

The 14th House

While most sidhe have little recollection of their time in Arcadia, some few retain vague and mysterious memories of a heraldry yet to be seen in the Autumn World: A burning crimson field emblazoned with a fearsome black dragon's head, poised to strike. These glimpses inspire both awe and dread in the minds of the sidhe who manage to remember the sight, along with some lingering questions — who are these enigmatic nobles, and more importantly why did they not return alongside the other houses?

As the events of the End unfold, however, stories of appearances by this unknown house begin to circulate more and more frequently. In some stories, a force bearing this standard appears in time to rescue a group of fae from feral chimera or Thallain attackers; in others, witnesses swear that friends long dead or heroes of old came to them wearing these colors and spoke urgently of a war in Arcadia, or of some grave threat to the Autumn world. Survivors tell of motleys lost on shifting trods rescued from certain doom by the sudden arrival of a group of these nobles, even deep in the Dreaming. Still others speak of these nobles appearing from ancient trods and asking for volunteers to return with them to battle some terrible threat deep in the Dreaming — a few stories even claim the same thing. Each report seems to indicate that these mysterious nobles are solidly Seelie, but other than that their motives appear inscrutable, as they do not dally to talk longer than is required of them and vanish as suddenly as they appeared.

The true identity of this secretive house is something that many sidhe have suspected for some time, but the memory of which was carefully deleted before their banishment to Earth. They are the ruling house of Arcadia, leaders of the sidhe and keepers of the silver gates into Paradise. More than that, they are House Danaan, sworn stewards of the legacy of the Tuatha de Danaan, their numbers composed entirely of those fae souls deemed wise and worthy enough to oversee fair rulership of Arcadia after the departure of their legendary patrons in ages long past. For millennia, they have been responsible for the upkeep of Arcadia and to a lesser extent the Deep Dreaming, leaving the other houses and the commoners to tend

to the Autumn world. While sympathetic to the plight of those who dealt with an increasingly Banal world, they felt it was their sworn duty to remain in Arcadia and tend to the tasks they had been given there.

Now, of course, the threat posed by the End Times and the possible return of the Fomorians, House Danaan can no longer limit its activities to the Dreaming. Arcadia remains under attack by forces unknown, and their quest for allies has sent some members to the Autumn World in search of those brave and dedicated enough to bolster their forces there. Conversely, some of the Danaan have gone against their dictates of their House and gone to fight the problems of the Autumn World alongside their brethren, reasoning that since the problems in Arcadia arose when the mortal world began to fall apart, Arcadia came under attack; perhaps by fixing things there, they can help put right Arcadia once more.



Author's Notes

Honestly, we had never anticipated the House being a PC-playable institution, coming at the end of the world as they did. However, I can say honestly that they weren't meant to be blockbusters either, as that role is neatly filled by the Tuatha and their scouts; rather, they were generally meant to be a sign of hope, a sign that Arcadia is out there and that the wayward children can find a home after all.

For what it's worth, I saw the House as something select changelings were asked to join between lifetimes - hence why some fae didn't reincarnate over time. (There might even have been something to that cold iron theory of the Beaumayn, in that it cut the fae off from the mortal world forever... but that's my personal spin.) They recruited very slowly for millennia, but finally got more active as Winter approached, hence their sudden jump in numbers.

As a House, they are traditionally split between Seelie and Unseelie, because Arcadia itself is a balance of both, with neither side enjoying more power than the other and many of the old traditions (like seasonal transfer of power, etc.) being upheld on a regular basis. Danaan is led by sidhe who have forsaken their past houses to join the cause of the Dreaming itself, but has a large number of commoner nobles as well, striking a balance once more. Lastly, by remaining divided between the two Courts, so too does Danaan maintain the balance of the fae Houses, as it ever was (and ever should be):

Seelie (6): Beaumayn, Dougal, Eiluned, Fiona, Gwydion, and Liam.

Unseelie (6): Aesin, Ailil, Balor, Daireann, Leanhaun, and Varich.

Split/Swing Houses (2): Danaan, Scathach.

If I had to design a Boon and a Flaw for the house, though, these would've been something like what I had in mind:

Boons: Danaan fae can never lose sight of the Silver Path, and any attempts to magically confuse or conceal it from them automatically fail. In addition, they may only leave the Path through their own free will - no cantrip or force of arms can budge them from the Path unless they will it, though this in no immunizes them from the attack itself. Furthermore, should they choose to leave it, they may spend a turn of concentration and a Glamour point to find the lo-

cation of the Path relative to their current position as an innate ability, regardless of where they are in the Dreaming. Lastly, Danaan fae may enter Arcadia Gate, and allow other fae to do so with their permission as well, provided it is freely granted - no mystical powers can trick or compel a Danaan to letting an outsider into Arcadia.

What's more, regardless of their actual seeming, all Danaan are in the prime of health (most choose to look young again, though they don't have to), do not visibly age unless they choose to do so, and suffer no penalties from aging or old injuries unless they choose to retain the injury for their own reasons.

Flaw: Danaan are bound by ancient and powerful oaths not to reveal what lies beyond Arcadia Gate; no force in the Dreaming or beyond can compel them to betray these oaths, except choosing to do so of their own free will. (This may not sound so hard, but when you consider that they typically come back for those close to them in life, and are not able to offer them comforting words about the homeland as they watch them suffer through the End Times and perhaps even come to suspect that the Danaan might be some trick of the Dreaming and not truly from Arcadia, the difficulty of this Flaw becomes more obvious.) Doing so immediately strips them of their standing in the House and casts them adrift at a random location in the Dreaming, where they rapidly become little more than a wisp of a chimera, forever wandering the Dreaming and lamenting its lost standing. It is said that certain unique actions may restore such chimera - the kiss of a true love, the oath of a true friend, or perhaps even a pardon from the House itself - but given their reluctance to have anything to do with other fae that remind them of their failure, doing so would be the stuff of great legends indeed.

They were a potential factor in each of the scenarios, really - though to be honest they weren't especially suited for Crown of Shadows (too overt) or Pick Your Poison (the fae have to dig out of that mess on their own), for those reasons. Here's how I envisioned them coming into play in the others:

Gods & Monsters: House Danaan make excellent harbringers of the war, perhaps appearing shortly before the Transformation and warning the fae to "get ready", or as a surprise wild card during the war, somewhat thematically akin to the spectral forces Aragon brings from the Paths of the Dead in Return of the King. In general, they make a good "this is IT" addition to this already bombastic scenario, as it shows the fae that when the dead show up to fight (however healthy they look), there really will be no "after" for anyone unless they win the war, and perhaps even then. Plus it's a great way to bring back favorite characters for the big finale who might otherwise be inconveniently dead. :-)

The Great Purge: Again, I could see the Danaan as excellent harbringers of the purge, perhaps coming against the will of the Tuatha to warn their friends and relatives and help them prepare for their last stand/last ditch negotiation. Or they could accompany the Tuatha "scouts" as guides (as they are more familiar with the mortal world, after all), and make an excellent bridge for the Kithain to use to help convince the Tuatha to strike up a new accord (or turn on them at a critical moment.) If you really want to ratchet up the horror of this scenario, though, consider having the returning "dead" of House Danaan be the ones who actually do all the killing in this scenario, led by a handful of Tuatha scouts giving orders. The Danaan aren't happy about this, but see it as bringing the changelings back home (if you want to be more positive) or perhaps even correcting a mistake in order to save their own skins (more negative). Then rather than faceless entities swooping down to destroy them, the characters find themselves facing departed friends and loved ones looking sadly down at them as they raise their weapon to deal the killing blow...

Starlight Exodus: Indeed, the Danaan were supposed to appear at the portals Dice creates and then help the fae find their way back to Arcadia or wherever else they want to go (hence one of

the reasons they're so good with the Silver Path). This meeting with lost friends and loved ones was meant as kind of a final pleasant surprise after all the heartbreak leading up to the departure, to give the players some hope for the future and some sense that they're gaining something rather than just leaving everything behind. Of course, the Danaan who come back to guide their old companions still can't discuss Arcadia - "You'll see when you get there" - and astute fae will note that the Danaan have also given up the absolute security of Arcadia in order to come back and help the departing fae come home; after all, in the end they are just as vulnerable as the refugees to the dangers of the Dreaming, and can easily die along the way, perhaps never even to be reborn again. Those wondering why the Danaan accepted such huge risks to come back are bound to get small smiles and answers like: "Well, I thought it was worth the risk to make sure you made it back safely" and the like. Thematically, the appearance of the Danaan, even if only right before the departure, ties into this scenario's sense of taking a measure of what is important in life and learning to say goodbye, as well as the lesson that every goodbye is in its own way a new beginning of sorts.

Storytellers looking for a twist could have the Danaan appear shortly after Dice leaves and help prepare the fae for their journey, tying into the "confront all you've known in life and make peace with it (or not!)" theme of the scenario. I like it better if they don't show up until near the time to leave - they can overshadow a lot of important stuff if they show up much earlier - but that's my cup of tea.

Credits

Author: Pete Woodworth

Artwork: Arkane & Pauline Benney

Layout & Typesetting: Charlie Cantrell