

REN VIENTO

CHARACTER BIO

- Tiefling
- Rogue/Deliverer

“You will not have this treasure!” the skeletal devil howled at me as he swirled his chain of bone. The chain came flying at my face at uncanny speed, threatening to rip my pretty head off.

I was fast, too.

With an expert twist of my weapon, I twirled the dagger around the oncoming missile and tore it from the fiend’s boney grasp. I rushed forward, and with his own chain, I entangled him. My grip pulled him off balance, and a boot to the head saw his skull crushed.

“I’ll have what I please, beast,” I said, exhaling a sigh of victory.

Behind the devil’s still body sat my prize atop an earthen dais made of the same material as the rest of this plane. A stone unlike any other, it shone with glorious light in the dark of the cave. It glowed a bright green with fluorescent rays shooting off it like sun shafts in all directions.

Grabbing it, a vague sensation of tightening filled my hand and crept up my arm. It was as though my arm were becoming stone, my red skin turning to a pale gray. The feeling threatened to overwhelm me, but I knew I wouldn’t be harmed. I prayed sincerely to my god, focusing our shared power into the stone.

The feeling subsided as I took control. The rock began bleeding energy as it fled into me. I drank in its power, feeling my strength grow as the connection with my deity solidified with the power of earth.

“Time to quit his lousy realm,” I whispered to myself, channeling magic to plane shift. I waved goodbye to the endless rock cavern that comprised this entire world and stepped into my home.

My mansion on the shores of Hayven’s western coast was the product of years of spoils from pillaging, pilfering, and adventure. Its halls were filled with loot that I couldn’t help but hoard from my many excursions into the wilds and depths of this ancient world. Weapons from all manner of foes I’d felled lined the walls, and trinkets, magical or not, were on display in droves.

I drew the rock, now silent, from my pack and sat it upon the counter. Its beauty captivated me, echoing the green in my own eyes.

“One down. Three more.”

My wounds from the Plane of Earth ached. I caught my face in the mirror, a black eye forming from the rock monster that caught me off guard.

“Tomorrow.”



HORNED DEVIL
JIM PAVELEC

I woke early to a pounding at my mansion’s front gate. Dressing quickly, Emaru and Ryadi met me.

“You’re both a day late. I got started without you,” I told them with a sly grin.

“We can tell. Let me take a look at that eye,” Emaru said, lending the healer’s touch. He cured my ails as an expert priest. Our deity’s divine blessing saw to that.

“It would seem our deliverer has managed to deliver us the first stone,” Ryadi commented, clutching the hilt of his greatsword.

“This one was the least guarded, as our orders entailed. I saw no reason to wait when I could easily dispatch its caretaker alone,” I explained.

“You’re awfully sure of yourself,” Emaru commented. “Why would you go off alone? You know we’re stronger together.”

“Because it suits me,” I told him, flipping a dagger into the air and catching it in its sheath.

“Showoff.” He smiled back. “We’ve three more devils to slay. Let’s get going.”

Wasting no time, I channeled my planeshift spell into a portal that coalesced before us. My home melded into the Elemental Plane of Air, winds whipping up loose objects around us.

“Hold,” our priest said, casting a spell of his own. He touched me, then Ryadi, then himself, and we all gained the power of levitation.

“We have one hour,” he added. We each acknowledged and drifted through the portal where it closed behind us.

The world before us had no floor or ceiling. It was a cacophony of air currents and clouds swirling about with every landmass in the distance visible through a light fog.

“Orient yourself to the sun!” Emaru instructed. We felt the lack of gravity’s pull as we positioned the sun directly above. Our knight pulled his map, an old

parchment granted by our order's leader. It held strange markings, but on it, the sun was atop a mountain of clouds and off center near a strange floating island was our bounty.

We floated along as fast as the winds would carry us, taking care not to separate too far. This strange world held great beauty in the endless white-blue skies above and below us. A great city loomed in the distance, tall towers sticking out in all directions around a central core of some making. Air elementals traveled to and fro along invisible lanes, worrying us briefly until we realized they cared little for a trio of interlopers.

If they only knew what we'd come to plunder from their realm.

A half hour later, we arrived at the appointed island. Nothing more than a floating platform of marbled stone, it appeared as though some ancient force chiseled it from a sculpture of its own. Decorative tiles lined the floor with statues, equally ornamental, studding every few paces. They depicted strange creatures floating with no legs, thick arms crossed and hats in a style none of us recognized. Wondrous creations.

"There," I said, noticing our quarry.

The creature stood twice our height, wicked horns echoing mine curled atop its head. Its skin, as well, stood out to everything else in the realm as the only red, save for mine. That's where our mirror images ended.

It stood proudly naked among the marble, a body toned and scarred with demonic symbols. Massive fiendish wings flapped as we approached, eschewing stealth for the preparation of seeing our foe's countenance. He held a vicious looking pike pronged with three cruel barbs on each end. It was etched with more *symboli infernii*, no doubt to curse anything that met its stab.

"I was just informed of your crossing into this realm," the horned devil said in the infernal tongue. Each of our ears were well accustomed to the foul language, mine above all.

"Look, friends. The dog can talk," I goaded in reply.

A sneer crossed the devil's face. "I'll eat your intestines."

Ryadi charged the devil with greatsword drawn and raised. They crossed blades, the devil expertly parrying every strike from our knight. Emaru and I both began chanting our spells in tandem.

My daggers alit with dark flame granted by our god's will. I threw them together, each slicing into the devil's ribcage on either side and searing his flesh. They both returned magically into my hands where I immediately began another spell cast.

A searing pillar of holy radiance pounded the devil from above as Emaru finished chanting his call to our lord. It left the creature cindering before us, but it would take more than our opening assault to quell the thing's anger.

The beast roared furiously and caught Ryadi off guard, smashing my companion's face with the haft of

its polearm. Its tail whipped around as it spun, hitting the paladin across the face and drawing blood. It sent him to his knees, but he held fast.

"Always told you to wear a helmet!" I shouted as I completed my spell, teleporting behind the devil to impale both of my daggers in its back. I clawed one of them through a wing and saw it fall aside, uselessly holding on by a thread of skin. A grin crossed my face.

Ryadi followed up with a mighty upward swing that bisected the devil across the stomach, spilling its entrails.

"It would seem we'll be the ones forced to deal with your intestines," Ryadi said coldly.

The devil fell to a knee, disoriented and trying to hold onto its innards. It dropped its weapon. Another trophy for my wall.

I took the opportunity to slash its throat from behind, and it disintegrated into a sulfurous dust that blew away in the winds.

"If only they'd die for true," Emaru said.

"Soon," I said, "when our lord rules above and below, we will raze the Nine Hells themselves. We'll bring an end to every fetid thing that calls it home."

"Taking the fervor out of my mouth," Ryadi said as he laid hands upon his own wound and divinely sealed it.

Behind the remnants of the slain monster sat a dais like the one in the Elemental Plane of Earth. It was forged of the same marble as the rest of the platform, but instead of a green rock sitting on it, we saw a brilliant white stone. It glowed in the same way, emitting rays of light that shined in all directions simultaneously.

"I'll take this one," Emaru said. He floated to it slowly, taking in the moment with every breath. With some trepidation, he put a hand on it, recoiling at the same sensation that had struck me. I imagined the power flowing into his hand and through his shoulder to his core as he gained the strength of wind for his own. Not a tangible power like the magic of our great lord that we held, but something ephemeral and ethereal. An understanding of things to come.

"Yes," Ryadi said. "Soon, this waiting will end. It was a great boon, discovering where all four stones lie."

"We still need the other two. May they be as simple to acquire," I hoped aloud.

I knew better than to hope.

The following day, we were at it again. Another portal, this time to the Elemental Plane of Water. Emaru cast another spell to aid us along, this time the unending breath we'd need to survive more than a few minutes in its depths.

An ocean met us, but instead of the vast seas of Hayven, this ocean was the size of a world. Endless, ceaseless waters in all directions threatened to overwhelm us if not for the equally limitless, brilliant life that lit our way with its bioluminescence. Everywhere we looked, shades of neon blue and pink glowed for

miles nesting in coral reefs the size of mountains. It was dizzying if not for the wide open swathes of water that separated them by leagues.

We swam for what felt like hours, growing more tired by the minute as we endured the currents. Ryadi as well, toting heavy armor and a weapon of great dragonsteel, had the worst of us. We were forced to stop for rest twice before arriving at our mapped destination.

This particular reef was different from the others – far smaller, and it was perfectly symmetrical. It felt more like a temple than something housed of life. Inside, we soon realized that it was, indeed, more hallowed than we'd anticipated.

We emerged into breathable air held within a bubble by some mystical force. The ground was covered in ice frozen hard with decorative pillars springing forth along the edge of the circular room. The pillars appeared as conical spikes of ice, shaped and molded to seem threatening.

In the center, our adversary stood with its back to us facing a dais of frozen coral. Atop the dais, a shimmering blue stone glowed with the same otherworldly energy that empowered our lord's will.

"You dare to steal the greatest treasure of the Nine Hells?" the creature asked.

"If this treasure were so revered," I answered, "why hide it in another plane of existence?"

The devil turned its malshapen body, revealing an icy spear that dripped frost held in both hands. Its long insectoid form was headed by the jowl of a mantis, mandibles clacking as it spoke. Enormous bug eyes refracted in red, warping the blue light into a deadly purple reminiscent of poison. Our lungs froze and ached just by breathing the air in its presence.

"You have only one purpose for collecting them. We believed no mortals could be so idiotic," the creature clicked. "How could you harbor such self-loathing?"

"No more self-loathing than a devil banished to a watery grave," Ryadi replied. "At least we fight with love in our hearts. Love for each other and love for our great lord."

That elicited a strange laugh from the creature.

"You are insane," it said to us. "I will cure your madness."

The beast moved with grace on its two legs, bounding backward when we expected it to rush forward as the previous devils did. It began chanting a spell.

"Oh, gods," I said reflexively, readying my weapons. I hoped I could get behind it in time.

We met eyes as a wall of ice rose around the devil, encompassing it on all sides like an igloo. My spell wasn't in time. I teleported, and my daggers hit nothing but frozen steel.

Ryadi rushed forward to break the wall down before the creature had time to conjure more magic. He struck twice in a single breath, trying to shatter the wall down with strikes infused with radiant energy. It wouldn't budge.

I saw panic in Emaru's face as he held back from chanting a spell. "Run!" he ordered.

I reacted as quickly as I could, diving away.

The wall shattered, but not of our doing. Shards of ice lanced into our soft flesh, impaling us horribly. The pain, like a thousand stinging ants crawling and biting, sent me to my knees.

Ryadi's sword had saved him from taking the full brunt of it. Like a warrior of olde, he took the onslaught in stride and answered with one of his own, slicing the devil across the carapace protecting its chest. The blow hardly left the thing weary, much less wounded.

It sprung into a hedonistic splay of strikes, giggling cheerfully with every thrust of its spear. Ryadi was able to keep the thing at bay while I recovered and Emaru tried to cast a powerful spell through the cold, but it was all our paladin could do to defend against the creature. He couldn't land a blow of his own while staving off the assault.

Climbing to my feet, I circled around behind the devil and sliced at it, but its tail kept me at bay. While striking Ryadi with its spear, it stabbed toward me with the spikes on its hindquarters, any one blow capable of disemboweling me.

I backed off and cast a spell at it, drawing its ire briefly and creating an opening for Ryadi. I saw the knight's greatsword slice into the devil's shoulder sending a howl through the temple that shook the ice.

My voice spoke divine words in the infernal tongue. "*Dark lord grant this power unto me to clutch this foe in your grasp, your arms holding it while we strike its heart.*"

The spell took hold, freezing the icy creature in its place long enough for us to approach. I went to work tearing at its thick armor and drawing blue blood that splashed my leathers, freezing on contact. Ryadi went for the kill, chopping at its neck, but nothing seemed to get through.

"We're just not dealing enough damage!" Ryadi screamed as he hurled his sword again and again at the monstrosity. He grabbed the creature's spear and threw



ICE DEVIL
D&D MONSTER MANUAL

it aside, making it less dangerous if we couldn't outright kill it.

"Step back!" Emaru ordered as he approached and channeled a spell. His hand glowed with blinding darkness that drew the light away from our eyes and caused pain by looking into it, the way staring at the sun briefly caused one to recoil. It was as though he held a black star in his hand. All he needed was to touch the creature and it would be destroyed down to atoms.

To our terror, my holding spell broke before our eyes.

"Emaru!" I cried as the ice devil impaled him through the stomach, its horrifying claw piercing my friend's organs. With one strong hand, it gripped his spine and held him up above, the blood draining from his skin and pooling in his mouth.

Ryadi's sword severed the creature's hand while it was still inside Emaru, sending our healer tumbling to the cold ground.

I took the opportunity to leap on top of it, stabbing its eyes again and again until nothing was left of them. I knew I'd hit its brain when it dissolved into stinking goo as all devils do, its spirit fleeing to the Hells.

"Hold on, Em," I said, rushing to his side.

He coughed weakly as Ryadi laid on hands, doing his best to close the wound. The blood flowed as I did my best to wrap it with what meager supplies we had. I pulled a winter blanket from my pack in a futile attempt to keep him warm in this frozen nightmare.

"We need to get him back to our world," I said desperately, sitting Emaru up. "Get the stone. I've got him."

I touched his hair as he gasped for breath, his lower body entirely rigid. We were among the most powerful trio in all of Hayven, and we'd had our fair share of close calls before. The possibility of death was something we'd never fathomed. Our dark lord would never have permitted it, or so we thought.

The blue light filled Ryadi, empowering him with the spirit of water. Solemnly, he paced back as I shifted us back to Hayven.

"We're so close!" Ryadi said fervently.

Emaru's blood stained the furniture of my study, but he held on for life. Even with our divine powers, his wounds would take time to heal. A wet cloth kept his fever down while we planned.

"There can be no delay," I said devoutly. "The eclipse is a day and a half away, and if we miss it, we won't have another chance for forty years. It must be now before the Hells are able to recapture the stones."

"You've given up on our ability to hold them already?" the paladin accused.

"We nearly lost our compatriot to a single ice devil," I said candidly. "Think of what an army of them would do. The entirety of this world will fall before them now that they know our plans. That monster pieced it together."

Ryadi's expression turned from righteous valor to shock, and then to fear. An emotion most unbecoming

of a paladin, especially one that followed our dark master.

"Then we must go now," he said, gripping his blade.

"To fire, then," I said resolutely. "Wait here for us, Em. We'll be right back."

I conjured the portal, a blast of heat slamming against us and singing the air with flame. We stepped through, our shared heritage keeping us safe from the fires within.

The landscape was red earth, hot to the touch. Random gouts of lava and flame fired up through it before settling into black ash. The great City of Brass beheld the horizon in the distance, its massive buildings signaling the efreeti who dwelled within. Before it, a lake of lava surrounded our destination.

We saw the temple, grand and imposing. The architecture was beyond ancient, pillars of obsidian forming a foundation with steps of onyx leading up to the open air precipice that hung over the lake. No doubt, our prize awaited there.

A bridge of gold covered the roiling magma and allowed us passage. The heat roasted our throats with every step, but we trudged on.

"It appears," Ryadi said through sweat and exhaustion, "that we have company."

Flaming imps descended upon us on the bridge. Dozens of pairs of wings flapped toward us creating a buzzing in the air that was warped by the heat.

"Fire Mephits," I said grimly.

"I hate this place already," Ryadi said, echoing my tone.

We went to work dispatching them, careful to not let them splash their magmatic blood on us. I threw my daggers at them, impaling their weak bodies and sending them careening into the golden bridge as we raced down it. Ryadi swung his sword relentlessly, cleaving them in twain as their bodies fell upon him, burning his skin through his armor.

We moved together as best we could, but the knight was tiring quickly to the imps' attacks. Their little claws dug into his flesh as their boiling blood dug into his spirit. He refused to back down, going into a frenzy against them. I tried my best to keep up, but his fervor couldn't be matched.

Ten mephits slain. Twenty. Thirty. The swarm kept coming, and he kept killing. He looked like death incarnate, a symbol of what would soon come.

The final mephit fell to his blade as he succumbed to the bloodlust against his oath. Our lord saw fit to punish him for his hubris.

Ryadi let out a howl of pain as burning blood splashed his eyes, fire spouting from them as they boiled away. The edge of his blade hit the ground as my friend's knees did, but he refused to drop it. Nothing would take the blade from his hands.

He heaved his breath, screaming in utter agony.

"Calm, friend," I said, afraid to touch his shoulder for fear that he'd lash out at me. "Calm."

My words somehow reached him, and he stilled his hysteria. He touched his face to heal his wound, but nothing came.

"The dark lord forsakes me," he said, head cast downward.

"Not yet, Ry," I said, patting him on the back. "Not yet. Rest here. I'll finish this."

I saw him nod, though he couldn't see me in kind.

"And if you hear their wings, do that again, will you?" I joked. He gave the slightest chuckle.

I crept forward, able to use my stealth now that I was alone. I preferred it this way. My lord had blessed me with the power of dark flame, and I could use it well.

Shrouding myself in invisible fire, I climbed the stairs and kept my profile low. The dark flames would keep me safe from prying eyes, but they would do nothing to protect me from what I saw.

This temple's guardian was a being beyond our wildest dreams of power. I recognized it from my studies of fiends, they being our dark lord's primary foes.

It stood the size of a large building, its devil horns reaching into the sky and curling back into deadly spikes. Three prongs sprouted along its chin, each able to impale me of their accord. Yellow eyes burned the air where they glanced, even in this realm of fire. A body of supreme girth was held aloft by cruel talons the size of wagons and a tail the length of a village road. Wings, blankets that could shadow that same hamlet, were donned by spikes at the top and bottom. Each hand was tipped by sharp sickles, fingers the size of a grown man.

This was not a foe that could be bested by mortals.

Fear slipped through my mind, evaporating any pretense of success I had hoped for.

"I see you, little tiefling," the pit fiend said with a voice deeper than the darkest wind. "You need not fear. Let us speak."

I cowered my way forward, confused and terrified. For all my great strength, magical prowess, and speed, I was an ant under the boot of this being.

"Introduce yourself," he said. "I am Azzarius, lieutenant of Asmodeus. I guard the gates of Baator."

"Ren is my name. Ren Viento."

"Ah. I can see that becoming a name of legend," he complimented. "One written in the annals of the cosmos itself. Tell me, Ren, what brings you to this domain?"

"I seek the stone behind you," I said, hesitating.

"You do?" Azzarius asked. "I can only imagine what for."

I saw the sneer fall across the pit fiend's face.

"You are aware," he continued, "that I am capable of slaying you with nothing more than a glance. Still you approach this holy site."

I bowed my head, hands behind my back, praying that this creature couldn't read my mind. "I mean no disrespect, great fiend."

"And you have shown none," his deep voice echoed. "On the contrary, I admire your gall."

"How might we proceed, great one?" I asked, desperately hiding my true intentions.

He pondered for a moment. "I am inclined to allow you this reward if you would explain to me why you require it."

There was no way. If he knew the true purpose of our ritual, he would kill me outright and hunt down everyone in our order. He would bind our souls to the Hells so that we could never return.

"I see the strain on your little face, mortal," Azzarius taunted. "You are considering the ramifications of lying to me. You believe that truthfulness will lead to your demise."

"It will," I admitted, hoping to distract him. My silent spell was almost complete.

"Honesty, then," he demanded calmly.

I saw no way out. My life was worth far less than the stone. The only armor I had against this demigod was faith.

"At noon tomorrow on the material plane, we will perform a summoning ritual using the four Elemental Chaos Stones created by the Dark Lord Tharizdun. This will create a portal through the chaos which I will open to the Nine Hells. Tharizdun will be reborn there where he will wipe out the devil infestation and regain his throne from Asmodeus."

I prepared myself for the void, having just explained the genocide of this pit fiend's race.

Silence.

I looked up at the pit fiend to see his mouth turn upward. He broke out in a laugh, an odd sound coming through a throat so large.

"I admire your nerve," he said.

Suddenly, he moved. The force from his massive form walking toward my body nearly knocked me off my feet. I looked up and saw a mace of flame materialize in his hands and swing at me, shattering the ground under my image's feet. My real body was safe behind him, next to the stone. I was right where my *ghostwalk* spell had placed me, leaving the copy in my original position.

"Ahhh," Azzarius said. "You are sneaky. I almost didn't notice you casting that illusion spell."

I was caught. One swing of his weapon at my real self, and I would be crushed dead.

Another throaty laugh left his chest.

"I like you, little tiefling," he told me. "Lofty goals."

I was as still as I could bear, dropping the illusory guise. It was useless now.

"I will allow you the final stone you seek. Take it now," he ordered.

"May I ask why, great one?"

He smiled.

"Because it suits me. A devil acts for no other reason. I think the two of us share that in common."

"Yes. I suppose we do," I said, taking the stone as it filled me with triumphant power.

I fled for the bridge to retrieve my awaiting friend where I portaled us back home. His vision would not

return soon. Combined with Emaru's ruptured body, the ritual was left to me.

Scrawling the summoning circle, I placed the four stones in their assigned places and recited the incantation. A low rumbling came from the earth, slow at first. Disastrous shaking followed.

Black smoke rose from the ground and swelled in the sky as I completed the second part of the ritual, casting my plane shift spell. A portal to the Nine Hells opened in midair, and the smoke stormed through it.

A thousand screams followed, each the death wail of the devils within. There would be no solace for them back in their home. No returning to life. No pity.

My great lord's grace filled me. I knew we'd won.



AZZARIUS, COLOSSAL PIT FIEND