



Channel Divinity: Vecna

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DEVOTEES OF THE MAIMED ONE

“Yet we have not forgotten. The time for benevolent demonstration is over. Vecna’s legacy demands true rebellion. These deities have massacred every belief we hold dear. They have banished our lord and despoiled his name. The only way to show them the nature of their evil is to commit our own acts of despicable villainy. Then they will see their own evil reflected in our actions.”

—The Scroll of Mauthereign

Searchers for meaning in the cosmos rarely let their wandering eyes linger upon the Maimed One. Vecna's name alone evokes terror in those who hear it. The tales concerning the dark god are filled with necromancy and pain, betrayal, and evil perhaps in its purest form. As a mortal, Vecna proved willing to do things none of his contemporaries dared. He was the first to sacrifice his body to gain immortality as a lich. He used his magic to raise up an army of undead and conquer an empire. He was betrayed, dismembered, and swallowed up by the Shadowfell to fight a war against his one-time companion and eternal rival for eons. And eventually, he stole divine power for himself to complete his apotheosis and become the god of secrets, the undead, and necromancy.

How then could anyone unsullied by darkness turn to the Whispered One for guidance and council? How could any reasonable mortal embrace the darkness that is Vecna? How could a heroic adventurer reconcile courageous and bold action with service to such a despicable master?

Without a doubt Vecna is evil, and those in service to him are cut from the same cloth. After all, Vecna is the god of undeath. His evil is the stuff of nightmare and his efforts to enfold the world in a necromantic grip have been ceaseless, predating his plunge into corruption. Yet for all that Vecna embodies the darkness, he is also the god of secrets, the lord of whispers, and the keeper of forbidden knowledge. Given the wickedness at large in the world, almost anyone would agree that some things should remain hidden—that certain truths should be left undiscovered. It is in this capacity that some unlikely individuals find their paths intersecting with those of light's champions to keep secret what should never be revealed.

THE TRUTH?

The truth has never been important to Vecna's followers. Or, rather, the truth is something they see as mutable, something they can bend to serve their interests. And if it means changing the facts about their god and his rise to power, so be it.

The trouble with Vecna's followers is that secrecy is the all-important objective in everything they do. It is better to further their designs from the shadows than to risk another confrontation with the hated foes found in other gods' servants. To make matters worse, followers of Vecna are under no obligation to work together. Many priests work in isolation, building small cults of likeminded and loyal followers. Isolation and truth's mutability ensure each sect has particular ideas about their god's identity and what it means to serve the Whispered One in the world.

Certain facts are true to every strain of Vecna worship. Vecna was once a mortal of great magical power. Magical mastery enabled Vecna to secure temporal power, with the assistance of his companion Kas. At some point during his ascent, he created the Lich Transformation ritual, then became a lich, and finally authored the *Book of Vile Darkness*. Not long after or maybe during this time, Kas betrayed him and nearly destroyed him. Vecna was dismembered and scattered. His soul, too heavy from wickedness, would not disincorporate and instead reclaimed all the missing pieces of his body but his hand and eye. His triumph over death allowed him to complete his transformation and become the god he always wanted to be.

The order of these events, Vecna's identity before his rise to power, explanations for the betrayal, and just how exactly Vecna became a god are all subjects

for debate and have proved instrumental to keeping the various factions at each others' throats from the moment Vecna came to power. Some believe, as recounted in the Scroll of Mauthereign, the gods themselves feared and hated Vecna, persecuting him for his brilliance and powers. Others have claimed Vecna was the mortal offspring of He Who Was and in him was entrusted the very hope for the world. Then again, there are tales about how Vecna was born to a despicable witch who showed him the path to darkness before she was herself cast into a pyre by righteous zealots. Kas might have been a redeemer, freeing Vecna from Nerull's influence, or he could have been a villain without peer, a traitor and blackguard who coveted Vecna's power. Too many variations exist for anyone to discover the actual truth and this is just how the Maimed One wants it.

Keeping the circumstances about his rise to power secret ensures no one can replicate them. As well, mortals invent far more elaborate tales about Vecna than what could have happened. The more fantastical the fabrication, the greater and more dreadful Vecna becomes. Finally, Vecna's past is really unimportant when it comes to understanding the god and his interests in the world. Myth and legend are sufficient explanations for his ascent and their fanciful embellishments just reinforce how unique a figure he must have been to become something greater than that to which he was born.

THE WHISPERED COMMANDMENTS

Although there are factions beyond counting in service to the Whispered One, all cleave to certain commandments laid out for them in the most ancient scrolls. These essential demands dictate how Vecna expects his followers to behave, what they should do in service to him, and, ultimately, give purpose to their lives. Vecna's basic commandments are as follows.

Follow the Subtle Path: Enemies abound. Ostentatious displays invite their attention. Reveal nothing about yourself and never offer more information than is required. Hold back all that you can because secret knowledge gives you power over others. Vecna knows your spirit, so never risk yourself or your gains by revealing your devotion to nonbelievers.

Nurture the Seed of Darkness: Search your heart, your mind, and your body for darkness and surrender to its power. Let the shadow consume you, fill you with its perfect darkness, and guide your actions in the world.

Those who shine brightest cast the darkest shadows. Corruption's potential is your greatest ally. Locate darkness's seed in those around you. Nurture it until the evil flourishes. Once your subject is in its throes, he or she will be powerless to resist you and become your obedient thrall.

Reject All Gods but Vecna: The Maimed God is the one true god of all gods. All others are lesser godlings, sycophants, and pretenders. They win mortal affection through trickery and fraud. Reject them and go forth confident in Vecna's favor.

Scorn the priests who prostrate at the altars to the false gods. Trust them not because they covet the

blessings Vecna bestows on you. Oppose their efforts lest they steal from you what you have earned.

Servants of Darkness

The relationship between an individual and his or her god is purely subjective. Remember, the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*® is a polytheistic one. Mortals from all races regard the gods as one body, a group populated with virtuous and shining individuals in whose shadows lurk the sinister, scheming, and corrupt. A petitioner might invoke many gods in the same prayer, beseeching the good or evil deity to intercede in those areas the god influences. Vecna, for all his obvious wickedness, has a place among

mortals and the prayers he receives come from dark intent. An adulterous man might offer a sacrifice to Vecna to keep his affair secret. A conspiracy to overthrow a tyrannical government might also call to the Maimed One to shroud their meetings in secrecy. A murderer might sketch the hand and eye in a victim's blood to ask the Whispered One to hide the wicked deed.

Vecna's servants are a reprehensible lot. Suspicious to the point of paranoid delusion, they veil themselves in secrecy. They retreat to the dark places in the world, hiding their religious devotion behind many different masks, sometimes living and working alongside right-minded people. Most are hard-lined fanatics, cleaving to the ancient lore passed down to them in sacred scrolls. They view any deviation from these texts as dangerous invention and regard those who cling to those beliefs as liabilities to their work.

These followers form an evil society. They scour the lands for forbidden knowledge and hoard it, perusing the filthy texts for secrets they can use to grow their own power. Most followers are versed in necromantic magic and rely on undead servants as guardians or companions.

Vecna's agenda is anathema to mortals. Snuffing out life and animating the remains to become undead thralls is not something many folks are eager to embrace. Still, people are sworn to the Maimed One all the time, giving their lives to bring about the dark future as promised by their master. Most are castoffs, freaks, and insane—misguided souls who have been duped into believing the lies foisted on them by Vecna's demagogues. Others see Vecna as a means to an end and as a vehicle to grow their own power. Whatever their reasons, once sworn to the Whispered One's service there is no escape.

BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS

The greatest and most enduring evil loosed upon the world is the *Book of Vile Darkness*. It's believed Vecna authored the work in the days before Kas maimed and nearly destroyed him. In it, Vecna recorded all the dark lore and knowledge he discovered in his mortal life, from dealings with demons to bargains made with devils. He advanced necromancy by leaps and bounds, revealed the alien powers living among the stars, and even included a ritual to breach the boundaries of the mortal world. Vecna never intended this lore to spread beyond his own library, but was powerless to halt its dissemination after the betrayal. Since then, the Book has become an artifact, appearing at various points in history to create much confusion and despair wherever and whenever it surfaces. Many cultists of Vecna make it their life's work to claim the book for themselves, either to lock it away or to awaken its true power.

Keepers of the Forbidden Lore

As terrible a force as Vecna can be, not everything associated with the god is evil. Vecna might be the god of undead, but he is also the god of secrets and he charges his followers with safeguarding dangerous and forbidden lore, to keep it hidden at all costs. Most followers of Vecna see this command as license to delve deeply into forbidden magic, but a more nuanced reading reveals that perhaps even Vecna understands some things are best kept secret.

Although Vecna would conquer the world and reduce its people to undead servants, he has no interest in seeing the Far Realm spill madness into the world or a demonic horde vomited up from the Abyss to lay waste to creation. Vecna does not want Nerull to return to power, nor does he want the Chained God freed from his Abyssal prison. Any threat to the world's survival denies him his ultimate goal, so it is in his best interest to ensure certain ideas, spells, rituals, and their ilk remain secret. Thus Vecna compels his followers to stifle anything they find that could imperil the world. They are to gather up this lore and secure it in the deepest, darkest vaults where Ioun's contemptible light can never fall.

The Keepers of the Forbidden Lore are a tiny sect as ancient and as storied as any other sect associated with Vecna. Contemporaries of Vecna when he walked the world as a lich, they were enforcers charged with gathering dangerous lore and returning it to him, whereupon he studied and perhaps compiled it in the *Book of Vile Darkness*. The Keepers survived Vecna's dismemberment and fall and continued their work in the long ages that followed.

Outside of a few orthodox sects, most followers of Vecna are not even aware the Keepers exist. Like their rivals, they value secrecy in their dealings, working from the shadows to gather up dangerous knowledge and to destroy those who would put into action the ideas such lore contains. Unlike other followers, the Keepers have opted not to take a side in the struggle between good and evil, and instead see it as their holy duty to protect the world from dangerous ideas. When Vecna returns, they plan to give to the dark god the works they have compiled to do with as



he wills. Until this day comes, the Keepers are ready and willing to lay down their lives to prevent such dark knowledge from leaving their control.

The Keepers have few allies in the world. Other followers see them as heretics, strange and untrustworthy since the Keepers reject most of the nastier rituals and ceremonies that make Vecna's followers so despicable. The Keepers also have trouble with Ioun since the god and her followers seem unable to recognize how dangerous a game they play. Many of Ioun's followers believe all information should be available for study, no matter how dangerous such knowledge might be. The idea is that it isn't the information that's dangerous, but how it is used. Thus the moral obligation to not use that knowledge falls squarely on the shoulders of the person who studies it.

As one might expect, the Keepers have little use for that kind of evasion and know from great experience that knowledge can be neutral, but it can also be uplifting or destructive. And so, the Keepers infiltrate Ioun's temples when possible, stealing the more dubious manuscripts or killing those who might use them for dark ends until the work can be contained.

SERVING VECNA

Serving Vecna means a life spent in shadows. Every action and every effort you make are lies told to conceal your true loyalties from those who don't understand or who oppose your patron. You cling to your secrets, guarding your knowledge against discovery, even if it means causing trouble for your comrades. You are unafraid to peer into the darkness because it merely reflects the poison coursing through your mortal soul.

As an unaligned devotee, you might approach your faith from a pragmatic perspective. Vecna is a distant patron who lends you power in exchange for your service. You follow the principles put forward by your god, but you are not above making creative interpretations to mitigate their darker results. For example, you might focus on opposing specific gods such as the Raven Queen, Zehir, or Asmodeus, while holding other gods in a general disdain. Likewise, actively seeking to corrupt your companions might not be your style, but you would never stop an ally from indulging in his or her bad behavior, and then using that behavior to your advantage later.

Creating a Follower of Vecna

When creating a servant of Vecna, it's important to keep the following ideas and options in mind.

Class

Not all player characters who choose Vecna as their god are members of a divine class. Vecna has strong ties to the shadow power source and thus most of his worshipers follow in his steps and dabble in darkness. Assassins, mages, and warlocks are all common.

For divine classes, Vecna can create some complications, especially when it comes to alignment. Most divine classes expect the character's alignment to match that possessed by the god. So if you want to play an invoker or paladin (other than a cavalier), you must choose the evil alignment. Avengers and clerics have a bit more flexibility, letting you choose unaligned or evil. Two classes stand out as exceptions. Warpriests (from *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*) and rune-priests can have any alignment regardless of the god they serve. However, you need to come up with a good reason for being good while serving such an obviously evil god.

Race

Members of any race might find cause to pledge service to the Maimed One, though humans are the most common people to follow Vecna. Vecna was human before he became a lich and his traditions, values, and culture all find their origins in the human race. Revenants might also serve Vecna, if only as a way to understand their undead status. Devas and most fey races have little interest in this dark god.

Skills and Skill Powers

As a follower of the god of secrets, you can demonstrate your affiliation with the god by taking training in knowledge skills or by swapping out utility powers for skill powers associated with the knowledge skills. Look at Arcana, History, and Religion first since these areas are the ones that best reflect Vecna's interests.

Feats

In addition to the new feats described below, Vecna's followers favor feats associated with divine devotion, learning and lore, and any feats associated with shadow, such as those described in *Heroes of Shadow*. In particular, Disciple of Death, Disciple of Lore, and Disciple of Shadow (*Heroes of the Fallen Lands*) strongly reflect the boons Vecna might grant to particularly cherished followers.

Class Features and Powers

When choosing powers for your character, focus on those that conceal or deceive other creatures, such as those with the illusion keyword. Attack powers that deal necrotic damage are also important, as are any powers that create undead or draw from the shadow power source. With your DM's permission, you might also adapt existing powers, changing the keywords and damage type from radiant to either necrotic or psychic.

Alignment and Final Details

It bears repeating: Most mortals who worship Vecna are evil and as such they make poor adventurers. The rare unaligned follower of Vecna doesn't dare reveal his or her loyalties to keep from inviting persecution from the god's enemies. What drew you to

the Whispered One? Most player characters who follow Vecna find the Keepers of the Forbidden Lore a strong option for reconciling their loyalties with being a heroic force in the world. The sect makes few demands on its members and downplays Vecna's evil aspects, while working toward a positive end in the world. In this way, the most virtuous cavaliers might debate the means, but have a hard time arguing against the end.

If you opt not to be affiliated with that sect, what is your story? How do you come to terms with your god's dark nature and your responsibilities in the world? Is Vecna a means to an end? Do you hope to follow in his steps? Do you serve Vecna out of hatred for another god, such as the Raven Queen or Zehir? Do you conceal your religious affiliation, or do you risk your life by professing your devotion to what is often regarded as one of the most evil deities in the pantheon? When confronted by an enemy of your god, how do you react?

Although it's advised you stick with being unaligned, serving Vecna does suggest an evil alignment. Be warned that even when they are made up of like-minded companions, evil adventuring parties rarely find success. Betrayals and interparty treachery take their toll, and in almost every case the entire enterprise dissolves in a bloody internecine power struggle. As always, before you create an evil adventurer, be sure to talk it over with your Dungeon Master and your fellow players to ensure that your character choice can fit within the larger group without being overly disruptive.

NEW HEROIC TIER FEATS

The Whispered One claims dominion over undead and secrets. Those who follow him and champion the spheres he controls find their patron offers bountiful rewards. The following feats help tailor divine characters to better fit as Vecna's servants.

Divinity Feats

Command Undead

Vecna Feats

Corrupting Presence

Hasten the Rot

Master of Secrets

Touched by Darkness

Vecna's Final Command

Command Undead

Vecna claims dominion over all undead creatures and extends his dark authority to those who serve him.

Prerequisite: A channel divinity power that targets undead from your class, and you must worship Vecna.

Benefit: You gain the *command undead* power.

Command Undead

Feat Attack

You compel an undead creature to become your slave for a time.

Encounter ♦ **Divine, Implement, Shadow**

Standard Action Close burst 5 (10 at 21st level)

Target: One undead creature in the burst

Attack: Wisdom vs. Will

Hit: You slide the target up to a number of squares equal to 3 + your primary ability modifier. The target then becomes immobilized until the end of your next turn. Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to the target takes 5 damage. *Level 11:* 10 damage. *Level 21:* 20 damage.

Miss: The target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Corrupting Presence

Vecna favors you with a shadowy mantle that appears whenever you draw from the darkness to fuel your attacks.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: When you use a divine encounter or daily attack power that has the necrotic keyword, you can create a zone in a close burst 1. The zone lasts until the end of your next turn. Bright light in the zone becomes dim light. Allies in the zone gain a +1 power bonus to attack rolls with necrotic powers.

Hasten the Rot

Undead creatures sense Vecna's favor around you. When you strike them, they cringe from you in fear of displeasing your dark master.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: Undead enemies hit by your divine encounter attack powers and daily attack powers that have the necrotic keyword also become slowed until the end of your next turn.

Master of Secrets

Your knowledge of secrets imparts a power useful toward completing your quests.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: You can choose skill powers associated with Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, and Religion as if you were trained in those skills.

Touched by Darkness

Your study of the forbidden has stained your soul.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: Whenever you use a divine attack power with the necrotic keyword, your attack ignores the first 5 points of necrotic resistance the target has.

Vecna's Final Command [Divinity]

Necromantic power is yours to command. You can channel divine energy to briefly animate a dying creature and exact a final service from it.

Prerequisite: Any channel divinity power, must worship Vecna

Benefit: You gain the *Vecna's final command* power.

Vecna's Final Command Feat Utility

You hold death back to allow the dying one final attack.

Encounter ♦ Channel Divinity, Divine

Immediate Interrupt Close burst 5

Trigger: A creature in the burst drops to 0 hit points.

Target: The triggering creature

Effect: The target makes a basic attack against a creature you choose.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons, Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, A Song of Ice and Fire RPG, Star Wars RPG, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *D&D® Gamma World: Famine in Far-Go*, *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, and in *Monster Manual 3*. Also, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com.