

ARTICLE

THE VELLURITH, PART ONE

What is the Vellurith? Why would beholders seek such a thing out? Find out more in this week's Forging the Forgotten Realms.

To humans of Faerûn, the dreaded creatures known variously as beholders or eye tyrants are more known in legend than met with in life. The relatively few humans to encounter a beholder seldom survive, or they end up petrified for long years.

Many and wild are the tales of what beholders can do, or have done, to adventurers, from effortlessly destroying strong wizards in spell-duels to magically ripping every bone out



of a living human body to leave behind a helpless, drowning-in-its-own-blood puddle of flesh and tissue. In all of this, there's not one word of the Vellurith, the Game Undying. Until now.

THE DOOM OF XROON

The beholder race includes many mighty individuals, because they are bright and capable entities, and any beholder that lasts long must be formidable. Only a few become legendary among their own kind, and one such was Xroon, the widely feared "Tyrant of Tyrants," infamous as the most deft of manipulators, awesome in battle (it once defeated three other tyrants in the same battle), and a creator of new and powerful magic.

As Xroon became an elder eye tyrant, it developed ways of mindspeaking other beholders in ways that they could not block, trace, or lash out at it through. It used this rarely, but the one time it did was to announce its own imminent demise—and it added that those who attended swiftly at the place of its passing might profit thereby.

So it was that almost thirty beholders converged on a remote ruin atop a tor in the northern Trollclaws, rushing into the caverns beneath the cellars of that forsaken keep to seize the magic accumulated during its life by the Tyrant of Tyrants. It discovered no beholder body, no treasure, and but one thing of magic: a glowing egg-like ovoid about the size of a human head, smooth and iridescent, enveloped in a glowing aura and floating in the center of a large cavern.

Any creature that touched or entered the aura received a mind-message that told them the object was an "ithrim" of Xroon's own making, living magic that if consumed by a beholder would allow that beholder to gain a new body as Xroon had done. The Tyrant of Tyrants was no longer in its lair because Xroon had been reborn in a new body, vigorous and vital again—and able now to become spectral (and completely invisible, as well) at will. At this point, Xroon no longer felt the need to dominate or manipulate its own kind or others; it was at peace, having moved "beyond the frailties of our kind."

THE GAME UNDYING

The gathered beholders fought each other viciously to try to claim the ithrim, but the moment the blood from a wounded eye tyrant touched the aura of the egg, that radiance flared with magical radiance and disappeared, leaving behind in the air the voice of Xroon: "Win the Vellurith, and my ithrim shall be yours."

The Vellurith, or "the Game Undying," is far older than Xroon. Said to have originated among the Beholder Ancients upon the command of the Great Mother, it's a sacred game of manipulation that has been played for a long time among tyrants of Toril, causing many deaths despite the intent of the gaming being to avoid direct battles between beholders. Since the 1100s DR, over twenty elder beholders up and down the Sword Coast have survived as active participants in the Vellurith. They share the belief

that both successes in the game and winning the game result in rewards from the Great Mother that can help them “rise to the next upliftedness,” as they say.

The Vellurith is played by doing as the Chosen of Mystra do: working to promote the aims of the goddess of magic: to manipulate individuals, political outcomes, and societal attitudes and customs to accomplish goals. Any direct confrontation between players, including destructive bloodshed counts against initiators, because it is seen as resorting to the low methods of lesser races.

The Vellurith has nine goals—and to win the game, a player must accomplish five of them. (Thus far, only two have been accomplished by different beholders.) Each goal accomplished, however, rewards the one who accomplished it, or every collaborator in achieving it. Although the opinion of players matters in how a player is regarded, success or partial success, and discredit or failure, in the achievement of goals is solely judged by the Great Mother (who “sees all,” but signals her acceptance or displeasure only afterward, never guiding).

The goals are all events brought about in human kingdoms by behind-the-scenes beholder manipulations, and they are as follows:

- Slay a god. Several beholders claimed to have killed the god Ibrandul after humans became aware that the Lurker in Darkness was no more, and Shar was masquerading as the god. Since none of them made their claim during the Time of Troubles, which later evidence made clear was the time of Ibrandul’s destruction, these claims have been universally dismissed. In 1383 DR, the beholder Xyxikarph claimed credit for the death of the duergar deity Laduguer through manipulating the dwarf god Moradin during the battle and by slyly substituting a thrice-cursed weapon for Moradin’s customary one, but these claims have been sneered at by most beholders—and soon after making its claims, Xyxikarph disappeared. When other beholders warily explored its lair, they found nothing at all—except a magic they could neither identify nor dispel, that caused a male human voice to announce calmly: “The Great Mother is not pleased.”
- Obliterate a human city, such that it is not rebuilt. Accomplished: the Moonsea human city of Sulasspryn collapsed into a sinkhole in 1307 DR, the Year of the Mace, and the resulting unstable site of so much death was abandoned and has never been rebuilt, though prospectors and traveling traders use it as a landmark, sometimes temporarily camp within sight of it, and even conduct trade at these camps. The beholder Alarkanamace achieved this goal by manipulating duergar into ever-more-energetic mining, by magically luring purple worms into boring above those mines, and by allowing the brilliant dwarf “watermaster” (hydraulic engineer) Burdurin Longhammer to find an “ancient” plan for subterranean river diversion that was actually carved by Alarkanamace. Then the beholder “aged” the area using spells to make it seem old and saturated limestone rock above the purple worm tunnels and beneath the cellars of Sulasspryn—which the beholder goaded certain citizens into enlarging by spreading rumors of rich gem lodes under the city.

- Topple a ruling dynasty and then restore them. Accomplished: The ruling family of Tethyr was swept from the throne in 1347 DR, and then restored with the ascension of Haedrak III in 1369 DR. The elder beholder Xithallowthlan claims to have successfully manipulated the situation to cause the fire that destroyed Castle Tethyr (and claimed the lives of King Alemander IV and his family) and to have covertly aided Zaranda Star many times during the Reclamation Wars. The Great Mother signaled acceptance of these claims by causing many eyes to appear all over the body plates of the sleeping Xithallowthlan—orbs which are not on eyestalks, but which have true seeing capabilities and can detect magic continuously and automatically.
- Create a distinct new race of sentience to equal the range of human, elven, or dwarven intellect. This race must breed true, must last for at least thirteen generations, and must in that span achieve enough success and social profile as to be recognized as a race by at least two humans, elves, and dwarves.
- Find the remains of the long-lost beholder Xarlcaun (“Zarl-CAWN”), which are somewhere in subterranean Toril, and recover the egg that was to have become a Hive Mother, trapped in stasis by Xarlcaun after it went mad. Ensure the safety of egg and means of stasis before making any claim. (Xarlcaun lived in a trap-filled lair not far beneath the cellars of a human settlement, location now unknown, and was last seen in the surface Realms circa 1186 DR.)
- Find the Blind Beholder, imprisoned somewhere in the deepest Underdark of Faerûn by illithids, free it from torment (the mind flayers seek to harness the innate magic of the beholder in a magical manner that causes the beholder ongoing pain), and escort it safely to the surface.
- Reopen the Gate of Eyes, a portal linking Faerûn to the Realm of a Million Eyes. Over time, its location has been entirely forgotten, though what beholders alive today recall is a rumor that a human city “of size” has been literally built over it. The gate was once guarded by a ring of eyestalks that possessed magical powers akin to a living beholder, so they could emit damaging rays, intended to prevent non-beholders from using the gate in either direction, but over time some of the eyestalks were destroyed, and others degraded so their powers became erratic or even changed to other magic.
- Persuade the ruler of a sizeable realm of Faerûn into making worship of beholders the state religion, and rendering assistance and obedience to beholders who request such. Maintain this ruling attitude for at least six years (in total, but preferably continuous).
- Subvert the Elder Rune or Larloch and his lichs into pursuing interests and goals that leave Faerûn largely alone and concentrate on other continents of Toril, or into seeing beholders as a race to be protected against the machinations of Shar or Gzemnid or any other deity except the Great Mother.