

Croatoa Lore

A Lore Primer for The Grim Vale RP

Half the content here is canon (lifted from CoH sources), and some of this is merely logical extrapolation for the purposes of laying down a richer lore, and a regional background.

I've attempted to make these extrapolations fit into the established lore as best as possible (an attempt to connect some dots where only implications were made).

>> REGIONAL NAME <<

- “**Croatoa**” is only a **nickname** given by Heroes to describe the small town of **Salamanca**, which is a suburb of Paragon, about 10 miles **Northwest of Independence Port**. (The name Croatoa is an obscure, allusory reference to “The Lost Colony” (**Roanoke**) in America (1590).
- **Salamanca** has always had some supernatural activity, and weirdness associated with it, but that weirdness has only become *extremely dangerous* in the last few years. Early settlers of Paragon even superstitiously nicknamed the woody, unsettled areas as “*The Forest of Dread*”.

>> EARLY HISTORY <<

- It would be safe to say the establishment of Salamanca was in the early 1800s, however canon does not actually give a date on this.
- Salamanca started as a very small, fairly isolated village settlement, largely ignored and isolated from Paragon. It slowly expanded with buildings and farming land over the next two hundred years. A significant portion of the settlers were Irish immigrants, which included some “pagan,” magic practitioners (including *hidden* members of The Cabal). In the late 1800s, religious groups across Paragon began a propaganda campaign to demonize magical practice, and especially witches. To avoid persecution, these practitioners consolidated themselves into one tribe, separated themselves from the people of Salamanca, and establish their own (cultish) home within the woods North (**Sunset Ridge**).
- At the establishment of the new settlement, the truth of these witches was revealed. While human, the elders of the group were not just old, but **very old**. As in, *hundreds of years old*. The elders assumed full, totalitarian control of the tribe, and started calling itself **The Cabal**, a name not uttered since the days of Ireland.

- Croatoa had its own, natural magical energy to the region, and had strange creatures that existed before humans arrived. (For example, **The Misty Wood area sits on top of a layline.**) The Cabal elders recognized this early on, and began to amplify their powers collectively. The Cabal had a variety of magical tools at their disposal, but most were based on **elementalism** (manipulating the elements of the natural world, especially the weather). But their most powerful, not fully explored abilities were tapping into energies from the **afterlife** (which was the source of their life extension). They began a series of powerful experiments, the first being the erection of the **Tree of Woe**--this took an ancient Oak tree in Sunset Ridge, and had it grow an extra twenty feet overnight. This now-enchanted tree behaved like a magical attenane, boosting the Cabal's power.
- As if an alarm bell had sounded, as soon as The Tree of Woe appeared, so did **the Red Caps** -- *at least to the awareness of others*. In reality, The Red Caps had already been living in Paragon and Croatoa, secretly causing chaos for decades, and had arrived in America as stowaways on the very same boats of the Irish immigrants to America. The Cabal and the Red Caps had been long time enemies going back hundreds of years, however The Red Caps did not view any Salamanca settlements as a threat until The Cabal decided to boldly announce their presence. The Red Caps then established themselves in small colonies across the many small caves of Northeast Croatoa, an area later named **The Broken Teeth**. (This is considered the most dangerous place to go in Croatoa.)
- The battle between The Cabal and The Red Caps continued for decades, with each tribe inflicting pain on the other as an act of malice.

>> LATER HISTORY <<

- Salamanca's village citizens spent most of its history in poverty. But about 30 years ago, the townspeople of Salamanca thought it would be a great idea to modernize and attempt to make the town less poverty-stricken.
- This town renewal involved: the construction of new buildings, adding a new train stop, donating land to Paragon University, and a marketing campaign to appeal to tourists. All of this happened under the influence of the well-to-do **Bower Family** (father Tom, son Gordon.... **Gordon Bower is the current elected mayor** of Salamanca). Largely, this effort was successful and brought an economic boost to its citizens.
- **Paragon University**, always struggling for space, graciously accepted the land donation, and quickly constructed another branch. They shuffled most of their liberal arts faculty and classes there, and even hired a few "mystical expert" professors. Some of the students started a longstanding tradition of "hanging out by the beach" near the school, sometimes gossiping about the weirdness of Salamanca, while still largely unaware of how bad things really were. This is where "Sally" (short for Salamanca) was discovered, who the students felt perfectly symbolized the strange town. A few photos and murky videos of Sally exist on YouTube, but the creature is extremely elusive.

>> THE LAST FEW YEARS <<

- When The Banished Pantheon began their own sinister operations of opening up magical portals to the spirit world (“the mists”) across Paragon, it affected the entire region. While the Banished Pantheon had no direct interest in the town, because Croatoa was uniquely attuned to this type of magic, it was massively affected. The first thing that **everyone** noticed is that “the mists” appeared -- quite literally; a general, often-present fog rolled into many pockets across the area. To those skilled at recognizing or utilizing it, these pockets of mist were in fact **DOORWAYS** into the spirit world.
- The Red Caps were the first to recognize this, and seeking an advantage in their conflict with the Cabal, they began summoning mystical allies from beyond: **Tuatha de Dannan**. The Tuatha were a “conservationist” race of fey, always seeking to protect what they viewed as “the natural order” (as defined by their own traditions). While the Tuatha were tricked and manipulated by The Red Caps for their own purposes, the Tuatha already viewed The Cabal as natural enemies due to experiences from the old world (Ireland). The Tuatha became uneasy allies with the Red Caps, and were drawn to protect the “sacred” leyline magic in **The Misty Wood**, establishing this as their new home.
- The appearance of the Tuatha held back the expanding power of the Cabal, and in retaliation they began to craft their own reinforcements. Reaching into the mists, The Cabal struck a “deal” with a race of dead fey (named the **Fir Bolg**) there. The Cabal offered the Fir Bolg new physical bodies on the Earthly plane, in exchange for their assistance in the growing conflict. When The Fir Bolg saw their oldest enemies (the Tuatha de Dannan) invading the region, they jumped at the opportunity. The Cabal did not want the Fir Bolg living near them, and having no other obvious place to go, they settled in the woods of **New Connaught**.
- Escalating conflicts revealed the presence of Eochai, a very powerful, once-murdered leader, reincarnated. The Red Caps countered this by sending some of their scouts directly into the mists to find a worthy adversary... to which they did. Deep in the mists, they found the dead spirit of **Jack In Irons**, an enormous, disturbingly strong ogre. Jack In Irons was pleased to reincarnate to the living world and enact revenge on those who’d murdered him, **The Cabal**. Jack In Irons is strong enough to easily tear trees from the ground, and has no qualms about hurting anyone. An apathetic ally of The Red Caps, he sees the entirety of Croatoa as “his”. Thankfully, Jack In Irons spends **weeks asleep**, before going on another short, murderous rampage for a single night, only to return to sleep again. No one knows where Jack In Irons sleeps.
- One area of note is **The Grim Vale**. The Cabal spent **decades** tending to the soil in the north of Croatoa, as part of some unknown, ominous, grand plan, enriching the magical energy of the area. These plans were interrupted by Red Cap skirmishes, and even more by the arrival of the mists. All four “factions” are interested in this contested territory.

>> THE CABAL <<

The Cabal have roots in pagan, elemental magic, but have always been led by an “old guard” of several very old, ill-intended witches. Historically, these leaders had kept their identities hidden, but with the permanent establishment in Croatoa, they’ve lifted the mask.

The Cabal are not a uniform population, and their internal politics vary greatly. There exists a small, peaceful circle (named ***Ravenwing***) who have made connections with Paragon officials in Atlas Park. There also exists a violent, extremist circle (named ***Bane Sidhe***) who literally advocate for the genocide of all non-witches. Most Cabal fall somewhere within this spectrum, but one very common theme is an uneasy discomfort for any Cabal who leave Croatoa, and a deep distrust for any that leave the coven. The Croatoa don’t really do scouting across Paragon, preferring deep (cult-like) isolation, and most of the “spying” they do is through remote viewing, and scrying, safely from their homes, in the woods of ***Sunset Ridge***, protected by their magical wards.

The Cabal elders have always been only women, and these elders cling to the incorrect superstition that men are simply not as good at elemental magic, and therefore are unfit to lead the coven. However, the original Ireland settlement *did* have men in their population! Early Cabalist settlements in Croatoa also kept some men around, but they were treated like some sort of bizarre “breeding stock” subhuman. The leadership of The Cabal eventually abandoned the idea altogether... having decided their newer, more powerful forms of life-extending power now made men completely irrelevant. Of course, there are still some witches who have relationships, both internally and externally. Some have even gone back to Ireland, where men are still accepted.

The Cabal have a rigorous training and education. Newer trainees are named “Adepts” and advanced witches are named “Mavens”.

Whenever a ritual event (or significant “experiment”) is performed by The Cabal, a byproduct is the summoning of watchful, protective spirits (called ***Sprites***). The Cabal do not INTENTIONALLY summon these. Sprites are sentient beings that “leak out” from the mists, but they are NOT controlled (or even allies of!) The Cabal. They have a compassionate, empathic energy and will only “act” as a counterbalance when very cruel behavior is detected, to silence it.

>> RED CAPS <<

The Red Caps are technically fey, and this means many things: they are naturally aware of other fey in their environment, they have a natural aptitude for magic, and they have inherent magical energy to their race. The Red Caps are largely viewed as “spirits of cruelty” -- their bodies appear to be something like “goblins”, though their sizes vary greatly.

Red Caps have a natural, stealthy, sneaky magic to them. To those outside of Croatoa, they are still seen by the public to be a wild rumor (like something akin to Bigfoot). They are also naturally very physically strong. Most importantly, Red Caps strength and magical power are literally “boosted”

through the misery, suffering, and torture of others near them. This includes both each other, other fey, animals, and especially humans. Red Caps are therefor thought of by their sworn enemies, The Cabal, as something like evil demons. (They kind of have a point.) Red Caps are well known for their riotous laughter, as they bask in the pain of others.

Not all Red Caps are the same. Some are *more* bullied by each other (a type of pecking order), and some are far more awful. Some are mere pranksters (called *Rascals*), while others are horrifying, psychopathic serial killers (called *Fiends*).

Red Caps view dinnertime as sacred, and its where they gather in groups within the caves of **The Broken Teeth** area... to commune, tell stories, and plot. They especially like stew, made in giant cauldrons, from the parts of anything they've slain or hunted that day.

When Red Caps perform significant acts of magic, they take the opportunity to *intentionally* summon reddish energy orbs -- these are called *Will o' Wisps*, and are sentient, magical spirits. Will o' Wisps are a twisted mirror images of *Sprites*, and they reflexively seek to interfere with anyone who tries to STOP *any* acts of horror within their presence.

>> TUATHA DE DANNAN <<

The Tuatha de Dannan are a fey race that has spent a millenia in Ireland fighting anyone that they consider disturbing "the natural order". While the Tuatha cling to this conservationist notion, they are surprisingly unskilled at articulating exactly what this means, and seems to be more of an emotional instinct inherent to their nature rather than an intellectual stance.

In recent years, dead Tuatha de Dannan have been reincarnated by The Red Caps as part of an uneasy bargain, through the power of the mists. They quickly populated *The Misty Wood* area, where a strong leyline exists, which they feel compelled to protect.

The Tuatha's bodies were somewhat different in their previous incarnations in Ireland, but in their current incarnation, they've taken the form of large, wooly "Deer Men". Tuatha are very strong, and even the small ones could easily lift a ton (they can certainly flip over a car). While The Tuatha don't seem to require much food, their bodies seem to require much activity; at night they move around a lot--exploring, running, climbing, lifting boulders, and clearing fallen branches, for which they build homes out of. All this activity works up quite a sweat, and The Tuatha are known to be smelly beasts. They are slightly self-conscious of this, and have taken to swimming frequently to minimize the smell.

While The Tuatha have an ancient rivalry with The Fir Bolg, who they see as "meddlers of nature", they are not in fact cruel creatures. While they are capable of great violence, they see this as something *provoked* and don't particularly want to instigate suffering in others. It is possible to become allies with the Tuatha, though they are mistrustful of outsiders. Even their allyship with The Red Caps is tentative... who can be seen more like "frenemies" to them.

The Tuatha have an aptitude for magic and spellcasting, but have not spent much time developing this ability, and prefer more physical (“natural”) solutions. They also can sense magic from far distances.

>> FIR BOLG <<

The Fir Bolg are a fey race that had spent a millenia **in Ireland** experimenting with ways to twist and manipulate nature for power. They were considered the enemies of human farmers, and other fey races regarded them as especially selfish, untrustable schemers. They were especially hated by The Tuatha de Dannon, and the two tribes had dozens of brutal scuffles. This escalated until it was revealed the The Fir Bolg as a race were actually *slaves* of one, singular, extremely powerful Fir Bolg.. **King Eochai**, who would simply absorb the life force (essence) of any Fir Bolg that dared to rebel.

In one climatic, epic battle, The Tuatha de Dannon assembled all of their forces and managed to defeat Eochai. While hundreds of Fir Bolg died in the battle, the reality was that Eochai had not been killed, **they used magic to split their consciousness up**. Most of those who died were part of Eochai, however, and his reign of terror seemed to have ended.

Unfortunately, in an act of desperation, The Cabal leveraged the newly active “mists” in Croatoa to recruit the dead spirits of the slaughtered Fir Bolg as reinforcements to their war with The Red Caps. When the Fir Bolg reincarnated, The Cabal put their spirits inside of the bodies of plant life nearby; most notably *the pumpkin crops of the local Salamanca farmers*. The Fir Bolg were absolutely mystified by the modern world, have an especially dim, clueless understanding of modern technology, and settled themselves in the woods of New Connaught, south of Salamanca.

They are still trying to understand their new forms, which have minor shapeshifting powers... they are able to transform into various forms of plant life, which make for excellent disguise.

The Fir Bolg hold a secret that very few people realize: the spirit of Eochai still exists within them. The few fey and humans of Croatoa who’ve had the displeasure of actually seeing Eochai assume it’s just another powerful being within their ranks. But, in truth, he is the manifestation of a **HIVEMIND**, and is theoretically able to manifest hims body anywhere numerous Fir Bolg are standing, absorbing their bodies into a larger mass. In other words, Eochai can never be truly destroyed without a full Fir Bolg genocide.

This is not to say that each Fir Bolg doesn’t have its own, distinct personality and mind. They do. But they also have Eochai in there, too, lurking. It is possible, through magic, to completely exorcise Eochai from a particular Fir Bolg, though very few of these “free Fir Bolg” actually exist.

>> MISCELLANEOUS NOTES <<

- The Red Caps, Tuatha de Dannon, and Fir Bolg are ALL considered “fey” (faerie) and all have roots in Ireland.
- All fey are weak to iron. An iron weapon will cause a fey being *serious* harm. It is not understood *why* this is the case, though some alchemists have theories.