

RAS NSI, REVISED

AN ALTERNATIVE TAKE
ON AN EXCITING VILLAIN

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DUNGEON MASTER'S WORKSHOP



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RAS NSI

The information presented for Ras Nsi in the official *Tomb of Annihilation* Fifth Edition adventure reduces Ras Nsi to a threat that can be overcome by second-tier adventurers instead of the ancient and powerful foe he is. This document presents an alternative take on him.

EXILED BARA

Not only is Ras Nsi a bara (immortal defender) of the city of Mezro, he was one of the original seven barae, hand-picked by Ubtao himself more than 4,000 years ago. For over two thousand years, Nsi (“ras” is a noble title akin to “duke”) used his powers in defence of Mezro, especially his special ability as a bara to muster the dead.

Ras Nsi was exiled from the city at the end of a 300-year war with a rival tribe, the Eshowe. After a desperate, doomed attack from the Eshowe against Mezro, Nsi raised a massive army from the fallen and set forth into the jungle on a bloody crusade to rid Chult of every Eshowe that remained. Nsi’s atrocities did not sit well with the other barae, who put him on trial and forced him into exile. They could not, however, strip him of his mantle as a Chosen of Ubtao.

For over a thousand years, Ras Nsi remained devoted to Mezro, advancing its interests using his own twisted methods throughout Chult and beyond. He put his undead servants to work clearing the jungle for timber and mineral extraction, the results of which still scar Chult as the Nsi Wastes. He created a mercantile empire amassing staggering quantities of wealth ready to be spent in Mezro’s service. He menaced those settlements which might seek to threaten his former home, demanding heavy tribute.

All the while, he waited to be called back to the city. It was a call that never came.

FALLEN CHAMPION

After his beloved city of Mezro was nearly destroyed by an army of goblins in the Year of the Helm (1362 DR), Ras Nsi’s patience with King Osaw and the other barae ran out, and he raised an army of undead to free the city of its misguided rulers. He was defeated before he could enact his ambitions, and Mezro vanished in the chaos of the Spellplague before he could consolidate his strength for another attempt.

The disappearance of Mezro greatly reduced Ras Nsi’s power, all but breaking his control over the dead. With his home gone, Nsi realized that his millennia of service to Ubtao had been betrayed. This bitterness has driven the bara down a terrible path; he aligned himself with the yuan-ti, the servants of Ubtao’s greatest foe, Denar the Night Serpent.

As part of the alliance, Ras Nsi underwent a transformation to become a yuan-ti malison and took leadership of a large cult based in the Fane of the Night Serpent beneath Omu. He also forged a pact with the archlich Acererak, agreeing to protect the Tomb of the Nine Gods where the archlich has sequestered his latest experiment, in exchange for help in freeing Dendar from her prison beneath the Peaks of Flame.

THE BARAE OF MEZRO

When Ubtao founded Mezro over 4,000 years ago, in -2,637 DR, he granted his blessings on seven of his wisest followers, creating the barae. A bara is bound to defend Mezro, and in exchange they are made into Chosen of Ubtao, granting them agelessness and a special power unique to each bara.

There are always seven barae. If one is ever slain, a new bara is appointed after they complete a trial in Ubtao’s temple. The oldest bara is Ras Nsi, the last of the original seven.

LAIR

Ras Nsi has taken the Fane of the Night Serpent (see chapter 4 of *Tomb of Annihilation*) as his lair. The fane is a large temple where Nsi is attended by scores of yuan-ti, with magic and servants at his beck and call.

LAIR ACTIONS

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Ras Nsi can take a lair action to cause one of the following magical effects; he can’t use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- Magical fog billows around one creature Ras Nsi can see within 120 feet of him. The creature must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed by Ras Nsi until initiative count 20 on the next round.
- Ras Nsi causes up to two corpses in his lair to rise up as ghouls, or one corpse to rise up as a ghost. These undead have an inverted triangle branded into their foreheads. When these undead hit a creature with their Bite or Claw attacks, Ras Nsi regains a number of hit points equal to half the damage dealt. These undead obey Ras Nsi’s telepathic commands, which can reach anywhere in the lair.
- Ras Nsi casts *mirage arcane*, affecting a room within the lair that is no larger in any dimension than 100 feet. The effect ends on the next initiative count 20.

REGIONAL EFFECTS

The region containing Ras Nsi’s lair is warped by his magic, creating one or more of the following effects:

- Snakes and undead within 1 mile of Ras Nsi’s lair serve as Ras Nsi’s eyes and ears.
- Ras Nsi can sense the death of any sentient creature with an Intelligence of 3 or higher within 1 mile of his lair.
- Ras Nsi can use a bonus action issue a command to an undead creature of his choice within 1 mile of his lair, as though he had cast the *animate dead* spell.

If Ras Nsi dies, these effects fade over the course of 1d10 days.

RAS NSI

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger, yuan-ti), ntrl. evil

Armor Class 20 (*bracers of defence*)

Hit Points 186 (26d8 + 78), reduced to 150

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +10, Wis +11

Skills Arcana +20, Deception +12, History +13, Insight +11, Perception +11, Persuasion +12, Religion +13, Stealth +10

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 21

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elven, Goblin, Old Omuan

Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Ras Nsi wears *bracers of defence*, wields a *flame tongue* longsword, and carries a *sending stone* matched to the one carried by the guide Salida.

Shapechanger. Ras Nsi can use his action to polymorph into a Medium snake or back into his yuan-ti form. His statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He doesn't change back if he dies.

Arcane Recovery (1/Day). When he finishes a short rest, Ras Nsi recovers all his spell slots of 5th level and lower.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Ras Nsi fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Innate Spellcasting. Ras Nsi's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *animal friendship* (snakes only)

3/day: *suggestion*

Spellcasting. Ras Nsi is a 20th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 21; +13 to hit with spell attacks). He can cast *detect magic* and *invisibility* at will. He can cast *animate dead* and *counterspell* once each without expending a spell slot, but can't do so again until he finishes a short or long rest. Ras Nsi has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *firebolt*, *message*, *minor arcana*, *shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *absorb elements*, *shield*, *thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *hold person*, *misty step*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *see invisibility*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *fireball*, *sticks to snakes*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*, *phantasmal killer*

5th level (3 slots): *cloudkill*, *geas*, *hold monster*, *steel wind strike*, *telekinesis*, *wall of force*

6th level (2 slots): *chain lightning*, *disintegrate*

7th level (2 slots): *teleport*

8th level (1 slots): *mind blank**

9th level (1 slots): *wish*

* Ras Nsi casts this spell on himself before combat.

Magic Resistance. Ras Nsi has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ras Nsi makes three melee attacks, but can use *Constrict* only once.

Bite (Snake Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 18). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained, and he can't constrict another target.

Flame Tongue Longsword (Yuan-ti Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage when used with two hands, plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Ras Nsi can take 3 legendary actions, choosing one from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Ras Nsi regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. Ras Nsi makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Move. Ras Nsi moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). Ras Nsi casts a spell from his list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

THE DEATH CURSE

Ras Nsi has lived for thousands of years, during which time he has been raised from the dead at least once. This means that he has been affected by the Death Curse.

Until he can devise either a cure or a way to destroy the curse at its origin, Ras Nsi has come up with an alternative solution.

Shortly after the Death Curse began, a plague of undead began to spread through the jungle as Ras Nsi sent out special ghouls and ghosts (marked by a blue triangle on their forehead) who would siphon life from their victims to fortify his own against the curse.

The resilience to the curse is not a total immunity. Each night at midnight (beginning on day 36), roll a d20. On a 1, Ras Nsi's hit point maximum is reduced by 1.

ROLEPLAYING RAS NSI

Below are some helpful points for roleplaying Ras Nsi.

FALLEN CHAMPION

The last time Ras Nsi appeared in an official novel, he was wholly devoted to Mezro, even in exile. In the Third Edition supplement *The Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, this loyalty is indicated to have been pushed too far by the opening of the city to outsiders in 1363 DR.

The actual timing of his betrayal is unclear. The *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* is set in the year 1372 DR, nine years after the city was opened, and various sources indicate that Ras Nsi's final confrontation with Mezro did not occur until shortly before the Spellplague in 1385 DR, another 13 years after that. Whether this was when he was stripped of his mantle as a bara or if that came later is not explicitly stated in any extant literature.

According to legend, the barae would be reduced to ash if Mezro should ever fall, and so when the city vanished during the Spellplague it was widely assumed that Ras Nsi had perished along with it. Of course, we know this to not have occurred. Whether this is because Ras Nsi was already stripped of his mantle as a bara (he would not have been the first bara to have lost his power) or because the city was not truly destroyed is not made clear.

What is clear is that Ras Nsi has been rebuked by Ubtao, a deity to whom he spent thousands of years in service. Likely, Nsi feels betrayed, which is a powerful motivator. It would explain why he has sought out the followers of Ubtao's sworn enemy, Dendar the Night Serpent, and seeks to free the ancient primordial from her prison beneath the Peaks of Flame.

UNLIKELY ALLY

Ras Nsi is thousands of years old and has long since rid himself of any qualms over the methods he uses in pursuit of his goals. As well, the transformation into a yuan-ti has reduced his empathy even further. This makes him both a dangerous foe and an unlikely ally.

If the yuan-ti capture the characters, Ras Nsi is unlikely to put them to death when he can turn them to his side and use them. He will readily share with the characters the terms of his alliance with Acererak to demonstrate how the archlich has broken their bargain. This gesture of trust is a calculated risk for the purpose of exploiting any emotional reaction which ensues. Once the adventurers see him as yet another victim of the death curse, they are more likely to agree to his proposition of an alliance.

Ras Nsi knows that the Tomb of the Nine Gods is riddled with deadly traps, and he does not wish to waste the lives of his followers by sending them inside in search of what Acererak promised him: the Black Opal Crown. In exchange for the final puzzle cube, Ras Nsi wants the characters to retrieve the artifact for him. To ensure they fulfill their end of the deal, Ras Nsi will phrase their responsibility in such a way as to allow him to cast *geas* on a character who Ras Nsi believes is less likely to be able to resist the enchantment.

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

The following are some pieces of information we at *Dungeon Master's Workshop* have devised to fill in missing pieces of Ras Nsi's history and motivation.

- The barae of Mezro were given a vision by Ubtao of the coming Spellplague, allowing them time to prepare. To complete their plan to move the city to a demiplane, they had to sever Ras Nsi's connection to it. Their efforts to revoke Nsi's mantle as a Chosen of Ubtao prompted his attack, which resulted in his defeat and the loss of his bara powers. Before he could rally another attack, the city vanished.
- In the aftermath of his defeat and the disappearance of Mezro, Ras Nsi's power was greatly reduced, but not spent. Though shorn of his mantle, Nsi was suffused by primordial magic that made him something more than mortal and allowed him to retain many of his former abilities, albeit to a much smaller scale. His mastery over the dead was limited in distance, as was his ability to perceive the deaths of sentient creatures. These abilities also required that he be attuned to the land around him, a process which takes time.
- Ras Nsi remains a spellcaster of peerless skill, surpassed only by those who have immersed themselves in the Weave or devoted themselves to magic as he once devoted himself to Ubtao. When Ras Nsi uses the *teleport* spell to travel anywhere in Chult, he arrives on target without any chance of failure.
- It was Ras Nsi who was responsible for the strange effect that has driven the yuan-ti from their ancient home in Hisari. He did so in order to move them closer to Omu and the Peaks of Flame, under which Dendar the Night Serpent is imprisoned. Through subtle means, he guided them to their new home before revealing himself to them with the promise of redemption. For his knowledge of where to find the Iron Doors to Dendar's prison and his dedication to her freedom, the yuan-ti were easily swayed to make him their leader.
- Ras Nsi is a master of many obscure and forgotten arts that have enabled him to create special ghastrs capable of siphoning the life force of victims and diverting it to their master. These ghastrs are marked by a blue triangle on their forehead, the Mezroan brand of an exile that Ras Nsi has taken as his symbol in defiance of his former home. This has allowed Ras Nsi to stave off the effects of the death curse, though it is not a complete immunity and it took time for the ghastrs to be created and spread about the jungle.

NEW SPELLS

The following are spells that are used above.

MINOR ARCANA

Transmutation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: S

Duration: Up to 1 hour

This is a utility spell used by spellcasters to perform sundry tasks that require basic magical knowledge. There is no exhaustive list of this spell's possible expressions, though there are a few things it can't do: it can't cause harm, it can't restore hit points, it can't replicate the effects of a spell of 1st level or higher, and it can't directly modify combat effects.

When you cast this spell, state your desired effect to the DM as precisely as possible. The DM has great latitude in ruling what occurs. The spell might simply fail, the effect you desire may only be partly achieved, or your efforts may have unforeseen consequences as a result of what you attempted to accomplish.

Some example uses of the spell are presented below:

- You instantaneously light or snuff the candles on a candelabrum, a torch, or a small campfire.
- You cause nearby flames to flicker, brighten, dim, or change colour.
- You instantaneously repair a single break or tear in an object, such as a broken chain link, two halves of a broken key, a torn cloak, or a leaking wineskin.
- You create a sound or an image of an object within range. A sound may continue unabated throughout the duration, or you can make discrete sounds at different times while the spell continues. An image can't create sound, light, smell, or any other sensory effect, and physical interaction reveals it to be an illusion because things can pass through it. A creature can use an action to examine the sound or image, determining that it is an illusion with a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check against your spell save DC and thereby causing it to become faint to the creature.
- You instantaneously clean or soil an object no larger than 1 cubic foot.
- You can interact with an unattended object within range as though you were physically touching it. You can't use this effect to attack, activate magic items, disarm traps, pick locks, or carry more than 10 pounds.

If you cast this spell multiple times, you can have up to three of its non-instantaneous effects active at a time, and you can dismiss such an effect at any time (no action required).

ISN'T THAT ALREADY A SPELL?

The *minor arcana* spell is a combination of various utility cantrips that have no good reason to be separated. It replaces *light*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*, and *thaumaturgy* for all classes with access to those cantrips.

STICKS TO SNAKES

3rd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (pieces of wood and a snake scale)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast this spell, you animate various pieces of wood no smaller than a torch and no larger than a quarterstaff, all of which must be within range. The pieces of wood transform into ophidian creatures, forming a **swarm of poisonous snakes** that appears within range.

The swarm is under your control, and as a bonus action you can mentally command it to follow a course of action, such as to guard a particular chamber or corridor. If you issue no commands, the swarm only defends itself against hostile creatures. Once given an order, the swarm continues to follow it until its task is complete.

The DM has the swarm's statistics.

At Higher Levels. If you cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, you can create one additional swarm for each slot level above 3rd.

APPENDIX: EXCERPT FROM THE RING OF WINTER

The following is an excerpt from *The Ring of Winter* by James Lowder which provides great insight into the nature of Ras Nsi's character.

"By Ubtao's blood, they were fools," he chuckled. "I end a three-hundred-year-long war, save Mezro from destruction, and they banish me."

"A war that lasted three hundred years?" Artus gasped.

"They sent you here without telling you of my great crime?"

Ras Nsi asked sarcastically. His sun-bright eyes flashed.

"They must be embarrassed by their foolishness, especially now that the city is in such grave danger."

Ras Nsi began his tale. He stared into the green stone on his ring as he spoke, as if it were calling forth his memories of the ancient battles.

"The war started about eighteen hundred years ago," the bara told Artus. "That was long before the wall encircled the city. We didn't need sorcerous protection then. Mezro boasted the mightiest army in the world, and every Tabaxi* who had the heart to be a warrior flocked to the city to prove his mettle.

"There was another large tribe of humans in Chult then—the Eshowe—and they were our sworn foes. They mocked Ubtao, worshipping the rain and the sun, calling upon local spirits for spells." Nsi sneered and reached behind him for a short-handled spear hanging on the wall. Holding the broad blade toward Artus, he added, "But their local gods could not help them against our righteous armies. For three hundred years we fought, driving the Eshowe farther and farther into the wild parts of the jungle, the valleys where creatures from before time still dwell in dark caves."

The bara tapped the spear against his palm, digging the sharp tip deeper and deeper into his bloodless flesh. The wounds healed instantly. "The Eshowe found just such a beast," Ras Nsi said, his voice strained with excitement. "A creature as tall as the highest spire on the Temple of Ubtao, its body wrought of blinding smoke and choking fog. They made a deal with the creature, promising the souls of all the slain to its greedy stomach, for it fed upon bravery, and the Tabaxi were known throughout Ubtao's jungle as the bravest of all men." He sank the spear into the arm of his throne. "The Eshowe led the beast back to Mezro for a final, desperate attack."

A look of sadness passed across the bara's features, though his eyes still blazed with an infernal light. "They sacked the city before we could defeat them. Our homes, our fields—all burned. Just the temple and a few of the buildings in the city's heart were left standing." Ras Nsi sighed. "Of the seven barae, only I survived. The others all died crushing the Eshowe and the beast. We were the victors, but at a terrible price.

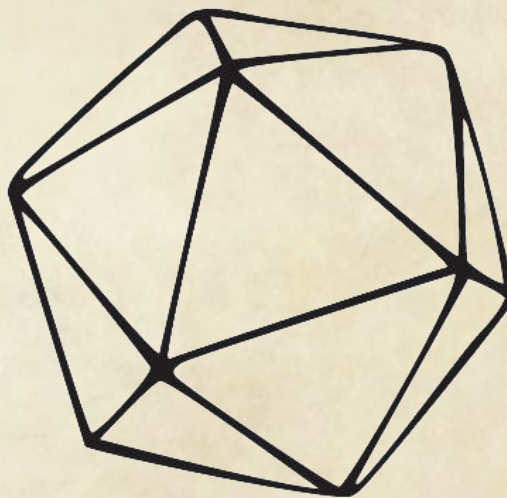
"For the next decade, I hunted the few Eshowe that survived the fight, tracked them with my zombies. I burned their homes and slaughtered their children. And each Eshowe warrior I killed was raised up to fight against his brothers." He gestured casually to the weird painting. "That depicts the last of the Eshowe being killed. There are no more of them in Chult."

Ras Nsi stated the gruesome facts with inestimable pride. Artus shuddered at the claim, his throat constricting. It was clear now the bara was blind to the horror of his actions.

"By the time I returned to Mezro, the legion of dead Eshowe trailing in my wake, Osaw had been made king, with Mainu and that bleeding heart T'fima serving as his most trusted advisors." The bara scowled. "When they saw what I had done, they banished me from the city. 'Your murderous ways are not honorable,' T'fima proclaimed at my trial. They were fools, but I had no choice but obey. Osaw was the rightful king and leader of Mezro. I would have done anything to help the city, and they turned me away!"

The bara glowered for a moment, staring at the screaming men and women in the painting. "I warned them that other enemies would arise, that there was a void in the jungle hierarchy. I have watched the Batiri rise up over the last thousand years. The war Mezro faces now could have been prevented long ago, had they only let me wipe out the goblins, too. But now I will remedy that mistake."

* Note that *The Ring of Winter* was written in 1992 while the game was still Second Edition AD&D. At this time, Tabaxi were not catfolk, but rather a tribe of humans living in Chult.



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Disclaimer: If you bite it and you die, it is poisonous. If it bites you and you die, it is venomous. Do not trust tabletop role-playing games to get this right.

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