

CHANGELINGS

A race of foundlings, isolated from one another and often unaware of their heritage, changelings are the offspring of hags and mortal fathers. Hags are able to produce children with fathers of nearly any race, but as unyielding fonts of supernatural hate, they make miserable parents. Their scant maternal instincts extend only far enough to prompt them to abandon their children on welcoming-looking doorsteps rather than killing them. As a result, most changelings attribute their odd behavior and outsider status to the fact that they are orphans and somehow broken inside, rather than to the seeds of potent magic that lie dormant within them.

A changeling hews close enough to her father's race that she rarely suspects anything is odd about her origins. Even so, most humanoids recognize some unnatural taint in the awkward, sickly children who grow into women of great beauty and grace. By the time a changeling's arcane powers begin to develop, her community has either embraced the foundling as a quirky treasure or shunned her. Her treatment at others' hands plays a large role in whether, when her true mother comes calling, the changeling resists her mother's fell influence or embraces her destiny as a hag.

HISTORY

The origin of hags is unclear, and the existence of several types of hags native to the Material Plane, as well as the extraplanar night hags, makes it even murkier. Night hags do not bear changelings, and yet increased night hag activity in the area often precedes changeling births. This suggests that even though hags native to the Material Plane have little in common with night hags, they might be somehow related. The evil, soul-stealing night hags are common foes of Pharasma's psychopomps, which seek to guide souls to the appropriate destinations after their death.

Some folktales claim that while hags might become night hags after death, the souls of changelings who resist the call to become hags are transformed into shoki psychopomps as a reward for their moral fortitude.

Changelings occupy a position in Inner Sea folklore similar to that of tieflings; folktales give a face to the common fear that one's neighbor might not be what she seems, and that inhuman evil can lurk behind a familiar face. While tieflings are often symbols of their parents' sins in such tales, and represent transgressions brought to light, changelings represent a danger that is more subtle—one that cannot be detected until it is too late. Only a slight pallor and, in most cases, mismatched eyes identify a changeling, who is otherwise blessed with beauty and grace that fit within the standards of the society that raised her. In reality, this deception is usually unintentional on the changeling's part, for most are unaware of their true parentage. In stories, though, young changelings become malevolent puppet masters, aping the innocence of children to pull the strings of those around them.

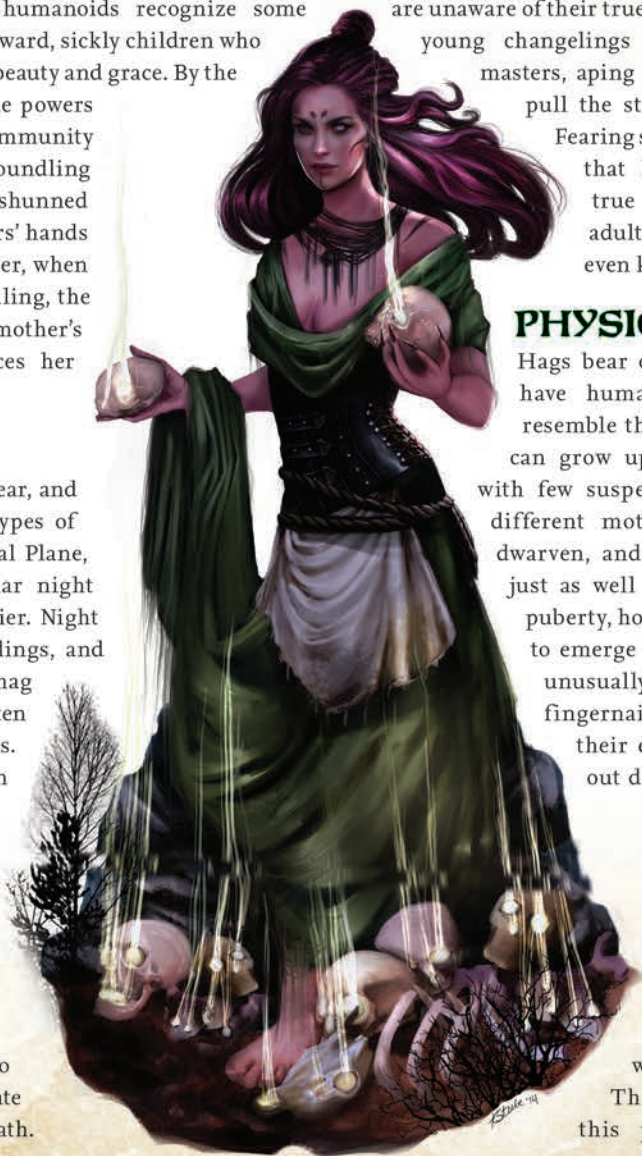
Fearing such an outcome, a community that learns about a changeling's true nature before she reaches adulthood might drive her away or even kill her.

PHYSIOLOGY

Hags bear only girls. Most changelings have human fathers, and so closely resemble their fathers that a changeling can grow up alongside human siblings with few suspecting the changeling has a different mother. Changelings of elven, dwarven, and even goblin blood blend in just as well with their fathers' races. At puberty, however, real distinctions begin to emerge as the young women become unusually tall and graceful, their fingernails harden into claws, and their eyes begin to be able to pick out distinct forms in the shadows.

Even then, a changeling is nearly indistinguishable from members of her father's race, and she can live, marry, and raise children among them, if she wishes.

Yet changelings are infused with twisted, inhuman magic. Though many learn to control this power and become potent



witches or sorcerers, it allows their mothers to subject them to brutal transformative rituals. The hags torture the changelings' spirits and scourge their flesh until hatred and sorrow kindle those magical embers into a blinding flame. The process transforms a changeling into a new hag as she sheds her old skin, life, and personality to become a creature of primeval cruelty.

SOCIETY

Though seemingly designed to fit in perfectly among the societies into which their hag mothers insert them, changelings possess uncanny awareness and unusual ways of looking at the world. This perspective and unsettling insight can turn them into outcasts whose exclusion is not acknowledged as such. They are rarely overtly shunned, but their families and neighbors usually find them eerie and discomfiting despite their beauty.

For this reason, people tend not to form close bonds with changelings. Most changelings journey toward adulthood with a growing awareness that something is wrong with them, but they are unable to identify what it is or how to fix it. Instead, growing frustration mixed with grief often builds within their hearts. As changelings begin to come into their power, these feelings might harden into resentment of those who subtly reject them but refuse to explain their reasoning. Alternatively, changelings' feelings might turn into a deep insecurity and desperation for approval and love—emotions that their hag mothers gleefully exploit when coming to claim them.

Apart from the vague but persistent sense of not belonging and their talent for magic, changelings reflect the society that raised them. The only constant in changelings' experience is "the call," a psychic cry that beckons a daughter to leave home and venture into the world. Most changelings believe they hear destiny beckoning, but in reality hags initiate the call to lure their children back to them. Those who resist the siren song long enough eventually stop hearing it, and blissfully, might never learn the truth of their origins. Those who follow the honeyed whispers in their head finally meet their mothers and are abducted for the grisly process of transformation into the next step of the hag life cycle. Hags must form a coven to call their children, and the groups often summon three or more daughters at a time. These horrifying family reunions are often the first time each summoned offspring has laid eyes on another changeling.



WHERE ON Golarion?

Changelings invariably spring up wherever hags flourish, especially in Varisia, the River Kingdoms, and the fey-choked Verduran Forest near Taldor and Andoran. They are also common in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, where changelings and hags alike work alongside the mysterious norns, and in Irrisen, where they enjoy some celebrity status for their monstrous parentage.

Changelings are most common in the gothic land of Ustalav, where nearly every family tree seems watered with a little inhuman blood. Here, hags roam the hills—and even the cities—without fear, and superstition is so widespread that changelings may learn who and what they are long before they hear "the call." Suspected changelings face heightened scrutiny aimed at swiftly catching those who turn bad, and many hag daughters go to great lengths to conceal their nature so they can avoid such constant, unwanted attention. Most hope to blend in and lead a semblance of a normal life, but some intentionally seek out their mothers and the power the hags offer in order to revisit pain and humiliation on their former abusers.

RELATIONS

Changelings' attitudes toward others mirror those of their parent race, but their outsider status colors them. Most live as objects of both jealousy or ire, desired for their beauty and feared for their magic. They might get along well with members of other common humanoid races, but they usually find the company of their foster families and communities uncomfortable. Whether aware of their heritage or not, many changelings prefer the company of other half-bloods—especially half-elves—with whom they share the burden of rejection tainted with envy. Those women who do learn about their roots often take to the road as wanderers or adventurers, or else withdraw from society to become hermits; some fear society's reaction to their bloodline, while others fear the implications of what that bloodline might mean.

Whether they embrace or reject their maternal heritage, or even remain blissfully ignorant of their origins, all changelings have a strong emotional connection to hags. Powerful arcane magic and fey emotion binds mother to daughter. This connection is the root of the call, and changelings instinctively react passionately to hags, either more loving and accepting than any sentient being should be toward such fickle and cruel abusers, or else displaying a vitriol unmatched in human experience.

FETCHLINGS

Fetchlings descend directly from humans trapped on the Plane of Shadow, where over the generations, the energies of that plane reshaped and molded them into forms more suited to their environment. Today, fetchlings are grim survivalists who can be found across the multiverse, serving as traders, middlemen, scouts, and assassins. Their affinity for shadow magic allows them to manipulate darkness to alter their appearance or conceal their presence.

While many humans are unsettled by fetchlings' eerie, monochromatic coloration, gaunt frames, and predisposition to skulk in the shadows, the true source of most of the unease is the knowledge that these shades were human once, but were stolen away from the world of light and warped into creatures of darkness. Fetchlings serve as reminders that horrifying accident or malignant design can twist an entire race into something alien.

HISTORY

Millennia ago, according to fetchling legend, seers warned an Azlanti governor that an impending disaster would destroy his lands, and he assembled a cadre of prophets, scholars, and spellcasters to find a way to avoid this predicted fate. Yet as the appointed day drew close, the governor and his advisors found themselves without a solution. It was then that one of the seers cried out in surprise, pointing to a hitherto-unnoticed figure standing in the shadows, silently observing. The figure was cloaked in umbral gray, and shadows within its hood hid its face. As the governor demanded to know who the figure was and how it had come unannounced into the council chambers, the light caught a sickle in its hand. The advisors moaned that death was in the chamber with them, but the figure, which referred to itself only as the Widow, made a gesture of negation that stilled their tongues and informed the governor that it could save his subjects.

The governor tried to question the Widow to determine whether this promised salvation would harm his people, but it merely

pointed to a window, where the first plummeting debris of Earthfall traced shimmering trails through the sky, and observed that it was too late to ask the price. Desperate, the governor begged the stranger to save his citizens. It raised its sickle, tearing shadowy rents into the air itself, and bade the governor to send his people through. After the last one leapt blindly through, the gateway closed, leaving the governor alone in his chamber to greet the coming disaster.

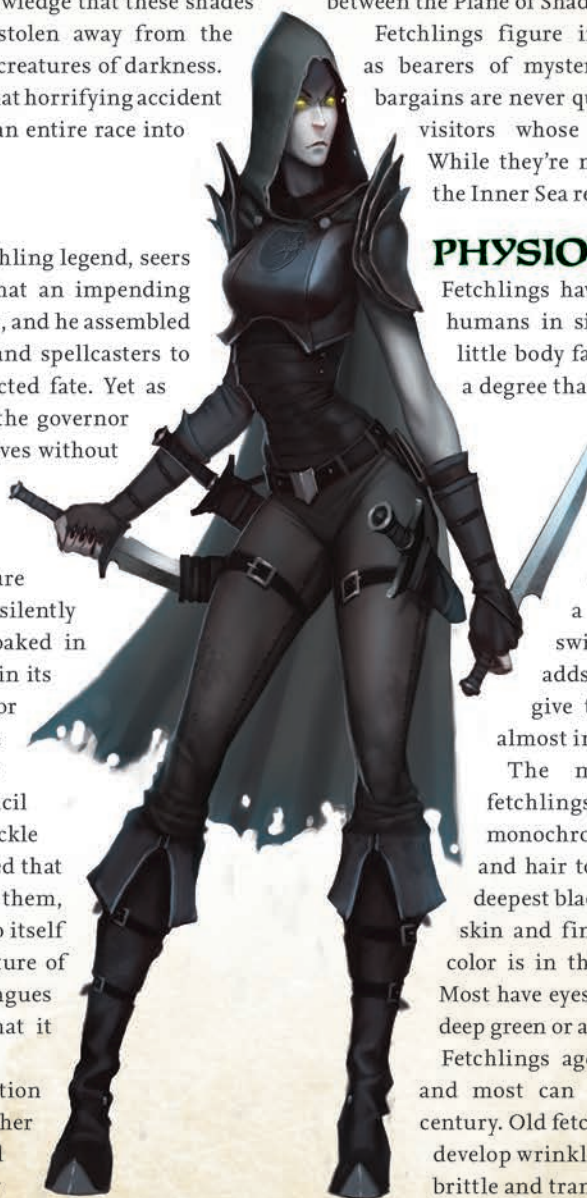
Over generations, the Azlanti refugees, now trapped on the Plane of Shadow, lost their regal bearing and took on hues matching their colorless new home. By the time they learned how to leave the plane again, they had transformed into the creatures now known as fetchlings. They became talented emissaries and traders, brokering information between the Plane of Shadow and the Material Plane.

Fetchlings figure in many Inner Sea folktales as bearers of mysterious tidings, dealers whose bargains are never quite what they seem, and eerie visitors whose presence presages change. While they're not exactly feared or hated in the Inner Sea region, neither are they trusted.

PHYSIOLOGY

Fetchlings have frames similar to those of humans in size and build, but they form little body fat and are therefore slender to a degree that would be unhealthy for most humans. Many appear gaunt or even skeletal, and their limbs are slightly longer in proportion to the rest of their bodies than those of humans. They move with a languid grace punctuated by swift, darting motions, which adds to their alien mien and can give their movements a scuttling, almost insectile appearance.

The most noticeable aspect of fetchlings' appearances is their monochromatic coloration. Their skin and hair tones range from pale white to deepest black, although most have grayish skin and fine, dark gray hair. Their only color is in their reflective, pupil-less eyes. Most have eyes of pale yellow, though eyes of deep green or aquamarine are not uncommon. Fetchlings age more slowly than humans, and most can expect to live more than a century. Old fetchlings rarely lose their hair or develop wrinkles; instead, their skin becomes brittle and translucent, like old parchment.



SOCIETY

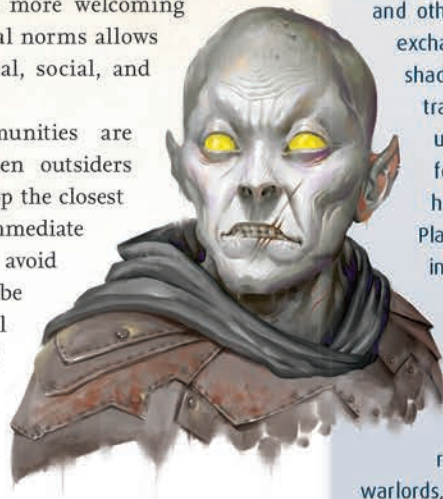
Outside the Plane of Shadow, fetchlings gather together in close-knit communities at the fringes of societies dominated by other races, often congregating in fetchling neighborhoods within human cities. Having long ago abandoned the rigid strictures of Azlanti society, they typically adopt the mannerisms of the society in which they live. In regions where fetchlings are viewed with fear or disdain, this social camouflage helps minimize their outsider status, and in more welcoming communities, adoption of local norms allows fetchlings to cultivate political, social, and economic relationships.

Typically, fetchling communities are insular and close ranks when outsiders intrude. Most fetchlings develop the closest bonds with members of their immediate families. While they prefer to avoid the attention that might be drawn to them with formal celebrations of weddings and births, fetchlings typically pair for life in quiet mutual agreements or small family gatherings. Families who have children understand that their primary duty to their offspring is to instill the tenacity, resourcefulness, and pragmatism that helped this people survive for generations, and all parents invest themselves in caring for and teaching their children. Fetchling communities are usually too small and too concerned with remaining unobtrusive to organize politically. They appoint leaders on an ad hoc basis, usually designating individuals comfortable interacting with non-fetchlings to serve as the face of the community. Fetchlings try their own criminals rather than trust outsiders with such matters, and exile the guilty rather than imprisoning or executing them, though banishment often amounts to a death sentence.

Many fetchlings enjoy wearing bright colors, but only in moderation. A fetchling might wear a single colorful sash, dye half of his hair a striking red or orange, or wear a piece of bright jewelry, but never all at once. To fetchlings, the dim grayness of shadow is not the absence of color, but a counterpoint to color deserving of its own expression.

RELATIONS

The aloof fetchlings prefer concealment and indirectness to forthright interactions, which makes it difficult for them to form permanent bonds with members of other races, who tend to see them as untrustworthy. Fetchlings' need to live in the present and plan for the future gives them little respect for tradition, making them appear disrespectful to members of cultures that prize tradition, such as dwarves.



Where on Golarion?

Although most fetchlings live on the Plane of Shadow, particularly in the umbral metropolis known as Shadow Absalom, they also congregate in small communities scattered throughout Golarion. The largest concentrations of fetchlings are in Absalom and Nidal, but these groups live very different lives.

In Absalom, fetchlings are often respected traders who pay high prices for colorful dyes, bright flowers, and other items unavailable on the Shadow Plane. In exchange, they offer rare silvery metals, vials of liquid shadow, and other rarities acquired via interplanar trade networks weaving between Absalom and its umbral twin. Although they may live in Absalom for decades, few consider Absalom their true home, and most look forward to returning to the Plane of Shadow. Some of Absalom's fetchlings insist on calling themselves *kayal*, a word which means "shadow dweller." They consider the term "fetchling" to be a racial slur propagated by ignorant humans jealous of their ability to thrive in two worlds.

In contrast, the area of the Shadow Plane reflecting Nidal is the territory of nightshade warlords, kyton torture-abbeys, and worse. As a result, although their lives in Nidal are harsh compared to those of their brethren in Absalom, fetchlings in Nidal rarely travel to the Shadow Plane. The Nidalese treat them as an underclass, pushing them to the margins of society, where they congregate for mutual protection from their cruel human neighbors. Because of their frequent oppression and lifelong distance from the plane that shaped them, which they feel is their true home, fetchlings in Nidal often slip into lives of crime and violence.

Elves and fetchlings share a mutual fascination with one another, but that interest is distant on both sides and rarely warms into camaraderie. Fetchlings are intrigued by gnomes, but their monochromatic appearance unsettles gnomes, as it evokes fear of the Bleaching. Most fetchlings find they have the most in common with half-elves and half-orcs, who can understand the sense of being cut off from one's home or caught between worlds.

Although fully aware of their human origins, fetchlings consider themselves to be culturally and physically distinct and react with contempt or hostility when mistaken for humans. For their part, many humans consider fetchlings to be alien and unnerving—a living reminder that one's very nature can be warped by an accidental descent into dark places. Friendships rarely spring up between humans and fetchlings, but they have been known to form between long-time trading partners.