The life span of a Vault Keeper is shorter than that of a Vault Builder (usually no more than a couple thousand years unless extended by the magical support of a *Vault Seed*), and when a Vault Keeper dies, it crumbles to dust and is permanently dead. Vault Builders can use *Vault Seeds* to create more Vault Keepers as needed, but these do not possess the memories of previous Vault Keepers. Strangely, the number of Vault Keepers can never exceed 32,768—the number of Vault Keepers that came into being when half of Sairazul's original xiomorns gave up their mythic essence to Ayrzul. Attempts by Vault Builders to create more than 32,768 invariably fail.

The vision that Ayrzul granted to the xiomorns revealed that even the Vault Builders' unique life-span-extending ability would be insufficient to save them from the coming yithian cataclysm. In fact, it may be this very resilience that will someday attract the yithians to the xiomorns as a host race.

SOCIETY

The xiomorns exist as two distinct castes: the mythic Vault Builders and the non-mythic Vault Keepers. The loss of the mythic qualities of the other half of their species has placed the Vault Builders in a natural position of rulership over the Vault Keepers. The lawful xiomorns believe their society represents perfect order as they work together toward their shared goal of deliverance from the threat of racial extermination.

Despite this veneer of harmony, fractures exist just below the surface. As a whole, the xiomorns work toward their goal through the building of vaults until a perfect race is crafted for their needs. However, not all xiomorns agree on the actual purpose of this created race: is it to battle and defeat the yithians, to serve as a host body into which the xiomorns' own consciousness can retreat

ahead of the extinction, or to serve as a servitor race to hide and protect a tiny remnant of surviving xiomorns after the yithian cataclysm? In addition, not all Vault Keepers are ambivalent about the sacrifice of their mythic essence and have ideas of their own.

The xiomorns have divided their society into a number of sects, each serving a different function.

Creators: This sect comprises the majority of xiomorn society and is composed of both Vault Builders and Vault Keepers in great numbers. These are the xiomorns that labor to create and maintain vaults both within the Plane of Earth and in numerous worlds of the Material Plane. One of the Creators' primary duties is to defend any vault experiments threatened by the incursions of other races. Usually a few Vault Builders and Vault Keepers are sufficient to defend a vault against external threats, but on occasion, major military actions or prolonged warfare has required auxiliary forces called in from elsewhere. Perhaps most infamous of these was the millennia-long war that was waged between the xiomorns and the aboleths in the primeval ages of the world of Golarion. The great loss of potential *Generation Stones* in that conflict is still felt keenly today, and it caused the xiomorns to rethink their entire doctrine on engaging other sentient species in all-out war.

Venerators: Composed of Vault Builders and Vault Keepers, this is the second-largest sect of the xiomorns. Venerators dwell almost exclusively in Ayrzul's Blistering Labyrinth on the Plane of Earth where they serve as mystics and go-betweens for the elemental lord. While xiomorns in general do not worship Ayrzul, instead seeing him as a patron and ally of their race, this sect comes closest to performing obeisance to the Fossilized King. They seek greater favor with him in hopes of gaining greater insight regarding the threat to their race.

Cogitators: This small sect composed entirely of Vault Builders contemplates the deep mysteries of the multiverse to gain a fuller understanding of their race's foretold fate and the surest means of their preservation. Ayrzul despises this sect and fears that it may someday learn of his treachery. He uses the Venerators sect to persecute the Cogitators at every opportunity.

Agitators: This relatively small sect of Vault Builders and Vault Keepers is composed of some of the most warlike members of the race. Many are veterans of the war against the aboleths of Golarion and have experience in military campaigns. This sect pushes for a preemptive strike against the yithians.

Indagators: Made up entirely of Vault Builders, this sect is a little-known subset of the Cogitators. These xiomorns seek signs of the legendary lost Crystalline Queen, Sairazul, and believe that she may have some means of saving their race if she can be found and freed. Ayrzul is unaware of the existence of this sect, and if he

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did know would likely have his Venerators purge such dangerous heretics.

Unalloyed Dissent: This small sect's numbers are entirely composed of Vault Keepers who are in open rebellion against the Vault Builders over the theft of their mythic heritage in the bargain with Ayrzul and believe the Vault Builders have sullied their very nature by association with the elemental lord. They kill Vault Builders whenever they are able and attempt to capture Vault Keepers to either convert to their cause or kill. Dissenters exist in multiple independent cells across the multiverse, and some of these have begun to seek divine patrons for their cause, beseeching archdevils, daemon lords, and other powerful entities for their aid. Only a few Vault Builders are aware of the existence of this sect, and they attempt to keep knowledge of it from spreading so that few xiomorns are even aware that such sedition exists.

As a whole, xiomorns are relatively peaceable but more as a matter of avoiding contact with other races. They have no qualms about wiping out an entire indigenous species if it encroaches on their laboratory space. Few races have regular interaction with the xiomorns, though large numbers of pechs still serve them on the Plane of Earth and in vaults on multiple worlds. Xiomorns generally get along with earth elementals and other elemental creatures, but they maintain a watchful truce with the shaitans of the Peerless Empire, with oreads (*Bestiary 2* 205) occasionally serving as envoys between the two races. Xiomorns despise the mephits of the Plane of Earth, and the Venerator sect frequently goes on genocidal rampages when too many of the pests have intruded upon Ayrzul's Blistering Labyrinth.

LAIRS

Xiomorns are usually found in a vault either within a world on the Material Plane or in the depths of the Plane of Earth, tending to their latest experiments. Occasional outcasts or sect cells might be found in long-abandoned vaults. The Venerators dwell in caverns within the Blistering Labyrinth, where they spend much of their time in meditation and supplication to their patron.

The vault lairs of the xiomorns can take forms as diverse as the ecosystems the *Vault Seeds* create: anything from a subterranean desert or mountain range to a more traditional dungeon complex to an entire city composed of architectural styles stretching across the entire history of the world it occupies. The construction techniques and technology introduced by these progenitors often finds its way into subsequent mortal cultures.

The occupied vaults of the Plane of Earth contain as many as 4,000 *Generation Stones* held by the Vault Builders until such time as they need to increase their numbers. Meanwhile, more than a thousand *Generation Stones* have been hidden in the Blistering Labyrinth by

the Venerators. These crystalline stones represent the future of the entire race and are kept sealed away from creatures unable to easily pass through stone, and they are always well guarded.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER RACES

True to their reputations as ancient, inscrutable world-shapers, xiomorns have impacted numerous races across the multiverse. While some view them as legendary near-demigods, others consider them arrogant manipulators with dangerous agendas. Those races with the strongest connection to xiomorns are noted here.

Aboleths: The xiomorns have long found their experiments hindered and corrupted by aboleth machinations. Whether the aboleths seek to repurpose xiomorn efforts to effect their own insane designs or wholly turn the Vault Builders' schemes against their masters, their interference has marked them as being among the xiomorns' most loathed enemies. While neither race is known for its trophy taking, xiomorn corpses have occasionally been found in aboleth holdings and vice versa, suggesting both enmity and a shared curiosity between the two species.

Anunnaki: Just as xiomorns shape the course of worlds, the aloof anunnaki (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 5* 28) shape the course of life. Unfortunately—or, perhaps fortunately for extant life on the Material Plane—nearly every time the anunnaki and xiomorn have crossed paths, misunderstanding and circumstance have resulted in violent outbreaks. While this might be an incredible series of cosmic coincidences, it's also conceivable that some farsighted race might actively work to prevent these two manipulative forces from allying.

Crysmals: These scorpion-like natives of the Elemental Plane of Earth are often found in close proximity to xiomorn vaults. Crysmals' (*Bestiary 2* 61) appearance seems to be more than just happenstance, leading some to believe that the xiomorn might have had a hand in the original creation of this race—and perhaps still exert some control over them. A related hypothesis suggests that some breeds of crysmals might be a side effect of the vault-building process and that any role the xiomorn have in the crystalline beings' creation is entirely accidental.

Xorns: Most xorns have little knowledge of or opinion about the Vault Builders. However, some xorns of the Plane of Earth's Opaline Vault claim to have uncovered evidence of great crimes the xiomorns committed against their race in the distant past. Some even posit that the xorns' taste for gems and crystals might be a result of ancient xiomorn attempts to tamper with their kind and harness their abilities. As a result, some xorn scholars meet the Vault Builders with great suspicion or even violence.

Yithians: The Vault Builders collectively dread and loathe no race more than the yithians. Knowing of

these elusive beings' crimes against their kind—past, ongoing, and future—xiomorns actively seek greater insight into their foe's abilities and weaknesses, as well as any glimpse they might steal of the impending yithian cataclysm.

XIOMORNS ON GOLARION

While the Vault Builders played a huge role in the development of Golarion's early history, especially in the Darklands, their direct influence today hardly extends beyond the few remaining fragments of their past. The Vaults of Orv and the development of the Orvian language are the most direct evidence of their lingering influence, but even these are hidden far from where most of Golarion's inhabitants would have any knowledge of them. Their greatest investment was in their eons-long conflict with the aboleths, but eventually the cost proved too much, and they abandoned their Vaults of Orv and departed from Golarion to seek other, less hostile worlds for their experiments. Now all that remains are the deep-buried Vaults and the enigmatic ruins and inscriptions from their bygone era.

Any xiomorns encountered are likely lone Vault Keepers, left behind to continue tending their posts when the rest of the race withdrew from Golarion—or they are deserters. The long-abandoned Vaults of Orv remain as mute testimony to their creators, with empty cities such as Ilvarandin and strange magical constructions such as the jade islands of the Sightless Sea serving as tantalizing hints of what has gone before.

XIOMORN MAGIC

Several Vault Builder works of magic have been described in various sources.

Crystal Womb: This vortex of endlessly growing, collapsing, and regrowing crystals serves as a portal into the heart of the Plane of Earth—though it is not specifically identified as such—where lies the means by which the Vault Builders create connections between that plane and worlds on the Material Plane. See page 47 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Into the Darklands*.

Generation Stones: These crystals hold the souls and memories of deceased Vault Builders (see pages 72–73 for more information). Unbeknownst to the Vault Builders, members of the Unalloyed Dissent have discovered a way to divide one of

these crystals to create four new Vault Keepers without the need for a *Vault Seed*. These newly made Vault Keepers are able to exceed the limit of 32,768 and fall outside the very nature of the xiomorns' creation. The Unalloyed Dissent is attempting to build an army of seditious Vault Keepers in this way at the expense of the destroyed essences of deceased Vault Builders. A rumor has arisen among the dissenters that when these Vault Keepers outnumber the remaining Vault Builders, the Vault Keepers' mythic heritage will be returned and they will regain their rightful place. This rumor is probably untrue, however, and was likely started by one of the dark powers whom the Dissenters have been courting.

Ioun Stones: While ioun stones were not created by xiomorns, the Vault Builders are intensely interested in these magical gems, with some collecting them in vast numbers. Xiomorns rarely use the stones, though. Instead, they seem especially interested in breaking them for entirely mysterious reasons.

Jade Islands: Constructed during the Vault Builders' long-ago war with the aboleths, these islands found in Golarion's Sightless Sea served as psychic weapons to entrap the aboleths. See page 38 of *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Darklands Revisited*.

Orvgates: These machines are composed of stone, metal, and crystal and have a green crystalline, weblike funnel atop them that serves as a gateway between the different Vaults of Orv. These devices are not exclusive to Golarion and are simply called *vaultgates* on other worlds. See pages 148–149 of *Pathfinder Module: The Emerald Spire Superdungeon*.

Vault Seeds: These potent artifacts are used by the Vault Builders to construct their miraculous subterranean vaults as well as to sustain the resultant ecosystems, moderating environmental hazards such as heat or earthquakes and enabling the Vault Builders to nurture new and modified types of life-forms. See page 149 of *The Emerald Spire Superdungeon*.

Whisperstones: These are pillars of black stone that enhance the racial telepathy of any creature that touches one of them, allowing it to communicate with any creature it knows on the same planet. *Whisperstones* are used by xiomorns to communicate across the vast distances between their vaults.

See page 148 of *The Emerald Spire Superdungeon*.

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