



PEOPLE OF THE ROAD

THE VARISIAN WAY OF LIFE

“Ours has always been the wandering life, for to tarry too long in any one place is to invite stagnation. Yet we are not homeless—every Varisian carries his home on his back, in his songs, and in his heart. This great land is our house, and our only wall is the horizon. City-dwellers are songbirds who have traded their freedom for a silver cage, and their minds and legs grow weak with disuse. We are the eagles; the hunters, the untamed, the memory of how it was. We are the children of the wind. We are the people of the road.”

—Giloria Abashe, Varisian elder

Varisians see everything as in a state of transition. The chrysalis of chaos, hardship, or maturity transforms caterpillars into butterflies, though some are born butterflies, and others forever remain worms.

“Dance on the windsong, dance on the breeze. Soar to the clouds but smile on the trees,” goes the Varisian folk song. Children learn its message from the moment they are able to sing: Reach as high as you can, dance like the butterfly, but cherish your roots. Elders might seem somber and stolid, but they are the trees that supported your cocoon.

Still, Varisians find it difficult to emulate anything as still and slow-growing as a tree. “Freedom!” they sing, and with freedom comes motion. From Cheliav to Ustalav, Varisians dance across the land whose name they bear and far beyond. They might settle for a time, for a week, a month, or even a season, earning their keep with songs and stories or the sweat of their brows—and, sometimes, with nimble fingers and loose morals. Soon, though, the wind tugs at their cloaks and they spin away in search of their next home.

As some Varisians age, they search for a permanent home. Their bones ache from the years of dancing, and the comforts of a soft bed and a solid roof every night grow too strong to resist. A song still plays in their hearts, though, and melodies drift through their dreams. Too tired or too bitter to follow the haunting notes, they return to the still and quiet trees only to frown on the skies.

“Climb to the palace, climb to a star. Lie down to sleep for you know who you are.” Varisians sing some of their oldest folksongs only at funerals, in voices to make the birds weep. In times past, Varisian seers led their people with visions of the future. They wandered the breadth of the land with joyous hearts, reveling in the freedom afforded by a secure future. Gifted oracles guaranteed that the Varisians followed their destiny and assured that one day each Varisian would ascend to the stars to frolic in Desna’s palace.

Now the winds of fate turn the Varisians this way and that, sending them tumbling through a world they no longer understand. Seers find the future unreadable, and only twisting and unpredictable paths remain. Fingerbones and marked stones rattle in their cups and reveal murky answers even the wisest soothsayer strains to interpret. Varisians are a people with a destiny hidden from them—perhaps forever.

“A clink and a clash and a round calabash. Find the step and the turn where your heart starts to burn.” Almost every inn and tavern in Varisia has at one time or another housed a Varisian troupe of stomping, clapping, shouting dancers. The quick, precise turns require linked arms and joined hands and occasionally lift a participant clean off the ground. As the music grows louder, the dancers move faster, until—with a great cheer—the

watching patrons slam their mugs together and down the contents as the dizzying Alehouse Jig ends.

When settling in a new home, or leaving an old one; when venturing into unknown territory or revisiting a friendly campsite, when celebrating the procession of youth to adulthood or bidding goodbye to an elder whose time has come, whenever the cocoon unfolds and whenever the Varisians require just a little bit of luck, then come out the colorful skirts and gauzy veils, the scarves of a hundred different hues trimmed with beads and sequins, bells and tassels, fringe and feathers. With scarves and skirts and songs winding and unfurling in the breeze, the Varisians come together to dance the Butterfly Flight.

Eternal wanderers in love with their freedom, seers in search of a lost destiny, entertainers to whom every word is a song and every step is a dance—these are the Varisians.

“A History of the Varisians” by Edouard Montaigne

In the time before this Golden Age, we were slaves, servants to fearsome devils who reigned in the northern lands. Trapped by an ancient covenant, our people served the devils for thousands of years before a hero arose to free us. No one remembers his name, but we refer to him as *Vyush’baro*, the Cunning Wolf. He beseeched the devils to provide us with a new covenant, and tricked them into signing a document so full of masterful speech and loops of logic that, when the signing was complete, our people were free.

In a rage, the devils pursued us through the twilight years, destroying the land wherever they stepped. But *Vyush’baro* led us into barrows and through tunnels, under mountains and over plains, until the devils vanished in howls of frustrations and left us to claim our true destiny.

Some say *Vyush’baro* was an angel, a servant of Desna, and that one day he will return in our darkest hour. Then, once again, we will follow him through black despair and mourning and come out into sunlight, to live forever in joy in our promised land.



“A History of the Varisians” by Samrilla Deslee

The way my mother told it was that we once ruled a magnificent kingdom. We were kings and queens who lived in towers of gold and silver. We were so rich, vain, and powerful that we allowed a shadow to enter our hearts. We forgot our role as Desna’s chosen.

A wise woman, a fortuneteller named Amendra, saw our pride swell and sought to bring the word of Desna back to our people. Many cast away their fortunes to follow Amendra, while others chose to remain in their beautiful city. One morning, Amendra led the faithful away to find a new life as wanderers. That evening, a mysterious disaster struck the golden city, and all those who stayed behind died in the cataclysm.

Amendra taught our people that the quest for riches had led us astray. We forsake all property and settlement because we know it leads only to misery. Some think we wander aimlessly across Varisia, but we actually follow the path Amendra once took. My mother told me that, when we reach the end of the trail she left, Amendra will return and show us where our destiny lies.

“A History of the Varisians” by Ekatarine Petalan

I dream sometimes of a great darkness, of our people walking through chambers and hallways so vast the walls become lost in the shadows. We carry candles that cannot penetrate the black and serve figures that stand always with their faces turned away. They appear human, in my dreams, but I sense they are so much more.

Then a great roar shatters the funeral peace; the walls shake and ceilings crumble. My people flee, faces streaked with dust, hands bloody from climbing through the wreckage. Those faceless figures, our masters, shriek in anguish and call fire and ice from the skies to protect their castles. They care nothing for us. They do not follow. They bring their power to bear to protect their lands but all for naught. They fall beneath piles of rubble while my people march into the night.

In my dream, it seems we walk for years, both over the land and beneath it, always searching for something. We lose our brothers and sisters to wild animals, fierce creatures with red eyes, starvation, disease, and broken hearts. When it seems I cannot bear another moment of this miserable trek, the sun rises. A flight of butterflies lifts off from the grass, and my people spin in joy, arms raised to the light.

Now the sun begins its descent to the west, and I fear the coming dark. But as my dream splinters, I see a lunar-white moth flutter from the shadows to lead us on once more.

VARISIAN DRESS AND FAMILY SCARVES

Varisians favor scarves of all sizes and colors, but some hold special significance. Most notable is the family

RITUAL DANCES

Varisians, they say, have a dance for every occasion. Presented here are four of their most sacred and well-known dances.

Alehouse Jig: Pairs of men and women participate in this boisterous reel. Synchronized stomping of wooden clogs on floorboards lends a rousing beat, and the male dancers spin their partners in circles until their skirts twirl like colored discs.

Butterfly Flight: Varisians dance this dance whenever they desire luck or wish to affirm their devotion to Desna. Quick, graceful movements of dancers moving in a larger synchronized pattern mark this dance, with the participants wearing dozens of scarves and veils to represent butterflies.

Rube’s Roll: Varisians rename this dance from city to city to make it sound more flattering. Varisian women in slinky outfits, with perhaps one or two men for contrast and to help with intricate movements, shimmy and shake their way through this dance. Near the end they draw nearby audience members into the dance, guaranteeing generous tips from at least a few.

Vimaturi: This ancient dance is considered the holiest of rituals. A Varisian might dance the Vimaturi once in her lifetime, if she is lucky. Only under the guidance of a fortuneteller of exceptional wisdom can a clan dance the Vimaturi, and once danced, the ritual summons spirits of the clan’s ancestors. The spirits provide the clan with guidance or assistance, and grow angry if summoned for frivolous reasons. Beyond this, outsiders know no details of the Vimaturi.

scarf, or *kapenia*. Children receive their *kapenia* upon maturity; to own one is to be an adult. These long, heavy scarves display elegant and complicated embroidery that is incomprehensible to most outsiders. To Varisians, though, the scarves show family trees. By tracing the loops and whorls of a scarf, one can trace a person’s history, back through her mother and father, her siblings, grandparents and great-grandparents, as far back as the family has knowledge.

Varisians wear their *kapenia* only on special occasions, such as weddings or funerals. Most choose to be buried with their *kapenia*, though some bequeath them to loved ones. It is extraordinarily rare for a Varisian to bequeath her *kapenia* to a non-Varisian, or even a Varisian not of her clan.

Varisians wear sensible but colorful clothes during the workday. When performing, they dress in fancy gowns and heavily embroidered vests and trousers and wear excessive amounts of jewelry.

Varisians believe that certain colors carry specific powers and choose their outfits to attract the right type of energy. Pink is the color of love, kindness, and courage. Red represents lust, long life, and inner strength. Orange is the color of happiness and resourcefulness, and adventuring Varisians often wear a touch of orange on their travels. Green enhances wisdom and self-control.

Turquoise represents physical strength and nonverbal communication, and most dancing costumes feature it. Blue is the color of health, youth, and beauty. Violet enhances intuition and divine inspiration, so most fortunetellers and seers wear violet scarves.

Varisians love jewelry and favor gems over coins. Most pragmatically believe that worn wealth is harder to steal than wealth hidden out of sight in a tent or locked up in a box.

VARISIAN TATTOOS

Tattooing is an ancient and revered Varisian tradition; many Varisian artists also design and ink tattoos for their clan. Unlike the tattoos of the Shoanti barbarians, which tend to the angular and abstract, Varisian tattoos usually represent concrete objects.

Many Varisians choose tattoos for aesthetic or sentimental reasons, but several symbolic tattoos represent Varisian values and magic. Even the Varisians themselves have forgotten why these tattoos conjure particular associations, but they keep the tradition alive.

Seven-pointed stars are common and represent inner strength and magical prowess. Tattoos of butterflies, birds, or iridescent insect wings represent faith in Desna, talent in fortunetelling, and freedom. Feather wings or colored circles represent spirits and angelic beings; particular styles and colors sometimes symbolize particular ancestors or guardian spirits. Open flowers with many petals represent bountiful love, both romantic and familial, while closed buds represent love lost. Vines symbolize strong family ties and fertility. A variety of images represent art and entertainment: goblets, masks, ribbons, teardrops, and flames are the most common. Varisians often combine these images with a symbolic color to conjure precisely the right effect.

Finally, traditional tattoos exist which represent particular schools of magic. No one knows why these elaborate lines of abstract tattoos persist in the Varisians' cultural lore, but their use remains widespread. (See *Pathfinder* #3 for more details.)

VARISIAN MAGIC

Varisian culture contains three distinct types of magic. Most outsiders know Varisians best for their public magic: flamboyant, entertaining stage tricks. Dexterous Varisian children quickly learn how to palm coins and cards, pull scarves from ears, swallow swords, and bring "dead" sparrows back to life. The Sczarni use this training to malicious ends, strengthening Varisians' mostly undeserved reputation as swindlers and pickpockets. In addition to stage magic, many Varisians also possess a streak of real magic, in the

form of sorcery. Wizardry exists among Varisians, but is relatively rare due to logistical difficulties. Some wizards do the best they can, studying at libraries whenever the family stops in a city, or trading spells with other wizards they meet on the road. Sorcerers have an easier time, as their power comes from within, and most families see such manifestations as a gift from the spirits. Sorcerers often call thrushes or giant butterflies (same statistics as a thrush) to serve as familiars, as these creatures have strong ties to their religious beliefs. In addition to sorcery, some Varisians follow the path of the cleric, generally worshipping Desna, and Varisian druids bring substantial value to the wandering people.

Finally, Varisians believe in what they call true magic—that which their fortunetellers possess. Fortunetellers, almost always female, believe they draw



their power directly from Desna and the spirits of their ancestors. Even among clan members, a fortuneteller's power seems mysterious and frightening. None know for certain how these powers come about—the gift comes from within, and even its bearer may not understand the power completely.

FORTUNETELLING

Fortunetelling, the oldest and most respected Varisian tradition, is the domain of the women. While men have taken up the mantle of soothsayer in the past, women by far possess the most talent and the greatest success at predicting the future. Yet, ever since the unforeseen death of the god Aroden and the resulting failure of prophetic magic, Varisian fortunetellers have found themselves lost and adrift. Their predictions once guided their people, but now their castings come up bleak and distorted.

Still, fortunetellers remain the heart of a clan. A fortuneteller lives in a small, private wagon, and the members of her clan frequently leave tokens of appreciation—posies, embroidered handkerchiefs, fresh-baked buns—outside her door. Though her predictions are now inconsistent and sometimes fail entirely, clans still consult their fortuneteller before making any major decision. Young men and women come to the fortuneteller with silver coins and scarves full of gathered herbs seeking good fortune in romance. Even outsiders sometimes approach Varisian camps, timidly offering worked goods and gold in exchange for a few minutes with the fortuneteller.

Fortunetellers traditionally pass their knowledge down to their daughters, ensuring their talents live on through the women of the tribe. Yet a thread of mystery winds through the history of Varisian fortunetellers, one strengthened by too many stories and strange events to be broken by common logic.

Varisians pay their elders great respect out of the belief that power increases with age, and this is especially true for fortunetellers. The eldest women in a clan possess the greatest wisdom, and stories abound of elderly fortunetellers who can lay curses on enemies, read a person's death in their eyes, and speak with the spirits of the dead.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Varisians find travel exciting and fulfilling. Most children are born on the road and spend their whole lives moving from place to place. Few can name their birthplace.

The composition of Varisian caravans varies wildly, but the most common contain four to eight large wagons and one small one, in which the fortuneteller travels. The caravan keeps two horses for each wagon, plus two or three for riding and in case one of the horses pulling a wagon sustains an injury. A herd of five to ten sheep or

METHODS OF FORTUNETELLING

Varisian fortunetellers and oracles use a variety of methods to read potential destinies.

Bones: By casting dry bones onto a flat surface, a fortuneteller can read runes and portents in the pattern. Chicken bones are traditional, though some oracles find them too brittle for everyday use. Many favor bones from foxes, weasels, and badgers for their durability. Fortunetellers often use bones when attempting to predict a death or disastrous event.

Cards: The most popular method of prognostication involves readings using a deck of cards known as the Harrow. For more information, see page 58.

Coins: A collection of coins from various regions and cultures sometimes serves the same function as bones. By interpreting the pattern of heads, tails, and overlaps, the oracle gains insight. Some fortunetellers claim that using coins heightens the accuracy of prophecies made regarding interactions with foreigners.

Hieromancy: Varisians widely consider reading the future in the entrails of slaughtered animals to be accurate but distasteful, and many refuse to end an animal's life for a reading save in the direst need. The Sczarni, however, make frequent use of hieromancy.

Spheres: Varisians believe the stars are spheres which give off light, and spherical objects hold special significance. Fortunetellers often look into crystal balls or roll small orbs of glass on the ground to tell the future.

goats provides milk and sometimes trade goods for the caravan. A pack of dogs serves as herders and guardians.

Solid wooden boxes topped with flexible willow "ribs" comprise a Varisian wagon. Canvas or oilcloth, stretched tightly over the ribs, protects the interiors from rain and snow, and Varisians often dye their wagon-tops bright colors. Most of the wagons contain boxed goods, trunks, barrels, and crates—not riders. The majority of the caravan walks, with only the ill, the very elderly, and the very young riding in the wagons. At night, the caravanners sleep under the open sky. If the caravan stops for more than a night, wagon-tops set on the ground make fine tents, and canvas tarpaulins protect the goods within the wagon boxes. In inclement weather, the travelers pitch tents or some sleep beneath and inside the wagons.

When possible, a caravan makes stops at small towns along trade roads. There it trades sewing, sheep's wool, trinkets, and carvings for dry goods and supplies. Varisians' greatest passion (next to traveling) is performing, and they seek out towns both to resupply and to entertain. A good performance nets a caravan enough money to splurge on fancy fabrics, pretty jewels, and forged weapons. An excellent performance might garner



gifts from the audience, such as baked goods, alcohol, or free lodging, while a poor performance leaves the caravan hungry and might get it run out of town.

Not all settlements welcome Varisian caravans, as unscrupulous Varisians and the notorious Sczarni have left their mark in the form of tales of Varisian deceit. Many peasants view Varisians as little better than thieves, and shut their doors in the face of performers. Some settlements react with undisguised hostility, meeting Varisian caravans with violence. Varisians rarely stand and fight in such instances. Doing so nets them nothing, and most caravans are not bloodthirsty pillagers.

Travelers and merchants sometimes ask to journey with Varisian caravans, on the principle of safety in numbers. Rarely does a traveler ask a second time, though—the Varisians' whimsical nature and love of travel means they often have no destination in mind. They find speed irrelevant—the journey is the purpose. Thus, caravans often take meandering routes, following shortcuts or alternative routes based on shooting stars, the patterns of stones in a river, a peculiar whinny from a horse, and a hundred other signs that seem meaningless to outsiders. Other travelers sometimes refuse to associate with Varisian caravans, believing them to be bad luck. "A race as mysterious as the

Varisians must hold many secrets," they reason, "and not all of them benign." Some travelers actually make a sign to ward off evil upon spotting a Varisian caravan.

Though hardly efficient, travel with Varisians is generally comfortable and relaxed, as an experienced caravan knows the best fishing and trapping spots, how herds of animals move, and typical weather patterns. Caravans tend to stick to particular areas in particular seasons, although the guidance of a fortuneteller always trumps past experience.

Varisians rarely settle down, and when they do, they form small, tightly-knit communities. These settled Varisians do not see themselves as owners of the land—such a concept is foreign to their culture—only as weary travelers unable or unwilling to continue the journey their brethren enjoy. Misunderstandings often occur between cultures who value land ownership and Varisian clans who inhabit a particular area.

THE SCZARNI

Tales of Varisian treachery and deceit usually come from interactions with the Sczarni, a clan of Varisians dedicated to larceny and confidence games. The Sczarni travel less frequently than their kin, setting up shop

NOTORIOUS SZARNI

Though the Szarni do their best to operate in secrecy, a few leaders possess a reputation notorious enough to spawn rumors. The following individuals lead Szarni families in illicit activities all over Varisia.

Doru Vasilica: Doru, also called King Longshadow, moves like a whirlwind across Varisia. Displaying mobility uncommon to the Szarni, Doru's family strikes, moves on, and strikes again with dizzying speed.

Jaster Frallino: This thug operates out of Magnimar, where he leads a family of Szarni known as the Gallowed. See *Pathfinder #2* for more information on Jaster.

Jubrayl Vhiski: No definite tie connects this thug and layabout to the Szarni, but the local authorities in Sandpoint strongly suspect Jubrayl leads a family of two dozen. See *Pathfinder #1* for more information on Jubrayl.

Rosannah Haralam: Also known as Queen Goldsmith, Rosannah's family engages in counterfeiting, an unusual occupation for Szarni but one for which they possess great talent.

Zilly Fortuna: Rumor holds that this ancient crone possesses true divinatory magic, which accounts for her family's knack for being in the right place at the right time. Whenever opportunity knocks, Zilly's gang answers.

in cities for months—even years—at a time. So long as their criminal activities go undetected, Szarni continue to bleed their victims until their pockets are full and neighbors grow suspicious. They then move on to the next town and start over.

The Szarni possess hearts of stone and morals of butter, but they rarely engage in outright malicious activity. Their concern is gold, not violence, and they generally eschew more violent crimes like rape and murder. Instead, the Szarni focus on subtler lawbreaking: gambling operations, con artistry, swindles, scams, petty theft, and minor thuggery. They believe this nets them the highest possible profit at low risk. The Szarni might find themselves driven out of town, beaten, or imprisoned—perhaps even mutilated—for their crimes, but they rarely hang.

Most Szarni operate in small packs, mimicking a traditional Varisian clan structure. Instead of an elder, though, the most talented thief or most profitable con artist assumes the role of leader. Leaders often grant themselves the title of king or queen, sometimes attached to an honorific. For example, a leader who gained his position through his skill as a pickpocket might go by the name King Swiftfingers.

Traditional fortunetellers refuse to associate with the Szarni, but many crime families contain at least one woman who attempts to fill the role. These amateur oracles guide decisions through traditional fortunetelling

methods, such as bones and cards. They lack the talent of true wise women, however, and Szarni leaders rarely give these prophecies full weight.

Most Szarni consider themselves proud Varisians. They believe they honor their culture by living off of the foolishness of outsiders, many of whom mistrust and persecute Varisians. Traditional Varisians frown on the Szarni way of life, believing their actions exacerbate tensions with outsiders, but they also accept Szarni as family. A Varisian clan might hate the Szarni, but they still come to their kin's aid in times of need.

CLANS AND BLOODLINES

Varisians use the terms “clan” and “tribe” interchangeably. Both refer to a group of Varisians who travel and live together, even though each member might not be related by blood. “Bloodline” and “family” refer to smaller family units within a clan, ones related by blood, marriage, or very close bonds of respect and friendship. The definition of family can be difficult to explain to outsiders, as Varisian families develop slowly over time and rely on events that might have occurred long ago. Clans might occasionally travel together in the same caravan, but they usually go their own ways after a few weeks.

Varisians believe wisdom comes with age, and as such hold their elders in great esteem. Children are taught to listen to and obey all older clan members, whether relations or not. Varisians love and care for their children, but believe their true potential develops only in time. Clans consider the birth of a child a great blessing, as their strong cultural pride fears Varisian extinction. Children preserve Varisian culture and carry on traditions.

While free-spirited individuals, Varisians remain heavily tied to tradition and value their bloodlines. Marriage requires more than two individuals in love; Varisians cherish family above all, and are loath to admit just anyone into their family. Marriage to non-Varisians is strongly frowned upon, but a family might accept a foreign suitor who proves his worth and spends enormous effort to win over his future family. The family might also object to a seemingly suitable match based on ancient history, feuds with another bloodline, or a wise woman's divinations. For the suitor to win the hand of his beloved requires heroic effort, great deeds, and endless patience.

Varisians believe in a peaceful afterlife full of joy and contentment in Desna's palace. Even so, they receive news of a clan member's death with sorrow. Funeral rites are private and solemn affairs; outsiders almost never get the opportunity to witness a Varisian funeral. Mourners sing laments in honor of the deceased and bury the body out

SPICY CHICKPEA SIMMER

Varisians favor simple stews on the road, and roasted meat, freshly gathered fruits, and herbs round out the meal. Most caravans begin preparing a large pot of stew in the morning, allowing the flavors to simmer and meld over the course of the day until the clan gathers for dinner in the evening. The following recipe emulates what a traditional Varisian meal might taste like.

Ingredients

1 bunch kale
 1 (12 ounce) can tomatoes, stewed
 1 (16.5 ounce) can chickpeas
 1 large onion
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 teaspoon chili powder
 1/2 teaspoon paprika
 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
 1/2 teaspoon lemon juice
 1/4 teaspoon pepper
 1/4 teaspoon salt

Directions

In a large skillet, preferably cast iron, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-low heat. Add chopped onion and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 2 cloves minced garlic and cook another 2–3 minutes until garlic is golden and fragrant and onions are soft.

While onion and garlic cook, drain and rinse chickpeas. Add chickpeas, chili powder, paprika and cumin to skillet. Stir constantly for 1 minute until spice mixture coats chickpeas. Add stewed tomatoes and stir to combine. Lower heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

While mixture simmers, coarsely chop kale (chard, cabbage, or other leafy greens may be substituted). Add chopped greens to skillet, stir, and simmer another 5 minutes until greens are wilted and tender. Add salt, pepper, and fresh lemon juice. Stir and remove from heat. Serve over brown rice or pasta.

in the open—at a crossroads, if possible, to represent the limitless roads available to the departed in the afterlife. The gravediggers bury the dead with trinkets, jewelry, ornaments, and other presents from the living. This is one reason why Varisian funerals are kept secret: to discourage grave robbing. Only Varisians know that their dead lie with valuables, and even the Sczarni would not dare disturb a Varisian grave. To do so would be to invite branding and exile.

Four times a year, during the seasonal changes, Varisians honor their dead with a feast that lasts from

sundown to sunrise. All night, the Varisians celebrate in a subdued manner, telling stories about the departed, singing mournful tales about lost loves, and reminding loved ones how special they are. At sunrise, the clan dances the Dawning Dance to welcome the new day and all the challenges the future brings.

Rumor holds that some of the eldest and wisest Varisian fortunetellers possess the power to commune with the dead, and some clans believe all prophecies come from the benevolent spirits of their ancestors. Even among those without magical gifts, some elderly Varisians believe they can speak to their ancestors and receive guidance from them.

A TYPICAL VARISIAN FAMILY

The Marandici clan, widespread and hungry for the road, has seen most of Varisia in its travels. Petre Marandici, the patriarch of his particular branch, takes pride in caring for his flock—sometimes to an extreme. Since losing his wife, Iulia, 2 years ago to a wasting disease, Petre acts the part of a protective father at all times. Some of the younger Marandicis chafe under his well-intentioned protectiveness, but their sympathy keeps them from rebelling, at least thus far.

Petre places great weight on the recommendations of Georgeta, Iulia's mother, a white-haired woman with the gift of foresight and great skill with the Harrow. Georgeta, always austere, withdrew even further after Iulia's death. She rarely stirs from her wagon, only rousing herself during festivals and at Petre's beseeching.

Petre's brother, Criste, is not related by blood, but in his youth saved Petre from drowning, and the two declared themselves brothers. Criste is still young and handsome enough to bring in substantial coin when he performs in towns. He fears the loss of his looks as he ages, however, and spends an increasing amount of resources on "youth potions" and virility enhancers, much to the amusement of the younger Marandicis. Petre's youngest son, Silviu, idolizes his Uncle Cristi, and plans to follow in his footsteps and become the greatest dancer and juggler in the clan.

Petre's oldest son, Iulian, named for his mother, also lost interest in clan life after Iulia's death. He now wanders alone for longer and longer periods, leaving the clan behind to hunt and scout for days at a time. The two middle children, twin girls named Nicoleta and Ruxandra, do their best to mother the family in Iulia's absence. Nicoleta is married to Viorel, a pleasant Varisian man, and they have a baby girl named Rosalie. Meanwhile, Ruxandra plots how best to follow Iulian on his trips. She suspects her older brother is preparing to leave the clan and wander on his own, and she wishes to join him.