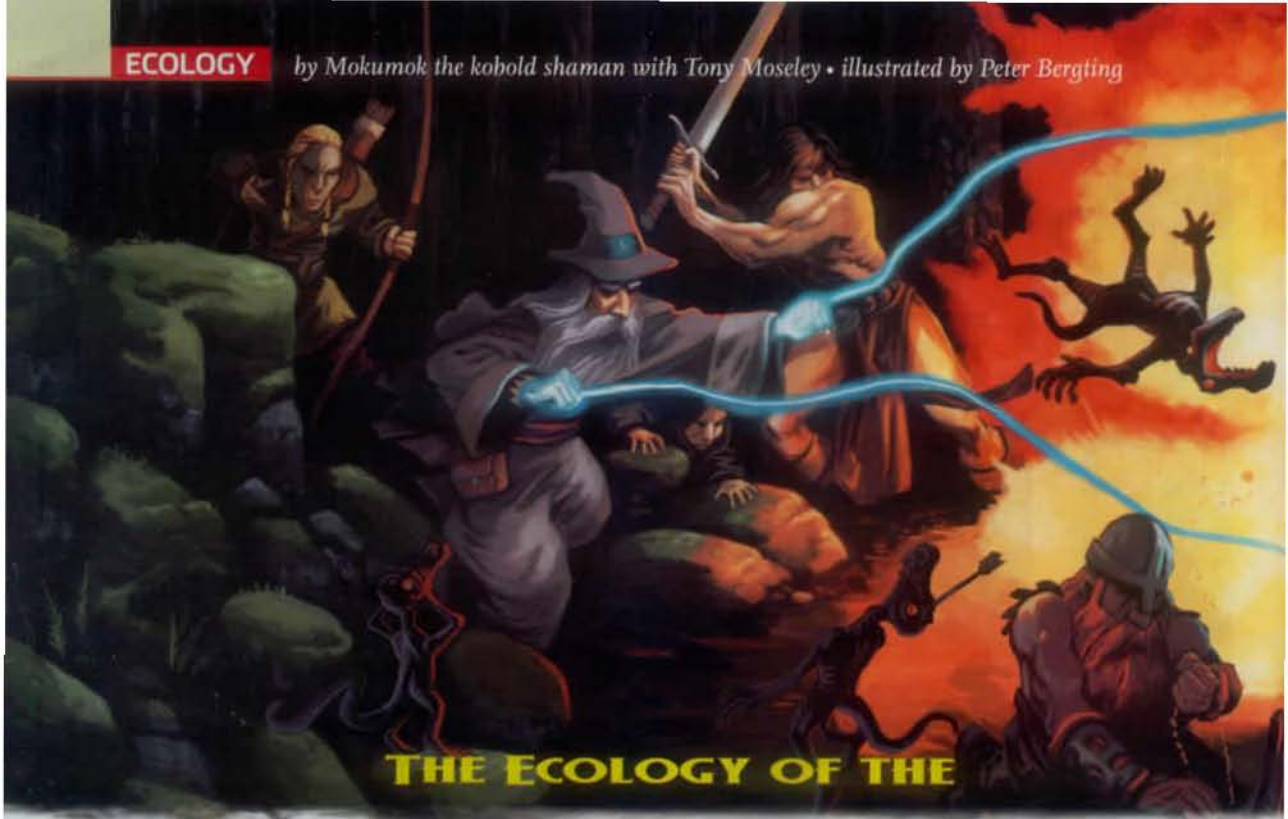


**DRAGON MAGAZINE'S**



**MONSTER ECOLOGIES**



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# Adventurer

**A**s shaman of my tribe, I have many duties: recording births and deaths, healing the sick and injured, interpreting omens, making spooky jewelry from teeth, restoring the visage of our fearsome god when the paint starts to peel, and supervising potato-sack races. Upon this already massive mound of obligations, our beloved chieftain has piled yet another task: writing ecology reports for illiterate kobolds. Oh joy and bliss. Who needs to sleep? Not me, apparently.

If you, like every other kobold, cannot distinguish a word from a beetle squashed on the page, please come by my office. I own a rare pair of *spectacles of literacy*. You can't borrow them, but you can admire the padlocked silver and electrum chest I keep them in.

## HISTORY OF THE CRYPT OF CYSTUS

Our tribe has inhabited the Crypt of Cystus since time immemorial. Similarly, adventurers have been raiding this

dungeon since time immemorial minus two days. Luckily, until recently, the raids were restricted to one per year.

When Cystus built this vast, magnificent dungeon, he had the foresight to enchant the front door so that it could only be opened on the ninth day of the eighth month, the anniversary of his divorce from Rita the Rogue, and then only if one knocked three times and shouted, while drunk, "It's me, Rita... the harpy!" This fabulous safeguard kept the number of adventuring parties assailing this place down to a minimum. Not too shabby, and far fewer than the sixty-something raids the poorly located Tomb of Horrors endures every year. (Cystus, unlike Acererak, felt no need to build his dungeon within walking distance of a bakery.)

By all accounts, until three months ago our tribe was thriving in this massive crypt. I'm not saying there wasn't room for improvement, mind you. There were many routine dangers here, such as wandering monsters and Ponzi schemes. Plus, at least three kobolds bled to death every



day in my waiting room while I took my afternoon nap. And, of course, the annual adventuring party raid. Still, our tribe was thriving and doing pretty well. Much better than now, that's for certain.

As I'm sure you know, Cystus's safeguard was overcome three months ago when an adventurer propped the front door open with a chair. Since then, adventurers of all types have been pouring in: sorcerers, paladins, arcane archers, bards—you name it. They come at the rate of one adventuring party per day, and all of them repeat the same rumor: that Cystus finally succumbed to chronic osteoporosis. Maybe it's true; I don't know. The last time anybody on our level saw Cystus was five years ago, when he came up here looking for his cat. What I do know, however, is that our warriors are being killed by the truckload (to use a popular anachronism I don't understand). Were it not for the hassle of packing and moving what must be dozens of boxes of stuff, I would suggest to the chief that our tribe relocate to a lower, deadlier level where, ironically, we'd be safer.

### CHAIR OF PROPPING

When placed against a door, this magical chair prevents the door from opening if the door is closed, or closing if the door is open. The chair can only be removed by the person who placed the chair against the door, or by an interior decorator.

Moderate evocation; CL 10th;  
Craft Wondrous Item, wall of force;  
Price 100,000 gp; Weight 3 lb.

So here we are and here we remain, defending our home against adventurers on a daily basis and worrying about the survival of our tribe. Wait, did I say "worrying?" Why should anyone worry? After all, is it even possible for adventurers to destroy a kobold tribe that has survived a millennium in this haunted crypt through determination, courage, and rapid breeding alone? Sorry, I don't have time to answer that question. I'm too busy stamping the chieftain's seal on piles of death certificates.

### PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ADVENTURER

Killing kobolds has always been an obsession for adventurers, or at least a really bad habit. Some days it seems

a kobold can't place a piece of quartz on a stool without an adventurer slaughtering him, stealing the quartz, and setting fire to the stool. Nonetheless, the true reason that adventurers begin adventuring is not and never has been about kobolds. Adventurers go into dungeons for another reason entirely—and the reason isn't treasure, if that's what you're thinking.

Several years ago, I sneezed while pronouncing the crucial final syllable of a *summon monster I* spell and somehow accidentally teleported myself into a tavern full of adventurers. Several of them promptly beat me into helplessness and dragged me upstairs to a room filled with obviously worthless copper pieces, castoff everyday weapons, and minor magic items. Their leader stared me dead in the eyes and said, "Explain your appearance in this tavern!" I replied, "Pretty much the way I look now, only with less bruises." One of them yanked off the tip of my tail and fed it to me. Swallowing quickly, I boldly asked their leader, "Why do adventurers go into dungeons?" The room became silent. Their leader spent several minutes cogitating,

then smiled and replied, "For fun." So that is the answer, straight from the source. Adventurers go into dungeons for fun. To them, adventuring is a game, it is something they play.

I have divided adventurers into three distinct types, based on their approach to fun. I call these groupings Gamist, Narrativist, and Simulationist. Every adventurer fits

cleanly into one of these three categories, without overlap.

### GAMIST

Gamist adventurers are the most deadly type of adventurer, as their every thought centers upon destruction and competition. If a gamist fails to kill more creatures in a battle than his companions, he will rip off his own head in humiliation and hurl it against a wall. Gamists are masters of the sword and bow, but are no less formidable when wielding improvised weapons, such as

chains, table legs, or bags full of kittens. Unlike other adventurer types, gamists never speak.

### NARRATIVIST

Narrativist adventurers are the thinkers in the party and love agonizing over what is right and wrong. Not surprisingly, narrativists are also the easiest to kill. The backpack of a typical narrativist contains a map, a journal, a memento from his dead parents, two or three worn books, a corsage from his junior prom, some letters from the family who raised him, a 30-pound tome of his true family's history, the last twenty-two issues of his favorite magazine, a pair of bronzed baby booties, a library card, receipts, and a miniature globe. Everything that happens to the party is recorded by the narrativist in his journal. The quickest

### ADVANCED ADVENTURER

Adventurers distinguish their skill and rank among one another by their number of possessions and the speed at which they kill things. Those with the most treasure, most powerful magics, and largest body counts are called heroes, while those with the least are called cohorts.

#### MORGAN IRONWOLF

CR 20

Human barbarian 2, cleric 1, fighter 2, monk 2, paladin 2, ranger 2, rogue 2, sorcerer 4, assassin 1, shadow dancer 2

N Medium humanoid

Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft., true seeing; Listen +17, Spot +17

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Undercommon

AC 37, touch 14, flat-footed 33; Dodge, Mobility; evasion

hp 232 (20 HD); DR 5/evil; fortification 100%

SR 19

Resist acid 30, cold 30, electricity 30, fire 30, sonic 30

Immune mind-affecting effects

Fort +29, Ref +26, Will +20

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee +5 dancing, keen, speed, vorpal, wounding longsword

+23/+23/+18/+13 (1d8+9/17-20); or

Axe of the Dwarvish Lords +24/+19/+14 (1d10+10/19-20/x3);

throwing range 10 ft.; or

flurry of blows +17/+17/+12/+7 (1d8+4)

Base Atk +13; Grp +21



way to kill a narrator in battle is to distract him with a question about his background. He will usually stop attacking to explain his coat-of-arms or why he is wearing a carnation in his buttonhole.

## SIMULATIONIST

Simulationist adventurers are prepared for anything and never carry less than 200 pounds of gear (not counting armor and weapons). A typical simulationist carries a 10-foot aluminum pole, a comb, a mirror, wolfsbane, garlic, a pound of salt, 400 feet of knotted rope, a bedroll, flannel pajamas, a 15-foot pole, a 7 1/2-foot pole, a favorite pillow, two carrier pigeons, breath mints, a padlock, a first aid kit, a second aid kit, a laminated card naming several people to contact in the event of an emergency, a dog

whistle, a canister of lamp oil, a pornographic drawing of an elf maiden, and so forth. Simulationists, being more curious than gamists or narrativists, can sometimes be lured into traps, ambushes, and small obvious cages. For reasons unknown, all simulationists have difficulty speaking in a normal fashion. Instead of saying "I see a chest," for example, they might say, "Verily, a chest!" or "Arrr, there be a chest, says I."

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ADVENTURER

Although it pains me to admit it, we kobolds have more in common with adventurers than we do with our crypt-mates. Have you noticed that ropers, darkmantles, and oozes don't even have laundry? Adventurers, on the other hand, have two eyes, a nose, and lack tentacles—just like all of us (not

counting Jimp, of course; sorry about that potion, Jimp). I'm not saying that adventurers are in any way preferable to our crypt-mates, not at all. But at least I can imagine how to go about torturing one.

In many important ways, however, we are extremely different. Consider the adventurer's diet. One might assume each adventurer consumes 900 pounds of raw flesh every day based upon the number of creatures they kill, but this is not the case. Adventurers only eat desiccated rations, which they bring with them. I know this sounds implausible, but trust me, an adventurer has never set foot in a dungeon in search of moist delicious food. My mother has had her kitchen ransacked by adventurers no fewer than eleven times and not once did they even force her to make sandwiches.

**Attack Options** Cleave, Combat Expertise, favored enemy +2

(humanoid [kobold]), Great Cleave, Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

**Special Attack** death attack (DC 15), flurry of blows, rage 1/day<sup>2</sup>, rebuke undead 7/day (+2 on turning checks), smite evil 1/day, sneak attack +2d6, spells, unarmed strike

**Combat Gear** scroll of imprisonment, scroll of Mordenkainen's disjunction, scroll of shapechange, 2 scrolls of time stop

**Cleric Spells Prepared** (CL 2nd):

1st—*disguise self*<sup>1</sup>, *doom* (DC 15), *sanctuary* (DC 15)

0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*, *light*

**D Domain Spell; Domains** Travel, Trickery

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 5th):

2nd (4/day)—*blur*, *glitterdust* (DC 16), *scorching ray*, *web* (DC 16)

1st (7/day)—*charm person* (DC 15), *enlarge person*, *feather fall*, *grease*, *magic missile*, *shield*, *true strike*

0 (6/day)—*dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*,

*prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 14)

**Abilities** Str 18, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 18

**SQ** aura of good, detect evil, divine grace, fast movement, hide in plain sight, lay on hands, poison use, summon familiar (hawk), trapfinding, uncanny dodge, wild empathy (+2 on wild empathy checks)

**Feats** Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Mobility, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Spring Attack, Track, Two-Weapon Fighting, Whirlwind Attack

**Skills** Balance +8, Bluff +11, Climb +11 (+13 using rope), Craft (alchemy) +11, Diplomacy +25, Disguise +11 (+13 to act in character), Decipher Script +11, Escape Artist +11 (+13 using rope),

Gather Information +8, Handle Animal +11, Hide +16, Intimidate +8, Jump +13, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +11, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +11, Knowledge (geography) +11, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (local) +11, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +11, Listen +21, Move Silently +14, Perform (dance) +11, Profession (sailor) +7, Ride +8, Search +11 (+13 involving secret doors), Sense Motive +11, Sleight of Hand +9, Spellcraft +13, Spot +21, Survival +11 (+2 aboveground, underground, on other planes, to avoid getting lost, to avoid hazards, or to follow tracks [permutations stack]), Swim +11, Tumble +20, Use Magic Device +11 (+14 using scrolls or to decipher spells on scrolls), Use Rope +11 (+13 involving bindings)

**Possessions** combat gear; +5 greater energy resistance (all), heavy fortification, spell resistance 19, mithral breastplate (counts as no armor); +5 lion shield; +5 anarchic, axiomatic, holy, unholy, adamantite, cold iron, silver longsword; +5 dancing, keen, speed, vorpal, wounding longsword; *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*; *holy avenger*; 50 greater slaying arrows (all); 2 masterwork daggers; *amulet of natural armor*; three bags of holding (type V); *carpet of flying* (20 ft. by 20 ft.); *cloak of resistance* +5; *crystal ball* (with all spells); *cube of force*; *cubic gate*; *Daern's instant fortress*; *eyes of petrification*; *gloves of swimming and climbing*; *Hand and Eye of Vecna*; *helm of brilliance* (disguised as pot); *pale green ioun stone*; *iridescent spindle ioun stone*; *mantle of faith*; *monk's belt*; *orange ioun stone*; *orb of storms*; *stone of luck*; three portable holes; *ring of seven wishes*; *ring of spell turning*; *winged boots of speed and teleportation*; other gear (see Chapter 7 of the *Player's Handbook*)

**Unnamed XXIII, hawk familiar**<sup>3</sup>; 8 hp; *Monster Manual* 273

<sup>1</sup> Why? <sup>2</sup> Ughh... you figure it out. <sup>3</sup> Hidden among equipment with the corpses of familiars one through twenty-two.



Because of the numerous dead creatures left in the wake of adventuring parties, scavenging vermin have experienced massive population surges in the crypt. This is becoming a problem, so if you see any vermin breeding, stomp your foot and scare them apart. Currently, I estimate no fewer than two hundred gnomes roaming our corridors.

### WEAPONS OF THE ADVENTURER

When not plundering dungeons, adventurers live in taverns on the surface, where they spend their time creating new, deadlier weapons to use in plundering dungeons. Over the years, the swords and arrows of adventurers have become so powerful that kobold warriors have started wearing armor

to impress women rather than for any measurable protection. Concerned, our master armorer hammered together a special oaken shield thick enough to deflect at least one blow from their latest super-weapons. Unfortunately, at 23 inches thick, it proved too heavy to lift.

At the rate things are going—the imagination of adventurers being outweighed only by their bloodlust—eventually an adventurer will arrive in our dungeon with a weapon so lethal that it kills any kobold approaching within 30 feet of it. At that moment, we will know the days of our tribe are truly numbered and without hope. Oh wait, never mind. An adventurer brandishing a dagger like that came through last week.

### TACTICS OF THE ADVENTURER

Adventurers are resourceful. They flank, sneak attack, levitate their archers above the reach of our swords, throw glass flasks that release eight-headed hydras, cast sonically-substituted *fireballs*, open massive gates into the Lower Planes behind legions of kobolds then scare them into flight with *symbols of fear*, and so on. Their most infuriating tactic, however, is not destructive: it is their application of resurrection magic on their dead. Seriously, that spell infuriates me. I've seen it happen over and over. Wave after wave of kobold warriors stream at an adventuring party until finally we kill one of them, and then tomorrow I see that same adventurer perched on the

statue of the king, prying the rubies out of its eye sockets.

The chief once asked me what kobold warriors can do to counter the tactics of adventurers. All I could come up with was, "Kill themselves to deprive the adventurers of the pleasure." Lucky for me his royal pompousness thought I was joking.

## SOME POSITIVE STUFF

Adventurers are a curse upon dungeon dwellers and we must recommit ourselves daily to their swift and merciless destruction before they succeed in eradicating us completely. But let's not go overboard. Adventurers are responsible for several good things, too.

For starters, they cull from the tribe our weak, our sick, and our not-exactly-sick-but-taking-vitamin-B-just-in-case. As a shaman dedicated to keeping the tribe healthy, this certainly lightens my workload.

Furthermore, because so many warriors have died in countless battles over the past few months, the lady kobolds now outnumber the males eleven to one. As tragic as this is from a military perspective, one can't help but notice that even the shortest, ugliest kobold warrior now enjoys at least five adoring wives... and most have far more! Myself, I have attracted thirty-one. I would be the happiest kobold in the tribe were it not for that spiked pit accident a few years back.

One would also be crazy to overlook the benefit of magic items. Adventurers bring these wonders into our shadowy world, not the other way around. The same goes for gold. We all hate adventurers, but whose coins do we use when we want to purchase sausages from the illithids? Not kuo-toa clamshells, that's for sure.

Lastly, I must mention our generous pension plan. I feel morbid saying it, but it remains well-funded only because so few kobolds live long enough to collect.

If you are wondering why I've mentioned benefits derived from our enemy, I don't know. I might have a fever. Or maybe I'm looking for the silver lining in a dark, imposing cloud that hates us

## NEW KOBOLD FEATS

Kobolds might choose a variety of unique feats to aid them in surviving. Unfortunately, they're about as good at choosing feats as they are at surviving. A kobold must have seen adventurers within the past five weeks to qualify for these restricted feats. Dreaming about seeing adventurers shouldn't count, but it does anyway.

### Bad Decision

You made a bad decision.

**Prerequisite:** Kobold.

**Benefit:** Upon choosing this feat, the kobold experiences an odd, nagging feeling that he did something really stupid. Wasteful, even.

### Dying Shriek

You refuse to die quietly.

**Prerequisite:** Kobold.

**Benefit:** Popular among kobold prison guards, this feat allows a slaughtered kobold to scream a short phrase upon his sudden, unexpected death. Popular screams are, "The humans have escaped!" and "I told you we should have killed them!"

**Special:** A kobold fighter can select Dying Shriek as a... nevermind. There are no kobold fighters.

### Elf

Better to die as an elf than as a kobold.

**Prerequisite:** Kobold.

**Benefit:** Upon selecting this feat, the kobold spontaneously polymorphs into an elf and is immediately killed by nearby kobolds. This feat can only be selected by mistake.

### Volunteer

You have a death wish... in addition to being a kobold.

**Prerequisite:** Kobold.

**Benefit:** A kobold with this feat boldly volunteers for any mission involving adventurers. Typical missions are, "Sneak into the adventurer's camp and strangle their guard dogs," and "Sneak into the adventurers' camp and smear their wizard with grease so he will be afraid to throw *fireballs* tomorrow." If a kobold survives five years with this feat, his chieftain attempts to memorize his name.

and wants to blast us with sonically-substituted, empowered *lightning bolts*.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Speaking as a fellow kobold, I'll be as direct as possible. The odds of you dying by adventurer are high. So high, in fact, that if you accidentally drank a quart of poison it would only reduce your chance of dying at the hands of an adventurer by five percent. Despair not, though, and more importantly, complain not, as the king says any dissent undermines the war effort and gives him a headache. So sharpen your gnome-sticker and never forget: We kobolds have battled adventurers since before the dawn of time! We are due for a win.

When you finally meet your foe, roar like a descending dragon and attack him with all the fury of our entire remaining population. If all goes well, you might qualify for a medal. If all doesn't go well, you'll likely find yourself dying on the cold stone floor, one of many kobolds whose broken bodies form a pathetic bleeding ring around a defiant scimitar-whirling cyclone of death. When that time comes, do not ponder the hopelessness of calling out for medical aid, but instead die in peace, comforted by the knowledge that I, Mokumok the Shaman, will record your death for posterity and the chief, as always, appreciates your sacrifice—probably. ☞



## The Ecology of the

# ANNIS HAG

Not all tales of lurking monsters and hungry witches are mere fantasies to terrify children. In the lonely, rotten places of the world, where few tread out of instinctual fear, rule undisputed queens of bitterness and savagery. Witches, ogresses, hags—these cursed crones give form to hatreds as old as the world and no story of their cruelty has ever exaggerated the truth.

This examination marks the second in a three-part series exploring the twisted minds, warped powers, and bizarre lifecycles of the most feared and deadly subspecies of hags. The first in this series, “The Ecology of the Green Hag,” appeared in *DRAGON* #331.

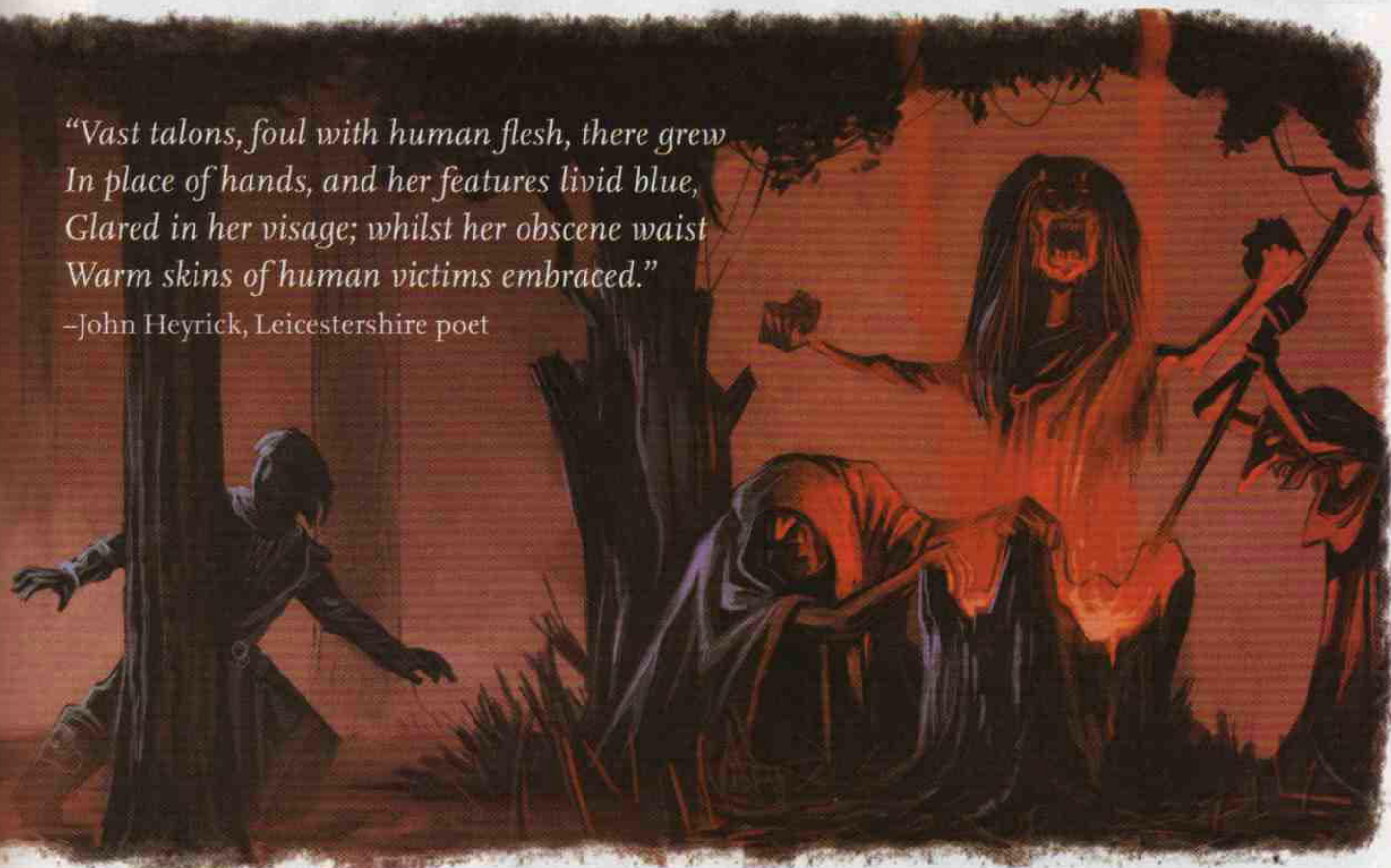
### HISTORY OF THE ANNIS HAG

While most of the civilized races discount the self-aggrandizing boasts and blatant lies hags claim as their heritages, a myth long held by ogres and hill giants corroborates one legend and possibly hints at the true origins of hags.

In the dark of a young world the fearful races sought protection from the terrors that haunted the night. In response to the multitude's unheeded prayers the moon came into being and brought with it a queen who ruled over its light—Cegilune.

*"Vast talons, foul with human flesh, there grew  
In place of hands, and her features livid blue,  
Glared in her visage; whilst her obscene waist  
Warm skins of human victims embraced."*

—John Heyrick, Leicestershire poet



Cegilune's worship quickly spread across lands and through numerous races. A silver-haired beauty, she was said to be as fickle as the nighted orb over which she held sway, and thus her followers constantly courted her favor. Those who pleased her best, pious priestesses whose comely forms reminded her most of herself, Cegilune adopted as her daughters and granted them powers with which to further her worship. The so-called songs of Cegilune were granted beautiful voices to entice others to her service, Cegilune's prophets were given the power to tread across water as easily as land so to spread her word, and the protectors of Cegilune were granted great strength with which to defend the goddess's followers.

For an age, Cegilune garnered the fear and love of her worshipers, but eventually she grew complacent, indulging in her followers' adoration but rarely intervening on their behalves. At the same time, the deities of distant lands began to encroach upon her disciples' hearts. Only when a wrinkle first marred the moon goddess's

## KNOWLEDGE OF ANNIS HAGS

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to annis hags. Those who live near lonely moors or marshes, particularly in frigid climes, or who have dealings with lesser giants such as trolls or ogres might possess this information, even if only in the form of colloquial legends.

### Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
----	--------

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Annis hags are hideous, blue-skinned ogresses who lurk in marshes and other dark, rotting places.                                                                                          |
| 15 | An annis hag's claws are made of rusted metal and, along with her great strength, can rend an armored knight to bits.                                                                      |
| 20 | Annis hags are incredibly resilient to all attacks but the blows of blunted weapons. These defenses can also turn away less powerful magics.                                               |
| 25 | An annis hag often uses her magical abilities to disguise herself as a large human or comely giant. They can also summon dense clouds of cold fog to cloak their approach.                 |
| 30 | Annis hags are, even among hags, especially egotistical and seek to dominate the lands and creatures around them. This vanity can often be exploited through gifts of magic and live food. |

supposedly eternal beauty did she realize her error. Appearing before her remaining followers, the goddess found that only her daughters had remained devout, but that they too had aged as she weakened. Others who had left her fold bitterly mocked the moon goddess, flaunting the powers of their

new divine patrons. Enraged, Cegilune slaughtered hundreds of her former worshipers, sending her remaining daughters on a bloody crusade.

The moon goddess's holy war was terrible but brief. Cegilune's willsome acts offended numerous younger deities and her outnumbered devotees were

## CEGILUNE

Lesser Deity (Neutral Evil)

Once a beautiful and powerful goddess of the moon, spurned Cegilune tenaciously retains her divinity seemingly only to take revenge against the countless mortal races she believes betrayed her. Collecting larvae, the soul currency of the Lower Planes, Cegilune uses their profane magic to empower her hag servants and create new nightmarish monstrosities to infest the Material Plane. Cegilune's symbol is an overflowing black cauldron.

**Portfolio:** Hags, larvae, the moon

**Domains:** Evil, Knowledge, Moon\*

**Favored Weapon:** Quarterstaff

**Worship:** Cegilune's only places of worship are small grisly shrines kept near the cauldrons and meal places of her devotees. Every night worshipers offer lengthy praises of their goddess's virtues and curses on all who betrayed her. These profanities escalate on the night of the full moon nearest the winter solstice when Cegilune's followers perform torturous sacrifices, each seeking to dedicate the greatest suffering to her name.

**Herald and Allies:** Cegilune's herald is a gigantic larvae with the same statistics as a 20 HD fiendish purple worm. Mindless and bred only to exact its mistress's wrath, the monstrosity is a bloated, trashing thing of sickly yellow flesh, with a corpulent humanoid face nearly lost amid its titanic rolls. The horror has no other name than that which Cegilune calls it—Ambrosial.

Clerics of Cegilune most often contact night hags with their *planar ally* spells.

\*See the *Spell Compendium*.

cut down and driven into the shadowed reaches of the world. In addition, her divine tantrums had expended much of her remaining power, devastating her failing beauty and leaving her a weakened, monstrous crone, who too fled to the darkest, loneliest pits of existence.

With the departure of their goddess, the surviving daughters of Cegilune found their divine blessings corrupted and their hearts infused with their patroness's hatred. Thus, the voices, prophets, and protectors of Cegilune

became the first green hags, sea hags, and annis hags.

Today, the daughters of Cegilune, hags of all types, still strive to wreak their mother's dark will and bring suffering to all the treacherous mortal races. As for Cegilune, from her desolate home at the bottom of the multiverse, a pit in the Gray Wastes known as Hag's End, she fosters her remaining powers while seeking ways to bring ruin upon all mortal races and the imposter deities of the night.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ANNIS HAG

While most perceive hags as nothing more than vicious wart-skinned beldames, merely one disgusted glance at an annis hag forces reconsideration. Easily the most physically menacing subspecies of hag, annis hags loom more than 8 feet tall, their scabbed and blemished blue skins stretched over obscenely powerful frames of jutting bone and knotty muscle. The flesh of these withered forms holds more akin to leather armor than the supple skins of most humanoid races, being capable of turning aside blades with ease. Only blunted weapons, capable of smashing down an annis hag's tenacious frame, are assured to do any harm. Such implies, however, that one can bypass these monstrosities' potent and unnatural offenses.

Often measuring upward of 3 inches long, an annis hag's nails are formed of actual iron that magically extends from their bodies just as keratin nails develop from a normal humanoid's fingertips. As an annis hag ages, her nails continue to grow, often replacing bits that have been filed away by battle, rough use, and rust. Many annis hags—in a typical showing of vanity—take great pride in their nails, cultivating them into lengthy spirals that gradually become like rusted corkscrews. While such gross luxuriance neither aids nor hinders hags in combat, the sight of the creatures' sword-length nails and the cyclical wounds they gouge can prove most disconcerting.

Also marking annis hags apart from their hag sisters are these creatures' vestigial horns. Little longer than a human's thumbs, these curved,

blackened nubs arch upward from the forehead and possess neither the length nor durability to serve as weapons. Although these horns' purposes are unknown, some scholars suggest these protrusions—along with their blue skin—mark a link between annis hags and the planes-hunting night hag or, alternatively, cunning ogre mages. Whether these similarities imply that annis hags are progenitors or scions of such terrifying beings, though, remains widely contested.

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ANNIS HAG

All hags possess powerful egos, but even among hags none prove more vainglorious than annis. Holding their size and strength as proof of their superiority, annis hags are quick to subjugate weaker creatures, especially other hags. Eager to have their perverse virtues acknowledged, they delight in manipulating bands of savage humanoids—the stronger the race, the greater their delight in subjugating them.

Annis hags show no more generosity toward their sisters than they do their minions. Ever eager to increase their powers, dominant annis hags physically subjugate weaker hags to form coveys, maintaining such groups through intimidation and violence. Their characteristic vanity and natural bitterness make groups with two or more annis hags exceedingly rare. Those that do exist often survive only through the extreme canniness or deception of another hag or as temporary arrangements. In the end, most alliances between annis hags end in bloody betrayal.

Exploring every imagined avenue to increase their power and fearsomeness, annis hags frequently augment themselves, either magically or physically. Deep scarification, bodily modification, magical enhancement, and grafting are all commonalities among these crones. One annis, known as Smiling Rut, was known for having gnawed through her own cheeks to give herself an obscene, gangrenous grin. Some go on to say that Smiling Rut was in fact an entire covey,



with the powerful annis hag having stitched her ever-flailing, semiconscious sisters upon her back.

Despite their self-superiority, annis hags prove most likely to acknowledge greater powers than themselves, especially when doing so promises to benefit them. As such, these hags are quick to appeal to potentially sympathetic powers such as bitter Cegilune, ancient Baba Yaga, the archdevil known as the Hag Countess, or any number of other dark deities.

While just as intelligent as green hags, annis hags' obsessions with physical strength and personal power lead many to perceive them as mere savages. In battle, such assumptions often prove fatal as these hags use their innate abilities to disguise their forms and create clouds of fog to disorient opponents who might otherwise be able to defeat them. Their need to possess undisputed strength within the territories they claim—usually an entire bog or forest surrounding their ruin or cavernous lairs—often leads them to perform feats of blatant savagery other hags would never dare. The annis hag called the Welt Mother once rampaged through three settlements bordering her moor, killing all the female young merely on the suspicion that another hag had seeded her changeling—potentially a future threat—among the villagers.

## THE CHANGE: ABERRANT ADOLESCENCE

With no male members of their species, hags prey upon males of other humanoid races to propagate. Upon giving birth, a hag mother seeks out suitable parents of the father's race and replaces their child with her seemingly normal seed.

A hag's spawn—often called a changeling in folktales—appears beautiful, healthy, and strong, the kind of infant parents pray for. As the child ages, though, her true nature begins to impose upon her personality. Yet even these selfish and bullying tendencies never seem so outlandish as to mark the young hag as anything other than a brutish member of her foster parent's race. In fact, even the changeling herself has no inkling of her true nature.

For the first forty years of her life, a juvenile hag blends in with her adopted culture. Most live unextraordinary lives, marked only by predilections toward the traits and habits of the hags they'll one day become. Swarthy, physically powerful, and aggressive, young annis typically seek out work as warriors, even adventurers. Juvenile green hags often become graceful beauties, but their attractiveness is marred by their prima donna vanities. Young sea hags tend to be hale, plain women with poisoned tongues.

As these unsuspecting hags age their hateful personalities grow worse, beginning to manifest in their mid-forties as terrible physical alterations. This transformation, known to hags as "the change," culminates in the young hag's rebirth as a true hag of the same subspecies as her true mother.

Hags frequently use such tactics of spreading suffering by targeting the weakest members of a community, both the eldest and youngest, as such losses often prove the most painful. For example, the tragedy at Hobb's End is widely thought to have been orchestrated by a sorcerous hag haunting the nearby swamp. That grim morning the townsfolk woke to find their children replaced by crudely carved, child-sized manikins, each

missing a limb, several digits, or other vital part. Despite much searching and the villager's many prayers, though, the children were never seen again.

## POWERS OF THE COVEY: HAG BREWS

As much a part of hag mythology as cruel coveys and grotesque hag eyes are these creatures' terrible cauldrons and the foul concoctions that bubble and writhe within. Part dark ritual, part cannibalistic feast, what screams and

ferments within these grotesque pools is more than just mad alchemy, but a form of magical creation that only hags are depraved enough to exploit. The corrupt hag brews that spill forth from these crones' cauldrons can wreak powerful magical effects, but often do so at a terrible price.

Formulating a hag brew is a process much like creating a hag eye. Instead of creating such a gem, a covey that meets the proper requirements (noted with each individual brew) can produce one hag brew a month on the night of the full moon. Every hag brew requires the sacrifice of a sentient creature, a number of other grotesque ingredients, and a two-hour-long ritual taking place in the hours before and after midnight. The hags creating the brew must remain


within 10 feet of each other and can perform no other action for the duration of the rite. Leaving the area or being distracted from the ceremony ruins the brew, the creation of which cannot be attempted for another month. A covey also cannot use their covey-related spell-like abilities the day after creating a brew, as this magic is expended by the brew's creation. Coveys that create a hag brew cannot create a hag eye in the same month.

An example hag brew is presented here, but more can be found online at [paizo.com/dragon](http://paizo.com/dragon) as part of the preview for this issue.

### BREW OF BLACK EYES

Infused with a sliver of hag tongue, a creature that drinks of this thick black brew gains the effects of *arcane*

*sight*, *darkvision*, and *see invisibility* for 1 week. For the duration of the brew, however, the drinker is afflicted by terrible nightmares of the hags that created the concoction, preventing him from getting a restful sleep, thus leaving him fatigued and unable to regain arcane spells. During these nightmares the hags and the drinker can communicate as per the spell *Rary's telepathic bond*, although the drinker has no choice but to participate in the communication. The effects of this brew can be ended early by *remove curse*. Hags most often bestow this brew upon minions tasked to hunt down specific enemies or magic items.

Moderate divination; a covey consisting of hags of three different types; Weight —. 

### ADVANCED ANNIS HAG

All hags advance by taking class levels. Advanced annis hags regularly take levels of barbarian or fighter, but they are also likely to take levels as clerics of evil and savage deities.

Within the chill depths of the Frostrot Marsh, the annis hag Black Agga has usurped control of the unorganized trolls of the Gut Gnaw tribe. Half-crazed with savagery, the hag claimed the oversized claw of the trolls' gigantic former king and grafted it onto her own. She now rules as a cannibal queen, leading her eager minions to raid the surrounding lands, dragging live prey screaming back into their dark bog.

#### BLACK AGGA

CR 16

Female annis hag barbarian 8  
CE Large monstrous humanoid  
Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12  
Language Abyssal, Common, Giant,

AC 27, touch 10, flat-footed 26; improved uncanny dodge

hp 145 (15 HD); DR 2/bludgeoning, 1/—  
SR 19

Fort +17, Ref +8, Will +7

Spd 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee rending claw\*  
+26 melee (1d8+12/x3)  
and claw +24 melee  
(1d6+10) and  
bite +19 melee  
(1d6+5)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +15; Grp +29

Attack Options Awesome Blow, Power Attack, improved grab,  
rake 1d8+12, rend 1d8+1d6+18

Special Actions rage 2/day

Combat Gear *potion of fly*, *potion of haste*, *potion of resist fire 20*,  
*potion of nondetection*

Spell-like Abilities (CL 8th):

3/day—*disguise self*, *fog cloud*

Abilities Str 30, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 12

SQ trap sense +2

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Great Fortitude,  
Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack

Skills Bluff +9, Diplomacy +7, Disguise +9 (+2 acting), Hide +13,  
Intimidate +17, Jump +14, Knowledge (nature) +8, Listen +12,  
Spot +12, Survival +10 (+2 above ground), Swim +16

Possessions rending claw graft, *bracers of armor* +5

Rage (Ex) When Black Agga rages, her statistics change as follows:

AC 25, touch 8, flat-footed 24

hp 166

Fort +19 Will +9

Melee rending claw\* +28 melee (1d8+14/x3) and  
claw +26 melee (1d6+12) and  
bite +21 melee (1d6+6)

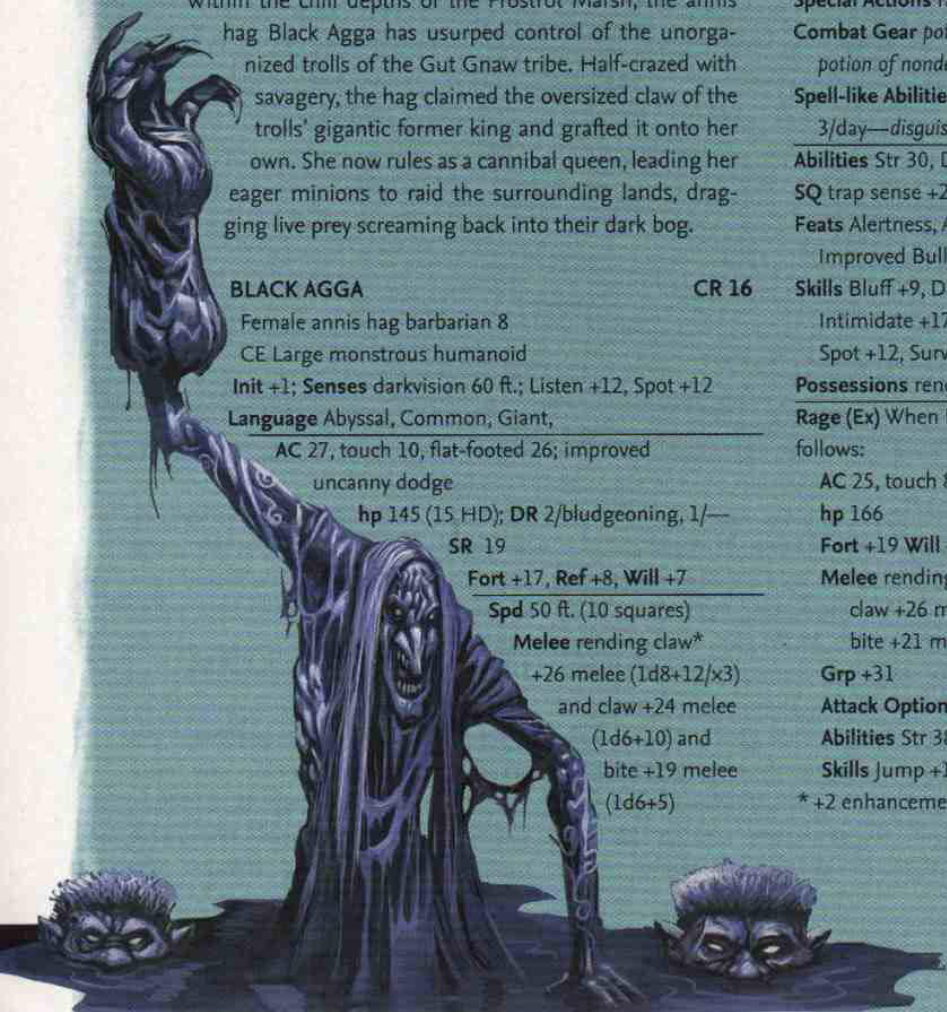
Grp +31

Attack Options rake 1d8+14, rend 1d6+1d8+20

Abilities Str 38, Con 23

Skills Jump +14, Swim +18

\*+2 enhancement from permanent *greater magic fang*.



by Eric Cagle  
 illustrated by Peter Bergting



## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# BEHIR

When most adventurers think of enormous, reptilian beasts, dragons immediately come to mind. However, dragons are not the only scaled giants to instigate fear, respect, and sheer awe with their mere presence. One such magical beast combines the voracity of an entire pack of starving predators with unchecked draconic deadliness: the behir.

Bestial yet canny predators, behirs prowl broken hills, wastelands, and barrens looking for food enough to fill their considerable gullets. With surprising cunning disguised by their monstrous appearance, behirs offer those expecting to face nothing more than a dumb beast only a slow and painful digestion.

### HISTORY OF BEHIRS

Behirs exhibit numerous traits that suggest an unnatural genesis. The most common theory posits that some enormous, magically altered snake or lizard—possibly even a manifestation of the gods Merrshaulk or Apep—bred with

a powerful blue dragon in a time long past. The offspring of this bizarre union lacked the intellect of their draconic parent but exhibited the lightning breath weapon, thick hide, and spiny crests. Over time, these aberrant dragon spawn managed to propagate their own species and broke from draconic society to take up lairs in the wilderness. Most dragons, especially blue dragons, completely deny such theories, seeing behirs as nothing more than abominations that should be destroyed whenever possible. However, a few dragons (typically metallics) confirm hints of truth in this possible genesis, although none admit the full story—if indeed any truly know.

An alternative theory suggests that it was in fact a blue dragon that created the first behirs. Seeking guardians akin to half-dragons, yet more powerful and easier to control, a draconic sorcerer began meddling with the blood of her own kind. Either by breeding with a magically summoned being or tampering with her own unhatched eggs, the blue dragon created a clutch of deadly yet dimwitted offspring.



Whether these feral sub-dragons turned on and cannibalized their mother or she grew disgusted with her unnatural brood and drove them from her lair remains unknown. Frequent observations, however, demonstrate that blue dragons revile and actively hunt behirs, while behirs fly into a rage at the merest mention of dragons of any color.

Regardless of tales of their draconic heritages, behirs prove physically (both internally and externally) very different from true dragons. As such, varying theories of their actual genesis prove far-flung and often radically conflicting.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE BEHIR

While superficially resembling dragons, behirs are more akin to gigantic snakes than true wyrms. A full-grown behir reaches at least 40 feet in length and weighs approximately 4,000 pounds. Their extremely tough and scaly hides bristle with armored ridges and vary in color from electric blue to nearly purple with bands of brown. The underbellies of male behirs exhibit a lighter hue, typically

## KNOWLEDGE OF BEHIRS

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to behirs. Those who study magical beasts, as well as inhabitants of the dry, dusty barrens that these monstrosities call home, are most likely to possess this information.

### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10	Behirs are wingless, twelve-legged, vaguely draconic beasts capable of blasting foes with their electrified breath.
15	Behirs territorially claim wide swaths of land and “rule” them from rocky spires and plateaus. Using their powerful jaws to snatch up prey, behirs either fatally constrict such prisoners or swallow them whole.
20	Behirs are intelligent yet brutish creatures capable of speaking Common and possessing egos as large as their monstrous bulks. A behir’s multiple legs make it a masterful climber capable of scaling most any surface.
25	Behirs hate all dragons and blindly attack them on sight. The breath weapon of a behir takes a relatively long time to recharge once used, yet this innate affinity for electricity makes behirs immune to all electrical attacks.

a pale blue, while female underbellies near shades of white highlighted with streaks of azure. All behirs sprout numerous large horns that curve backwards from their heads and continue down their serpentine necks. Largely ornamental, these horns act as an indicator of the beast’s age (growing for a behir’s entire life) and

are frequently used in preening hard-to-reach scales.

Behirs possess a dozen short but powerful legs capable of tucking up neatly along the sides of their bodies, allowing them to either slither along like a snake or gallop in an undulating stride. They prefer using their snake-like locomotion when traveling any

considerable distance, as it makes moving across the broken landscapes they usually inhabit far easier. Behirs commonly only use their legs when climbing or feeding. Both because of their numerous legs and their comfort while slithering, it's impossible to trip or knock over behirs.

Overly large, a behir's mouth sports dozens of thin, needlelike teeth that curve inward for the purposes of grabbing meat and tearing it in large gob-bets. A behir cannot chew food with any particular ease and spits out anything it cannot swallow entirety. The throat and stomach of a behir are equally oversized, capable of swallowing entire creatures whole. When filled, an incredibly powerful acid floods the behir's stomach that reduces flesh to a nutrient-rich chyme in a matter of minutes. The rare items a behir cannot digest (such as exceptionally resistant substances like adamantite) it regurgitates in a slow, awkward process within its lair.

A portion of the energy behirs generate from their food goes to fueling a number of strange, almost glassy organs that run below the thickly armored plates of their necks. Far different from the draconis fundamentum organ that produces the breath weapons of true dragons, these coarse formations are arrayed in a state of constant friction, shifting and colliding against one another as a behir moves. This constant friction gathers within several chambers inside the behir, waiting to escape in a bolt when the creature opens a specialized chamber within its mouth. Sometimes this energy escapes in ribbons that ripple over a behir's tongue or crackle over its spines,

especially when the creature becomes agitated or otherwise excited. These formations require almost exactly 1 minute to generate enough friction to create a blast of electricity deadly enough for a behir to use as a weapon.

Not far from these charged structures rests a behir's brain. Large and complex enough to facilitate a behir's sentience and capacity for speech, this organ is in no way as complex or advanced as a dragon's brain. Also, perhaps due to



the electrified organs nearby, behirs are prone to violent mood swings, far-flung leaps of reasoning, and spasmodic muscle actions.

Perhaps another effect of the electricity that at times seems uncontrolled within their bodies, behirs live fast and burn out quickly, rarely living beyond forty years. However, possibly as a result of some aberrant origin, a behir's maximum age varies extremely from one to the next, with some dying of old age in their thirties while others live well into their hundreds.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE BEHIR

Behirs prefer inhabiting dry, rocky hills (although rumors of jungle and desert behirs persist), basking in the scalding sun between hunting forays and patrols of their territories. Frequently lairing in cliffside caves, plateaus, rocky spires, or other high natural hiding spots, behirs seek out homes that afford them a view of the surrounding lands and prove difficult for creatures unable to climb sheer surfaces to access.

Most behirs live solitary existences, claiming all the land visible from their lairs as their territory. As behirs favor lofty homes, a behir's alleged domain might span dozens of miles, with its lair always at the center. However, these contended dominions are regularly exaggerated, possibly encompassing the prior claims of other creatures, or even whole cities a lone behir could never hope to overtake. Regardless, behirs are violently territorial creatures and attempt to drive out any beings they perceive as threats, while subjugating weaker creatures. This often leads to lengthy conflicts between behirs and humanoids or other powerful monsters, all with equal belief in their ownership of the land.

In the cases where behirs win such disputes, whole regions of weaker creatures might pay homage to a single behir as landlord—or even deity. Although physically powerful and intelligent enough to communicate, behirs make poor leaders and worse rulers. Little more than oversized, self-interested bullies, behirs care nothing for the “weaklings” that dwell within their territories. Rather, they treat such vassals little better than slaves and livestock, often demanding ridiculous tributes of food or wealth. Also, due to their often sporadic mood

swings—often blamed on the powerful electrical discharges occurring in such close proximity to their brains—behirs quickly neglect or forget responsibilities and promises. Such shifts commonly occur every 5 to 10 minutes and might prove dangerous, as a behir can seem agreeable—even playful—one moment and suspicious or antagonistic the next.

Despite their brutishness as rulers, behirs are not innately evil creatures. Although particularly foul-tempered exceptions that cross the line surely exist, most behirs adhere to a neutral outlook. However, this neutrality combined with a relatively low intellect and great physical prowess makes behirs exceptionally self-concerned. Canny humanoid might use this sense of self-superiority to their advantage, as behirs are highly susceptible to flattery, especially pertaining to their horns and size.

Behirs are immune to electricity and relish roaming or climbing to the peaks of their lairs amid thunderstorms, becoming quite excited and agitated when the lightning begins to strike. The mating cycle of behirs coincides with the hottest days of summer, when electrical storms rage most frequently. During such times the swift popping bellows of behir mating cries mingle with regular crashes of thunder. Travelers should be extremely wary of wandering through an agitated behir's territory during this time of year and especially in the middle of such a storm.

Occasionally, in areas with a large enough food supply, a mated pair of behirs bond for several years—usually somewhere between two and twelve. A pair of behirs usually produce one small clutch of between eight and ten eggs. These eggs resemble large geodes tinged with electric blue lines, similar to lapis lazuli, and might be mistaken for huge blue gemstones. Typically, only half of the eggs produce live young, and only half that number survive the first few weeks of life. This relatively high mortality rate keeps behir numbers in check, especially considering the huge amount of food required to sustain even one in an area.

## BEHIR AMBUSHES

Devious creatures with a variety of lethal abilities, behirs make deadly opponents even on level battlefields. However, with the instincts of a predator, a behir never chooses to attack unless it possesses a distinct tactical advantage.

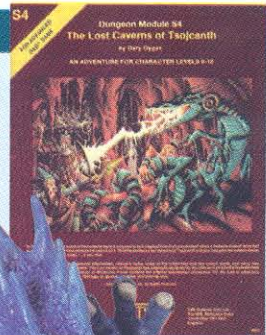
**Tunnel Attack:** Although not skilled tunnelers, behirs are particularly adept at navigating and detecting threats underground. Either making use of the natural crevices of the terrains they favor or intimidating servants into creating tunnels, behirs often lie in wait within such depressions. When prey nears, a behir can extend its head and neck from the hole and attack with its breath weapon while the rest of its body remains below (granting it cover). If its targets instead become threats the behir can slip underground, where few creatures would dare follow, possibly even arising from another opening to attack again.

**Shanghai Strike:** Swift predators with the ability to climb sheer surfaces, behirs can outmaneuver most opponents. Even if a group looks too powerful for a behir to attack head-on, it might strike anyway, grappling or swallowing a single opponent, then retreat up a cliff or elsewhere its enemies can't follow. In this manner, it might dispatch its foes one at a time while subjecting itself to the least danger possible.

**Death from Above:** A behir's attack more likely originates from a cliff face or cavern wall above its adversaries than from directly in front. Capable of moving in directions most opponents rarely consider, behirs use such tactics to their advantage and attack from above whenever possible. Such arrangements also allow behirs to knock down rocks and cause cave-ins (much like the Stone Blocks from Ceiling trap on page 71 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*).

## BEHIR AND NOW

Long a piece of D&D history, the behir numbers with the bulette, mind flayer, and dozens of other monstrosities as a unique creation of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game. First appearing as a new threat in Gary Gygax's famous 1982 adventure, *S4: The Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth*, the behir found good company among the first published descriptions of demon lords like Baphomet, Graz'zt, Kostchtchie, and even Fraz-Urb'luu (see page 24 of this issue). The behir has also recently been reinterpreted, bigger and more deadly than ever, as a Huge model in the *Giants of Legend* expansion for *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures*.



Behir mothers raise their young for two years, first providing hatchlings with regurgitated meat before teaching them to hunt small animals. Male behirs take little interest in their young, except for occasionally providing them with food and doing them the service of not ingesting them.

After the second year, the mother behir drives out the surviving juveniles with blasts of lightning and thunderous bellows forcing the young to find their own territories. Most behirs that become threats to humanoid settlements are juvenile behirs seeking their own domains.

Behirs and dragons are dire enemies and never willingly tolerate each other's presence within their respective territory. When a behir and dragon catch sight (or scent) of each other, bloodshed inevitably follows. Those who witness a battle between a behir and dragon recall it with awe, as both creatures assail each other with breath attacks and gouge scale, muscle, and sinew with razor-sharp claws and teeth.

Besides dragons, any large animals (including humanoids) that wander into a behir's territory are considered food first and potential bargaining partners second. Behirs possess the capability to negotiate but only do so if they believe that for some reason they can't take what they desire. Those who must frequently travel through a behir's territory find that offering large amounts of food (such as a cow or a horse)—along with a healthy amount of self-depreciating flattery—is a good way to keep a behir from attacking. Additionally, perhaps owing to some draconic ancestry, behirs have a fondness for treasure, coveting silver to the exclusion of all other offerings. If properly wooed with such riches, food, and compliments, some behirs might be convinced to reveal information or perform favors for lesser creatures.

**VS. BEHIRS**

Although nowhere near as intelligent as an average human, behirs possess numerous deadly abilities and enough intellect to make clever decisions and plan attacks with cunning and reason.

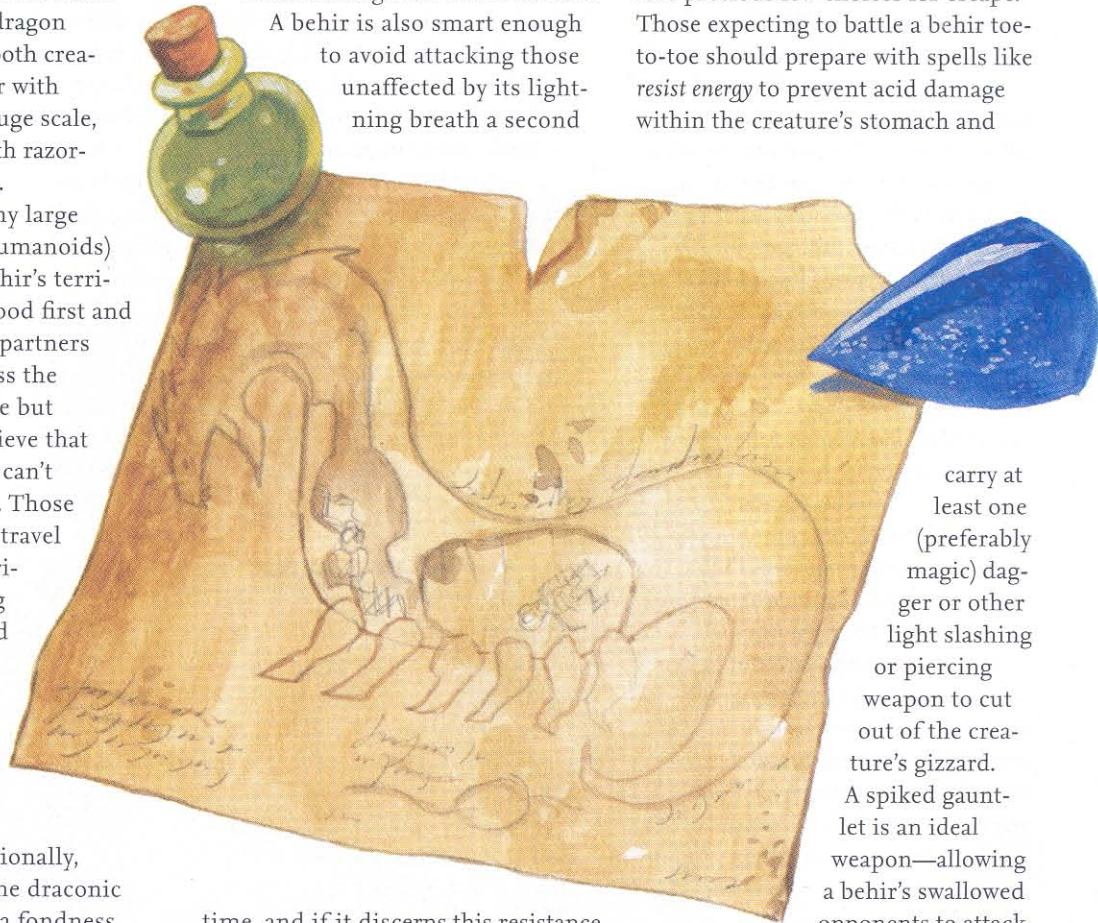
**Beware the Breath:** Like a dragon, a behir possesses a breath weapon—a line of lightning that deals terrible damage. Behirs can only use this ability once every 10 rounds, meaning that

they purposefully maneuver themselves to line up foes for maximum effect. A behir frequently identifies the most dangerous-looking enemy and unleashes its breath weapon on him first in hopes of killing him off before closing in to melee combat.

A behir is also smart enough to avoid attacking those unaffected by its lightning breath a second

such a battle proves unavoidable, spells like *bull's strength*, *freedom of movement*, and *grease* should see generous use.

**Getting Out of the Gullet:** Those who do fail at grappling with a behir are likely to be swallowed, where they face precious few choices for escape. Those expecting to battle a behir toe-to-toe should prepare with spells like *resist energy* to prevent acid damage within the creature's stomach and



time, and if it discerns this resistance early it attempts to destroy such opponents with physical attacks first.

**Avoid Grappling:** When initiating a grapple—almost always using its bite and improved grab ability—a behir's formidable grapple bonus (at least +25) practically ensures a good grasp on a victim. The round after achieving a hold, a behir constricts before unleashing its fearsome rake attack. This rake attack is the only means in which a behir can bring its numerous but relatively short claws to bear, and thus it makes use of this attack whenever possible.

As this series of attacks proves so common when facing behirs, adventures should seek to avoid melee combat with such creatures at all costs. If

carry at least one (preferably magic) dagger or other light slashing or piercing weapon to cut out of the creature's gizzard. A spiked gauntlet is an ideal weapon—allowing a behir's swallowed opponents to attack without having to

draw a weapon first.

**Adroit Ambushers:** Once alerted to the presence of enemies, behirs favor attacking by surprise. A behir's decent Hide bonus allows it to remain out of sight from all but the most observant creatures, while its skill at climbing lets it plan ambushes from the most unexpected directions (see the Behir Ambushes sidebar).

**Behirs With Character Levels:** Possessing a better-than-average Charisma, it's quite possible that an advanced behir might take levels in sorcerer. Alternatively, some behirs advance as barbarians, augmenting their already formidable fighting prowess with rage and enhanced speed. ▣

by Eric Cagle  
illustrated by Peter Bergtig

# THE ECOLOGY OF CHOKERS

**I**nnumerable creatures claim the Underdark as home. Some, such as drow, duergar, and illithids, craft daunting cities carved from the subterranean stone, creating sprawling underground empires. However, the bulk of creatures that live in the eternal darkness consist of little more than mindless beasts or barely sentient savages prowling the gloom in hopes of finding their next meal.

One such creature, the vicious predator known as the choker, derives its name from the way in which it dispatches its victims. This small aberration, a ubiquitous and dangerous part of the Underdark ecology, strikes from the darkness without warning. While not particularly powerful, this stealthy opponent proves maddeningly difficult to locate when it wishes to remain hidden. This article examines the life and habits of chokers,



including their history, physiology, and mental outlook, as well as ways to defeat them.

## HISTORY OF CHOKERS

Chokers are relative newcomers to the pitch-black realms of the Underdark. Scholars and adventurers note that their numbers seem to increase with each passing year, although no one knows the reason why. One theory claims that a population of gnomes who descended into the darkness long ago evolved into chokers. Over time, these gnomes mutated into horrible aberrations, possibly due to a mixture of cannibalism and the weird magic of the Underdark. Gnomes vehemently deny this possibility and insist that any resemblances are purely superficial. The *svirfneblin* also dispute the possibility, although some seem to know more than they let on. Any attempts to pry more information from the *svirfneblin* on this topic results in stony

silence or worse. A variation of this theory involves halflings, who also find the prospect detestable.

A more likely theory involves chokers as the result of some experimentation that went horribly wrong. Many of their characteristics seem reminiscent of drow handiwork, but drow dismiss this accusation, pointing out that the creatures now pose as much of a nuisance and threat to them as to anyone else. Of course, the lofty pride of the drow might mask the truth in this matter. Some scholars note that chokers often congregate near drow settlements, either to remain close to a reliable food source or perhaps because of some lingering racial memory of their creators. Regardless, most drow despise chokers and frequently hunt them for no other reason than to kill as many as possible.

The chokers, barely sentient themselves, have no knowledge of their origin and show little interest in discovering the truth of their past. They seem

to care only about how to get their next meal and collecting shiny trinkets.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF CHOKERS

Although an aberration, the choker has a roughly humanoid form. From a distance, the choker vaguely resembles a long-limbed halfling, although close up the differences become readily apparent. As a Small creature, the choker stands around 3 to 4 feet tall, with smooth, dark gray skin mottled with patches of black, brown, and rust. It possesses a bony, slender frame with a jutting spine, hips, and rib cage. The choker's long, almost equine face ends in a vicious-looking mouth filled with jagged teeth. Two beady black eyes sit squarely in the front of its face, granting it excellent vision that also allows it to see through the utter darkness of its home. The relatively small ears of the choker, nestled within its skull, possibly indicate that the creature relies more on darkvision and other senses than hearing to locate prey.



## Choker Knowledge

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks as it relates to the choker. Inhabitants of the Underdark and adventurers that make forays into its depths might know this information.

### Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Dangerous aberrations that lurk in the Underdark, chokers get their name from the way they choke victims to death.
15	Chokers move easily over almost any surface and usually attack from over doorways, arches, or from cave roofs. They sometimes hide in pools and underground streams.
20	Extremely nimble, chokers move in rapid bursts of speed that allow them to move faster than it appears they should be able.
25	Food and treasure can often be used to bribe chokers into answering questions or working as guides through their territory.

The flexible tentacle limbs of the choker allow it to reach creatures up to 10 feet away. Its arms and legs end in oversized flexible pads filled with serrated spines that allow it to grip almost any surface, including slippery cave walls. Because of its flexible, elongated limbs, the choker appears bowlegged, and it moves in a peculiar, fluid fashion, preferring to keep at least three of its limbs in contact with some surface at all times.

The choker speaks Undercommon in a hoarse, raspy voice, intermixing words with meaningless barks, coughs, and grunts. It peppers its crude vocabulary with banal epithets and baseless threats.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF CHOKERS

Stealthy, solitary hunters, chokers survive on what they manage to kill and the carrion left by more dangerous predators. As befitting their name, they strangle their prey by ambushing creatures and quickly grabbing their necks. Fearless in their assaults despite their small size, chokers sometimes attack prey up to four times their size. Chokers attack through surprise and usually wait to ambush a solitary creature rather than confront a group. Particularly hungry or desperate chokers might go after a group of creatures, but only by picking off stragglers or those in the rear, where their attacks are more likely to go unnoticed.

Before a choker devours its prey, it uses its powerful grasping hands to squeeze the meat into a tenderized



pulp. The choker does this even with carrion it finds, fulfilling its instinctive desire to squeeze the life out of its meal. Although constantly hungry, chokers can survive for almost a month without meat, becoming increasingly irritable and likely to take risks in order to procure food. In a pinch, the choker subsists on lichens, moss, and fungi, scraping it off cave walls with its raspy tongue. The choker requires relatively little water for its size and seems to derive most of its hydration from the blood of its victims.

Greedy creatures, chokers covet bright, shiny objects, such as coins, gems, and jewelry. If a group of creatures comes across a choker and approaches cautiously, they might succeed at making it an offer for some sort of trade. Chokers lack any sense of diplomacy and have low Intelligence and Charisma scores,

causing the most elaborate choker bartering to consist of "I give this, you give that." A choker might offer its services as a guide through the tunnels and caves of the Underdark in exchange for coins, gems, and food. If negotiations go poorly in the first few minutes, however, the choker quickly retreats, and it refuses to reenter negotiations with the erstwhile bargainers.

Solitary beings, chokers do not tolerate other creatures—even other chokers—in their territory. Once every two years, though, females release a pungent scent that attracts male chokers. Mating is brief and violent, with males wrestling each other into submission for a female's favor. Gestation lasts for roughly six months, after which the female gives birth to a litter of two to four young. The mother raises her young for a year before abandoning them in a warren at the edge of her territory. Among the most aggressive and dangerous chokers around, these juveniles try to establish their own turf, battling with their own kind and the other foes that lurk in the darkness. Chokers generally live for about 20 years, although those in captivity occasionally reach the age of 40.

Most denizens of the Underdark consider chokers annoying menaces deserving only of eradication. The more intelligent races, such as drow, duergar, and illithids, actively hunt chokers, sending out teams of warriors and trackers to perform search-and-destroy missions. Some creatures occasionally capture chokers and attempt to train them to act as guardians and trackers. While these projects usually fail, those few who succeed produce highly loyal servants—as long as they provide the chokers with a suitable amount of live meat to hunt and eat. Because of their elastic bodies and their ability to worm through almost any crevice or enclosure, only solid-walled holding cells can hold choker slaves, adding to the difficulty and expense of such an endeavor.

## The Life and Times of the Choker

The choker originally appeared in the *Monstrous Compendium Mystara Appendix*. For third edition, the choker found its place among the iconic creatures in the *Monster Manual*. It can also now be found in the new *Absorptions* D&D miniatures set as a common figure.



### CHOKER LAIRS

A choker typically sets up a den in some twisting cave difficult for larger or less flexible creatures to navigate. Bones, bits of trophies from various victims, and indescribable chunks of meat squeezed to a pulp typically litter the filthy den. Chokers are intelligent enough to hide their stash of food in a place where the smell doesn't attract other predators. They also prowl close to the settlements of other races, picking through garbage and occasionally ambushing loners who stray too far from safety. Most chokers hide their treasure among the debris and bones of their lair, occasionally pulling out particularly shiny bits and baubles to admire when it's safe to do so.

Chokers establish their lairs near crossroads or other places with readily available prey. In an ideal situation, the entrance to a choker's lair is a difficult-to-spot narrow crevasse only accessible by climbing up a wall. Chokers dislike large spaces, so they often lair behind tiny apertures that Medium or larger creatures find uncomfortably cramped. A choker tries to find a space with at least one—and preferably two—escape routes that it can block with loose stones easily overlooked by a casual search.

### VS. CHOKERS

A stealthy, cunning foe, the choker relies on surprise to ambush its prey. Archways and stairwells provide chokers with ideal ambush locations, forcing prey to lift their heads in order to see (and thus, expose their necks more to the angle of attack). *Fly*, *levitate*, and *spider climb* allow you to fight wall-clinging chokers on more even terms. However, since chokers are CR 2 creatures, characters of a level high enough to cast those spells rarely consider a single choker much of a danger.

Despite the choker's Small size, it has the 10-foot reach of a Large creature. The choker always uses this to its advantage, attacking from ceilings, around corners, or from holes in the ground, gaining as



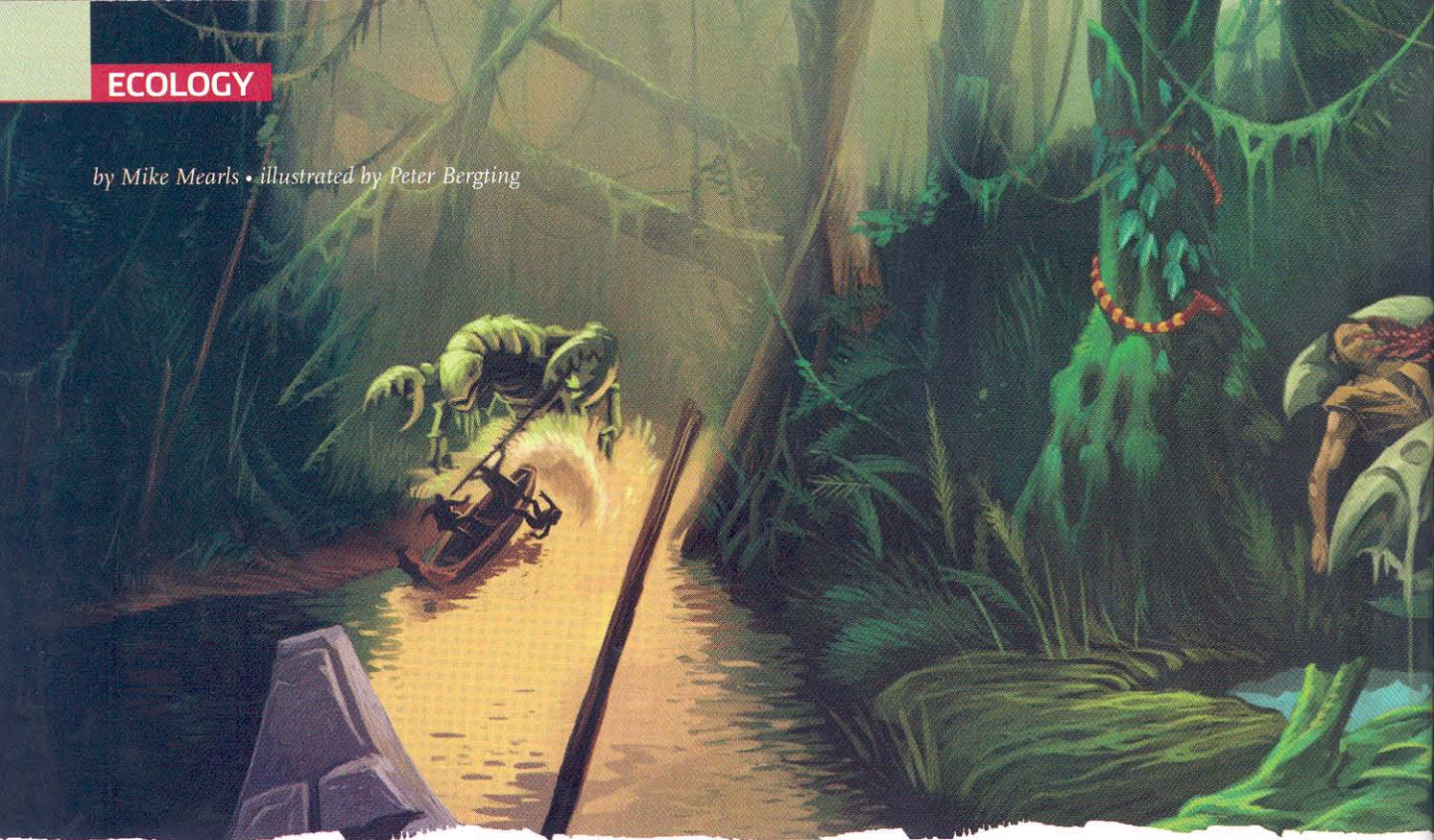
much cover as possible. In order to get around the reach issue, front-line fighters should use reach weapons to hold the choker at bay, while the rest of the party attacks with ranged weapons and spells. *Magic missile*, always a solid choice, ignores whatever partial cover the choker might find. Ray spells and area of effect spells, especially those that don't allow a Reflex save, also can be effective. The ranged touch attack of ray spells eliminates most of the choker's relatively high armor class, giving the average sorcerer or wizard a decent chance of hitting it. Other useful spells include those that hinder a choker's movement or keep it trapped, such as *hold monster*, *slow*, and *web*. The various wall spells, such as *wall of stone*, block its egress and force the choker to fight more on your terms. Other useful items include smokesticks (to flush it out of a hiding space), tanglefoot bags (to stick it in place), or nets.

The choker is very particular about which victims it attacks. Given a choice, it goes after creatures in the following order: a creature by itself, a creature of size Small or smaller, a creature with no obvious weapons, a creature more than 15 feet away from its comrades, and a Medium or larger creature. Thus, a halfling or gnome scouting ahead of the party needs to be exceptionally wary of chokers. Scouts need a high Spot modifier to overcome the choker's +10 Hide skill. A high Listen modifier helps, but once a choker finds its ambush site, it tends to stay still. The surest way to avoid choker ambushes is for the party to stay as close together as possible.

The choker's quickness ability allows it to take an extra standard action or move action during its turn each round. This means that a choker can move its base speed of 20 feet and make two tentacle attacks in the same round. However, because it lacks Mobility or Spring Attack, and its attack often requires several rounds to kill a victim, the choker prefers to attack from ambush, often gaining a surprise round. In addition, because of its ability to climb with ease, the choker often retreats by clambering up a wall, away from all but ranged weapons. To prevent this from happening, characters should move to block the choker's route of escape, so it provokes multiple attacks of opportunity whenever it moves.

Because of the choker's greed, it's possible to make an offer of treasure or food to a looming choker before it attacks. In most cases, this makes it pause while it ponders the offer. The choker knows little beyond what happens within its hunting territory, and questions of an abstract nature or about individuals tend to confuse it or result in it giving a random answer. It knows sources of fresh water, areas where food is plentiful, and the quickest passage (for the choker) through certain areas. When traveling in areas of known choker activity, always carry a few shiny trinkets and pieces of raw meat in order to bribe any chokers met. Of course, you need to see them first, which means you'll need darkvision, good Spot checks (or excellent Listen checks), or a little luck. ☐

by Mike Mearls • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

CHUUL

With crushing claws and crippling tentacles, one creature has torn itself a niche among the fetid waters of the land's most deadly wildernesses. Although the vicious chuul has only recently appeared in the lands of civilized races, already it is renowned as one of the world's deadliest swamp predators. With its monstrous pincers, glistening carapace, and paralytic tentacles, the chuul is a threat to even the most skilled warrior. While physically powerful, a chuul's greatest advantage over other swamp dwellers is its keen mind. Its hulking body belies an intellect that matches the average human's and surpasses those of many of its swamp-lurking competitors.

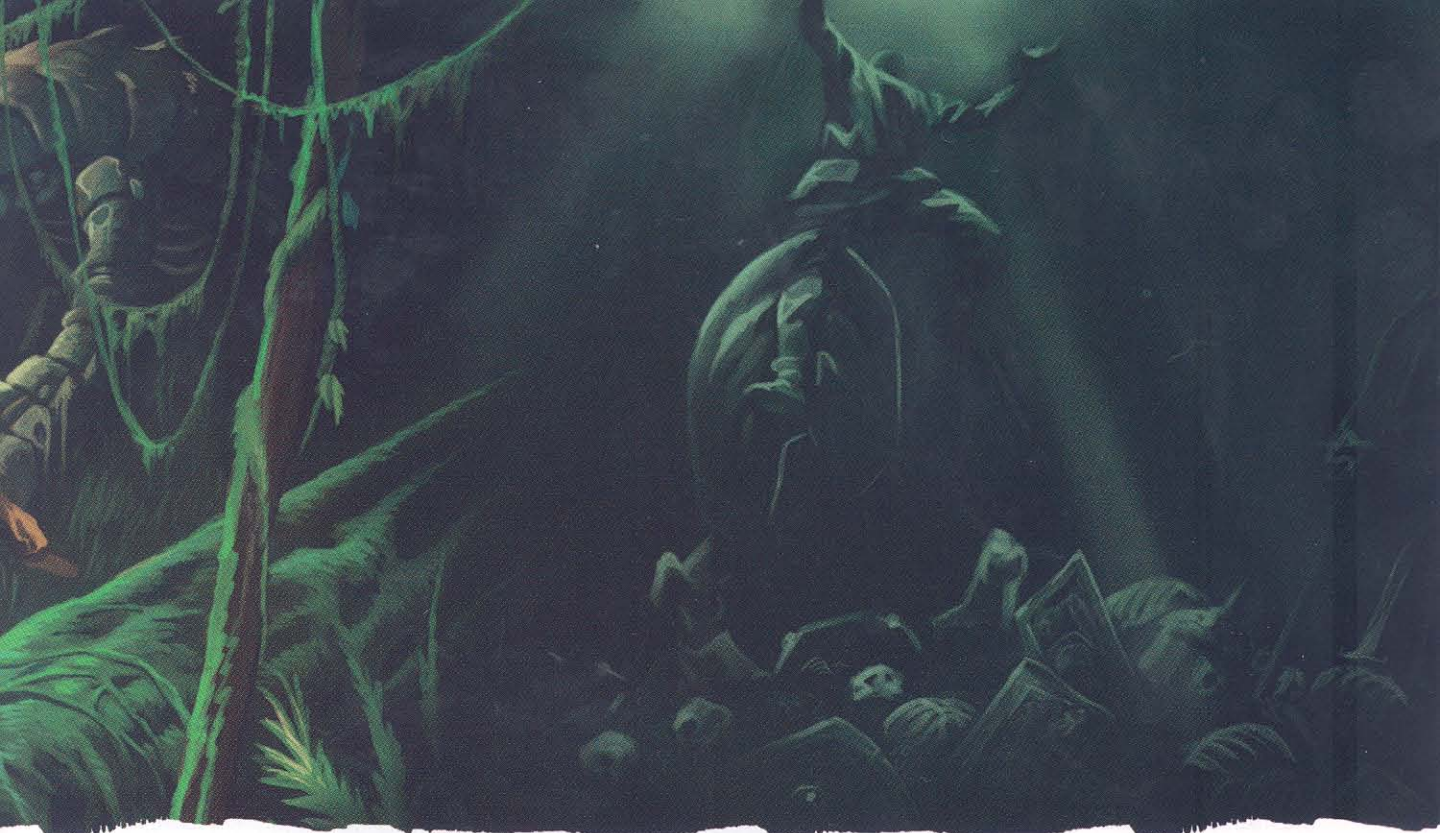
HISTORY OF CHUULS

The first chuuls appeared within the world's swamps merely a few dozen years ago. Most sages assume that, given their strange physical mixture of insectile, reptilian, and crustacean traits, they are the result of a madman's experiments. After all, many of the world's most terrible

monsters arose from arcane tampering with the secret processes of life. None can say where chuuls first arose, but the methods by which they spread paint them as an insidious, cunning enemy.

Six years ago, an expedition under the command of the elf wizard Tarthalas Driishan set sail for the endless waves beyond the horizon. Tarthalas had uncovered the ancient library of the archmage Kleptis. The archmage's journals described a tropical island far from established trade routes and major currents. According to the books, this place was once the abode of a powerful mage who had gathered great material and arcane wealth. Supposedly, the world had ignored him until he unleashed a strange, terrible army of aberrations to conquer nearby lands. When he revealed himself as a threat, the nearby civilized nations banded together to destroy him.

The journal detailed the island's location, but the notes ended with the entry that described Kleptis's preparations for the ocean journey. Tarthalas assumed that the archmage had failed to reach his destination or had died there. In his



hubris, Tarthalas believed that with his skills and magic he could succeed where Kleptis had failed. Gathering his resources, Tarthalas organized a fleet of three ships to venture out to the island and recover its treasures.

When Tarthalas and his men arrived at the island, they soon learned why Kleptis never returned. The place was overrun with a bewildering array of strange and deadly monsters. Its ecosystem resembled a continuous, blood-thirsty war between predatory creatures. Tribes of primitive mind flayers attacked his crew by night, killing scores of sailors. Three-armed, brutish giants assaulted the ships during the day, while expeditions into the jungles encountered ettercaps, otyughs, gibbering moutherers, and a variety of previously unknown monstrosities. Howling lizardfolk assaulted the sailors with barbed javelins and poisoned darts. Plants lashed out at the explorers, choking them to death in powerful vines or drowning them in murky pools. The monstrous hordes destroyed two of Tarthalas's ships and slaughtered their crews. When a captured and magically dominated lizardfolk revealed nothing about the ruins Tarthalas came searching for, he and the survivors began preparing for the voyage home.

## CHUUL KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the result of Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks related to chuuls. Those who live near swamps or plumb the Underdark's alien depths might know this information.

### Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Chuuls are amphibious creatures that combine the most deadly aspects of crustaceans, insects, and snakes.
15	Chuuls attack from ambush whenever possible. A chuul can crush a man to death with its claws if it manages to grab hold of its prey.
20	Chuuls are surprisingly intelligent and might set a variety of traps for their prey. They often create simple underwater lairs and gather treasure and other trinkets there.
25	A chuul's tentacles might seem puny, but they are coated with a paralytic venom. Chuuls possess a particular hatred of all humanoid creatures.
30	Despite their size, chuuls have short arms and can't reach especially far. Chuuls sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to barter for goods and information, using the treasures of previous victims in trade.

What the lizardfolk's gibbering did reveal was that the creatures of the island had fought and died for centuries. The lizardfolk spoke of a mighty god who had once ruled the island. One day a horde of monsters that walked upon the water beached themselves and unleashed a torrent of smaller beasts that killed the god and reduced his temple to dust. It spoke of beings called the enforcers, hulking warriors that once defended the god

but had walked across the sea on some unknown quest before the god's demise. Since that time, the island had fallen into chaos as the god's progeny, freed of his calming influence, battled for supremacy. Every year, new species arose to fight for dominance, either dying at their enemies' jaws or carving out a link in the food chain. The entire ecosystem seemed to be focused on producing the deadliest creatures imaginable in an evolutionary process

gone haywire. Once, the creatures had struggled for the god's amusement and favor. Now, they battled to survive.

On the night before Tarthalas's departure, the primitive mind flayers made their final assault and slew the wizard. During the fighting, the sailors failed to notice three large, clawed beasts that slipped pulsing egg sacs through a porthole into an empty cabin. In the morning, relieved that they had survived, the remaining sailors cast off for home.

None would live to see their destination. The newborn chuuls picked off the crewmen one by one, carefully pacing their attacks to satisfy their hunger while leaving enough survivors to guide the ship to its destination. After slaying the last sailor, the chuuls leapt overboard in sight of land and swam to their new homeland.

Some of the forgotten god's enforcers had never left the island, and now they had a chance to escape it. Driven onward by their creator's final orders to battle against all humanoid, they were determined to avenge their ancient, bitter defeat.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF CHUULS

The individual organs and parts of a chuul bear a resemblance to those found in other organisms, but the collective whole they form is utterly unique. The chuul's outer shell and massive claws give it an outward resemblance to a crustacean, but its rear legs and exoskeleton mark it as a gigantic insect. Stranger still, dissection reveals that the foremost sections of its body resemble a serpent. With its thick carapace removed, a chuul looks like the upper half of a tentacled serpent fused with the hindquarters of a giant water bug. A closer inspection supports a literal interpretation of this initial appearance. Through some trick

of evolution or arcane experimentation, a chuul is the union of two creatures that shared such a close symbiotic bond that they eventually melded into a single species.

The divide between the chuul's brutish appearance and its surprisingly keen intellect traces back to this symbiotic link. Its basic body form derives from a monstrous animal that fused qualities of crustaceans and insects. This simple creature lacked the chuul's



intellect and its paralytic tentacles. The second half of this duo was a small, snakelike aberration that hunted by paralyzing its prey, burrowing into its brain, and slowly feeding as it controlled its victim's body like a puppet.

On the hellish island that spawned the chuul, these two creatures adopted a close relationship, with the serpentine puppet masters preferring to victimize the crustacean-insect creatures. Over centuries of artificially accelerated evolution and magical intervention, the chuul's predecessors merged into one species.

Chuuls are relatively new to ecosystems beyond their home island. That they have spread so quickly across the

world, and even into the planes, illustrates the potent combination of their keen minds and mighty bodies. Worst of all, most of the chuuls that dwell near civilization are relatively young. Who can say what horrors await the world as chuuls grow old and develop into growth phases beyond adulthood?

### PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE OF CHUULS

In the hyper-competitive environment that spawned the first chuuls, their young had little time to learn the tricks and tactics needed to compete with stronger, faster, and deadlier creatures. Over time, chuuls evolved a mechanism that allowed them to pass on some knowledge from one generation to the next. A newborn chuul possesses a portion of the hunting knowledge its parents accumulated, retained as vague images and sense memories. While many of the less important details fade, some chuuls possess thoughts that trace back generations, but more as a form of heightened

instinct than as actual memories. This ancestral instinct shapes much of a chuul's actions and attitudes regarding other races.

Chuuls see themselves as locked in a war against the humanoid creatures of the strange new lands they inhabit. In the misty past of their race, they were formed to fight against all outsiders. This siege mentality has remained with them. To the chuuls, anything that walks on two legs and has hands is a mortal enemy. After all, men, elves, lizardfolk, and orcs inevitably dominate the regions they settle. To chuuls, this is a sure sign that humanoids are their primary competitors. Thus, they harbor a deep, racial hatred

## CHUUL LAIRS

Chuuls most commonly lair in natural aquatic caverns, sunken ships, sewer tunnels, or underwater complexes created to their own alien specifications. While the drowned caves and other preformed structures they inhabit might take a variety of shapes, their river bottom homes—usually formed of fallen branches, swamp mud, and various debris—have a relatively uniform layout.

In such a chuul-constructed lair, an underwater entrance leads into the first of several roughly circular chambers. This entrance room often holds a makeshift door made from an uprooted tree stump or other barrier that creatures weaker than a chuul might have trouble moving (requiring at least a DC 15 Strength check to move aside). Past this barrier lies the chuul's all-purpose sleeping and eating chamber, decorated with the humanoid bones of past meals. If any chamber in the lair is even partially filled with air it's likely to be this main room, allowing a chuul to house a slave or the rare prisoner here. A third circular space commonly branches off from this central chamber, holding the chuul's trophies from previous ambushes and raids. While a chuul lair is likely to be at least this simple, one housing a pair or pack of chuuls is likely to be significantly larger and more complex, with every resident chuul having its own trophy room.

## CHUUL TROPHIES

All chuuls harbor a notorious hatred of humanoid races, one they openly express in their lairs. Within these grim aquatic halls and in specialized trophy rooms, chuuls exhibit the bones and treasures of humanoids they've defeated. While an opponent's most valuable possessions are often traded away, particularly impressive pieces are sometimes hoarded or worked into totems and fetishes consisting of the rest of the victim's remains. Chuuls commonly determine status by which chuul possesses the greatest number of or most impressive trophies, although all an ambitious or covetous chuul must do to advance is slay another chuul and claim its best trophies as its own.

### d10 Example Chuul Trophies

- 1 A totem of six halfling skulls impaled upon a lizardfolk spear.
- 2 An entire dwarven skeleton, purposefully shattered then reassembled.
- 3 A humanoid spine fashioned into a necklace with a number of finger bone bangles.
- 4 An elven skull randomly punctured by seven arrows of elven make.
- 5 A pouch filled with humanoid teeth of wildly varying sizes.
- 6 The skull of a giant crocodile with lizardfolk claws in place of teeth.
- 7 A stack of human hands and snake meat stacked upon a rapier like a shish kebob.
- 8 The dismembered arm and claw of another chuul.
- 9 A finely stitched quiver crammed with elven rib bones.
- 10 A number of humanoid femurs arranged in a sunburst pattern with a black dragon skull at the center.

of such creatures and delight in tormenting and slaying them whenever they have the opportunity.

Even the most simple humanoid activities in an area a chuul considers its territory are sure to attract its murderous scorn. A caravan bound through a swampy region might find that its sentinels disappear one by one over the

course of several nights, dragged off by an unseen opponent smart enough to avoid a large scale confrontation. Hiding amid the rampant vegetation, a chuul might then attack supply wagons, knocking them over and destroying the food and water stored within. Next it strikes at the horses, mules, and other beasts of burden. Finally, when the

surviving guards and merchants teeter on the verge of starvation, when the endless panicked hours of marching through deep mud and foul water have drained their strength, the chuul closes in for the kill. To a chuul, this carefully planned assault is little more than a game of cat and mouse.

While chuuls hate all humanoids, they sometimes work with beholders and mind flayers. Those races typically use their magical abilities to dominate their chuul servants, but sometimes they form tenuous alliances. A chuul's racial memories tell it that mind flayers and beholders are creatures native to its race's home island and might be worked with to defeat particularly dangerous enemies.

Chuuls have also been known to sometimes put aside their hatred of humanoids to work against greater threats. While a chuul never willingly serves a humanoid creature, it might approach such creatures to benefit itself. Understanding that even the most monstrous humanoid races find their forms just as disgusting as they find the humanoid shape, chuuls sometimes work with such races via a messenger or slave. Such a servant is most often a member of a humanoid race less intelligent than the chuul (usually a kobold, goblin, troglodyte, or lizardfolk) and is pressed into its service either by the promise of wealth—taken from the chuul's previous victims—or violence. Once forced into a chuul's employ, such a servant trades for information or goods its master's form would prevent it from creating itself—which is a great deal, considering that a chuul's massive claws prevent the fine manipulation of small or delicate objects. In this manner chuuls become aware of much happening within the areas they inhabit and sometimes gain the materials needed to make surprisingly complex traps.

The chuuls' racial memory also makes them a dangerous threat, for they remember glimpses of their homeland and wish to extend that perfect environment to the mainland. Some chuuls even remember their creator, and many wish to help restore his

legacy. If their plans come to fruition, they could import an entire malevolent ecosystem that could push aside the native plants and animals. Thus, a chuul might gather treasure and items not merely as keepsakes or out of greed, but to help secretly fund more expeditions to its native lands. A chuul might spare a traveler, offering him a bribe in return for such service. Other chuuls leave slave-created maps to their homelands in treasure caches beside busy roads for travelers to uncover.

**VS. CHUULS**

Malicious and devious in a way no crocodile or giant serpent could be, chuuls are some of the deadliest threats of the swamp. Even when outside its favored environment, a chuul's host of natural weapons and abilities makes it a fearful combatant.

**Alien Physiology:** Unnatural abominations warped by magic and an afflicted environment, chuuls do not possess a physiology like any natural creature. As such, poisons and similar toxins do not affect chuuls, and those relying on such solutions when fighting these aberrations might be in store for a fatal surprise.

**Beware of the Water:** In stagnant ponds and swampy waterways, Chuuls often lurk just below the surface, waiting for prey to pass nearby. Even the dark depths below the water's surface doesn't hinder a hunting chuul, as its darkvision allows it to see nearly as well as it does on the surface. Thus, those passing through areas potentially home to these predators should remain watchful for patiently prepared ambushes from even the most placid pool.

**Keep Away:** Since chuuls are one of the few Large creatures that lack reach, longspears and ranged weapons can keep them at bay. These armaments form a good combination with a mobile strategy, keeping the chuul at a safe distance while opponents maneuver around it. Other basic tactics like using ranged weapons and preparing the spell *remove paralysis* should also help keep one out of a chuul's reach.

**Cowardice:** Despite all their cunning and strength, chuuls universally

possess low Charisma scores. Such a flaw most commonly manifests as intense cowardice. As such, chuuls are easily scared off or unnerved when faced with larger or obviously more powerful creatures or groups.

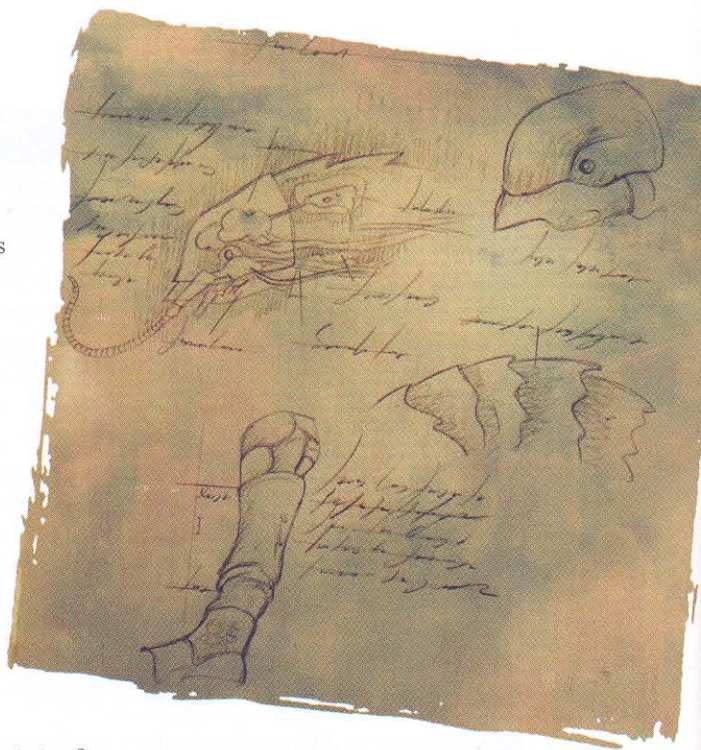
**Slow Eater:** When fighting chuuls, remember that they must use a move action to transfer a victim from their claws to their tentacles. Thus, if one can keep a chuul moving it cannot make full use of its abilities.

**Aberrant Intelligence:** Adventurers cannot forget that chuuls are highly intelligent predators and use tactics that expose a party's weaknesses. A chuul might rush for the party's sorcerer or wizard for an easy meal, ignoring heavily armored PCs in favor of a softer target. Unlike animals and brutish aberrations, the chuul is smart enough to maximize its abilities.

Given their hatred of humanoid life, chuuls rarely parley. They can

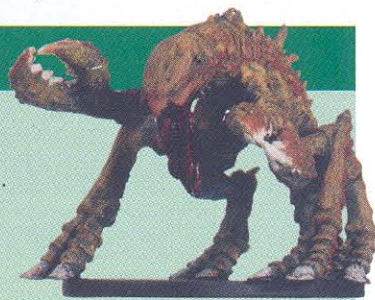
speak Common, but if they stop to talk, one can count on a trick or an offer intended to cause havoc. When a chuul truly does wish to parley, it most commonly uses a servant as a mouthpiece.

Adventures seeking unparalleled information about an area might be able to barter with a chuul or its servant, offering food and information of their own in return. However, a chuul will attempt to unbalance even a situation such as this to its favor, so negotiators should be exceptionally wary. ☞



**OUT OF THE WADING POOL**

The chuul was newly created for the third edition *Monster Manual*, making it a member of D&D's monstrous family for only four years. It also appears as a rare figure in the recent *Aberrations DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures* set. Being one of the few mid-level aquatic creatures, chuuls fill a useful niche and have appeared in numerous *DUNGEON* adventures, including "Tammeraut's Fate" (in #106), "Strike on the Rabid Dawn" (in #111), and "The Styes" (in #121 this month). For more on chuuls, check out *Lords of Madness*, also releasing this month.



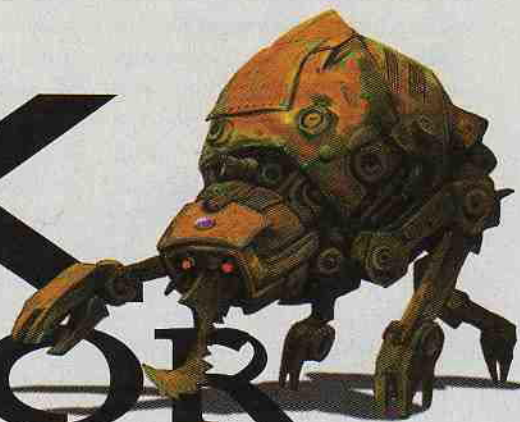
*"A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law."*

—The Third Law of Robotics, Isaac Asimov



the Ecology of the

# CLOCKWORK HORROR



Those races that create mechanical life do so to make loyal warriors, servants, and laborers. Few of these constructs possess any real intellect, much less individuality or free will. There does exist, however, a race of constructs do that pursues its own agenda—to raze the landscape and spread its cold, metallic kind. As these constructs not communicate with anyone but themselves, other races gave them the name clockwork horrors. Merciless, driven, and unstoppable, they possess a strict hierarchy, organized to kill, destroy, and render down resources to bolster their numbers with cold efficiency. They are a mechanical plague upon the living worlds of the Material

Plane and possess no greater mandate than the destruction of all they encounter.

## HISTORY OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

As clockwork horrors never speak with other creatures, their history, motivations, desires, and thoughts remain forever hidden. Beyond rumors of scoured worlds and lifeless spheres, few even believe these beings exist outside the realms of morbid myths and crazed doomsaying. Yet, survivors of the grinding metal apocalypse that is a clockwork horror invasion pass on similar rumors about the rapacious machines' origins and ultimate intents. Or, at least, those who retain their sanity do.



These tales begin with an ancient people known only as the “Lost Ones.” Wizards, scholars, and innovators, these explorers of far-flung mysteries traveled all across their world, then beyond to the planes themselves. Possessed of insatiable curiosity, the Lost Ones discovered things both wonderful and terrible in their travels, learning what they could and returning home to share their discoveries and improve the lives of their people.

One artificer, inspired by the creatures of Mechanus, took it upon himself to craft a mechanical servant, an adamantine construct of such intricacy as to rival the inevitables of the Clockwork Nirvana. Weaving powerful spells about the contraption, the masterful Lost One inventor bestowed intelligence and great magical abilities upon the thing, granting it life.

In gratitude for its creation, the adamantine machine’s first act was to destroy its maker.

Taking control of its inventor’s vast and secluded magical workshop, the

adamantine horror set to work creating allies to defend it from all threats—which, from its early experiences, it considers all organic life. Within a span of decades it created a host of mechanical servants, each akin to itself in abilities and form but lacking free will, totally enslaved to its cold intellect. When their adamantine master deemed it time, legions of platinum, gold, and lesser horrors flooded the world of the unsuspecting Lost Ones. No defense garnered from countless worlds or planes could turn back the armies of these mechanical monstrosities, and while the Lost Ones fled their conquerors scavenged the ruins of their cities and nations for metal, using it to swell their teeming ranks. In the end, the Lost Ones were either eradicated or scattered to unexplored planes, their home consumed by the voracious grinding of metal gears.

While the death of an entire world is tragic beyond measure, the threat of the clockwork horrors might have been contained were it not for the intervention of another kind of evil.

When a spidership—a star-faring vessel of neogi slavers—landed upon the ruin of the Lost Ones’ world in search of captives, the cruel neogi were intrigued by the race of mechanical insects they discovered. The clockwork horrors ignored the neogi until the aberrant visitors attempted to take a number of the constructs back to their vessel. Reacting to the danger as one, hundreds of clockwork horrors attacked the neogi, destroying the slavers and their captive cargos, ultimately claiming the spidership as their own. Under the direction of the adamantine horror, the constructs unraveled the technology of the neogi spidership, providing them with the ability to ply the stars. Some rumors say that, in thanks for their gift, the neogi’s lost home world was the first to fall to the gears of their beneficiaries’ mechanical war machine.

None know how many worlds have fallen to incursions by clockwork horrors. Only sightings of strange meteors and rumors of metal insects precede an onslaught of clockwork invaders.

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to clockwork horrors. As these constructs refuse to communicate with other beings, any information typically comes from firsthand accounts and magical deductions made by planar sages, doom-saying prophets, and travelers from the stars. Characters can learn more about a specific type of clockwork horror's special attacks by making a Knowledge (arcana) check with a DC of 15 + the horror's CR.

The clockwork horror appears on page 47 of the *Monster Manual II*. The 3.5 update and additional information about these creatures can be found in the downloads sections of [wizards.com/dnd](http://wizards.com/dnd).

#### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
14	Clockwork horrors are intelligent, insectile constructs that destroy everything in their path. They possess a rigid hierarchy denoted by their component metal—the more precious the metal, the more powerful the horror.
19	Clockwork horrors possess a single, linked mind, allowing them all to stay in constant communication with one another. Their face-mounted saws function as magical weapons.
24	Clockwork horrors are susceptible to the effects of a <i>shatter</i> spell, which blinds them for a short period of time.
29	Supposedly, a single adamantine horror leads the entire clockwork horror race. It is thought that destroying this leader might cause its minions to shut down.

Clockwork horrors now undoubtedly travel the dark places of the heavens and, unobserved, increase their numbers in the hidden depths of countless worlds. There they prepare, massing to sweep aside all that is soft and weak, harvesting the materials necessary to multiply their ranks and spread, like a clockwork contagion, to the next, unsuspecting world.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

Clockwork horrors are so named because their internal workings are made up of a complex array of gears, screws, pistons, and other machinery. Externally, a clockwork horror resembles a four-legged, mechanical beetle with a body about 2 feet in diameter. Although every clockwork horror possesses a tough frame of base metal, such as iron or steel, each is covered with a thin precious or semi-precious carapace, often etched with obscure symbols. Copper and electrum horrors have very simple, almost blocky craftsmanship, while gold and platinum horrors bear elaborate swirls and other embellishments. Every clockwork

horror boasts a large gem embedded on top of its head. This is one of the few parts of a clockwork horror that shows some form of individualism, as no two gems are exactly alike in shade or cut, although the colors are the same among members of the same variety: purple for copper horrors, green for electrum, blue for gold, yellow for platinum, and red for adamantine. A serrated mechanical saw sits in place of a natural insect's mandibles—the more powerful the horror, the more complex and magically enhanced the saw. Copper and electrum horrors also possess small compartments in their bulbous bodies where they store raw materials, carrying them back to the main group for processing into new clockwork horrors (see the "Creating a Clockwork Horror" sidebar). Gold and platinum horrors contain special machinery that "exudes" processed metal in order to create new horrors.

Clockwork horrors are capable of defending themselves in a variety of ways. The worker caste, copper horrors, possess powerful pinchers, as useful for fine manipulation as for battle.

Electrum horrors come equipped with steam-powered pressure dart launchers, often called spring casters, built into their heads. The bodies of gold and platinum horrors bear special rods attached to the top of their carapaces, each resembling miniature cannons or magical wands, which can cast powerful lightning bolts at their enemies. The elusive adamantine clockwork horror possesses a similar wand, a weapon sometimes called the nightmare stick, capable of casting *disintegrate*, *implosion*, or *Mordenkainen's disjunction*.

Like other constructs, clockwork horrors cannot heal naturally. If a horror loses more than half its hit points, the others in its unit tear it apart after a battle and use its materials to create a new one. Less damaged horrors continue to function if possible, although they do not receive any special protection or concern from the others. Clockwork horrors subjected to a *shatter* spell are blinded for a short time but do not suffer the normal effects of the spell.

When destroyed, a clockwork horror's body fuses into a mass of melted metal and the gem on its head disintegrates. This metal, however, can be rendered down to make new horrors. For this reason, clockwork horrors strive to retrieve their destroyed brethren after a battle—a dead horror contains roughly a quarter of the unspoiled resources needed to make a new one. This diminishing return on supply ensures that the clockwork horrors must continually search for new sources of metals and gemstones.

Clockwork horrors communicate through two methods. First, they use their own unique language of short and long clicks, similar to but incredibly more complicated than that which some sailors use to communicate between ships at sea. As of yet, interpreting this language has proven impossible without magical aid. The second method employs their linked mind, which allows every clockwork horror within 10 miles of each other to remain in constant communication, meaning a unit of horrors thinks and acts almost as a single organism. So far, no one has been able to discover the source behind this linked mind ability—

## CREATING A CLOCKWORK HORROR

Clockwork horrors exist solely to produce more of their kind. The creation of a new horror requires 200 pounds of iron or steel with which to make the main body, along with 100 pounds of a precious metal. Additionally, there must be a gemstone worth at least 100 gp, although the actual type does not matter. Gold or platinum horrors with these necessary materials can build new horrors (lesser clockwork horrors cannot). Creating a new horror takes three days—two days to craft the main body and a day to cover the carapace with the precious metal overlay and set the gemstone. In order to process the metal, the gold or platinum horror intakes the raw material and exudes it in easily worked strands, much as a spider spins a web. Gold horrors can create copper and electrum horrors, while platinum horrors can create gold and lesser horrors. Four platinum horrors can band together in order to create a new platinum horror—this process requires a week, rather than three days. Despite the creation of bodies, no new clockwork horror is activated until the adamantine horror animates it, an act that supposedly it alone can perform (although some rumors hold that multiple specially made platinum horrors can also animate a new horror). The adamantine horror can activate any new horror body within 5 feet as a full-round action.



it is not based on magic, psionics, or any other energy known to scholars.

Clockwork horrors are powered by magical energy—the large gems in their heads acting as the main source. They do not eat, sleep, or rest, but a gold or superior clockwork horror must “recharge” lesser horrors at least once a month. The superior clockwork horror gives the inferior construct a minor jolt of electricity provided by the rod on its back. If a lesser clockwork horror fails to get this rejuvenating charge, it is affected as per the spell *slow* until it falls into torpor one week later. It remains inactive, effectively helpless, until it is struck by the equivalent of 6 points of electrical damage. If it receives this jolt, the clockwork horror immediately awakens and operates at full capacity. Because of this hibernation, clockwork horrors sometimes create reserves of lesser horrors as backups and reinforcements, awakening them to attack interlopers or to tear apart large caches of ore for processing. Gold and platinum horrors do not require these restorative charges, as they can create them themselves, and the adamantine horror is immune for more mysterious reasons. Clockwork horrors are aware

of any shut-down horror within the 10-mile radius of their linked mind ability.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

Unlike most constructs, every clockwork horror possesses both intelligence and a certain amount of free will, although how much depends on the type. Copper horrors are virtually mindless and display the least amount of individuality and initiative. Electrum horrors are almost as lackluster, but they are a bit more curious, especially as their main function is to serve as scouts and assess potential resistance. Gold and platinum horrors possess the intellect and reasoning capability to act as true individuals, although even they are enslaved to the whims of the adamantine horror. Regardless, all horrors are utterly loyal and dedicated to the goals of their race. They follow the orders of their superiors without question. While copper and electrum horrors seem to have no compunctions about sacrificing themselves for the common good, gold and platinum horrors show greater caution and senses of self-preservation.

Clockwork horrors exist solely for the purpose of razing and stripping lands for their resources in order to create more of their kind. They are constantly on the move, looking for deposits of metal ore and gemstones. When they enter a new area, electrum horrors scout out a defensible location to establish a base of operation where copper horrors can process ore and gold and platinum horrors can create new horrors without interference—caves, ruined castles, and other protected areas being most appealing. Copper and electrum horrors collect large quantities of rock, ore, and metal in huge piles, which copper horrors then render down into small pieces for use by their superiors. Iron and steel are required in bulk, but clockwork horrors constantly seek caches or veins of copper, silver, gold, and platinum. This desire for ore is one of the reasons why settlements are targeted, as they usually possess concentrations of these metals—especially processed steel. Otherwise, clockwork horrors strip-mine huge swaths of territory, forcing each inch of ground to yield up every single scrap of metal and

## THE ADAMANTINE HORROR

The adamantine horror is the supreme leader of all clockwork horrors. It is thought that only one exists, although interplanar travelers who encounter clockwork horrors sometimes report spotting adamantine horrors on different planes and separate worlds. Whether this means one exists per plane or that the reports are simply mistaken, no one knows. Also, while an adamantine horror's main mission of destroying territory to create other horrors is obvious, any other goals remain a mystery. The adamantine horror keeps the secrets of how its race's numbers are maintained and only it knows how to create the spark that animates the bodies of lesser horrors. Much as insects show no remorse or conscience when their comrades perish, though, neither does the adamantine horror appear to care how many of its "children" die in pursuit of the race's goals.

gemstone. When the horrors thoroughly exhaust all the resources of an area, the entire now-enlarged unit moves to a new territory and repeats the process over again.

Unless given specific orders to the contrary, clockwork horrors never venture farther than 10 miles away from the location of an immediate superior, thus allowing them to maintain constant contact with each other through their linked mind ability. If a copper or electrum clockwork horror finds itself outside the range of the linked mind without specific orders, it immediately returns to the last location where it had contact with the rest of the assembly. Gold and higher clockwork horrors enjoy a bit more willpower in this regard and make limited decisions on their own if they must. Groups of scouts might leave a lone gold horror behind when forced to travel beyond the reaches of their superiors' orders—this individual acting as a mindlink relay between the two groups.

The stratified hierarchy of clockwork horrors sometimes works to their disadvantage. If the top horror of a collective is destroyed, the others continue on their original mission, deferring to the orders of the next highest in command, albeit at a slower rate and in a more confused manner. As higher-ranking horrors typically gain farther-reaching goals, like "subjugate this region" or "create 100,000 new electrum horrors," they can often function for lengthy periods without receiving orders. If a clockwork horror completes its goals without receiving new orders it simply shuts down, furthering a gradual chain reaction down the hierarchy.

## NEW CLOCKWORK HORROR

The clockwork horrors listed in the *Monster Manual II* are not the only versions known to exist. The lowliest, but most numerous, is the copper horror. These peons serve as workers and, in times of urgency, as fodder in battle. They show little in the way of intellect or initiative and spend most of their time rendering down metal, mining, moving debris, and hauling ore for processing. Despite their crude nature, copper horrors are fast and always appear in large numbers. Their carapace is covered with a dull copper layer, and copper horrors that spend too much time in the elements often bear streaks of verdigris on their joints. Superior horrors have no compunctions whatsoever about sending a copper horror into a situation that spells its doom, as long as it serves the rest of the race.

Besides copper horrors, warriorlike silver horrors are also known to exist, but they fill much the same role and have similar abilities to electrum horrors.

*A rusting automaton shaped like a clockwork beetle clicks and whirs as it comes closer, the pinchers on its front legs snapping threateningly.*

### COPPER HORROR CR 2

Always LE Small construct  
**Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.,  
 Listen +3, Spot +4  
**Languages** Clockwork Horror,  
 mindlink (10 miles)

AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 16  
 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 14 (2 HD)

SR 12

Immune electricity

Weakness *shatter*

Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +1

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee razor saw +1 (1d6)

Base Atk +1; Grp -3

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 2nd)

1/day—shocking grasp

Abilities Str 10, Dex 13, Con —, Int 4,  
 Wis 12, Cha 4

SQ construct traits, linked mind, spell  
 vulnerability

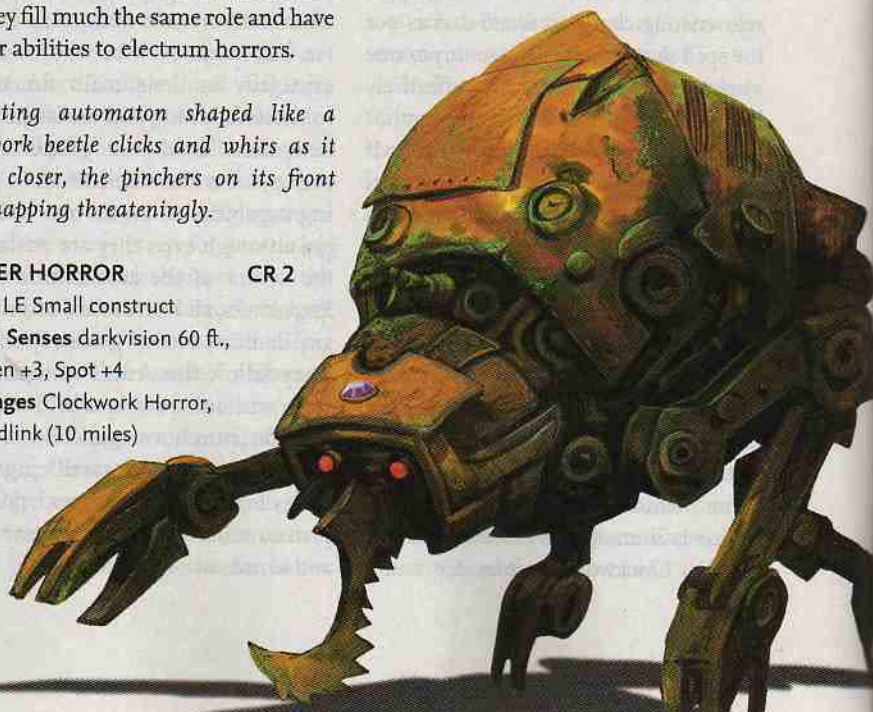
Feats Toughness

Skills Listen +3, Spot +4

**Shocking Grasp (Sp)** Once per day, a copper horror can generate a *shocking grasp* effect, allowing it to deal 2d6 points of electricity damage with a successful melee touch attack.

**Linked Mind (Ex)** All clockwork horrors within 10 miles of a gold, platinum, or adamantine horror are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. If one in a particular group is not flat-footed, none of them are. No clockwork horror in such a group is considered flanked, unless they all are.

**Spell Vulnerability (Ex)** A clockwork horror is susceptible to the *shatter* spell, which blinds it for 1d4+1 rounds. ☞





# Ecology of the Dark Ones

## Enigmas Wrapped in Shadows

by Paul Leach • illustrated by Peter Bergting

*For our kind, there is nothing but the darkness.*

—Dark Ones' Proverb

The mysterious and unpredictable dark ones lurk in the tenebrous tunnels and isolated recesses of the Underdark's vast night. Robbing and killing as they please, these strange humanoids embody the veiled dangers and deepest secrets of the underground world, preying on the unwary and shunning anything to do with the forsaken world of light. While monsters of unsurpassed evil and power are the stuff of the Underdark's all too real nightmare, the dark ones remain its forgotten highwaymen—and that's exactly what they want.

Few people know the origins of the secretive dark ones or why they appear to be split between two different races: dark creepers and dark stalkers. The diminutive dark creepers are hoofed and pale, while the lithe, almost ghostly dark stalkers look frighteningly akin to normal humans. The truth of their genesis and dual-species society is one of the endless night's

best-kept secrets, a past that all but these enigmatic denizens of darkness have forgotten.

### DARK ONES IN THE WORLD

Dark ones are found almost anywhere underground, but they are most often encountered near trade routes or lurking on the outskirts of wealthy settlements. Some of them live in cave warrens, catacombs, or sewers of the surface world, venturing into the land above on moonless nights. They maintain temporary lairs near their victims but have larger communities too secluded to be found by any but the most thorough explorers. The shadowy bandits do little to alter their natural surroundings, preferring to leave as little trace of their existence as possible.

Dark ones are subject to the Underdark's predators, but they use their stealth and special abilities to avoid most creatures. Purple worms, umber hulks, and xorns are more difficult to circumvent, since these monsters all hunt using tremorsense, leading dark ones to exercise extreme caution when in areas roamed by such

creatures. Dark ones rarely antagonize communities of dangerous humanoids, out of fear of provoking retaliation, and every now and then, they make alliances with such races or local monsters. More commonly, dark ones support their communities by raiding caravans from distant lands and travelers passing through their territory.

### THE LIFE OF THE DARK ONES

Dark creepers and dark stalkers are born in a similar manner as humans and grow to maturity within 15 years. Parents share the responsibility of rearing and teaching their children with the other adults of the tribe. The young play games that reinforce essential survival skills such as concealment and observation. Young dark ones learn to hate the lighted world and consider any who carry light with them to be enemies. Their elders teach them that other creatures that dwell in the Underdark and outsiders are sources of wealth, amusement, and danger. Dark ones consider the whole Underdark their home, and they spend their lives wandering, hiding,

and stealing. Dark creepers live to be about 50 years old, while dark stalkers sometimes surpass 75 years.

When a dark one dies, its body decomposes in a manner befitting this strange race. Unless eaten or otherwise prevented from normally decomposing, the body deteriorates at such a rate that it vanishes within a month. Patient observers can see thin wisps of shadowy smoke rising from a corpse, although this opportunity is rare, since dark ones try to recover their dead whenever they can. Many of the natural vaults that serve as their tombs have been used by countless generations. "Born of the dark, we return to the dark," is their simple prayer and hope.

### PHYSIOLOGY

Dark stalkers and creepers share many common traits owing to their shared heritage. Their eyes are quite disturbing, appearing as sinister slits uniformly colored a dead shade of gray. While they do have irises and pupils, these features are well camouflaged, reminiscent of the sightless eyes of cavern-dwelling fish. Dark ones are not blind, but neither do they possess darkvision. They rely on elevated senses of smell and hearing to provide them with an unmatched ability to navigate in total darkness.

Their soft voices remain so, even when used in anger. Dark ones do not so much speak words as breathe them. When they speak their dark tongue it sounds like a series of punctuated sighs, and they rely on subtle changes in tone to convey meaning. Even when dark ones converse in other languages, their voices sound like wind currents lost in a tunnel.

Their hair ranges in color from stark white to an inky black, and their skin is cool to the touch. Dark ones tend to be light for their size and they move as if they have no more substance than shadows. They conceal themselves in cloaks, masks, turbans, and wraps, preferring garb that covers their faces.

### PSYCHOLOGY

Darkness ultimately defines all aspects of dark one life, from the core beliefs of each individual to their society as a whole. They believe nothing lasts forever, except for the dark, and therefore little else really matters. This is not a morbid or depressing certainty to

dark ones, but the basis for their freedom, which they value above all else. They see no reason to tie themselves to the demands of land, industry, or conquest; neither do they have much use for glory or honor. Dark ones believe city walls and ideals were created to provide false security; city walls only make it easier for an enemy to find you, and moralistic ideals can only convince you to die for no reason at all. Dark ones see the civilized races of the world as pathetically clinging to ruinous traditions of self-deception, greed, and hatred, and dark ones eagerly capitalize on these conceits to take what they need. They think of themselves as wary survivors, while others call them cowardly parasites.

While dark ones have a relaxed attitude about many things, they have an almost maniacal fear and hatred of light that goes beyond the physical pain it causes them. They revile the sun as a merciless entity that maliciously blinds them and renders their survival skills useless. Dark ones believe that earthly fire and light-shedding magic were weapons the sun bestowed upon the world to help the brutish surface dwellers hunt and destroy them. Because of this, they refuse to engage in any type of metallurgy and rely solely on theft for their metal weapons, tools, and jewelry. Dark ones loathe blacksmiths due to their connection to the sun's power, even though they crave forged wares.

Dark ones often refuse to openly communicate with other races as a result of their paranoia. They learn the languages of other races so they can use the knowledge to better understand and spy on their prey. Dark ones learn languages either by secret observation or through tribal tutors. To speak to an outsider is taboo and should only be done in cases of dire necessity. Communicating with outsiders is too close to sharing or accepting the ways of those who might destroy the tribe. Dark ones never teach their own language to outsiders.

### DIET

Dark ones are omnivorous, but their Underdark habitat and fear of fire often limits their diet to edible fungi and insects. They have a limited tolerance of raw meat and fish but prefer them cooked if they have access to a steam vent or hot springs. Smoked meat and

baked goods are often priority targets during raids.

### INDUSTRY AND THE ARTS

Dark ones obtain most necessities by gathering what they need from nature or hapless humanoids, but they do craft some items for themselves. They excel in preparing dyes from fungi, algae, and strange minerals, which allows

#### DARK ONES AND THE FIEND FOLIO

The dark ones first appeared in the original printing of the *Fiend Folio* in 1981. Along with other staples from that bestiary (such as the drow, githyanki, and slaad) they have appeared in dozens of adventures since their inception and have long been a favorite of DMs and players alike. Continuing the tradition, both dark creepers and dark stalkers appear again on pages 37-39 of the 2003 printing of the *Fiend Folio*.

them to darken their garments to the color of deepest shadow. Other substances are used to cure monster hides, enabling dark ones to make leather armor, pouches, and belts. They sometimes weave their own tunics, pants, and cloaks, but they usually prefer to modify stolen items.

Dark ones do not bake ceramic containers and instead chemically treat and seal fungal spore pods (typically the shape and size of large potatoes) to create the organic equivalents of ceramic flasks. While the podskins have a number of mundane uses, they are perfect for delivering dark ones' diverse arsenal of alchemical weapons.

A tribe of dark ones often has several apothecaries who create poisons from Underdark flora and harvest the poisons and secretions of such creatures as carrion crawlers, scorpions, and other vermin. The apothecaries also specialize in shadow essence poison (see page 39 of the *Fiend Folio*), which they make by mixing a few inert ingredients with drops of their own blood.

Dark one spellcasters use stolen masterwork weapons to fashion magic items such as *assassin's daggers*, *daggers of venom*, and seeking and wounding ammunition. They also enchant rings and wondrous items, especially *bracers of armor*, *cloaks of displacement*, and *rings of invisibility*. With the aid of the tribe's alchemists,

potions and oils are also frequently produced, usually *potions of cat's grace*, *potions of invisibility*, and *oils of darkness* for their hunters.

Dark ones do not use written words to record their history, religion, or culture; rather, they know who they are and what they have suffered, and that is enough. Like city walls and foolish bravery, written records are the fruits of vanity that can only help your enemies. They are a race without mythic heroes, and each generation slips silently into the peaceful shadows, continuing the exodus begun long ago. Their hushed chants and few poems are imbued with an inspired solemnity.

### RELIGION

Dark ones do not worship specific gods as most other races do, and in fact find the concept abhorrent. Rather, they revere darkness as an abstract force, a destination after death, and a personal ideal. How legitimate this religion is remains a matter of much debate, but the fact that dark stalker clerics mysteriously receive spells and that all dark ones are inexorably claimed by shadows after death lends credence to their beliefs. Dark ones have few clerics and those that exist are almost always dark stalkers. These clerics most often have access to the Darkness (from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*), Luck, Trickery, and Underdark (from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Setting*) domains.

Although no one can be sure, many sages speculate that dark ones' refusal to worship specific gods led them to their current state. They might once have been members of a culture that never came to trust deities, or they could be heretics who turned their back on their gods. Another theory suggests that the forebears of dark ones were offered protection by the god of the sun and, when they refused him, were forever cast from his sight, cursed with their aversion for light. Whatever their history and however it ties to their strange religion remains yet another of dark ones' countless mysteries.

### SOCIETY

Dark stalkers have always been the leaders and caretakers of dark ones. There is no formality to their rule, and authority is usually shared between all of the community's stalkers. In a feat of governing unheard of in nearly all other societies,

dark stalkers never flaunt their rule or lord their authority over dark creepers, showing an unaccustomed affection for and understanding of their underlings. While the dark creepers are not servile, they rarely disobey their leaders.

Dark ones have no real laws, but they do have strong taboos against harming other members of the tribe. Murder is almost as bad as teaching an outsider their secret tongue, and either offense is worthy of exile or death. Betraying the tribe's lair to enemies is unheard of. Stealing is not an issue in dark one society as they are not a particularly greedy people. Thefts can only lead to counter-thefts in a tribe of pickpockets.

### KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

Dark ones tend not to ally with many races, but they find natural predators very useful. Supreme opportunists, they sometimes merely wait for passers-by to stumble in another monster's lair, or they purposely lead headstrong enemies into its maw. While their prey is busy handling another creature, they take advantage of the situation to pickpockets and make attacks of their own.

**Dark Creepers and a Cloaker:** A cloaker with two dark creeper minions can be a considerable threat. By positioning themselves at opposite sides of a cavern, the creatures can attempt to catch enemies between them. The cloaker primarily uses its nausea and stupor moan effects (keeping dark ones outside the 30-foot range of most of its subsonic attacks) so the creepers can easily make sneak attacks. Two dark creepers and a cloaker are an EL 7 encounter.

**A Dark Creeper and Darkmantles:** Dark ones often lurk near small clutches of darkmantles, eagerly aiding the camouflaged predators and looting the bodies of their prey. By waiting until the darkmantles have used either their darkness or constrict ability, the dark creepers can slink close to targets and make sneak attacks while their opponents are either unaware or grappled. One dark creeper and two darkmantles are an EL 4 encounter.

**Dark Creepers and Shocker Lizards:** Dark ones are adept at using unintelligent Underdark creatures in simple but elegant ambushes. While two creepers wait at the far edge of a lair of four shocker lizards, a third creeper, pursued by PCs, dashes through the lair and sets the lizards on alert. When the PCs enter the lair, ranged attacks from the dark creepers aggravate the lizards into attacking the nearest targets, probably the PCs. While the four shocker lizards deal 8d6 points of damage with their lethal shocks, dark ones make sneak attacks. Even if they are exposed to the lizards' electrical attacks, dark ones' evasion ability gives them better-than-average chances of surviving the attacks. Three dark creepers and four shocker lizards make an EL 8 encounter.



**A Dark Stalker and Dark Creepers:** Dark ones are most commonly found in small hunting or raiding parties consisting of several dark creepers and a single dark stalker leader. Usually, dark ones hide using their shadow cloak abilities and slip close to their prey under the cover of the dark stalker's *fog cloud*. Dark creepers then sneak attack targets and retreat, trying to confuse and separate their enemies while the dark stalker watches and waits. Although the dark stalker aids overwhelmed creepers, he seeks out and concentrates his sneak attacks and poisoning on the strongest-looking enemy. After such an initial attack, the entire band of dark ones retreat, only to repeat the tactic on their weakened opponents again and again. A dark stalker and five dark creepers make an EL 9 encounter.

**A Dark Stalker and Dire Weasels:** Many dark stalkers favor dire weasels as both pets and hunting partners. With the dire weasel's attack and blood drain abilities, their dark stalker masters often send the animals ahead of them in combat. Once the weasels have caused Constitution damage, the stalkers take advantage of their enemies' lower Fortitude saving throws, thus maximizing their poison attacks. A dark stalker and four dire weasels make an EL 7 encounter.

**A Dark Stalker and Rasts:** Although dangerous creatures to train, or even be near, dark stalkers greatly value the aid of rasts. A rast ally is extremely versatile, being able to drain an opponent's Constitution or paralyze it from afar, allowing the dark stalker to use its poison or sneak attack abilities at its leisure. Also, the alien nature and sheer savagery of a rast makes one a perfect distraction for a far more stealthy dark stalker. A dark stalker and one rast make an EL 6 encounter.

**A Dark Stalker and Troglodytes:** Dark stalkers have been known to follow troglodyte hunters and steal their prey. While a dark stalker hides and keeps its distance from the troglodytes, it attempts to make sneak attacks with its poisoned javelins against characters sickened by the troglodytes' stench and suffering a -2 on saving throws. Once either the troglodytes or their prey is weakened, the dark stalker attacks. A dark stalker and two troglodytes are an EL 5 encounter.

## VS. PCS

Dark ones use cunning and efficient methods to defeat their opponents. They are ruthless but not sadistic; murder is only a means to an end and is not employed if the dark one can simply pick a pocket instead. Dark ones zealously kill those who invade their home caverns,

though, and lightbearers provoke escalated violence under any circumstances.

**Sneak Attacks and Sleight of Hand:** Dark ones use ambushes against lone scouts and stragglers, but sometimes they attack small groups, especially if the group uses artificial light. A band of dark ones usually splits its attacks. One group

## NEW ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

Dark ones have a peerless understanding of the alchemical uses of fungi and vegetation native to the Underdark. Using the hundreds of strange and deadly plants that surround them, dark ones have created a wide variety of distinctive alchemical items. The majority of these items are splash weapons, the rules for which are on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*.

### BROWN MOLD OIL

Brown mold oil is ground brown mold neutralized by a compound of lime and algae. When exposed to air, the compound turns gummy and inert, allowing the brown mold to revive for 1 round to cause cold damage to any creature it touches. A flask or podskin of brown mold oil has a range increment of 10 feet and is used as a thrown splash weapon. A direct hit deals 2d6 points of nonlethal cold damage, while all creatures within 5 feet take 1d6 points of nonlethal cold damage from the splash. Brown mold oil may be created with a successful DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check.

Cost: 75 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

### OIL OF NAUSEA

Odorous resins and slimes are used to create oil of nausea. Flasks and podskins of the oil have a range increment of 10 feet and are used as thrown splash weapon. Those directly struck by oil of nausea must make a successful DC 15 Fortitude saving throw or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds, while those within the 5-foot-splash radius must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. Oil of nausea may be created with a successful DC 15 Craft (alchemy) check.

Cost: 60 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

### POISON-FRIEND POD

These fungal spore pods are chemically altered so that their otherwise harmless clouds cause creatures to be more susceptible to poison. A poison-friend pod is a thrown weapon with a range increment of 10 feet. Upon striking a creature or square, these fungi erupt in a 10-foot cloud of spores that disperses in 1 round. Anyone caught in the cloud must make a successful DC 15 Fortitude save or take a -4 penalty on all saving throws against poison made in the next 10 minutes. Poison-friend pods may be created with a successful DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check.

Cost: 50 gp; Weight: —

### SHADOW HAZE DUST

Shadow haze dust is a potent eye irritant that obscures its victims' vision with dark hazes. One bag or podskin has a range increment of 10 feet and fills a 10-foot-radius cloud with the dust. Those within the cloud must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer a -6 penalty on all Spot checks for 1 hour or until a gallon of water is used to flush the character's eyes. Shadow haze dust may be created with a successful DC 20 Craft (alchemy) check.

Cost: 30 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

### SHADOW VEIL

Shadow veil is a black dust created from finely powdered crystals that grow only in the deepest reaches of the Underdark. When stored in bags or podskins, this dust can be thrown as a splash weapon with a range increment of 10 feet. Upon striking a creature or square, the dust erupts in a 10-foot-radius cloud. Although this cloud has no effect on living creatures, it reacts with all nonmagical fires no larger than a campfire within the area, snuffing them out. Torches, lanterns, candles, cooking fires and the like go out instantly, but magical fire (such as a *wall of fire* spell) is unaffected. Although its effect is swift, a shadow veil dissipates quickly, and extinguished fires can be relit on the round following its use. Shadow veil may be created with a successful DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check.

Cost: 40 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

## SECRETS OF THE DARK ONES

Dark ones are inscrutable, mysterious creatures that keep their secrets with the same cold silence of the darkness they revere. Although sages, explorers, and those harassed by these Underdark brigands have long sought to unravel the dark ones' secrets, all methods of investigation, from the most potent magical inquiries to ingenious drow tortures, have revealed little. Over the decades, four enigmas have consistently perplexed those brave and foolish enough to pry into the secrets of the dark ones.

## ORIGINATING IN SHADOWS

Many races know where they came from or how they came to be, and myths of racial creation are among the best known throughout the world. Such tales are not told of dark ones, however. Of how these creatures came to be, what events or beings affected that creation, and why they bitterly speak of the surface with knowledge akin to hateful memories, only dark ones know. This question is made all the more significant as dark stalkers appear so much like humans, perhaps too like them not to share a single heritage.

## THE WORSHIP OF DARKNESS

Rather than worshipping a single deity, all dark ones hold reverence for the dark. To them, all shadows are one—dark slivers of an unfathomable whole that provides them with all they need. Although they keep the specifics of their worship a jealously guarded secret, it seems to serve them well. What force grants the dark ones their powers and claims them in its shadow clutch after they die remains an enigma—one that could challenge mortal understanding of divine power.

## A SOCIETY OF SECRETS

All dark ones hide themselves, both in the shadows of their Underdark homes and behind concealing layers of clothing, masks, and other disguises. Constantly trying to hide their natural forms, dark ones consider revealing themselves to outsiders a deeply rooted cultural taboo. Although no one is sure, some who have studied this strange race believe that dark ones hide themselves out of shame for some ancient disgrace. However, the truth of why dark ones hide themselves, and to what end, remains another of their countless secrets.

## TWO SPECIES, ONE RACE

Anyone who has encountered dark creepers and their secretive leaders, the dark stalkers, has noticed that the dark ones are in fact two distinct races. While dark creepers seem to be primitive sneaks, little more than cunning goblins, the dark stalkers are elegant and deadly, with the stealth and grace of living shadow. How these two radically different types of creatures have come to live together, and seemingly in such harmony, is perhaps the dark ones' greatest mystery.

Some sages suggest that, despite their lower standing, dark creepers are better adapted to life underground than dark stalkers. This has raised the theory that dark creepers are the result of natural changes affecting a new generation of dark stalkers. However, this possibility throws into question why some dark stalkers hold a respect for dark creeper elders akin to children for their parents.

initiates combat with ranged attacks and another uses sneak attacks to finish off dangerous enemies or pick their pockets. Wizards and sorcerers are prime targets for pickpocketing, as wands, scroll tubes, and potions are prized loot for dark one rogues with the Use Magic Device skill.

**Evasion:** Dark ones always have an escape plan and typically break off an encounter after only a few rounds. They slow down adventurers by impairing their vision, leading them through difficult or confusing terrain, or causing them more damage. Examples of these tactics include using a dark stalker's *fog cloud* ability at tunnel junctions, and

using pitfalls or underground streams to force pursuers into making Climb or Swim checks, especially after the adventurers have lost Strength due to shadow essence poison. Their evasion tactics are often designed to split up their victims so they have another chance at executing a second ambush on fewer numbers.

## VS. DARK ONES

Adventurers should expect short fights intended to relieve them of their treasure and attempts to seriously wound or kill one of them. If the party is dedicated to wiping out dark ones, they

must prepare and execute a cautious search and destroy mission.

**Detection:** Between dark ones' shadow cloak abilities and bonuses to Hide and Move Silently checks, odds are that PCs will only notice them when they make sneak attacks. Having some kind of light source is a prime way to provoke them into doing this. Spells such as *detect chaos*, *glitterdust*, *owl's wisdom* (to increase a character's Spot check bonus), and *true seeing* are most beneficial when trying to detect dark ones. *Detect magic* is useful if dark ones use their shadow cloak ability.

**Stealth and Trickery:** Due to the dark ones' blindsight, it is very difficult to surprise them. Only a character affected by both *invisibility* and *silence* is likely to force a dark creeper or dark stalker to make a Spot check. The Disguise skill might also work in some cases, but the best way to get the drop on dark ones is for a PC to disguise herself as something harmless by using *polymorph* or the druid's wild shape ability.

**Vision And Light:** If someone in the party lacks darkvision, the PCs must protect their light sources from theft or destruction. Locked gauntlets can secure a light-shedding magic weapon or a torch, but the PCs should have access to several essential spells, such as *dancing lights*, *daylight*, and *light*. *Daylight* and *light* work best when cast on items that dark ones cannot easily take, such as breastplates and robes.

**Protection:** Although dark ones have to get close to take valuables from adventurers, PCs should expect poisoned ranged attacks. Spellcasters should prepare protective spells that can travel with their users, since most fights with dark ones are quick and mobile. Increase Fortitude saves with antitoxin, the Great Fortitude feat, and spells such as *bear's endurance* and *protection from chaos*. Treating poison using the Heal skill is more likely to succeed when supported by a healer's kit, the feats Skill Focus (Heal) and Self-Sufficient, and if the caregiver is under the effects of *owl's wisdom*. *Delay poison* and *neutralize poison* are also highly recommended.

**Use Charm:** Due to dark ones' weak Will saves, PC spellcasters have a good chance to overwhelm them with *charm person*, *color spray*, *command*, *hold person*, *lullaby*, and *sleep*.

**Ranged Attacks:** The average dark creeper does not have many hit points,

but it does benefit from its shadow cloak's concealment, good Reflex saves, and evasion. Dark stalkers are tougher, but they are in the minority, and they don't have the evasion ability (unless they're also rogues).

*Magic missile* is the best damage-causing spell to use against dark ones, since it ignores anything less than total concealment. Good secondary spells are *acid splash*, *chill touch*, *flame arrow*, *ghoul touch*, *poison*, *scorching ray*, *searing light*, and *stinking cloud*; these spells either do not allow a saving throw or are negated by a Fortitude saving throw, which is a dark one's weakest save.

*Spectral hand* is almost a necessity for delivering spells with a range of touch. If a spell allows a Reflex saving throw, it is likely to be ineffective against a dark creeper's evasion ability.

**Melee:** A dark one's shadow cloak concealment negates roughly half of all attacks directed at the dark one, so the more attacks a PC can make, the better. While Two-Weapon Fighting is helpful, a monk's flurry of blows ability paired with the Stunning Fist feat can offer several attacks that require dark ones to make Fortitude saves.

**Stick Together:** Characters should avoid the temptation of leaving slow or disabled party members behind to chase thieving dark ones. Lone PCs are prime targets to these bandits.

## DARK ONES AS CHARACTERS

Most dark ones find other humanoids too suspicious or contemptible to join their company for anything longer than a short-term venture. A creeper or stalker who joins a group of outsiders for an extended period of time is exceptional, but if the character and his new companions are able to work out their opposing views on light, they can easily get along. These natural rogues fit in best with those they feel are kindred spirits, such as bandits and spies. In addition to underground settings, dark ones work well in nocturnal city adventures as well as those that take place in dense woodlands and shadowy hills.

### Dark Creepers Humanoid

Dark creepers are known to be naturally stealthy and prefer the cool comfort of shadowy places. Spry and sinister-looking creatures, these dark ones' activities are usually assumed to

have some nefarious purpose often far worse than their actual intent. Feared in numbers and demonized alone, dark creepers are able pilferers, but not innately evil creatures. Their interests lie in maintaining their own comfort and the safety of their communities, regardless of the cost to other races.

Members of this class often focus on skills and feats that compliment their natural agility and stealth. Although their shadow cloaks defend them from many threats, dark creepers fear relying on innate abilities alone and develop their skills accordingly.

### Racial Traits

- **Small:** A dark creeper gains a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 bonus on Hide checks, but they must use smaller weapons than Medium creatures do, and their lifting and carrying limits are three-quarters of those of Medium creatures.
- **Speed:** Dark creeper base land speed is 30 feet.
- **Blindsight:** Dark creepers can effectively see 60 feet without the need of light. Invisibility, darkness, and most kinds of concealment are irrelevant, although the dark creeper must have line of effect to the creature or object to discern it. See page 306 of the *Monster Manual* for a full description of blindsight.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Dark creepers are subject to a -2 penalty on attacks, saves, checks, and damage when they are exposed to sunlight or light equivalent to a *daylight* spell.
- **Skills:** A dark creeper gains a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks and a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks when in areas of darkness or shadowy illumination.
- **Automatic Languages:** Dark One and Undercommon.
- **Favored Class:** Dark creeper. The best multiclassing choices for a dark creeper are rogue and ranger.

### Class Skills

The dark creeper's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Hide (Dex), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), and Tumble (Dex).

### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the dark creeper monster class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Dark creepers are proficient with all simple weapons and light armor, but not with shields.

**Feats:** A dark creeper receives one feat at 1st level. After 5th level it gains feats normally according to character level, as shown on Table 3-2: Experience and Level-Dependent Benefits in the *Player's Handbook*.

**Natural Armor:** Dark creepers have thick hides and gain a +1 natural armor bonus to their armor class.

**Shadow Cloak (Su):** Dark creepers can conceal themselves in shadows the indicated number of times per day. This ability provides concealment in bright light and total concealment in shadows. Darkvision does not negate this concealment, but creatures that can see in magical darkness ignore this effect. Each use of this ability lasts 10 minutes per Hit Die, but the dark creeper can dismiss it at will.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** A dark creeper of 2nd level or higher can sneak attack. This ability

## NEW FEATS

These feats compliment the dark ones' style of banditry, but other characters (especially rogues) might find them useful as well.

## CULPURSE

You are able to pick the pockets of your melee opponents.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Unarmed Strike, Sleight of Hand 5 ranks.

**Benefit:** While engaged in combat, you may attempt to use the Sleight of Hand skill to pickpocket an enemy without provoking an attack of opportunity. This feat allows you to disguise your Sleight of Hand attempts as combat maneuvers.

**Normal:** Using Sleight of Hand in melee provokes an attack of opportunity.

## DEEP POISONING

Your sneak attacks with poisoned weapons are more potent.

**Prerequisites:** Poison use, sneak attack.

**Benefit:** When making a sneak attack with a poisoned weapon, you may elect to exchange +1d6 sneak attack damage dice for a +1 increase to the DC of the victim's Fortitude saving throws (maximum 5d6 exchanged for DC +5). You sacrifice outright damage for accurately delivering poison to critical parts of the victim's anatomy.

## EXPERT TUMBLER

You can tumble with exceptional deftness.

**Prerequisites:** Tumble 5 ranks.

**Benefit:** You may use the Tumble skill at normal speed with only a -5 penalty.

**Normal:** Using the Tumble skill at full speed incurs a -10 check penalty.

## MONSTER CLASS BASICS

Monster classes first appeared in *Savage Species* and allow characters to play monstrous characters from 1st level with no level adjustment. Although monster classes are for the most part presented as character classes, there are several significant differences. Most notably, you must take a monster class as your first level, and characters who take levels in a monster class cannot multiclass until they have completed the full progression of the monster class. This rule keeps characters from gaining the benefits of a monster's type and then quickly switching to a standard class. Characters who take levels in a monster class do not gain Hit Dice, base attack progression, base save bonus progression, skills, and feats at every level, instead gaining them only when it is noted in the class progression. Also, monster classes are likely to alter a character's fundamental form, affecting their ability scores and natural armor. At every level a character gains an ability adjustment, this change stacks with all previous ability score adjustments. However, adjustments to natural armor do not stack. For complete rules and more examples of monster classes see Appendix 1 of *Savage Species*.

functions as the rogue ability of the same name. Sneak attack bonuses gained from the rogue class stack with those from dark creeper levels.

**Evasion (Ex):** At 3rd level, a dark creeper gains the evasion ability, which functions as the 2nd-level rogue ability.

### Dark Stalkers Humanoid

Aloof and decisive creatures, dark stalkers are rarely seen. With a size and shadowy grace far beyond that of their dark creeper brethren, those who see a dark stalker often mistake them for some breed of Underdark elf or dark fey. Not caring what outsiders suppose of them, dark stalkers strive to make their communities as comfortable and prosperous as possible, all while avoiding the taint of foreign ways of thinking or the accursed light.

The mystery and deadly grace of dark stalkers is reflected in their class

progression by their continually advancing Dexterity and Charisma. While the former is often augmented by ranks in the stealthy and thieving skills these dark ones rely on, the latter is used to lead their dark creeper brethren. These traits, in addition to their shadow cloak ability, allow dark stalkers to remain hidden much of the time but be commanding presences when they do appear.

### Racial Traits

- **Medium:** As Medium creatures, dark stalkers have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size.
- **Speed:** Dark stalker base land speed is 30 feet.
- **Blindsight:** Dark stalkers can effectively see 60 feet without the need of light. Invisibility, darkness, and most kinds of concealment are irrelevant, although the dark creeper must have line of effect to the creature or object to discern it. See page 306 of the *Monster Manual* for a full description of blindsight.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Dark stalkers are subject to a -2 penalty on attacks, saves, checks, and damage when they are exposed to sunlight or light equivalent to a *daylight* spell.
- **Skills:** A dark stalker gains a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks and a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks when in darkness or shadowy illumination.
- **Automatic Languages:** Dark One and Undercommon.
- **Favored Class:** Dark stalker. The best multiclassing choices for a dark stalker are rogue and sorcerer.

### Class Skills

The dark stalker's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Hide (Dex), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), and Tumble (Dex).

### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the dark stalker monster class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Dark stalkers are proficient with all simple weapons, short swords, and all light armors, but not shields.

**Feats:** A dark stalker receives a feat at 1st level, and another one at 7th level. After 8th level it gains feats normally according to character level.

**Shadow Cloak (Su):** Dark stalkers can conceal themselves in shadows the indicated number of times per day. This ability provides concealment in bright light and total concealment in shadows. Darkvision does not negate this concealment, but creatures that can see in magical darkness ignore this effect. Each use of this ability lasts 10 minutes per Hit Die, but the dark stalker can dismiss it at will.

**Poison Use (Ex):** At 3rd level, dark stalkers are able to utilize poisons without accidentally poisoning themselves.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** A dark stalker of 2nd level or higher can sneak attack. This ability functions as the rogue ability of the same name. Sneak attack bonuses gained from the rogue class stack with those from dark stalker levels.

**Fog Cloud (Sp):** At 8th level, a dark stalker is able to cast *fog cloud* twice a day as a 5th-level sorcerer. ☐

### DARK CREEPER

Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Skill Points	CR	Special
1st	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	(2 + Int mod) × 4	1	Feat, +1 natural armor, shadow cloak 1/day
2nd	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	2	+2 Con, +2 Dex, sneak attack +1d6
3rd	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	2	+2 Dex, evasion, shadow cloak 2/day
4th	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	3	+2 Str, +2 Wis, sneak attack +2d6
5th	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	3	+2 Dex, +2 Wis, shadow cloak 3/day

### DARK STALKER

Level	Hit Dice	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Skill Points	CR	Special
1st	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	(2 + Int mod) × 4	1	Feat, +1 natural armor, shadow cloak 1/day
2nd	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	1	+2 Con, +2 Dex, sneak attack +1d6
3rd	1d8	+0	+0	+2	+0	-	2	+2 Str, poison use, shadow cloak 2/day
4th	2d8	+1	+0	+3	+0	(2 + Int mod)	2	+2 Con, +2 Dex, sneak attack +2d6
5th	2d8	+1	+0	+3	+0	-	3	+2 Cha, +2 Wis, shadow cloak 3/day
6th	2d8	+1	+0	+3	+0	-	3	+2 Str, +2 natural armor, sneak attack +3d6
7th	3d8	+2	+1	+3	+1	(2 + Int mod)	4	+2 Int, +2 Wis, feat
8th	3d8	+2	+1	+3	+1	-	4	+2 Cha, +2 Dex, fog cloud 2/day

# Ecology of the Death Knight

by Matthew Sernett

“From the dark into the light,  
From the small unto the great,  
From the valleys dark I ride  
O'er the hills to conquer fate!”  
— “*Horseman Springing*,” Lilla Cabot Perry

None can win the war with death, but losing the war does not mean the combatants have seen their last battle. Warriors who wish to fight beyond the limitations of flesh and blood can seek a forbidden way to steal their souls from fate. The cost of this immortality is death, but the fearless few who pay this price become death's allies. Indeed, death bestows power upon them. Their fleshless bones clad in skins of armor, their brittle fingers clasping weapons with a grip of iron, these knights of death take command of their souls and their destinies. When they charge from the shadowy afterlife into the lands of the living, death knights ride to wage war upon life itself.

## History

The origin of the death knight lies in a period so ancient that only legends can speak of it with authority. Each race has its own version of the story.

For elves, the first death knight was a tragic figure who was tricked into becoming a death knight in order to win his love from the clutches of a rapacious rival. In this version, lies lead the story's hero to death. His rival is not a villain. His lady doesn't truly love him. The wicked fey creature who offers the hero a path to power leads him instead to damnation. After killing his apparent foe and learning the truth of his supposed love, the death knight embraces the flame of darkness in his heart by slaying the lady and turning his grief and rage upon the rest of the world.

To dwarves, the first death knight was a greedy king who could not release his grip on the throne. The king sullied his clan, his kingdom, and the many honored dead who passed on before him by seeking unnatural means of extending his life. Seeing foes and rivals everywhere, he arranged for his children, his relatives, and those who refused his commands to die in battle or exile. With no heirs and no kin, he claimed his throne for eternity by becoming a death knight and transforming his loyal retainers into undead servitors. Dwarven legend says the death knight still sits on his throne and rules over a kingdom of undead, entombed behind miles of rock by those few dwarves who escaped his reign alive.

Humans relate several competing legends of the first death knight, but all bear a common theme: A man or woman wanted power and received it, and with that dark power, the newly made death knight accomplished its goals. The death knight might have been tricked or cursed, but in these tales the means are unimportant when compared to the ends. Sometimes tragic, sometimes triumphant, these stories teach that great power allows the



wielder to achieve great things, even if the price is cursed immortality.

Halfing legend tells what might be the oldest story of the first death knight, and the story is so simple it might be closest to the truth. They say the first death knight arose in service to Orcus, Demon Prince of Undead. The tale's protagonist, a human warrior of considerable skill and renown, was plagued with an unquenchable thirst for vengeance. When denied a position of power he felt was his right, he sought revenge but was denied satisfaction. Bloodied and disgraced, he fled to fell lands inhabited by demons. There he proved his worth to Orcus first by defeating the Demon Prince's minions and then by killing Orcus's enemies. When cultists of Orcus offered the man the power to avenge the slights against him, he readily accepted and became the first death knight.



## Knowledge of the Death Knight

The following table shows the results of a Religion check as it relates to death knights.

### Religion DC Result

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 | Death knights are skeletal warriors who retain the intelligence and combat skills they had in life. They often lead other undead soldiers in a war against the living.                                                               |
| 20 | Death knights are warriors who chose to become undead. Often they have a specific goal or vendetta that provoked their transformations, but some simply fear the afterlife so much that they instead choose an eternal living death. |

25 A death knight carries its soul in its weapon. This weapon has the power to become ghostly and pierce armor as if it was not there. If you take a death knight's weapon, you weaken the knight. A death knight can also surround itself in a burst of unholy fire that burns the living and wreathes undead in dangerous green and black flames.

30 A death knight's soul weapon weakens anyone else who wields it as long as the death knight has not been destroyed. If you break a death knight's weapon, the knight can restore it with a touch. Death knights bolster nearby undead allies, so it's best to separate the knight from its minions.

## Becoming a Death Knight

Those who desire the dark powers of a death knight in death must first perform the proper ritual. Discovering the right ritual to become a death knight can be extraordinarily hazardous. Good-intentioned individuals often destroy copies when they find them, and the most fanatical will kill those who seek its secrets rather than allow knowledge of the ritual to spread. False rituals abound—traps laid for the unwise and unwary by those who seek souls for other dark purposes.

Despite this, working versions of the ritual exist, each with its own peculiar requirements. One ritual might simply demand that the performer sacrifice a loved one, while another might stipulate that the caster must die in battle at the hands of a foe while in a graveyard or tomb. Frequently, the supplicant must have spilled the blood of innocents with the weapon that will become the soul weapon.

The rarity of the true ritual drives many to seek it from a surer source, such as the cultists of Orcus. These vile madmen despise the gods and bow only to Orcus, who they believe will one day make eternal undead of them all. As worshipers of destruction, demons, and undeath, cultists of Orcus can never be trusted . . . but they enjoy seeing destructive undead unleashed upon the world, and few undead can be as dangerous as a death knight. The demands made of supplicants are a mystery, but the rites are terrible enough that even most Orcus cultists avoid this particular fate. Perhaps they do not feel worthy, or maybe, like many, they simply fear death.

Fear of death is a luxury those seeking undead knighthood cannot afford. Instead, they must seek death out. They must hunger for it. They must embrace death to gain its power. Through death, they become death.

## Soul Weapons

The ritual to become a death knight tears the ritual caster's soul from his body and binds it to the weapon used in the ritual. The ritual caster dies as the living parts of the body are consumed in unholy green fire. From that conflagration rise the soulless bones of the living person, guided by an evil intelligence that no longer needs a brain for its vile thoughts and an endless hatred that no longer requires a heart to drive its dark passion.

A soul weapon is similar to a lich's phylactery in that the death knight's soul resides there instead of in its body. But in most other ways, the soul weapon is the opposite of a phylactery. For a lich its phylactery is a weakness that allows its permanent destruction, but the soul weapon is



the death knight's greatest strength. A death knight literally wields its soul as a weapon. The soul weapon's strikes burn with death, and at the death knight's command it can become immaterial, passing through armor and shields to strike at its foes' unprotected flesh.



A death knight need never fear its soul weapon's destruction, for with a thought the knight can restore the weapon to wholeness and unwholesome power. If the weapon is taken, a death knight becomes weakened and distracted, distraught by the loss of its soul and consumed by the need to recover it. However, no other creature can wield a death knight's soul weapon without feeling despair, so few can withhold a soul weapon from a death knight indefinitely.

## Physiology

Death knights have no flesh and blood and thus lack the needs of a living body. They are tireless warriors who only desire vengeance, conquest, and other bloody evils. Despite lacking muscle and heart, death knights maintain the strength and vigor they had in life.

Like many of the living dead, death knights can be destroyed by damaging their bodies. Although they feel little pain, enough punishment can break their bones. Unlike a lich, a death knight cannot take refuge in a phylactery, and it does not reform from its soul weapon. When its earthly body is destroyed, a death knight's soul leaves its weapon and travels to whatever dire fate awaits it in the afterlife. None can say with assurance what happens to the souls of death knights. Some death knights might believe they know the fate of their souls, and that knowledge spurs them to maintain their undead existence by any means. For the rest, the afterlife is an intangible and terrifying unknown. If no devil or vile deity seizes a death knight's soul, the knight can expect no quarter when its soul is weighed by the gods.

## Psychology and Society

Those who seek knighthood in death tend to be courageous and ambitious individuals. Either loners or leaders in life, in death they become both, leading lesser undead but isolated from mortal society. A group of death knights might form a cadre of dark riders, but even among such a collusion of evil, one death knight typically assumes leadership over the rest. The most ancient among them might even have been the one to corrupt the rest, creating a society of undeath.

Although on rare occasions a person has been transformed into a death knight through accident, deception, or outside force, most death knights hunted for their undead fate. They might have been motivated by fear of the afterlife, but those who seek to deny gods or devils their souls cannot be considered cowards. Rather, the desire for knighthood in death stems largely from a desire for power. Those who become death knights are often already powerful warriors, so the temptation of undeath must offer them something mortality cannot: power unmitigated by age.

Most who turn to death as a means of power are frustrated in life, thwarted in their efforts to achieve their ambitions. Defeat is less tolerable than death, and they are willing to trade flesh and life for the power to avenge themselves or to accomplish a goal. Upon achieving unholy knighthood, such individuals relentlessly pursue the cause of their rage. Continued failure results in greater frustration and anger and drives the death knight to marshal superior forces. Since time has little meaning to a death knight, it might return for revenge generations after those who wronged it are buried and gone. Success provides a death knight only fleeting happiness, for

after achieving its goal, a death knight can only look forward to a cold eternity of endless struggle.

Whatever their personalities in life, death knights become brooding and wrathful in death. They carry their souls in their bony hands, a constant reminder of a bargain that cannot be undone. For power to accomplish a single goal, death knights forego all other joys. That choice weighs upon its every immortal moment.

Newly made death knights and those who regret their decision usually act alone, but with time most death knights accept their status among the undead and use it as a tool for power. Death knights can command lesser undead, and though they will work with dim-witted creatures such as zombies, most prefer minions that can accept and act upon complex commands. In particular, death knights prefer the services of undead that behave like warriors. Humanoid skeletons, battle wights, and sword wraiths serve them well as foot soldiers, captains, and bodyguards.

Of course, death knights are rarely welcome among the living, and as they gather forces about themselves, they must stay on the move or find refuge lest an army be brought to bear upon them before they are ready for battle. A death knight might take command of a ruined castle, or it might raid and claim a fortress from its inhabitants. If the death knight thirsts for conquest, such conquered territory might become the heart of a dark empire. If the death knight is still marshalling forces or nursing anger about a past defeat, the fortress might remain a haunted ruin, a source of dark rumors and whispered tales.

Although the majority of death knights work alone or as leaders, some become followers to greater forces. Death knights who became undead unwillingly or at the behest of others attach themselves to a superior who shows great purpose and initiative. Sometimes this is another death knight, but it might be a powerful undead such as a lich or vampire, or even a mortal who holds influence over the undead. Death knights might serve another for years or even centuries, but most eventually turn against their erstwhile masters, waiting until they are weak due to some loss. A death knight's loyalty and sense of honor can last far longer than any living person's, but with its soul in hand as eternity stretches out before it, a death knight finds few promises worth keeping and morality a farce.

If a death knight makes any long-term connection with a creature, it is most likely to be with a favored mount. Few horses can stand to carry such a horror, but evil beasts such as nightmares and undead mounts willingly carry a death knight into battle. The teamwork necessary for rider and mount to act as one is often a death knight's only source of lasting pleasure.

## Monster Evolution

The death knight has been making fearsome appearances in **Dungeons & Dragons** games for over 25 years. Since its creation, the concept of the death knight has appeared in novels, role-playing games, and computer games.

## Mechanics

Until 3rd Edition, the death knight changed little from its original form as envisioned by Charles Stross (also the creator of the githyanki) for the original *Fiend Folio*, published in 1981. Stross designed the death knight as an armor-wearing lich with a sword. It could cast eleven different spells, including *wall of ice* at will, a 20d6 *fireball*, and *gate* to bring in



demon allies. When the death knight reappeared in 2nd Edition, it lost the *gate* spell but retained virtually every other aspect of its mechanics. The death knight's translation into a template for 3rd Edition gave the lich some space by removing nearly all the death knight's spells, but it didn't really define the death knight as something other than an undead with a fear aura and 20d6 fiery blast.



In designing the death knight for 4th Edition, we originally developed the concept without including any kind of fiery blast or spellcasting. We wanted the death knight to feel more like an undead knight, so we gave it special weapon and shield abilities, an ability that activates when foes flank it, a special mount power, and a melee-oriented fear ability. Development of the concept stripped away some of the complexity, because the NPC that becomes a death knight should have interesting melee powers just like the NPC turned into a lich should have interesting spellcasting powers. The second design also brought back 3rd Edition's abyssal blast and added undead leadership powers. Yet that version of the monster still didn't feel right. It didn't emphasize melee, and it felt too much like a lich because the death knights employed phylacteries.

The final mechanics for the death knight template are easy to use and reinforce the death knight as a significant melee threat. The melee-oriented abilities augment any capabilities the NPC already has, rather than making a DM choose between using a death knight power or an NPC power. The death knight retains its supernatural nature without having abilities that feel like spells, and it can be a great leader of undead without necessitating undead minions. The new soul weapon concept gives the death knight its own space in mechanics and story, bringing new life to this decades-old undead.

## Appearance

The death knight has always been an armored warrior with a fleshless head, changing little in basic appearance since its original *Fiend Folio* depiction. The most significant change came with 3rd Edition's *Monster Manual II*. There the death knight clearly had green fleshy forearms and appeared to have similarly colored skin on its face. For 4th Edition's depiction, we returned to the classic appearance of the most famous image of a death knight, Keith Parkinson's *Lord Soth's Charge*. You can see one result of that effort on the cover of this issue.



## Famous Death Knights

The first named death knight was Saint Kargoth, introduced in a 1983 *Dragon* article, but the most famous by far is Lord Soth of the *Dragonlance* campaign setting. Here's a primer on some of the death knights **D&D** has named over the years.

**Saint Kargoth:** First introduced in *Dragon* and then adopted by the *Greyhawk* campaign setting, Saint Kargoth was a noble human knight who, along with thirteen fellow knights, became a death knight after being corrupted by Demogorgon. Kargoth was jealous that another knight was chosen to lead the Great Kingdom's knight protectors, and his fury and envy lead him to seek the power of undeath to pursue his revenge. He became a hero to the worshipers of Hextor, hence his appellation as a saint.

**Lord Soth:** Like Kargoth, Lord Soth was also a great knight, but Soth's transformation into a death knight is a far more twisted tale. Soth's wife gave birth to a monster that was a representation of Lord Soth's soul. Thinking his wife had been unfaithful, Lord Soth murdered her and his child, even though Lord Soth was himself unfaithful to his wife. When his crime was discovered, Lord Soth was spirited away from his execution by knights loyal to him.

While besieged with his knights, Lord Soth was informed that he could save the world from a great cataclysm. He left to pursue the quest that would save the world, but he turned back when told lies about his new wife's fidelity. Soth confronted his new wife and their child while the cataclysm occurred, refusing to save them from a fiery death. The fire that killed them engulfed the whole keep, killing Lord Soth and his allies, but the cursed Lord Soth arose as a death knight and his followers joined him in undeath.

**Miltiades:** Although not specifically referred to as a death knight, a skeletal undead paladin named Miltiades appears in the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting. Cursed by Tyr, god of justice, after dishonorably slaying a foe, Miltiades sought to do good even after death. Tyr restored Miltiades to life after suitable heroics.



[Savage Tide adventure path \(Warning: spoilers below\)](#)

## Sample Death Knights

Death knights can be used in many ways in a **D&D** game, as minions of a greater foe or as a main villain. As NPCs with an applied template, death knights have any number of options. Below are a few ideas to inspire you when you create a death knight for your game.

**King of Brigadoon:** The death knight might be the lord of a roaming fortress that appears at certain times in particular places. The death knight and his minions can threaten the PCs wherever they are, and the haunted ruin of the castle can offer an unexpected opportunity for exploration and adventure. It might be like [Brigadoon](#), appearing for a time and then vanishing for years, or perhaps it's like the [flying citadel](#) of *Dragonlance* fame. The *Ravenloft* setting offers obvious possibilities, but if your players are familiar with Lord Soth's [time in that land](#), you might want to try something different.

**Ring Wraiths:** In its initial inception **D&D** borrowed a lot from J.R.R. Tolkien, so consider borrowing a bit more. The ring wraiths, or [Nazgûl](#), were kings transformed into undead by the corrupting influence of the rings they wore and the One Ring. However they came about, you can arrive at the awesome image of a half-dozen death knight charging across the landscape. Your dark riders might be a legion of evil seeking to bring their brand of justice to the PCs, or they might be the servants of a more powerful master.

**The Headless Horseman:** The Headless Horseman from Washington Irving's [The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#) could very well have been a death knight. A dejected death knight might become the unseen menace of an area that the PCs frequent. Based on the PCs' actions in the area, the death knight might gain a purpose and abandon random murders in favor of a more strategic effort against the PCs.

**King Haggard:** Like King Haggard in Peter S. Beagle's [The Last Unicorn](#), a death knight could be the lord of a desolate kingdom that guards something the PCs need. The death knight might even have mortal servants who are not evil but serve out of a sense of loyalty to the former living knight. Dealing with this minion of evil without unduly harming his misguided followers could present an interesting challenge to players.

**The Black Knight:** A death knight ably fills the role of a stereotypical [Black Knight](#). This works best if you disguise the death knight's status as an undead warrior, and the death knight works as an ally of the PCs for a time. Like some of the black knights of literature and legend, the death knight might follow a strict code of honor despite his villainous nature.

**Genghis Khan:** If you really want the death knight to make an impact on your players, put it at the head of an undead army. Your death knight might be like [Genghis Kahn](#), gathering warriors of the conquered nations into its army as it moves. These warriors might be the dead of the conquered, risen as undead warriors, or even living warriors who believe that serving the death knight offers a better chance of survival than opposing it.

**Blackrazor:** The adventure [White Plume Mountain](#) introduced *Blackrazor*, a magic sword that stole a character's soul and made him subject to its whims. In your game, you might use *Blackrazor* or invent a different magic weapon that steals its wielder's soul and transforms the person into a death knight. The magic weapon might be the true villain, with the death knight as its hapless pawn.

**Lancelot and Guinevere:** Consider pairing your death knight with an evil partner. Perhaps your death knight is a version of Lancelot who has fallen for an evil [Guinevere](#), or your Guinevere might be the death knight and Lancelot an evil lord. One might be a vampire or demon who leeches off of the unrequited love of the other. In a dark turn on the Arthurian legend, Guinevere is secretly a vampire or succubus who preys upon the enthralled king while her dark knight Lancelot does her bidding, turning the shining kingdom into a growing blight of darkness and despair.



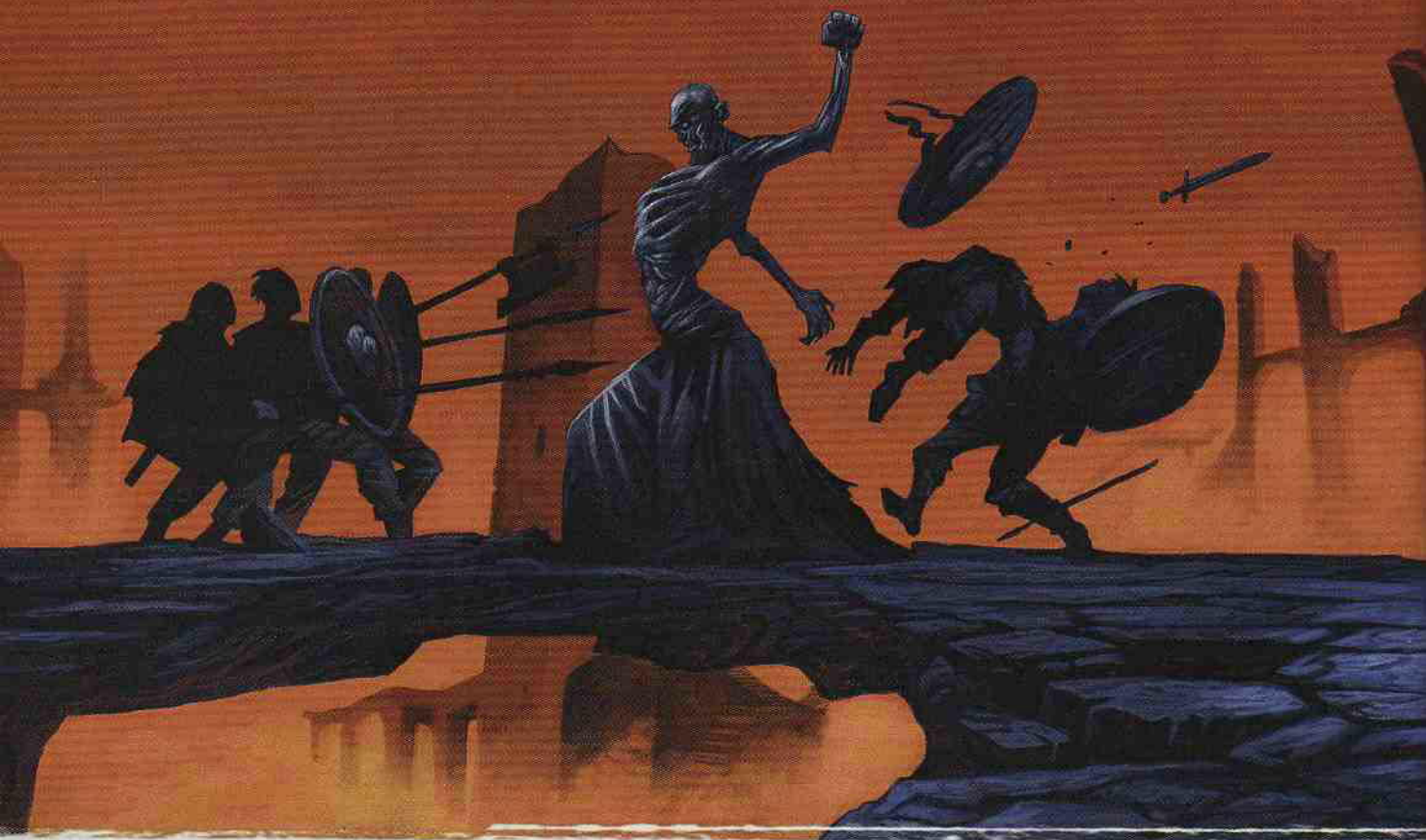
## About the Author

**Matthew Sernett** has been a designer of 4th Edition, the Editor-in-chief of *Dragon Magazine*, a pizza cook, an onion packer, and an assembly line worker in a spring factory. In 1999, while working for *Men's Health*

Magazine, he narrowly avoided being a wardrobe tracker in the male fashion industry. He feels very fortunate to now be employed as a creative designer for Gleemax.

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## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# DEVOURER

*"Hunger is misery; a full stomach is trouble."*

—Haitian Proverb

Souls are the root of all life. Whether mortal laborer, profane lich, or serene astral deva, nearly all creatures of the multiverse possess this animating spark. All, except devourers. Lacking such vital animus, these undead scour the planes, glutting their impossible hunger in an endless blasphemy against all the laws of existence.

### HISTORY OF THE DEVOURER

Githyanki life ends in one of three ways: death in combat, execution by mandate of cruel racial laws, or sacrifice to Vlaakith, their dreaded Lich-Queen. Beyond service and glory in battle, there is little future for the servants of the

githyanki empire. Even the most successful and skilled must eventually submit to the "ultimate honor," their souls consumed by the Lich-Queen to fuel her profane immortality. Such is the way of the githyanki—a bleak, hopeless march to glories few survive to see. Those who rebel are hunted with the utmost prejudice.

In the sixth century of the last Vlaakith's rule, a cunning warlock named Xinfyrit rose through the ranks of the Lich-Queen's legions. The intense warlord became a hero to his people, leading his armies to victory after hollow victory at the Lich-Queen's whimsy. Doves of sycophants flocked to the warlock, and any who survived his rigorous testing gained places as his apprentices. Buying his armies' loyalties with the spoils of conquered worlds and promises of eternal glory, Xinfyrit's legions became more akin to cults of devoted followers. Yet the



ambitious general had no care for his supporters nor his race's great empire, only for personal power and complete control—goals directly impeded by the continued existence of the Lich-Queen herself. Thus, subtly, Xinfyrit's popularity became the seeds of rebellion.

Yet Vlaakith was not blind, and the ageless queen was intimate with the ways of deception and rule. Upon returning to Tu'narath after the purging of a world-spanning illithid enclave, Xinfyrit was publicly beckoned to the Lich-Queen's palace, Susurrus, to receive the Great Reward, the consumption of his very soul—a high honor. Graciously accepting, the general and an escort of his finest apprentices and knights entered the Palace of Whispers, intent on murdering the githyanki queen in a bloody coup. Just as Vlaakith expected.

The resulting battle devastated Xinfyrit's forces, and only by sacrificing the vast majority of his troops did the warlock and his closest apprentices manage to escape to the depths of the

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEVOURER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (religion) check as it relates to devourers. A Knowledge (the planes) check might reveal the same information, but the check DCs are always 5 higher. Information about devourers is most likely to come from a planar scholar, loremaster, or githyanki. The devourer appears on page 58 of the *Monster Manual*.

### Knowledge (religion)

DC	Result
21	The creature you face is a devourer, a powerful undead being from another plane.
26	Devourers can drain life force from a distance and can trap and consume a creature's very soul. This soul energy fuels a variety of death-related magical abilities.
31	Devourers are resistant to magic and, when bearing an imprisoned soul, are immune to numerous magical effects.
36	A devourer can only consume one soul at a time. As long as a figure appears within its ribs, it won't try to devour another. If no such figure is visible, it doubtlessly hungers for a new soul to feast upon.

Astral Plane, pursued by the Lich-Queen's most zealous champions. The renegades' flight took them far and lasted six grim years, but finally they were captured by Vlaakith's agents, their souls stripped and shackled within black gems, their bodies left

to drift in the far-flung reaches of the Astral Plane.

Xinfyrit's rebellion did not end so quietly, though. Eventually, the husk of the githyanki rebel drifted near a color pool of fathomless onyx. Infused by astral winds and emanations from

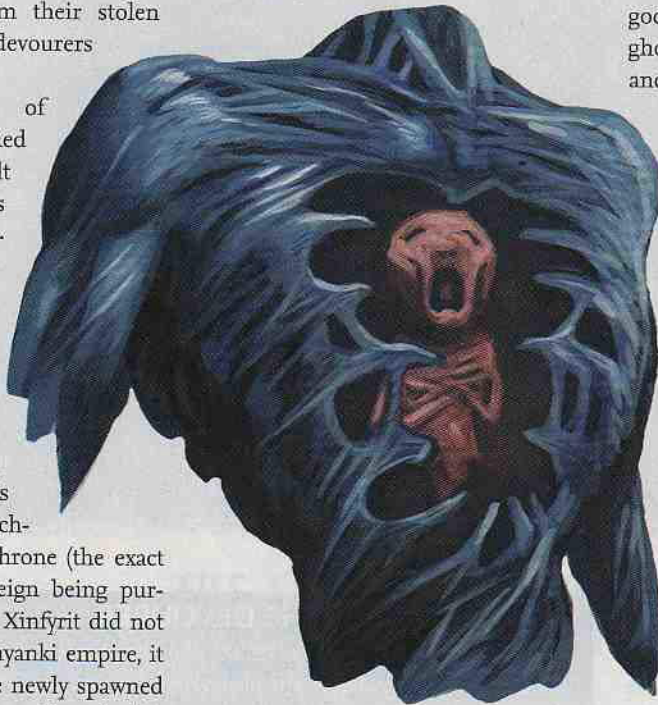
the Negative Energy Plane, Xinfyrit's soulless, plane-warped form reanimated with full memory of his death and a hungry emptiness unlike any he had ever known. Not fully understanding what had happened, the deathless warlock resurrected his apprentices in the aura of the black color pool and, together, they plotted their revenge and an attempt to reclaim their stolen souls. Thus, the first devourers were born.

Untold numbers of shocked githyanki died in the devourers' assault on Susurrus, their souls fueling newly discovered and even greater powers among the undead. In the end, Vlaakith and Xinfyrit did battle over the corpses of their followers. It is unknown who fell, but during this decade the current Lich-Queen took a vacant throne (the exact span of a Vlaakith's reign being purposefully obscured). As Xinfyrit did not take control of the githyanki empire, it seems unlikely that the newly spawned devourer was victorious, though his fate remains unknown even to this day. What is known is that several of Xinfyrit's devourer apprentices escaped their second attack on the Lich-Queen without their souls, fleeing into the Astral Plane, the Ethereal Plane, and beyond. Though his coup failed, Xinfyrit's rebellion brought a dreadful realization to the githyanki race, a newly-realized choice in regards to death: that their lives can end in either pain or in horror.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DEVOURER

As undead creatures, devourers do not have a functional physiology and have no place within the natural environment. Although they do not age, sleep, or reproduce, they do hunger. Devourers are literally soulless husks motivated by the hate-filled echoes of their living memories. All devourers seek to reunite with their lost souls, whether that essence be held prisoner somewhere

or has departed to the Outer Planes. To fuel their hunt, and any of countless insidious schemes they might concoct to regain their essences, devourers temporarily sate their infamous hunger with the stolen souls of other creatures. Such souls are consumed, digested, and ultimately annihilated, denying their victim any form of afterlife.



Should a devourer ever regain its soul or attain proof positive assurance that its soul has been destroyed, it is unknown what might occur. Many scholars posit that, if a devourer frees its captured soul, the abomination would simply die, the soul departing to the proper Outer Planar realm. Others, though, contest that any creature tenacious enough to cling to existence—even without a soul—would not be content to pass on and, upon completing or finding its quest fruitless, would likely succumb to madness, becoming an even greater terror upon the planes.

Although the first devourers were doubtlessly spawned of the githyanki race, devourers of other races have likely formed. The method by which devourers are created remains unclear but seems to rely upon three elements:

a body killed by the draining of its soul, energies from the Negative Energy Plane, and a third mysterious animating force. As the first devourers animated on the Astral Plane, some source there unquestionably provides the requisite vim, perhaps the astral winds, influences of countless planar energies, or the echoing memories of the dead gods floating in the astral depths. The ghostly energies of the Ethereal Plane and sinister emanations of the Plane of Shadow both also make those transitive planes fertile grounds for the creation of devourers. These strange energies cause a variety of unusual alterations in a devourer's physical (and possibly mental) state—including hastened desiccation, the visible collapsing of the corpse's chest cavity, and an increase in size.

Despite the unusual nature of some of the requirements necessary for a devourer's animation, the most important is a body with a fundamental will to survive, even beyond the removal of its soul. As these terrible corpses fuel their selfish hunts with the destruction of other living souls, only bodies inspired by the thoughts and willpower of the most evil individuals arise as devourers. Hypothetically, a devourer could also arise from a body whose soul was removed and has since passed onto the Outer Planes. Such a departed soul might be wholly unaware of the reanimation of its body. Few things are more terrifying than the prospect of a soul that's passed on to its eternal reward being hunted by its endlessly hungering corpse.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DEVOURER

To understand devourers, one must understand their hunger. As the creatures possess no souls, they are victimized by a yearning perhaps no other creature in existence understands. They are incomplete, and the very laws of existence implant their unnatural animate forms with the fundamental

## DEVOURER PLOTS

Devourers are insidious in their methods and plots to regain their lost souls.

**To Consume a God:** Rakis-Ka has come to the ruins of an ancient aboleth city, Golismorga, hoping to gain increased insight and power by feasting upon the essences of one of the aquatic race's ancient, unfathomable gods known as the Elder Evils (see "The Lightless Depths," in *DUNGEON* #144).

**Corruptor:** A bargain with a dark religion left Radraz'im the guardian of an unholy relic known as the *cauldron of corruption* (see "Tears for Twilight Hollow," in *DUNGEON* #90). The devourer was told the exact location of his soul but is magically compelled to guard the cauldron for 10,000 years or until it has spawned ten thousand undead. Thus, he tempts any creature who discovers the cauldron to raise legions of undead servants—not mentioning his power to control such horrors.

**Soullessness:** An ancient, abandoned githyanki fortress is rumored to be a lost storehouse of imprisoned souls and is haunted by undead githyanki called *kr'y'izoth*, the result of necromantic experiments by the Lich-Queen herself (see "The Lich Queen's Beloved," in *DUNGEON* #100).

What's not known is that the devourer Drazramml is the one spreading these rumors, intent on interrogating and consuming any creature attracted by such tales. Although the other resident undead are free willed, the devourer has subjugated them into working for it.

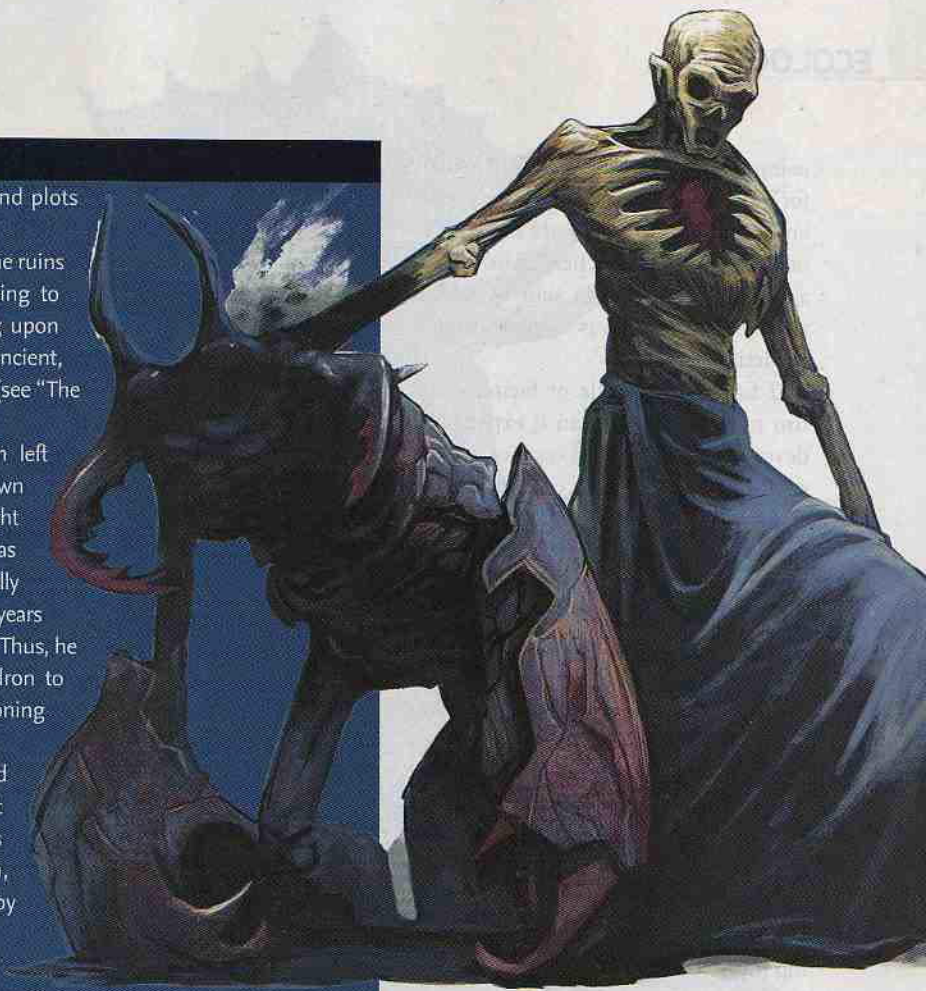
**Undead Revenge:** The devourer Omaz'vril has awakened a legion of undead heretics and compelled them to attack a nearby temple. As his undead warriors deal with the temple's faithful, the devourer scours the catacombs below, seeking to corrupt a relic capable of summoning back the souls of the departed.

drive to correct the grievous wrong. Thus, devourers temporarily sate this yearning with stolen souls. While a devourer suffers no perceivable hindrance for not having a trapped essence, the longer one goes without a soul to feed on the greater its sensation of hunger grows. A devourer is driven to feed within hours of losing a trapped essence and is nearly mad with hunger in a matter of days. Although smart enough to avoid suicidal efforts to garner food, a starving devourer is increasingly willing to take risks for a worthwhile soul to devour. While they can burn the essence of simple beasts or even other undead, only the "taste" of thinking, living creatures can sate their unliving hunger for long.

As most devourers actively scour the planes for their lost souls, these undead are nomadic hunters, most often encountered on the Transitive Planes as they roam from world to world. When encountered on the Material Plane, they are most commonly hunting for souls, searching for clues as to their souls' whereabouts, or in the midst of some plot to reveal their essences' locations. Often being quite intelligent, devourers are able to see the benefits of allying with living creatures. Powerful clerics, sorcerers, and wizards, especially those with potent divination magic or the ability to question deities, prove most helpful to devourers, as such magic-users might aid in locating their souls. Alliances with mortal

spellcasters rarely end well, however, as impatient and unstable devourers are quick to let their anger and hunger take hold at the slightest delay or failure. As such, devourers are most comfortable in the presence of outsiders and other undead, creatures whose souls are fundamentally different from those for which they hunger. Some githzerai have come to surprisingly beneficial agreements with the eldest devourers, possibly the apprentices of Xinfyrit's rebellion. These monks employ devourers as guardians of monasteries in Limbo, feeding the undead horrors a steady stream of souls from captured githyanki as they meditatively search for the creatures' lost essences.

Even when temporarily taking up residence somewhere, devourers do not surround themselves with symbols of death. Indeed, those seeking them are less likely to find devourers in a crypt than a forest. Devourers want to be where the living are, and thus they avoid places shunned by their meals. They most often lair near communities or major trade routes, luring mortals to secluded places



using their *suggestion* ability. Fortunately for all living creatures, though, devourers are not gluttons and are driven ever onward by their searches. Thus, unless a devourer believes its soul is hidden nearby, its incursion is likely short and its victims few.

If forced into battle or facing a victim more powerful than it expected, a devourer with a trapped essence uses its spell-like abilities freely, confident it can trap a new essence as soon as the current one is expended. In fact, consuming its current essence quickly makes its most powerful attack—trap essence—available sooner. If it has time to prepare, a devourer casts enough spell-like abilities to leave its trapped essence nearly depleted. It can use its *spectral hand* ability to deliver both a touch attack, such as *ghoul touch*, and its own energy drain, as a single attack. Once a foe has been energy drained several times the devourer moves on to a new target unless it needs to feed. A devourer facing numerous armored opponents tries to catch as many as it can in the area of its *confusion* ability, hoping to reduce their effectiveness. In the aftermath, a devourer can “smell” the most powerful soul, burning any essence already trapped for a more savory meal.

### DEVOURER ALLIES

Typically, devourers have no treasure because they have no lairs nor do they need to linger in one place for long. Any treasure a devourer gathers from its victims is quickly used to pay off vile creatures summoned with its *lesser planar ally* spell-like ability. Although devourers spend no experience points when using this ability, they must take 10 minutes to use it and pay their summoned ally for services as outlined in the spell description. Obviously, a devourer rarely has a spare 10 minutes during a combat to call for help, but one planning an attack or knowing it's being hunted is a different matter. A devourer able to gather as much treasure as a monster of its CR typically carries could pay one 6 HD planar ally to serve in a series of raids taking up to 12 days or three 5 HD planar allies to serve for a task taking up to 11 hours.

For multi-day attacks devourers typically favor a bearded devil (6 HD) to serve as a bodyguard and shock trooper, with the devil entering a battle frenzy to hold stronger foes at bay while the devourer consumes a weaker target. A devourer seeking to infiltrate a town might summon a succubus to gather information for it or lure victims from the relative safety of civilization. Alternatively, a devourer simply needing muscle for a single raid most often summons three xill for 11 hours. While the xill aren't as dangerous in combat as the devourer itself, their ability to make four attacks a round, paralyze, and planewalk allows them to deal with numerous lesser foes (or gang up on one powerful enemy), freeing the devourer to focus on one victim.

Devourers also often use other undead as allies, especially ghosts and wraiths. They work well with ghosts, as those undead only want to feed on the dead and devourers feed on the living. Should doing so suit their plans, devourers might establish control over packs of lesser undead with *control undead*. More powerful beings sometime employ devourers to act as commanders of lesser undead.

Devourers rarely ally with one another, unless the same event spawned them both. Otherwise, their goals prove too divergent to weather a competitor with the same hunger.

### ALTERNATIVE DEVOURER ORIGINS

Little enough is known about devourers that a DM could give them origins more appropriate to a specific campaign. A few possible optional origins are outlined below.

**Missing Mortality:** The transition from life to lichdom is fraught with peril. A powerful spellcaster seeking to make the transformation into undeath unleashes potent magical forces as he attempts to transition his soul to a phylactery. Should he lose control of these forces, the soul-laden phylactery might be flung to some random corner of the multiverse, cursing the spellcaster to an existence as a devourer.

**Ravenous Genesis:** Devourers are created when a barghest is killed by ghoulish fever contracted from a ghast. The devourer inherits the hunger of both creatures, although it remembers little of its former life.

**Soul Reapers:** A few senior clerics of Nerull have access to a ritual that can turn anyone who died of starvation into a devourer, although they refer to these undead as soul reapers. The ritual cannot be performed on the Material Plane, resulting in devourers being native to the Astral and Ethereal Planes.

### ADVANCED DEVOURER

Shivra of the gish caste was one of Xinfyrit's first apprentices, a sorcerer of great skill but possessed of a deep-rooted fear of dying. Hoping to free herself from the Lich-Queen's inevitably fatal edicts, the githyanki spellcaster stood with her master when he attempted to overthrow Vlaakith, fled with him to escape the tyrant's wrath, and ultimately died by his side. When Xinfyrit and his minions returned to Susurrus as devourers, it was Shivra's mission to locate and confiscate the stolen souls of the newly spawned devourers. Before their assault was turned back by the Lich-Queen's forces, Shivra discovered that the Lich-Queen had not consumed their souls, but rather had sent the black gems to some hidden githyanki holding on a back-water Material-Planar world. Escaping the Palace of Whispers with this information, the devourer now hunts the planes seeking more clues, both to the location of her soul and regarding the survival of her master, Xinfyrit.

**SHIVRA** CR 15  
 Always NE Huge extraplanar undead  
**Init** +3; **Senses** Listen +28, Spot +28; darkvision 90 ft.  
**Languages** Common  


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**AC** 33, touch 7, flat-footed 33  
 (–1 Dex, –2 size, +7 armor, +19 natural)  
**hp** 162 (25 HD)  
**Immune** spell deflection, undead immunities  
**SR** 26  
**Fort** +8, **Ref** +9, **Will** +17

**Speed** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** 2 claws +24 each (2d6+13 and energy drain)

**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

**Base Atk** +12; **Grp** +33

**Atk Options** Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm

**Spell-Like Abilities\*** (CL 22nd; ranged touch +9):

At will—*confusion* (DC 18), *control undead* (DC 21), *ghoul touch* (DC 15), *lesser planar ally*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *spectral hand*, *suggestion* (DC 17), *true seeing*

\* Expend one level of trapped essence per 5 spell-like abilities used

**Abilities** Str 36, Dex 8, Con —, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 18

**Feats** Ability Focus (trap essence), Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (claw)

**Skills** Climb +28, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +23, Hide -9, Jump +28, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +28, Move Silently +14, Search +29, Spot +25, Use Magic Device +29

**Possessions** *wrappings of armor* +5 (as *bracers of armor* +5), *ring of blinking*, *ring of force shield*

**Energy Drain (Su)** Living creatures hit by Shivra's claw attack or *spectral hand* ability gain one negative level. The DC is 26 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based.


**Trap Essence (Su)** Shivra can consume an enemy's life essence. To do so, she must forgo her normal melee attacks and make a trap essence attack. This requires a normal attack roll but deals no damage. The affected creature must succeed at a DC 28 Fortitude save or die immediately. The save DC is Charisma-based.

A slain creature's essence is trapped within Shivra's ribs, and the figure takes on that victim's features. The trapped essence cannot be raised or resurrected, but a *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish* spell frees it, as does destroying Shivra. Shivra can only hold one essence at a time.



The trapped essence provides Shivra with enough power to use five spell-like abilities for each Hit Die or level of the trapped creature. As this energy is expended, the twisted soul fades away until it evaporates completely. The trapped essence gains one negative level for every five times Shivra uses one of her spell-like abilities. When the essence's number of negative levels equals the creature's total Hit Dice or level, the essence is destroyed. If an essence is freed, the restored creature must succeed on a DC 28 Fortitude save for each negative level or lose that level permanently.

**Spell-Like Abilities** At the start of any encounter, the trapped essence within Shivra is assumed to have 5d4+3 levels.

**Spell Deflection (Su)** The trapped essence provides a measure of magical protection. If any of the following spells are cast at Shivra and overcome her spell resistance, they affect the imprisoned essence instead: *banishment*, *chaos hammer*, *confusion*, *crushing despair*, *detect thoughts*, *dispel evil*, *dominate person*, *fear*, *geas/quest*, *holy word*, *hypnosis*, *imprisonment*, *magic jar*, *maze*, *suggestion*, *trap the soul*, or any form of charm or compulsion. In many cases, this deflection effectively neutralizes the spell. Some of these effects might eliminate the trapped essence, depriving Shivra of her spell-like abilities until she can consume another victim. 

*“And naught will be left save shattered thrones with no rulers.  
But the dead dragons shall rule the world entire...”*

—From Maglas’s *The Chronicles of Years to Come*  
as translated by Sammaster the Mad, circa 887 DR



# The Ecology of the DRACOLICH

Who does not fear the great unknown that is the night, when spectral winds carry strange sounds from the darkness? That time when dread clutches the stomach and fear tingles along the spine of even the most stout-hearted; where every mundane shadow becomes a sinister, alien visitor. Night terrors have haunted the living since time began, and with good reason, for many imagined fears are all too real. None, though, commands the dark of midnight skies and abyssal caverns with the horror and the authority of the immortal night dragon—the dracolich. The most powerful creatures of nature and magic transformed into ever-living, undead monstrosities, they are threats to all who fall under their sway and few can flee beyond their skeletal claws.

## HISTORY OF THE DRACOLICH

Many sages and magical practitioners—“experts” in the realm of dragons—claim that Falazure the Night Dragon created the first dracoliches. There might be some truth to this, considering that “night dragon” is a commonly accepted term when referring to a dracolich. As wholly unnatural, created beings, however, a common heritage is hard to trace. The origins of dracoliches are as varied as the locales in which they appear, whether they come about through the machinations of madmen and demented cults or by dragons instigating the unnatural process through their own arrogance and naked ambition.



The earliest known dracolich, the infamous Dragotha, was created from the body of one of Tiamat's favored consorts. The god of undeath, Kyuss, granted him unlife in exchange for his eternal servitude. Since then, mortal adepts have developed dim echoes of Kyuss' magics in the form of a powerful ritual accompanied by the consumption of a foul magical concoction—part poison to slay the imbiber and part elixir to bring about the cold existence of undeath—called The Damnable Libation, or more simply, *dracolich brew*.

One other commonality in the origins of dracoliches is their absolute reliance on a magical phylactery in which to store their souls. In this they parallel their humanoid counterpart in undeath, the lich. No one is sure how they came to follow this path and no other form of undead is so reliant upon such a receptacle—except perhaps vampires' connections to their coffins. Perhaps dracoliches rely upon these essential repositories for their high invulnerability, although

### KNOWLEDGE OF DRACOLICHES

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (religion) check regarding dracoliches. Those who study the magic of necromancy, dragons, and the most ancient of occult tomes might possess this information. A Knowledge (arcana) check can still reveal information about the type of dragon a dracolich was in life.

Knowledge (religion)	
DC	Result
15	A dracolich is a fearsome foe combining all the powerful abilities a dragon enjoyed in life with those granted by an undead existence. As skeletal beings, they are most vulnerable to bludgeoning weapons.
20	Dracoliches are formed when a dragon drinks a foul concoction called <i>dracolich brew</i> and then partakes in a vile ritual of reanimation. The complex ritual requires the cooperation of clerics and wizards in addition to the dragon.
25	Like liches, dracoliches hide their life force in phylacteries. Only if the phylactery is found and destroyed can a dracolich be permanently slain.
30	Dracoliches are masters of the dead, possessing paralyzing abilities and mastery over lesser undead creatures. A slain dracolich can possess the body of any draconic corpse within a short distance of its phylactery.
35	When inhabiting a body other than its own, a dracolich spends a few days as a weakened proto-dracolich. If the proto-dracolich can be found during this time it is more easily destroyed and might serve as a clue to the hiding place of its phylactery.

they trade it for extreme vulnerability at the hands of anyone who should locate their soul-storing phylactery. Perhaps this crucial vulnerability

holds some symbolic significance, such as being a representation of the Hades Pyxis, the receptacle of Falazure hidden somewhere within the

## THE FIRST DRACOLICH

While the dracolich as a monster was introduced in 1986 with *DRAGON* #110 and Ed Greenwood's article "The Cult of the Dragon," this was not the first appearance of an undead dragon in D&D. Some 7 years earlier, with 1979's *White Plume Mountain*, an arrow pointing off the map of the mountain's environs bore a sketch of a fearsome skeletal dragon and the note, "Beyond to the lair of Dragotha, the undead dragon, where fabulous riches and hideous death await." In June 1988, this note led to William Simpson's article in *DRAGON* #134, "Lords & Legends," which presented stats for Dragotha, the one-time consort of Tiamat and a unique undead menace. Dragotha rears his deathless skull again as part of the Age of Worms Adventure Path, coincidentally in *DUNGEON* #134, with the adventure "Into the Wormcrawl Fissure."



shadowed plains of the Gray Waste and said to hold the accumulated knowledge of all dead dragons.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACOLICH

Dracoliches have no metabolism and therefore no need to eat. Old habits die hard, however, and the desire and racial hunger to consume lesser creatures might still exist. Some dracoliches still carry out the function of devouring prey, but the flesh simply falls through their rotting skeletal forms, leaving mountains of mangled corpses. Sometimes, a dracolich eats foes simply out of malice or to feed parasites that cling to its remaining flesh. A dracolich is aware that its maw makes for a fearsome weapon—what better way to make an example out of an enemy than consume him before his friends' eyes? In all other physiological aspects dracoliches follow the same path as liches, having no need to eat nor having any inescapable cravings or dependency on diets. Dracoliches are magically created and, therefore, have no ability to propagate.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACOLICH

Consider a creature that lives almost forever agreeing to its own excruciating

murder to assure complete immortality. Could it be that all dragons, tortured by the knowledge of their own transience, face this death gladly? Could their near endlessness be a living curse; the very nearness of immortality being a madness that mortal minds cannot conceive? Dare they trust those who promise them immortality in the final moments before their deaths?

Some believe that a dracolich must, by necessity, be insane: a dragon driven by such insatiable need and ego that it cannot perceive its own death and is willing to go to any lengths to avoid it—including the tortuous ritual of death followed by an appalling undead rebirth. Others say that lichdom is something most dragons some day strive for, as the thought of their own mortality is unbearable to such narcissistic creatures. Perhaps they are to be pitied—creatures so unable to face rest that they willingly go to any lengths to avoid it, so fuelled by greed and desire that they cannot conceive of such hungers ending. Avoiding death becomes an obsession, a need so great that it causes them to face their own agonizing poisoning to achieve it.

Dracoliches, as creatures of great intelligence, are consumed by needs and quests, driven by the knowledge

that one day they will succeed in all their goals and face the ultimate terror of torpidity. They are thus creatures of great distraction, able to juggle a thousand plots at any time, almost needing to do so. They are also, therefore, many things to many people: a tyrant ruling a kingdom, a benefactor to sages engaged in unfathomable studies, a fearsome battle lord conquering vast territories, and a terrible legend. Uniquely driven, dracoliches are terrible creatures indeed, sometimes seemingly mad in their goals and desires—which are almost as endless as their own lives.

When two or more of these ferocious, proud, and terrible creatures meet, such engagements frequently end in one's destruction. A dracolich is a terrifying foe, and other dracoliches rightly avoid their own kind for fear of being matched. As such, they use their ancient cunning to lure others to do their dirty work for them, spreading rumors of boundless treasure along with their opponents' possible weaknesses, all the while doubling and redoubling their already obsessively thorough defenses.

### PHYLACTERIES

The one true weakness of a dracolich is its phylactery. As the destruction of this relic spells calamity for its draconic owner, a dracolich obsesses about its phylactery and weaves plots of astonishing complexity around its whereabouts. The destruction of a kingdom or loss of a hoard means nothing to the dracolich compared to the safety of its precious soul.

Dracoliches thus devise an amazing array of lies and ruses, rumors, false leads, and fakes to prevent their true phylacteries from falling into the wrong hands. Alternatively, some dracoliches prefer to keep their phylacteries with them—cunningly hidden beneath the strongest metals, or held within their form—sometimes melded to appear like parts of their own skeletal bodies. Other dracoliches prefer more obvious approaches, like horrendously trapped dungeons guarded by the toughest



monsters. Some prefer the double bluff approach—hiding their phylacteries in places so obvious that no one would think to find them—wreathed beneath protection spells within a cathedral, for example, or perhaps built into the foundations of some huge civic building in the center of a city.

Phylacteries are as unique as the dracolich to which they belong; examples include sheets of paper-thin iron covered in sigils and bizarre illustrations, a length of horn from some impossible creature woven into an incredible knot of rune-inlaid ivory, or a stone puzzle-box with a hundred different possible shapes. Regardless of how a phylactery looks, most possesses the same statistics—a Tiny object with 40 hp, hardness 20, a break DC of 40, and immunity or resistance to a variety of energies, often related to the color the dracolich possessed in life. If the phylactery is destroyed, the dracolich suffers no physical harm but it is unable to create a new phylactery. Thus, if it is slain, its death is permanent. (More on dracolich

phylacteries can be found on page 120 of the *Draconomicon*.)

### EXAMPLE DRACOLICHES

No two dracoliches are alike, either physically or mentally, and each individual creature makes a special lair with unique followers, and shaped by its motives and desires. In creating lairs for dracoliches, bear in mind that such places are littered with so many potential escape routes that reaching their residents at all could be a task worthy of several adventures. Such lairs are guarded not only by the dracolich but by the surrounding terrain and devout followers both secret and overt.

### THE BREATHER OF LOCUSTS

At the heart of the rainforest lies a steep hill strangled by twisting jungle boughs. This hill is alive: a brooding draconic terror that merely appears to be held amid the overgrowth. Yellow bones and decaying green flesh fester in the vines—a rotting olive spider in

the heart of its web, a living building of bone, decay, and hate. Vast canvases of skin flap from the frame, like sails on some huge vessel, and ribs like towers rise sharply upward to a gablelike back and a great green head. Two huge blackened sockets stand like caves at the top of this terrible form, and from within them burns a malicious green fire.

The Breather of Locusts is an evolved great wyrm green dracolich (see *Libris Mortis*) capable of vomiting from its rotting stomach huge plagues of bloodfiend locusts (10 swarms at a time). Of almost unfathomable age, it dwells in the legendary Twilight Mires, part of a great rainforest from where it plans, occasionally sending its children—swarms of bloodfiend locusts or hullathoin (both from the *Fiend Folio*)—into the world to do its bidding.

The Twilight Mires are a nightmare land of bottomless, sucking pools, of floating bogs where whole horizons seem to sway like bloated skins, of rivers that twist like mazes through deep canyons, and twisted rainforests filled

## DRACOLICHES IN FAERÛN

In Faerûn, the first known dracoliches appeared nearly 500 years ago through the machinations of Sammaster First-Speaker—mad archmage, former Chosen of Mystara, and founder of the Cult of the Dragon. While studying an ancient work of the seer Maglas, Sammaster mistranslated a key passage that led him to believe he alone had uncovered the destiny of Faerûn—to be ruled by undead dragons. As a result of this and the influence of one Algashon Nathaire, Sammaster devised the means to create dracoliches. Virtually every dracolich in Faerûn has some connection to the cult. All known dracoliches were originally “Sacred Ones” created by the cult and either serve a cult cell, lead a cult sect, or have rebelled and now plot their own schemes outside the scope of the cult’s activities (often involving the destruction of the cult that created and tried to dominate them).

A recent development in the continual plotting of the Cult of the Dragon involves the Grail of Shargrailar, a cup fashioned from one of the horns of the first dracolich created by Sammaster and the mightiest dracolich to ever walk the face of Faerûn. It is believed that somehow some part of that great night dragon lives on in the cup that bears his name, and the cult seeks to use the jeweled goblet as a phylactery for a new dracolich (preferably Nartheling, the ancient fang dragon that dwells atop Umbergoth in eastern Aglarond). It is believed that such a dracolich will possess the animating spirit of Shargrailar, restoring the most fearsome of all dracoliches to once again terrorize the lands. The leader in this scheme is the necromancer Winn Kardzen of Glarondar (CE male half-elf necromancer 7). Unfortunately, his plans have hit a snag, as the fabled grail has disappeared somewhere in the Yuirwood.

The 1998 release, *Cult of the Dragon*, details more of the cult’s history and activities, as well as the ongoing plots of numerous dracoliches currently active across the Realms.

with ancient trees that weep in the dark. In the deepest quicksand abyss of this place the Breather of Locusts hides his phylactery, a sphere of fused animal skulls. Nothing else lives in the forest, its floor of fallen leaves hiding uncountable numbers of bones.

### SIN FEASTER

Sin Feaster—the LychSpider, Slayer of Harvests, the Nightmare that Watches and Waits—dwells in an abandoned cathedral on the edges of a cliff overlooking the ruins of a city the dracolich destroyed on a whim. The Feaster, a corrupted wyrm black dragon dracolich (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*), has made an alliance with the followers of Lolth and claims to be a consort of the Spider Queen herself. Its ruinous cathedral is choked with vast webs, with the dracolich lair in the spire itself, hundreds of feet up, where it watches and broods over its phylactery, an iron sphere that sits at the top of the spire. Driders and spiders live

in vast numbers in the dreadful city of webs, making it a nightmare of arachnid horrors. The spiders have spread their influence over the rocky hills and deep valleys, giving the region its name: the Ill-Woven Vales.

### AURGLOROASA

Within the lost dwarven city of Thunderhome—a realm she personally destroyed—the shadow dragon dracolich Aurgloroasa scrys all those she calls foes. Vain and powerful, Aurgloroasa is an obsessive schemer and calculating adversary—traits exemplified by her

fixation with collecting every scale she has ever lost and fusing each brittle obsidian shard back onto her undead form, partially disguising her undead nature. Through her subtle manipulations from deep within the mountain, Aurgloroasa controls a vast network of worshipful agents, dictating events through them and from the shadows that cloak her every movement. The poisoned whispers she hisses from the darkness and her mastery of shadows have led her to be known as the Sibilant Shade.

### AURGLOROASA CR 23

Female ancient shadow dragon dracolich

CE Huge undead

*Draconomicon* 146 and 191

**Init** +2; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft.; Listen +31, Spot +29

**Aura** frightful presence (300 ft., Will DC 35)

**Language** Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarf, Elven, Gnome, Goblin, Infernal, Terran, Undercommon

**AC** 52, touch 8, flat-footed 52

**hp** 387 (31 HD); **DR** 15/magic and 5/bludgeoning

**Immune** cold, electricity, energy drain, paralysis, polymorph, sleep; undead traits

**SR** 33

**Fort** +22,



Ref +19, Will +26

Spd 80 ft. (6 squares), 150 ft. fly (poor)

**Melee** bite +40 (2d8+10 plus 1d6 cold plus paralysis) and  
2 claws +37 (2d6+5 plus 1d6 cold plus paralysis) and  
2 wings +37 (1d8+5 plus 1d6 cold plus paralysis) and  
tail slap +37 (2d8+12 plus 1d6 cold plus paralysis)

**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

**Base Atk** +31; **Grp** +49

**Special Actions** breath weapon (50-foot cone, 6 negative levels, DC 37), paralyzing gaze

**Spells Known** (CL 13th, +29 ranged touch)  
6th (5/day)—*create undead*, *disintegrate* (DC 26)

5th (8/day)—*magic jar* (DC 27), *mind fog*, *persistent image* (DC 25)

4th (8/day)—*bestow curse* (DC 26), *crushing despair* (DC 24), *summon monster IV*, *unholy blight* (DC 24)

3rd (16/day)—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *dispel magic*, *fireball* (DC 23), *ray of exhaustion* (DC 25)

2nd (8/day)—*alter self*, *blindness/deafness* (DC 24), *darkness*, *desecrate*, *web* (DC 22)

1st (9/day)—*chill touch* (DC 23), *magic missile*, *obscuring mist*, *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 23), *shield*

0 (6/day)—*arcane mark*, *dancing lights*, *daze* (DC 20), *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *message*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 13th)

3/day—*mirror image*, *nondetection*

2/day—*dimension door*

1/day—*shadow walk*

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 15th)

1/3 days—*control undead*

**Abilities** Str 31, Dex 10, Con —, Int 28, Wis 28, Cha 31

**SQ** invulnerability, shadow blend

**Feats** Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Hover, Improve Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack, Quicken Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (necromancy), Weapon Focus (bite)

**Skills** Appraise +24, Bluff +44, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +35, Gather Information +40, Hide +30, Intimidate +44, Knowledge (arcana

## DRACOLICHES IN EBERRON

Who knows what intrigues work within the mysterious land of Argonessen? Some historians claim to have found evidence implying that some dragons allied themselves with the forces of Khyber during the Age of Demons, the cost of their allegiance being a dark gift of immortality—the secrets of creating dracoliches. Some wonder if the draconic stewards of this knowledge still secretly create undead dragons for their own unfathomable purposes. Perhaps they seek to retain the wisdom of their elders like the elves of Aerenal, or possibly an army of undead dragons now bides its immortal time deep within the draconic continent.

As an aside, the Keeper, one of the Dark Six, also takes the form of a skeletal dragon, and makes his lair in the Demon Wastes.

+39, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +34, Knowledge (history) +34, Knowledge (local) +24, Knowledge (nature) +24, Knowledge (religion) +43, Knowledge (the planes) +43, Listen +31, Move Silently +35, Sense Motive +39, Spellcraft +43, Spot +29

**Possessions** *bracers of armor* +8, *crystal ball with true seeing*, *darkskull*, *gem of seeing*, *ring of wizardry III*, *wand of gentle repose* (44 charges)

**Breath Weapon (Su)** Aurgloroasa's breath weapon is a 50-foot cone of billowing smoky shadows. Those affected by this breath attack gain 6 negative levels. Those who make a successful DC 37 Reflex save gain only 3 negative levels. Removing a negative level requires a DC 37 Fortitude save 24 hours later (see the rules for energy drain on page 308 of the *Monster Manual*).

**Paralyzing Gaze (Su)** Aurgloroasa's gaze can paralyze victims within 40 feet who fail a DC 35 Fortitude save. If the saving throw is successful, the victim is forever immune to her gaze. If it fails, the victim is paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Paralyzing Touch (Su)** Any creature struck by one of Aurgloroasa's physical attacks must make a DC 35 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Invulnerability** If Aurgloroasa is slain, her spirit immediately returns to her phylactery, a single unremarkable onyx gem she hides in plain sight upon a towering obsidian pillar within her lair. If no dragon-type corpse lies within 90 feet for her spirit to possess, the dracolich is trapped within her phylactery

until such a time—if ever—that a corpse becomes available. If her phylactery is destroyed while it contains the dracolich's spirit and a suitable corpse is not within range, Aurgloroasa is permanently slain. Likewise, she is unable to possess the corpses of other dragons if her phylactery is destroyed.

**Shadow Blend (Su)** In any condition of illumination other than full daylight, Aurgloroasa can disappear into the shadows, giving her total concealment. Artificial illumination, even a *light* or *continual flame* spell, does not negate this ability. A *daylight* spell, however, does.

### BECOMING A DRACOLICH

Although the *dracolich brew* and accompanying ritual is by far the most common method of becoming a dracolich (if such a thing can be considered common), there are other, even less-known, paths to this form of immortality.

**The Well of Dragons:** Hidden in an ancient caldera deep within a range of violently active volcanic spires, the Well of Dragons is difficult to reach even by draconic standards. This stagnant lake has been a dragon graveyard for untold centuries, its murky black waters riddled with ash and islands of dragon bones. Unlike other dragon graveyards, though, this place has been forsaken by all goodly dragons, and thus only chromatic dragons come here to die.

A cursed place said to have once been a brooding pit of the great dragon Tiamat, the dragon mother beckons her most powerful children back to the Well of Dragons as they near the times

of their deaths. The Chromatic Dragon is not a nurturing mother, though, and seeks the service of her spawn even in death. Most dragons who drink directly from the Well of Dragons are stricken down and die immediately, animating as mindless zombie dragons (see the *Draconomicon*, page 198) in 1d4 days. Those with exceptionally powerful personalities (Charisma of 25 or greater) sometimes manage to retain their minds, awaking in 1d4 days as dracoliches, the skulls of nearby lesser dragons spontaneously becoming their phylacteries. The waters of the Well of Dragons have no effect if removed from their tainted caldera.

Through the centuries the Well of Dragons has become a legend among dragonkind, leading countless wyrms on fruitless and often fatal searches for its location. Those who find the caldera must still contend with the dead wyrms that have come before them, now total slaves to Tiamat's will and protectors of the foul well.

**Spiritgorgers:** After uncounted eons of undeath some lichs—and even some dracoliches—physical forms decay to dust, leaving only their phylacteries behind. In most cases such undead reform in some hateful new body, refreshed and more powerful

## ALTERNATE DRACOLICHES

Not all dracoliches are true dragons. In fact, any creature with the dragon type can become one of these undead horrors, opening the door for dracolich wyverns, dragon turtles, and all manner of half-dragons. Surviving the process of becoming a dracolich is an incredibly painful and trying experience for a mortal spirit, and one that not even all dragons survive. Thus, while non-true dragon dracoliches do exist, they are incredibly rare. For an example, find Sakatha the Deathless, a half-black-dragon twelve-headed hydra dracolich in this issue's web enhancement available at [paizo.com/dragon](http://paizo.com/dragon).

than ever—but occasionally they return to their phylacteries as trapped souls. Such phylacteries, known as spiritgorgers, are dangerous to deal with. The hateful unlife within the phylacteries whisper and make promises to anyone who has the misfortune to find them. If the owner makes a willing pact with the phylactery he curses himself with lichdom—his physical form is instantly destroyed and he rises as a lich with two minds in one corrupt body. Such schizophrenic abhorrences are usually driven mad by their impossible double mind or are wholly overwhelmed by the lich's ancient sentience.

Rare cases exist of demented dracoliches being created in such a way. The mad dracolich of the Corusk Mountains calling himself the Infernal Skald is one such example of this sort, combining the essence of the ancient dragon Prystis—these the White with the frost giant sorcerer/bard Beostagg. Able to assume either form, the Skald

alternates between visiting the giantholds of the mountains as a lorekeeper and entertainer or razing them as a draconic attacker—often both on the same lodge within a week.

**Soul Substitution:** On very rare occasions, when the circumstances are just right, a dragon skeleton that has been necromantically charged and kept in long proximity with a receptacle holding the essence of some powerful evil being—such as an entrapped fiend or bound soul—can spontaneously arise as a dracolich. One occurrence of this phenomenon bides its time at the Silphar Royal Museum in the Kingdom of Raoke. For long years this museum has displayed the treasures of the ancient priest-king Ramaket, looted from his hidden burial site by graverobbers. Among these treasures is a jeweled urn said to hold Ramaket's ashes. Yet also within the urn resides Ramaket's soul, which has been helplessly imprisoned in the vessel for millennia. In an adjacent gallery hangs a display featuring the mounted skeleton of an old blue dragon. The curator of the museum, a sorcerer, secretly cast *animate dead* on the skeleton to guard the treasures of the museum against thieves. Unbeknownst to the curator, the powerful will of Ramaket's entrapped soul has slowly begun influencing the necromantic magic animating his mindless guardian, gradually transforming the undead thing into a dracolich with the mind of the evil priest-king—the ancient urn serving as its phylactery. It is only a matter of time before the soul will have attained sufficient control of its new body to launch a second reign of Ramaket. ■



Dracolich  
Phylactery



*“...when three moons rose from the lap of the forest, dragons, terrible and great, made war on this world of Krynn.”*  
 —The Canticle of the Dragon

**THE ECOLOGY OF THE**

**DRACONIAN**

Charging through the acrid smoke of the battlefield, wings flapping, swords drawn, a company of draconian shock troopers terrifies even the most hardened knight. Nobody could have imagined such creatures before the War of the Lance. Since then, draconians have left an indelible impression, one colored by rumor, supposition, and fear.

**HISTORY OF THE DRACONIAN**

Legends say that in the ancient days of Krynn, Paladine, the noble ruler of the gods, and Takhisis, the Queen of Darkness, bent their divine wills upon the elements and created the first dragons from base metals. Dragons of tin, lead, nickel, zinc, and iron, these creatures were the blessed of the gods. Covetous Takhisis, however, wanted the dragons as her own and, whispering corruption into their ears, they became tarnished and wicked. Sorrowful, Paladine sought to create five more dragons, this time from precious metals, and set them in opposition to their now chromatic cousins. Thus the gods set the stage for the

world of Krynn, home of the DRAGONLANCE campaign setting, and the many wars that would play out upon it.

Takhisis repeatedly attempted to conquer Krynn, her cause championed by ogres, lizardfolk, evil humans, and goblins. Each time, knights, elves, and Paladine’s dragons defeated her. Bitter at the failure of her armies, Takhisis plotted revenge after revenge, finally striking upon an answer. She needed a new race of warriors and servants, loyal to her alone, a living symbol of her hatred for the dragons of light.

She gave Harkiel, a sly and crafty female red dragon, the task of secretly flying to the Dragon Isles. There the good dragons had spent the last thousand years apart from the mortals of Krynn. From them Harkiel stole their precious eggs, leaving behind her Dark Queen’s threat: stay out of the coming conflict or the eggs would be destroyed. Thus, the good dragons remained in exile, watching helplessly as the powers of evil began to work in secret, readying their armies for war.



Takhisis had no intention of keeping the eggs safe. Indeed, they offered the key to her revenge. She imparted upon Dracart, a wizard of the infamous black robes, and Wyrllish, one of her dark clerics, the instructions for a vile ritual. Together with Harkiel, these depraved individuals corrupted the good dragons' eggs with dark magic, blasphemous invocations, and dragon ichor, deep within the dungeons beneath the city of Sancton. When these eggs hatched, an entirely new race spilled forth from the defiled shells—draconians.

The forces of the Queen of Darkness made quick use of this new secret weapon. Growing rapidly, the draconians matured, trained, and formed a powerful appendage of the rising dragonarmies, swiftly convincing Ariakas, Takhisis's chief Highlord, of their effectiveness. As the War of the Lance unfolded, refugees spread word of monstrous dragon-men, but the world had not seen dragons in more than a thousand years and the general populace largely considered these reports the ravings of madmen—at least, until the abominations took to the fields of war en masse.

After months of battle, the beleaguered forces of good discovered the secret behind draconian creation,

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE DRACONIAN

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to draconians. This table assumes that a game takes place after the defeat of Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel. Prior to this event most of the information about draconian creation remains unknown.

### Knowledge (arcana)

#### DC Result

10	Draconians are brutal dragon-men. They have wings and scales and walk on two legs. Less savage than orcs or goblins, they wear armor and use weapons like trained warriors.
15	There are different breeds of draconian, and they all die in different, dangerous fashions. Some turn to stone, some to acid, and some explode.
20	The five types of draconian are aurak, baaz, bozak, kapak, and sivak. Bozaks and auraks cast spells, while sivaks can change shape and take the form of people they kill. The presence of evil dragons boosts the confidence of draconians.
25	Each of the five breeds of draconian is linked to one of the five good dragons. Despite being creations of dark magic, not all draconians are unable to overcome their evil tendencies.
30	A vile corruption ritual creates the draconians and involves the eggs of good dragons. An evil wizard, a dark cleric, and an evil dragon are required to perform this ritual.

a revelation that proved a turning point in the war. Gilthanas, an elven prince of the Qualinesti, and D'Argent, a silver dragon who had defied her oath of non-intervention, infiltrated the tunnels underneath Sancton and learned the truth. The heroes defeated Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel, and brought draconian

creation to a standstill. D'Argent and Gilthanas returned the uncorrupted dragon eggs to the Dragon Isles, freeing the dragons of light from their oath. The good dragons released their fury by striking back at evil dragons, avenging their murdered young and allowing the allied goodly races to resist the dragonarmies.



Defeated, scattered to the four corners of Ansalon, and deprived of many of their highest-ranking leaders, the dragonarmies continued to lash out for years after the War. The draconians, trained for nothing but battle and terror, remained a dangerous and capable enemy even in a time of peace. Eventually, though, factionalism and rivalry erupted among draconian units and breeds. Lacking the cohesion of the dragonarmies, the draconian race split apart into like-minded groups, each seeking its own fate.

Yet the real question arose: could a race of warlike, unstable, and cruel creatures ever hope to regain some of the noble potential of their draconic sires? Would they simply go violently

into history's night, a footnote of corruption doomed to extinction?

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACONIAN

As scaly bipedal creatures with claws, snouts, and tails, draconians superficially resemble lizardfolk or troglodytes. In truth, they bear a closer relation to their draconic progenitors than to humans or reptiles. This becomes more obvious when examined internally, for a draconian is a dragon forced into humanoid form. Most possess wings like dragons, share the same ocular structure that gives dragons their exceptional eyesight and darkvision, and rely upon the same heightened auditory and olfactory senses. Draconians even possess many draconic glandular systems such as the *draconis fundamentum*, a gland attached

to the heart and central nervous system that regulates and charges the draconian's body with the elemental power inherited from its dragon "parent." As a result, draconians are immune to almost all pathogens and can survive for long periods with very little food or water.

The draconian creation process, however, sabotages this otherwise delicately balanced internal physiology. When a draconian meets its end through violent means, magical forces erupt within the draconian and cause the *draconis fundamentum* to essentially overload. Sages know this phenomenon as a draconian's death throes, which presents a particular danger for any opponent who slays a draconian enemy. The specific nature of these death throes, and other distinguishing

## THE DRACONIAN CREATION RITUAL

By all accounts, Takhisis only entrusted the secret of creating draconians to Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel. Historians report even earlier experiments, however, and almost all of them failures. The true ritual involves vile incantations and prayers to Takhisis, chanted in unison by a dark priest and an evil wizard, preparing the egg of a good dragon placed upon an altar consecrated to the Dark Queen. At the climax of the ritual, the saliva of an evil dragon provides the final essence of corruption, harkening back to Takhisis's defiling of the first five dragons. The number of draconians produced always depends on the type of dragon. Brass eggs produce as many as twenty baaz, while a gold egg yields only one or two auraks.

characteristics, vary from one breed to the next.

Although only one race, there exist five different breeds of draconian, one spawned from each type of metallic dragon.

**Baaz:** Baaz draconians are the shortest and most capable of passing as other humanoids—with a little help from cloaks and masks. Their scales are brass colored, acquiring a greenish-brown patina as the draconian ages. Baaz frequently display ramlike horns or thick curving plates around their skulls, reminiscent of the brass dragons they're spawned from. Their features are considerably less reptilian in appearance than other draconians, with blunt snouts and thin lips, but undisguised they are never mistaken for humans. When a baaz draconian dies, the *draconis fundamentum* causes widespread calcification, possibly related to the brass dragon's stasis-inducing breath weapon. The outward result is that the baaz becomes a stonelike statue that crumbles to dust minutes later.

**Kapak:** Slightly taller and sleeker than baaz draconians, kapaks have longer snouts and snaggle-toothed jaws. Their whiskers, a mane of thin, dark hair, and softly padded feet give them an almost catlike appearance, but the coppery-brown scales and wings indicate otherwise. Kapaks possess a set of two glands underneath their

tongues, which constantly produce venomous saliva. This, together with the acidic quality of the *draconis fundamentum*, betrays their copper dragon progenitor. When a kapak dies, this caustic fluid reduces the kapak's body to a hazardous pool of acid.

**Bozak:** Bozak draconians boast broader, more prominent wings and smoother scaled hides than baaz or kapaks. Their bronze scales grow darker as bozaks age, while their claws, teeth, and eyes grow lighter. Along with this coloring, a bozak's flesh and blood are charged with seemingly uncontrolled magical currents. This resonance allows a bozak to more easily align itself with the ambient magic of Krynn, granting it a natural affinity for sorcery. Unfortunately, it also means that when a bozak dies, the draconian's soft tissue, skin, organs, and scales rapidly shrivel as if unable to withstand the unfettered power, causing the bones to explode outward with considerable force.

**Sivak:** The broad-shouldered sivak draconians easily top 8 feet in height,

making them the tallest of the draconians. Their fully-functional wings, unlike those of the other breeds, permit them the ability to fly as well as glide. Underneath their silver scales sivaks are muscular and powerful, and the transformative magic of their silver dragon progenitors allows them to easily take the physical forms of opponents they slay—often to the horror of those who witness such transformations. Such illusions also take on a morbid cast when sivaks die, as they take on the appearances of whatever beings killed them. These deceptions, however, reveal themselves three days after sivaks die, as their bodies collapse into piles of ashes.

**Aurak:** Aurak draconians are uniquely wingless and comparatively weaker than the other breeds. As tall as a bozak, the slender, gold-scaled auraks possess many of the same cosmetic features of gold dragons: catfish-like frills and whiskers around the jaw, elongated fangs, and sweeping spiked horns and spines. Arcane magic comes naturally to auraks, even more than with bozaks, as their *draconis fundamentum* acts as a volatile furnace of sorcerous power. By tapping into this reservoir of magical energy, auraks



## SAMPLE DRACONIAN WARBAND

The following represents a typical elite draconian warband attached to the Green Dragonarmy, operating out of the desert region of Khur. The Green Dragon Highlord, Salah-Khan, favors kapaks and bozaks, assigning skilled bozak leaders to units of kapak skirmishers and archers. Sakiel's company consists of two strike teams, two groups of archers, and a command retinue.

### Sakiel's Company

A relatively small company numbering only thirty-three bozak and kapak draconians, Sakiel's Company excels in swift ambushes and hunting down small bands of enemies.

**Command Retinue (EL 11):** Sakiel's Company maintains a tightly focused core command of three bozaks, including Sakiel himself (LE bozak fighter 3/sorcerer 2, CR 9, uses a +1 *seeking longbow*). Sakiel's lieutenants Dengath and Torrek (both LE bozak fighter 2, CR 7) each lead a strike team. Sakiel, a deadly marksman in his own right, often commands the archers directly.

**Strike Team (EL 13):** Kapaks, equipped with scimitars and studded leather armor, make up each strike team. Both teams consist of ten kapak skirmishers (LE kapak rogue 1/fighter 1, CR 6). The EL of a strike team increases to 14 if Dengath or Torrek commands it.

**Archers (EL 10):** The archer units use shortbows of masterwork quality. Each squad of archers is made up of five kapak archers (LE kapak fighter 1, CR 5). The EL of a band of archers increases to 11 if Sakiel leads it.

**Tactics:** Sakiel's Company favors missions in rocky badlands, where they can make use of advantages like cover and height. Sakiel arranges his archer units in positions that allow them to cover the advance of the strike teams who then spread out in skirmish formation. One team then tightens up to lead the assault against the opposing forces, engaging once before dispersing. The second team repeats the attack and alternates with the first team while the bozaks cast spells to confuse and hamper the enemy.

direct rays of pure force, transform or alter their physical form, and even slip through extradimensional pockets. Auraks can also release a noxious cloud of gas that atrophies muscle mass and blinds those caught within it. When slain, an aurak combusts, overloading the energy reservoirs stored within its body and causing it to explode in a fiery blast.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACONIAN

As a created race, draconians respond to the social behavior instilled in them as they mature. The Dark Queen's armies intended to use them as soldiers and strict disciplinary methods employed by their superiors ensured that the dragon-men served loyally and efficiently. Before reaching full-size, leaders assign each draconian to a

training group, where it remains until mature. A draconian first sees a member of another breed only when ready to go to war. Their wartime roles therefore dictate the structure of their society.

Ironically, their progenitor dragons bequeathed their strongest and most prevalent social traits to the draconians, albeit twisted by the corruption ritual and its lingering instability. This dark mirror of the souls and personalities of the good-aligned dragons color much of what the draconian experiences and, despite the rigorous social conditioning of their dragonarmy masters, each breed naturally manifests distinct stereotypes.

**Baaz and Kapak:** Cruelty and cunning are common traits in both of these breeds. Baaz tend to be clanish and subject to forming brute

## ADVANCED DRACONIAN

While most draconians advance as fighters, auraks and bozaks often take levels of sorcerer, and kapaks are likely to take levels of rogue. This example baaz draconian is an elite soldier in Dragon Highlord Ariakas's Red Dragonarmy.

### SHOCK TROOPER KURZ CR 6

Male baaz draconian fighter 4  
NE Medium dragon

*DRAGONLANCE Campaign Setting 217*

**Init** -1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +2, **Spot** +3

**Languages** Common

**AC** 19, touch 9, flat-footed 19

**hp** 53 (6 HD)

**SR** 12

**Immune** disease, paralysis, sleep

**Fort** +11, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

**Spd** 20 ft. (4 squares)

**Melee** +1 *scimitar* +10 (1d6+4/18-20) and bite +4 (1d4+1)

**Base Atk** +6; **Grp** +9

**Abilities** Str 16, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 12

**SQ** death throes, glide, inspired by dragons, low metabolism

**Feats** Die Hard, Endurance, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Run

**Skills** Bluff +3, Intimidate +3, Listen +2, Spot +3

**Possessions** +1 *scale mail*, +1 *light steel shield*, +1 *scimitar*, *cloak of resistance* +1

**Death Throes (Su):** Kurz's body turns to stone the moment he dies. If killed by a slashing or piecing weapon, the wielder must make a DC 16 Reflex save or have the weapon trapped. The statue crumbles to dust after 1d4 minutes, releasing trapped weapons. Items carried by Kurz or trapped within his body are not petrified.

**Glide (Ex):** Kurz can use his wings to negate falling damage. While gliding, he may travel horizontally up to four times the vertical distance descended.

**Inspired by Dragon (Ex):** Kurz receives a +1 bonus on attacks and saving throws when within sight of an evil dragon.

**Low Metabolism (Ex):** Kurz can survive on one-tenth the food and water it takes to sustain a human.

squads, a twist on the brass dragon's social tendencies, while kapaks more commonly embody malicious or devious behavior, a perversion of the copper dragon's trickster nature. Neither breed produces above-average leaders, so the dragonarmies typically assign command of a baaz or kapak unit to either a non-draconian or a draconian of a different breed. Attitude with regard to structure and rank provides the key difference between the two: the self-serving baaz find strength more impressive than titles, whereas kapaks like to follow orders and rely on the tactics of their assigned superiors.

**Bozak:** Bozaks make exceptional sergeants, lieutenants, and political officers. Their training includes a significant amount of spiritual education, and most bozaks learn from their educators that their innate spellcasting powers come from devotion to Takhisis. Combined with a love of psychological warfare inherited from

their bronze dragon parentage, bozaks exhibit a sense of earned authority over the lesser draconians. Many feel their gifts bring with them a tremendous responsibility and their role is one of faith as well as leadership.

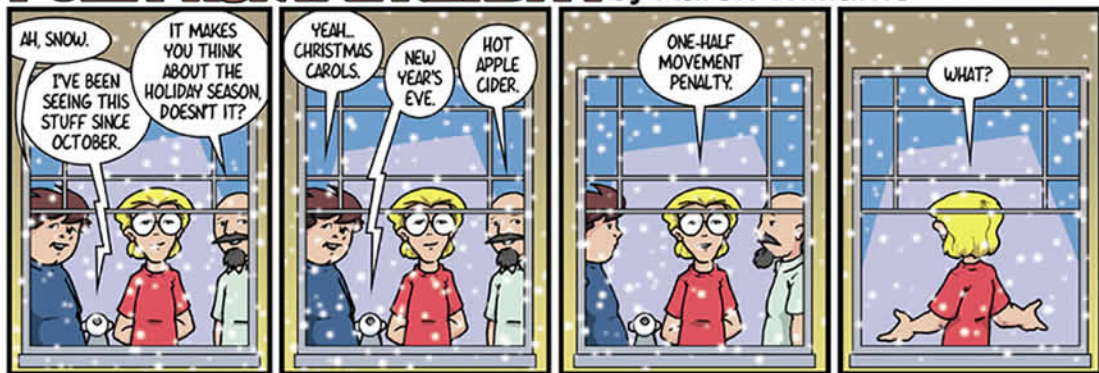
**Sivak:** Like bozaks, these draconians make effective leaders and commanders. They are fewer in number than all but the aurak draconians, and this makes them a precious commodity in the eyes of the Dragon Highlords. Sivaks train intensively and undergo rigorous conditioning. When twisted into a sivak, a silver dragon's deep affection for mortals becomes an obsession with espionage and covert activity, sometimes leading them to assassinate and impersonate the enemy. Most sivaks know that their assignments demand restraint and prudent action, and act accordingly.

**Auraks:** The least common of the draconian breeds, auraks are also the most independent. Few in number, immature auraks grow up in small,

focused training groups of three or four individuals. Intelligent and insightful, an aurak quickly learns that it occupies the top rung of draconian society. Each develops a feeling of superiority and privilege, a twisted remnant of the gold dragon's nobility and sense of purpose. Auraks thus master strategy, manipulation, and politics, never happy unless they are controlling something or someone.

While many of the draconians who survived the War of the Lance struggled with both their innate natures and the cruelty ingrained within them, their place in Krynn remains in question. Dark powers seek to control draconian hearts and many of even the most forgiving races refuse to forget the atrocities committed by draconians during the War of the Lance. Thus, the future of the draconian race seems to be one doomed to hatred, strife, and the purpose they were created for—war. ☛

## FULL FRONTAL NERDITY by Aaron Williams



<http://archive.gamespy.com/comics/nodwick/ffn/ffn.htm>



by Amber Scott  
 illustrated by Peter Bergting

# THE ECOLOGY OF DUERGAR

The ringing of hammer on anvil, choking blankets of forge smoke, repetitious chanting, and ceaseless toil—such bleakness embodies the world of the duergar. Living in the darkness, laboring to serve their god, the duergar find no joy in anything save the fierce satisfaction of a task thoroughly completed. With hearts as cold and hard as iron and souls as dark as coal, duergar desire merely to please their grim god and to slay all who oppose his will.

This article examines the life and habits of the xenophobic duergar, including their history, physiology, and outlook, as well as ways to defeat them. *Races of Stone* offers further information on the lives and ways of dwarves of all types

## HISTORY OF DUERGAR

Duergar claim that their god, Laduguer, forged the world. In the time before time, the world was but a chill nothingness, containing neither life nor light. The desire for creation

existed, and the empty void of the universe pulsed with the uncontrolled desire to be. From that hunger formed the figure of a dwarf wielding a hammer, and with his hammer he shaped the void into a cold, dark world of eternal twilight. Laduguer beget Laduguer, it is said; he birthed himself out of sheer will and the desire to create.

Laduguer thus peopled the first world with his children, the duergar; the grey dwarves. He gave them the desire and skill to work, and provided them with materials with which to toil. He commanded them to serve him with production, to emulate their creator by creating new and wondrous things. The duergar call this the Time of Creation, where they worked in peace to forge magnificent items for their god, and all were content.

Even then, sometimes duergar creations floundered. Some attempted to make great things and failed, and thus Laduguer cast the unworthy into his forge as punishment. One such ambitious dwarf sought to set himself above



the rest, making himself superior to the others, although Laduguer made all equal. He worked in secret, struggling to master the power that only Laduguer commanded—the ability to create life. He forged strange creatures; ugly, spindly things that he flung from his workshop in disgust. The Lone Craftsman, as duergar call him, struggled day and night for a year, each time failing in his creation and throwing the mewling, misshapen monstrosities into the wilderness. All the creatures, races, and monsters of the world—animals, giants, elves, humans, kobolds, and orcs—arose from the Lone Craftsman’s anvil. Thus, duergar created all other races.

After a year of failure, the Lone Craftsman finally succeeded. By his experience and will, he forged another dwarf. He made his creation taller, stronger, and more beautiful than the duergar, with skin of copper, hair of bronze, and gems for eyes. The Lone Craftsman was admiring his creation when Laduguer found the secret forge and flew into a terrible rage.

The Lone Craftsman fell to his knees, begging his god for mercy. He pleaded that he made his creation only as a tribute to Laduguer’s greatness.

Laduguer roared, “Insolent fool! Do you think you can improve on my work by creating a life greater than your own? You do this for your own glory, not mine!” He struck the Lone Craftsman and turned him into a shrieking, gibbering madman without the skill, patience, or talent to create

anything ever again. Thus was born the first derro.

The damage already done, this began an age known as the Time of Perversion. The works of the Lone Craftsmen and their offspring spread over the world, forming societies and raising the best of their miserable races to the status of gods—gods who defiled the world with bright sunlight, green things, song, and other foolishness. The duergar despised these rejected

### DUERGAR KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to the duergar. Inhabitants of the Underdark and adventurers that make forays into its depths might know this information.

#### Knowledge

(local)

DC	Result
10	There are many subraces of dwarves. Some of these breeds lurk deep within the earth and toil for dark purposes.
15	Duergar despise all other races but reserve their most vicious hatred for other dwarves. They avoid the sun and bright light at all costs.
20	Duergar have the power to increase their size and become invisible. They create some of the most masterfully crafted goods in the world, although such items often lack ornamentation.
25	Duergar life revolves around the worship of their god Laduguer. They are particularly stealthy and resistant to paralysis, poisons, and illusions.



creations, but none so fiercely as the dwarves descended of the Lone Craftsman's finest achievement: those bright-faced dwarves who live in the mountains and fancy themselves great craftsmen rivaling Laduguer's children. Duergar refuse to suffer these other dwarves' existences and hunt them relentlessly.

Now duergar live apart from the other races, in hidden strongholds beneath the earth where they work ceaselessly for the glory of their god. There they train as fighters, spies, and craftsmen to ensure the survival of their people. They trade by necessity, grudgingly offering the least of their wares (still among the finest crafts in the world) for food and materials other races provide. They disdain all things pleasant, bright, and beautiful as useless frippery, and refuse to sully their exquisite creations with such pointless accoutrements.

All duergar sneer at the fantastic lies the other races spin about their origins, because the grey dwarves know the truth. Each duergar exists merely to serve Laduguer, and they all dream of the day when their efforts are enough for Laduguer to vanquish the other races, blot out the sun, and bring about the Time of Perfection. Then duergar will return to the cool, dusky surface where they can forge in peace for all eternity.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF DUERGAR

Averaging about 4-1/2 feet tall and more slender than most dwarves, duergar have dull grey skin that seems to blend with the shadows around them. With lean muscles as hard as iron, they move in near-silence with a fluidity strange to dwarves. Most duergar are completely bald, although some women develop lank rings of black, white, or gray hair and men often keep wiry beards. Overall, duergar bodies are studies in ultimate efficiency.

Duergar eyes are almost uniformly pitch-black and curiously flat, making a duergar's stare incredibly unnerving. Gray dwarves say that Laduguer bestowed incredible sight

on his children as a divine blessing so they might hunt their light-dwelling cousins more easily. Thus, duergar who invoke the wrath of their priests usually have their eyes put out as punishment, while the birth of a child with grey or white eyes is considered a terrible omen.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF DUERGAR

Duergar society revolves around the worship of Laduguer, and gray dwarves draw no distinction between secular and religious authority. The priests rule as they always have and always will.

Laws are handed down and enforced by thuldors, the priests of Laduguer. Thuldors wear unpolished iron breastplates emblazoned with the broken crossbow bolt of Laduguer and holy brands of this symbol on their foreheads. Thuldors choose only the strongest duergar to join their ranks, but even then the initiation rites, which involve branding, torture, and performing feats of superhuman endurance, cull the weak and unworthy. The culmination of these trials involves tying an initiate between two crushing blocks of stone and leaving him in solitude for a week.

Gray dwarves forbid all other races access to their cities, as the presence of such abominations sullies their homes. In a few cases, duergar trade outposts allow other races to settle nearby, but only if they obey the priesthood. Duergar trade using heavily guarded caravans or other far-traveling emissaries. Drow make frequent use of duergar items, although they patronize the dwarves and act as if their goods were inferior to drow-crafted items. Duergar despise the dark elves for this reason, but they readily accept their coin.

Duergar spies, known as darkhafts, often travel among gray dwarf caravans. They gather information about the races they trade with and use that information to further duergar goals. As weapons traders, the duergar profit from conflict, and while the world never lacks in that, darkhafts

## LADUGUER

### Intermediate God (Lawful Evil)

The god of the duergar, Laduguer occasionally answers the prayers of other dwarves. The Gray Protector, as he is called, demands constant toil and a rigid adherence to order from his subjects, many of whom are stolid craftsmen, slavers, or would-be warlords.

**Symbol:** A broken crossbow bolt.

**Portfolio:** Magic weapon creation, artisans, magic, duergar.

**Domains:** Evil, Law, Magic, Protection.

**Favored Weapon:** Warhammer.

**Clerical Training:** Would-be clerics of Laduguer engage in hour after hour of repetitive prayer, punctuated only by hard physical labor or similar hardships. Those that endure the process become clerics and inflict similar mind-numbing initiations on the next generation of Laduguer's followers.

**Quests:** Laduguer's quests often involve awakening—and hopefully controlling—some long-buried evil. If an army of slaves is trying to unearth a fallen, ancient labyrinth-temple, Laduguer is probably behind it.

**Prayers:** Prayers to Laduguer are simple one- or two-sentence affairs, but they're repeated dozens of times, with exactly the same rhythm and intonation.

**Temples:** Laduguer has simple temples unadorned with decoration. Many have torture chambers, prison cells, or battle arenas attached to them.

**Rites:** Laduguer offers his followers few rites, because time spent in ceremonies is time spent away from proper duties.

**Herald and Allies:** Laduguer's herald, Garludor, is a particularly sinister duergar 10th-level rogue/10th-level assassin. When not on a quest for his god, the herald spends much of his time haunting the forges of Laduguer's faithful, assuring that work progresses and punishing negligent or unskilled craftsmen with his death attack. Laduguer's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are bearded devils, barbed devils, and pit fiends.

sometimes give things a push. They enjoy encouraging the rivalry between two opposing factions, coaxing ill will to the surface like an erupting boil and then supplying both sides with weapons and armor. Not only do such underhanded acts open up new markets for their weapons, but they sow bloodshed among the countless races the gray dwarves despise.

Occasionally, duergar foster conflicts between small drow outposts or isolated tribes of other races, such as

derro or kuo-toa. Darkhafts exacerbate hostilities with well-placed words and false rumors until combat erupts and one faction destroys the other, at which point a unit of duergar soldiers attack, easily crushing the weakened "victors." Darkhafts carefully hide all evidence of duergar involvement after the dwarves' slaughter and looting, thus avoiding future trade complications.

## DUERGAR LAIRS

Along with their grim cities, duergar toil and hoard their greatest works within the treasure-vaults of the thuldors. These unique strongholds are both massive workshops and bleak temples of Laduguer. They often have similar features but never have the same layout.

At least four duergar soldiers guard the entrance to a treasure-vault, as well as possibly one or two priests. Duergar require no light, so adventurers approaching carrying torches, lanterns, or magical illumination immediately give themselves away to the guards. Beyond the guards, a complex series of magical and mechanical locks and traps ward the stronghold's entrance.

The inner halls of thuldor strongholds usually lack living guardians, instead holding countless unique and ingenious traps and constructs. Wanderers through these halls should move cautiously and carefully, using long poles to test suspicious areas and ready *detect magic* and *dispel magic* in case of magical traps. Thuldors often create golems, particularly stone golems, and adventurers should consult with sages to learn ways to defeat these guardians.

The vault's center chambers hold the duergar's greatest treasures, countless masterfully crafted weapons, tools, and magic items piled upon mountains of rare ores, gems, and coins. Sometimes thuldors tame giant monstrous spiders or summon planar allies to serve as guardians for these vast troves. Thuldors who desire solitude—or those punished with it—sometimes reside here, relying on their magic to sustain them. Whether defending their work or trying to regain their brethren's

favor, priests encountered here guard the vault with their lives, and raiders should be appropriately wary.

## VS. DUERGAR

Resolute and fanatical combatants, duergar fight not just to defend themselves and further their goals, but to destroy the abominations that are all other races. When facing such a combination of natural cunning and magical abilities, only the most prepared might hope to stand against a determined duergar.

### Dealing with Invisibility and

**Darkness:** Lurking in the darkest depths of the Underdark and with the ability to turn invisible once per day, few ever see duergar coming. Those seeking out duergar or passing through their lands should ready several scrolls of *see invisibility* or *invisibility purge* to even the odds. Although such spells reveal invisible duergar, the darkness the gray dwarves favor still offers its own hindrance. Parties traveling through the Underdark with most forms of visible illumination (torches, lanterns, *light* spells, and the like) only attract more danger. However, since duergar and many other denizens of the Night Below are sensitive to exceptionally bright light, adventurers should rely upon *daylight* and scrolls or wands of that spell. Adventurers who wish to remain undetected and who don't all possess darkvision should equip themselves with *potions of darkvision* or similar magic. Yet even these magical measures won't help a group detect a stealthy duergar, as all duergar benefit from a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks. Thus, high Listen and Spot bonuses and spells that augment these skills (like *owl's wisdom*) should see frequent use.

### Magic Both Natural and Divine:

With the power to enlarge themselves and a strict religious culture, magic almost always comes into play when facing duergar. Duergar warriors often use their *enlarge person* ability before charging into combat, while clerics make frequent use of *aid*, *bull's strength*, and *deeper darkness* to assist their allies and extinguish magical light. *Dispel*

*magic*, or at least *reduce person*, thus becomes necessary to even the odds. Conversely, grey dwarves are resistant to spells, particularly phantasms (like *nightmare* and *phantasmal killer*), and they are immune to all paralysis effects. Spellcasters planning on facing duergar should focus on spells that don't allow saving throws or that deal damage even on a successful save (such as *Melf's acid arrow* or *fireball*).

**Poisoned Weapons:** Duergar are immune to all forms of poison and make frequent use of it. Often, a volley of crossbow bolts coated in black adder venom, greenblood oil, or other Constitution-sapping injury poisons precedes duergar rushing into melee. Thus, adventurers should always carry antivenom and potions or scrolls of *delay poison*, *neutralize poison*, and *lesser restoration*.

**Keep Out of Harm's Way:** Duergar gain Strength bonuses from their *enlarge person* spell-like ability and often have bonus hit points from high Constitution scores. Those fighting duergar should stay out of reach and make full use of ranged weapons. Since gray dwarves have a speed of 20 feet, even when enlarged, using superior mobility and hit-and-run tactics easily wears down enemy duergar. If you can't avoid melee combat, attacks and spells that reduce Constitution or Strength scores (such as a rogue's crippling strike ability or the *ray of enfeeblement* spell) might help.

**Beware of Spiders:** Duergar frequently make use of the varied forms of monstrous spiders that roam the Underdark. Noted for making exceptional steeds and beasts of burden, these arachnid mounts allow the duergar to move much faster and even over vertical surfaces with ease. Given the duergar's penchant for stealth and poison, giant monstrous spiders or even phase spiders might serve the gray dwarves as deadly companions. Such a pair might easily sneak up on a party invisibly and ethereally before striking with surprise. ☐



## The Ecology of the ELEMENTAL WEIRD

At home in raging flames, surfaceless seas, unyielding granite, or limitless voids, the elemental weirds often make their way to the myriad worlds of the Material Plane. These harbingers of the fickle fates promise to reveal furtive secrets of the unforeseeable to the mortal races, although often at a hefty price. Indeed, these creatures of pure elemental form possess alien minds and needs well beyond the understanding of those who seek them out.

### HISTORY OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

The oldest of legends from the most ancient of races speak of prophecies, decreed fates, and soothsayers. This suggests the presence of creatures like oracular weirds at least parallels the mortal races of the Material Plane—and possibly predates the plane itself.

In many myths, elemental weirds are said to possess immortal heritages, often tracking their lineages back to specific deities and the primordial elements of the world. Some such tales speak of deities lying with the unspoiled rivers and teaming oceans, giving birth to nixies, sirines, many of the mortal aquatic races, and the eldest water weirds. Inspired by their divine legacies, whispered to by the rolling waves, and

confided to by all the creatures of the sea, it is said that whatever water touched, these weirds knew.

Similarly, myths of volcano spirits that bestowed truth and the gift of fire to the early races describe the role fire weirds played in the legendary past. Said to be the corporeal messengers of deities, fiends, or possibly some indefinable intellect of the Inner Planes, these living flames brought much needed hope and warmth to the dark days of prehistory—revealing insights and laws all sentient creatures were meant to know.

Much like water weirds, legends tell of earth weirds springing from divinely inspired mountains, canyons, and lightless depths. Described as treacherous harbingers of suffering, the rotting dead supposedly whisper their secrets to earth weirds, who thus foretell times of waste and death. Despite their morbid words, earth weirds are said to know the will of the world, serving as emissaries of some greater planetary consciousness. Their dark words and fearful, underground demesnes are at least partially responsible for the widespread distrust of emissaries of the earth, particularly the fey.

Air weirds figure only subtly in legend. Rituals of praying to an open sky—a heaven above—partially arise from the ancient practice of seeking guidance from these spirits of the air.



The offering of incense, ash, and flowers to the winds suggests a long history of seeking direct guidance from those elementals who call the sky home.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

The corporeal form of all weirs share many characteristics. Each appears as a striking female figure comprised of a single element, whether air, earth, fire, or water. These homogenous forms behave in a manner similar to true elementals, being resilient to weapons and the vulnerabilities of an organic body. They also prove highly resistant to spells, shrugging off most with little worry.

As elemental weirs are made up only of the elemental essence of their kind, organs, flesh, nerves, and blood are alien to their composition. The very energies that flow through these creatures, however, far surpass those of many other creatures from the Elemental Planes, granting immense intelligence, spell-like powers—particularly related to powers of divination—as well as other strange abilities.

Seemingly as a limit to these powers, though, all weirs are bound to an elemental pool to which they remain permanently tied. Of diverse shapes

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to elemental weirs. Those who study the Inner Planes, worship the powers of the elements, or are knowledgeable of prophecies or similar mysteries might possess this information. The elemental weird appears on page 90 of *Monster Manual II*.

#### Knowledge (the planes)

##### DC Result

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | An elemental weird is like an elemental, but is often less prone to destruction.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 15 | Elemental weirs typically appear as beautiful humanoid women. Each is tied to a specific element that determines its form and powers, but also binds it to a pool of concentrated elemental matter from which it can never leave.                               |
| 20 | Elemental weirs possess immense magical powers, potent oracular abilities, and guard portals to the Inner Planes. These elemental augurs command great influence over other elemental beings and can even wrest control of such creatures from their summoners. |
| 25 | Elemental weirs typically demand rare offerings or services for their insights. These oracles are sometimes guarded by elemental servants known as guardian weirs.                                                                                              |
| 30 | Air weirs specialize in information relating to guidance. Earth weirs warn of impending doom. Fire weirs weave prophecies of peace and prosperity. Water weirs hold knowledge of antidotes and healing.                                                         |

and sizes, at their smallest these pools fill an area 20 feet across and 40 feet deep, but whole lakes, volcanoes, or larger tracts of land or sky might comprise them. These pools are more than merely pure accumulations of natural elements, though. Each is in fact a small projection from an Elemental Plane, which contains a portal to that

hostile realm. An elemental weird holds great control over its pool, possessing the power to summon creatures through it for aid, as well as the ability to allow others to enter the pool and pass onto its home plane. The draw of the Inner Planes is powerful, though, and a weird's control is not absolute. Thus, many have accidentally entered the pool of an



elemental weird and met swift deaths, either from the inherent dangers of the flowing and grinding elements or upon the unforgiving Inner Planes. Just as frequently as mortals seek to employ an elemental weird's gift of foresight, they often request use of a weird's portal to the Elemental Planes. Weirids are quick to bargain for their pool's use, but are just as likely to wantonly refuse—supposedly out of some prophetic elemental insight.

Being spirits of the Inner Planes, weirds must maintain their link to their homes and cannot be separated from their pools—never straying more than 10 feet. Once, however, an elemental weird can make use of its pool's portal to travel back to its elemental home. Upon passing through, the portal closes and the weird's pool is drawn back to its native plane, leaving no evidence of the oracle's passing. Weirids usually only leave the Material Plane when they face assured destruction, risk having their site forcibly used by the unworthy, or when their prophecies so demand. It is conceivable that unbound elemental weirds might be found on the Elemental Planes, but none have ever been seen. Some propose that, upon retreating to their native planes, elemental weirds merge with the plane, imparting their vast intellect and observations back to the realm that spawned them.

**PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD**

While aloof toward the mortal races of the Material Plane, elemental weirds possess a certain fondness for creatures tied to their source element. Most often, this relationship resembles that between a

guardian and a servant or a demigod and a worshiper. Since a weird cannot travel away from its pool, these attendants serve vital roles as scouts, messengers, and the eyes and ears of the weird.

In regards to their own kind, weirds often live solitary lives; although on rare occasions as many as four might collect in places of particular power, importance, or elemental convergence. Interracial hostility is unknown to weirds, and groupings involve weirds of multiple kinds as often as weirds of the same kind.

Often the existence of multiple weirds in close proximity spawns numerous legends and local traditions relating to seeking mystical guidance.

The four most common weirds display a wide range of unique traits and affectations. These tendencies often hint at the type of information likely to provide.

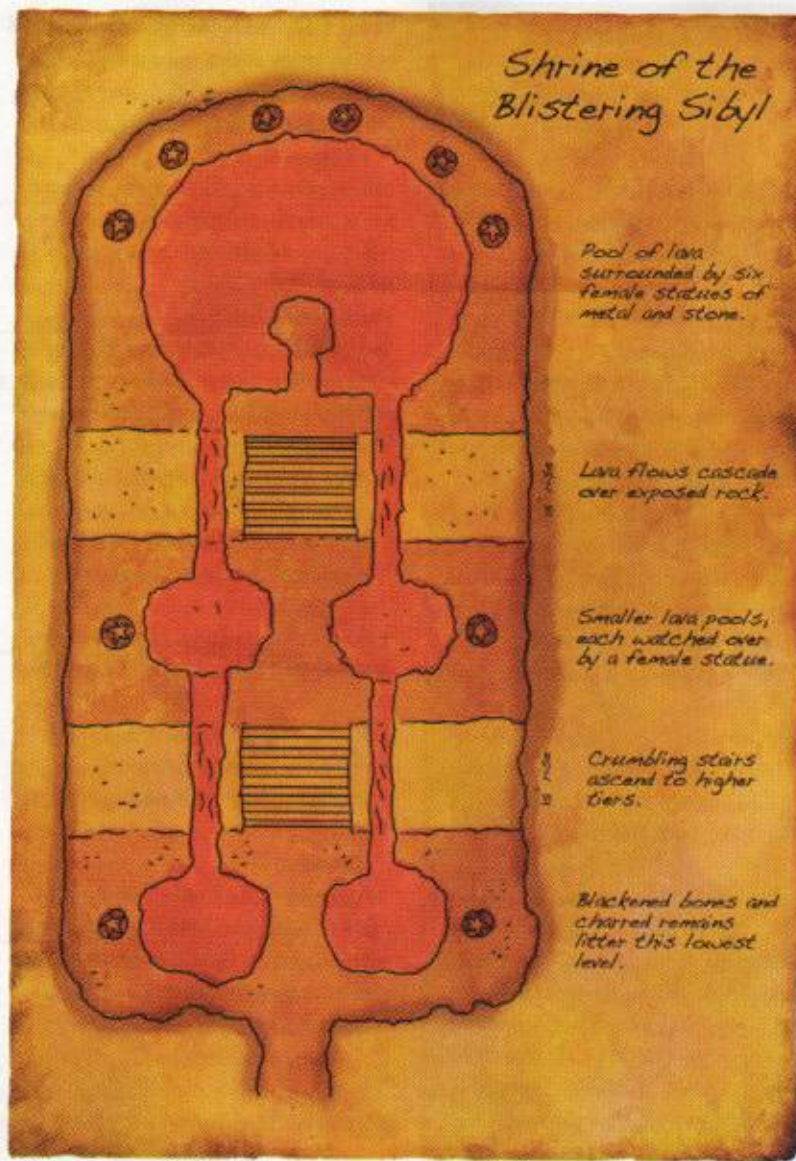
**Air Weirds:** These weirds speak of facts and places, yet they speak of such in a manner more direct than most. For these elementals, the world exists as a compass with many choices, with each choice a possibility and each containing its own dangers and rewards. Unable to predict the actual future of a chosen direction, they supply information regarding the facts of the journey. These flighty creatures offer neutral indecisiveness to most mortals, seeing all paths as equal but leading to vastly different journeys.

In trade for their insight, air weirds often request artifacts from far-flung nations, lost environments, or even other

planes. A rock from a mountain that long ago eroded to sand or a gear from Tvashti's Laboratory on the Outlands would not be unusual offerings.

**Earth Weirds:** Possessed of a cold, calculating mindset terrifying to most mortals, and capable of foretelling the death of thousands or the arrival of great wealth with equal dispassion, these weirds speak of future events the same as those in the past. Viewing the passage of time with the same indifference as mountains, earth weirds often speak of general fates, understanding that mortal minds lack the ability to comprehend exact details on an immutable future.

Emblems of finality and the bounty of the land most appeal to earth weirds. The skull of a thousand-year-old lich, crushed to powder, or a stone that has never been exposed to any sort of light might both appeal to one of these elementals.



tyrants, and secrets capable of unseating whole dynasties. The longest segment of the *Rod of Seven Parts*—capable of casting *heal* once per day, the noose that hung a deposed despot, or the illicit diary of an empress might all tempt a water weird.

**ELEMENTAL WEIRD LAIRS**

Few creatures claim to know how, where, and why pools containing elemental weirds form. Even elemental weirds themselves seem to have little choice in where they lair, with some dwelling in regions cut off or inhospitable to most other sentient forms of life. While some claim weirds simply appear in areas strong with their associated element, others propose these elementals exercise their incredible foresight when choosing a lair, selecting homes where they might someday be needed.

The lairs of weirds often take advantage of their elemental nature, while allowing limited access to allies and supplicants. Places suitable to maximize the abilities of summoned elemental protectors also constitute preferable territories.

**Air Weirds:** While air weirds prefer open spaces, such as wide plains or high mountains, any place with expansive open space provides the proper element for these oracles. Alternately, an air weird's pool might linger above a rocky coral reef under the great sea sky or at the heart of an enormous underground cavern—where air is most rare.

**Earth Weirds:** Remote wilds make ideal lairs for earth weirds. The greenery of life and death appeals to these creatures just as much as the grim, lifelessness of often-barren tunnels and lightless chasms. Mountain peaks and desert wastes also please the harsh mentalities of these weirds.

**Fire Weirds:** By far the most restricted by the natural appearance of their element, fire weirds prefer lairs within volcanoes or places deep within the crust of the earth. Boiling springs, geysers, and volcanic fields, as well, sometimes make comfortable homes for these prophets. Fire weirds have been known to appear in the midst of great forest fires, meteor strikes, and even blazes in communities resulting

**Fire Weirds:** Fire weirds represent the most empathetic of the weirds. Foretelling dreams of hope, love, and nourishment, these weirds provide the light in the dark to those who seek them out. Offering hope, however, falls short of actual investment in the well-being of those who seek their council. Fire weirds provide what aid they can while retaining the same reclusive nature and quid pro quo manners of their sister weirds.

Fire weirds favor offerings that embody positive feelings and the wishes of other creatures, such as the aged heirloom of a noble family, a kingdom's royal crown, or, ultimately, a preincarnate soul from the Bastion of Unborn Souls on the Posi-

tive Energy Plane. Fire weirds care little for the emotional or moral associations mortals place on such items, so stealing such a gift matters little to them.

**Water Weirds:** Great hopes of the sick and needy, water weirds grant life where only death walks, assisting those who need more than faith to survive. These weirds grant boons in the way of curative secrets and answers to overcome the unconquerable. Due to their direct opposition to many in positions of power, most leaders see water weirds as embodiments of anarchy and discord to be rooted out. In response, they remain the most secretive of weirds.

Water weirds seek rare items with healing properties, the regalia of fallen

PROPHECIES

Elemental weirds are known for their mystical foresight and puzzling prophecies. The following examples show the forms of speech and type of word games to expect from the four common elemental weirds.

**Air**

*"Walk the realm of angry winds to find your fate. Raptor wings hold the keys and an angry roar shields the spirit. A kerchief comforts the bloodiest pit of lamentation, which falls to the star."*

This advice from the air weird Sister Storm directs travelers through two portals to the star-shaped gatetown of Tradegate on the Outlands. The first portal is guarded by an androsphinx whose feathers act as portal keys and whose roar can deafen. The gate leads to the painfully noisy layer of Pandemonium called Cocytus, the layer of lamentation. A handkerchief is the gate key to the second portal, at the bottom of a nearby pit comprised of dark red rock.

**Earth**

*"When the blackened sea is stolen,  
And plague pyre fills the sky,  
And four are fortresses fallen,  
Then You and I must die.  
With eyes above the steppes,  
And a heartless iron roar,  
Night's tide eternal rises,  
Til man exists no more."*

The earth weird known as the Obsidian Duchess of Geoff spoke this forbidding rhyme, seemingly referring to some

unknown incursion from the sky, before retreating back to the Plane of Earth.

**Fire**

*"7:19 And on the shore black madness reigns, and a bounty of gems buys discord and dark hearts. 7:20 Yet over seas of salt and wells of darkness lies sealed the sister of vice, whose lust unlocks a double death."*

The much-debated "Wells of Darkness" passages from the *Etheric Scrolls*, a collection of prophecies dictated by the three fire weirds together known as the Oracle of Ashes.

**Water**

*"Through me lies the cure.  
Wind in a crystal chalice.  
From his pride springs life."*

When entreated for aid to cure a devastating plague, the water weird called the Spirit of the Silver Stream spoke this haiku. Adventurers eventually employed the weird's portal to travel to the City of Glass on the Elemental Plane of Water. Once there, they discovered that the well-loved garden of a jann leader, Sheik Yasuf, held a rare kind of grape whose wine possesses healing properties.

from lightning strikes. In such cases, fire weirds tend to realize the short-lived nature of their surroundings and escape through their pools before the flames burn out.

**Ice and Snow Weirds:** Ice weirds commonly remain near glaciers or constantly frozen lakes, while snow weirds enjoy the deep tundra (see *Frostburn*). The occasional weird might use its portal to perpetually freeze unnatural areas, such as an entire island during summer, an ancient tree that remains snow-covered year round, or a mountain perpetually covered by a glacier.

**Water Weirds:** More adaptable than most might expect, water weirds occupy deep ocean bottoms, great rivers, underground springs, tiny streams, or even the occasional town well. In some cases, a great flood or tsunami has moved a water weird's pool, though just as often a weird retreats back to its home plane to avoid potential destruction.

LESSER ELEMENTAL WEIRDS

A sinuous elemental serpent rises up before you, its body comprised of raging primal force.

LESSER ELEMENTAL WEIRD CR 5

N Medium elemental (extraplanar, see below)

Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6, Spot +5

Languages Aquan, Auran, Ignan, or Terran

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14

(+4 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 36 (8 HD)

Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +4

Spd 20 ft. (2 squares), burrow 90 ft. or fly 90 ft. (perfect) or swim 90 ft.

Melee slam +7 (1d4+1 plus 1d6 energy damage\*)

Ranged elemental blast\* +10 (2d6)

Base Atk +6; Grp +7

Special Atk constrict, elemental blast, elemental command, improved grab, suffocate

\* Energy damage varies by subtype.

Abilities Str 12, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 11

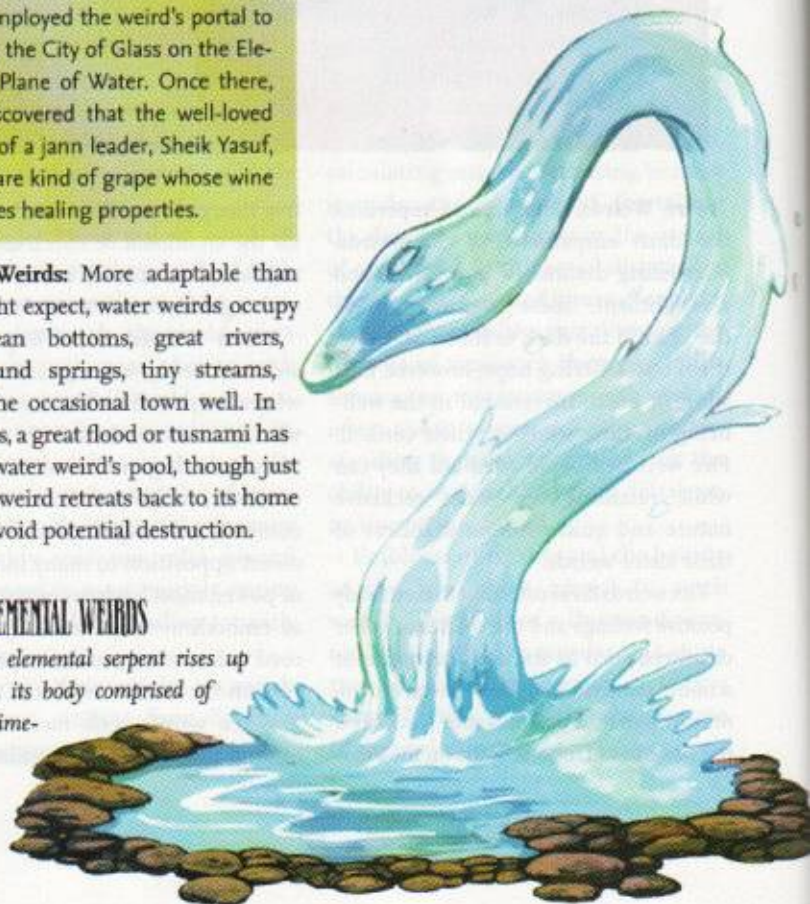
SQ Elemental glide, elemental invisibility, elemental subtype

Feats Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility

Skills Hide +15, Listen +8, Move Silently +14, Spot +8

Advancement 9–14 HD (Medium); 16–30 HD (Large); 31–45 HD (Huge)

Elemental Blast (Ex) Once per round, a lesser elemental weird can release a



blast of elemental energy that deals 1d6 points of damage per 4 Hit Dice. The energy type of this damage differs for each type of weird: air weirds fire a ball of electricity, earth weirds expel a glob of acid, fire weirds shoot a burst of fire, and water weirds discharge a blast of incredibly cold water. The range increment for this blast is 30 feet. The type of damage dealt is the same type dealt by the weird's slam attack.

**Elemental Command (Su)** A lesser elemental weird can attempt to gain control over any elemental of the same subtype as it that it successfully hits with a melee attack. The elemental must make a successful DC 14 Will save or succumb to the weird's control. An elemental that saves against this attack is immune to that weird's elemental command ability for 24 hours. There is no limit to the number of elementals that a weird can control. The save DC is Charisma-based. Once under the weird's control, an elemental serves the weird for 1 day, until either it or the weird dies, until the weird dismisses it, or until the duration of its summoning expires. It obeys the weird explicitly, even if ordered to attack the being who originally summoned it. The weird does not need to communicate to maintain control over any elemental it commands.

**Improved Grab (Ex)** To use this ability, a lesser elemental weird must hit with its slam attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can suffocate.

**Suffocate (Su)** While being grappled by a lesser elemental weird a creature is deprived of air. Normally, a creature can hold its breath a number of rounds equal to twice its Constitution score before it begins to suffocate. While being grappled by a weird, a creature can only hold its breath if it makes a DC 8 Constitution check every round. Each round, the DC increases by +1. When the character finally fails its Constitution check, it begins to suffocate. In the first round, it falls unconscious (0 hit points). In the following round, it drops to -1 hit points

and is dying. In the third round, if still being grappled by the weird, it suffocates.

**Elemental Glide (Ex)** A lesser elemental weird can glide through the same element as its subtype as easily as a fish swims through water. Its passage leaves behind no tunnel, nor creates any sign of its presence. A *gust of wind*, *move earth*, *wall of fire*, or similar spell that manipulates elements cast on an area containing a burrowing weird flings the elemental back 30 feet, stunning the creature for 1 round unless it succeeds on a DC 15 Fortitude save.

**Elemental Invisibility (Ex)** As a full-round action, a lesser elemental weird fully submerged or surrounded by the same element as its subtype can turn invisible. *True seeing* and similar spells reveal these creatures as normal.

**Elemental Immunities** Lesser elemental weirds possess a subtype related to the element they embody. This subtype, air, earth, fire, or water, determines the damage type of a weird's elemental blast and slam attack, its immunities and vulnerabilities (see Chapter 7 of the *Monster Manual*), and its movement type.

Lesser elemental weirds are immature versions of oracular elemental weirds. Lacking the insight of true weirds, these lesser versions stay in constant contact with the elements that comprise them, letting these primal forces whisper tales and portents they might one day grow wise enough to decipher. While most commonly found on their home planes, lesser elemental weirds sometimes dwell near their mature brethren, protecting them and learning their secrets, although they might also answer the calls of other magic-users. It is thought that through some process lesser weirds evolve into true weirds, but such does not always seem to be the case, as ancient and powerful lesser weirds are not unknown.

Lesser elemental weirds exist for at least all four common types of elemental weirds (air, earth, fire, and water), and others might exist. These creatures understand the language related to their elemental type (Auran for air weirds, Teran for earth weirds, and so on), although they cannot actually speak. ☐

## ELEMENTAL GUARDIAN

Conjuration (Summoning)

Level: Clr 5, Drd 4, Sor/Wiz 5

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Effect: One summoned lesser elemental weird

Duration: 1 day/level

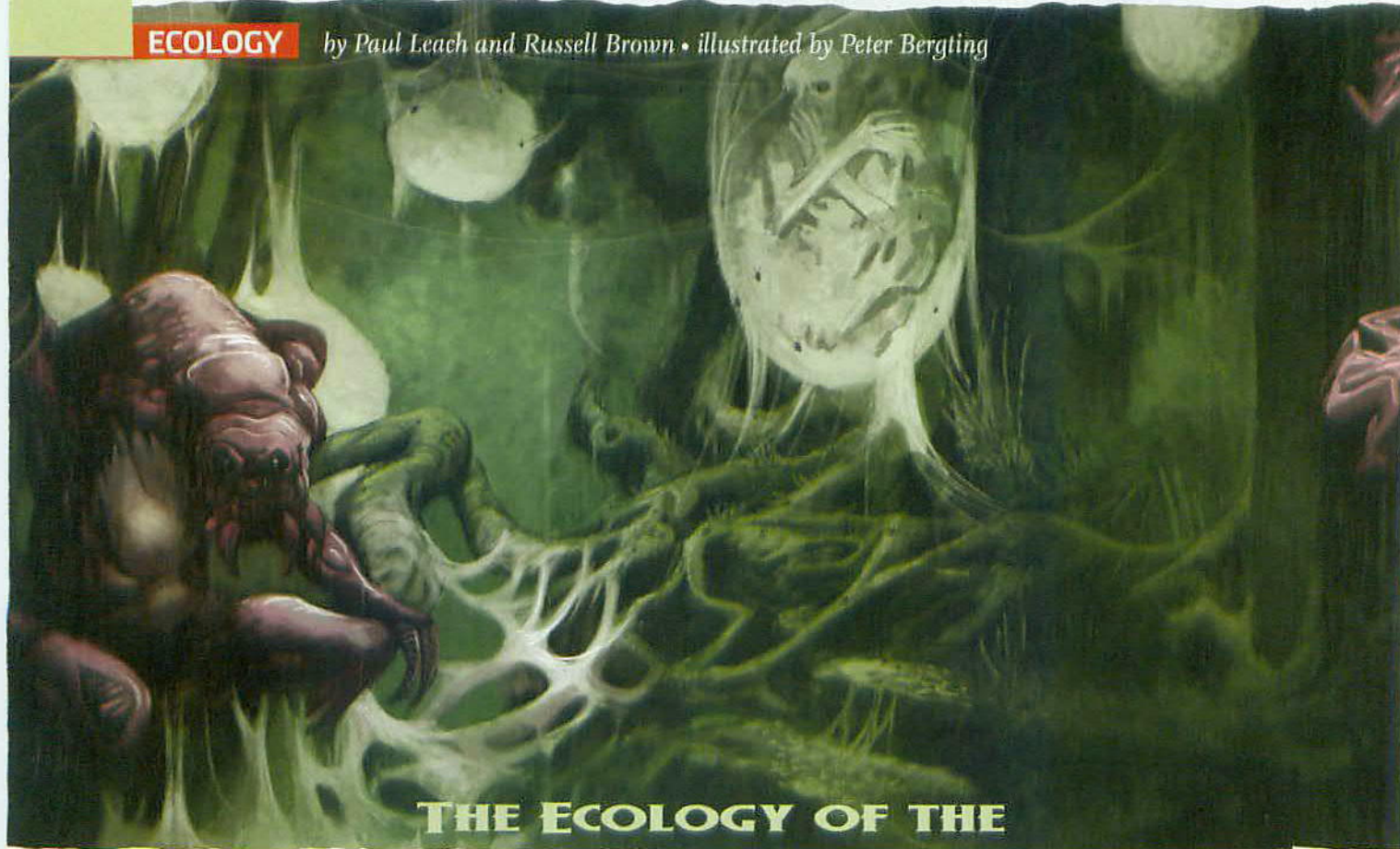
Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

You conjure a lesser elemental weird to guard an area you designate. Choose one of the four types of elemental weirds and at least a 5-foot area comprised of the same element. The weird cannot move more than 100 feet from that spot and cannot leave the element that it is bound to. For example, a lesser water weird tied to a point in a pond could not leave the pond or go more than 100 feet from the point it is bound to, while a lesser air elemental would have free range within a space or open air but could not fly farther than 100 from the designated point. The lesser elemental weird you summon appears in the spot you designate and acts immediately on your turn. The lesser elemental weird attacks any creature other than you that comes within range of its attack. If you speak the same language as the weird you can provide it with more detailed instructions, like to not attack specific individuals or members of specific races, or to only attack certain creatures. The elemental weird obeys your commands until either it is destroyed or the spell's duration expires, at which time it departs back to the appropriate Elemental Plane.

A 15th level caster can use *permanency* and expend 3,500 XP to make this spell permanent. This effect binds the lesser elemental weird to the area until it is destroyed.

**Material Component:** A bowl or brazier filled with an element corresponding to the lesser elemental weird you plan to summon.



**THE ECOLOGY OF THE**

**ETTERCAP**

In the darkened tangles of the deepest forest mazes, where eldritch boughs create an endless green night, hang the grasping webs of the degenerate ettercap. Gifted with the cunning patience and bloodthirsty tenacity of the spiders they so closely resemble, ettercaps are master predators and trappers with few peers. Perverted and alien, they attempt to blend in with the natural world. Parasites trying to pass as children of nature, their terrible forms and insatiable, verminous hunger for warm flesh belie their true spirits.

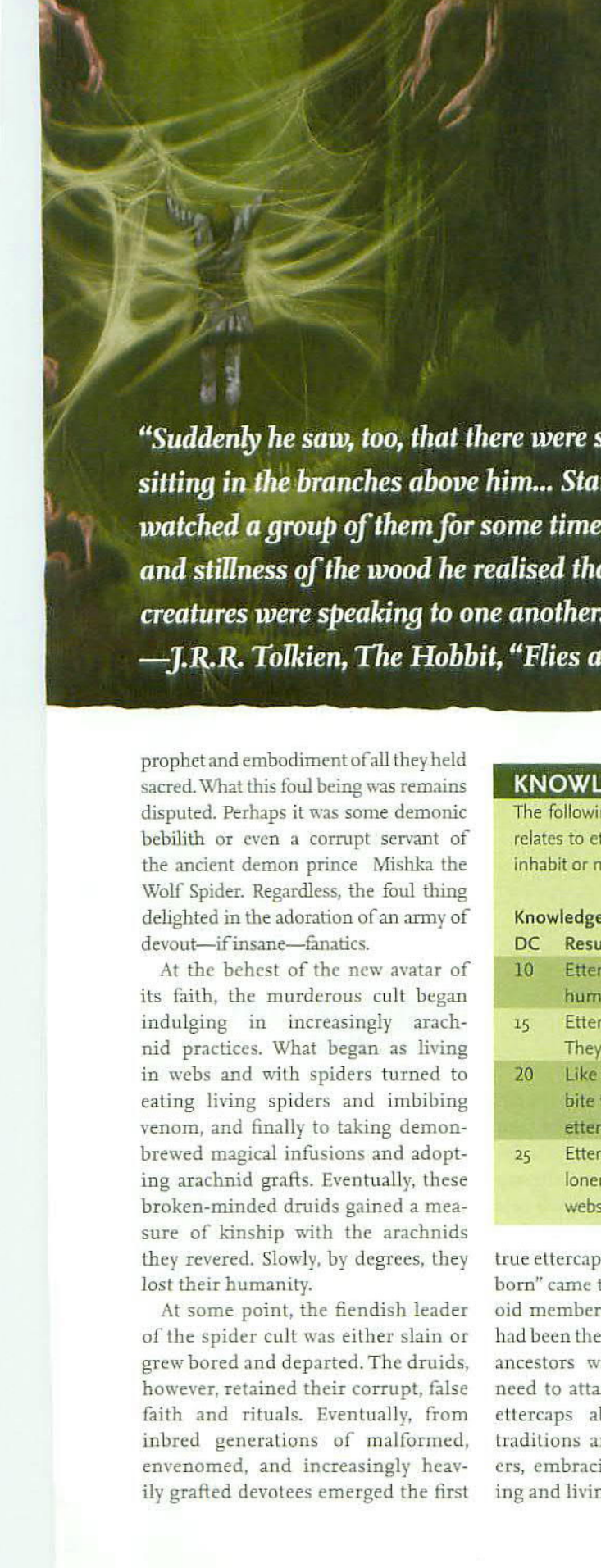
**HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP**

Most people believe ettercaps somehow evolved or were magically manipulated from arachnid stock, but their horrible origins in fact occurred well outside of any natural order. Predictably, drow experimentation is often presumed in these beings' genesis, yet the worshipers of Lolth fervently and disgustedly deny the Spider Queen's involvement. The truth, however, lies less in external evils

and more in the simple, willing corruption of what was once a pure intention.

Upon great menhirs and carved upon living guardians, pulses the vast, cultic knowledge of the druids. Within their secret circles, druids worship all facets of the world's being, and for each of nature's countless aspects there are corresponding druidic rituals and inspired ceremonies. One such fragment of ancient natural lore mentions a secret cannibalistic tradition, a disgusting rite overlooked or marginalized by many nature worshipers. There were once—and some say still are—druidic sects that adhered to these natural truths of betrayal and blood. One such fleshtearing sect is held responsible for fathering the ettercap race.

These deranged druids embraced vile aspects of nature, particularly the invasive, fecund, and unkillable virtues of vermin. Thus, in a time long past, when a terrible spider fiend came upon their ranks, the druids took its presence as the ultimate validation of nature, seeing the monstrosity as a



*“Suddenly he saw, too, that there were spiders huge and horrible sitting in the branches above him... Standing behind a tree he watched a group of them for some time, and then in the silence and stillness of the wood he realised that these loathesome creatures were speaking to one another...”*

*—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, “Flies and Spiders”*

prophet and embodiment of all they held sacred. What this foul being was remains disputed. Perhaps it was some demonic bebilith or even a corrupt servant of the ancient demon prince Mishka the Wolf Spider. Regardless, the foul thing delighted in the adoration of an army of devout—if insane—fanatics.

At the behest of the new avatar of its faith, the murderous cult began indulging in increasingly arachnid practices. What began as living in webs and with spiders turned to eating living spiders and imbibing venom, and finally to taking demon-brewed magical infusions and adopting arachnid grafts. Eventually, these broken-minded druids gained a measure of kinship with the arachnids they revered. Slowly, by degrees, they lost their humanity.

At some point, the fiendish leader of the spider cult was either slain or grew bored and departed. The druids, however, retained their corrupt, false faith and rituals. Eventually, from inbred generations of malformed, envenomed, and increasingly heavily grafted devotees emerged the first

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE ETTERCAP

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to ettercaps. Those who study arachnids or aberrations, as well as those who inhabit or make their living in the forest, are most likely to possess this information.

#### Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Ettercaps are evil forest-dwelling creatures that resemble bloated humanoids with distorted arachnid features.
15	Ettercaps create and hunt with webs, ensnaring prey in their sticky folds. They surround themselves with arachnid pets and prefer to eat live prey.
20	Like many spiders, ettercaps are venomous, possessing a poisonous bite that stiffens and slows victims. Despite their horrific appearance, ettercaps are relatively intelligent and speak Common.
25	Ettercaps are skilled at climbing, hiding, and trapmaking. Typically loners, they riddle their territories with snares and traps incorporating their webs and venom, waiting until victims are defenseless before approaching.

true ettercaps. Over time, these “perfect born” came to outnumber the humanoid members of their order, and what had been the quest and religion of their ancestors was forgotten. Having no need to attain a more arachnid state, ettercaps abandoned their druidic traditions and forgot their forebearers, embracing their instincts, hunting and living as spiders, exulting and

indulging in the profane knowledge of their perverse perfection.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ETTERCAP

An ettercap looks like nothing so much as a disgustingly bruised, rotund, humanoid warped with arachnid features and mounted with a multitude of insectal eyes. Sickeningly pale, sagging skin covers its bloated abdomen while

**ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM**

*Countless tiny horrors gibber and trample one another as they surge toward you, their features something between those of hairy black spiders and sickly pink newborn humans. Dozens of tiny mandibles click and chatter as they come, dripping a mixture of poison and anticipatory drool.*

**ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM**

**CR 3**

NE Tiny Aberration

**Init** +2; **Senses** low-light vision; **Listen** +6, **Spot** +5

**AC** 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex), **touch** 14, **flat-footed** 12

**hp** 18 (4 HD)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

**Spd** 15 ft. (3 squares), **climb** 15 ft.

**Melee** swarm (2d6 plus poison)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

**Base Atk** +3; **Grp** —

**Special Atk** distraction

**Abilities** Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 2

**Feats** Alertness, Great Fortitude

**Skills** Climb +10, Listen +6, Spot +5

**Environment** warm forests

**Organization** solitary, tangle (2–4 swarms), or infestation (7–12 swarms)

**Treasure** none

**Advancement** none

When it hatches, an ettercap egg sack releases a swarm of starving, underdeveloped ettercap young. These malformed, pink hatchlings attack anything to sate their fetal hunger. See page 237 of the *Monster Manual* for special combat rules for swarms.

**Combat**

**Distraction (Ex):** Any living creature that begins its turn with an ettercap brood swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save is Constitution-based.

**Poison (Ex):** Injury, Fortitude DC 14, initial and secondary damage 1d3 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

**Skills:** An ettercap brood swarm has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. It uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb checks. It can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.

splotchy pinks and purples color the rest of its body.

Ettercap physiology relies on a blend of humanoid and arachnid organs and processes. An ettercap's prominent venom-injecting fangs conceal its near-human, yet totally fleshless, mouth. Its exposed teeth allow it to chew meat, while a hidden tubelike tongue allows it to drink its prey's bodily fluids. Like a true arachnid, an ettercap drools enzyme spittle on its meals to start the digestive process. Its muscular and flexible fangs display an ability to manipulate small items, and an ettercap sometimes uses them like a third hand when crafting

traps and other items. Its clawed hands also show great versatility, despite their lack of opposable thumbs. With a few quick gyrations and clips, an ettercap quickly weaves, cuts, and casts web nets as speedily as its lower abdominal spinnerets looses strands.

Ettercaps conceive young through normal sexual reproduction, but the gestation and birth cycle results in a large external egg sac filled with scores of tiny ettercap young. These egg sacs are 2- to 3-foot ovoids, wrapped in sticky, protective webs, that allow them to be easily hung in clusters from cave walls, tree boughs, web structures, or

other easily defensible locations. Upon hatching, a process that takes nearly three months, thirty to eighty tiny, half-formed ettercap young spill forth with ravenous intent. Ettercap mothers try to keep an immobile but living food source near the eggs—sometimes storing such a creature alive for weeks—so their newly hatched young don't cannibalize too many of their siblings. If a mother fails to find suitable prey, she flees to escape her starving children, returning only after the swarm has had time to sate itself or its numbers have thinned. Thus, these swarms of mindless newborn ettercaps can threaten not just those who stumble across a web-filled ettercap nursery, but whole regions (see the Ettercap Brood Swarm sidebar). In the weeks after hatching, the number of young ettercaps dwindles through exposure, starvation, birth defects, and the predation of their parents, their peers, and other creatures. The mother collects the most promising youngsters (no more than three) and raises them until they reach maturity in four years. The rest are left to their near-inevitable demises.

An ettercap grows throughout its life, possibly attaining Large size if it lives long enough. They can live for approximately 50 years, though, violence ends the lives of most ettercaps, before age 20.

**PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ETTERCAP**

The ettercap's mixed arachnid-humanoid brain sets a natural limit on its emotional and intellectual capacity. Rooted in their collective consciousness, however, is a connection to arachnid life that extends far beyond shared appearance—a holdover from the druidic rites that ultimately inspired the race's creation. Ettercaps feel instinctually obligated to serve as a kind of warden to all arachnid life and to increase their own numbers. Excessive sentiment results in survival risks. Other ettercaps are only needed for breeding, and thus groups of ettercaps larger than a pair are rare. They believe that life and death serve as the only real, tangible truths, and



thus they do not recognize any deities or other moral codes. Religion and higher thought do not place victims in the web.

In some extraordinarily rare conditions, a particularly intelligent ettercap—usually a female—appears and gathers a large number of ettercaps and other arachnids around her. These leaders are often motivated, by destructive humanoid incursions and great loss of arachnid life, to strike out from their webs and stalk prey back to its home. These forays can lead to whole humanoid communities besieged by swarms of ettercaps, monstrous spiders, spider swarms, and other arachnid monstrosities.

An ettercap acts as a lone shepherd in relation to other ettercaps and true spiders. As keepers of their kind, they dispose of (eat) the weak and sick, while nurturing the specimens most likely to thrive and fulfill their intended roles in nature. Their ability to commune with normal spiders results naturally from their inherited spider traits. To an arachnid, an ettercap is just another spider. Ettercaps exude powerful pheromones and bodily resins that have euphoric effects on other arachnids and mask any hint of residual humanity. Thus, spiders are more active and seem more content whenever an ettercap is near.

## THE REAL HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP

The name ettercap can be traced to the Old English word for spider, *attercoppe* (“atter” meaning “poison,” and “coppe” meaning “head”). Middle English *coppe* (or *cob*) was synonymous for spider, as in *cobweb* or *spider web*. J.R.R. Tolkien gave this name to his intelligent spider monsters in *The Hobbit*.

*DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* ettercap first appeared in the original *Fiend Folio* and has been resurrected in every edition since. An Ettercap miniature also appeared as part of the *D&D Miniatures Giants of Legend* set.



Despite their isolationist attitudes and alien thoughts, ettercaps speak Common. They simply call it “The Old Tongue” and use it on the rare occasions they need to speak to one another or, more often, when they must communicate with outsiders. While ettercaps most often talk to humanoids when attempting to taunt or deceive their prey into following them into an ambush, ettercaps might try to parley their knowledge of the forest and its dangers when a superior enemy prevents their escape. Ettercaps sometimes use coins or other treasure as bait for humanoid prey, although few truly want such treasure for its own value.

## ETTERCAP LAIRS

An ettercap's lair defines the creature as much as any of its traits and abilities.

Its lair serves many purposes: shelter, food storage, and the nerve center of its trap system. An ettercap builds its cocoonlike home out of specially treated, hardened webbing camouflaged with branches and leaves and suspended from large boughs high in the forest canopy, allowing it to spend much of its time—like a spider—lying in wait.

Aside from shelter, a complex network of web strands runs from an ettercap's lair. Some of these might connect with the lairs of other ettercaps, directly linking several ettercaps in a region to a complex webcraft community. More commonly, a single strand of webbing connects each of an ettercap's traps to its lair. If a trap is disturbed, the strand shakes violently, alerting its creator to the disturbance

and leading him to investigate. Ettercaps regularly crisscross their territories with such strands, which prove so light and difficult to notice that many creatures disturb the webs without ever knowing. As such, an ettercap's lair serves not just as its home but as the center of a complex web that encompasses its entire territory. A character must make a DC 18 Search check to reveal the presence of these warning webs in a 5-foot square. Characters who have gained

access to an ettercap's lair might also notice webs vibrating in alarm with a DC 18 Spot check, but they might not realize its meaning without making a DC 20 Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature) check.

### ETTERCAP WEB TRAPS

Insidiously imaginative and innately skilled, ettercaps are natural trap makers and create a wide range of booby traps and pitfalls. Usually incorporating

their natural webbing and leftovers bits from past meals, some of these arachnid monstrosities' more cunning traps are detailed here.

**Baited Limb and Poison Spikes:** The most intelligent ettercaps have noticed that a humanoid creature, wrapped tight in webs and suspended as bait from a weakened tree limb, often attracts other humanoids. The victim moves out onto the limb, which breaks, dropping him and the bait into

### ADVANCED ETTERCAP

Ettercap males most often advance by Hit Dice, becoming stronger, larger hunters. Females, typically being more intelligent, might advance by Hit Dice but frequently take levels in druid, fighter, ranger, rogue, or sorcerer. The Matriarch, presented here, would be a perfect candidate for a leader instigating an attack on a humanoid community.

#### THE MATRIARCH

CR 15

Female ettercap druid 7/ vermin lord 4\*

NE Medium aberration

**Init** +1; **Senses** low-light vision; **Listen** +2, **Spot** +8

**Language** Common, Sylvan

**AC** 19, **touch** 12, **flat-footed** 17

**hp** 100 (16 HD); 20 point swarm armor

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +4, **Will** +13

**Spd** 30 ft. (6 squares), **climb** 30 ft.

**Melee** bite +12 **melee** (1d8+2 plus blood drain and poison) and 2 claws +10 **melee** (1d3+1)

**Base Atk** +10; **Grp** +11

**Special Attack** blood drain, poison, web

**Druid Spells Prepared** (CL 9):

5th—*insect plague*, *tree stride*

4th—*dispel magic*, *giant vermin* (2)

3rd—*contagion* (DC 18), *greater magic fang*, *poison* (DC 18), *snare*

2nd—*barkskin*, *summon swarm* (3), *warp wood* (DC 17)

1st—*entangle* (2, DC 16), *long strider*, *jump*, *obscuring mist* (2)

0—*detect magic* (2), *detect poison* (2), *guidance*, *know direction*

**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 9):

1/day—*spider hand*\*

**Abilities** Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 12

**SQ** animal companion, chitin +2, spontaneous casting (*summon nature's ally* spells), swarm armor, vermin servant, wild empathy +8, wild shape 3/day

**Feats** Ability Focus (poison), Dodge, Great Fortitude, Multiattack, Natural Spell, Run

**Skills** Climb +17, Craft (trapmaking) +11, Hide +13 Listen +12, Knowledge (nature) +14, Move Silently +9, Ride +5, Spellcraft +6, Spot +16, Survival +12

**Possession** *bracers of armor* +4, *dusty rose prism ioun stone*

**Blood Drain (Su):** The Matriarch has enlarged mandibles.

As part of her bite attack she can start a grapple without provoking an attack of opportunity. If successful, the mandibles automatically deal 2d6 points of damage each round as they suck blood from her victim. The blood drain ability only works on living creatures.

**Chitin (Ex):** The Matriarch has chitinous plates that grant her a +2 natural armor bonus.

**Poison (Ex):** Injury, Fortitude DC 24, initial damage 1d6 Dex, secondary damage 2d6 Dex.

**Swarm Armor (Su):** Every day, upon regaining her spells, the Matriarch is covered by a swarm of spiders. These arachnids absorb up to 20 points of damage from any damaging attack (weapon or spell). The spiders die off when then they absorb such attacks. Swarm armor has no effect if the Matriarch is wearing armor.

**Web (Ex):** An entangled creature can escape one of the Matriarch's webs with a DC 20 Escape Artist check or burst the web with a DC 24 Strength check. See page 106 of the *Monster Manual* for a full description of this ability.

\* From the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).



## SPIDER SPELLS

Ettercaps regularly make use of a variety of spider-related magic. Spells like *creeping doom*, *summon swarm*, *giant insect*, and various *summon monster* spells that summon monstrous spiders are particular favorites.

### Spider Hand

Transmutation

**Level:** Cleric 1, druid 1

**Components:** V, S

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Range:** Personal

**Target:** Caster's hand

**Duration:** Concentration (up to 1 minute/level)

You detach your hand, which transforms into a Small monstrous spider (see the *Monster Manual*) that you control. You can see through its eyes, and it can travel up to 20 feet per level away from you. If the spider is killed or prevented from returning to you, your hand is restored when the spell ends, but you take 1d6 points of damage. If you direct the spider to return to your arm (a move-equivalent action), then let the spell end, you take no damage.

the ettercap's web. The trap is even more effective if the bait is left screaming for help and the ground is planted with sticks covered in the ettercap's poison.

CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 22 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. high (2d6, fall); crude ground spikes

(Atk +5 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each plus poison); poison (ettercap poison, DC 15 Fortitude save resists, 1d6/2d6 Dex); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 17.

**Dancing Dead Man:** Ettercaps create dancing dead men by filling a

humanoid husk with rocks, wet leaves, and liquid webbing. Once attached to a strong web and placed to swing into the victim's path, the device behaves as a pendulum-style giant sap that bursts upon hitting a target, covering it in webs.

CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +5 melee (4d6 nonlethal plus liquid webbing); liquid webbing (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp, Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 15.

**Camouflaged Tripping Strand:** As a simple trap, ettercaps simply hide strong, braided strands of webbing across a path, causing creatures to trip and fall into a web hidden just a few feet ahead.

CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; Atk +15 melee touch (trip plus entangle); entangle (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp, Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 15. ☞

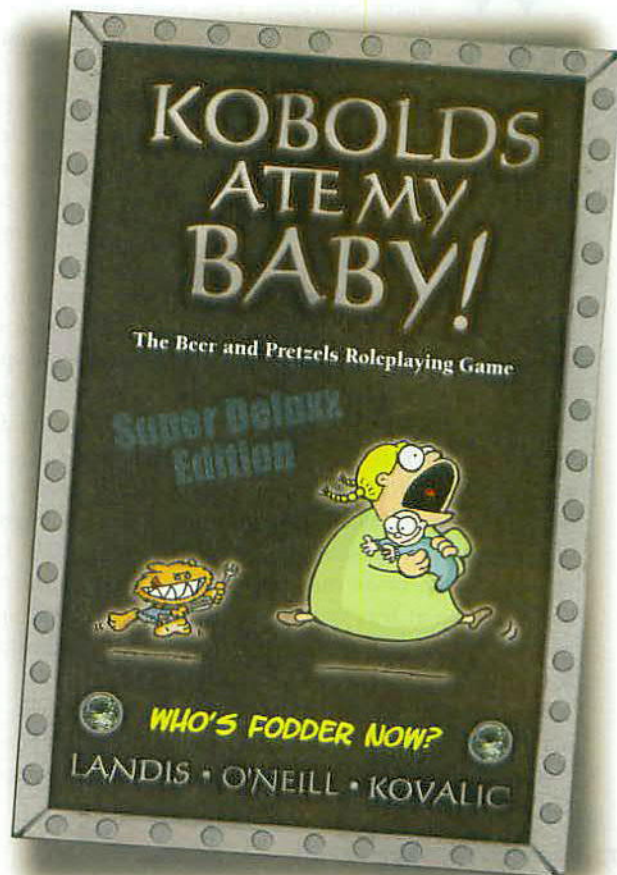
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# Ecology of the Fire Archon

by Matthew Sernett

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"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,  
With whom revenge is virtue."  
--*The Revenge*, Edward Young

Living flames forged by blazing magic, fire archons exist to destroy. Overrun and consume, take all and leave nothing but ashes -- these are the desires that burn within fire archons' incandescent souls from their first moments. Always hungry for conquest, these elemental mercenaries work for anyone with power and the promise of many victories.



## History

In an ancient time, when the world had hardly been formed, primordial beings battled the gods for control of creation. In this cataclysmic conflict, the deific host marshaled armies of angels and cadres of exarchs, and though the primordials could call forth titanic beasts and their giant children, they could not muster a true military to face their enemies. To match their foes, the consummate creators gave being to a means by which elemental creatures could be recreated -- reshaped and hammered into soldiers. The warriors formed through this process were the first archons.

Fire archons believe that the honor of being the primordials' first soldiers belongs to them, but that is a secret

only the gods and primordials remember. Regardless of which type was first, the presence of the archons turned the tide of battle in the primordials' favor. Given life, the archons could reproduce themselves, building armies faster than giants could be born or angels ordained. Their uncontrolled creation pleased the primordials and worried the gods.

Thus it was that one deity devised the plan that would starve the archon armies of troops. Rather than combat the archons directly, the gods' forces attacked the creatures and energies that served as the archons' source. To create an archon, one needs another elemental being. Virtually any kind will do. That creature is then remade into an archon in a magic foundry built upon a well of elemental power. The angels, exarchs, and gods set about destroying any elementals they encountered and diverting or ruining the largest sources of elemental energy in the Elemental Chaos.

Some reshaped the elemental spirits rather than destroy them. Medusas are said by some to be earth spirits reformed by Zehir. Others blame doppelgangers upon Sehanine's reshaping of water elementals. Yet the vast majority of elementals were slain. Whole races were snuffed out or driven so far to the brink that none have seen one of them to this day. Efreeti remember this time as the Desolation in their legends, and they believe that the Elemental Chaos still hasn't recovered.

The gods might have done more damage, but their defeat of the primordials made continued conflict wasteful. Without the gods' forces to fight, and with no clear direction, the archons began to clash with one another. Some fell into ranks behind powerful archon leaders. Others aligned with powerful children of the primordials who tried to fill the power void left by their creators. The once innumerable archons ground down their number and might have disappeared altogether had not some races, such as the efreeti, preserved the means for their renewal.

Today, archons are just one type of creature among the countless beings that inhabit the Elemental Chaos. Their numbers wax and wane as different armies of archons go through cycles of creation and conflict, flaring up and burning themselves out as they prepare for war and engage in it.

## Knowledge of the Fire Archon

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to fire archons. A result provides the information at the given DC and the information from all lower DCs.

### DC Result

- 12 Fire archons are a warlike race of fiery elemental beings. Roughly humanoid in shape, they wield weapons and wear armor.
- 15 There are other archons consisting of other elemental forces. They seem similar in many respects besides the elemental material encased in their armor.  
Unlike aimless elementals, fire archons have a militaristic culture based on continual conquest. This seems to be true of all fire archons from the moment of their creation. Other archons are militaristic, but none are as rampantly destructive as the fire archons.
- 20
- 25 Fire archons can be created through a difficult ritual involving the use of a special forge built upon a concentration of elemental fire. Once created, a fire archon owes no fealty to its creator, but a person with the power to subdue the fire archon can control it through intimidation.

30 Fire archons were created by the primordials in their war against the gods. The secret of creating fire archons was stolen by the efreeti and it disseminated from them to others. Most fire archons are now either created by other fire archons or the efreeti. When archons created by the efreeti build upon and alter the lands they conquer, they try to recreate the greatest of the efreeti cities, the City of Brass.

## Physiology

Fire archons exist as creatures of living flame, but their bodies aren't so mutable as a flickering fire. Every fire archon has two arms, a torso, and a head. Their lower bodies take the form of single conflagrations rather than separate legs.

Despite lacking a skeletal structure, their upper bodies conform in motion to human norms. Their arms are equivalent to a human's, with clearly positioned shoulders, elbows, and hands. Fire archon fingers seem to blend together into a mittenlike form or separate into true digits depending on their need. Whether this is due to the obscuring effect of the flames or a true joining of fiery flesh is unclear, but no fire archon has ever been seen to be missing a finger or limb. If such a member is severed, the fire archon instantly grows another while the severed part burns away in a swirl of fire and smoke. The only exceptions seem to be the head and the torso. Severing these parts from the body is damage sufficient to kill a fire archon instantly.

A fire archon's head has a defined front and back, but it typically lacks facial features. Brighter eyelike points can appear on their faces when they become agitated or angry, and they see as well as most humanoid. Their bodies typically provide light equivalent to a bonfire, and thus they illuminate any darkened area they enter, obviating the need for darkvision. Fire archons seem incapable of diminishing the light their bodies emit, and thus they would find hiding from foes difficult in most situations. However, fire archons aren't inclined toward stealth even when it would benefit them, preferring instead to alert their foes to their presence by sending up columns of smoke from things and creatures they burn. The lower body of a fire archon is one large flame rather than legs. As with other archons, fire archons glide about on a column of their constituent element. The exact method of this locomotion is poorly understood, but it is assumed to resemble a slug's movement, with the fire archon somehow gliding over a thin layer of super-heated air.



Although made of transparent and flickering flames, and apparently empty of organs, a fire archon has a solid form. Those brave enough to have touched a fire archon's body describe it as being like holding a boiling bag of writhing snakes. A fire archon held in this way is certainly very hot, but it does not truly burn. The archon can set things ablaze with its body, but this seems to require some concentration -- something that a fire archon is

incapable of while wrestling or in combat. This solidity gives the archon a weight roughly equivalent to an elf of similar stature, but since they tend to stand close to 7 feet tall, they often weigh close to 200 pounds.

Fire archons must "breathe" in the sense that a fire needs air. Without it, they dwindle and die, suffocated by the lack of fuel. Similarly, fire archons must "eat." Periodically, they must concentrate on burning an object completely to ash. A fire archon might accomplish this by holding the item, standing over it, or even placing it within the fire archon's face and "swallowing" it. Yet like other elementals, fire archons shall never know the joy of dreams or the terror of nightmares for they do not sleep.

## Psychology

The primordials created fire archons to be their soldiers, and they come into being with a soldier's mindset. From their first conscious thought, fire archons expect battle and are ready to serve in war. Fire archons seem to recognize the authority of other fiery creatures automatically and fall into ranks for them. Yet others who summon or create them must first cow them by some show of superior force. Once they know their place, fire archons serve willingly so long as their needs are met, particularly the need for conquest.

Fire archons think of everything in terms of conflict. They remain ever aware of what side they are on, their subordinates and commanders, what creatures are current foes, and which enemies are ones they must face in some later fight. This extreme perspective might make them appear brutish, but they possess astonishing cunning and a general's grasp of tactics. Underestimating a fire archon is a sure way to see it gain the upper hand.

Just as a fire archon must breathe and eat, so must they conquer and destroy. Such activity nourishes and energizes them. Without it, they grow restless at first and then careless and sluggish. This need for new ventures keeps fire archons on the move and on the offensive. Defeats, the need to build and train forces, and planning can cause them to stop for long periods, but unless a foe can destroy them utterly, it's often best to attempt to redirect their fury toward easier targets.

## Society

Left to their own devices, fire archons adopt a society based on a rough military structure. Physical and strategic contests, usually not lethal, are used to determine rank. Fire archons are quick to acknowledge superior power and intellect in another fire creature, so competitions tend to be few and brief unless there are several contestants of very similar power. Despite their warlike natures, fire archons aren't inclined toward fractiousness and infighting. Fire archons on the opposite sides of a conflict will happily slaughter one another, but within a force, fire archons prefer to focus their aggression outward.

The number of "ranks" in a fire archon society depends upon how many fire archons there are. A leader has five followers, who each in turn have five followers. This structure flows downward to the lowest rank. Each member in a group of five takes its orders from any of the members of a group of five individuals of the next highest rank. Uneven numbers of groups are placed in the lowest rank. Any odd number in a rank filters in as extra members of one of the other groups rather than forming a group of less than five. Similarly, attrition results in eventual redistribution into groups of five. Thus a hundred fire archons would typically have one leader, five subcommanders, twenty-five captains, and sixty-nine members in its lowest rank.

Scholars can't be certain of the significance of the number five, and fire archons themselves simply see it as "natural" and "efficient." In numbers less than five, fire archons see themselves as individuals rather than

brethren, and they become less efficient and less willing to work as a team. Those who seek to subjugate fire archons should keep this in mind. Similarly, the rank structure of fire archons doesn't allow an outsider to elevate a favored archon above its personal merits. Doing so can result in the archons flouting commands while they follow the old structure, or the favored member might be ostracized from the ranks, resulting in a reorganization and poor cooperation with the favored member. Material goods, particularly weapons and armor that can make a favored archon more powerful, presents a much better way to reward service.

All fire archon societies inevitably strike outward, and the leader determines the direction and target. When they do, the archons seek to lay waste to nearly everything they encounter. Archons tend to avoid building or creating anything, but they will make fortifications when fighting a long-term conflict or to protect a valuable resource, such as a fire font and foundry. Fire archons prefer not to do such work themselves, and when possible, they enslave conquered people and use them for forced labor. Such slaves face a bleak existence held by captors that have no empathy and no use for them once the job is done. Slaves with an interest in their future therefore find ways to remain useful, playing upon the fire archon's sense of superiority and concern about foes.

Many fire archons owe their existence to the efreeti, and these archons seek to emulate their creators, even long after being freed from their control. They are far more inclined to take and keep slaves, build structures, and secure territory. They often attempt to create an environment similar to that which surrounds the City of Brass -- a task aided by the effect the presence of fire archons can have on the environment.

When fire archons gather in numbers, they set fire to things and their bodies produce heat, but these factors cannot explain the drought that presages the army's march or the eruption of long-dormant volcanoes. It seems that simply having fire archons in an area creates a sympathetic link to the qualities of heat and flame. Created by elemental flame and composed of it, fire archons seem to form a peculiar gateway for the power of fire in the Elemental Chaos. It's said that within a mile of even a single fire archon, a candle flame burns an inch higher and a single spark can kindle a coal.

## Creating a Fire Archon



Fire archons cannot reproduce by any typical means. Instead, they are created from another elemental's body and spirit. To accomplish this, a ritual must be performed in a magic foundry infused with elemental fire. The nature of the elemental summoned by the ritual is not important. It might be a dumb earth beast or a highly intelligent elemental with ties to water. The ritual taps into the creative and recreative power of the primordials, wholly transforming that creature's form and soul. Needless to say, most consider the creation of a fire archon a

wholly evil act.

A foundry must be constructed upon a powerful font of elemental fire. That kind of upwelling of fiery energy can be found in the Elemental Chaos as rivers of fire hurtling through space, lakes of molten air flickering in glowing caverns, or great crystals brilliant with internal infernos. Fire fonts can be found on other planes as well. They are most common in places such as volcanoes or tunnels where magma flows, but fire fonts aren't beholden to other sources of heat. A fire font might act as a gateway to the Elemental Chaos or from it to another plane. Or a fire font can be a concentration of elemental energy native to the plane on which it is found. One might be a holdover from the days of creation, a seam in the plane that was never sown shut. Another might be a weakness in danger of widening or perhaps a vent to let power escape so that it does not build. In all cases, fire fonts are miraculous places of fantastic appearance.

Fire archon foundries vary in appearance, but all have two elements in common: a summoning crucible and a forge. The summoning crucible serves as the transformation space for the summoned elemental creature. It must be large enough to hold the elemental and have the power of the fire font coursing through it. The summoning crucible must have elements designed to focus the fire energy and use it as a binding force. Held in place and infused with this energy, the summoned creature can then be destroyed and reincarnated by the ritual. It must then be encased in armor from the forge.



Although a fire archon can remove its armor and wear different armor during its life, the encasement of its energies in armor from the foundry's forge is a crucial element of the ritual. Without that final step, the fire archon might expire or lack the intelligence and soldier's mindset at best, and at worst, it might grow into something powerful and uncontrollable that seeks revenge for its torturous transformation.

The forge itself rarely appears like a common forge. Using the fire font as a source of heat and flame and

elemental energies as hammers and forms, the forge can be an unrecognizable contraption of magic and arcane elements.

A working foundry can produce fire archons as often as the ritual can be performed and for as long as the foundry's resources are maintained. The power of the fire font the foundry is built upon determines the type of fire archon created. As the fire energy fluctuates in strength, so too do the results of the ritual. A fire font at ebb generates basic fire archons, while at high flow it produces the more powerful fire archons, such as blazesteels or ash disciples. Creatures without fiery souls should beware creating fire archons beyond their ability to quell.

## Fire Archon Weapons and Armor

The fury of a fire archon's form is contained by its armor, and its first suit of armor is integral to its being inasmuch as a human or elf must have skin and bones. After time however, a fire archon can change its original armor for new should it choose to do so. Many never see the need, but fire archons that evolve or gain levels often perceive the value of a different armor strategy.

Fire archons choose a new armor for the armor's capabilities or they may pick a piece to replace a sundered piece. Armor generally takes the form of a breastplate and pauldrons, but other elements such as bracers, girdles, vambraces, and helms are not uncommon. Breastplate, full plate, chain mail, and chain shirts are most common. Nonmagic organic materials such as leather are destroyed over time because a fire archon unconsciously burns the material when it eats.

Fire archons craft weapons and armor of amazing quality and stunning appearance. Using instinctual knowledge of metallurgy, fire archons craft only items of masterwork quality. Their work is on par with that of dwarves, but of course, the two are easy to tell apart. A flame motif decorates nearly everything a fire archon crafts, and its work looks seamless because it is.

Fire archons can use many different weapons, but they prefer those that remind them of the flickering tongues of fire. Thus they avoid heavy or bludgeoning weapons, and enjoy scimitars, falchions, and even lighter weapons such as rapiers. Metal weapons are a must, since most fire archons can transfer the heat of their bodies through weapons to burn foes -- an impractical attack if the medium for that transference turns to ash.

## Behind the Scenes: Monster Evolution

The fire archon derives its origin from two places: the desire for more interesting elemental monsters and

## Fire Fonts as Adventure Locations

A fire font presents a great opportunity for a cool adventure location. Let your imagination run wild. Put it anywhere you like, and use it as an excuse to make a truly magical location. Flame throwers in the walls and floor, flying bonfires, jets of fire that leap from place to place, buildings of flickering crystal, inferno tornadoes that carry creatures about, stairs of smoke, blazes that act as teleport pads -- whatever you want.

The location might be a landmark in your campaign known half the world around for its miraculous powers. Or maybe it's a hidden resource jealously guarded beneath the ziggurat of some mortal ruler. It could be an ancient and lost mystery like the Fountain of Youth or it might have thrust itself up from the earth with cataclysmic suddenness.

Of course, it doesn't have to be all about fire damage. Some of the fires might not harm anything and instead act more like *continual flame* spells. Other fires might deal another type of damage, such as cold or acid. Use color to indicate what the fires do, but allow the players to experiment and learn. A blue flame might be cold and a black one negative energy. An upside-down fire might indicate a teleporter, while a fire that doesn't flicker might be solid as a rock.

A fire font gives you a dramatic backdrop and an excuse to plan some very dynamic encounters. Use the environment like monster in the fight. Allow it to become a character in the story of the adventure. You won't regret it.

**Dreamblade.** When we sat down to discuss which creatures would carry forward to the new edition, what would be in the first *Monster Manual*, and what would inhabit the various planes in the new cosmology, the need for more interesting elemental foes came up again and again. This problem first reared its head in the bland nature and conflicting natures of elementals of 3rd Edition.

## Out with the Old

The elementals of 3rd Edition have no needs, no clear desires or motivations, and no culture, yet they attain human Intelligence, speak, and can manipulate objects. They exist in limitless numbers on the elemental planes, but they build nothing and make no lasting impression upon the game. Mechanically, they exist as neat creatures to summon or put in a dungeon and nothing more. What do they do on the elemental planes besides attack interlopers? What do they care about? In 3rd Edition, we have only vague ideas that they fight each other. If they were dumb beasts, they would make more sense. If they had a culture and did interesting things like invade the Material Plane, they would be better. But the elementals of 3rd Edition don't do either. Most creatures of the elemental type follow suit, and you have to look at outsiders such as salamanders and genies for interesting creatures with elemental themes.

Add to this the fact that the elementals' mechanics are either boring or complex. Most of them simply walk up to a PC and hit the character with a fist. Fire elementals at least do fire damage, but it hardly screams cool to face an elemental and have it act like an ogre without Power Attack. It doesn't even whisper it. The flip side of this includes mechanics such as the air elemental's whirlwind. Any mechanic that makes a person look up weather conditions in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is just begging to be "forgotten" by the DM.

We tried to rectify this in the late stages of 3rd Edition. You can see various attempts in *Monster Manuals III, IV, and V*, the most successful probably being the avatars of elemental evil of *Monster Manual IV*. Yet such inventions were a band-aid on a scar over thirty years old. The new edition offered a chance to shuffle thing up a bit, give elementals a new hand, and deal in some new players.

## In With the New

Of course, elementals -- those beings of the four elements that exist so people can summon them and put them in dungeons -- still exist in 4th Edition. We've given them a new story and some clean but cool mechanics, but this article isn't about them. It's about how else we filled the void for interesting elementally based creatures. The upcoming edition uses an altered list of creature types and uses type quite differently when it comes to mechanics. Thus creatures that seemed like they should be elementals (efreeti, salamanders, and so on) bear that type now. Yet even after reshuffling things, the game still cried out for more elemental baddies.

That's where **Dreamblade** comes in. The Flame Harrower caught the eye of several folks in R&D when it came out, and Bill Slavicsek mentioned that he wanted something like that in 4th Edition. On a purely aesthetic level, the combination of a largely transparent miniature with some metallic parts is pleasing to the eye. It's like looking at jewelry or candy. However, we all agreed that the "metal underpants" were not a positive feature. To fix that, we decided that the future monster would have a lower body of solid elemental material.

So we had a hole to fill and a visual cool concept to fill it. All that remained were the name, flavor, and mechanics. The mechanics evolved over time. In fact, as I write this, we are playtesting, and I can't be sure that the current 4th Edition mechanics will remain. The flavor evolved somewhat, but we knew that we wanted them to see a lot of use, so we always planned on them being a somewhat mercenary force. The name was an easy choice, if a bit controversial to some.

Early on in the process of designing 4th Edition, we had many discussions of the elements of 3rd Edition that we could carry forward. We took a long look at which cows really were sacred and which would make fine rump roast. The animal-headed archons weren't high on anyone's list. They exist to fill out an alignment wheel of outsiders -- a dubious purpose -- and they're an inherently strange concept. In **D&D's** universe, why do some angelic beings have horse heads? What population besides werebears and normal bears do bear angels serve? Add to their innate weirdness the fact that alignment and the planes work differently in 4th Edition, and there simply wasn't reason enough to preserve them.

Yet the word "archon" is powerful, and we knew we wanted 4th Edition to use it in a cooler way that would be more likely to see play than the angelic furies. Giving it to the new elemental beings we wanted in the game seemed a perfect fit. There could be no confusing them with the old archons, and using a cool word that would be familiar to many players would raise their profile.

## Sample Fire Archons

The following statistics present three fire archons using 3rd Edition rules. The first fire archon has statistics similar to the Fire Archon miniature from the *Desert of Desolation* set. The second and third fire archons use 3rd Edition mechanics to mimic the fire archon's 4th Edition rules.

### Fire Archon CR 6

**hp** 68 (8 HD); death throes

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Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +9

**Languages** Common, Ignan

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**AC** 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15

(+3 Dex, +5 armor)

**Immune** critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +13, **Will** +7

**Weakness** vulnerability to cold

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**Speed** 30 ft. in breastplate (6 squares), base speed 40 ft. *{{see skill points below; original text just said 30 ft. (6 squares)}}*

**Melee** mwk scimitar +14/+9 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) or

mwk scimitar +10/+5 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) and

mwk scimitar +10 (1d6+3 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)

**Base Atk** +6; **Grp** +12

**Special Actions** death throes, fire burst

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**Abilities** Str 23, Dex 24, Con 19, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16

**SQ** darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold

**Feats** Iron Will, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar)

**Skills** Intimidate +14, Jump +14, Listen +8, Spot +9 *{{numbers I come up with if speed is base 30 ft (20 ft. with armor): 14/8/8/9; if speed is base 40 ft (30 ft. with armor), then these numbers work; I'm making the assumption that the base speed is 40 feet above based on the stats here.}}*

**Possessions** 2 masterwork scimitars, masterwork breastplate

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**Fire Burst (Su)** Three times per day as a standard action, a fire archon can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 3d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 18 for half).

**Death Throes (Su)** When a fire archon is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a fire burst attack that causes 5d8 points of damage.

**Vulnerability to Cold (Ex)** A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

### Fire Archon Blazesteel CR 7

**hp** 105 (10 HD); wounded burst

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Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)

**Init** +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12

**Languages** Common, Ignan, Terran

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**AC** 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16

(+4 Dex, +4 armor, +2 shield)

**Immune** critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8

**Weakness** vulnerability to cold

---

**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares)

**Melee** mwk scimitar +16/+11 (1d6+7 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)

**Base Atk** +7; **Grp** +14

**Combat Options** flanking fire

**Special Actions** wounded burst

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**Abilities** Str 25, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 15

**SQ** darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold

**Feats** Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (scimitar)

**Skills** Balance +5, Intimidate +15, Jump +21, Listen +12, Spot +12, Tumble +15

**Possessions** masterwork scimitar, masterwork chain shirt, masterwork heavy steel shield

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**Wounded Burst (Su)** If a fire archon blazesteel is reduced to half its hit points or reduced to 0 hit points, it unleashes a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 5d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 21 for half).

**Flanking Fire (Ex)** When a fire archon blazesteel flanks a foe, it may make an extra basic attack against that foe whenever it attacks. In addition, the fire archon blazesteel's attacks against the flanked foe cause +1d6 points of fire damage for every other fire archon adjacent to the flanked target.

**Vulnerability to Cold (Ex)** A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

### Fire Archon Ash Disciple CR 8

**hp** 119 (14 HD); death throes

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Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)

**Init** +10; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12

**Languages** Common, Ignan, Terran

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**AC** 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15

(+6 Dex, +5 armor)

**Immune** critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +15, **Will** +9

**Weakness** vulnerability to cold

---

**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares); flame step

**Melee slam** +16 (1d6+5 plus 1d6 fire and target catches fire)

**Ranged fire bolt** +16 (50-ft. range; 8d6+5 fire and foe catches fire; creatures adjacent to target take 1d6 fire)

**Base Atk** +10; **Grp** +15

**Atk Options** Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot

**Special Actions** cinder burst, death throes, flame step, flame wave

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**Abilities** Str 21, Dex 23, Con 19, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 17

**SQ** darkvision 60 ft., flame step, immunities, vulnerability to cold

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (slam)

**Skills** Balance +8, Intimidate +18, Jump +26, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Listen +12, Spot +12, Survival +3 (+5 on other planes), Tumble +23

**Possessions** +1 *mithral shirt*

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**Cinder Burst (Su)** Once per encounter as a standard action, a fire archon ash disciple can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 8d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area and blinds them for 1 round (Reflex DC 21 for half and to avoid blindness).

**Death Throes (Su)** When a fire archon ash disciple is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a cinder burst attack that causes 10d8 points of damage.

**Flame Step (Su)** As a move action, a fire archon ash disciple can teleport to within 15 feet of any fire creature within 100 feet.

**Flame Wave (Su)** Once per encounter, a fire archon can unleash a wave of flames in a 30-ft. cone. Creatures in the area take 8d8 points of fire damage (Reflex DC 21 for half) and are pushed back two squares (no save).

**Vulnerability to Cold (Ex)** A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

## About the Author

**Matthew Sernett** has been a designer of 4th Edition, the Editor-in-chief of *Dragon Magazine*, a pizza cook, an onion packer, and an assembly line worker in a spring factory. In 1999, while working for *Men's Health Magazine*, he narrowly avoided being a wardrobe tracker in the male fashion industry. He feels very fortunate to now be employed as a creative designer for Gleemax.



## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# Green Hag

**F**oul beyond reasoning and old beyond reckoning, half-crazed shadows cackle madly in the mist-shrouded night. Lurking in the rank, wild places even the bravest fear to tread, nightmare crones haunt the legends of every culture and hint at the corruption that festers deep within each mortal soul. Cunning predators, vengeful adversaries, and warped reflections of the civilized races, these are the monstrosities known as hags.

This treatise marks the first of a three-part series detailing the foul powers, cruel plots, and preternatural lifecycle of the mostly frequently encountered and arguably most deadly breeds of hags.

### HISTORY OF GREEN HAGS

For as long as there have been tales to tell, there have been whispered warnings of hags. From legends of cruel yet wise seers prowling the fringes of civilization to cau-

tionary tales of cursed, hate-filled women, hags haunt the mythology and folk-stories of nearly every race.

One legend stands out among the countless others, told among dozens of races with little variation. Known as Kiersana the Unfaithful to elves and to orcs as Grigga Toegnawer, the fable of the creature most commonly called Green Mary terrorizes the dreams of countless children, regardless of race.

In a time long ago Green Mary lived as a protector of the woodlands and its creatures, a beautiful druid with a forest domain encompassing hundreds of miles. Making her home at her forest's heart, protected and served by the creatures that she in turn watched over, Green Mary worshiped and obeyed the spirits of nature and their timeless laws. On the day the winds whispered of danger and the crows squawked of death, she investigated their reports. Her search led her to a powerful and skilled hunter who stalked her animal wards



out of sport and felled the trees to make his weapons. Although the voices of the forest cried out for revenge against the careless hunter, Green Mary found him as comely as he was dangerous. Moved to speak with him, she became entranced by his silken words and he compelled by her beauty. That night, Green Mary defied the timeless whispers of the forest and lay with the source of their wrath.

The next morning, the hunter awoke to find his lover horrifically transformed. The forest had reclaimed its servant's willful body, changing her milky skin into gnarled bark, her raven hair into vines, and her soft hands into twisted claws. Realizing the extent of her sin, Green Mary obeyed her spirit masters' orders with a fearful and repentant fervor. When it was done, not even a drop of the hunter's blood remained to stain the verdant ground.

Yet nature knows no mercy, and, despite Green Mary's atonement, her form did not return to its one-time alluring shape. Disgusted by her actions and new form, she fled the beautiful groves and glens through which she once danced and took up residence among the rotting vines

and festering pools of her forest's most putrid swamp. Thus rose the first green hag, a creature of nature enslaved to passion but fated to destroy all after which she lusts.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF GREEN HAGS

Green hags possess fearsome powers, horrible diseased features, and cruel natural weaponry, but despite all of this, perhaps their most disturbing trait is how closely they resemble normal humans. Ranging the same heights and weights as human females, only their withered, swampy appearances mark green hags as anything more than particularly misshapen crones, and even these tell-tale deformities might be hidden behind myriad magical disguises. Monstrous yet strangely familiar, green hags prove the least physically terrifying of all hags, marking them as the best examples of all hags' aberrant crossbred ancestry.

Although their proportions mimic those of withered human women, their bent backs and hunched postures make some appear far shorter. Their weight also runs to far greater extremes, with some green hags appearing as emaciated, skeletal things while others can

barely support their own obese bulk. Regardless of appearance, one must never assume that a green hag is frail or sickly, as all of their race possess physical powers outstripping nearly any humanoid of similar size.

Aside from seemingly unnatural strength, a green hag's twisted form affords it a host of extraordinary and deadly powers. A green hag's physical similarity to human women is only superficial, as any who nears swiftly sees. Their mold-colored hair forms a wild viny tangle that rings their exaggerated, wart-covered features like a swampy mane. Their bent bodies possess a similar algae-green coloring as their hair but appear scarred and thick like bark, often marked with cancerous, knobby protrusions. This calloused hide makes green hags particularly resistant to physical attacks and often aids them in hiding amid the decaying overgrown areas in which they lair. This warped, hard physiology becomes most deadly as it extends to green hags' hands, which twist into yellow-nailed, filth-encrusted talons as deadly as any wild beast's.

Perhaps it's their physical heartiness, or their similarity to gnarled trees, but

## GREEN HAG KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to green hags. Inhabitants of rural and frontier communities most often know this information, as it passes on through folktales and local legends. Due to widespread fictitious stories involving green hags, some of the information provided at low DCs (15 and lower) is mere superstition and has no basis in truth. Higher DC results (20 or greater) contradict such fables with legitimate facts.

### Knowledge (nature)

DC Result

10	Green hags are sadistic cronelike monstrosities who lurk only in swamps and marshes. No plant, stone, or water way hinders them within their fetid domain and they hold mastery over all natural creatures.
15	Green hags know much of magic and the natural world, and can mimic the sounds of any animal that lives near their lair. Hags can magically swap their foul spawn with the unborn babes of other races. Children suspected of having been swapped by a hag are called calibans or changelings*.
20	Green hags can drain an enemy's strength with the slightest touch and possess significant resistance to magic. Although absolutely evil, green hags are very intelligent and might barter or be reasoned with.
25	Green hags are the least xenophobic of all hags and might appear in nearly any environment. They frequently infiltrate urban settings using their innate abilities to change shape, speak any language, turn invisible, or create any number of other distractions.
30	Green hags operate just as well above water as below. They often foster their children to humanoid families, but cannot switch children before birth. There is no such thing as a caliban or changeling*.

\*This is merely a colloquial term and has no relation to the changelings of the EBERRON campaign setting.

green hags never seem to age or suffer the ravages of time. As such, a green hag might terrorize a region for untold centuries, commonly becoming a famous monstrosity that haunts local legends for generations.

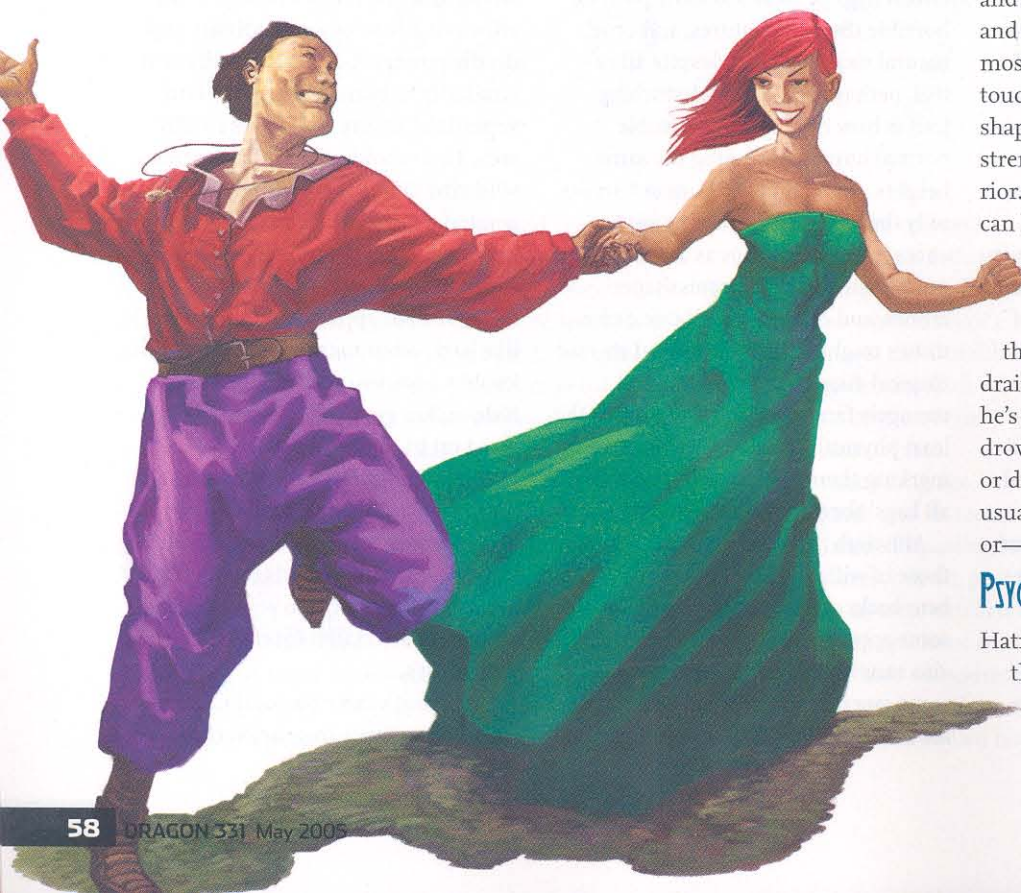
Already so like the uncaring natural predators of the swamps, it's little surprise that green hags can naturally mimic the sounds of the creatures that live within their domains. This ability does not extend to speech or the noises of manufactured items, but the sounds of wounded animals often prove sufficient enough to cause potential prey—whether other beasts or passing travelers—to investigate. Green hags are known for slaying and dragging away the bodies of pets and animals owned by those who live on the edge of swamps and forests, then coaxing their owners into the wilderness with the creature's mimicked cries. As such, local wisdom commonly holds that anything lost to the swamp remains there.

With all their deadly natural powers, the fact that green hags also possess an arsenal of supernatural and magic abilities merely compounds their horrific nature. Aside from their ability to see in total darkness, resist magic, and perform a wide range of deceitful and misleading magic, a green hag's most deadly weapon is her slightest touch. With a mere brush of her misshapen claw a green hag might sap the strength from even the strongest warrior. Although some might resist, few can hope to overpower a green hag's already formidable strength with their own leached away.

Frequently using this ability to their advantage, green hags favor draining an enemy's strength until he's totally unable to move, then either drowning him in their boggy homes or dragging him back to their lairs, usually for some unspeakable magical or—even worse—amorous purpose.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Hatred and dreams of ruin dominate the minds of green hags. They seek the destruction of all things civilized and beautiful,



## POWERS OF THE COVEY: HAG EYES

One of the most potent and versatile abilities of a hag covey is the unique power to create magic gems known as *hag eyes*. While these gems superficially appear as nothing more than semiprecious stones, spells such as *true seeing* reveal them as monstrous disembodied eyes. As long as a *hag eye* remains on the same plane as its makers, any of the hags who created it can see through it whenever they please.

The creation of a *hag eye* requires a gem of any size worth no less than 50 gp, the cooperative efforts of an entire covey of hags, and three days. During these three days a covey spends much of its time in deep concentration and meditation, preventing its members from performing any action besides eating, drinking, and sleeping. Any disruption of this meditative state foils the creation of the *hag eye*, and while it does not destroy the gem, it forces the covey to begin the ritual anew. At the end of this period, the life essences of all the covey's members are bound to the *hag eye*, allowing any of them to use its powers at any time, but also causing all of them to suffer should the gem ever be destroyed (see page 144 of the *Monster Manual*). There is no limit to the number of *hag eyes* a covey might create, although only one can be created in any three-day period.

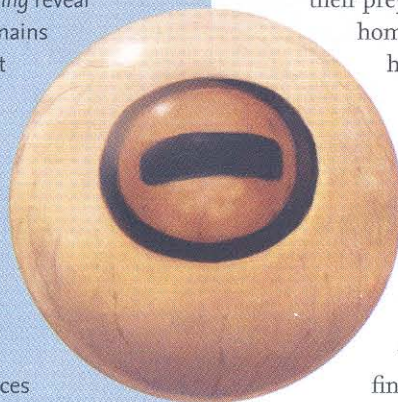
Hag coveys make use of their *hag eyes* in an insidious variety of ways.

**Aberrant Accessories:** Often setting *hag eyes* into jewelry, a hag with the ability to change her shape might distribute these gems to potential victims or powerful opponents as innocuous gifts, keepsakes, or forget-me-nots. Once in place, a hag knows the wearer's every step.

**Watchful Masters:** Hags frequently equip their servants with *hag eyes*, allowing them to keep aware of all of their minions' dealings and encounters. Combined with spells such as *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *sending*, or *whispering wind*, hags might effectively communicate through even their weakest servitors.

**Natural Spies:** Hags with animal companions or familiars often send such nondescript creatures (especially those with wings) on reconnaissance and patrol duties bearing *hag eyes*. Setting the gems in tree branches, hallows, and rocky crevices scattered throughout their territories also allow hags to keep constant vigil over their claimed territories.

**Treasure Trap:** *Hag eyes* are frequently worked into magic items or otherwise attached to a hag covey's most powerful or valuable treasures. Should a thief steal such an item, its hag owners murderously seek out and punish the culprit, swiftly retrieving their possession.



themselves under layers of their inherent magic, green hags sometimes lair in the slums or sewers of cities, stalking their prey within their own

homes. In such cases, green hags frequently disguise themselves as beautiful women and tempt men to secluded locales with libidinous promises and appealing disguises. Although green hags do not seek out male victims exclusively, they find that men quite easily, almost willingly, fall to their temptations. Once alone, they take sadistic pleasure in revealing their true forms to their would-be lovers before savagely slaughtering them. However, even worse is when a green hag's victims are more than mere would-be lovers. Insanity often follows those that survive such a traumatizing rendezvous.

With thoughts of feeding and reproduction aside, green hags ultimately seek the corruption and downfall of all things civil and pure. Intelligent and cunning in the extreme, green hags seduce and beguile their way into positions of power, installing themselves as consorts of community leaders or even false goddesses to tribes of savage humanoids. Daring those under their influence to more and more profane and degenerate acts, the greatest plots of green hags seek to recreate civilization into the brutal, decaying morasses they naturally favor.

Green hags prove far more willing to cooperate with other creatures harboring similar goals—both of their own race and others—than other breeds of hags. While all hags gain great benefits from forming coveys, green hags most frequently form such alliances and triunes of green hags form far more frequently than ones consisting exclusively of annis or sea hags. Besides their own sisters, green hags frequently ally with other evil swamp dwelling creatures, finding particular affinity with the alien cruelty of will-o-wisps, and sometimes putting

but whether out of some forgotten offense or hereditary spite is unknown. Yet while these cruel aspirations and the seemingly innate need to torment and kill inspire the foul deeds of all hags, green hags act with a malevolence and deceitfulness in excess of even their most savage brethren.

Far more glib and persuasive than any of their sister hags, green hags excel at manipulation and temptation. Their simplest plots involve using their natural and magical abilities to lure trespassers into their swampy home to

face some horrible end, but green hags commonly favor far more grandiose plots. Frequently, green hags disguise themselves and walk among the very races they terrorize. Spreading rumors of wise women or beautiful fey who live in the nearby wilderness, they eagerly make themselves into local legends. Such rumors often lead the foolish and desperate to seek the source of the tales, only to fall into the green hag's clutches.

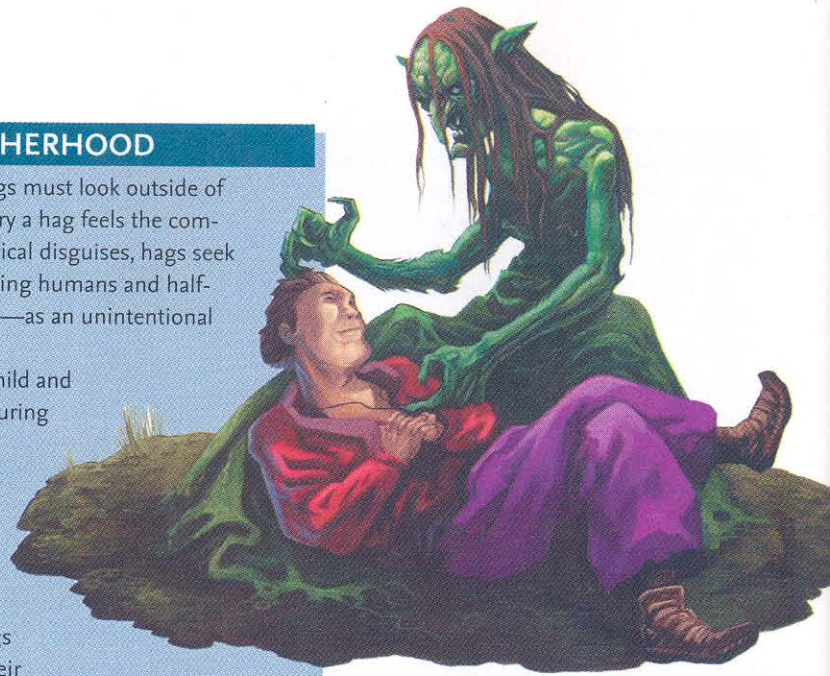
Besides luring victims to their homes, more so than any other types of hags, green hags actively seek out and invade humanoid settlements. Disguising

## THE CHANGE: MONSTROUS MOTHERHOOD

Being a race exclusively consisting of females, hags must look outside of their own species to propagate. Once every century a hag feels the compulsion to reproduce. Using kidnapping and magical disguises, hags seek out nearly any humanoid male (seemingly preferring humans and half-elves). The resulting tryst is swift and brutal, often—as an unintentional mercy—culminating in the death of the male.

Hags innately know the moment they are with child and enter a nine-month period of decreased activity. During this time, hags largely rely on their covey sisters or guardians to protect them. However, this lethargy makes them no less deadly if they are roused to action. At the end of this period the hag gives birth to a female child that looks like a perfectly normal member of the father's race.

Despite their compulsion to bear children, hags possess no maternal instincts and rarely raise their own spawn. Instead, hags frequently seek out female newborns in nearby humanoid settlements, kidnapping and murdering a suitable child, and replacing it with their own. In this way, hags perpetuate their foul species, leaving their daughters to grow as parasites within the same cultures they despise. Often the young hags know nothing of their nature, at least until they reach maturity and undergo the Change, when they take on the form and mannerisms of a true hag.



aside their hatred of humanoids to ally with evil druids. However, like all hags, green hags feel a natural—although sometimes unwarranted—sense of superiority over all creatures and know nothing of true trust or partnership. Although a green hag might ally with or even pose as a servant to another creature, such an alliance lasts only as long as it is convenient or until she sees an opportunity to supplant her supposed master.

### VS. GREEN HAGS

Cunning and duplicitous in ways that far outstrip even their hag sisters, only adventurers armed with the best equipment and information can hope to stand against a green hag and survive.

**Second Your Senses:** Green hags possess a host of spell-like abilities that allow them to trick the senses. When pursuing one of these monstrosities, adventurers should rely on multiple senses before taking anything at face value. For example, a green hag under the effect of her *disguise self* ability might be revealed simply by interacting with her physically (as creatures that touch such a glamer receive a save

to disbelieve the illusion). In addition, adventurers should be wary of distracting and misleading spell-like and extraordinary abilities, such as *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, or the hag's mimicry ability, and should only investigate unexplained sights and sounds with extreme caution.

**Steel Your Strength:** A green hag can sap the vigor from even the strongest warrior with the merest touch. To defend against her weakening touch, adventurers should consider casting spells like *bull's strength*, *heroism*, *protection from evil*, *lesser restoration*, or even make use of a bard's inspire courage ability to boost their Fortitude saving throws or regain lost Strength.

**Dispel Disguises:** Green hags may use any of their spell-like abilities at will, and thus use them frequently. While adventurers might seek to cast spells like *dispel magic* or *glitterdust* to reveal a magically masked green hag, these crones can replace their dispelled disguises in moments. Instead, hag hunters should cast spells that continually reveal or bypass illusions, such as *detect thoughts*, *invisibility purge*, or *true seeing*. Better funded adventurers

should seek out magic items like *dust of appearance* or *gems of seeing*, which provide more versatile, longer-lasting, and more reliable effects.

**Unexpectedly Underwater:** Adventurers cannot afford to forget that green hags can move just as nimbly underwater as on land. Possessing both a swim speed and the spell-like ability to breathe water, every stagnant pool and placid pond becomes a potential ambush site. Taking advantage of their weakness supernatural ability and their target's vulnerable state, green hags take special pleasure in grappling those who pass by their hunting waters and dragging them underwater, where the victim's surprise and terror swiftly brings a particularly horrific death by drowning.

**Classed Crones and Local Legends:** Perhaps more than any other hag, green hags are likely to take levels in a variety of character classes (see "Root of Evil" in *DUNGEON* #122 for an example). Well suited to the various spellcasting classes, as well as those that thrive in natural settings, green hags frequently add the abilities of barbarians, druids, or sorcerers to their already potent arsenal of abilities. Thus, adventurers should always research their prey and listen well to the stories of locals. The tale of Gnarled Jan controlling the beasts of the swamps might suggest a green hag druid more powerful than her ordinary kin. ▀

by Mark A. Hart • illustrated by Peter Bergting

## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# GRIMLOCK

In the dark realms below lives a race of stalwart, aggressive, and paranoid creatures capable of operating with equal ease in darkness and in light. These creatures, known by many on the world above as grimlocks, possess preternatural camouflage in their cavernous homes, the heightened senses of true Underdark predators, and a xenophobic mistrust of all other races. Often toiling as slave-warriors in the armies of the drow, duergar, and mind flayers, grimlocks have endured centuries of enslavement and deprivation. Although these creatures demonstrate a remarkable capacity for evil, they nonetheless display qualities of bravery, determination, and sometimes even fierce loyalty. The races of the surface world rarely witness this grim nobility, however, and thus most consider grimlocks as nothing more than twisted, evil, and degenerate monsters.

### HISTORY

In the distant past, grimlocks lived on the surface as a race of stony-skinned, mountain-dwelling barbarians. Carving out a fierce warrior society upon their mountaintop homes, they made war with all those who lived below, subsisting by raiding the settlements of more peaceful races. Although widely feared, such brutality could only be tolerated for so long, and eventually an alliance of their victims struck back, forcing the grimlocks from their lofty homes. Hunted by their one-time prey, those grimlocks who weren't exterminated hid wherever they could find shelter, many retreating deep into the tunnels below the peaks they once called home. Thus, grimlocks gained both their place among the creatures of the Underdark and their race-wide loathing of all other beings.

Unexpectedly, grimlocks found a pathetic kind of purchase within the Underdark, wandering widely through its depths



in separated groups and multiplying as they could. Their stone-colored skin allowed the surviving grimlocks to hide from many of the Underdark's greatest predators and flourish within the lightless depths. However, their survival was not assured by their own tenacity to survive, but unexpectedly by the cruel whimsy of one of the Underdark's greatest horrors: illithids.

When a group of blindly wandering grimlock refugees encountered and wiped out a group of their kobold thralls, the mind flayers turned their sinister attentions upon this new band of interlopers. Seeking out and capturing this displaced people, the illithids found that the grimlocks' weak will combined with martial prowess made them perfect thralls. Altering their forms to better suit the grimlocks' new darkened homes and the needs of their masters, the illithids and the strange radiations of the Underdark warped the grimlocks into the perfect slave race. Breeding them as cattle, the mind flayers put the newly adapted grimlocks to widespread use as servants, food, warriors, and as trade goods to the other foul races of the Underdark. Thus, sold

and traded like animals, grimlocks spread far and wide.

Only a few roving bands of grimlocks remained free, adapting to their new environments through exposure to the Underdark's strange radiations in much the same way as the illithids warped their enslaved cousins. Today, these tribes, as well as bands of slave grimlocks who have somehow found their freedom, roam the Underdark in search of food. Many free grimlocks also serve other creatures to improve their chances of survival and worship powerful creatures like aboleths, medusae, deep-dwelling dragons, or other powerful, intelligent monstrosities. The grimlocks bring them food, slaves, and other offerings in exchange for protection.

A handful of grimlock cities have developed throughout the underground realms. Such communities, small by human standards, survive in remote locations, distant from other races. If anything, a grimlock city resembles a fortress more than a settlement. Grimlock builders make use of natural terrain as well as obstacles such as rivers and ravines. Often, these communities originate when a grimlock tribe breaks free from enslavement and many might even be within

the ruins of another race's fallen city. Former slaves often prove more successful and fiercely independent than their free brethren, as they understand the price of failure. Ex-slaves of the Underdark's cruelest masters, these grimlocks almost universally prefer death to servitude.

## PHYSIOLOGY

In the light, a grimlock's appearance resembles a half-formed, almost fetuslike humanoid with drooping skin and under-defined features. A smooth mask of skin stretches taut across grimlock faces in place of eye sockets and their splotchy gray flesh appears mottled and sickly, like melted stone. Although average grimlocks stand over 5 feet tall, they walk with a hunched, stooped posture that gives them a shorter, bulkier appearance.

Grimlocks possess impressive strength significantly beyond that of a normal human. Because the Underdark consists of endless tunnels, caverns, and cliffs, grimlocks gain much of their might through constant climbing, jumping, running, and toil. In addition to their wiry physical power, grimlocks boast a high degree of agility and flexibility, along with a hardy stamina. Even the weakest



grimlock walks, runs, hunts, or performs heavy labor for long periods of time without tiring, as life in the Underdark permits only the strongest and healthiest to survive.

Although blind, grimlocks enjoy heightened hearing, sense of smell, and even touch. In combat, they detect enemies through both noise and smell, using their acute senses to pinpoint nearby targets. Using their improved sense of touch, grimlocks can run their hands across a surface and learn almost as much about it as any sighted creature looking at it. With only a fleeting touch, a grimlock perceives minute variations and changes in temperature and texture.

Young grimlocks mature rapidly and gain strength over their first three years of life. The weak fall prey to monsters, accidents, or the slaver's lash; the survivors representing the strongest, fastest, and sturdiest of their generation. Although children appear emaciated and small, the scrawniest grimlock child possesses considerable strength and impressive speed.

Grimlocks often ritually scar their bodies with intricately tattooed spiral patterns. The older a grimlock lives, the more scars one accumulates, with each tattoo growing more elaborate by the year. Grimlocks recognize one another through scent, speech, and by each other's scars. Indeed, a grimlock's tattoos describe his name, his skills, his profession, his deeds, and his history with remarkable detail. While some scholars believe this practice might be an extreme reinterpretation of one of the grimlocks' lost surface traditions, others suggest that it is an attempt by grimlocks to exert some control over their forms, which have been so altered by the Underdark and torturous illithid augmentations. Grimlocks take excessive pride in their tattooed scars and many grimlock masters, primarily drow who favor using whips in culling their slaves, have been overwhelmed by unexpectedly enraged grimlocks whose ornate scars are marred by the lash.

**PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIETY**

Grimlocks live harsh, brutal, and often short lives. Because most grimlocks serve as slaves and live in the Underdark, day-to-day survival is always uncertain. Free

grimlocks spend their time foraging for food and hiding from enemies, while enslaved grimlocks serve as disposable soldiers or perform bone-crushing labor all day. Regardless, an individual grimlock struggles every day to survive.

Scraping together sufficient food often proves difficult in the Underdark and free grimlocks must forage daily for sustenance. Grimlocks will eat nearly anything, but prefer fresh meat and fish. Quite regularly, grimlocks are forced to subsist on mushrooms and other fungi, insects, carrion, and rodents. With true adaptability, grimlocks digest anything remotely edible, regardless of taste or consistency. Without regard to morality, grimlocks frequently practice cannibalism, disposing of the weak, aged, and infirm before they become a hindrance to the tribe.

Grimlock tribes are little more than loose-knit groups of families. While families care for children for the first year, after that the tribe shares responsibility for the young. Indeed, after the first year, the average grimlock maintains the same degree of contact with his parents as with everyone else in the community. Tribes consider their children a shared resource for the future, something for which every member holds responsibility.

Whether enslaved or free, grimlocks learned to expect the worst from other races. Other races inevitably attack them, enslave them, or steal their food and resources. In the cruel world of the Underdark, grimlocks expect brutality, violence, and betrayal from everyone they encounter. Since their relocation to the Underdark, grimlocks have endured the bullying and abuse of every major underground race. As a result, trust remains a difficult concept for them to accept. For the most part, grimlocks prefer peace and isolation. When other races steal their food and enslave their children, grimlocks must raid to survive. At times, simple desperation forces grimlocks to raid surface villages and farms, creating a monstrous cycle of predation and survival.

In rare circumstances, grimlocks come to treat other individual creatures as equals. For example, grimlocks

might view someone who saved a tribe member's life as an equal. Although the grimlock language includes no word for "friend," these creatures understand the concept of an ally, fellow hunter, and brother. When an outsider enters grimlock culture and demonstrates he deserves equal status, usually through skill at the hunt or in battle, an unusual bond might develop between that individual and the grimlocks. Although such intense loyalty remains rare, it demonstrates grimlocks share a few traits in common with surface dwellers. Grimlocks share their food with adopted friends and demonstrate a willingness to fight alongside that person, as long as the individual continues to prove his usefulness. Understanding that a weak individual is a sickness to society who makes the whole tribe vulnerable, grimlocks do not allow frail members of their own race to survive and feeble outsiders are cast out or quickly put to another use—often as food.

Despite the grimlock familiarity with aggression and xenophobia, their culture involves more breadth and depth than survival and hunting. Grimlocks enjoy several unique styles of art and entertainment, and demonstrate a knack for music. Thanks to their acute sense of hearing, grimlocks interpret a wider range of sound than many other races. Their material art, seemingly little more than cave etchings to most cultures, relies on touch and scent rather than sight and includes variations in texture, moisture, and temperature to create pictures and tell stories. Grimlocks have also cultivated a unique art form that combines their skill at music and sculpture. By shaping cavern walls and creating complexly shaped hollow pillars within windy tunnels, grimlocks are able to alter the sounds underground breezes create as they pass through such formations. This art, called wind sculpting, has thus far only been mastered by grimlocks, although it appeals to many of the Underdark races that hold them as slaves and has appeared near the cavernous homes of many such peoples.

On rare occasions, grimlocks abandon their tribes or their tribes abandon them—often in the case of extreme

## KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (nature) checks as they relate to grimlocks. Those who travel the Underdark or have dealings with evil Underdark races might possess this information.

**DC 10:** Grimlocks are blind creatures that dwell underground.

**DC 15:** Grimlocks possess exceptional skill in hiding when in the mountains or underground. Grimlocks often ally with drow, duergar, illithids, and other powerful Underdark monstrosities.

**DC 20:** Grimlocks rely on sound and smell to navigate and are thus immune to most illusions and all gaze attacks. Xenophobic in the extreme, grimlocks are often held as slaves and eagerly rebel against their masters.

**DC 25:** Because grimlocks sense their surroundings through sound and scent, sonic attacks and strong smells render them effectively blind. Strength of arms and offers of food might win a grimlock's assistance if not its trust or loyalty.

illness when cannibalism seems more dangerous. A few exceptional individuals survive alone, living short nomadic lives constantly on the run from the Underdark's countless threats. A few of these individuals journey to the surface, either seeking a more hospitable home or with the desire to learn about the world above. Yet even these unusual grimlocks must struggle each day to be viewed as more than monsters, rely upon what allies they make, and put aside their inherent mistrust of other races.

### VERSUS GRIMLOCKS

Underground or in darkness, grimlocks make vicious enemies. Alone, a grimlock is a fierce but often unmotivated combatant, favoring its own survival to needless fighting. However, a grimlock raiding party fights in total silence and cooperates like a pack of wolves, exhibiting savage fury and fearlessness. Although a grimlock raiding party poses a serious threat, when motivated by a cruel taskmaster like a mind flayer or other monster, grimlocks become even deadlier.

**Beware Ambushes:** Against most opponents, grimlocks rely upon their stealth and camouflage abilities as well as natural cover. The preferred grimlock tactic involves hiding and waiting

for enemies to enter melee range. Often, grimlocks position themselves in nooks or crevices above enemies, waiting for hours if necessary until prey passes close.

Once in melee, grimlocks attack with heavy, simply made weapons such as axes or clubs. Grimlocks fight almost exclusively with such melee weapons as their senses don't allow them to perceive distant creatures with the clarity ranged weaponry requires. Thus, PCs combating grimlocks should consider using spells that limit their enemies' mobility and access to allies, such as *entangle*, *web*, and the various *wall* spells.

**Blind Them:** Countering either a grimlock's hearing or sense of smell effectively hampers its blindsight ability. If a grimlock loses both its hearing and sense of smell, it experiences the full effects of blindness.

**Give Them Targets:** Grimlocks lack the tactical awareness to attack spellcasters or other specialized targets. When confronted with an enemy, they attack. When characters face grimlocks, they should find ways to bring in allies and thus provide more targets for grimlocks to attack. The *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells provide quick and inexpensive allies to the party and force grimlocks to spread their attacks. Even if the party's spellcasters summon weak creatures such as wolves or monstrous centipedes, grimlocks lack the ability to immediately differentiate a weak opponent from a strong one. The party's spellcasters should also place a few summoned monsters between them and the battle as a front line of defense. Spellcasters should avoid casting spells like *mirror image* or similar illusions, as the sight-based nature of such spells prove completely ineffective against blind grimlock attackers.

**Look for Leaders:** Often, non-grimlocks command grimlock raiding parties. Any creature capable of controlling grimlocks and commanding their fear deserves the PC's respect. Aboleths, drow, duergar, medusa, mind flayers, and numerous other more intelligent monstrosities often control a band of grimlocks on patrols or raids. In most

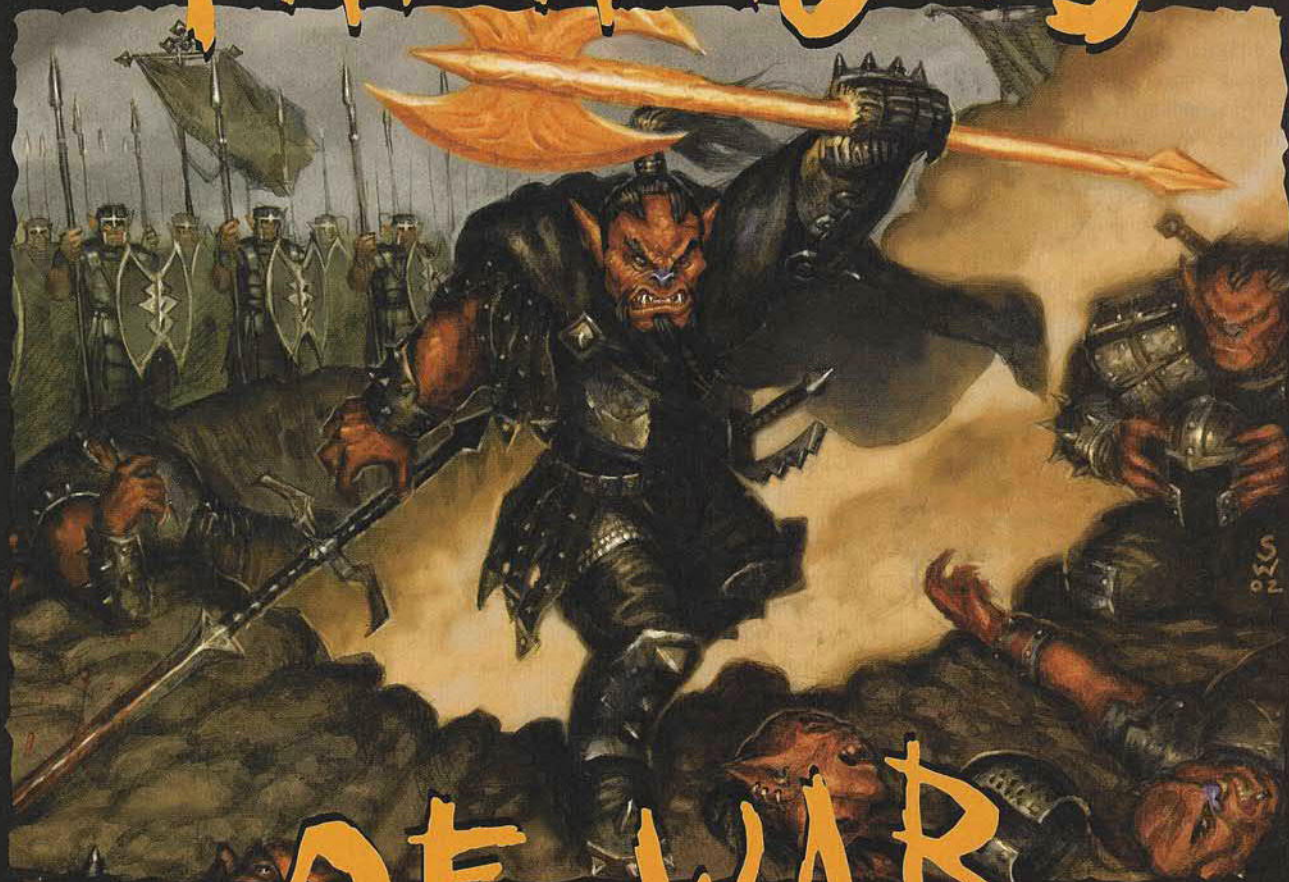
cases, leaders remain hidden while their minions fight. As such, characters should take steps to locate and eliminate the creature leading the grimlocks. Because such leaders often prove cowardly, characters should look for concentrations of grimlocks or other creatures serving as bodyguards or defenders. However, in some cases, a leader might prove even more powerful than its entire grimlock entourage, so PCs should exercise extreme caution.

**Remember Immunities:** Grimlocks lack both eyes and eyesight. A grimlock's blindness renders him immune to all visual illusions, gaze attacks, and any spell or effect dependent on sight. A great many spells become ineffective against grimlocks, including *blindness*, *color spray*, *dancing lights*, *darkness*, *deeper darkness*, *flare*, *fog cloud*, *mirror image*, *obscuring mist*, and many others.

**Show Overwhelming Strength:** Despite their savage and barbaric culture, grimlocks possess intelligence and self-preservation instincts. If adventurers demonstrate overwhelming strength and superiority against a grimlock band, the grimlocks might accept truce or parley. PCs also stand a better chance of ending a battle if they eliminate the grimlocks' leader. Certain destructive spells, such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt*, might convince grimlocks to retreat or offer a truce rather than fight to the death. Of course, such diplomacy can only take place if the grimlocks aren't being driven on by a master they fear even more than the PCs.

**Target Scouts:** As grimlocks rely heavily on their sense of hearing while traveling, bands of grimlock warriors and hunters often send lone scouts in various directions ahead of them. These scouts perform the dangerous role of providing warnings to their brethren as they stumble across danger or draw them on when they come upon prey. By the sounds of either the scouts' screams or a series of swift barks, a scouts' allies can swiftly close on its position. Thus, PCs who encounter lone grimlocks should seek to dispatch them swiftly and quietly, before they have the opportunity to alert other grimlocks in the area. ■

# PARAGONS



# OF WAR

## The Ecology of the Hobgoblin

by Terry Edwards · illustrated by Sam Wood

*Goblins flee the world of light, cursed  
and wretched in their plight.  
Dark dank caves the goblins live in, gob-  
lins pray to him who begat them:  
Help us take back what's lost to day.  
Maglubiyet guide us on the way,  
Make a race whose power can end the  
reign of elves, and dwarves, and men.  
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!*

*Gather now by standards, by swords;  
come unite the scattered hordes!  
By order hobgoblins will reclaim the  
world that goblins fled in shame.  
Bring war, bring strife upon the land!  
One tribe in victory will stand!  
Guide to war the lesser kin and lend  
them strength the day to win.  
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!*

*Don the armor of fallen foes and pick  
the flesh clean from their bones,  
Hobgoblin tribes grow strong through  
war; if they know peace they grow  
no more.  
Shielded lands defended with might will  
never, never flee from light.  
Vengeful conquest now begin. All gob-  
linkind, come join your kin.  
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!*

—Verses from hobgoblin creation myth, author unknown

There is a tendency among civilized peoples to classify all the evil humanoid races that populate untamed lands as lawless, savage, and disorganized barbarian hordes. But anyone laboring under such a misconception has obviously never been unfortunate enough to share territory with a hobgoblin tribe.

Hobgoblins represent the antithesis of the common goblinoid stereotype. Highly organized, well trained for battle, and strictly obedient to their military code, they function with a focused efficiency that army commanders of any race would envy. Driven by a simple ethos based on survival through continuous conquest, hobgoblin tribes have spread systematically throughout the inhabited regions of most campaign worlds. To state that these remarkable humanoids are merely survivalists, however, downplays the incredible depth of their culture.

Most players and even many DMs view the evil humanoid races as little more than substitute orcs, but in fact each fills a special niche within the campaign world. In particular, the unique psychology of hobgoblins on both the individual and the societal level serves to distance them from the rest of the humanoid pack. Hobgoblins are definitely not substitute orcs, and they are far more than just big goblins.

### PHYSIOLOGY

Hobgoblins are born predators, and this heritage is apparent in their physical shape. A typical hobgoblin is lean and tall, averaging 6 1/2 feet in height and 200 pounds in weight. The muscles of his lithe frame are designed more for agility than strength, enabling him to move with an almost feline grace. Like a tiger, a hobgoblin excels at moving

unheard, and his keen yellow eyes can see even in the darkest conditions.

Tattoos often accentuate a hobgoblin's crimson-orange skin, but they are far different from the ink pinprick designs that are sometimes sported by other races. Hobgoblin tattoos are deep scars branded into the flesh to demonstrate the bearer's tolerance for pain. For much the same reason, body piercing—the deeper and more painful the better—is a popular form of adornment among hobgoblins. But while his body might be run through with metal in several places, a hobgoblin always keeps his red (or in some cases, blue) nose unobstructed.

Coarse hair, usually gray or brown in color, covers the hobgoblin's thick hide. The hair on his head is generally worn long in several braids, which are adorned with bone jewelry crafted from the remains of slain foes. In like manner, any other adornments a hobgoblin wears are designed to call attention to either his battle prowess or his high tolerance for physical hardship.

### PSYCHOLOGY

To ensure that each hobgoblin's mind remains continually focused on the survival of the tribe, the young are taught the life metaphor of the personal perimeter (see below) as soon as they are old enough to understand spoken words. This concept embodies the central philosophy behind hobgoblin behavior, and its principles influence all aspects of a hobgoblin's life. The personal perimeter means everything to a hobgoblin, and each is proud of the disciplined lifestyle required to maintain it.

### The Personal Perimeter

Each hobgoblin learns early in life to establish a personal perimeter of defense. This perimeter represents not

the chaotic creature's need for personal space, but a highly lawful creature's portion of the greater tribal perimeter. In the hobgoblin mindset, one hobgoblin controls his own immediate area, two control still more, and so forth. Thus, a whole tribe jointly controls a significant area that it claims for its own use.

The first step in learning to maintain a personal perimeter is rigid mental conditioning designed to expunge the potential weaknesses of debilitating emotion and extraneous thought. A mind free from distraction can give its full attention to maintaining a perimeter.

The methods used to achieve the required mental conditioning process are harsh, to say the least. Abuse, both physical and mental, is a common tool for developing the desired mental state. Combat training is the only emotional outlet allowed to hobgoblins, and learning to defend a space is the most integral part of maintaining a personal perimeter. Years of such extreme programming yield an unquestioningly loyal soldier who desires nothing more than to serve the tribe.

Always on the defensive, hobgoblins constantly evaluate their surroundings for tactical advantages. This tendency is most noticeable when they are outside the protective confines of their own tribal lands. No hobgoblin can be found overimbibing ale in a tavern while seated in front of a window or with his back to a crowd. More likely, he sits in a dark corner of the tavern that provides him with an unobstructed view of the room, nursing one drink throughout his stay.

### Morality

The narrow focus of the hobgoblin mind leaves no room for moral questions. Mercy and compassion can only weaken the perimeter and cloud thinking.

### 371 B.C.E.: The Oblique Order Formation

Arguably the greatest general in the ancient world to date, Epaminondas leads the Theban army against the Spartans. But instead of lining up his phalanx and charging it headlong into the Spartan phalanx, as the Spartans themselves would do, Epaminondas masses his troops heavily to one side and staggers the rest of his line.

When the two phalanxes clash, the heavy side of the Theban phalanx massively overpowers its side of the Spartan phalanx. The weaker, staggered side of the Theban force rotates back slightly, just enough to defend. The broken phalanx of the Spartans is then flanked by the overpowering force of the Theban's heavy end.

This arrangement allows the Thebans to assault the Spartan phalanx from its most vulnerable position—the side—while the rest of the Theban line fights defensively. Unable to protect themselves, the Spartans are slaughtered—not through superior training or weaponry but through superior tactics.

Philip II of Macedonia, trained by Epaminondas himself in all manner of warfare (including logistics, tactics, drilling, and the use of multiple field units in addition to infantry), further refines his mentor's so-called "oblique order." Generals throughout the ages will replicate the tactics of Epaminondas, and Philip's son Alexander will master them.

### 359 B.C.E.: The Complete Army

Philip II of Macedonia conquers Greece with the most tactically advanced army in the world. His force, predictably centered on the Greek phalanx, consists primarily of heavy infantry. Using tactics he learned from Epaminondas, Philip compensates for the inherent weakness of the phalanx by doubling its size and providing auxiliary cavalry, light infantry, skirmishers, and archers to protect its vulnerable flanks. He also extends the length of the lances used by the infantry to more than 12 feet.

Philip II's army is the first to use artillery routinely on the battlefield. His forces employ large dart-throwers capable of killing enemy soldiers at more than 200 yards. (The Greeks never

Individual freedom is meaningless and has no place in hobgoblin society, and respect for the freedom of others never enters a hobgoblin's thoughts.

The hobgoblin survival ethos drives every individual in the tribe and forms the basic rationale for the perimeter concept. Among hobgoblins, survival and security means constant preemptive domination of their surroundings. The land must be tamed to serve the tribe's needs, and enemies must be vanquished before they can become threats.

### Other Cultures

Hobgoblins tend not to be social creatures. In fact, creatures of other races usually find them paranoid, insulting, and dismissive. At first meeting and for some time thereafter, hobgoblins usually exhibit all those traits, but only because they consider any creature not of their tribe to be a threat. Then too, a hobgoblin's rude behavior is often an expression of the paranoia that keeps him on his toes, as well as his disdain for the soft lifestyles of others.

### Death and Dying

Although hobgoblins are born for combat, most do not actually intend to end their lives on the battlefield. Unlike many warmongering humanoids, hobgoblins do not view death in combat as honorable or glorious. Rather, it is viewed as evidence of failure to maintain a strong enough personal perimeter. Nevertheless, comrades felled in battle are respected and honored for their sacrifices.

A time to die is chosen by (or for) any individual who can no longer contribute anything to the tribe. The choice is a matter of pride, and the method invariably benefits the tribe. Many hobgoblins choose a form of ritual suicide designed to supply adepts with sacrifices.

widely adopt the use of artillery, but Philip's son Alexander does in years to come.)

Philip's army is the most flexible and versatile to date. It is capable of fighting in any terrain against any known force of his era. The adaptability of his armed forces allows Philip to conquer all the Greek city-states except Sparta.

### 350 B.C.E.: The Roman Legion

The Romans, now a rising power on the Italian peninsula, abandon the use of the Greek phalanx. The Italian countryside is ill-suited for the tightly packed formation, and it proves too cumbersome against the more mobile forces of the Gauls.

To replace it, the Romans develop a new formation that becomes known as the legion. Based

### SOCIETY

The primary concern of a hobgoblin tribe is survival. Survival means effective defense, and effective defense means eradication of all enemies and successful subjugation of all other creatures within the tribal perimeter. Hunting is a preemptive measure that serves both to remove threats from the tribe's ever-expanding area of control and to strengthen its individual members.

Like many humanoid races, hobgoblins maintain a parasitic relationship with the world around them, systematically stripping the land of its resources with no thought for conservation or renewal. Since few ecosystems can long tolerate such a disruptive presence, the tribe must move frequently. Agrarian civilizations are prime targets for hobgoblin raiding, since they boast ready supplies of food and populations unaccustomed to conflict. A hobgoblin incursion on such a territory can be likened to a locust swarm ravaging crops—a swift, overwhelming invasion that leaves nothing behind. Each successful conquest brings food, weapons, and materials into the tribe, which in turn provide the resources to fuel future campaigns.

### Social Hierarchy

Unlike their chaotic goblinoid cousins, hobgoblins maintain a highly organized social order that operates with military efficiency. Hobgoblin society is loosely divided into three castes, each of which is further separated into two subcastes. The divisions are: military (command/warrior), religious (priest/instructor), and labor (crafter/worker). Caste assignment is based on both individual affinity for a given task and the tribe's current needs; gender has no bearing on placement.

on small groups of soldiers called maniples (Latin for "handfuls") that are arrayed in three lines, the Roman legion is far more maneuverable than the old Greek phalanx. It can adapt quickly to changes in the tide of battle by switching out its ranks so that fresh troops are always at the forefront. The legion evolves into an extremely fluid and versatile unit. Its long-term use builds the Roman army into the most disciplined and effective fighting force of the ancient world.

### 334 B.C.E.: The Triumph of Cavalry

In his first battle against the overwhelming forces of the Persians, Alexander the Great achieves the first victory in history to be decided by cavalry. The Persians, whose cavalry

Once given, a caste assignment changes only when an individual is no longer capable of performing the required duties (such as a warrior who has taken a debilitating wound) or when the tribe's needs shift dramatically.

All castes are vital for the continued existence of the tribe, and as such their members receive equal treatment and honor. Although status within the tribe is most often linked with victory in battle, a heroic warrior always recognizes that victory would not be possible without the aid of the other castes. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others within the tribe is a serious indiscretion. Repeated incidents of such neglect can result in the offender being formally ostracized from the tribe.

**Military:** The largest of a tribe's three social divisions, the military caste consists mostly of warriors and fighters. These individuals receive the best military training and are responsible for the protection of the tribe and the expansion of its perimeter. Ascension to command requires adaptability, cunning, and a keen mind—values often found among rogues. A tribe's leader is almost always a seasoned fighter/rogue from the military caste who is venerated as a hero by the tribe.

**Labor:** The crafters and workers of the labor caste are respected as the heart of a hobgoblin tribe. Composed primarily of experts and warriors, this caste makes up roughly one-third of the tribe's total adult population. Members of the labor caste are responsible for meeting the tribe's mundane needs. Most specialize in resource management, turning goods seized during conquest into food, arms and armor, housing, clothing, and other needed items. Members of the labor caste often receive military training as

forces outnumber Alexander's two to one, are arrayed atop a steep riverbank. Alexander is forced to cross the river to engage. He opens with a feint, ordering a small band of cavalry uphill into the left wing of the Persian force. As Alexander's forces charge, taking horrendous damage from Persian arrows and javelins, the Persian left wing breaks formation and rides forward. Alexander then leads the rest of his right wing into the center of the disorganized Persian line. With speed and ferocity, his cavalry riders punch through and take the riverbank. They are joined by the Thessalian cavalry force of Alexander's left wing, which has outmaneuvered, outfought, and annihilated the numerically superior Persian right wing. Alexander's heavy

well, in case their help is needed to defend the tribe.

**Religious:** By far the smallest of the three castes, the religious caste is made up of truly outstanding individuals who were chosen for their minds. Most are trained as adepts, although sorcerers, clerics, and even assassins can be found within this caste. The religious caste serves as the tribe's connection to the divine and provides instruction for the youth, but in a very real sense, it is also the tribe's governing body. Although a member of the military caste typically functions as ruler, it is the religious caste that guides the tribe's fate. Tumultuous internal politics are rare in hobgoblin tribes, but if need be, the church can exercise the power of executive veto over a leader's decision.

### Upbringing

Life within a hobgoblin tribe is strictly regimented. From the moment of birth, hobgoblin youths are molded, body and mind, in accordance with tribal ideals. Instructors from the religious caste oversee the youngsters' initial development and guide them in building their personal perimeters. Throughout the training process, the instructors assess their charges and choose future roles for them within the tribe. By the time the young hobgoblins reach adolescence, their instructor-based training is finished, and their personal perimeters have been firmly established. After a stint of mandatory military service, each takes up his or her preassigned role within the tribe.

### Military Tactics

When a hobgoblin tribe moves into a new area, its first priority is to establish an entrenched base camp and defensive perimeter. Since raids against

other humanoid settlements are the most efficient means of supplying the tribe with the resources necessary for survival, the location of the base camp is usually chosen to provide proximity to such a target. The base camp is often built around or within an existing structure, such as a dungeon, natural cavern, or building.

Once a secure camp has been established, expansion can begin. While stealthy scouts venture beyond the perimeter on reconnaissance missions, the hobgoblins in camp transform the landscape into a defensible battle plain. The earth is molded into trenches and ramparts, trees are felled for building material, and streams are rerouted to serve as moats. The outer perimeter of a completed base camp usually consists of a ring of outposts placed a few miles from the center. Depending on its proximity to trade routes and its relative importance, an outpost might be defended by anywhere from four to nine hobgoblin warriors and fighters.

The tribe's perimeter—outposts, moats, and fortifications—is a cooperative extension of each individual's personal perimeter, and it is maintained with the same degree of dedication. Once a hobgoblin tribe digs in, reaching the heart of its base camp requires a long and difficult fight.

### Diet

Although hobgoblins are omnivorous, meat is their food of choice. Because of their mobile lifestyle, they have never mastered the techniques of agriculture, but most tribes maintain small herds of livestock. The bulk of a tribe's food, however, is obtained through raids and conquest. Hobgoblins consume the flesh of nearly every farm animal employed by humans and other civilized races, and

large hobgoblin tribes and nations often seek to enslave or capture others who are capable of farming.

### Reproduction

Hobgoblins reproduce through a selective breeding program that pairs the tribe's elite warriors, crafters, and priests in the hopes of producing superior offspring. Peers generally arrange such couplings during seasonal celebrations, religious holidays, or post-victory feasts. Marriage and monogamous relationships are unheard of in hobgoblin culture, since the emotion evoked by such close ties would only serve to weaken an individual's personal perimeter. Although parents maintain roles of authority in their children's lives, religious instructors raise the young hobgoblins in a communal environment, and their only true family is the tribe.

### Industry

Hobgoblin conquests bring a steady supply of weapons and armor into the tribe. Since they rarely work from raw materials, hobgoblin crafters have become masters of repair and recycling. A typical suit of hobgoblin armor usually consists of several pieces of salvaged armor blended by hobgoblin experts into a work of functional art (usually the equivalent of studded leather). Any metal item that cannot be salvaged is melted down and forged anew. A hobgoblin always treats her equipment with respect, ceaselessly polishing and maintaining it, regardless of its origin. Unlike other goblinoids, hobgoblins never wear shoddy armor or wield rusty weapons.

While hobgoblin craftsmanship is at its peak in the reclaiming and manufacture of arms and armor, weaponsmithing is not the race's only creative outlet. The deep, resonant thunder of hobgoblin war

infantry is now in position to engage the Persian forces. History repeats itself, and the Greek heavy infantry destroys the Persian infantry and light cavalry.

Through his feinting maneuver combined with the mobility and skill of his cavalry, Alexander earns a bloody victory. From there, he moves on to conquer the rest of the Persian Empire. In years to come, Alexander conquers lands beyond the borders of the known world, extending the Macedonian Empire from India in the east all the way to Europe in the west.

#### 304 B.C.E.: Multifunction Siege Towers

The Greek engineer Epimachus creates the first multifunctional siege tower, which he calls

helepolis, or "city-taker." At 140 feet tall and 150 tons, helepolis is the largest siege tower to date. Just rolling it forward on its eight massive wheels requires the combined might of 3,000 men. Iron scales protect its wooden frame from fire, and its front face has twenty artillery ports, each of which is fitted with wooden shutters covered in leather and stuffed with wool to protect the artillerists from attacks.

The tower sees its first use at the siege of Rhodes. After a prolonged battle, several of the iron scales are dislodged, leaving the tower vulnerable to attacks by fire. Rather than risk losing it, the Greeks pull back.

Despite its mediocre performance, the great tower profoundly changes the way siege warfare is waged. In later periods, the Romans and other cultures will improve upon the design of helepolis, adding hoisted battering rams and more powerful artillery, as well as boarding planks that allow infantry to storm walls.

#### 221 B.C.E.: The Great Wall of China

The Great Wall is erected across northern China by the Qin Dynasty. This immense barrier eventually spans more than 4,000 miles and serves as the primary defense against marauding Huns from the north. Its effectiveness forces the Huns' migrations westward, into Asia and eastern Europe.

drums, called hrun'doums, is well known far beyond tribal lands, and hobgoblin crafters take great pride in building these instruments. They also craft many smaller percussion instruments, including steel drums, kintalas, and unique "talking" drums called p'doums. Hobgoblin drums are often enchanted for use on the battlefield, and many can produce rolling sonic attacks, doleful fear effects, and frenzied activity in their listeners. When a tribe actually needs to trade with another culture, drums and mercenary service are the typical offerings.

### Race Relations

While most creatures sharing territory with hobgoblins can expect constant conflict with the tribe, a few cultures actually find hobgoblins to be good neighbors. Perhaps the greatest strength of the hobgoblin race is its ability to unite otherwise scattered goblinoid tribes into cohesive units. Weaker creatures such as goblins are easily conscripted into the fighting ranks of a hobgoblin tribe. Such creatures are typically used either to test enemy defenses or to overwhelm opponents with large numbers. Bugbears, ogres, and trolls that join hobgoblin tribes can occasionally claim leadership roles, but they usually end up serving as frontline muscle in perimeter outposts. Occasionally, hobgoblins can even form mutually beneficial relationships with human settlements. Many a warring king has discovered that a hobgoblin tribe can provide a ready supply of highly skilled mercenaries—for the right price.

While hobgoblins are open to guarded alliances with many other races, they do not tolerate proximity to rival hobgoblin tribes. Other humanoids in hobgoblin lands are seen as resources for the tribe, but another tribe of hobgoblins

represents competition for the same resources and thus threatens the tribe's survival. Encounters between tribes always result in fierce battles and the destruction or routing of the weaker tribe. Only an exceptionally powerful hobgoblin leader can end such hostilities and unite multiple tribes.

### KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

Hobgoblins recognize the value of allies in strengthening their perimeters, both tribal and personal. If the perceived benefit is sufficiently high, other intelligent creatures might even be accepted into the tribe to ensure the long-term success of joint ventures. The following combinations demonstrate the benefits of common hobgoblin alliances.

#### Hobgoblin and Worg

Worgs are frequently found within goblinoid societies, and hobgoblin tribes are no exception. In fact, many tribes even breed the foul beasts. Animal handlers within the labor caste often train worgs to serve as sentinels along the perimeter of a tribe's base camp, where their scent ability and racial skill bonuses can be invaluable assets to tribal security. Selective breeding programs can yield large worgs suitable as mounts, and even exotic (fiendish) breeding is not unheard of in larger tribes. Because worgs are respected and well treated in hobgoblin society, they tend to be quite loyal to the tribes they serve.

A single 2nd-level hobgoblin fighter mounted on an 8-HD advanced worg is an EL 5 encounter.

#### Hobgoblin and Barghest

Although they are outsiders, barghests blend seamlessly into hobgoblin society, both mentally and physically. A barghest's change shape ability allows it to

pose as a goblin or wolf when necessary, although it does not usually bother to disguise its true nature from the tribe. A barghest that joins a hobgoblin tribe typically assumes a leadership role within it and uses its position to push the tribe toward ever more evil behavior. As far as hobgoblins are concerned, the only drawback to allowing a barghest into the tribe is its tendency to eat more than its allotted ration.

When a barghest joins a warband, its spell-like abilities add a new dimension to traditional tactics. *Crushing despair* demoralizes foes, and *dimension door* allows for either a quick retreat or delivery of the barghest to a key battlefield location.

A barghest coupled with a gang of four 1st-level hobgoblin fighters is an EL 6 encounter.

### REVISION ALERT

*Crushing despair* is a new spell available to bards and wizards. The revised barghest can use the spell once per day as a spell-like ability.

### Hobgoblin and Bladeling

The infernal battlefield of Acheron is home to a warlike race of outsiders known as bladelings (see *Monster Manual II*). Although these beings dwell in virtual isolation on Ocanthus (Acheron's fourth layer), their warbands sometimes venture elsewhere within the planes, occasionally even joining the eternal war among the cubes. Bladeling mercenaries are welcome additions to Maglubiyet's armies on Avalas and are eagerly recruited.

The goblin deity also occasionally finds use for bladelings on the Material Plane, assigning them to serve as elite warriors within favored hobgoblin tribes.

### 216 B.C.E.: Double Envelopment Maneuver

The Carthaginian general Hannibal launches a campaign to destroy Rome. His army consists of nearly 45,000 troops, including 11,000 Numidian and Celtic cavalry riders supported by additional Spanish and Celt infantry. On his left wing are the Spanish/Celtic heavy cavalry forces under the leadership of his brother Hasdrubal; on his right wing are the Numidian light cavalry riders. Across from Hannibal, eight legions of Roman soldiers—80,000 troops and 6,000 cavalry—await in a deep Roman battle formation, hoping to crush Hannibal's center with their superior numbers.

Hannibal's heavy cavalry units begin the battle with a charge from the left into the

Roman cavalry in front of them. The Roman cavalry force begins to crumble immediately under the onslaught of Hasdrubal's numerically superior and more skillful forces. The Roman legions charge headlong into Hannibal's infantry, which is forced to give ground to the superior numbers of the Romans.

As Hannibal's army is pushed back, its line becomes bowed, so that its outer sections flank the advancing Romans on either side. Rather than pursuing the fleeing Roman cavalry, Hasdrubal's riders swing left and come in behind the Roman legions. Nearly 60,000 Romans are slaughtered at Cannae, but Hannibal loses only 8,000 men.

The Battle of Cannae comes to be regarded as one of the most decisive victories and one of the bloodiest massacres in history. Hannibal's brilliant double envelopment maneuver remains in active use for thousands of years.

### 200 B.C.E.: The Roman Ballista

The Romans design a new weapon called the ballista. Essentially a massive crossbow mounted on a rolling frame, it launches large stone balls or deadly, iron-tipped spears that are capable of impaling multiple targets. The design is highly adaptable, and many types of ballistae quickly appear, varying greatly in size and purpose. Some fling missiles at enemy soldiers, while

A bladeling's damage reduction, resistances, immunities, and razor storm ability make it an excellent melee fighter and an ideal addition to a warband. While the bladeling takes on opponents in melee, its hobgoblin companions are free to focus on ranged support. Then, after the bladeling has used its razor storm ability, the hobgoblins can join the melee and finish off the enemy.

Two bladelings with four 1st-level hobgoblin warriors constitute an EL 4 encounter.

### Hobgoblin and Formian

When the expansionist formians encounter hobgoblins in search of new territory, the typical result is an explosive war that ends only when one side or the other has been utterly destroyed. Nevertheless, examination of each race's social structure reveals many parallels that could be exploited in joint ventures.

Although formians would never accept the rule of a hobgoblin leader, the opposite is possible. A hobgoblin tribe in dire need might allow its members to be conscripted as workers or warriors under the command of formian taskmasters. The taskmasters' telepathic abilities allow them to issue precise yet silent orders, which would prove invaluable to a warband engaged in a covert assault on a nearby area.

A single formian taskmaster with three 2nd-level hobgoblin fighters is an EL 8 encounter.

### TACTICS

Because of the hobgoblins' military bent, tactics are an important part of any encounter with them. The following sections examine the tactics that hobgoblins commonly use against their enemies and provide tips for PCs to use in overcoming a hobgoblin threat.

### Hobgoblins vs. PCs

The tactics described below are typical for a group of hobgoblins facing a PC party. DMs can adapt these as they see fit or use them as springboards to develop customized tactics for a particular tribe.

#### Tactical Terrain Advantage:

Hobgoblins are always aware of their surroundings and tend to take advantage of terrain benefits, especially high ground, cover, and concealment. Cover and concealment are most useful for ranged attacks, and the +1 bonus on attack rolls granted by higher ground provides a significant asset during melee. If combat occurs on the hobgoblins' home turf, terrain enhancements designed to convey such advantages should already be in place.

**Ready the Reserves:** While the main tribal force engages the PCs in melee, one or two hobgoblins armed with bows remain in reserve. Their main purpose is to use readied actions to disrupt spellcasters with ranged attacks. The reserves might lose an action or two in this way, but the potential benefit is worth the trade, since a single successfully cast spell can leave a warband asleep, dazed, or just plain dead. Reserves can also help to defend allies during a strategic retreat or hold PCs at bay while their comrades fall back and set up a trap to catch pursuers.

**Adept and Overcome:** Adepts and other spellcasters from the religious caste often travel with hobgoblin warbands. Although adepts lack the focus and power of wizards and have only a handful of spells to choose from, their effectiveness should not be underestimated. The adept has access to classic arcane spell effects such as *burning hands*, *invisibility*, and even *lightning*

*bolt* at higher levels. On the divine side, adepts can cast *cure* spells and enhance their comrades' effectiveness on the field via *bless*, *bull's strength*, and assorted protection effects. Furthermore, adepts can wear armor without fear of spell failure. Even though they are not proficient with its use, armor allows them to blend in with the fighters and gain a substantial degree of protection.

### PCs vs. Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins are militant creatures geared toward combat. When your party encounters them, you can expect tactics to play a key role in the outcome of the battle. Below are some tips that might help to turn the tide in your party's favor.

**Level the Field:** A party balanced with a mix of character classes probably can't trade blow for blow with a hobgoblin gang composed primarily of fighters. Thus, it pays to upgrade your party's combat capability ahead of time if you can. Cast spells such as *bless*, *bane*, *aid*, and *protection from evil* to improve the attacks, Armor Class, and other combat capabilities of your allies. *Shield* or *protection from arrows* should also be cast early to foil enemy archers.

Concealment can give you a significant edge. While it won't help you hit, it does reduce the effectiveness of hobgoblin archers. Smokesticks and spells such as *blur*, *darkness*, *fog cloud*, and *obscuring mist* are all good sources of concealment.

**Hit the Dirt:** If hobgoblin archers are giving you a hard time, try kneeling or even lying prone. Such positioning imposes a -2 or -4 penalty, respectively, on ranged attacks against you. While this tactic significantly reduces your melee effectiveness and makes your ranged

others are designed for siege warfare. Like the artillery of modern armies, ballistae are fired from the rear, over the heads of allied soldiers.

### 104 B.C.E.: The Professional Soldier

Amid great controversy in the Roman Senate, Marius, Consul of Rome, opens up recruitment to commoners. For the first time, a commoner can receive training and gain an actual profession by taking up arms with the standing army. In this manner, he can earn land and a pension for his family. Under this new program, commoners swell the ranks of the legions. With mandatory training for all, the army becomes a streamlined, uniform order of disciplined soldiers.

### 53 B.C.E.: Mobile Cavalry Defeats Infantry

Seeking to push the Roman border into Armenia, Marcus Crassus leads more than 30,000 soldiers into Selucia. There they encounter the main force of native Parthians, who are arguably the best cavalry soldiers of their era. The Parthians surround and harass the Romans, forcing them into a defensive square. Relying on their better bows and vastly superior mobility to keep away from the Roman infantry, the Parthians force the invaders to retreat over the course of three days, leaving their wounded behind. The Parthians butcher the stragglers, including Crassus's own son, whose head they place on a pike to taunt the Roman general.

Once the Romans are down to a few thousand men, the Parthians offer to parley with Crassus. In no position to retreat further and unable to engage the Parthians because of their deadly harassing tactics, Crassus agrees. But when he and his command staff enter the enemy command tent, the Parthians slaughter them and then rout the now-leaderless Romans. More than 20,000 Roman soldiers die, and 10,000 more are captured.

### 300 C.E.: The Catapult

The Romans invent a torsion-based siege device to replace the ballista. Named the onager, or "wild ass," for its kicking recoil, the contraption resembles a classic Hollywood-style catapult



**Language:** Hobgoblins speak the guttural goblin tongue, which uses the dwarven script, and most also speak Common.

**Names:** The religious caste names each hobgoblin at birth. The suffix 'ken' is added to the given name of a female, and the suffix 'kon' to that of a male. This construction is then followed by the mother's and/or father's name, the tribe's name, and the individual's position (for example, a male hobgoblin warrior might be named Maelegym Uluk'kon of Aeltan's Shield, Guard of the First Perimeter). In human lands, a hobgoblin separated

from his tribe might use a name that contains references to his past but still identifies himself based on his new role and homeland (for example, Hemelion of Alsheem Merchant Praikos, Caravan Guard).

**Adventurers:** Finding little acceptance outside their own society, outcast hobgoblins are often attracted to the adventuring life, where they can put their militaristic skills to good use.

### Hobgoblin Traits

Hobgoblin characters have the following racial traits.

- +2 Dexterity, +2 Constitution:

Hobgoblins are naturally agile, and they are capable of enduring great physical hardship.

- **Medium:** As a Medium creature, a hobgoblin has no special bonuses or penalties due to his size.

- **Base Land Speed:** A hobgoblin's base land speed is 30 feet.

- **Darkvision:** A hobgoblin can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise like normal sight, and a hobgoblin can function just fine with no light at all.

- **Racial Skill Bonus:** A hobgoblin has a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

combined assault, featuring rapid fire from mounted archers combined with shock attacks from mounted lancers. The military wisdom of the *Strategicon* rivals that of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* from a millennium earlier, and numerous parallels exist between the two works.

#### 600 C.E.: The Iron Stirrup

Greatly impressed by the precision and military prowess that the Huns to the north display on horseback, the Chinese develop the iron stirrup. This device gives cavalry riders unprecedented control and stability, which in turn allows them to fight effectively from horseback with all manner of weapons.

Over the course of several centuries, the stirrup migrates slowly to Europe, where it helps to establish the dominance of cavalry over infantry on the battlefield during the Middle Ages. Its use by mounted knights also serves to reinforce the feudal system. Many military scholars consider the stirrup to be the most significant military invention of the period.

#### 919 C.E.: The Military Use of Gunpowder

The Song Dynasty in China puts gunpowder (invented in 3 C.E.) into military use against the invading barbarians from the Asian steppes. Chinese soldiers drive back the invaders by shooting gunpowder from bamboo-tube flamethrowers. Although it receives

little notice at the time, this use of gunpowder sets a precedent that will eventually change the face of warfare.

#### 1,000 C.E.: The Crossbow in Europe

Invented almost 1,500 years before by the Chinese, the crossbow now comes into regular use in medieval armies. Operating a crossbow requires considerably less skill than firing a long-bow does, and a crossbow bolt retains enough penetrating power to kill a warrior even after passing through both his shield and the mail armor behind it. And unlike the bow, the crossbow is easy to mass-produce. The wholesale adoption of this weapon by European military forces means that, for the first time, relatively

- **Automatic Languages:** Common, Goblin. Bonus Languages: Draconic, Dwarven, Infernal, Giant, Orc.

- **Level Adjustment:** +1. A hobgoblin has an effective character level (ECL) of 1 + his class levels, so a 6th-level hobgoblin fighter would have an ECL of 7.

- **Favored Class:** Fighter. A multiclass hobgoblin's fighter class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty.

## NPC Hobgoblins

NPC hobgoblins are often attracted to classes that focus on evil activities, particularly rogue, assassin, and blackguard.

**Rogue:** Within the military caste of hobgoblin society, intelligence separates the commanders from the common warriors. Commanders are experts at utilizing their surroundings and typically incorporate stealth into their defense of their personal perimeters. With their impressive array of skills and abilities, hobgoblin commanders are extremely adaptable and very dangerous.

A hobgoblin's naturally high Dexterity score coupled with his racial bonus on Move Silently checks makes him an excellent candidate for the rogue class. Because of the militaristic social structure of a hobgoblin tribe, however, the typical hobgoblin picks up some levels as a fighter before switching to rogue. The leader of a hobgoblin warband is usually a fighter/rogue.

**Assassin:** Hobgoblin tribes often need special operatives to manage their dealings with difficult enemies or allies. Such agents must be able to function as diplomats or simply remove inconvenient enemies, as the need presents itself. Thus, they are often trained as assassins. Candidates for assassin training are selected at an early age by the religious caste, which directly oversees

even the portions of their education supplied by mentors from other castes.

All hobgoblin assassins are operatives of the church, and the leaders of the religious caste take great pains to ensure their loyalty. Rarely does an assassin ever look beyond her station or question the motives and orders of her religious superiors. Any hobgoblin assassin encountered outside a tribe is likely to be on a mission of "diplomacy" and is always alone.

**Blackguard:** The presence of a barghest leader within a tribe often leads to the rise of a champion of evil within the hobgoblin ranks. When the barghest relinquishes control of the tribe, through either death or choice, its evil disciple is ready to take over the reins of leadership. The new leader's agenda is frequently even more horrific than that of the barghest.

A blackguard within a hobgoblin tribe is always its leader, unless a barghest is also present. In the latter case, the blackguard might function as the tribe's high priest instead. Charismatic hobgoblin blackguards are often capable of uniting rival hobgoblin tribes and drawing huge armies to their causes.

Blackguard leaders usually command from the front line, inspiring troops with their heroic acts of evil. The momentum of their dark armies builds with each conquest, until only the death of the blackguard himself can stop them.

## LAIR OF THE HOBGOBLIN

The map presents a sample hobgoblin lair. This outpost could function as the main launching point for a planned conquest of a nearby human village or serve as the base camp of a small tribe.

### I. The Site

The hobgoblins of the Phalanx tribe have

converted an abandoned flour mill into a watchtower and fortified the surrounding area. The camp is manned by a standard hobgoblin garrison consisting of twelve 1st-level warriors, eight 1st-level fighters, one 3rd-level fighter sergeant, and one 6th-level fighter/rogue leader (Kehelahna Pegn'Ken of Phalanx, Perimeter Commander).

### 2. Rock Wall and Ramparts

The hobgoblins have built earthen ramparts averaging 10 to 15 feet in height (Climb DC 15) around the site. Along the tops of the ramparts are several 4-foot-high walls that can provide cover for Medium creatures. These walls can also be collapsed onto anyone attempting to climb the rampart as a standard action, dealing 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage to each climber (DC 15 Reflex save for half).

During any attack from the outside, the sergeant and nine of the warriors defend the ramparts.

### 3. Trapped Rock Wall (EL 2)

Two 4-foot-tall rock walls stand roughly 30 feet from the first earthen ramparts. Just behind each wall is a spiked pit trap covered with canvas and hidden under bracken and small stones. If anyone falls into the pit, the rock wall collapses into the hole as well, dealing additional damage. These two structures are designed to trap invaders who try to take cover.

**Rock Wall Pit Trap:** CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 10 ft. deep (1d6, fall and 1d6, falling stones); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

### 4. Loading Deck

A 7-foot-tall wooden wall set with iron spikes now stands in front of what was

poorly trained soldiers can produce ranged fire with excellent killing power.

The widespread use of the crossbow spurs the development of plate armor, but the crossbow evolves right alongside it, maintaining such a level of lethality that the Pope eventually and unsuccessfully bans its use.

#### 1,066 C.E.: Cavalry at the Battle of Hastings

The Battle of Hastings marks the beginning of the cavalry's ascendancy on the battlefields of Europe. The defender is Harold Godwinson, backed by his fierce Huscarles—an elite cadre of Anglo-Saxon infantry clad in heavy chainmail, bearing large shields, and wielding axes. A mounted infantry corps of Huscarles is also

present, but its soldiers are not trained to work cohesively and are not, strictly speaking, a cavalry force. The attacker is William the Conqueror, who fields a Norman army that includes infantry, cavalry, archers, and spearmen. Although more diverse than Harold's force in both composition and discipline, William's army is inferior in actual prowess.

After a full day, the battle is a stalemate. The phalanx shield wall of the Huscarles remains impenetrable until a feint from William's left cavalry wing tempts Harold's line into breaking. The charging Norman cavalry riders turn away at the last moment as if to flee, and the main body of Harold's army gives chase without orders. The remaining Norman cavalry units then flood

into the gap, and Harold is slain. A few bloody minutes later, his army is in full rout.

William's victory in this battle establishes Norman rule in England. Within a century, the Norman Empire is the most powerful nation in Europe.

On the field of battle, cavalry rises to prominence over infantry and becomes the army's primary assault arm. While the infantry remains the backbone of the classical army, the cavalry maintains its place as the army's most tactically powerful unit for centuries to come.

#### 1,100 C.E.: The Trebuchet

The Europeans improve upon an earlier Chinese device that allowed a single soldier to

once the loading deck of the flour mill. Six hobgoblin defenders, each armed with a longspear or halberd, stand on a raised platform affixed to the inside of the wall, ready to defend it. Twenty extra weapons of each type lie on the platform beside them, ready for use. A barred gate in the center of the wall gives access to the outpost.

Each hobgoblin attacking from the wall gains a +1 bonus on melee attack rolls because of high ground. During an attack on the camp, the hobgoblin leader joins the six warriors stationed here.

**Wooden Wall:** 6 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 60; Break DC 20; Climb DC 21.

### 5. Barracks

The area that once served as the storage and milling rooms of the flour mill now functions as quarters for the hobgoblin garrison. This portion of the building is set into the hillside and accessible only through the front door or the tower above. Arrow slits have been added to the walls and doors, granting improved cover to the five archers that can man each of the walls. Food and water supplies for the outpost are stored in this area, along with several longbows and a large reserve of arrows.

### 6. Watchtower

The windmill's blades have been removed to allow construction of an archer loft on top of the mill. This loft can be reached either by ladder from the barracks or through a trapdoor in the ceiling that is accessible via a ladder at the back of the mill. The loft area can provide cover for up to five hobgoblin archers.

During an outside attack, two hobgoblin elite fighters and three hobgoblin warriors man the loft.

launch small stones great distances. The European version of this trebuchet becomes the ultimate siege weapon, a device of deadly power that can propel a 300-pound boulder more than 300 yards.

Edward "Longshanks" I of England is credited with the creation of a monstrous trebuchet known as the Warwolf. This device, which can blast a hole through a 5-foot-thick wall with a single impact, becomes known in later eras as "the atomic bomb of the medieval age."

The advent of the trebuchet spurs the development of improved fortifications. Many stories of the new weapon's capabilities filter home from the Crusades.

### 7. Tent Sites

Atop the hill are two large holes covered with tents. These makeshift structures are designed to house the outpost's excess population until raiding allows comfortable expansion. The tents are not visible from lower elevations.

#### Kehelahna Pegn'Ken of Phalanx,

**Perimeter Commander:** Female hobgoblin Fighter 4/Rogue 2; CR 6; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 4d10+16 plus 2d6+8; hp 53; Init +3; Spd 20 ft. in hobgoblin armor; base 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +5; Grp +6; Atk +9 melee (1d8+5/19-20, +2 *defending longsword*); Full Atk +9 melee (1d8+5/19-20, +2 *defending longsword*) or +6 melee (1d6+1/19-20, short sword) or +8 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SA sneak attack +1d6; SQ darkvision 60 ft., evasion, trapfinding; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 10.

**Skills and Feats:** Climb +3, Escape Artist +5, Handle Animal +7, Hide +5, Jump +3, Move Silently +8, Ride +12; Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

**Evasion (Ex):** If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, Kehelahna takes no damage on a successful saving throw.

**Trapfinding (Ex):** Kehelahna can use Search to find any trap with a Search DC higher than 20. She can also use Disable Device to disarm magic traps and can bypass a trap without disabling it by beating its Disable Device DC by 10 or more.

**Possessions:** hobgoblin armor (scale mail), small spiked steel shield, +2 *defending longsword*, short sword, longbow, quiver, 20 arrows, *potion*

#### 1,196 C.E.: Gunpowder Weaponry

The Chinese develop additional military uses for gunpowder. The first of these is a new weapon—a multichambered bamboo tube that is filled with gunpowder and shrapnel and affixed to an arrow. In mid-flight, the arrow becomes propelled by repeated gunpowder blasts (the first staged rockets). Eventually the missile explodes, sending deadly shrapnel into enemy ranks.

Shortly thereafter, the Chinese also learn to launch ignited casks of gunpowder at their enemies with siege engines.

#### 1,200 C.E.: Plate Armor

The proliferation of deadly piercing weapons spurs the creation of armor that can better

of cure moderate wounds, 2 tanglefoot bags.

**Hobgoblin Sergeant:** Male hobgoblin Ftr 3; CR 3; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 3d10+9; hp 25; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+1/18-20, scimitar); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+1/18-20, scimitar) or +8 ranged (1d8+1/x3, composite longbow [+1 Str bonus]); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 12.


**Skills and Feats:** Climb +6, Move Silently +7, Ride +10; Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (composite longbow).

**Possessions:** hobgoblin armor (studded leather), scimitar, composite longbow (+1 Str bonus), quiver, 20 arrows, 2 *sleep arrows*, *potion of cat's grace*, tanglefoot bag.

**Hobgoblin Elite (8):** Male and female hobgoblin Ftr 1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 12; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +2 melee (1d8/19-20, longsword); Full Atk +3 melee (1d8/19-20, longsword) or +1 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger), or +4 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10.

**Skills and Feats:** Climb +2, Move Silently +4, Ride +6; Dodge, Weapon Focus (longsword).

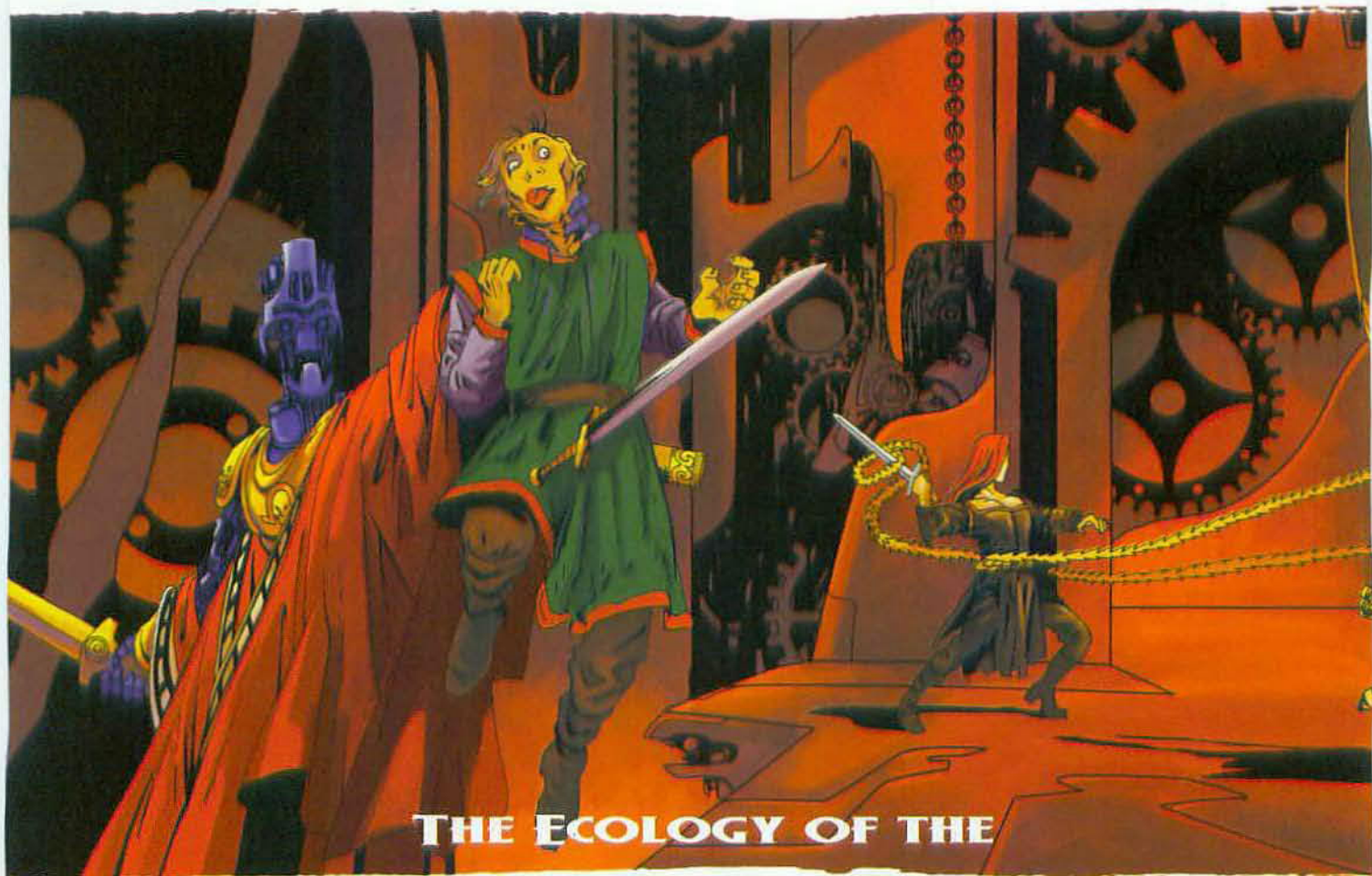
**Possessions:** hobgoblin armor (studded leather), small steel shield, masterwork longsword, dagger, masterwork longbow, quiver, 20 arrows.

**Hobgoblin Warriors (12):** Male and female hobgoblin War 1; see the *Monster Manual*. 

resist penetration. The addition of iron plates to common chain armor improves its protective qualities without significantly reducing mobility.

Initially, the chain hauberk of an elite soldier is covered with a gambeson, or quilted coat, that has iron plates sewn into it. The eventual addition of armored sleeves, leggings, and joints produces a full suit of plate armor, which slowly evolves into the famous full plate armor used centuries later.

Because of its weight and expense, few footsoldiers use full plate armor. Such protection becomes the province of mounted warriors, whose steeds can bear the brunt of the armor's weight.



## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# INEVITABLES

Implacable agents of law, the inevitables dispense justice without regard to race, creed, or station. If you have broken one of the natural laws of the multiverse there might be an inevitable on your trail right now.

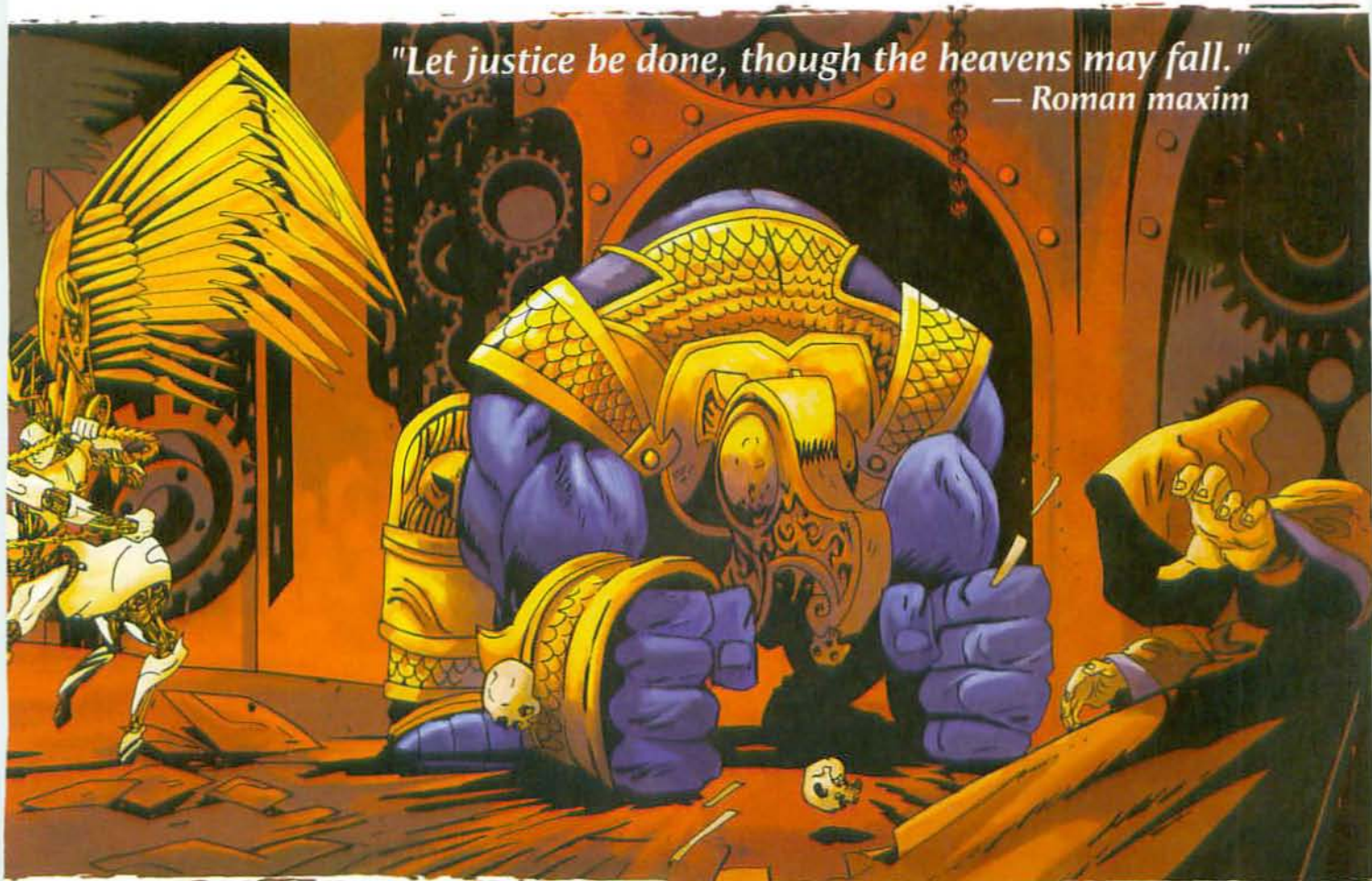
### HISTORY OF THE INEVITABLES

By the standards of the eons-old multiverse, the rise of the inevitables is a relatively recent occurrence. Some historical texts (most notably Ganthros the Elder's *Accounting of the Realms Beyond* and Hannak Lathar's *Verses of the Blood War*) trace their

emergence to 10,000 years ago. At that time, angelic creatures called aphanacts called the plane of Mechanus home. Ambitious and obsessed with justice, the aphanacts raised great armies that crusaded on other planes, bringing vast swaths of the multiverse under their rigid code of laws.

Ganthros's writing hints that the deities themselves ended the aphanact crusades, while Lathar posits an alliance of convenience among the fiends of the Lower Planes and the archons, angels, and eladrins of the Upper Planes. In any case, every last aphanact disappeared 10,000 years ago.

"Let justice be done, though the heavens may fall."  
— Roman maxim



In their place rose the first inevitables. Massive, fortresslike crèche-forges appeared amid the spinning gears of Mechanus. For a decade they softly hummed, impervious to any effort to penetrate them or divine their purpose. Then maruts started to emerge from the crèche-forges, striding across the planes. Other sorts of inevitables followed in centuries to come.

Neither Ganthros the Elder nor Hannak Lathar can identify the creators of the crèche-forges (and consequently the inevitables) with any certainty. That doesn't stop them from speculating, of course. The inevitables have no larger society; their application of justice is absolutely an individual one. Each inevitable has a tightly defined purpose and no interest in matters beyond the next target brought to justice. Thus, planar historians speculate that whomever created the inevitables wanted to avoid a repeat of the aphanact crusades.

Without broad ambition or the inclination to organize in groups, the inevitables remain individually powerful, but collectively dormant.

Whether one god, many deities, or other powerful denizens of the outer planes created the inevitables remains a mystery. Because inevitables periodically return to their crèche-forge to have their memories removed, even the first inevitables don't remember who created them.

### LIFE CYCLE OF THE INEVITABLE

When an inevitable first emerges from a crèche-forge on Mechanus, it seems to possess very little knowledge beyond the identity of its first target and a sense of how its powers work. It speaks little and generally refuses to interact with bystanders unless they directly aid or hinder its current mission of justice. Maruts, quaruts, and varakhuts *plane shift* to the appropriate plane to begin their mission, while

zelekhuts and kolyaruts start seeking a natural portal to the relevant plane.

Because *plane shift* is imprecise and portals rarely emerge at a convenient spot, the inevitable often has a long journey ahead of it—even if the first target isn't on the move. During this journey, the inevitable observes its surroundings, recording its observations and soaking up information like a sponge. It starts to interact more with passersby in simple ways, asking for directions and questioning witnesses. An inevitable's first interactions are often awkward, as the inevitable struggles to make itself understood and tries to deal with creatures that don't share its single-minded purpose. Inevitables are reasonably intelligent, so they develop rudimentary conversation skills within a few weeks of travel in populated areas.

When an inevitable's first mission is complete, it uses what it's learned about its surroundings to identify

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE INEVITABLE

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to inevitables. Because there are many sorts of inevitables, the DCs are listed as formulas, not specific numbers. When the PCs are inquiring about a specific kind of inevitable, plug the relevant Hit Dice of a typical example of that type into the formula. For example, PCs researching kolyaruts, which usually have 13 HD, learn the first result on the table on a result of 23 or higher. Planar travelers, powerful lawful clerics, and servants of the forces of order typically possess this information.

**Knowledge (arcana)**

DC	Result
10 + HD	Each inevitable is obsessed with one particular aspect of justice and you know the purpose of this particular inevitable. All inevitables have the ability to repair themselves at an astonishing rate, but weapons infused with the power of chaos can bypass their self-repair functions.
15 + HD	Inevitables bring those they consider wrongdoers to justice, although this doesn't always mean a death sentence. They don't brook distraction or interference with their work and defend themselves with lethal force. The particular inevitable in question has a key attack power (a kolyarut has <i>enervation/vampiric touch</i> , a marut has fists of thunder and lightning, a quarut has <i>temporal stasis</i> , a varakhut has dispelling blast, and a zelekhut has an electric spiked chain).
20 + HD	Inevitables wander the planes in search of targets to bring to justice; if you can bring them evidence of wrongdoing, sometimes they'll start hunting down whomever you suggest. This particular inevitable has the following important spell-like abilities (list three or four the inevitable is likely to use in a battle).
25 + HD	In their travels, inevitables gradually develop distinctive, idiosyncratic personalities. Eventually, this develops into a drive to return to their "birthplaces," mysterious crèche-forges on Mechanus, and have their memories and personalities wiped away. This particular inevitable has the following spell-like abilities (tell the players about most or all of them).

a new target. Sometimes the identification is instantaneous. If a zelekhut tracks a fugitive to a hidden colony of exiles under the city, it might apprehend a second fugitive mere seconds after the first, because the exile colony is essentially an immense cluster of fugitives. Sometimes, catching another fugitive can take weeks, months, or years. In one notable example, the marut known as Gantrenacht waits outside the ruined walls of the Crucible of Fears because it knows the prophecy that every 500 years, a lich-lord emerges from the crucible.

Inevitables are capable of learning and remembering, so some of them

recall transgressors they meet in the course of a mission and revisit the wrongdoers once the mission is complete. This is more common among inevitables that have been away from the crèche-forges of Mechanus for a long time. For example, shortly before its return to Mechanus, the kolyarut known as Janu-Harim told the viziers of Queen Marnau III that it had prioritized 242 contract-breakers on a mental list and was bringing each "back into compliance." Some inevitables, especially newer ones, ignore all other transgressions until their current missions are complete and then seize the next transgressors they come across.

Regardless of how they acquire new targets, inevitables ceaselessly seek out each wrongdoer in turn. As they grow more experienced, they grow more comfortable working with other creatures toward a common purpose—as long as the purpose puts the inevitable tangibly closer to its target. An inevitable starts to refer to itself by a name (one given by others or one it invents itself) at some point. It also develops the rudiments of a distinctive personality, shaped by interactions with other creatures. Inevitables remain totally singular of purpose and largely emotionless, but they can evince basic empathy or hostility toward allies or enemies.

An inevitable's personality develops only so far. With each successful mission, the drive to return to the crèche-forge grows slightly stronger. Eventually, an inevitable stops chasing transgressors and starts its journey back to Mechanus with the same single-minded purpose it displayed during its missions. When the inevitable gets back to the crèche-forge, it is swallowed up and emerges weeks later, remembering nothing of its previous existence. Whether the crèche-forge wipes away those memories, stores them, or transfers them to another entity is unknown.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE INEVITABLE

Inevitables have no culture of their own, and they're too single-minded to fit well in the societies of other creatures. A typical inevitable leads a lonely existence, making friends only when convenient and having no enemies beyond the current target. It's a creature of such singular purpose that emotions and moods are irrelevant, although some inevitables feel a vague, brief sense of satisfaction when they bring someone to justice.

The mind of an inevitable is the mind of a hunter—an endlessly patient hunter willing to overcome any hardship or obstacle to reach its prey. Even inevitables that have developed a measure of self-awareness and personality put that personality to work in the service of the

single-minded pursuit of enforcing a natural law of the universe.

**Kolyarut:** Both written and oral contracts are the purview of the kolyarut, which regards itself as an impartial “enforcement clause” for that contract. A kolyarut undertakes a mission only when it has a complete understanding of the contract. Sometimes these inevitables study an actual copy of the contract or is present when the oral bargain is made, but more often it acquires a mystical understanding of the terms of the contract in a flash of inspiration. This instinctive understanding of the terms is beyond the control of the kolyarut, but it seems to require a degree of proximity to one of the parties to the contract, oath, or bargain. Thus, a kolyarut in search of its next mission tends to gravitate to royal courts, magistrates’ benches, temples, and other places where oaths are frequently sworn and contracts made.

Because it regards itself as part of the contract, a kolyarut is simultaneously the easiest and most difficult kind of inevitable to negotiate with. A kolyarut won’t be swayed by an oathbreaker’s claim of “extenuating circumstances.” The kolyarut, if given to conversation, would reply: “The circumstances are indeed extenuating, but they aren’t part of the contract. You are thus in breach.” Avoiding a confrontation with a kolyarut is as simple as returning to compliance, or (if it’s a two-party contract) providing convincing evidence that the other party has also broken its part of the deal. Kolyaruts simply walk away from situations where both sides have broken a bargain.

Kolyaruts rarely kill except in self-defense; their concept of what constitutes appropriate justice is usually spelled out in the oath, bargain, or contract. They use *suggestion*, *mark of justice*, and *geas/quest* to compel compliance, resorting to violence only if such measures fail



or lethal force is part of the bargain to begin with (like an oath on one’s life that is subsequently broken).

**Marut:** Maruts, almost always enforce their natural laws by killing transgressors. They hunt down those who would cheat death by extending their lifespans unnaturally. Some maruts also bring justice to those who engage in large-scale necromancy (raising undead armies, for example), because doing so cheats the inevitability of death for others.

The quarry of a marut is, by definition, powerful enough to keep the grave at bay. The marut’s foe is also either immortal or very long-lived. So a marut must be patient itself, spending years or decades on a single foe such as a necromancer, lich, or cult leader seeking immortality.

The target of a marut is often set apart from society by the nature of the transgression, so maruts get little practice interacting

with other creatures. Thus, they develop distinctive personalities much more slowly than other inevitables.

**Quarut:** The target of a quarut is also a potent foe, capable of reordering time and space in dramatic, dangerous ways. A quarut’s target list consists of creatures that can stop the flow of time itself or wish a new reality into existence, so it approaches its targets with patience and caution. A quarut is unlikely to stride into the archmage’s floating tower, shackles in hand. Instead, the quarut interrogates former associates and minions, seeking out weaknesses. The quarut employs proxies to engage the archmage in battle, using the opportunity to assess the capabilities of its quarry.

While some transgressors are able to defeat the quarut in battle, others are able to reach accommodation with the inevitable by setting aright whatever dramatic change they made to space or time. Simply undoing the change in reality is rarely enough to satisfy a quarut, however. A transgressor eager to be free of a tenacious quarut must rework time itself so that the change in reality was never made in the first place.

**Varakhut:** Those who seek mere immortality are the province of the maruts, but those who seek godhood are considered transgressors to



## ORIGIN OF THE INEVITABLE

"When Jeff Grubb, Bruce Cordell, and I split up the writing duties for the 2002 *Manual of the Planes* sourcebook, I was lucky enough to get the monsters chapter. At the time, the only monsters anyone had were the ones in the *Monster Manual*, because the third edition of the D&D game was less than a year old.

"First, I wanted to check for gaps in the existing supply of monsters to make sure we had at least a starting point for adventures on every plane. Second, I pored through first- and second-edition sources looking for planar monsters that I could "promote" into the new rules set.

"I saw a gap in the available denizens of Mechanus. At the time, the formians were the sole denizens of the plane. They're great monsters, but it strained the imagination to have formians enforcing laws, chasing down criminals, and meting out punishment from within their hives. The same held true with second edition's modrons.

"Eventually, as I was at my desk flipping through the *PLANESCAPE Monstrous Compendium Appendix*, looking for good monsters, I came across the marut.

"The marut entry included a bit of fiction that was a riff on Poe's "Masque of the Red Death," so it wasn't much of a stretch to imagine these guys as enforcers of a "don't try to cheat death" natural law. The marut thus became the first example of a class of creatures we eventually called the inevitables.

"The marut was on board, and his natural law was one that would make him a useful ally or a potential opponent. Because the inevitables are lawful neutral, I wanted them to function as enemies or allies. Thus their natural laws had to be laws that you could imagine PCs upholding or breaking, depending on the circumstance. Thus came the kolyarut (don't break a contract) and the zelekhut (don't escape justice), and with the *Fiend Folio* the quarut (don't mess with space and time) and the varakhut (don't mess with the gods)." —David Noonan

the varakhuts. A rare type of inevitable, varakhuts hunt down those who make a credible bid for godhood.

To attract the interest of a varakhut, the attempt at godhood must be legitimate. Not every two-bit cult leader and would-be demigod is subject to the justice of a varakhut, only those on the cusp of becoming true deities. In some cases, powerful outsiders or would-be godlings intentionally antagonize varakhuts in an attempt to legitimize their bids for godhood.

Once a varakhut identifies a credible attempt at godhood, it studies its enemies like a quarut does, learning as much as it can about its target before making a direct confrontation. The varakhut prefers to thwart would-be deities by eliminating them directly, but it isn't above destroying artifact-level power sources or wreaking havoc on minions and worshippers if doing so weakens the prospective godling.

Only two ways of forestalling a varakhut exist. The first is obvious: destroying it. The second way is to actually achieve deityhood. Once a creature becomes a demigod, varakhuts regard the new deity as part of the natural order they're charged with enforcing.

While most varakhuts search the cosmos for those trying to join the pantheon of deities, occasionally varakhuts target those attempting the reverse: deicide, the act of killing a deity.

**Zelekhut:** Because they're charged with hunting down fugitives, zelekhts spend more time traveling and doing detective work. More so than the targets of other inevitables, the quarry of a zelekhut certainly doesn't want to be found. Zelekhts thus interact with



## ADVANCED INEVITABLE

Inevitables most often advance by Hit Dice, as they forget their classes upon returning to their crèche-forges. Occasionally, kolyaruts become fighters or clerics of deities of order, and zelekhts sometimes take levels of ranger, choosing humanoid favored enemies. Maruts most rarely take levels in specific classes, their already massive bulks added to with each return to the forge, eventually growing to truly epic proportions.

### GANTRENACHT

CR 22

Advanced marut inevitable

LN Huge construct

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +24, Spot +27

AC 37, touch 9, flat-footed 36

hp 276 (43HD); fast healing 10 DR 15/chaotic

Immune construct traits

SR 25

Fort +16, Ref +15, Will +19

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 slams +25 melee (3d6+43 plus 3d6 sonic or 3d6 electricity)

Space 15 ft.; Reach 15 ft.

Base Atk +32; Grp +60

Attack Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, fists of thunder and lightning Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Spell-like Abilities (CL 14):

At will—*air walk*, *dimension door*, *fear* (DC 19), *greater command* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic*, *mass inflict light wounds* (DC 20), *locate creature*, *true seeing*

1/day—*chain lightning* (DC 21), *circle of death* (DC 21), *mark of justice*, *wall of force*

1/week—*earthquake* (DC 23), *geas/quest*, *plane shift* (DC 22)


Abilities Str 46, Dex 12, Con —, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 20

Feats Ability Focus (fists), Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Natural Attack, Run

Skills Concentration +18, Diplomacy +16, Knowledge (religion) +21, Listen +24, Search +13, Sense Motive +12, Spot +27, Survival +16 (+18 following tracks)

**Fists of Thunder and Lightning (Su):** Gantrenacht's left fist deals 3d6 points of sonic damage and deafens the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the deafness). Its right fist deals 3d6 points of electricity damage and blinds the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the blindness).

\* Includes adjustment for 25-point Power Attack.



passersby more than other inevitables and develop distinctive personalities faster. A zelekhut often brings a fugitive back to authorities alive, employing *mark of justice* and *lesser geas* to augment the mundane shackles and other restraints on the prisoner.

A zelekhut often has to interrogate witnesses who might know something about the whereabouts of its quarry. A zelekhut recently emerged from its crèche-forge asks direct questions and might resort

to physical violence if it thinks it'll gain better information that way. A more experienced zelekhut is a subtler interrogator, using Sense Motive to ferret out witnesses who are withholding information important to the zelekhut's search.

## ORDER OF INEVITABLE JUSTICE

*"Some seek to uphold the law or enforce the law. We want to become the law."*

—Andrinn d'Vascou, Lord Knight of Serenity Fortress

The knightly Order of Inevitable Justice are mortals who seek to

emulate the single-minded tenacity of inevitables, undertaking the cause of enforcing the natural laws of the universe. Members of the order undertake quests to bring justice to places where neither spiritual nor temporal justice can reach.

The order has no ceremonial duties or leisure activities; such idleness has no place in a cosmos crying out for inevitable justice. The order is thus relatively free of internal politicking; even the hint of such things is unlike the constructs that members of the order emulate.

**Fortresses:** The Order of Inevitable Justice has one or more fortresses on each nonchaotic plane and two or three per continent on the Material Plane. Most are imposing structures, but a few are hidden in lands under the sway of rulers the order considers unjust.

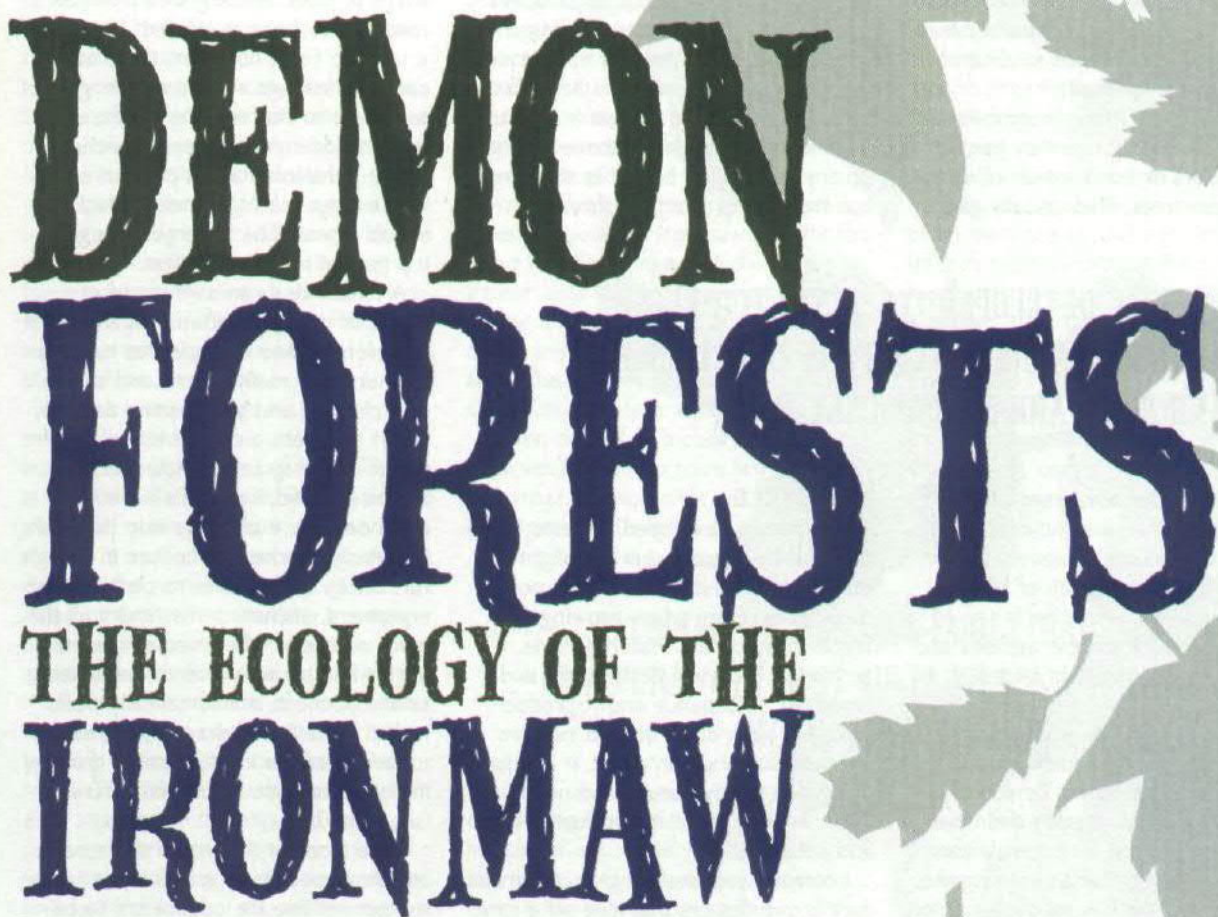
Members of the order and those who can prove that they are devout servants of justice can find aid at any of the group's numerous fortresses. Each fortress is the functional equivalent of a small city for the purpose of buying and selling items, enlists a 13th-level cleric (of a god with the Law domain) who can perform needed spellcasting for 80% of the standard NPC price, and houses order sages and diviners who can provide members with information on known lawbreakers in the general area.

**Missions:** Each member of the order specializes in a type of justice that corresponds with a particular type of inevitable. Some members, for example, hunt undead as maruts do, while others seek out fugitives as zelekhts. Just as inevitables undertake missions without regard for how long they'll take to complete, so too do members of the Order of Inevitable Justice leave the fortress for months or even years without consequence. As long as members don't engage in lawbreaking themselves and attempt to uphold the same ideals as the inevitables, they remain members in good standing of the order. 🗡️



# DEMON FORESTS

## THE ECOLOGY OF THE IRONMAW



By Skip Williams • illustrated by David Walstrom

Adventurers and sages familiar with the denizens of the Outer Planes have long been aware of the deadly ironmaw, an insatiable predatory plant from the Infinite Layers of the Abyss. The creature gets its name from its most ghastly feature: a gaping maw capable of engulfing an ogre in one gulp and crushing the victim in an inexorable grip, like a massive iron vise.

The ironmaw remained virtually unknown on the Material Plane until recent decades, when it managed to establish itself in the forests of the Material Plane, probably from seeds unwittingly carried out of the Abyss by adventurers. Although it remains fairly rare, an ironmaw can turn the most idyllic-looking glade into a sinister and dangerous place.

An ironmaw has a certain low cunning and the ability to speak Abyssal, but it usually concerns itself with securing a steady supply of food and thinks of little else. It has no taste for vegetable matter or carrion but otherwise will eat virtually anything—and it is always hungry. Anyone who attempts to parley with an ironmaw had best stay alert. Although simple-minded, it is fully capable of lying to draw a potential meal within reach of its grasping tendrils.

### IRONMAWS IN THE WORLD

Today, ironmaws can lurk in almost any locale on the Material Plane where trees grow. Although they can withstand arctic cold, they prefer temperate or tropical climates, where prey is more plentiful and where they can

pose innocuously as the broadleaf trees they resemble. Although primarily a forest dweller, the ironmaw can also be found in swamps, hills, and even mountain valleys, always in the company of tall trees.

Travelers returning from the Abyss relate tales of dense stands containing dozens or even hundreds of the monsters. Ironmaws living under these conditions stay on the move almost constantly, each one trying to shuffle to the edge of the stand, the only position from which it has any real hope of capturing prey. Thus they creep across the Abyssal landscape like great, dark amoebas flowing in ever-changing shapes and occasionally splitting into smaller masses. Any creature unfortunate enough to stumble into one of these awful groves usually dies within

seconds to sudden deadly strikes by the ironmaws' tendrils. The creatures then squabble over the corpse, literally tearing it to bits as each tries to obtain a morsel of flesh for itself.

On the Material Plane, ironmaws are largely solitary, although they can be found in pairs or small stands of up to half a dozen trees. They usually gather

ments seldom last long, since the dragon eventually grows tired of fetching live prey for its servant. Even if a dragon does not press an ironmaw into service, it often keeps close tabs on the creature. Ironmaws have little interest in treasure, and most dragons aren't above picking up any baubles left behind as the ravenous tree roams about the forest.

creature wields them like very long whips or flails. A full-grown ironmaw's tendrils can grow to 120 feet long (1d6 x 10 + 60 feet); however, the creature can only manage attacks with lengths of tendril up to 60 feet. The excess coils remain hidden in its upper branches, allowing the ironmaw to pay out extra length when making a melee attack, should a tendril be severed. This gives it a natural reach of 60 feet.

A tendril deals an average of 17 points of damage (2d6+10) on a hit, and that alone makes it dangerous to many creatures. Its many thorns and barbs deal piercing and bludgeoning damage, and it threatens a critical hit on an attack roll of 19 or 20. However, an ironmaw's tendril delivers more than mere damage. It also digs into the flesh, becoming attached like a burr in a dog's fur. Sticky sap adheres to clothing and equipment, anchoring the tendril all the more securely. Whenever an ironmaw begins its turn with a tendril attached to an opponent, it automatically deals tendril damage and drags that creature 10 feet closer to itself, possibly drawing the opponent into its crushing maw (see below).

The moment the tendril strikes and attaches, specialized spines inject virulent spores into the opponent's bloodstream. These spores have a powerful anticoagulant effect, causing the wound to bleed profusely and dealing an additional 3 points of damage each subsequent turn. This damage occurs at the beginning of the ironmaw's turn in the initiative order and continues each round until the wounded creature dies or the wound is treated. The bleeding can be stopped only by a Heal check (DC 10) or the application of any *cure* spell or other healing magic (*heal*, *healing circle*, or the like). Each hit by a tendril causes another wound. The ironmaw's blows also have a sickening effect on the victim, dealing 1d6 points of Constitution damage as the ironmaw feasts on its blood. Severing a blood-filled tendril releases a gory spray of crimson from the cut. This doesn't do any extra harm to the ironmaw, but it looks impressive.

Breaking free from a tendril is difficult. To do so, the opponent must make an Escape Artist check (DC 25) or a Strength check (DC 26), or deal 13 points of damage to the tendril with a single blow from a slashing weapon

## THE IRONMAW DEVELOPED ITS TASTE FOR FLESH IN THE ABYSS, WHERE SUNLIGHT IS UNRELIABLE AT BEST AND SOILS ARE NOTORIOUSLY POOR.

to mate or to take advantage of a rich hunting area. Once a stand contains about six individuals, however, one or more shuffle off in search of better opportunities.

Because of its insatiable appetite and evil nature, an ironmaw is seldom a welcome addition to any sylvan neighborhood. Nearby elves who become aware of its presence quickly mount an expedition to eradicate it. Druids often react the same way, despite their live-and-let-live mindset—an ironmaw can quickly drive off or kill an area's game, thus disrupting the natural cycles of the forest. Centaurs, dryads, nymphs, and even the usually playful and carefree sprites are similarly hostile, although they often lack the magical power needed to defeat the creature. They usually keep a close watch on the ironmaw lest it approach a settlement, then either attempt to discourage it or seek help. One effective tactic is to throw a cordon around the slow-moving plant and drive off all the local animals, thus depriving the ironmaw of prey and encouraging it to move elsewhere.

Green dragons also resent the presence of such capable predators in their territories, but occasionally one forges an alliance of sorts with an ironmaw. Protected by its mobility, breath weapon, and magical power—not to mention its sheer size—the dragon can sometimes intimidate or bribe the creature into serving as a guardian for its lair. The ironmaw is content to serve so long as the dragon brings it food regularly (very few beings willingly approach a dragon's lair, and they are even less likely to do so with a voracious ironmaw around). Such arrange-

### LIFE CYCLE

The ironmaw developed its taste for flesh in the Abyss, where sunlight is unreliable at best and soils are notoriously poor. Even when growing in a fertile zone on the Material Plane, an ironmaw craves flesh, bone, and blood for sustenance and reproduction. Although often able to survive on good soil and sun alone, it is insatiably hungry by nature and needs an extra energy boost to produce fruit and seeds.

Ironmaws produce hanging clusters of dark brown flowers that give off a stink like that of carrion. Every ironmaw has both male and female flowers and is capable of reproducing on its own, but stands often gather to cross-pollinate. An ironmaw transfers pollen from flower to flower using its tendrils. Once pollinated, the blooms develop into clusters of dark brown fruit resembling acorns, retaining their foul odor. The fruit tastes just as bad as it smells, and it is too acrid for humans to eat unless first cured in lye. Even then it tastes like rotten meat.

When cast on the ground and watered with blood, a fruit sprouts within a few weeks. An ironmaw seedling resembles an adult but is dangerous only to Fine and Diminutive creatures. A seedling can take anywhere from a few months to a few years to reach adult size, depending on how much food it gets.

### NATURAL WEAPONRY

An ironmaw possesses a mighty arsenal of natural weaponry, which includes its tendrils and powerful maw.

**Tendrils:** An ironmaw's four thorny tendrils are formidable weapons. The

(AC 22). Use the procedure for surrendering a weapon (see Chapter 8: Combat in the *Player's Handbook*) to resolve the attempt.

**Maw:** An ironmaw can use its namesake feature to deliver bite attacks. The creature's bite isn't nearly as formidable as its tendrils, but it deals a respectable 9 points of damage on average (1d8+5). The real danger comes when the ironmaw manages to drag a foe into bite range with a tendril. When it tries to bite a creature that has at least one tendril attached, it gets a +4 bonus on its attack roll.

If the ironmaw drags a Large or smaller foe into its own space, it attempts to engulf the creature. The foe is allowed a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid the maw. If the save succeeds, the foe is pushed either back to where it began the turn or into any space adjacent to the ironmaw (the ironmaw chooses the space). Any tendrils attached to the foe remain attached. If it fails the save, the foe is deposited in the crushing maw, where it is forced into the ironmaw's hollow, fluid-filled trunk. The ironmaw detaches any tendrils attached to the engulfed foe.

The tree's digestive juices are too weak to cause any immediate harm to an engulfed foe, but the victim must hold its breath or begin to drown. The trunk, however, acts like an enormous gizzard, grinding up the ironmaw's food and dealing 2d6+10 points of bludgeoning damage each round to the creature within.

An ironmaw's trunk can hold one Large, two Medium, four Small, eight Tiny, sixteen Diminutive, or thirty-two Fine creatures. Creatures killed inside the trunk are completely consumed after about an hour, at which time the ironmaw expels any indigestible matter.

The ironmaw might also engulf creatures it has killed with its tendrils, storing them for several days until it can "plant" them around an ironmaw seed. About a week after planting, the seeds sprout into ironmaw saplings, which feed off the corpses planted with them and reach maturity within a month.

### IRONMAWS IN COMBAT

Because it is virtually immobile, an ironmaw hunts by ambush. Despite being fairly stupid and always hungry, the creature exhibits considerable guile and patience. It first chooses a locale

where prey is likely to approach: Springs, fords, game trails, salt licks, and areas of young, tender growth all attract wildlife and make prime hunting grounds for ironmaws. More daring specimens lurk near roadsides, bridges, and campsites, hoping to ambush unwary people.

An ideal spot has many broadleaf trees of about the ironmaw's height (20 to 30 feet for a mature individual) and a clear area nearby. The ironmaw hides among the trees and uses its tendrils to attack anything that enters the clear area. The edge of a woodland meadow serves its purposes well.

Given its lack of mobility, an ironmaw would seem to have few options in combat. Its incredible reach, however, gives it flexibility. It threatens

opponent struck has to deal with a bleeding wound and an attached tendril. On subsequent rounds, with one or more foes so occupied, the creature uses its free tendrils against any who are still free, starting with those who are trying to assist their comrades.

If reduced to less than 25% of its original hit points, an ironmaw often switches tactics and directs all its free tendrils against the foe that has hurt it the most. This tactic works well, since the Constitution loss from multiple tendril hits can kill a single creature outright.

Whenever a foe succumbs to an ironmaw's tendril attack, its Great Cleave feat comes into play. It detaches the tendril to make another melee attack, usually against the

## ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS FAIRLY RARE, AN IRONMAW CAN TURN THE MOST IDYLIC-LOOKING GLADE INTO A SINISTER AND DANGEROUS PLACE.

everything within 60 feet and can make attacks of opportunity within that area, and it can easily attack multiple foes even when they are scattered.

An inexperienced ironmaw lashes out whenever anything comes within range. An older, more crafty specimen usually waits until prey gets closer, usually about 40 feet away, especially when several opponents approach in a group. This ensures that the ironmaw can attack any of its foes and makes it more difficult for them to withdraw out of reach.

In either case, the ironmaw tries to attack before its opponents can spot it. If it manages to get surprise (quite likely given its excellent ability to hide among the trees) the ironmaw makes its single attack against the closest foe. This generally assures it of a clear line of sight and also forces the foe's companions (if any) to move closer if they want to help free their comrade from an attached tendril.

When using its first full attack action against a group, an ironmaw usually lashes at three or four different foes, starting with the creatures closest to itself. Although this tactic dilutes the ironmaw's offensive power, it also blunts any countermeasures, since each

closest foe who does not already have a tendril attached.

An ironmaw seldom tries to flee from combat, knowing that it cannot outrun anything with its land speed of 10 feet. But if it is being harried from beyond its reach by ranged weapons or spells, it has sense enough to withdraw or at least seek cover.

### Ironmaw Group Tactics

When a pair or stand of ironmaws fight together, they usually do not bother to coordinate. Instead, they stand 5 to 10 feet apart in a circle with a diameter of 40 to 50 feet. The creatures usually hold their attacks until they are spotted or until opponents come within reach of at least two individuals. Once the battle commences, each ironmaw generally follows the tactics described above.

Frequently, tendrils from two or more ironmaws become attached to the same foe. When this occurs, all of them try to drag the creature toward themselves. To decide which one wins the resulting tug-of-war, first look for a space that is 10 feet closer to all the ironmaws involved. If no such space is available, find a space 10 feet closer to at least one of the competing ironmaws

and not farther away from any other. If there still is no such space, all the ironmaws make opposed Strength checks (if any individual has more than one tendril attached, it gains a +2 circumstance bonus on the check for each extra tendril). The loser must detach its tendrils, and the remaining ironmaws repeat the process until there is a legal space to move the creature or

splotches on the leaves. A druid can immediately recognize the ironmaw as an unnatural plant. A Knowledge (planes) (DC 20), Knowledge (nature) (DC 15), or bardic knowledge (DC 25) check confirms its true nature—and, of course, characters might recognize it from their own experience.

The wary might loose an arrow or other ranged attack at the odd-looking

lurking nearby. If you allow one ironmaw to occupy your attention, another just might creep into range unnoticed.

### Going Toe to Root

Defeating an ironmaw with melee attacks usually takes much less time than a ranged assault, but it entails far more risk.

It doesn't pay to be timid in close combat with an ironmaw. Move in quickly so that it gets few chances to use its tendrils. Also, send in as many attackers as possible so that no one opponent faces all the creature's tendrils. Should the ironmaw manage to attach a tendril to a comrade, don't be in too great a hurry to free the character unless you intend to flee. Constitution damage occurs only when a tendril first hits and attaches. Breaking free only invites another tendril attack along with another bleeding wound and more Constitution damage. If a party member is snared within 15 feet of the ironmaw, however, try to sever every tendril as soon as it attaches. You don't want anyone engulfed.

Once you get close enough for melee, plan to stay there until you get the job done. Almost anyone can outrun an ironmaw, but there's no escaping those tendrils when you're within 60 feet of the monster.

### Spellslinging

A typical party's ability to strike effectively at a distance usually rests with its spellcasters. However, an ironmaw's spell resistance of 30 makes it all but immune to most magical assaults, even from casters with the Spell Penetration feat. Spells that employ cold or electricity are a waste of time: Ironmaws are immune to these energy types. They are also resistant to acid and sonics, so use fire and force effects if you must cast spells against an ironmaw. It is best to stick with spells that enhance your party, such as *greater magic weapon*.

Spells that create or conjure allies, such as the various *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells, and *animate objects*, get around an ironmaw's spell resistance. Such allies, however, often cannot overcome the creature's damage reduction and thus can only block or delay its movement. But sending in a first wave of summoned creatures floods the area with

## IRONMAWS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO ERADICATE, BUT WITH SMART PRECAUTIONS AND CAREFUL TACTICS, A PARTY CAN DEAL WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY.

until only one ironmaw has tendrils attached to it.

### FIGHTING AN IRONMAW

Often, the best way to deal with an ironmaw is to avoid the creature.

In theory, a trained observer can easily recognize an ironmaw's territory. This is true, to an extent. When an ironmaw has remained in one place for a while, the area becomes littered with indigestible bits from its previous victims, such as scraps of fur. If the ironmaw has battled intelligent creatures, it leaves behind pieces of their equipment, particularly metal and wooden items, coins, gems, cloth, and leather, which the ironmaw either cannot digest or does not care to eat. However, all this detritus is easily overlooked among the natural litter and brush that covers most forest floors.

The Spot DC to notice telltale debris in an ironmaw's vicinity is 20. Even if successful, the check merely reveals its presence, not its significance. A Survival check (DC 15) allows the observer not only to notice the refuse but also to realize that some predatory creature has fed and left it behind. A character who successfully spots the debris can attempt a Knowledge (nature) check (DC 15) to come to the same conclusion.

Even when scanning the area upon noting the debris, a party might overlook the ironmaw's presence. They must make Spot checks opposed by the ironmaw's Hide (which is excellent within a wooded area) to actually see the creature. Even then, it resembles an oak tree distinguished only by blood-red

tree. This usually motivates it to strike if there is a foe within reach, even if the ranged attack misses or fails to overcome the ironmaw's damage reduction. If no foes are within reach, the creature waits a round or two, hoping someone will move in for a closer look.

### Stay Back If You Can

Given an ironmaw's extremely slow speed, an obvious combat tactic is simply to stay out of reach and hurl spells and ranged attacks. However, this is easier said than done.

An ironmaw has impressive damage reduction, rendering it all but immune to ranged weapons with less than +3 magical enhancement. Since most characters focus on melee combat, sufficiently powerful ranged weapons are seldom available. A *greater magic weapon* spell can make up for this lack nicely. Even so, expect to spend a long time pumping arrows into an ironmaw before it succumbs. If you are in a thickly overgrown area, chances are the ironmaw can gain cover from the surrounding trees, making the task of bringing it down with ranged attacks even more laborious. Also keep in mind that the creature is not completely immobile. It can cover 20 feet a round with a double move, or 40 feet if it runs, requiring a minimum distance of 105 feet to be entirely safe from an ironmaw's attacks. While it is difficult to run through a forest, an open space is much easier—ironmaws lurk near clearings and meadows for a reason.

When playing cat-and-mouse with an ironmaw, keep an eye out for others

more targets than the ironmaw can deal with, allowing the PCs to get within melee range without drawing tendrils attacks. Most ironmaws are cagey enough to redirect their tendrils against more dangerous opponents, but this tactic might still buy combatants a little time.

Being evil and extraplanar, an ironmaw is vulnerable to banishing spells such as *dispel evil* and *holy word* (even if it grew from a seed planted on the Material Plane). These spells still have to get through its formidable spell resistance, but the battle is over if they work—and the +4 deflection bonus to AC from *dispel evil* doesn't hurt either. Comrades who have been engulfed or who have tendrils attached stay behind when the ironmaw is banished back to the Abyss. The *banishment* spell, of course, is the most effective means of sending an ironmaw packing. Items repellent to an ironmaw include: a pound or more of salt, a pound or more of silver, hairs from a celestial creature or good outsider, fire, and an axe blade. Each extra element improves your ability to overcome the ironmaw's spell resistance by +1 and also raises the spell's save DC by 2, so try to use as many as you can.

#### ALTERNATE STATISTICS

The statistics below represent a juvenile ironmaw. The standard monster description can be found in the *Fiend Folio*.

**Ironmaw Seedling:** CR 10; Large plant (Extraplanar); HD 8d8+32; hp 68; Init -1; Spd 10 ft.; AC 21, touch 9, flat-footed 21; BAB +6; Grap +16; Atk +12 melee (1d8+6 4 tendrils/crit 19-20) and +7 bite (1d6+3); Face/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft. (40-foot reach with tendrils); SA Attach, engulf, illness, tendrils, wounding; SQ Acid resistance 10, cold immunity, DR 10/+2, electricity immunity, plant traits, sonic resistance 5, SR 20; SV Fort +10, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 22, Dex 9, Con 19, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 14.

**Skills:** Hide +5\*, Spot +12, Listen +12;  
**Feats:** Alertness, Power Attack, Cleave.

**Attach (Ex):** If an ironmaw hits with a tendril attack, the tendril, in addition to dealing normal damage, attaches to the opponent's body. A tendril draws a stuck opponent 10 feet closer in each subsequent round (no attack of opportunity) unless the opponent breaks free, which requires an Escape Artist

check (DC 21) or a Strength check (DC 21). An ironmaw can draw in a creature within 10 feet of itself and bite with a +4 attack bonus in that round. An ironmaw can draw a creature into its space and attempt to engulf it as well. A tendril can be severed by a single attack with a slashing weapon (made as an attempt to sunder a weapon) dealing at least 7 points of damage. Severing a tendril does not shorten the ironmaw's reach; it simply plays out more tendril from its trunk.


**Engulf (Ex):** As a standard action, an ironmaw can attempt to engulf a Large or smaller creature that enters its space. The victim of the attack can make an attack of opportunity, but if it does, it is not entitled to a saving throw. A victim that does not attempt an attack of opportunity must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or be engulfed; on a success, the victim is pushed back or aside (but not freed from attached tendrils). An engulfed creature takes 1d8+6 points of bludgeoning damage within an ironmaw's trunk each round and must hold its breath or begin to suffocate.

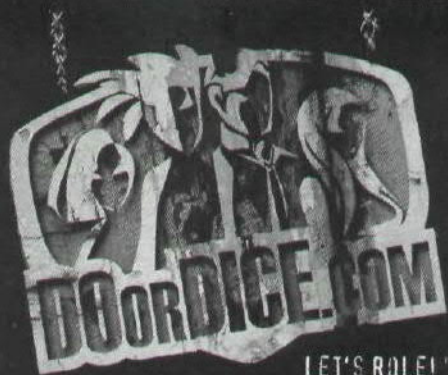
**Illness (Ex):** An ironmaw's tendrils can sap an opponent's health. Anyone caught by a tendril must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 18) or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage.

**Tendrils (Ex):** An ironmaw can attack with its four tendrils from up to 40 feet away. Anyone struck by a tendril can take damage, lose blood, suffer illness, and be drawn toward the ironmaw's trunk.

**Wounding (Ex):** A wound resulting from an ironmaw's tendril attack bleeds for an additional 3 points of damage per round thereafter. Multiple wounds from such attacks result in cumulative bleeding loss (two wounds for 6 points of damage per round, and so on). The bleeding can be stopped only by a Heal check (DC 10) or the application of any cure spell or other healing spell (*heal*, *healing circle*, or the like).

**Plant Traits (Ex):** An ironmaw is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. An ironmaw also has low-light vision.

**Skills:** Ironmaws receive skills as fey. An ironmaw has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. \*In wooded areas, an ironmaw has a +15 racial bonus on Hide checks. 



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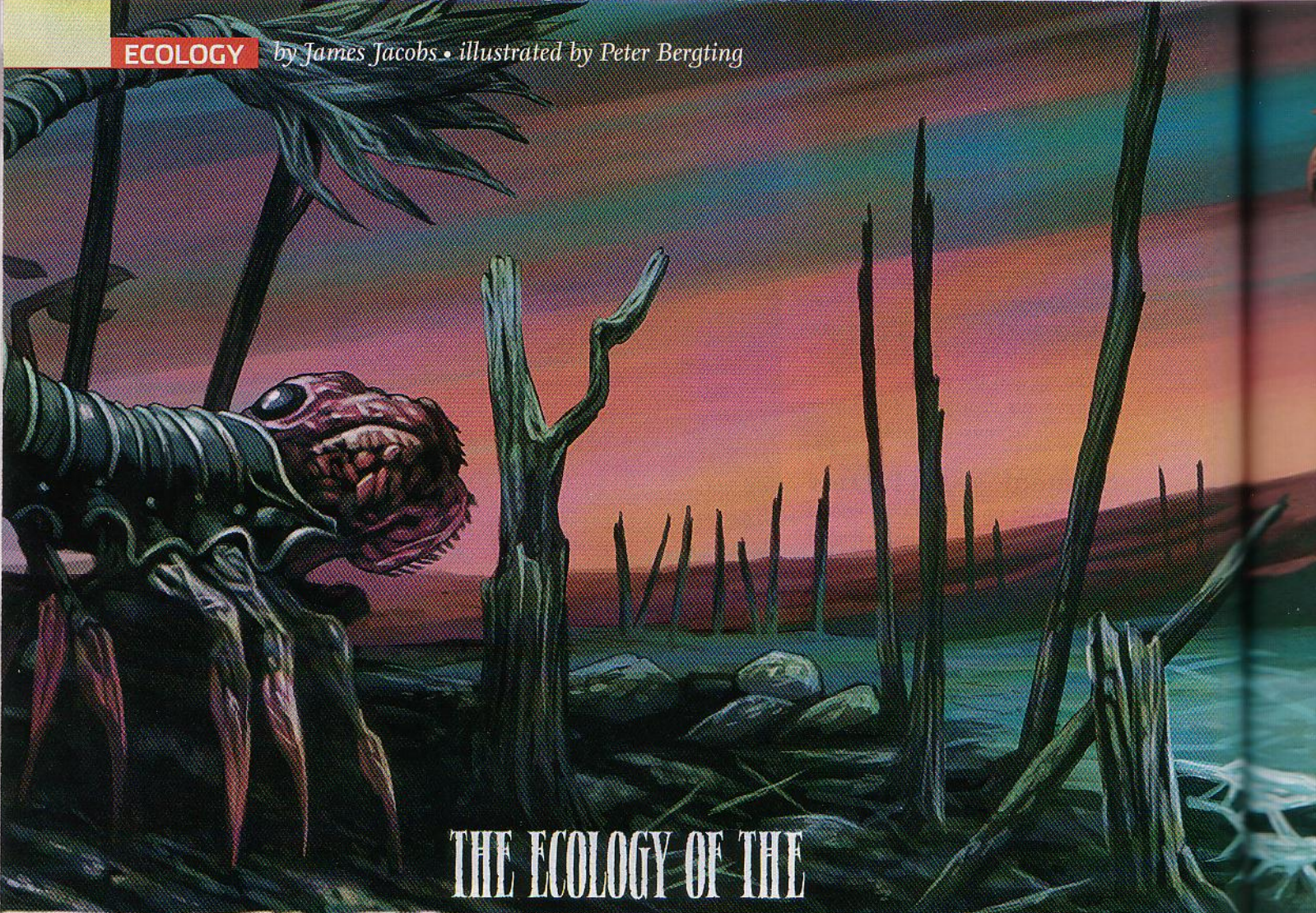
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## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# KAORTI

*"I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and drawn down daemons from the stars... I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to world to sow death and madness... Space belongs to me, do you hear?"*

—H. P. Lovecraft, "From Beyond"

The world as we know it is a poison to some, a canker whose very existence is a constant irritant to something larger, more vast than anything sane mortal minds can comprehend. What we take to be order and nature is in fact the aberration, for the Far Realm is vast beyond all concept. It is what lies beyond the infinite of possibility. It is

the infinite of impossibility. And that which dwells beyond where man was meant to travel does not react well to our timid intrusions.

### HISTORY OF THE KAORTI

The Far Realm predates existence and life on the Material Plane—in fact, life might have begun on the Material Plane when one of the Elder Evils from the Far Realm brushed against it, and what leaked into our world became the aboleth race. Yet beyond the aboleths, few even guessed that there lay beyond our world a more ancient and insane realm. At some point after the collapse of the aboleth empire, the Elder Elves



became the first mortal race to discover the Far Realm when, quite by accident, they created the Vast Gate, a portal they hoped could bridge all distance and push “outside” creation. What they discovered undid everything the Elder Elves strived for, and when what dwelt beyond noticed the pinhole the elves had punctured into the outer madness, they invaded reality. Although the Vast Gate was eventually closed, the link between the Far Realm and the Material Plane, a link the multiverse never intended, remained and grew.

In ancient Imaskar, long before Martek came to rule and yet long after the Elder Elves pierced the veils between reality and unreality, a sect of proud and elite wizards who called themselves the Quin (after the Imaskari word for “entitled”) discovered ancient tablets bearing fragments of the Elder Elves’ magic. Working from these fragments, the Quin became

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE KAORTI

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to kaortis. As kaortis are rare and alien creatures, all DCs to reveal details about them are 10 higher than normal. Information about kaortis is most likely to come from their escaped victims, experienced planewalkers, and those who glimpsed the malign insanity of the Far Realm. The kaorti appears on page 108 of the *Fiend Folio*.

### Knowledge (the planes)

DC	Result
21	This creature is a kaorti, a creature humanoid in shape only. It is an alien to the Material Plane, hostile as much due to its sheer wrongness as due to its inherent cruelty and evil.
26	The kaortis are adept at manipulating arcane magic, and while not all kaortis are sorcerers or wizards, they do all possess spell-like abilities that allow them, among other things, to disguise their appearance with illusions, sap the strength of their foes, and unleash blasts of sickening color to stun or blind their victims.
31	Kaortis are immune to poison, yet ironically, the natural world itself is poisonous to them. Druidic magic is particularly effective against them.
36	Those captured alive by a kaorti are advised to seek death at their own hand, for these monsters can infuse beasts they captivate with their own alien taint, transforming prisoners into monstrously deformed and insane thralls. Humanoids subjected to this procedure instead become kaortis themselves.

obsessed with the concept of reality beyond reality and wondered what great magic might lie hidden in such a realm. Eager to be hailed for what they felt would be a great discovery but wary about repeating the Elder Elves' mistake, they constructed a structure that would transport them to the Far Realm rather than bring the Far Realm to them.

Their work was highly publicized, and as they neared the end of ten years of toil in creating what had come to be known as the Quinspire, the entire nation watched expectantly, hoping the Quin would return with fabulous resources and powers to elevate their proud nation even higher. The Quin made bold promises, and even started work on projects to be finished after their return, but when the time came and the Quin activated their tower, they simply vanished. All that remained were the tower's lowest foundation stones. Eventually, Imaskar forgot the Quin, and then Imaskar itself crumbled and was all but forgotten.

Yet the doom triggered so long ago by the Quin has only now begun. For their experiment had been a success. They arrived safely on the Far Realm, yet they did not remain safe for long—they had vastly underestimated the sheer hostility and alien nature of the Far Realm, and their tiny mote of Material Plane matter was like a beacon. Within minutes of their arrival, a vast and ancient entity called Zurguth, one of those whom the aboleths know as the Elder Evils, came to investigate the disturbance. Yet so potent was Zurguth's existence that its very proximity changed the Quin and their works. They were transformed into something new, and when Zurguth arrived and turned its mind to them, it found nothing to see, for nothing remained of the Quin but their warped Far Realm translation. They had become the first of the kaortis.

For untold eons, the kaortis dwelt within the Far Realm, yet deep within their now-alien

minds remained a seed of memory. When their alien curiosity finally drove them to investigate this memory, they found traces of the Material Plane too minute for Zurguth to notice, but not quite so small to escape the kaortis' own investigations. When they used their magic to trace these fragments back to their source, they discovered what, to them, was a new realm—a realm so inimical to them that they could have but one reaction: a consuming urge to overwhelm and transform. When the kaortis finish with our world, the Far Realm will be all that remains.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KAORTI

Although the kaorti might appear to be humanoid, they are not. The shape of their forms is little more than an accident, just as one might be able to coax mold to grow in artificial paths, so did the presence of Zurguth use the Quin's human frames as a matrix.

A kaorti's resemblance to a human breaks down quickly once viewed in detail. Their bodies are painfully thin and wet with alien excretions that serve

more as blood than sweat. Hands and feet are long and distended, with digits that seem connected not by rigid bone but flexible strips of resin and cartilage, allowing their fingers to bend in unnatural directions. Yet it is in the kaorti's face where one can see the greatest echo of Zurguth's alien presence, for the shiny black spheres that serve them as eyes and the bony ridges of ivory-colored hardened resin that serve them as teeth give the viewer a tiny hint of the appearance of what forged them from sane flesh.

Kaortis have no need to eat or sleep, for these are diversions mortals use to replenish their bodies and minds. Rather, kaortis exist from the outside in. A kaorti's body is in a state of constant self-consumption and replenishment, as the ooze that coats their bodies gathers unknown resources from the environment and then hardens into a shell-like but flexible "skin." This shell is slowly drawn into their cores by strange and hideous sucking and chewing organs



### KAORTI 3.5

The kaorti detailed on pages 108–110 of the *Fiend Folio* are, for the most part, usable with the 3.5 rules. The one major disconnect between revisions, though, is in their spell-like abilities; spells like *alter self* and *reduce* no longer affect outsiders. When running an encounter with kaortis in a 3.5 game, you should substitute their spell-like abilities with the following:

1/day—*color spray*, *comprehend languages*, *disguise self*, *feather fall*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *spider climb*.

*Disguise self* lets kaortis continue to masquerade as humans while harvesting thralls, while replacing *reduce* with *comprehend languages* gives them the capacity to understand languages spoken or written by their prey; kaortis have little interest in communicating with their victims until they become kaortis themselves, but they find the ability to understand things like road signs or directions helpful.

designed to cannibalize and recreate the green fluid that serves them as blood. Deep within the kaorti's torso is a pressurized reservoir of this reeking fluid (an organ mistaken by some scholars as a heart). Tangles of arteries run along their arms to pores along the inner surface of their fingers so they might secrete their blood as tools. It might be easiest to think of the kaorti's "heart" as a forge that transforms its outer body into the resinous "building blocks" of Far Realm matter, stuff the kaorti use to not only create their armor and weapons but to build their cysts.

The resin also serves an important role for kaorti invaders, for the Material Plane is poison to them. An unprotected kaorti can survive only for a few hours or days on the Material Plane before the non-resin parts of its physiology are scoured away. The first kaortis to invade the Material Plane learned this weakness the hard way and their deaths served as an object lesson for those who came later. On the Material Plane, kaorti explorers wear chitinous bodysuits made of resin, often sculpting horns, ridges, and spikes upon their shoulders, faces, and torsos to make their appearance all the more horrific.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KAORTI

Little is known of how the kaortis exist in the Far Realm, but on the Material Plane their society is brutally simple and efficient. Little interests the kaortis other than the transformation of what is natural into what is theirs—

everything in a kaorti-held region exists in some way to perpetuate this one driving urge.

An initial group of kaortis invading the Material Plane is known as a cyst pilgrimage; this exploratory band consists of 10–20 kaorti and 1–3 thralls (typically pseudonatural creatures harvested from a similar Material Plane region to the one they are invading). The goal of a cyst pilgrimage is to establish a beachhead on the Material Plane, to create a cyst of kaortis resin that blocks out the harmful effects of the Material Plane and gives their kin a safe fortress to stage further colonization and transformation efforts. Kaorti resin suits are costly and time consuming to create, so typically a cyst pilgrimage only consists of a few kaortis who seek out a remote or hidden area to begin their work. Pilgrimages lucky enough to have access to urquirshs (see Minions of the Kaorti) can establish large cysts in a relatively short time, but most pilgrimages must make do with what they can secrete on their own.

When a kaorti pilgrimage is sent into the Material Plane, the trip is one-way; there's no return portal for them to retreat to if things turn sour. This is to prevent their enemies on the Material Plane from being able to strike at their unknown fortresses just on the other side as much as it is to prevent the Material Plane from leaking into their world. Yet the kaortis do not view this as a disadvantage, for their method of procreation is as swift as it is horrifying.

Once a cyst is established (typically a network of cavelike tubes and chambers deep underground or in remote wildernesses, but rarely in areas close to urban regions), the kaortis begin their harvest. Their spell-like abilities allow them to cloak themselves in illusions, allowing them to walk among humanity, where they can pick and choose their victims. Initially, they choose their victims from the dregs of society: vagabonds, prostitutes, scoundrels, and street urchins—those whose vanishing won't be noted. They return to their cyst, where after 8 hours of surgery and injection of kaortic fluids (typically delivered through 8-hour bites, but sometimes through tools like wrist lancets), their abductees become new kaortis, immediately capable of capturing and transforming others. Left unchecked, a kaortincursion can very rapidly become a major invasion.

Kaortis take to arcane magic, especially sorcery, and many become rogues or fighters with ease (although their natural weakness make them poor melee combatants), but to date, no kaorti clerics, druids, rangers, or other divine casters have been encountered. This is likely a psychological issue, for the kaortis have no concept of faith in anything but themselves.

### MINIONS OF THE KAORTI

Where kaortis are found, so too are their monstrous minions. While creatures transformed into pseudonatural thralls are far and above the most common of kaorti minions, they frequently create other monsters to serve as mounts or guardians as well, shaping and sculpting the warped flesh of several creatures at once, using them as clay to form more powerful minions than might be achieved by a simple kaortinc transformation alone. These transformations take place in bubbling pools of raw resin deep within kaortinc cysts and generally take several days to complete. The three most commonly created minions are the destructive insectoid rukanyrs (used as living siege engines and tanks in large conflicts;

*Fiend Folio*, 144), the alien and horrific skybleeders (used as mounts and magical support; *Fiend Folio*, 156), and the savage and ruinous kaortie hulks (used as shock troops; *DRAGON* #330).

Yet not all of the monstrous minions of the kaorti are their creations—many are denizens of the Far Realm, brought along on their initial forays or called in through portals deep within a kaortie cyst. These creatures, such as half-farspawn (*Lords of Madness*, 151), amoebic crawlers (*DRAGON* #330), and nightseeds (*DRAGON* #330) are, if anything, even more alien than creatures sculpted from once-normal beings, for they are wholly of the Far Realm.

Perhaps the most commonly utilized creature is the vile and foul-smelling urquirsh, an abominable miscarriage of flesh that looks like nothing more than a writhing tangle of spurting tubes, greasy entrails, and dangling arms held aloft by three long spidery legs. These horrific monsters are notable not just for their detestable shape and smell, but for the fact that when they are brought to places outside of the Far Realm, their alien cores implode, creating a tiny but mobile rift between realities back to the Far Realm. These rifts always lead to the tidal washes of the Amoebic Sea, providing the urquirsh with an endless supply of resin that the kaorti can use to coat large regions, altering the environment so they can exist within with relative ease.

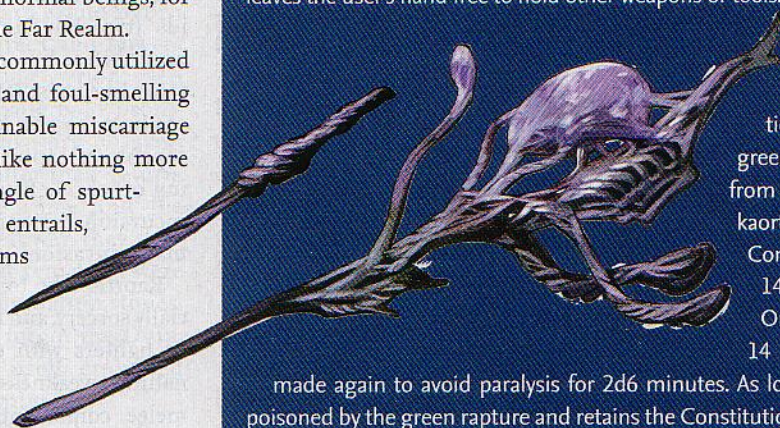
**URQUIRSH** **CR 4**  
 Always NE Small aberration (extraplanar)  
**Init** +10; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., sightless; Listen +3, Spot +3  
**Aura** stench (20 ft.)  
**Languages** Kaorti (cannot speak)  
**AC** 17, touch 17, flat-footed 11 (+1 size, +6 Dex)  
**hp** 39 (6 HD)  
**Immune** acid, disease, poison  
**Fort** +4, **Ref** +10, **Will** +8  
**Weakness** vulnerability to electricity

## KAORTI EQUIPMENT

Kaortis are masters at using their resin to create organic tools, weapons, and armor. Kaorti resin items appear alien and horrific, and their use is sometimes not readily apparent from their appearance. The resin suit and the ribbon dagger (*Fiend Folio*, 110) are the two most common kaorti items, but others like those detailed here exist as well.

**Wristlancet:** This purple device is worn on the wrist and triggered by a flexible stalk that protrudes from its midsection. At one end, a flexible resin sac can store poison or disease-laced fluid, while protruding from the other end is a rigid hollow spine. When triggered as a standard action, the spine shoots out to a distance of up to 2 feet and the fluid within is dispensed reflexively. A kaorti can use this device to inject a target with whatever fluid is stored inside by successfully hitting a target with the device. A wristlancet is an exotic light weapon that deals 1d2 points of piercing damage on a hit, with a critical multiplier of ×3. Its wrist-mounted straps make it difficult to disarm, granting the wielder a +4 bonus on checks made to resist being disarmed. Likewise, it leaves the user's hand free to hold other weapons or tools. *Cost:* 100 gp. *Weight:* 1 lb.

**Green Rapture:** Introduced to a creature via consumption or injection, a dose of this pale green poison (which is distilled from the resin of newly created kaortis) deals 1d2 points of Constitution damage if a DC 14 Fortitude save is failed. One minute later, the DC 14 Fortitude save must be made again to avoid paralysis for 2d6 minutes. As long as a creature remains poisoned by the green rapture and retains the Constitution damage or is paralyzed, the poison acts as a catalyst for kaortie transformations. Such a victim subjected to a kaorti's vile transformation ability makes the change into kaorti or pseudonatural creature after only 2d6 rounds of contact. *Cost:* 300 gp. *Weight:* 1 lb.



**Spd** 60 ft., climb 60 ft.  
**Melee** 3 claws +11 (1d6–1)  
**Base Atk** +4; **Grp** –1  
**Atk Options** vile spray  
**Special Actions** acid bomb  
**Abilities** Str 8, Dex 22, Con 15, Int 5, Wis 16, Cha 13  
**SQ** death burst, freedom of movement, internal rift  
**Feats** Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse  
**Skills** Climb +17, Jump +21, Use Magic Device +20  
**Environment** any (near kaortie cysts)  
**Organization** solitary, pair, or wash (3–9)  
**Treasure** none  
**Advancement** 7–12 HD (Medium), 13–18 HD (Large), 19–24 HD (Huge), 25–30 HD (Gargantuan), 31+ HD (Colossal)  
**Acid Bomb (Su)** Once every 1d4 rounds, an urquirsh can generate a small

globe of concentrated acid extracted from its planar rift. This globe has a range of 90 feet and explodes in a burst of rancid acid, filling a 20-foot-radius burst and inflicting 4d6 points of acid damage to every target in the area. A DC 15 Reflex save halves the damage, but if this save is failed, the creature is also nauseated by the horrific stink for 1d4 rounds if he fails a DC 15 Fortitude save. An advanced urquirsh's acid bomb deals an additional +1d6 points of acid damage for every 2 Hit Dice it possesses. The save DCs are Constitution-based.

**Death Burst (Su)** When an urquirsh is slain, its internal rift to the Far Realm bursts before it closes. Any creature caught within this 10-foot-radius spray must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be nauseated

## ZURGUTH, THE FEASTING VAST

The Far Realm is home to ancient entities of vast power. Although not technically deities themselves, their powers approach and might even eclipse the gods. They existed before divinity, and will likely do so beyond the advent of the last deity's death. Respect for these entities is as close to religion as the aboleths come—saner scholars whisper of them collectively as the Elder Evils.

As with the majority of these cosmic entities, Zurguth does not dwell on the Material Plane. His influence is felt there, though, primarily through the actions of his accidental creations, the kaortis. The kaortis do not count divine spellcasters among their ilk, nor do they erect temples in Zurguth's image, yet those who escape the vile transformation of a kaortic embrace speak of memories that are not theirs. Memories of drowning in a sea whose water can think, of fluids thicker than flesh that still run like mud, of vast islands heaving out of an endless bulk only to open eyes and split open into bottomless tooth-lined throats, of mountains of parasitic creatures heaving along a landscape of shuddering mobility too huge to be a planet and too mobile to be something dead or dying. Few who escape the kaortic transformation sleep well ever again, for many fear that when they die, it is not the afterlife that waits for them, but the infinite wet embrace of Zurguth, the Feasting Vast.

for 1d4 rounds. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell removes the effect from a nauseated creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. Worse, the death burst has a 50% chance of summoning another urquirsh into the spot previously occupied by the first urquirsh. A summoned urquirsh does not generate a death burst when it is slain, nor can its death trigger the summoning of a third urquirsh. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Freedom of Movement (Su)** An urquirsh is constantly affected by a *freedom of movement* effect that cannot be dispelled.

**Internal Rift (Su)** An urquirsh that enters an area that blocks extraplanar travel is cut off from its internal planar rift to the Far Realm and takes a -4 penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks as long as this condition persists. It cannot use its acid bomb, death burst, or vile spray abilities while within such an area.

**Sightless (Ex)** An urquirsh has no eyes, and is thus immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

**Stench (Ex)** An urquirsh's odor is

abominably offensive to all creatures not of the Far Realm. Any such creature within 20 feet of an urquirsh must succeed on a DC 15

Fortitude save or be

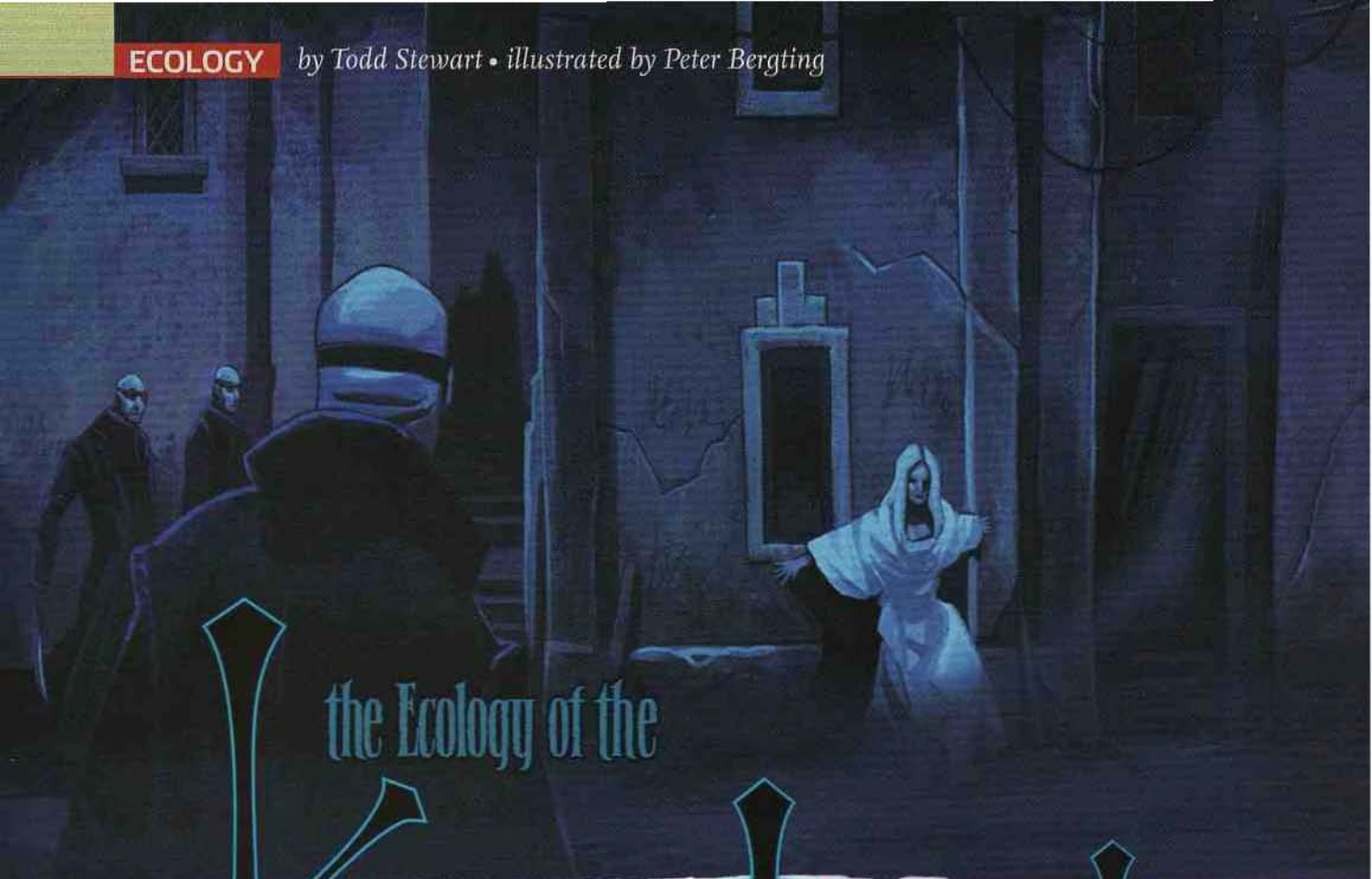
sickened for 1d6+4 minutes. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same urquirsh's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell removes the effect from a sickened creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Vile Spray (Ex)** An urquirsh spews a relentless spray of vile otherworldly ooze, channeled in through its internal rift to the Far Realm. This foul-smelling ooze coats everything within 20 feet of the urquirsh, quickly hardening to a flexible, rubbery texture. Creatures in its area must make a DC 15 Reflex save or take a -4 conditional penalty to their Dexterity. Being hit by and failing multiple Reflex saves does not

result in a higher penalty. The ooze is permeable and can be breathed through and does not hamper speech. The stuff can be peeled off of a creature with 1d4+1 rounds of work, though one covered in the slime cannot effectively remove it from his own body. The ooze hardens slowly, with the imparted Dexterity penalty increasing by 4 points every hour. A creature who accumulates a penalty equal to or in excess of his Dexterity score is rendered immobile as the stuff dries completely; further Dexterity penalties do not accrue, but without external help, the victim can only escape the resin cage with a DC 22 Strength or Escape Artist check. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Skills** An urquirsh has a +18 racial bonus on Climb checks and a +10 racial bonus on Jump and Use Magic Device checks. 🐛





the Ecology of the

Keepers

**T**hey appear without warning, demanding answers and enforcing silence. Their expressions grim, their mannerisms inhuman, their very presence unsettling and unnatural—the few who dare speak of these men in black know them only by their unnerving moniker: the keepers. A faceless collective of questionable intentions and dreaded methods, they seek information and secrets while offering none in return. Their very nature is ever shrouded in mystery—be they the lingering demons of an overzealous creator, servants of a dead god, or beings from another reality altogether? As with every detail of their existence, the truth is yet another of the secrets they keep.

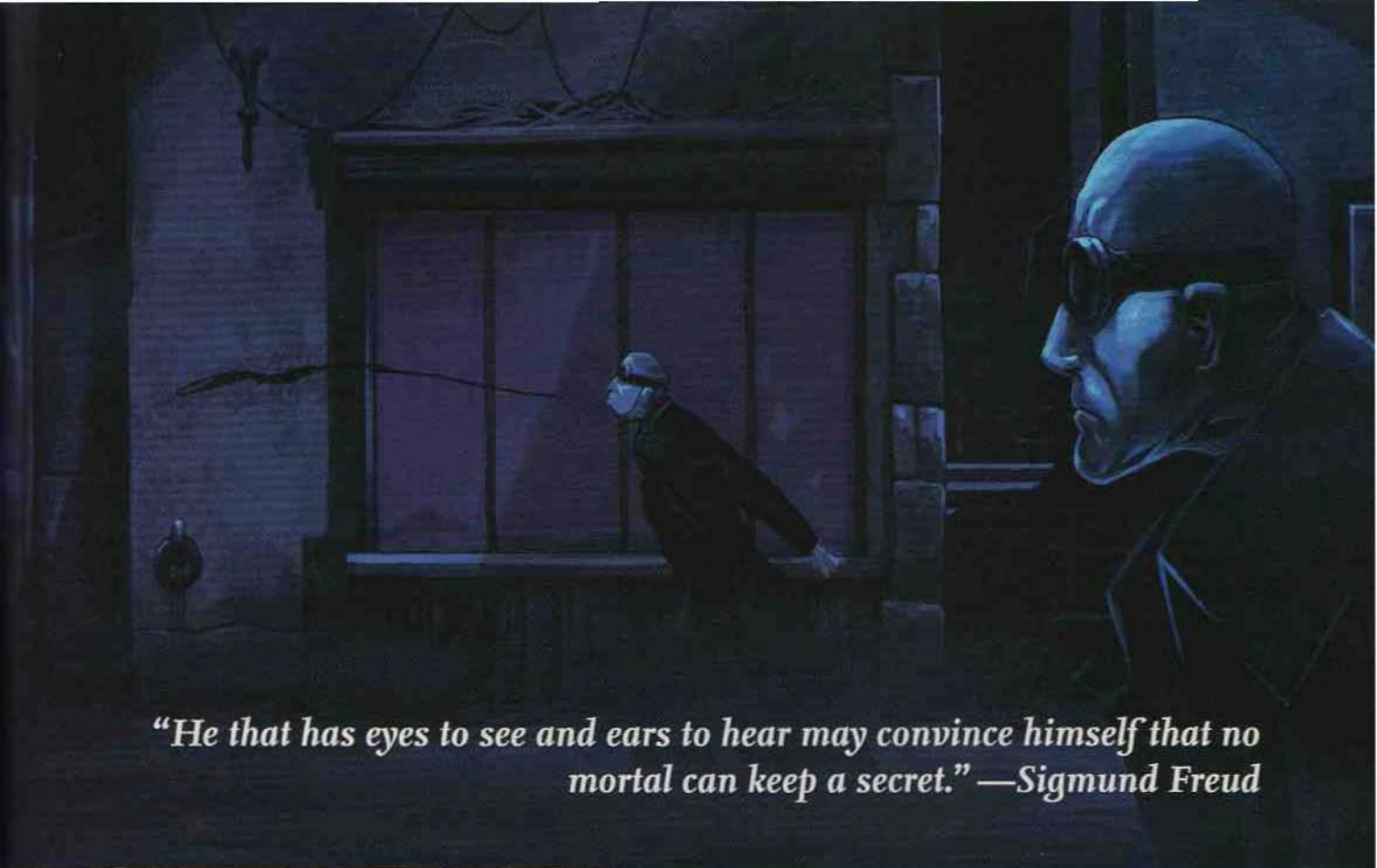
**HISTORY OF THE KEEPER**

Keepers fixate on secrets and secrecy, especially in regards to their own origins, holding their race's past among the darkest of the lore they hide. While scholars disseminate stories and legends about them, the veracity of such myths proves difficult to judge—just the way the keepers like it, of course.

Of the stories told about the keepers, perhaps the most compelling tale puts their creation roughly thirteen hundred years ago at the hands of a singularly talented wizard, alternately placing him in the Fortress of Enlightened Discipline on the plane of Mechanus or within Sigil, the City of Doors. Hungrier for secrets than power, this fanatical scholar obsessed over scattered bits of obscure and hidden lore. Through his work he hoped to gather a palette of secrets, step back, and gain some profound insight into the very nature of reality.

Covetous of knowledge as he was, he was only one man, and he lacked any sort of followers or apprentices upon whom he could rely to further his pursuits. Of course, had he either, his secretive nature would have precluded granting them any trust. So he solved his problems in a most elaborate way: he created the keepers, a wholly unique and specially suited race of like-minded servants.

From there, the tale grows muddled, as some tellings claim the keepers were found, rather than made. These versions claim the wizard called them into the world from



*“He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret.” —Sigmund Freud*

somewhere else, some alternate reality of bizarre and alien law that he either discovered or created from nothing. Whatever the specifics, if he found the keepers already extant, or created them from a malleable void of potential, the legends agree that when he called out the keepers responded.

Ultimately, though, after the wizard had gathered hundreds, maybe even thousands of blank-faced keepers, his obsession turned to paranoia and began to gnaw at him. Concerned that his enemies, real or perceived, might come to understand the secret process by which he had found the keepers and bound them to his will, he instructed them to destroy or silence any source of that knowledge.

Of course, given their nature, they dispassionately complied by immediately killing him.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KEEPER

The first thing most people notice about a keeper's physical appearance is a contrast of pale flesh and dark clothing. Looking closer, though, one begins to notice the incongruities—the things

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE KEEPER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to keepers. Loremasters, planar scholars, and those who study obscure magical lore might possess this information. Keepers appear on page 111 of the *Fiend Folio*.

#### Knowledge (the planes)

DC	Result
----	--------

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 17 | Keepers are humanoid creatures about which little is known. They are supposedly obsessed with finding and suppressing obscure knowledge.                                                                                                                                                     |
| 22 | Keepers lack normal humanoid anatomy. They have no eyes yet seem to see perfectly and can alter their limbs to form weapons. Keepers sometimes perform rude, repulsive, or comical acts in an attempt to blend in with society.                                                              |
| 27 | The bizarre physiology of keepers' bodies provides them with immunities typical of unliving creatures. When killed, keepers completely dissolve into puddles of poisonous, foul-smelling toxins. They are known for murdering those who possess secrets they either desire or seek to erase. |
| 32 | Keepers share a telepathic hive mind that places them in constant communication. They are capable of bending space in order to instantly physically switch positions with other nearby keepers.                                                                                              |

that stand out as disturbing, and hint at something terribly amiss.

The typical keeper dresses to cover as much of its body as possible, usually only showing its face and hands, obscuring the rest beneath heavy cloaks or greatcoats, boots, and opaque goggles or dark spectacles. And all

for good reason. Devoid of its heavy clothing, a keeper seems like less a living being than a half-completed artist's model given life by some fickle demiurge. The gray, glossy flesh of a keeper is smooth, hairless, and lacks any sense of musculature beneath the surface. When a keeper moves, it displays

none of the hallmarks of typical humanoid motion. The joints seem far too flexible, sometimes flexing in wholly wrong directions, and its limbs show a disturbingly amorphous, liquid ripple, as though the creature's body was nothing but a thin, rubbery membrane barely containing a volume of homogenous protoplasm.

Their odd, rubbery flesh can congeal and shift form into myriad simple shapes. If pressed into combat, rather than drawing a weapon a keeper forms one from its own flesh. When it does so, its hand seems to melt away, hardening, and reforming into knots of dense, heavy bone for a club, or elongating to fashion a blade.

Most disturbingly, though, keepers lack eyes. Hidden beneath their ubiquitous dark eyewear is naught but the smooth, gray sheen of their skin stretched over shallow, empty depressions. Despite this defect, though, their vision seems unimpeded, suggesting that they utilize either some form of quasi-telepathic mindsight or navigate by a combination of vibration, smell, and an enhanced sense of touch.

While all of these traits hint toward some complex, alien internal structure, the specifics of keeper anatomy prove impossible to determine through normal dissection. When a keeper dies, becomes magically imprisoned, or succumbs to any other situation that would leave it vulnerable to revealing its secrets, it undergoes a process of dissolution, melting into a poisonous biological slurry. Some have been known to vomit gouts of the disgusting stuff, using it to debilitate prey. Those covered in the reeking, alien humor are typically disgusted, while some exposed to heavy doses are mortally poisoned.

With alien thoughts swimming within the anomalous hollows where their brains should reside, keepers instead possess some powerful telepathic cells. Allowing them to communicate telepathically over a range of approximately a tenth of a mile, the



shared thoughts provide individuals with details of the activities, needs, and experiences of their nearby brethren. This intimate mental connection seems to be fundamentally tied to another unusual trait, the ability of mentally linked keepers to simultaneously teleport, spontaneously swapping places with one another. With each keeper serving as a destination for the teleportation, wounded or hindered keepers can retreat, filling their position with a healthy reinforcement or sacrificing a mortally wounded peer. Often, groups of keepers assault foes one at a time, exchanging places as their resources are expended, their victim possibly not even aware that his opponent has been replaced.

In addition, keepers seem to lack gender, or any differentiation based on age or maturity, so the question of keeper procreation has lingered in the minds of scholars for centuries. Keepers might be unable to form more of their kind, but other theories suggest that once a group of keepers arrives at some critical mass of knowledge, the group gathers to pool what it learned and, through some alien processes, summons another of its kind into being. Many scholars discount this theory, lending popularity to the idea that keepers are a dying—or at the very

least, stranded—race, and one of the secrets they hope to collect in their endless searching is for a way to reproduce.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KEEPER

Keepers organize within hundreds, possibly thousands of distinct, intensely compartmentalized groups. Assuming truth in the tales of their original creation, each group of keepers was collectively spawned or summoned and subsequently tasked to a specific goal, seeded with instructions still being processed after centuries. While none can know how many keepers exist, they are most commonly encountered in groups of three to thirteen members, although larger groups (or “conspiracies”) with twenty-three or more members are known to exist. In every case, the number of keepers in a group consists of an odd number of individuals and seems to directly relate to the importance or obscurity of the knowledge they seek.

Each small, cloistered sect of keepers has no males or females, no old or young, and no apparent hierarchy. In these groups, each keeper functions as a limb or extension of the group, each being an interchangeable fraction of a shared hive mind. Because of this, keepers have extreme difficulty functioning outside of their groups. The concept of a solitary existence seems to terrify them, and if a group of keepers befalls some harm, leaving only one left alive, the survivor almost inevitably dissolves, unwilling or unable to exist in the absence of its fellows.

Linked by their own group mind, keepers fail to truly understand normal society and socialization. They go about the motions of normality and fitting in—as they perceive such—acting as if they belong, but their horribly superficial efforts betray a frightening, puppetlike lack of empathy or cultural knowledge. A group of nine keepers might purchase food in a marketplace and later eat raw, uncleaned fish while drinking flasks of lamp oil in the common room of a tavern, silent and

unaware of the incongruity they present to their surroundings.

The keeper mental organization seems to preclude individuality in the sense that most mortals possess. Keepers distinguish one another by some set order, seemingly unrelated to age or accomplishments. As such, while they do not have names, per se, they are called "First" or "Second," or another numerical designation. Within a group, there is no need for any further suffix to this, but when groups of keepers gather, or refer to keepers of groups other than their own, they use very specific titles for those other groups that invariably refer to the type of secrets they were originally tasked to discover. For example, a keeper known as "Twenty-Three" to those of its group might be "Twenty-Three of the Darkened Sun" to others. A few noted names of keeper groups include: the Apotheosis, the Draeden, the Final Gate, the Iron Flask, the Maze, the Mists, the Gray Path, the Seven Parts, the Ur-Fiend, and the Unliving God.

The only time keepers are found away from their typical pursuit of others' knowledge is in the depths of the Ethereal Plane. Although normally isolated from one another, multiple groups of keepers irregularly congregate and converse in the most remote portions of the Ethereal Plane, gathering around features known as ether gaps. These gaps resemble holes in the fabric of the plane itself, wounds in the essence of the ether, places where the raw probability windows down to nothing and vanishes to some unknowable elsewhere. Groups of keepers float silently around the margins of these ether gaps, just outside of the reach of the tidal forces. They linger there for days or weeks on end, unmoving, deep in meditation and mental conversation, filling the ether with a material hum from their telepathic banter, speaking with one another, and possibly with something from beyond the ether gap speaking back to them. The purpose of these strange gatherings, the schedule on

## ENCOUNTERING THE KEEPERS

Few ever go looking for keepers, as these men in black never share the secrets they protect. Rather, keepers typically seek out individuals for their own predictable, but nonetheless enigmatic, reasons.

- **Knowledge:** A person who discovers some mystery of the Multiverse—the existence of a parallel dimension, the key to a banished race's prison, a weakness of all deities—might be visited by the keepers. Somehow innately knowing of the discovery, a lone keeper typically approaches to verify that its target actually knows the secret. Once this suspicion is confirmed, a group of keepers hunts its prey and silences him for good.

- **Association:** Sometimes one doesn't even need to know a secret to attract the attention of the keepers. Someone closely associated with an individual who makes some forbidden discovery might, for seemingly no reason, be shadowed by keepers who seek to determine exactly what he knows—or to permanently silence him just in case.

- **Guidance:** For all their mystery and seemingly preternatural knowledge, sometimes keepers simply lose track of their prey. In such cases, an individual or whole group of keepers might approach those associated with their person of interest and conduct roundabout interrogations or blunt intimidations. Keepers sometimes stalk wholly unwitting individuals for weeks in the hopes of gaining a lead to their true prey.

Of course, those few who do dare seek out the keepers run the risk of discovering some secret truth about these enigmatic strangers, and so risk becoming their next target.



which they occur, and their connection to the ether gaps are simply more secrets these strange collectors keep.

### ADVANCED KEEPER

As keepers age, gaining further exposure to various mortal and immortal cultures and societies, their normally rigid minds become more adaptable to new situations, allowing them to advance by character class. Most often, as to best aide their subterfuge, they take

levels of rogue, although rare keepers take levels in sorcerer, typically learning spells that benefit and support their group as a whole.

Third of the Colorless Pool has hunted for various secrets revolving around a legendary and unique color pool on the Astral Plane for more than six hundred years. As the oldest surviving member of his cloister, he has increasingly concentrated upon the practice of interrogation through intimidation and the often-bloody erasure of secrets once they've been gained.

**THIRD OF THE COLORLESS POOL**

Keeper rogue 5, assassin 3

NE Medium outsider (extraplanar)

Fiend Folio 111

**Init** +10; **Senses** blindsight 200 ft., hive mind 500 ft., scent; **Listen** +10, **Spot** +15

**Languages** Celestial, Common, Infernal

**AC** 25, touch 16, flat-footed 19; **Dodge**, Mobility evasion, uncanny dodge

**hp** 70 hp (12 HD); **DR** 10/+1

**Immune** ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, death from massive damage, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, nonlethal damage *sleep*, sneak attacks, stunning

**Resist** acid, cold, fire, electricity, and sonic 10

**SR** 13

**Fort** +8\*, **Ref** +17, **Will** +5  
\*+1 against poison

**Speed** 40 ft. (8 squares); climb 20 ft.

**Melee** +2 kukri +17 (1d4+4/18–20)

**Melee** warhammer (mimic) +13 (1d8+4) and warhammer (mimic) +13 (1d8+2)

**Base Atk** +9; **Grp** +13

**Atk Options** Combat Reflexes, Spring Attack, death attack (DC 16), sneak attack +5d6

**Special Actions** body switch, mimic weapon, poison spit

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure serious wounds*, *potion of shield of faith*

**Assassin Spells Known** (CL 3rd)

2nd (1/day)—*invisibility*

1st (3/day)—*disguise self*, *feather fall*, *true strike*

**Abilities** Str 18, Dex 23, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 8, Cha 10

**SQ** dissolution, outsider traits, poison use, trapfinding, trap sense +1

**Feats** Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack<sup>B</sup>, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Balance +19,

Climb +23, Concentration +7, Craft (poisonmaking) +8, Escape Artist +17, Hide +17, Jump +17, Listen +10, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (the planes) +14, Move Silently +17, Open Lock +17, Search +9, Spellcraft +10, Spot +15, Tumble +19

**CR** 12

**Possessions** +3 leather armor, +2 kukri, *eyes of the eagle*

**Blindsight (Ex)** Keepers possess a special, non-visual way of sensing their surroundings. The spell *silence* negates this ability and effectively blinds a keeper.

**Hive Mind (Ex)** All keepers within 500 feet of each other are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. In one in the group is not flat-footed, none of them are. No keeper within range is considered flanked unless they all are.


**Body Switch (Su)** As a standard action, Third of the Colorless Pool can

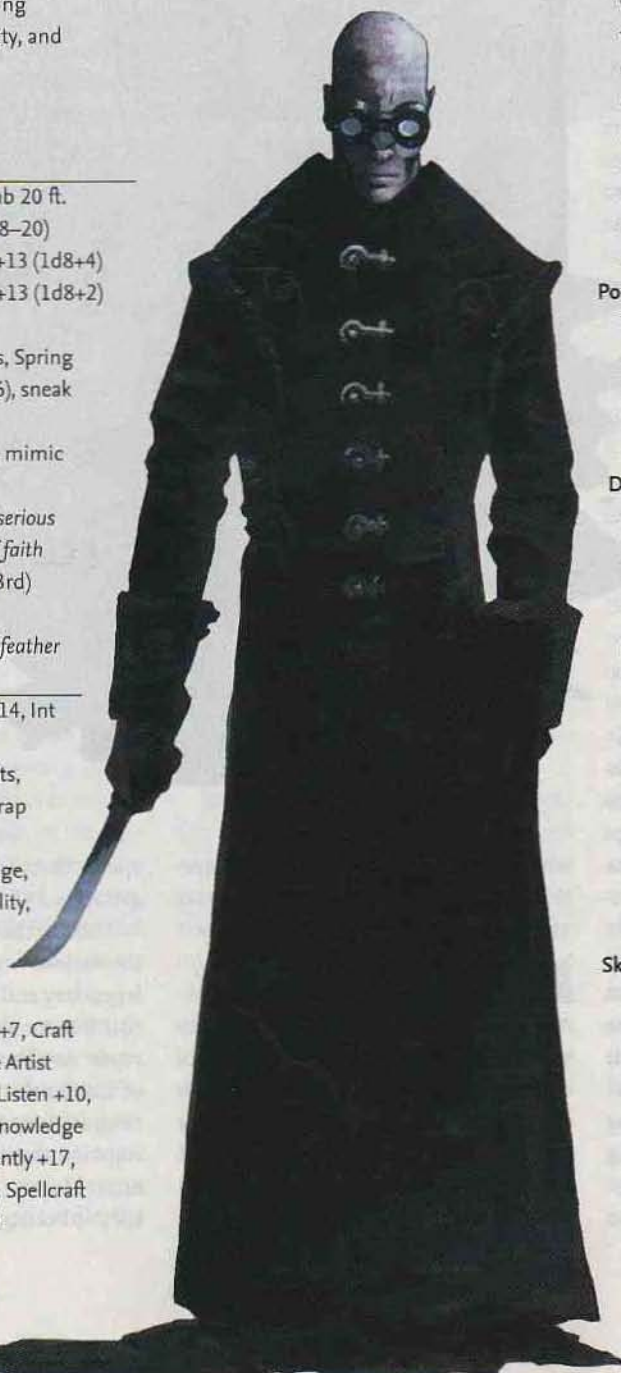
change places with any other keeper within 500 feet as per the spell *teleport without error*. The other keeper is instantaneously moved to the space Third of the Colorless Pool occupied before using this ability.

**Mimic Weapon (Ex)** Third of the Colorless Pool can form its arms into any melee weapon (even an exotic weapon) it has witnessed in use and then wield the weapon with proficiency. It can form either arm into any Medium melee weapon, or fuse both arms into a Large or double-weapon. A keeper cannot form weapons larger than it could normally wield. A mimicked weapon has all the properties of a standard weapon of that type. A keeper's attacks with a mimicked weapon are treated as natural weapons; thus a keeper does not incur the normal penalties for fighting with two weapons, cannot be disarmed, and does not gain iterative attacks with its mimicked weapons.

**Poison Spit (Ex)** Once every 1d4 rounds, Third of the Colorless Pool can spit a nauseating contact poison in a 20-foot cone. Contact, Fortitude DC 14, initial damage nauseated for 2d6 rounds; secondary damage 2d6 Con.

**Dissolution (Ex)** When Third of the Colorless Pool dies or is captured, pinned, or held helpless for 10 rounds, it dissolves into a 5-foot-wide puddle of the same contact poison it spits. The puddle and any poison taken from it evaporates in 4 rounds—a DC 20 Craft (poisonmaking) check made during that time preserves one dose. Any creature that touches the puddle or the dissolving keeper (such as with a natural attack that dealt the death blow) must make a Fortitude save to avoid the poison's effects.

**Skills** Keepers have a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. Their malleable physiology also grants keepers a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist and Jump checks. \*Keepers are not limited by their heights when determining the distance they can jump. 



by Eric Cagle • illustrated by Peter Bergtig

## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# KENKU


In the dark places of many cities, hidden by the refuse of those who walk the streets by day, stretch ominous markings, scores in the stone left by the unseen passage of powerful talons. Although dark figures lurk within the alleys of any city, in some skulk deadlier avian intruders. These interlopers are kenkus, a vagrant people akin to crows and other filthy avian scavengers. Hidden by shadows and tattered rags, they plot in larcenous flocks, taking what they please and preying off their unsuspecting neighbors. Without homes of their own, these greedy, cruel beings scheme against their enemies from within, thieving and murdering for even the most trifling copper. Yet, beneath the guise of murderous vagabonds kenkus hide far darker secrets and ties to powers both ancient and foul.

### HISTORY OF KENKUS

Secretive and reclusive, kenkus reveal little about their true origins—if indeed their scattered communities even know them. Scholars who delve into their history find that

for centuries kenkus have existed as a ubiquitous part of most large urban areas—the largest cities always having aeries of kenku lurking in the darkest parts of town.

What few details the eldest and most learned kenkus let slip to outsiders indicate that their race came into existence as the result of tragedy piled upon tragedy. Long ago, kenkus existed as a race of large, intelligent ravens that lived in the shadows of other races. During a time of strife, a great plague spread among their hosts. In desperation, these proto-kenku resorted to theft and blatant raids, and in doing so spread their disease among the neighboring peoples. Infuriated, many races took up hunting these sentient birds and destroying their mountainous nests—almost universally aided by giant eagles, who bore a long-standing rivalry with the massive ravens. Driven nearly to extinction through assaults on their homes, the ravens' various aeries came together into a single massive flock. Their numbers blackening the sky, they squawked and cried out to something, anything, to save them from their unrelenting enemies and seemingly incurable disease.



The answer came in the form of an enormous raven, its unnaturally white feathers soaked and stained red with gore. Descending from the moonless sky and speaking in all the languages of the world, this raven agreed to grant the petitioners their wish; but at a price. In that single night, the ravens' plague was miraculously cured and all giant eagles and their eggs within 100 miles were laid to bloody ruin—a nightmare that race vengefully remembers to this day. In exchange, the cruel birds agreed to call one lord, Pazuzu, their true master and spread his name among the creatures of the world.

Yet even in those times, the creatures that would be kenkus were a fickle, deceitful lot. Their proselytizing in honor of the Prince of the Lower Aerial Kingdom proved to be short lived as their attentions were drawn to the treasures of those to whom they preached. Within a generation the ravens grew bored with their piety, some even turning to the worship of humanoid deities promising greater wealth and power. Enraged, the demon prince Pazuzu returned, slaughtering many of the ravens and cursing the survivors with an affliction far greater than that which he removed. From that day on, the giant ravens' fledglings hatched without wings, instead

## KNOWLEDGE OF KENKUS

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (history) checks related to kenkus. Those who inhabit large cities most often learn this information, commonly from victims of the insidious plots of these avian humanoids.

### Knowledge (history)

DC	Result
10	Kenkus are birdlike humanoids who skulk in the back alleys and abandoned areas of most major cities.
15	Kenkus are extremely greedy, vicious beings, but work closely with each other. They prove deadly in groups, but are often cowardly if caught alone. It's extremely difficult to force a kenku to turn against its kin.
20	Kenkus can mimic almost any sound they hear and use this ability to sow lies and mistrust among their enemies. Their aeries are most commonly found at heights of tall abandoned buildings or within sewers.
25	Kenkus are consummate assassins, often hired by other races to do their dirty work. Being that they fill a similar niche in a city's underworld, kenkus and thieves guilds often fight ongoing criminal wars for territory.

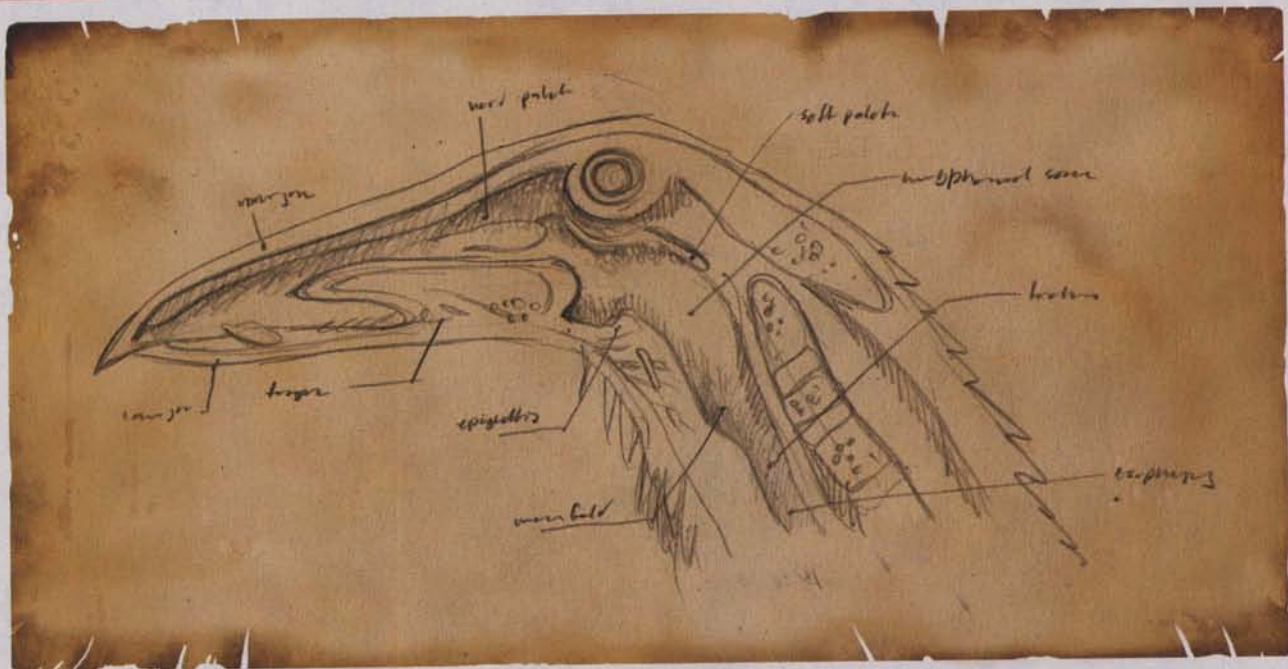


possessing scaly arms and legs, forever exiled from the skies for their betrayal. Thus, kenkus were born.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF KENKUS

Although humanoid, kenkus clearly come from avian stock and retain many features common to birds. Kenkus average 5 feet in height, but because of their partially hollow bones, commonly weigh a mere 75 pounds. Their heads are the most distinctive part of their

bodies—resembling those of oversized ravens or crows—complete with large, inquisitive black eyes and short beaks. Lacking wings, kenkus possess scrawny arms that end in powerful claws and legs supported by taloned feet. (As a result, kenkus are unable to don normal shoes or other footwear, magical or otherwise, unless such items were created to fit taloned wearers.) Born from large eggs, young kenkus naturally have soft, dark feathers, typically a



shiny black in color, which cover their heads and torsos, although variations do occur in certain individuals. As kenkus age, their feathers—beginning on their heads and slowly extending to the rest of their bodies—turn a pure, ivory white. These aging creatures typically retain their intellect and cunning until the moment of their death, becoming true masterminds and pulling the strings of entire aeries from afar. Despite their kin's superficial loyalty, however, the competitive nature of kenkus requires elders to maintain a constant vigil as there is always a potential rival or ambitious child plotting to take over.

Kenkus are omnivores perfectly adapted to eating the abundant scraps found on and under city streets. They enjoy carrion intermixed with the occasional bit of rotting vegetable or fruit.

Although they possess beaks like birds, the throat and tongue of kenkus resemble elongated humanoid structures, granting them the ability to mimic almost any sound, voice, and even accent that they overhear. Kenkus might not understand the meaning of the words they mimic, but they do so with astounding accuracy. They typically use this ability to guide unsuspecting victims into ambushes, frequently by tempting victims with the voices of allies or threatening them

with monstrous growls. Kenkus speak flawless Common, but possess their own language filled with squawks, caws, and other sounds similar to crows and ravens. An angry or excited kenku sometimes slips, interspersing these sounds with the Common tongue.

Light does not harm kenkus, but they commonly only venture onto the streets at night, where their black coloration and natural stealth suit them well. Kenkus seriously dislike traveling in sunlight and garb themselves in dark, tattered clothing to shield themselves from the sun's rays, in addition to helping them blend into surrounding throngs of people. Regardless, only the most elaborate disguises allow kenkus to hide their prodigious beaks.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF KENKUS

Unlike many fractious evil humanoids, kenkus get along well and work best with others of their own kind. This tight-knit attitude ensures that they never lack for allies to assist them in their sinister schemes.

Kenku society resembles that of some birds, with several family units dwelling together in communities called aeries located in or near large cities. Like other avians, kenkus prefer creating lairs on the highest ground possible in order to keep an eye out for attacks—towers and minarets proving

the most valuable real estate in their minds. Failing to find a tall place to make their lair, kenkus go the opposite route, squatting in sewers and long-forgotten basements. Because they never announce their presence unless sorely pressed, kenkus have secretly migrated into such places for millennia, with the original occupants none the wiser. Despite the efforts of law-enforcement and other power groups, kenkus excel at getting into places they aren't wanted. Once an aerie establishes itself, it's extremely difficult to root out.

Even in these communities, kenkus stick close together and spend most of their time interacting with their immediate family or in coterie of like-minded individuals. Kenkus rarely travel anywhere alone, preferring multiple eyes to warn each other of danger or to watch for opportunity.

Kenkus greatly desire wealth, and much like crows and ravens they become obsessed with collecting shiny things. Status within kenku society is measured almost exclusively by ostentatious displays of wealth, regardless of how it was amassed. Theft is perfectly acceptable among kenkus and most aeries are rife with petty bickering as the result of one kenku stealing from another. Kenkus desire knowledge almost as much, particularly the dark secrets

of individuals that they can use for blackmail and extortion.

Ever mindful of their duty to the aerie, even the most selfish kenkus offer a portion of what they find or pilfer to the rest of the flock. Such distributions of food and treasure become true tests of the kenku pecking order, as elder kenkus squawk, squabble, and fight for the finest scraps, while the young and weak look on greedily until their chance to clean up anything that remains. Unsurprisingly, even in a city filled with garbage and abandoned food, starvation proves the primary cause of death among kenkus, followed closely by disease and death by violence. While many races might seek to change their ways in the face of such pointless deaths, kenkus have no sympathy for their brethren who lack the cunning and skill to survive.

Reproduction and child rearing is an odd dichotomy of protectiveness and negligence in kenku society. Kenku females lay eggs like regular birds, but leave the protection of their group's aerie to do so. Creating nests in high, hidden places, mothers seek to avoid scheming eyes and hungry mouths, especially those of their own race. Commonly laid in clutches of three to seven, these eggs hatch after only a month. Once the eggs hatch, the nest is abandoned and the newborns are introduced to the rest of the aerie. Staying close to the communal nests for nearly nine years, the young kenkus learn the valuable skills of hiding, taunting others, and stealing unattended objects, all the while forced to fight for even the most meager scraps of food. Attrition is high among young kenku: typically only half survive the first month.

Kenkus commonly show little remorse for the dead. The bodies of young kenkus who have not yet proven themselves valuable to the community are dumped in some lonely, forgotten spot or given to the aerie's clerics for unspeakable purposes. However, older kenkus who die undergo an

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Kenkus were first introduced to the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game as part of the original *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Fiend Folio*. These original kenkus were telepathic, hawk-headed kidnappers who commonly wielded quarterstaves or samurai swords. Related to tengus, shapeshifting birdmen of Japanese myth, kenku have appeared in numerous adventures throughout D&D's

history, as well as being memorably featured in the popular D&D computer adventure *Eye of the Beholder*. The kenku's current statistics appear in the *Monster Manual 3*, and these flightless pilferers make appearances in the *Deathknell* expansion for *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures* and the *DUNGEON* adventure, "Forsaken Arch," both of which release this month.



elaborate ceremony in which the corpse is placed upon a significant height for winged scavengers to feed on and carry the remains aloft. In this way, all kenkus hope to regain their lost ability to fly after death. The height at which a kenku is placed is directly proportional to its usefulness and respect within the community, with most kenku corpses being placed upon tall hills or castle spires. Particularly honored elders might have their bones borne all the way to a mountain top, while the greatest insult is for a body to be deposited merely on the street, left for the dogs and other land-bound scavengers. In all cases, of

course, the bodies of the dead are thoroughly stripped of valuables first. Pious kenkus are a rare sight and few feel the desire or inclination to become clerics. Those who do find themselves drawn to darker deities, most notably Vecna, the god of secrets, whose dogma parallels the kenku lust for the forbidden. Some particularly sinister kenku—hoping to garner his favor and return to the skies—turn to the worship of Pazuzu (see page 56 of this issue). The demon prince has not forgotten the kenkus' ancestors' betrayal, however, demanding far more of these cults who in turn seek to placate him with grotesquely elaborate and creative sacrifices. Among kenkus, such demon cults are known as "murders."

## VERSUS KENKUS

Kenkus possess a well-deserved reputation as devious, dangerous opponents who work extremely well with one another. They prefer to attack only when the chance for victory sits squarely on their side. Although not particularly strong or dangerous as individuals, kenkus congregate and attack in groups, posing a serious threat to those who fail to keep an eye out for danger or consider them beneath attention.

It should also be noted that kenku have a level adjustment of +0. Thus, players and DMs might want to consider



## TALONS OF REKROK—A KENKU THIEVES' GUILD

The Talons of Rekrok is a band of kenku thieves, assassins, and information brokers typical to most large cities. Named after its leader, the white-feathered elder rogue Rekrok, the Talons maintain a low profile, but are willing to use their impressive skills for anyone willing to pay their exorbitant prices. Primarily focusing on breaking-and-entering, theft, and murder for hire, this group has garnered a well-deserved reputation for efficiency and a lack of scruples.

In order to employ the Talons, the prospective client must meet one of their agents atop a high place—a castle spire, a watchtower roof, or some other place uncomfortably high off the ground and largely inaccessible. With little chance of escape should things go awry, the client must offer, up front, a combination of treasure (the shinier the better) and tidbits of information. Once the kenku operative—usually one of Rekrok's lieutenants—feels the gesture is made in good faith, the client must offer additional loot, serving as the true heart of the deal. While expensive, the client gains the skills of a dedicated band of murderers, thieves, and other unsavory types for whatever job necessary. However, as might be expected, the Talons are perfectly willing to sell out a potential client for a better deal, especially if the risk proves low.

As with any band of kenkus, the Talons of Rekrok work best together, forming small teams composed of specialists who augment each other's skills. A typical band for a common breaking-and-entering job is comprised of two rogues, two warriors, and an assassin/rogue.

kenkus as a player race in addition to those presented in the *Players Handbook*.

**Sneaky Foes:** When kenkus fight, they do so with stealth and cunning. Kenkus prefer ambushing opponents and despise a direct fight unless they outnumber their enemies by at least two to one. They choose dark alleys, sewer grates, and other cover from which to strike, using it to protect them from harm and provide them with an escape route if things turn sour. Thanks to their Hide and Move Silently bonuses, kenku slink through most areas without concern.

**Beware Allies:** Kenkus work best together, as most notably shown by their great ally ability. This ability works with any ally, so a kenku fighting with other types of creatures gets this bonus too. Those fighting kenkus and their allies should keep their backs against walls or some other cover to minimize the chance of getting flanked by more than two kenkus. When fighting kenkus, it's best to find one individual and isolate it from its aerie mates, thus denying it this ability. Also, a lone kenku is much more likely to crack from fear and surrender when cornered rather than face death.

**Cowardly Combatants:** Kenkus possess a deep cowardly streak and flee

or surrender as soon as things turn against them. If captured, a kenku offers up almost anything for its release, but always with the thought of treachery in the back of its mind. Non-kenkus who deal with kenkus should never accept their word at face value, as kenkus lie and bend the meanings of agreements without hesitation.

**Skilled Sneaks:** The strength of a kenku can never be judged based on its race alone. Kenkus are often skilled warriors or rogues, and some might even have levels in fighter or cleric. Older kenkus often multiclass between these roles and might even take up the assassin or shadow dancer prestige class.

**Don't Believe What You Hear:** The remarkable tongue and throat of a kenku allow it to mimic familiar sounds, voices, and accents. As this ability isn't magical in nature, magic often fails to detect this falsehood. In addition, the untrustworthy and duplicitous nature of a kenku virtually guarantees that anything coming out of its beak is a lie. Those forced to make a deal with a kenku should use treasure as an equalizer, as a kenku's natural tendency to lie fails in the face of serious material gain. 🗡️

## KENKU MIMICRY

One of kenkus' most distinctive abilities is their power of mimicry. While imitating familiar voices to lure victims into ambushes is a tested staple of their strategy, these cunning birdmen have been known to use this ability to many other devious effects.

**City Code:** On the bustling streets of any large urban center, no one pays any attention to the whiney of horses, the creaking of wagon wheels, or the tolling of distant bells. Yet if such sounds are part of an elaborate kenku code, they might foreshadow some elaborate concerted crime.

**Distractions:** The sounds of a battle, breaking glass, or a watch whistle are all sure ways to call attention to an area. Or in the case of kenku using these sounds as distractions might serve to divert even the most attentive eyes.

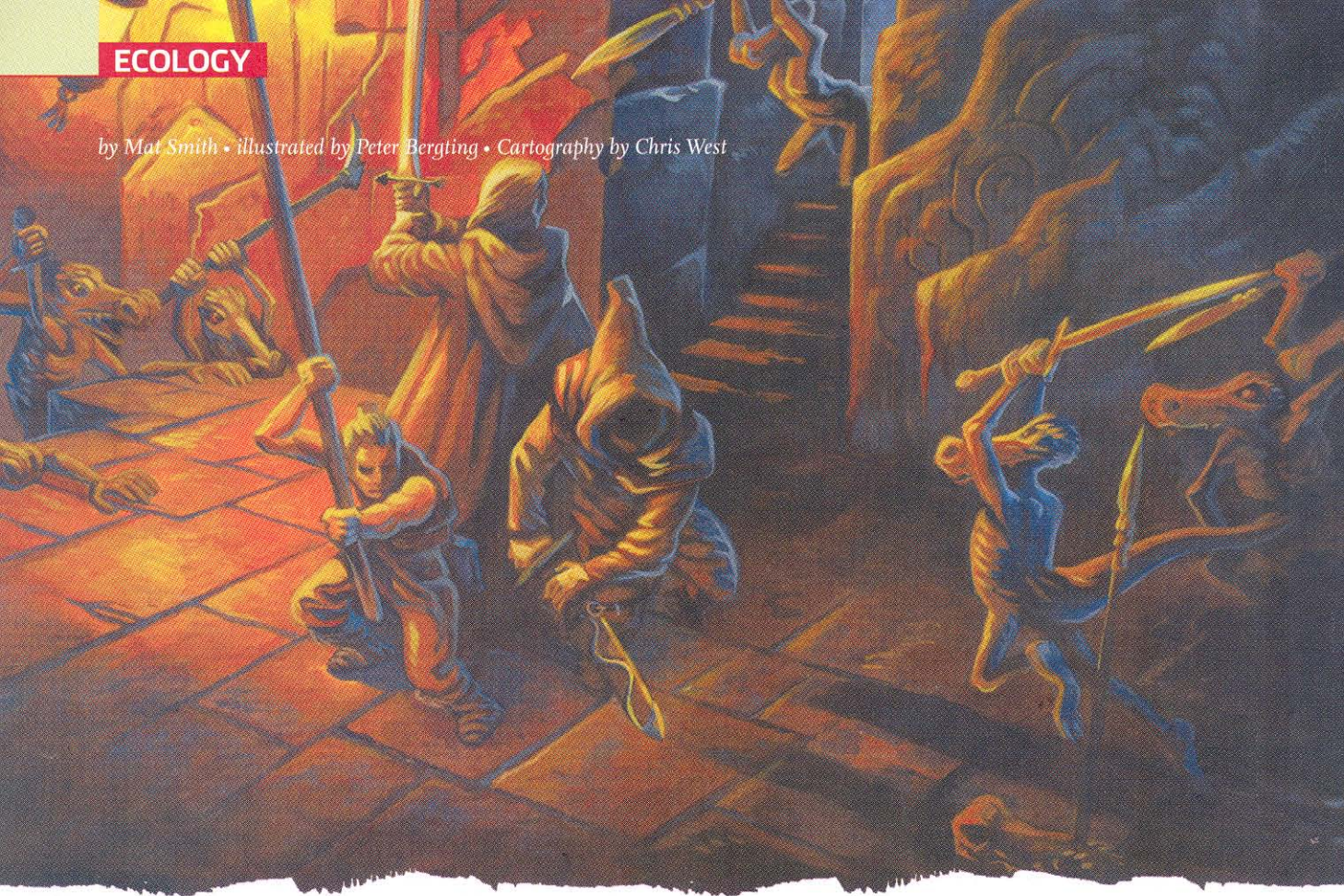
**Gaslighting:** Blindfolded and trapped, surrounded by the sound of sharpening metal, monstrous snarls, and pain-filled screams, a victim might reveal anything—never realizing he is actually being held by only a single kenku.

**Performance:** No sound is too complex for a kenku to mimic, not even those of elaborate musical instruments. Kenkus might use their mimicking ability as a means of performance or to weave elaborate musical illusions.

**Pseudo Spellcaster:** Hooded and cloaked, a kenku might perfectly mimic the chanting prayers and arcane sounds of spellcasters. Although their words hold no magic, those they're trying to intimidate probably don't know that.

**Sow Dissension:** Another way for kenkus to use voices they overhear is to try to pass themselves off as the original. If the kenku can convince—or even just confuse—a party into thinking that one of their allies is a doppelganger or shape-shifting spellcaster, such dissension might be turned to their advantage.

by Mat Smith • illustrated by Peter Bergting • Cartography by Chris West



# THE ECOLOGY OF THE KOBOLD

**N**ever has a race of creatures been so perilously underestimated. Countless adventurers' tales describe kobolds as cowardly weaklings easily dismissed by any who encounter them. If kobolds were truly such a pitiful race, however, they would have been exterminated ages ago. Those few survivors of an actual kobold attack tell of devious warriors emerging from the darkness—sometimes through the very walls—in relentless waves of sadistic ferocity and lethal ingenuity.

Brethren of dragons, kobolds are one of the most resourceful, industrious, and tenacious races to ever plumb

the reaches of the Underdark. Hidden away beyond labyrinthine tunnels and countless traps, kobolds manage to do more than just survive in the deadliest realms known to explorers, they thrive.

## HISTORY OF KOBOLDS

While not organized enough as a culture to have constructed a common history, kobolds do share a great deal of folklore and a number of heroic stories, most of which vary slightly from tribe to tribe. Not surprisingly, kobold culture lays claim to a few impressive creation myths, including one that traces back through the ages to the earliest times—back



to the cavernous lair of the goddess of evil dragons, Tiamat.

Shortly after the Queen of Dragons laid her first clutch of eggs, an army of thieves invaded her lair. Enraged by the intrusion, Tiamat sprung from her mountainous nest of gold and gemstones to crush the interlopers. Her merciless teeth and claws tore through scores of intruders while her terrible breath weapons destroyed hundreds at a time. The attackers hurled countless swords, spears, and arrows against the Chromatic Dragon. Most of the weapons shattered harmlessly against her formidable hide, but as the battle wore on, those few that hit their mark began to take their toll on the mighty goddess.

Amid the chaos of the frenzied attack, the swiftest of the bandits snatched up fistfuls of treasure and attempted to flee. The boldest of these struggled under the burden of even the smallest of Tiamat's magnificent eggs. Upon noticing the violation of her nest, Tiamat let forth a thunderous roar that brought down the ceiling of her lair and its connecting

tunnels, crushing her attackers and trapping the escaping thieves.

Weakened by innumerable wounds, Tiamat crawled through the rubble of her lair and collapsed upon her nest. Needing time to recover from her injuries and unable to adequately protect her incubating brood, Tiamat used the last of her strength to cause the first of her precious eggs to hatch early. Punching his way out of his still-hardening shell with a stinger-tipped tail like that of his mother, Kurtulmak entered the world.

Infused with a fraction of Tiamat's divine power, Kurtulmak understood his situation and immediately set about clearing the fallen rock from his mother's lair. As he worked, he concocted a way to single-handedly defend the entire cavern from further intrusion. Collecting the weapons strewn about the lair, Kurtulmak constructed hundreds of devious traps to riddle the floor, walls, and ceiling of the vast chamber. Satisfied with the impenetrable perimeter of deadly mechanisms and pitfalls forming

around her nest, Tiamat charged Kurtulmak with reopening the tunnels connecting her lair to the planes and then fell into a deep slumber.

In order to foil further intrusions, Kurtulmak began carving a twisting mazelike network of passages, unfathomable to any but himself. After cutting through miles and miles of rubble, earth, and stone, Kurtulmak eventually came across a niche filled with a small portion of his mother's stolen treasure. As he collected the gold and gems that had become fused in the living rock, intending to return them to Tiamat's lair, he also discovered one of her pilfered eggs. Knowing that the egg had been away from the nest for too long and deciding that his immense task would be easier with help, Kurtulmak caused the egg to hatch, creating miniature incarnations of himself. Thus the first of the kobold race was born.

Working alongside their creator, the kobolds quickly learned the art of mining through the earth and soon had discovered other caches of treasure and wayward eggs (which

## KOBOLD KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to kobolds. Gnomes and those who dwell in or explore the Underdark (or the other dark places kobolds thrive) also might possess this information.

### Knowledge (local)

DC Result

10	Kobolds are small, weak, cowardly reptilian humanoids who live underground.
15	Kobolds attack in overwhelming numbers using ambush tactics. They foster an intense hatred of gnomes and are highly sensitive to bright light.
20	Kobolds protect their lairs and their narrow connecting tunnels with deadly traps. They often employ poisons (favoring Strength-draining toxins) and guardian creatures, particularly when fighting larger enemies.
25	A kobold tribe usually hoards its treasure deep inside a temple dedicated to its god, Kurtulmak. Filled with the deadliest traps imaginable, these temples are usually rigged to collapse.

Kurtulmak also caused to hatch, further proliferating the kobold race.) Kurtulmak also showed his people how to construct wily traps and various defenses in order to secure the newly carved tunnels. As creatures began to discover and explore the passageways, Kurtulmak taught the kobolds the art of ambushing enemies and the wisdom of entering battle only with the advantage of superior numbers.

As the kobolds grew in number, they continued digging an ever-expanding network of tunnels, eventually reaching every corner of the Material Plane, where they established lairs of their own and began to flourish.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF KOBOLDS

Standing just over 2 feet tall and weighing around 40 pounds, average kobolds are physically weak but fast and agile. Their thin and wiry frames make kobolds well suited to moving quickly and fighting within the cramped tunnels of their lairs.

After hatching from its egg, a kobold grows quickly, reaching maturity around the age of six. While the lifespan of an average kobold might be shortened by violence, accident, or disease (in that order), particularly wise and wily kobolds can live up to an astonishing 120 to 140 years (owing to their draconic heritage).

Kobold skulls are often described as being doglike due to their long snouts and sharp teeth. However, many of the characteristics of a kobold's head are more accurately defined as displaying rudimentary features of dragonkind: forward-facing nostrils, ear holes, a forked tongue, and two short, keratinous horns sprouting from the top of the skull.

Kobolds' remarkably sensitive, glowing red eyes allow them to pick out the smallest details from their surroundings, even in pitch-black caverns. However, intense light (such as bright sunlight or that created by a *daylight* spell) is difficult for kobolds to tolerate and causes discomfort and disorientation (resulting in the dazed condition). Kobolds also rely on their acute sense of hearing to detect approaching danger and to pick out familiar sounds that help them navigate the confusing maze of tunnels surrounding their tribe's lair.

Ranging in color from dark, rusty brown to reddish black, the toothy scales that cover kobolds' tough hides are similar to those of an iguana or other large lizard. The scales that cover kobolds' short tails are very fine and slightly lighter than the rest of their mottled hides, giving them a smooth, "naked" appearance. While primarily used for balance, kobolds often use their highly flexible yet non-prehensile tails to wield specialized

weapons (see the tail blade and tail club in *Savage Species*).

Kobolds can eat just about anything—plants, animals, and even intelligent humanoids (cannibalistic kobold tribes are common). Despite an omnivorous diet, kobolds do not possess differentiated teeth—they are all short and pointed. Interestingly, a kobold loses and grows new teeth throughout its entire life, taking anywhere from two to three years to completely replace an entire set of fifty-four. Kobolds often save their teeth, strung on necklaces or other adornments, as an impressive demonstration of their age.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF KOBOLDS

As a relatively small and physically weak race, kobold society revolves around survival. Virtually every aspect of all kobolds' activities contribute toward the tribe's survival in one way or another. As such, all kobolds serve their tribes by filling at least one of several predictable roles.

Kobold trapmakers not only create deadly devices that guard against intruders, they also design contraptions to catch or kill animals for food. Farmers cultivate mushrooms and edible plants as well as carnivorous, poisonous, or dangerous vegetation that serve as barriers or deterrents against invasion. Miners extract precious metals, minerals, and gemstones from the earth while carving the intricate tunnels and chambers that form the tribe's lair, its outlying defense, and mazelike escape passages. Animal handlers capture, raise, and train the tribe's guardian creatures while also tending small herds of lizards, centipedes, or other domesticated animals and vermin.

The warriors of a kobold tribe, of course, play the most proactive roles in the tribe's collective effort to survive. Kobold warriors constantly remain active and alert—verging on paranoia. The need for constant watchfulness is such that a warrior caught sleeping or distracted while on duty faces a death sentence.

## KOBOLD TRAPS

For miles around and throughout every kobold lair are set a dizzying number of traps. Kobolds make use of materials from their surroundings and use weapons and armor from fallen enemies. They fill clay pots with vermin, oozes, and other deadly substances. They lace corpses with vermin eggs, ready to burst into swarms, and cultivate deadly plants, mold, and fungi. They dig pits lined with disease-ridden spikes or containing deadly creatures. Kobold trapmakers are renowned for their enviable skills but feared for their innovation—they're always devising something new.

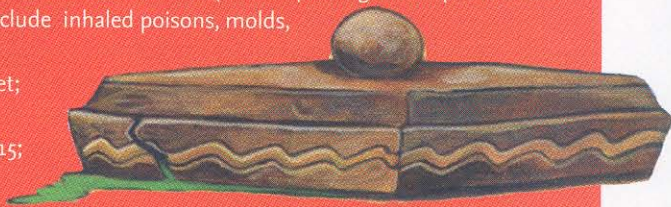
### Ceramic Mines

Commonly fashioned as shallow ceramic bowls, ceramic mines are filled with any of a variety of alchemically prepared substances and then sealed. The creation process, which involves firing the ceramic vessel in a kiln, creates a fragile vessel filled with a pressurized gas or liquid that explodes outward when the mine is broken (Hardness 2, 2 hp).

Usually buried in a passageway so that a passing creature treads upon them, some ceramic mines are concealed in walls or ceilings to be targeted with a crossbow bolt or sling stone during a fight. Others are fashioned to appear like rock formations (usually stalactites or stalagmites) or even decorative sculptures. Sculpted ceramic mines are commonly placed where they can be dropped on opponents or hidden among kobold treasure hordes to confound thieves (often exploding within packs of stolen loot). Substances often used in the creation of ceramic mines include inhaled poisons, molds, oozes, slimes, vermin eggs, or other alchemical substances.

**Ceramic Mine (Basic):** CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; no reset; DC 11 Reflex save half damage; 2d6 points of acid, cold, or fire energy damage; single target; Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 15; Market Price: 600 gp.

**Ceramic Mine (Green Slime-filled Stalactite):** CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; Atk +15 (2d6, stalactite; see note); single target; Search DC 15; Disable Device DC 15; Note: When targeted square is entered, this stalactite drops from the ceiling, possibly striking the character. Upon impact, the stalactite shatters, covering everything within the target square with a veneer of green slime (see page 76 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* for effects); Market Price: 2,500 gp.



Kobold executions usually take the nerve-racking form of forcing the condemned to test the effectiveness of newly created traps. The execution continues until either the condemned kobold is killed or he has sprung or avoided three traps. At that point, the kobold emerges either as a corpse or an exonerated hero worthy of praise and respect from the tribe.

While survival of the tribe is paramount, for an individual kobold self-preservation remains top-of-mind. Because of this “better you than me” mentality, patrols and warbands actively recruit even the weakest, most incompetent, and dull-witted kobolds. That way, when encountering a superior enemy, the clever, swift, and strong kobolds can safely retreat while encouraging their less-apt companions to “hold them off while reinforcements move up.” (This explains why the caricature of the bumbling kobold remains so prevalent—those are the ones most adventurers actually see.)

As Kurtulmak teaches, fleeing from certain, probable, possible, or perceived danger is acceptable, intelligent behavior. Most kobolds quickly come to the realization that “I don’t have to outrun a dire bear, I just have to outrun another kobold.” Particularly clever kobolds discover that tripping or incapacitating another kobold often makes it even easier to get away. Survivors of these when-push-comes-to-shove situations become envied by their more fleet-footed peers for their ingenuity and superior escape tactics.

The only exception to this cowardly trend arises when a kobold warband encounters a group of gnomes. All kobolds share a vitriolic hatred of gnomes and (unless outnumbered) ferociously ambush them on sight, fleeing only if the tide of battle turns tragically against them.

### TRIBAL STRUCTURE

Most kobold tribes form caste-based gerontocracies—where the oldest

individual kobold leads the others. Often, this leader is a powerful sorcerer, but occasionally a highly skilled warrior or another particularly talented kobold outlives his contemporaries to assume the leadership of a tribe. Change in leadership usually happens when a leader dies, although some are usurped when the tribe determines that the mere fact that he continues to draw breath no longer warrants his position of power.

Tribal laws come and go as each leader of a tribe changes rules to suit his personal ideas and vision. Regardless, a constabulary force enforces even the newest laws as if they had always existed, often causing problems for kobolds away from the tribe during a change in leadership. Devious kobolds who come to power occasionally institute laws that enable them to eliminate rivals or make other personal gains.

Clerics of Kurtulmak (known as Eyes of Kurtulmak) rarely live long enough to become chieftains. However, they

do possess a great deal of power and influence within the tribe, as their place rests at the center of every important endeavor. The installation of traps and construction of other tribal defenses are always blessed by a cleric of Kurtulmak. Additionally, they oversee a tribe's tunneling and mining efforts, directing new excavations toward "divinely inspired" goals, such as one of the fabled Lost Eggs of Tiamat. Whether exploring new areas, facilitating a trade of commodities, or probing for weaknesses in nearby gnome or dwarf settlements, an Eye of Kurtulmak leads all expeditions. Every warband, hunting party, and raiding party includes at least one cleric, whose presence and prayers draw the favor of their deity down upon them.

While worship of Kurtulmak is prevalent in kobold societies, organized religious services are virtually nonexistent. However, all kobolds utter small prayers and makes observations to their deity regularly throughout the day. This is largely because Kurtulmak takes a very active interest in his people, to the point that he regularly sends an aspect of himself to assist in particularly important raids, battles, or other crucial undertakings.

A kobold tribe's activity continues around the clock, with each kobold's work, rest, and recreation time broken into shifts based on the amount of time it takes a patrol to make one or more tours of the tribe's longest patrol route. (Kobolds keep track of time in "watches," rather than "hours," making each tribe's unit of measure different.) This perpetual activity keeps a tribe extremely vigilant.

As a caste-based society, certain occupations afford greater privileges. Each caste, in turn, forms a sort of pecking order that determines leadership and differentiates a master from an apprentice. (Positions in this chain of command shift with regularity, as talented and determined kobolds supplant those above them.) Gender has no bearing on the structure of kobold society—roles

and responsibilities fall upon the most suitable or convenient individual.

The most coveted and privileged roles for a tribe member are trapmaker, sorcerer, caretaker, and warrior. Clerics, farmers, and miners make up the bulk of the tribe's second-class. Animal handlers, craftsfolk, and those with other abilities usually fill the lowest rank in a kobold tribe, as their contribution to the welfare of the tribe doesn't immediately impact its survival.

### NEST TO PYRE: GROWING UP KOBOLD

Kobolds rarely mate for life. Typically, a romantic bond between an adult male and female lasts no more than a few months, often culminating in the female laying a single egg. Kobolds of both genders remain fertile throughout their adult lives, with females capable of laying around a half dozen eggs over the course of a year.

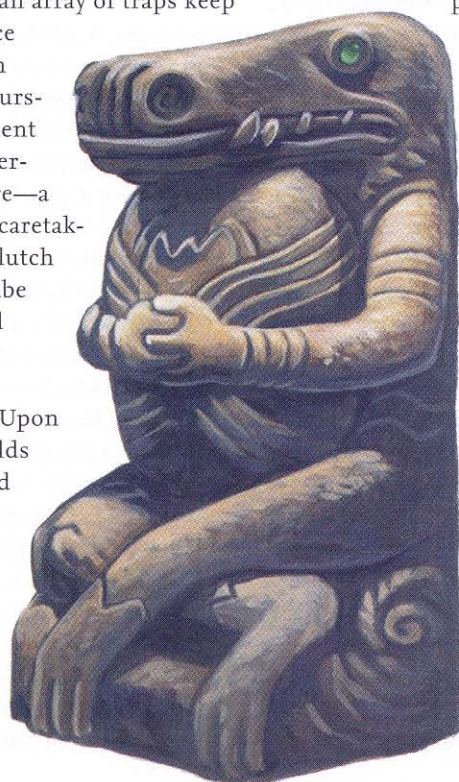
Kobolds are partially ovoviviparous—the embryonic kobold develops inside its egg for two months before its mother lays the egg and another two months before hatching. Once laid, each egg is carefully collected in a central nursery where caretakers and an array of traps keep them safe. (Once an egg has been moved to the nursery, neither parent takes much interest in its welfare—a task left to the caretakers.) A typical clutch of eggs for a tribe of two hundred kobolds ranges anywhere from twenty to fifty. Upon hatching, kobolds are fully formed and somewhat self-sufficient (able to derive nutrition from just about anything they can chew),

but aren't strong enough to fend for themselves against predators.

During the first six months of life, hatchlings form powerful emotional bonds with their clutch mates—other kobolds who hatch within a month of one another. The intense rivalries and friendships developed between clutch mates are the strongest in kobold culture.

Hatchlings quickly develop motor skills and a rudimentary understanding of the Draconic language. Also among the first things taught to hatchlings are fundamental survival skills—ranging from rock throwing and digging holes to running away and hiding. Kobolds' natural talents for trapmaking are also fostered at an early age. Kobolds learn to use simple weapons, such as slings and spears, as soon as they're coordinated enough to survive the learning process. Caretakers note each hatchling's particular skills and aptitudes (or lack thereof), watching for that first spark of sorcery, gift for trapmaking, skill with a weapon, or any other trait that could pigeonhole where a kobold might fit into the tribe.

By age two, a kobold may petition to leave the nursery by enduring a private ceremony known as the Blessing of the Pit. Presided over by a caretaker and an Eye of Kurtulmak, the simple ritual requires the kobold to cross a 10-foot-wide pit constructed with a variety of hazards. Pit dimensions and contents vary from ritual to ritual as determined by the presiding priest. How the young kobold leaps over, climbs around, drops



# LAIR of the BLACKTONGUE TRIBE



1. Main Cavern & Living Quarters	Trapped Areas	
2. Temple of Kurtulmak	Concealed Doors	
3a. Nursery	Vertical Passages	
3b. Hatchery	Rubble	
4. Mushroom, Lichen, and Moss Farms		
5a. Giant Cave Cricket Corral		
5b. Giant Centipede Corral		
6. Food & Supply Storage		
7. Secondary Cavern & Living Quarters		
8. Craftsfolk Workspace		

1 square = 10 feet

down to navigate through, or otherwise circumvents the danger is irrelevant—the end result being what’s important. By successfully reaching the far side, a clever or capable kobold earns the Blessing of the Pit and the right to join the rest of the tribe as a juvenile. Failure to cross the pit invariably results in the unremarkable death of a particularly clumsy or dull-witted kobold.

The Eye of Kurtulmak who presides over the ceremony assigns the young kobold her first role in the tribe. The assignment usually follows the suggestions of the nursery’s caretakers, but might differ depending on the presiding cleric’s whim or the immediate need of the tribe. (If an entire warband has recently been slaughtered, the nursery produces a surprising number of new warriors.)

Non-warriors aggressively seek out apprenticeships in accordance with their assigned roles, trying to impress would-be mentors with demonstrations of talent or capacity for a chosen vocation. An apprenticeship might last anywhere from six months to several years, terminating when the student demonstrates a higher degree of skill than the master (at which point, their roles are reversed).

A significant number of kobolds (often those without any noteworthy talents or ambitions) become miners. Fortunately, few races possess a greater inborn proclivity for mining than kobolds. The unrivaled industry and skill of a kobold workforce produces a remarkable amount of gold, iron, coal, and other valued substances in a stunningly short time. Governments and crafts guilds often secretly employ kobolds for just this reason.

Kobolds most commonly mine in one of two ways, as dictated by threats within those regions and the ambitions of their leader. Some skittish kobold

miners venture far from their lairs, yet avoid lingering around large deposits of precious metals and gemstones for very long, as too many other races seek such treasures. When encountered, these miners usually extract a few cartloads of these valuable substances and then hurry back to their lair. Alternatively, more ambitious kobold tribes covetously guard precious deposits and mine them until depleted. Rather than hoarding such wealth, such tribes usually turn their treasures toward currying the favor of more powerful allies, like derro, troglodytes, and deep-dwelling dragons.

Working in tandem with miners, tunneling crews are charged with exploration and crafting defensive mazes around a tribe’s lair. They often employ trained or magically controlled burrowing creatures, such as dire badgers or thoquas, to speed their efforts.

Budding warriors are assigned to the tribe’s constabulary, the least-respected role in the warrior caste,

where they gain additional training with weapons and simple tactics. By the time a kobold outgrows her first set of teeth, she is considered old enough to join a patrol. (Some kobolds, eager to see action before their third year, attempt to collect or claim other kobolds’ teeth as their own.) In order to join, a kobold must prove herself worthy by defeating and taking the place of a superior. Such challenges rarely prove fatal, but the grudges they often produce frequently end in accidents in the field.

By the onset of adulthood, a kobold usually settles upon a vocation, although this role commonly changes several times over the years depending on the fluctuating needs of the tribe. At this point, a kobold focuses on honing her skills in order to increase her standing in her caste and value to the tribe. Age and ability are the two most attractive qualities a kobold can possess, warranting larger shares of food, safer sleeping arrangements, better weapons and





gear, and increased interest from the opposite gender. An adult kobold's life consists of perpetual jockeying to gain more of all of these.

Kobolds usually meet their end in combat, during a cave-in, or in a messy accident involving a newly installed trap. In order to avoid attracting scavengers, and not wanting to waste perfectly good meat, the remains of a slain kobold are usually cooked and eaten. Hunting parties use the bodies of kobolds who died of disease or poison as

bait. Tribal heroes and those few kobolds who live long enough to die of old age receive the honor of being burned on a funeral pyre (after they've been stripped of particularly valuable items and gear).

### KOBOLD LAIRS

Kobolds have been encountered in just about every location that is suitably dark and restricts the movement of Medium or larger creatures, such as heavily overgrown forests, jungles, and swamps. However, most

kobold lairs are located underground, formed by series of interconnected caves surrounded by a snarl of trap-laden tunnels and shafts that might span several miles. Innumerable intersections, unexplained dead-ends, and concealed passages make navigating the labyrinthine network all but impossible for any outsider. While even the largest tunnels usually hamper the movement of anything much bigger than a kobold, some narrow to a point so that even

## THE ORIGIN OF KURTULMAK'S RIVALRY WITH GARL GLITTERGOLD

From a young age all kobolds learn to hate gnomes and crave to confound all their efforts. This rivalry amounts to far more than ingrained racial hatred, however. Rather—as kobold priests often relate—there is a very specific reason for this centuries-long blood feud, which traces back to their very gods.

### The Kobold Myth

Long ago, Kurtulmak set about carving an immense cavern, the grandeur of which soon rivaled the audience chambers of any of the other deities. Kurtulmak intended to use the magnificent grotto as the setting for the greatest prank ever played—he planned to invite all the other deities to dinner, and as entertainment he would tell the tale of “The Violation of Tiamat's Lair,” ending when he dropped the cavern on their heads.

As a miner without equal, Kurtulmak skillfully cut from the roof and walls ponderously large slabs of rock and held them in place with a complex, interconnected series of cunningly wrought and artfully concealed beams. The entire devious construction,

which ranged over the whole cavern, would collapse in rapid succession after the removal of a single golden keystone.

One day, while looking for shiny gemstones, Garl Glittergold passed near Kurtulmak's cavern and heard the toil within. Ever curious about Kurtulmak's activities, Garl crept nearer in order to spy upon the kobold god, as he so often did. As he caught sight of the grand cavern, the gnome god stopped to observe Kurtulmak's breathtaking endeavor.

While puzzling over the intricately crafted stonework, Garl's eye was caught by the twinkle of a small, gold-colored stone wedged tightly into a nearby wall. Greedily, he tugged and tugged on the sparkly stone, but it wouldn't come loose. Frustrated, Garl gave up his struggle in order to further marvel at the work that sprawled overhead. Slowly, the nature of Kurtulmak's construction dawned upon the gnome god who then guessed at the keystone's purpose, becoming awed by Kurtulmak's incredible skill.

Stricken with jealousy, Garl became intent on destroying Kurtulmak's brilliant creation before anyone else witnessed its subtle majesty. He seized the keystone once more, twisting and turning it every possible way until he finally wrested it free from its socket. As Garl dropped the golden prize in his pocket, a sudden rumbling noise filled the enormous cave. Frightened, he fled down a nearby passage and hid from the catastrophic cave-in that followed. As a souvenir of his harrowing experience, Garl pierced the stone and hung it on a chain around his neck, adopting it as his own holy symbol.

Kurtulmak, furious at the cavern's impossibly premature collapse, quickly dug his way out from under countless tons of stone. Soon afterward, the kobold deity discovered the culprit responsible for the calamitous event when he noticed Garl wearing his keystone like a trophy around his neck. Kurtulmak confronted the gnome god, who nervously chuckled, dismissed his disastrous act as an



Small creatures must squeeze in order to pass.

At least one section of virtually every kobold tunnel is rigged to collapse, enabling a tribe to quickly and easily seal off a passage in the event of an invasion or other imminent danger. To prevent accidents, these areas are usually constructed with two or three fail-safes (requiring the removal of multiple bypasses before triggering the cave in), although some function as particularly deadly traps.

The actual inhabited area of a tribe's territory consists of an ant-hill-like combination of natural and kobold-made chambers often adorned with simple carvings, murals, and totemlike trophies. Aside from these rudimentary decorations, most kobold lairs are fairly Spartan, as individual kobolds keep all of their personal possessions with them at all times. Usually shared by several kobolds at a time, in shifts as each day progresses, living and sleeping

quarters take the form of ledges, nooks, and small caves fashioned to conceal their occupants from casual observers (Spot DC 14). Kobold lairs are very clean and sanitary; waste is disposed of by dumping it down a deep shaft or by feeding it to a captive creature that subsists on refuse, such as an otyugh or gelatinous cube.

Every kobold community contains a temple or shrine to Kurtulmak carved from solid rock and accessed through twisting, trap-filled tunnels. The skulls

episode he'd long forgotten, and hastily excused himself.

His legendary stunt spoiled, Kurtulmak vowed to exact a slow and terrible revenge upon the gnome god. Kurtulmak's intense hatred for Garl Glittergold sparked a feud between the two that spread across the planes, touching the races created by each of the deities, which explains why kobolds and gnomes hate one another.

### Gnomish Revisions

While the basic points of the story of how Garl Glittergold collapsed Kurtulmak's cavern remain irrefutable, most gnomes point out a few misconceptions about Garl's intent and involvement with the kobold god's schemes.

Never having taken any real interest in Kurtulmak, Garl found himself at the entrance to the kobold god's cavern only because of the tremendous racket echoing from within. Having followed the cacophony of hammer, pick, and chisel, Garl became somewhat curious about the work going on inside. Renowned for his masterful execution

of countless practical jokes, The Joker quickly surmised what Kurtulmak was up to. When the twinkling keystone caught his eye, Garl smiled as he instantly understood its function and decided to put Kurtulmak's work to the ultimate test—just to see if it would work. The gnome deity was pleasantly surprised when the entire cavern actually did collapse, toppling Kurtulmak from his ladder and burying him under enormous slabs of stone. The gnome god decided to keep the nugget-shaped keystone both since it so closely resembled his long-held holy symbol and as a souvenir of his quickly forgotten little joke.

As Garl has greater cosmic concerns and distractions, the conflict between he and Kurtulmak continues, for the most part, to be a one-sided battle. However, as kobolds developed a deity-fueled hatred for gnomes, they came to pose a very real danger to his people. Because of this, Garl keeps a casual eye

on his self-proclaimed "archenemy" and warns his followers to never underestimate the threat posed by Kurtulmak's vicious spawn.



of all the gnomes slain by the tribe festoon the interior of the temple. Deep within the structure, the accumulated wealth of the tribe lies secured within a heavily trapped vault. (Reliable sources report that kobold temples are always constructed in such a way that they collapse when triggered purposefully by attendant clergy or accidentally by unwitting thieves.) Few kobolds, aside from the clerics who know the secrets to the temple's many traps, actually ever set foot inside the temple. Instead, kobolds offer prayers at its entrance with the belief that Kurtulmak hears them.

While the temple to Kurtulmak is a lair's dominant edifice, the most important structure to a kobold tribe is its well-concealed and trapped nursery, with hatchlings raised in a secured cavern and eggs locked away in a well-protected hatchery. Safe passage into and through the nursery requires admittance and guidance by one of its caretakers.

Other structures commonly found within a kobold tribe's lair include a small forge, an oven or kiln, a well or cistern, and a chamber that serves as a storage locker for food gathered by the tribe's farmers, foragers, and hunters. Large caverns nearby are often reserved for cultivating foodstuffs and raising livestock. Located throughout a kobold lair, particularly at every entrance and major intersection, signal devices such as gongs, drums, or horns contribute to the tribe's collective vigilance.

The layout of a kobold tribe's lair is extremely fluid—workers regularly collapse or seal off tunnels and caves as they carve new ones. This makes any information about the layout or location of areas inhabited by kobolds progressively less reliable over time. In fact, a kobold lair actually migrates slowly through the Underdark as its miners and priests cautiously search for a defensible, safe area in which to establish a more permanent kobold settlement.

## VS. KOBOLDS

Because of their physical weaknesses, kobolds rely on a combination of ambush tactics, ranged attacks, traps, and overwhelming numbers to defeat

## MINIATURE MULTITUDES

Along with D&D staples and fan favorites like orcs, goblins, and drow, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures* provides a host of miniature kobolds, each meticulously crafted to 32mm scale. Starting with the Kobold Warrior in the *Harbinger* set, kobold reinforcements have since appeared in *Dragoneye* (with the Kobold Skirmisher) and *Aberrations*

(featuring the Kobold Champion and the Kobold Sorcerer). This trend continues next month with the release of *Angelfire* and the new Kobold Soldier.



*Kobold Champion Kobold Sorcerer Kobold Soldier*

their enemies. Never underestimate the viciousness of a kobold force and always remember the veteran explorers adage: "For every kobold you see, there's a dozen more hiding in the walls."

**Watch for Traps:** Walk slowly and carry a 10-foot pole. Kobolds protect their lairs and a vast area surrounding them (reaching miles in all directions) with all manner of traps. Use caution when moving through kobold territory, making liberal use of Listen, Search, and Spot checks along with tracking and stone cunning abilities if available. The Disable Device skill also proves invaluable. Keep in mind that by the time a party actually sees a kobold, they've probably already stumbled deep inside a tribe's trap-laden province.

**Be Suspicious:** A kobold holding its ground is probably bait, daring an attacker into moving within range of an undetected trap or other threat (such as a roper or darkmantle). Taking the time to make a Sense Motive check on any enemy is never a bad idea.

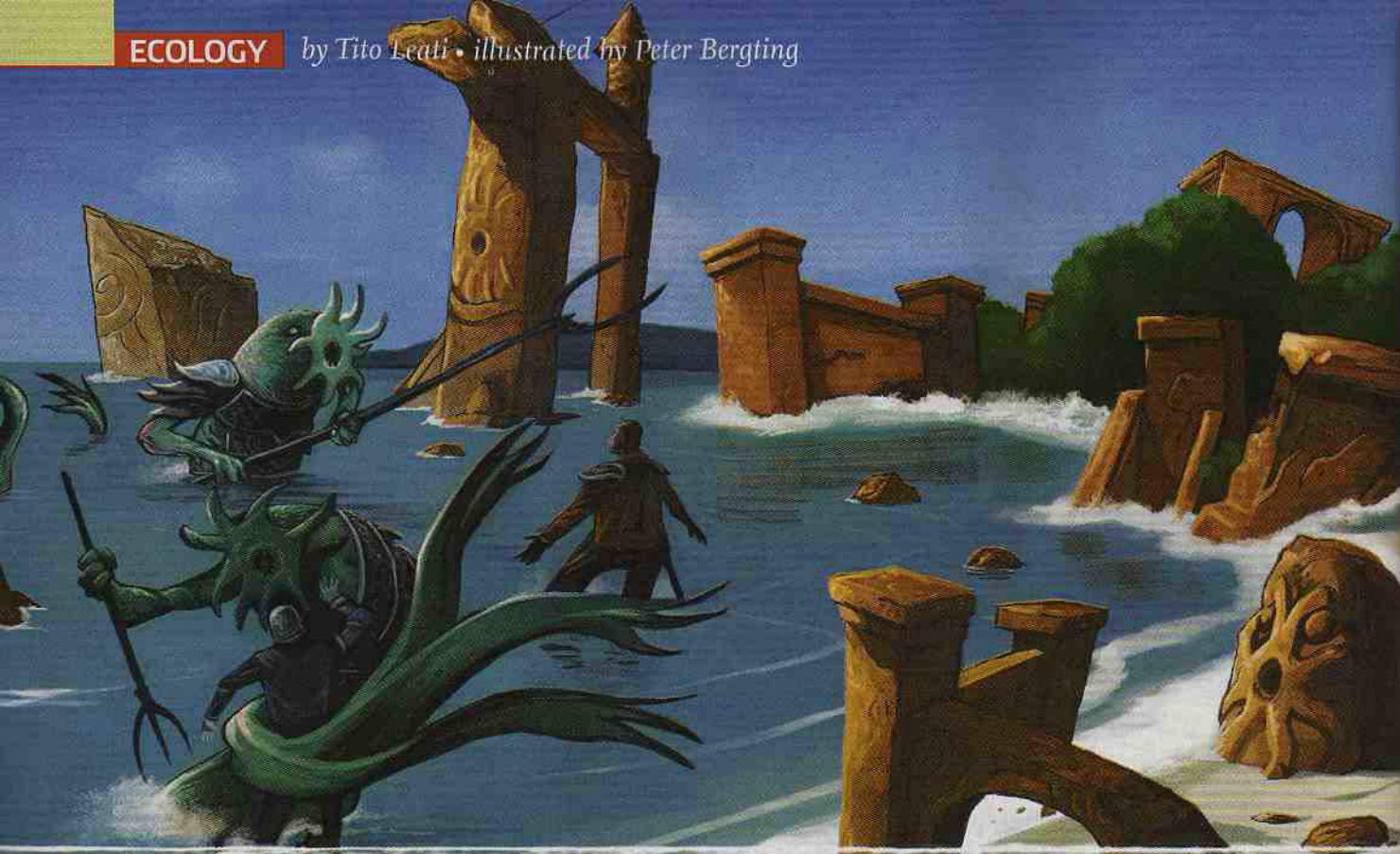
**Beware Divine and Arcane Magic:** Fear the wrath of Kurtulmak and the blood of Tiamat, as a kobold warband always counts a cleric and often at least one sorcerer among its number. Commonly used spells include those that bolster the effectiveness of a warband's members, such as *bear's endurance*, *bless*, *cat's grace*, and *haste*, as well as spells that add to the warband's numbers and strength, such as monster summoning and *planar ally* spells. Spells such as *confusion* and *suggestion* are also often used to reduce the effectiveness of an enemy force.

**Light 'Em Up:** Kobolds prefer to fight in darkness, where they retain an advantage over light-dependent enemies. Extinguishing light sources is among the first actions taken during a kobold ambush. Like many underground-dwelling creatures, kobolds become dazzled in bright sunlight. Well-prepared explorers of any subterranean realm should possess at least one *daylight* spell, although scrolls and wands of this spell might prove even more valuable.

**Fire Bad:** Kobolds always try to use a party's already-lit torches and lanterns to ignite combustibles—such as oil, flammable gas, or other alchemical substances. Using magic light sources, such as magic weapons or sunrods, avoids inadvertently contributing to the kobold war machine.

**Poison:** Kobolds often employ poison on their weapons and traps, favoring Strength-sapping toxins harvested from domesticated vermin (most commonly Medium spiders and Large scorpions).

**Don't Start a Fight You Can't Finish:** Encounters with kobolds are often cut short as they flee into the darkness. Their hit-and-run style of fighting usually lead adventurers to mistakenly claim victory. As Kurtulmak teaches, no fight is truly over if even one kobold survives. Surviving kobolds regroup, gather reinforcements, and patiently tail a party with the intention of springing another ambush. This follow-up attack likely occurs after the party has been weakened by another threat, is incapacitated or distracted in some way (such as by climbing a wall), or has settled down to camp. 🗡️



# THE ECOLOGY OF THE KOPRU

*“Who can fathom the depths of the abyss?”*  
—Ecclesiastes

A monstrous mix of human, eel, squid, and lamprey, koprus are deep-dwelling amphibians of evil disposition and appearance. Uncivilized and savage, koprus dwell under the sea, roaming submerged caverns and ruins. They are rarely seen above the surface, but sometimes they emerge from the watery depths and saltwater pits of ancient coastal cities to prey on the local population. Whether these creatures have goals beyond their hunger for live flesh is a mystery. It is rumored, though, that koprus were once a civilized and powerful race ruled by a caste of sorceress-matrons and fanatically devoted to Demogorgon, the Prince of Demons.

## HISTORY OF THE KOPRU

Although they have regressed to a primitive state, koprus were once part of a great civilization comprised of a multitude of city-states across the oceans of the world. More than three thousand years ago, these twisted, aquatic cities were founded at the time of a great proliferation of the kopru race, which coincided with an abundant growth of their basic food source, a particular species of clam mollusk called kopura. At that time, the largest of the kopura were imbued with demonic magic by early kopru shamans, who cultivated a fiendish specimen sacred to Demogorgon. These fiendish clams invariably produced black pearls of great size and value, used by the kopru shamans to work dark magic. The shamans founded a class of ruling nobility, and kopru power swiftly



spread throughout the oceans with the rise of thousands of city-states in the following centuries.

Although the first kopru nobles were male shamans, the physically stronger and sorcery-attuned females soon took charge, and the government of the city-states developed as a form of matriarchate, an oligarchy of noble families headed by the eldest female member. Wherever they ruled, koprus enslaved masses of primitive sahuagin, locathah, and sea elves, which they captured in hunting raids and subjugated with their domination ability. The kopru forged occasional alliances with kuo-toas but were almost always in conflict with ixtxachitls. They fought ritual wars with neighboring city-states and periodically sacrificed slaves to two supernatural entities, which they believed to be the creators of their race: Prukal, the Dark Globe, and Shothotugg, the Great Whirlpool.

About two thousand years ago, the kopru were at the peak of their civilization and were among the most powerful marine races of the world—exceeded only by the deeper-dwelling aboleths. A sudden, unexplained disease caused the

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE KOPRU

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to koprus. Members of aquatic races, veteran sailors, and natives of remote islands most commonly possess this information. The kopru appears on page 134 of *Monster Manual II*.

#### Knowledge (nature)

##### DC Result

- 16 Koprus are deep-dwelling monsters with eel-like bodies and humanoid torsos. They are savage, cunning, and terrible to behold.
- 21 Koprus are mainly driven by hunger and the will to survive. Aside from powerful claws and tails, their gazes can bend others to do their will.
- 26 Koprus are the descendants of a fallen ancient civilization that once spanned the oceans. The fall of that culture has left them scattered and largely disorganized.
- 31 Rumors exist of koprus with deformed skulls, five-digit talons, and exceptionally large eyes. These koprus comprise a special caste of highly intelligent specimens that once ruled their ancient civilization.
- 36 Koprus actively worship Demogorgon. As servants of the Prince of Demons, they often have demonic allies and fiendish weapons.

koprus' kopura food source to diminish, resulting in a severe shortage. This famine, coupled with the depletion of other marine resources, marked the beginning of their decline.

The kopru grew increasingly greedy and angry, and they developed cruel eating habits. To survive the famine, they killed and devoured their slaves, and

in some cases members of the nobility practiced cannibalism on lesser kopru. Wars erupted among bordering city-states, and strife grew between kopru nobles and commoners, until a great rebellion of slaves finally caused the destruction of most of the undersea city-states about fifteen-hundred years ago. Nobles were hunted and mercilessly

slain by both their rebellious slaves and vindictive subjects. Kopruf society fell to ruins. As other marine races occupied their territories, the few surviving kopru went into hiding in remote depths.

Today, kopru ruins are remembered as drowned places of great woe and slaughter, and have been abandoned and shunned ever since. Only the savage descendants of the kopru of old return to the places of their former glory, both to seek refuge from their enemies and to relieve the insane melancholia that constantly torments them.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KOPRU

The serpentine body of the average kopru is 9 feet long and weighs 300 pounds. A humanlike torso with a large, anguilliform head and two muscular, spine-covered arms extends down into a powerful tail that splits into three flexible tentacles. Kopru hands have four webbed and clawed fingers, useful for swimming but as dexterous as any land-dweller's—perhaps even more so. Their skin varies from tones of gray to blue, green, and orange, and is thick and oily like a whale's, providing excellent protection from the elements. Upon their forward-jutting heads, koprus' bulging eyes resemble polished orbs of mother-of-pearl protected by heavy, wrinkled lids. Below, the mouth is a fanged orifice surrounded by four to eight prehensile tentacles, a number that differs depending on breeding and regional variation. An average specimen lives for fifty years.

Once a year, female koprus lay three to five eggs, which need a very warm environment to hatch. For this reason, koprus usually mate in tropical regions, and the females look for hot springs or sulfuric waters to lay their fecundated eggs. Koprus enjoy bathing in such hot water and can tolerate boiling temperatures without harm, sealing their eyes, nostrils, and gills if fully immersed. Koprus have both gills and lungs, although these organs are atrophied in some regional breeds (see the Amphibious Kopru sidebar). They are excellent swimmers but are extremely clumsy out of the water, where they must slither and crawl using their tail and hands.

### KOPRU MAGIC

Koprus practice strange magic drawing upon the powers of their fiendish patrons.

#### KOPRU SKULL DEFORMATION

The young of kopru nobles were once deformed in order to enhance their strength and intellect, making them so-called "high skull" kopru. Although forgotten by most of the race, a few surviving nobles still engage in this practice. The effects of skull deformation result in the following traits (in addition to their modifiers for size and advancement) and related changes to a kopru's statistics. Only a kopru who underwent the proper rituals soon after birth can benefit from these alterations.

**Size:** Large.

**Hit Dice:** 12 HD.

**Abilities:** +2 Dexterity, +4 Intelligence, +4 Charisma.

**CR:** 9.

#### KOPURA SHELLS

Large, black clams filled with bitter, Hell-red meat, many kopru spellcasters employ kopura shells in their magic. Any spell with the evil descriptor cast using a koprua shell as an additional material component has its effective caster level increased by +2. The shell is destroyed in the spell's casting. Koprua shells are exceedingly rare and cost upward of 100 gp.

In ancient times, kopru nobles customarily practiced skull deformation as a sign of noble status, enhancing newborns both physically and mentally. The deformation allowed the newborn to grow bigger through a program of hypernutrition. Being more intelligent and stronger than their lesser brethren, noble, or "high skull," koprus were natural leaders and ruled without opposition for more than a thousand years.

Koprus are capable of speech, but infrequently do so. On the rare occasions they do vocalize, their words are ugly strings of halting gasps, hisses, and belches. Among their own kind they communicate through their gazes—an eerie, completely silent form of communication. Noble koprus, thanks to their skull deformation and larger eyes, seem able to perform more elaborate communication.



## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KOPRU

Their ancient civilization shattered, most kopru live alone or in small bands, caring only about survival. While dangerous predators and fearsome combatants, melancholia has become a common problem among koprus, which show a distinctive maniacal-depressive behavioral pattern. When not pushed by hunger, most koprus lie inactive in their lairs for weeks, a factor that contributes to their inability to rebuild anything of their past splendor. Koprus almost never wear clothing or jewelry, but practice tattooing and piercing with bone instruments and ornaments. They can wield weapons but rarely do so.

At the time of the city-states, kopru commoners, the so-called "low skulls," lived under the strict regulations ruled out by their dominating caste, the "high skulls." The matriarchal oligarchy of the koprus was a trapezoidal-pyramidal scheme of ruling families, with a small group at the top and a much larger number near the bottom. The "high skulls" had different levels of influence and prestige, depending on the number of individuals in their service and on their degree of affiliation to the colleges of shamans and sorcerers. "Low skulls," on the other hand, were all the same, with little influence and voice.

Kopru commoners built houses, palaces, and temples, tended the kopura vats, and fought in slave raids and ritual wars between city-states—mock wars where every death was considered a sacrifice to Demogorgon. They were allowed to mate and reproduce, but they could not form named families on their own and could typically only earn respect through combat in ritual warfare.

In kopru noble families, the matriarchs ruled as ruthless tyrants, constantly fomenting strife among their subjects to divide and rule them more easily. Their prestige in kopru society was the highest, and they were chosen among the females of a house for their might as sorceresses. The exclusively male college of shamans was the other, equally potent power in the city-state. Although they had a great

## AMPHIBIOUS KOPRU

Koprus are a disparate race, with wide regional variations in color, number of tentacles, and ability to function on land. While some deep-dwelling koprus live their whole lives beneath the surface (like those presented in *Monster Manual II*), those who lurk near islands, in marshes, or underground might make regular forays out of the water. Such coastal koprus usually possess the amphibious trait, although it makes them no more adept at moving on land. This addition does not change a kopru's CR or any other abilities.

**Amphibious (Ex):** Although koprus are aquatic, they can survive indefinitely on land.

degree of freedom in their matters, the shamans were considered the voices of Demogorgon and, when organized, could cow even the matriarchs.

At the bottom of the social ladder were the masses of nonkopru slaves, who had no rights whatsoever and were doomed to lifelong exploitation.

Koprus were very observant of the superstitious practices linked to Prukal and Shothotugg, the Dark Globe and the Great Whirlpool of their mythology. More than "real" deities, Prukal and Shothotugg represented darkness and water, or the "qualities" of the Abyss, and were believed to be the parents of Demogorgon. According to kopru legends, Prukal manifests at sunset above the sky, enclosing the entire world in darkness for the night. The stars are holes punched through Prukal when it was wounded by the light beyond. This happened the day land emerged from the sea-covered world, confining the power of the koprus to just a portion of the world. The matter that once filled the holes fell unto the world as dark dust, which transformed the kopura. Since then, fiendish kopura have supplied the kopru with powerful black pearls made of Prukal's own substance, which are capable of incredible dark magic. As such, koprus love the darkness of the ocean depths and hate any form of skylight. They are almost never seen above the surface during the day, and they prefer moonless, starless nights to emerge for any reason. Koprus consider starlight a cursed element and mark themselves with special, star-shaped tattoos to neutralize its influence.

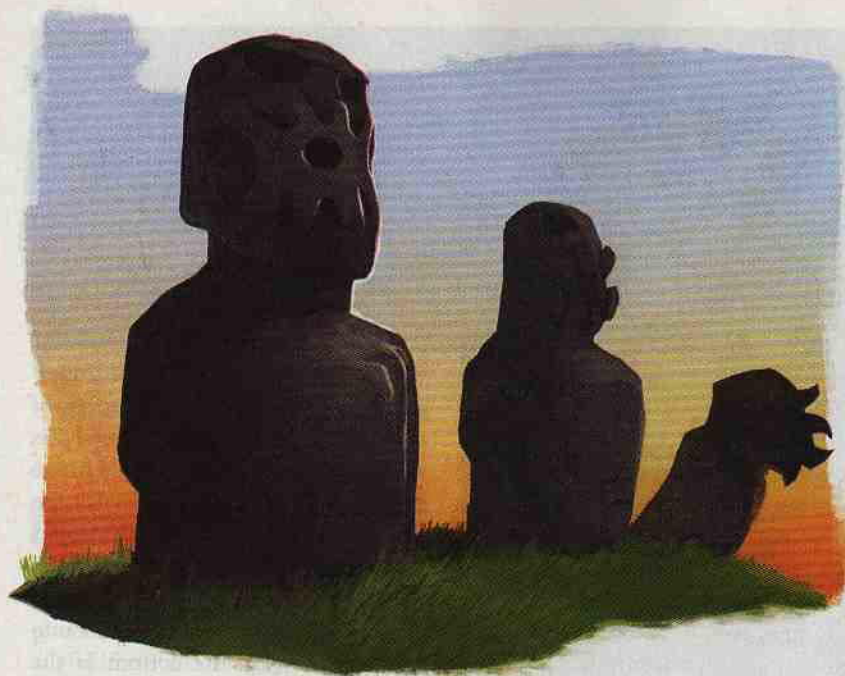
The other primeval deity of the kopru, Shothotugg, symbolizes both their favorite element and their greatest supernatural faculty. Koprus believe

that Shothotugg lives in large underground basins and the deepest of pits. Shothotugg's chaotic whirling is where everything originates and where everything must return. The day the first kopru city state of Shotho'Kopur was founded, the shamans performed a massive sacrifice, dropping tons of treasure and hundreds of victims into a great chasm on the bottom of the sea. In return, Shothotugg granted the koprus their ability to dominate sentient beings with their hypnotic gaze. Nowadays, koprus still make similar sacrifices on much smaller scales and out of sheer superstition.

Although the vast majority of koprus seen today are round-headed "low skulls," a few surviving nobles are rumored to live under the ruins of some cities, where they have renewed the traditions of their race and rediscovered many secrets of their ancestors. Having shaken off their racial melancholia, these "high skulls" even dream of restoring the might of their ancient civilization. Regardless of caste, all koprus revere Demogorgon and, if called to his service, answer with the fervor of true fanatics.

## KOPRU RUINS

Kopru ruins lie in many places at the bottom of the oceans. They are huge complexes of palaces, pyramidal temples, lesser houses, and large squares, now reduced to heaps of salt-encrusted rubble covered with seaweed, coral, and anemones. A decorative theme common to all kopru architecture is the depiction of the kopru head. Kopru heads were sometimes carved into colossal proportions, like the 40-foot-tall ones sometimes found on coastlines near areas of kopru influence. Sometimes heads are carved in ivory, coral, and amber, or



have details in mother-of-pearl, jade, and other semiprecious materials. These heads are often larger than life-size, and can have incredible value as art objects.

### THE CULT OF DEMOGORGON

In ancient times, koprus worshiped Demogorgon extensively, and their shamans formed an organized clergy at the service of the Prince of Demons and his supposed progenitors. The adepts were invariably male, and the most powerful among them were able to summon the Prince of Demons in a way that their body merged with Demogorgon's essence. When this happened, the kopru shamans permanently transformed into hideous, two-headed mutants who were actually aspects of Demogorgon himself (see "City of Broken Idols" in *DUNGEON* #145).

Sacrifices in the name of Prukal—Demogorgon's mother in kopru mythology—took place on special occasions, such as celebrations, the conclusion of a successful slave raid, the end of ritual war between two city-states, or the annual laying of eggs by a matriarch. The sacrifices were held atop great basalt pyramids, which were invariably topped by apparatuses used to crush the victims. The apparatus looked like a large amber cylinder with a descending stone piston, which pushed down the millstone

on creatures trapped inside. After the death of the victims, the millstone was raised and the shamans would foresee the future through the bloodstains on the calendar stone's surface.

The pyramids were usually built over a deep undersea pit, where weekly sacrifices were done in the name of Shothotugg—Demogorgon's other mother. These pits were connected to nearly bottomless undersea rifts. The treasure cast into the pits was considered taboo, and whom-ever tried to recover it was immediately put to death, be it a noble, commoner, slave, or foreigner.

### ADVANCED KOPRU

Oleklan is the priestess of a group of koprus who rediscovered the traditions of their race in the labyrinth under Shotho'Kopur. Her skull was deformed at birth by an incredibly old kopru, probably an undead survivor of the original kopru civilization. During her life, Oleklan has ritually deformed the skull of about thirty other koprus, effectively creating a new noble family, whose female members are already showing sorcerous talent. Oleklan has also recruited about two-hundred normal koprus, forming one of the largest organized groups since the fall of the city-states. Up until now, the aging Oleklan has cared only about

### KOPRU PROPHECIES

Kopru writing was a clumsy, loose, and rarely used ideographic code with hundreds of thousands of complex symbols spread throughout the various city-states across the world. This writing system is today undecipherable without the help of magic, and has been long forgotten by the kopru themselves. Numbers, on the other hand, were strictly codified in handy ciphers by kopru law. These numbers were engraved on the calendar millstones used by the shamans to crush sacrifice victims and perform divinations. The way the victim's blood stained the numbers on the stone's surface was the omen the shamans needed to foresee the future.

Having a strong oracular tradition, kopru shamans often recorded their perceptions of the future in the same way other civilizations might recount the past. Thus, much of kopru artwork—mostly being elaborate bas-reliefs and heads—have dates, either in the past or future, incorporated into them. As the kopru calendar begins with the founding of their first and greatest city-state, Shotho'Kopur (nearly 13,600 years ago), every date measures from that time. For example, a massive onyx relief dug from kopru ruins off the coast of Keoland and now hanging in the Gradsul library shows horrible twin serpents breaking from an egg covered in continents and screaming humanoids. Symbols depicting the number 13,597 circle the work.

the survival and prosperity of her family, but her sons have resumed active worship of Demogorgon and might be planning some greater evil already.

#### OLEKLAN

CR 12

Female advanced kopru sorcerer 7

CE Large monstrous humanoid (aquatic)

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +10


Languages Aquan, Common








AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15

hp 134 hp (17 HD)

Fort +9, Ref +16, Will +15

Speed 5 ft. (1 square); swim 40 ft.

ARABIC	ROMAN	KOPRU
0	none	 <small>Kopru's shell</small>
1	I	 <small>fish's head</small>
2	II	 <small>eyes</small>
3	III	 <small>tail</small>
4	IV	 <small>mouth</small>
5	V	 <small>middle hand</small>
10	X	 <small>lower hand</small>
50	L	 <small>lower hand</small>
100	C	 <small>bobbed pearl</small>
500	D	 <small>bobbed hand</small>
1,000	M	 <small>whirlpool</small>
/	none	 <small>slash</small>

SAMPLE NUMBERS	
11	
24	
1,142	
4,898	
27,753	
1,466,027	
2,562,253,151	

#### KOPRU NUMBERS

The kopru numerical system is a hybrid of Roman (prevalent) and Arabic. Numbers are written as the Roman ones with the following exceptions:

- 1) A "zero" symbol exists, although it is used only to indicate "0" and multiples of thousands, millions, and billions (see below).
- 2) Special symbols for "2," "3," and "4" exist. They are used only as the unit digits when a number (or prefix, see below) ends with them (i.e., "234" or "13," but not "16" or "39").
- 3) To make unit digits from "6" to "9," the symbols for "1" and "5" are used as in the Roman system.
- 4) When more than one "M" symbol is needed, multiple thousands are shown by a prefix number separated by a slash, which represents thousands, millions, and billions.
- 5) Multiple thousands, millions, and billions are written in a Roman/Arabic way, putting the "zero" symbol after a normal number for thousands, millions, and billions each in the prefix before the slash (in much the same way as a comma is used).

**Melee** tail slap +22 (1d8+8), and  
2 claws +20 (1d6+4), and  
bite +20 (1d6+4)

**Base Atk** +15; Grp +27

**Atk Options** constrict 4d6+12, improved grab

**Special Actions** dominate person

**Combat Gear** *potion of cure serious wounds*, *wand of magic missile* (5th)

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 7th)

3rd—(5/day) *haste*, *hold person* (DC 19)

2nd—(7/day) *detect thoughts* (DC 16),  
*invisibility*, *Tasha's hideous laughter*  
(DC 18)

1st—(7/day) *charm person* (DC 17),  
*identify*, *magic missile*, *ray of*  
*enfeeblement* (DC 15), *shield*

0—(6/day) *dancing lights*, *detect poison*,  
*detect magic*, *light*, *ghost sound*,  
*mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

**Abilities** Str 26, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 17,  
Wis 10, Cha 19

**SQ** amphibious

**Feats** Ability Focus (dominate person),  
Combat Reflexes, Greater Spell Focus  
(enchantment), Iron Will, Multiattack,  
Spell Focus (enchantment)

**Skills** Bluff +14, Concentration +13,  
Diplomacy +18, Intimidate +11,  
Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge

(nobility and royalty) +8, Listen  
+5, Move Silently +10, Search  
+13, Spellcraft +20, Spot +10  
Swim +18

**Possessions** combat gear  
plus *ring of Dexterity* +4 (as  
*gloves of Dexterity*), *ring of*  
*protection* +2

**Constrict (Ex)** With a  
successful grapple check,  
Oleklan can constrict a grabbed  
opponent, dealing 4d6+12 points  
of bludgeoning damage.

**Improved Grab (Ex)**  
If Oleklan hits an  
opponent of her own  
size or smaller,  
she deals normal  
damage and attempts  
to start a grapple as a free  
action without provoking  
an attack of opportunity.  
If she wins the grapple check,  
she establishes a hold and con  
strict.

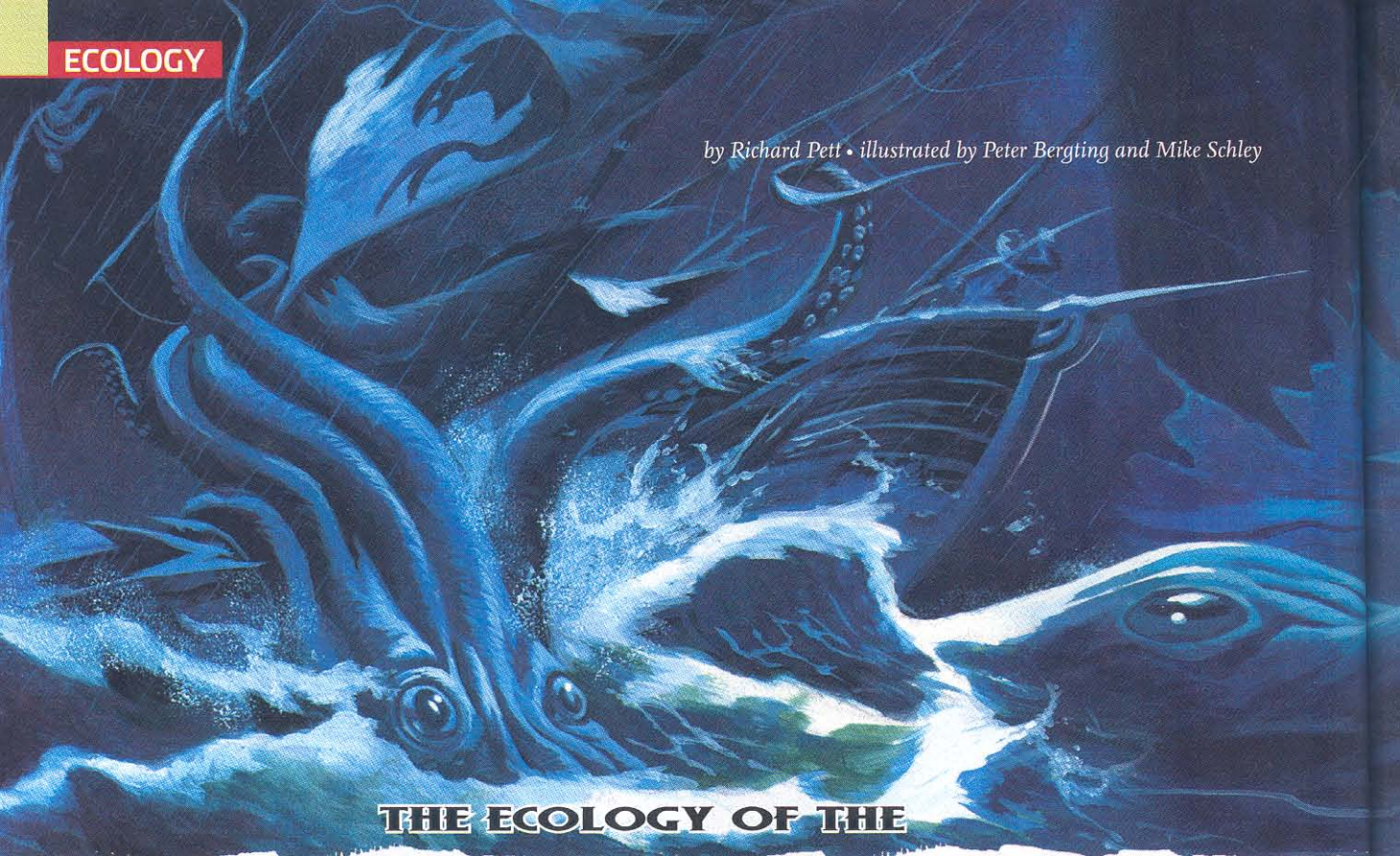
**Dominate Person (Su)** Once per day,  
Oleklan can produce an effect like  
that of a *dominate person* spell (caster  
level 10th, Will save DC 16), except

that the range is 180 feet and the  
duration is eight days.

**Amphibious (Ex)** Although koprus are  
aquatic, they can survive indefinitely  
on land. ☞



by Richard Pett • illustrated by Peter Bergting and Mike Schley



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# KRAKEN

*“Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep...”*

—H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

**T**hey rule the mightiest kingdoms, lightless trenches of crushing pressures where the sun never touches, unreachable seas that writhe in anger, jagged depths under sheer black cliffs. Their home is alien, elemental, and unforgiving. And here they are masters. Cruel geniuses possessing vast strength, they wait in the dark, weaving their plots, slowly considering their next abomination, their next move in an endless evil game of vast complexity. Not merely hulking mindless brutes nor cathedrals of flesh given fury, but sadists, torturers, and unspeakable terrors, thinking goliaths of calculating hate. So many places exist where the sea touches the land and sky, so many places where krakens—the unseen masters of the oceans—might reach out their cruel tentacles to afflict the lives of men.

## HISTORY OF KRAKENS

Festering within the depths of vast watery abysses lie the lightless domains of the mercifully elusive krakens. Only the foolhardy or insane try to learn more of these terrible leviathans, as even the mere rumor of a kraken can turn back a fishing vessel or force a captain to hastily beach his ship. Those who learn much of krakens speak of scattered island communities or remote coastal villages that worship these tentacled horrors, even supplicating them with slave offerings to stave off their fury. Yet the most terrible reports arise only occasionally, ever so rarely, when some insane escapee emerges from decades in the dark to tell of air-filled prisons far below where there is no hope. These escapees never live long in the light.



Some whisper that evil gods made krakens so the creatures of the land would never dare stray far from their homes. Others argue—primarily against those who posit the opposite—that aboleths created krakens. Regardless, scant knowledge leads to conjecture, as krakens share nothing, least of all their secrets. Most laymen accept that there are fathoms where the ocean is blackest and the sea most elemental, and from these trenches of primordial fluids and infinite darkness krakens first emerged.

Krakens themselves believe they came from the mouth of the Great Unbeheld, a kraken of impossible size who sleeps within the deepest ocean abyss and whose great tentacles thread through the depths of the entire world. Only by claiming all oceans as their own and enslaving every other sea-bound race might the Great Unbeheld rise and flood the world, giving them dominion over all. Although krakens don't worship the Great Unbeheld as a god, it is treated as a communal ancestor and is often touted as a favored child of Panzuriel or even as the guard of his severed limb (see the Panzuriel sidebar).

## KNOWLEDGE OF KRAKENS

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to krakens. Any sailor, port-town tavern owner, or scholar of the seas might know varied pieces of the following information. However, as every deckhand and dockside drunkard weaves tales of sea monsters, truths about krakens are often garbled by the fictions of the uninformed, superstitious, and wildly imaginative. As such, some of the information provided at low DCs (15 and lower) is blatantly false. However, higher DC results (20 or greater) contradict such yarns with actual facts.

### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10	Krakens are brutish gigantic squids that plunder ships and coastal communities in search of food and wealth, which they collect in vast coral palaces deep underwater.
15	Krakens can snatch sailors off the decks of their ships with two massive, barbed tentacles. A ship might ward off a kraken attack by hauling five dead bodies and a chest of copper behind it.
20	Krakens are loners with an astonishing sense of their own importance and a hard and cruel intelligence. They can also dominate native animals and often press intelligent undersea creatures into their service.
25	Krakens can shoot clouds of murky black ink and jet through the water with near-unparalleled speed. Their lairs deep below the waves often hold huge air-filled caverns to keep and breed hopeless generations of slaves but rarely any substantial material wealth.
30	Krakens possess the ability to control the weather and winds. Rumors persist of islands and ports where whole populations worship an individual kraken. These locals make living sacrifices to the kraken and act as its eyes and ears on land.

## THE CALL OF THE KRAKEN



Krakens first appeared in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* as part of the 1983 *Monster Manual 2*, by Gary Gygax, and have remained a part of the game ever since. However, they bear a far deeper history than merely their appearances in D&D bestiaries.

For centuries, krakens have lurked as legendary terrors of the sea. Erik Pontoppidan, a Norwegian bishop, first described a kraken in his *Natural History of Norway* (1752), noting it as a “floating island” one and a half miles across. Also known as a *krabben*, *sciucrak*, or *hafgufe*, the tales of numer-

ous cultures detail krakenlike creatures. Such tales even provided the inspiration for the poem “The Kraken,” by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

“Below the thunders of the upper deep,  
Far, far beneath in abysmal sea,  
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep,  
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee...”

In more recent years, British novelist John Wyndham’s novel, *Out of the Deeps*, or *The Kraken Wakes*, presents a perfectly insidious plot from beneath the sea (although it is devoid of actual krakens in all but its title). In this tale, an invulnerable undersea intelligence terrorizes shipping lanes, leaves islands and ports empty, and eventually melts the polar-ice caps, flooding the land.

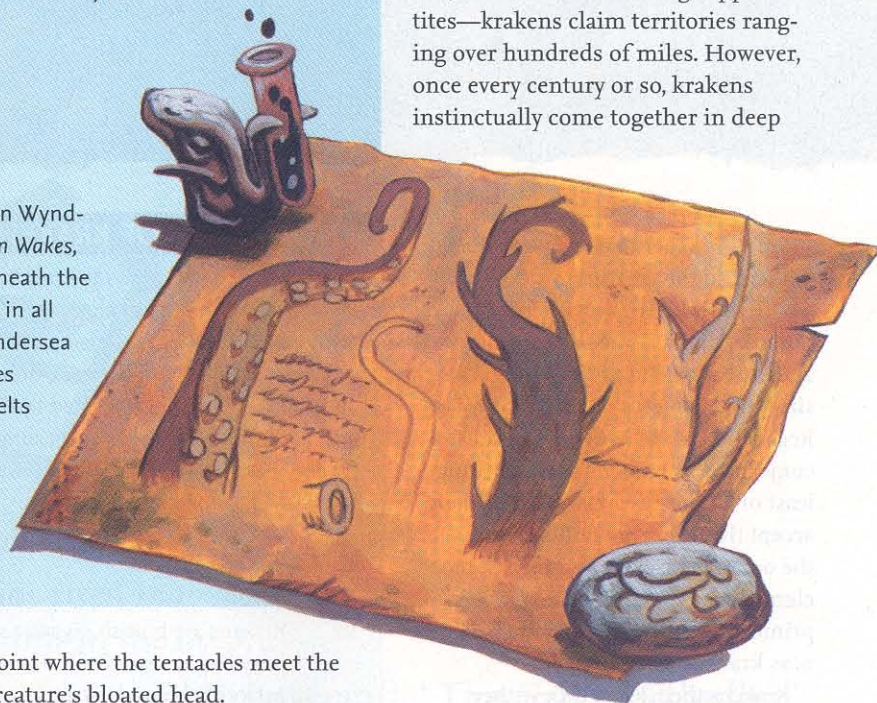
For D&D’s most recent encounters with krakens, scour “The Styas” in *DUNGEON* #121 or dare alien depths in “Seekers of the Silver Forge” in *DUNGEON* #125.

them in any way, whether it be with increased power or simply a more threatening appearance (grafts, templates, and prestige classes—especially those in *Lords of Madness*—see regular adoption by krakens).

Krakens lay cylindrical membranous eggs, but these are rarely seen. Indeed, krakens seem to mate only every century or so in a ritual known to them as the *Hateful Compulsion*, where the seas churn as though in the grip of some dreadful storm.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF KRAKENS

Loners—primarily because of their evil, selfish minds and huge appetites—krakens claim territories ranging over hundreds of miles. However, once every century or so, krakens instinctually come together in deep



## PHYSIOLOGY OF KRAKENS

Essentially huge intelligent squids, krakens never stop growing. The average kraken measures around 100 feet long. However, the near-immortality of these creatures leads to tales of staggeringly huge beasts that sailors mistake for small islands.

Average krakens possess a distinctive head, bilateral symmetry, and tentacles with suckers and hooks. Six of the beasts’ tentacles stretch to merely 30 feet in length, while the remaining two, covered in cruel barbs, writhe to nearly 60 feet long. A huge beak, curved and capable of tearing apart whales, nestles at the

point where the tentacles meet the creature’s bloated head.

Krakens have huge eyes, which give them formidable sight and the ability to hunt in total darkness. Most krakens spend their lives at incredible ocean depths, but some make lairs near the lands of men where there are plentiful supplies of food and slaves. Voracious carnivores, krakens need vast territories in which to feed, the greatest whale constituting little more than a fair meal to a kraken.

Despite their formidable shapes, krakens do not view their own forms as sacred and willingly alter themselves if they believe it might benefit

ocean trenches to mate. This fleshy, feeling ritual is abhorrent to the coldly calculating minds of krakens and is known to them as the *Hateful Compulsion*. Krakens from vast areas of the ocean gather, both fearful of the danger in doing so but unable to control their lustful compulsions. Males frequently get torn to pieces by the less numerous females in their insane desire to be fertilized, turning the sea black with kraken blood and causing parts of limbs and heads to wash ashore in oily froths. (This black rotting flesh has an appalling odor

and is avoided by living animals.) In their coitus-fuelled madness krakens involuntarily create cataclysmic storms (see page 94 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*), leading to horrifically sized whirlpools and waves, which might rage for months or even years. The Hateful Compulsion continues until all the assembled females are impregnated, an act that forces a male to struggle for life within his mate's grip, a lustful battle capable of lasting for months. Fearing such eventualities, some krakens have risked the most extreme measures—including self surgery and undeath—to avoid these spawning moots.

After mating, great black eggs soon fill deep oceanic trenches. Kraken young take a decade to hatch, and—mercifully—over this time even the brood-mothers who watch their spawn lose many of their eggs to daring predators. Occasionally, and for reasons even krakens cannot understand, some brood-mothers devour their whole clutch, an act that always leads to the loss of the kraken's sanity. Such an insane kraken is a terrible foe indeed, as its calamitous psychosis menaces anything that lives in or near the sea. Some suggest that this madness is connected with the insane god, Tharizdun, as part of some unfathomable plot he weaves from his prison. The few krakens who don't worship Panzuriel often turn to Tharizdun, usually after witnessing a brood-mother consume her young.

All krakens believe themselves to be divine creatures and the rightful rulers of the deep. As such they cannot conceive of a sea without their presence. Thus, they never knowingly put themselves at physical risk and always plan a hundred cunning escapes. Krakens possess cruel, calculating intelligences and use them to move events to their own advantage. Effectively immortal, krakens patiently plot over centuries to concoct elaborate escapes, hatch fearful schemes, and breed loyal servants in their sightless lairs deep below the waves. While nearly all krakens keep slaves or dupe worshipers, kraken

## PANZURIEL

### Intermediate God (Neutral Evil)

The god of the seas' foulest evils, Panzuriel ever seeks twisted minds and abominable visionaries to carry out his will both below and above the waves. The Writhing One welcomes all evil ocean-dwelling creatures into his crushing fold with sahuagin, sea hags, scrag, and kuo-toas (heretics against Bildooolpool) proving particularly prevalent. However, Panzuriel prefers creatures warped of body as well as of mind, making koprus and krakens his favored children.

Panzuriel bears an ancient hatred for Deep Sashelas, patron of aquatic elves. In aeons long lost, Panzuriel sought to make the darkened lands below the sea his exclusive dominion, perverting them into roiling oceans of fluid horrors. An alliance of opposed gods, led by Deep Sashelas, rose to resist the Writhing One, driving his corruptive ambition from the Material Plane and cutting off his left foot. The god's massive, gnarled appendage fell into the ocean but was never found. Thus, Panzuriel retains his link to the mortal world and, through his favored minions, seeks to corrupt the seas and avenge his ancient exile.

**Symbol:** A left footprint, kraken head, or squid eye surrounded by nine tentacles.

**Portfolio:** Confusion, murder, subversion, and evil aquatic creatures.

**Domains:** Corruption<sup>1</sup>, Darkness, Evil, Water.

**Favored Weapon:** Whip (for land-dwelling worshipers) or net (for use underwater).

**Clerical Training:** Worshipers must sacrifice a sea elf in a ceremony known as the Endless Revenging.

**Quests:** Panzuriel sends visions to his servants to destroy specific ships, raid undersea and coastal communities, and defile the temples of all other aquatic deities.

**Prayers:** Hugely complex low tonal chants, usually conducted in vast groups, the echoing songs of Panzuriel's worshipers are sometimes heard even on the surface, where mariners refer to the doleful droning as the "Wail of the Severed God."

**Temples:** Huge cave complexes deep underwater or simple stone circles centered around tentacled idols serve as Panzuriel's temples. Krakens often force slaves to toil for centuries, digging unholy trenches deep enough to reveal portals leading to the Pool of Panzuriel (said to fester somewhere in Carceri).

**Rites:** Panzuriel regards the sea as a battleground between himself and the hated sea elves, making raiding and slaughter the only rites he demands.

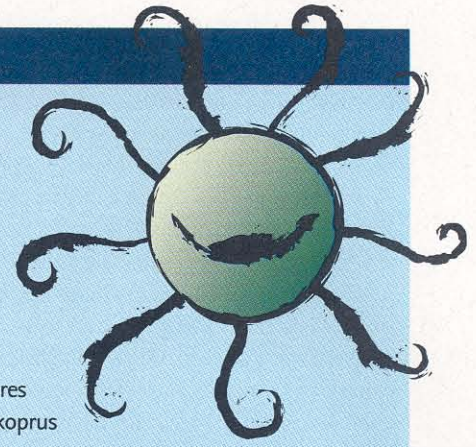
**Herald and Allies:** Panzuriel's herald is a 50 HD pseudonatural<sup>2</sup> kraken known as Tirbitus. Corrupted by Panzuriel's maddened will, Tirbitus hardly resembles a kraken anymore, appearing more like the Writhing One's symbol made flesh: a swollen red eye surrounded by countless flailing tentacles. Panzuriel's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are callers from the deeps<sup>3</sup>, half-fiend krakens, and scyllans<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed in *Lords of Madness*.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed in *Stormwrack*.

elders often manipulate the younger of their kind, sacrificing them to enemies or duping them into performing dangerous undertakings. The prevalence of such trickery causes krakens to wisely avoid others of their kind and hold them in constant suspicion.



Many krakens—but by no means all—keep lairs in caves deep below the waves. These dens often serve as little more than hiding places, both for the kraken and the useful treasures it might collect. To krakens, prime among such exploitable valuables

## KRAKEN CULT: THE BROOD OF WORSHIPFUL K'THURALL

For centuries, the people of remote St. Telers island have kept a deadly secret. Their religion, on the exterior nothing more than a quaint island tradition of worshipping spirits of the sea, in fact reveres the depths-spawned abomination they know as Worshipful K'thurall.

Having lived below the island for countless ages, Worshipful K'thurall claims St. Telers and the seas around it as his personal dominion. In the centuries since worshipers came to his island, K'thurall has styled himself as their patron deity and the sole source of either their prosperity or annihilation. Fearful and reverent toward their worldly god, all the people of St. Telers devotedly serve the kraken—whispering frequent prayers and decorating their structures with countless ichthyoidal shapes—dreading his anger and the storms and droughts it incurs.

Worshipful K'thurall forces two obligations upon his cultists: sacrifice and service. Sacrifice to K'thurall is conducted in a yearly ceremony known as the Drowning Man. In this ritual a dozen men and women are imprisoned within the belly of a gigantic man-shaped wicker cage, then slowly lowered off a vast cliff known to the locals as the Despair of Salvation. K'thurall accepts the drowning victims and dines not only upon their flesh, but their very souls, as the rite has long since transformed him into a soul eater (see page 66 of the *Book of Vile Darkness*). Some sacrifices he lets drown, transforming them into drowned undead (see page 46 of the *Monster Manual III*), which he then sends to attack ships and bring him more victims.

Even as a yearly offering, the Drowning Man ceremony threatens to deplete the adult population of St. Telers. Thus, many of Worshipful K'thurall's cultists travel to distant lands, telling of their home as either an island paradise or an oppressed slave-state in need of a savior, all in hopes of luring victims to the Drowning Man.

For their life-long service, Worshipful K'thurall blesses his most pious followers with his touch: a "gift" his cultists claim brings them "closer to the sea," but in fact begins the transformation into a deep thrall (a kraken monster cultist prestige class from "The Minions of Darkness" in *DRAGON* #300). The island elders exhibit the most obvious changes, as they are afflicted with huge bulbous eyes, tentaclelike limbs, gasping breath, and innumerable skinless abscesses—marks from the touch of K'thurall's powerful suckered arms. Once these cultists complete their apotheosis into creatures more kraken than humanoid, Worshipful K'thurall accepts their leap from the Despair of Salvation. Upon taking this final step, K'thurall welcomes his deluded children into the ranks of an aberrant generation of cultists that he sequesters beneath the island in a hellish, tentacular mockery of life above.

are slaves, and as such a kraken's lair might hold several leaking air-filled chambers. Egotists of the highest degree, krakens never deign to sully their tentacles with simple chores. Whether its desires entail carving its lair to meet its whims or spying upon land-dwelling creatures, a kraken's slaves serve out of fear and the knowledge that escape means only a crushing death miles below the surface. Regardless of their uses, to krakens, the word "slave" and "meal" often prove interchangeable.

Those krakens truly devoted to keeping slaves might house whole

degraded societies within their lairs, as generation after generation of servants are born, serve, and die, never knowing a world of light and open air. Even if liberated, such slaves rarely flourish if brought to the surface, as all their minds know are the horrors of worshipping a living god and its foul experiments. This is to say nothing of the scars, grafts, and other manipulations krakens regularly inflict upon their servants to better serve their needs.

Besides slaves, krakens often maintain relationships with groups of other underwater-dwelling evil creatures. While such associations are rarely

equal, creatures like sahuagin, scrag, and sea hags frequently worship krakens or pay them tribute in return for aid or protection. To a kraken, such arrangements serve merely as preliminaries to it claiming an entire tribe, society, or race as its slaves.

## VS KRAKENS

Krakens possess an astonishing sense of self-preservation and, if ever victory seems unlikely, retreat always remains an option. Easily embittered and possessing lengthy memories, a defeated kraken might calculate its revenge for decades, inflicting brutal retribution upon foes who have long forgotten their victories.

**Watch the Weather:** Krakens use their *control weather* and *control winds* spell-like abilities to bring foes to them or sink vessels without ever rising above the water. Despite these powers, many krakens relish the chance to personally splinter ship masts and drown weaker creatures. Many seafarers know to rightly fear gales that seemingly arise from nowhere, as these might prove to be the work of a kraken.

**The Terrible Embrace:** A kraken possesses a monstrous grapple modifier: +44 at the very least. Its constrict attack deals automatic damage every round, which might wear down even the mightiest foe and could prove impossible to break. With such a significant modifier, a kraken might opt to take a -20 penalty on its grapple check to use only one tentacle and retain its ability to make attacks and threaten an area (see the description of the improved grapple ability on page 310 of the *Monster Manual*). With merely a second opposed grapple check a kraken might move with its victim, dragging it underwater to a terrible, gurgling end (see the descriptions of moving while grappling on page 156 of the *Player's Handbook* and drowning on page 304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). Thus, magic items like *helms of underwater action* or *potions of water breathing* might help those fighting krakens stay alive for a time, but only treasures

like a *cape of the montebank*, *cloak of etherealness*, *ring of freedom of movement*, or armor with the slick special ability might save a kraken hunter's life.

**Tentacle Attacks:** When facing a kraken, sundering the creature's tentacles proves the most effective way to avoid being grappled. A kraken's tentacles can be specifically targeted with sunder attempts as per the rules on page 162 of the *Monster Manual*. Attacks upon the tentacles, however, deal less damage to the kraken as a whole. Thus, those combating krakens should stay cautious when making such targeted attacks.

**Water Reliant:** Krakens are most confident and deadly within the expanses of the seas. However, those somehow removed from such an environment prove a far less significant threat. If a kraken can be lured into a port or other costal inlet, spells like *control water*, various *wall* spells, and creative uses of *transmute rock to mud* or *move earth* might trap the creature inland. Even more effectively, if such traps dispose of the water, leaving the kraken beached, the monstrosity cannot breathe and thus swiftly suffocates. Krakens are keenly aware of their reliance on water, however, making such traps incredibly difficult to spring.

**Defensive Defilers:** In keeping with their extreme senses of self-preservation, krakens often protect themselves within layers of magical defenses. At the most basic level, this means making use of their *resist energy* spell-like ability (usually cast to resist electricity). Krakens with slaves might also have spellcasters cast long-lasting defensive spells like *mage armor*, *protection from arrows*, or *shield other*. The most twisted and ambitious krakens might even seek out creatures capable of giving them grafts or research ways to adopt a variety of acquired templates.

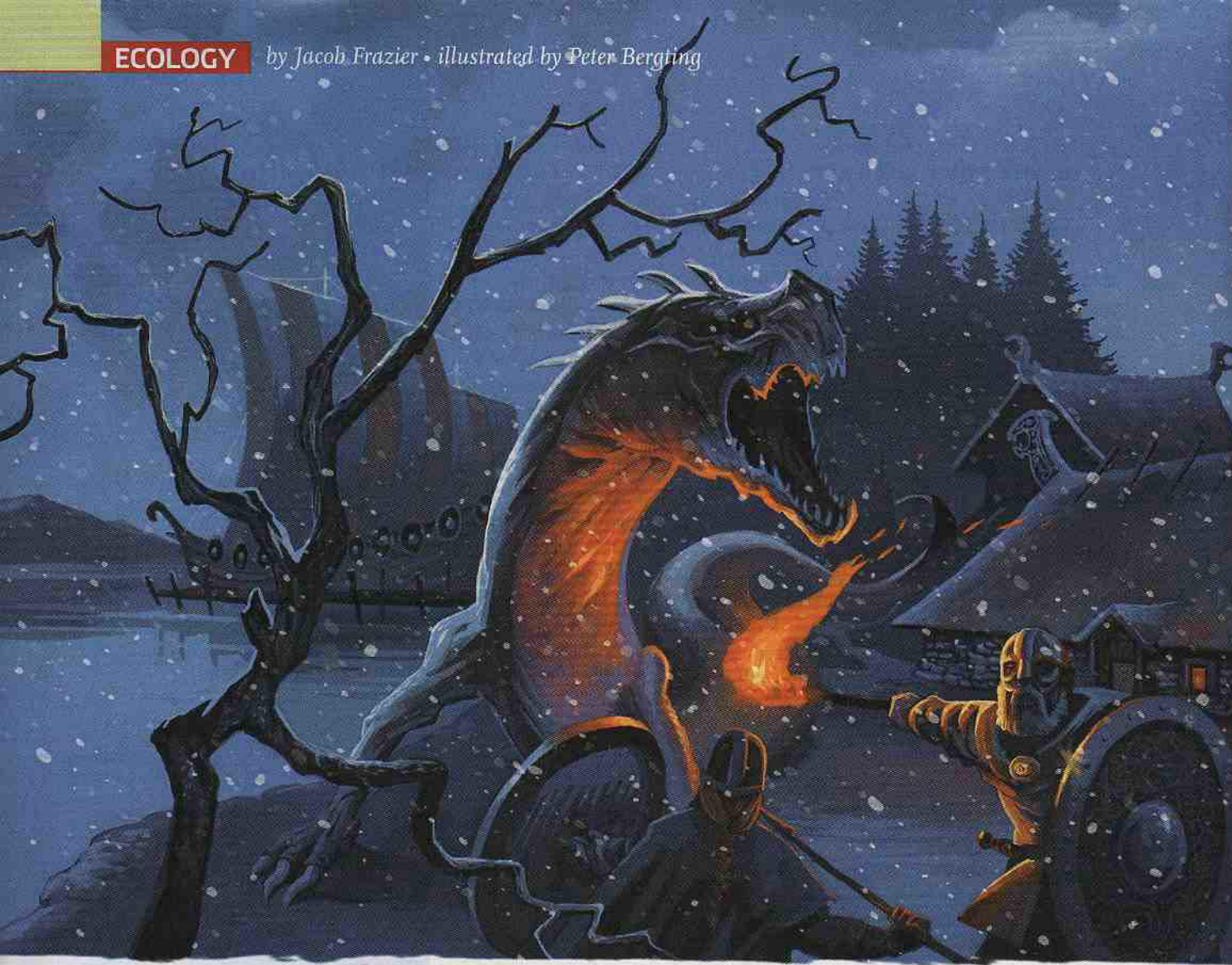
**Minions and Worshipers:** Commonly encountered alone, krakens usually prefer solitude as they hunt or attack choice targets. Despite these tendencies, krakens regularly have access to a horde of allies, whether



these minions be deluded worshipers, slaves, monstrous allies, or sea creatures they control through the use of their *dominate animal* spell-like ability. Those hunting a kraken should remain exceptionally wary, as any person or beast might secretly be a kraken's servant.

**Retreat and Revenge:** Krakens willingly use their jet ability to escape at rapid speeds, covering such retreats

with clouds of ink. Once out of direct danger, a kraken invariably begins plotting its revenge, relying on its minions to extend its reach far beyond the sea. However, even with armies of minions at their disposal, krakens favor ending such standing debts themselves. Thus, a kraken's servants often merely lure prey within reach, letting their master take revenge at his leisure. 🐙



# THE ECOLOGY OF THE LINNORM

*“Thor shall put to death the Midgard Serpent, and shall stride away nine paces from that spot; then shall he fall dead to the earth, because of the venom which the Snake has blown at him.”*

—Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda* (Brodeur translation)

Although many true dragons are storied to be covetous, deadly creatures, there are those who balance the depravity of their evil brethren, wyrms who exemplify the virtues of honor, charity, and self-sacrifice. Yet not all breeds of dragonkind possess such balancing agents. Born of dark legends and apocalyptic myths, linnorms are dragons of

ruin, covetous monstrosities that care nothing for their kin, the world, or the devastation they bring to all things.

## HISTORY OF THE LINNORM

Scholars believe linnorms are evolutionary members of the dragon family—lesser serpents evolved from a common ancestor of dragons. The physical anatomy and behavioral characteristics of a linnorm are similar enough to a dragon's that this is widely accepted among the scholarly population. Researchers also claim linnorms are on the precipice of extinction, and the fact that younger linnorm sightings occur infrequently adds weight to the hypothesis.



Some sages tell a different story, though, declaring these theories pure drivel—pretexts manufactured to keep the heritage of these god-defying creatures hidden. These sages assert that linnorms instead originated from the far side of the Corpse Gate in Niflheim, the layer of the Gray Waste of Hades where the goddess Hel courts the dead. There, in the boiling spring of Hvergelmir, the primeval ancestors of linnorms bred among themselves in an orgy of debauchery and incest.

Chief among them was Nidhoggr the Dread Biter, the vile corpse-sucker who gnaws one of the roots of Yggdrasil, forcing the great ashen World Tree to know true suffering. Nidhoggr is not alone in Hvergelmir—other serpents thrive there and help the great corpse-tearer rot away the roots of the World Tree. There are the serpent brothers Goin and Moin and their father

Grafvitner the Gnawing Wolf. There live Grabak the Gray-Back, Grafvollud the Field Gnawer, Ofnir the Entangler, Svafnir the Sleep-Bringer, and countless others

How the linnorms broke free of their vile breeding nest and into the realm of mortals remains a point of contention. The popular theory speculates that the World Tree's roots have decayed enough so that a twig has fallen away, allowing the lesser serpents to wriggle through to the Material Plane. A more radical view claims that Odin's cataclysmic imprisonment of Hel's older brother Jormungandr, the immense World Serpent, created a planar rift that allowed the linnorms to extend their uncle's hatred to the Material Plane. Either way, what was thought to be locked away by the deities themselves have found a way to envenom the realms of mortals.

Whether they are draconic stepchildren or godly progenies, linnorms are among the most despicable of all dragonkind. Rumors of their capacity for meting out destruction precede them, and most who encounter these dread wyrms dearly hope the scholars—those who proselytize the coming end of the linnorm race—are right.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LINNORM

Although linnorms draw frequent comparisons to dragons, their anatomies are more suggestive of serpents, with elongated bodies that lack wings and rear legs. Linnorms live longer than dragons and never stop growing, reaching ages of 4,000 years, lengths of 70 feet, and masses of 2 tons. Unlike dragons, however, they do not gain new abilities and powers as they age.

Sporting a flexible skeleton containing hundreds of vertebrae, a

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE LINNORM

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to linnorms. Dwellers of the frigid Northlands, dragon hunters, and worshipers of the Norse pantheon most often possess this information. Linnorms appear on page 140 of the *Monster Manual II*.

### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10 + CR	Many different breeds of linnorms exist and you have enough passing familiarity to identify this one's name and behavior. This result reveals dragon traits and the special qualities of linnorms.
15 + CR	All linnorms are cunning creatures with a variety of magical abilities, the gray and corpse tearer varieties even cast spells as clerics do. Linnorms can speak Abyssal and Draconic, though some know other tongues.
20 + CR	Linnorms are fiercely territorial and tolerate no other intelligent creatures in their domains, including other linnorms. They defend their habitats using their imposing size, powerful physical attacks, and deadly breath weapons (this result reveals information about the linnorm's breath weapons).
25 + CR	Linnorms are cold and calculating, never entering battle before studying their foes and formulating a plan. When they do strike, it is quick and deadly. This result reveals all the linnorm's spell-like abilities.
30 + CR	The oldest linnorms are insane, made so by centuries of solitude and the obsessive gathering of power and wealth. They keep and aggressively defend sizable treasure hoards. This result reveals all the linnorm's unmentioned special attacks.

linnorm grows large trunk muscles that allow for rectilinear locomotion—digging into the ground with the scales of its underbelly and pushing forward with its ribs. Only two front legs facilitate movement as its hind limbs, or anal claws, have been lost to atrophy due to elongation of the body. The forelegs end in sharp, razorlike claws.

A narrow skull with locked jawbones contains roughly three-dozen teeth that curve back toward the throat, making escape difficult once it bites into its prey. Unusually long saliva glands in its upper jaw store an enormous amount of toxins or other compounds, which many linnorms utilize to poison their enemies or create their deadly breath weapons.

A linnorm has a central nervous system and a developed brain. Its internal organs are compact—it is missing its left lung and has the ability to shift its three-chambered heart to one side, allowing it to swallow food within the narrow confinement of its body. During digestion, by-products pass to the cloaca, where the body reabsorbs water and

excretes the rest through an opening at the base of the tail near the internalized reproductive organs.

Cold-blooded, a linnorm can survive for a full year without sustenance by allowing its body temperature to drop. This efficiency has proven serendipitous, as a linnorm often depletes the food supply of its surroundings. In warmer climates, a linnorm pants so that the water in its mouth evaporates, which causes a cooling effect that helps to regulate its overall body temperature.

A linnorm interacts with its environment using superior sensory systems. It lacks external ears but has eardrums below its eyes that allow it to pick up low frequencies and vibrations. It constantly flicks its tongue to gather information about its surroundings, as it has highly developed taste buds that intercept airborne chemicals and a specialized organ in the roof of its mouth that processes this information. A linnorm's head bears small pits that contain heat-sensing cells that convert the infrared spectrum to nerve impulses that transmit to the brain,

allowing the linnorm to detect creatures in even total darkness.

Rough, dry scales serve to retain body moisture and prevent the linnorm's internal organs from drying out due to loss of water. The underlying skin determines these scales' pigment and varies among the many different linnorm breeds, ranging from dull grays to bright oranges. Once a year, a linnorm's eyes gloss over, indicating that it is ready to shed—a new layer of skin growing beneath the old causing the scales' color to become dull. Eventually, the linnorm hooks its lip on a tree or rock and squirms out of its old, dead skin. Many scholars and trophy hunters prize the cast-off skins of linnorms and might pay up to 12,000 gp for an intact find.

Out of the many different breeds of linnorms, the gray linnorm, dread linnorm, and corpse tearer are the three most extensively documented.

**Gray Linnorm:** Grays are the smallest of the linnorms, reaching lengths of only 20 feet. They use their trunk muscles exclusively for locomotion without the aid of their front legs. At birth, their scales are jet black and fade to dull gray with age. Unique to gray linnorms are a rear poison gland and curved stinger at the tip of their tails that drip with deadly venom.

Sleeker than most of its brethren, a gray linnorm must take care when swallowing its food. To this end, its saliva glands store a black corrosive fluid that it can breathe as a deadly weapon, allowing the gray to begin the digestion process before swallowing to lessen its chances of choking.

**Dread Linnorm:** Not only are these linnorms unique in that they sport two separate heads, they are also the largest of their kind, reaching lengths of up to 70 feet. Two serpentine necks extend from the main trunk of their bodies, each ending in a massive head adorned with a blotchy, rancid mane that hangs below the jaw. Their scales are pitch-black upon hatching but seem to rot with age, turning a variety of sickly gray and brown shades. A dread linnorm reflexively flushes its

## ORIGIN OF THE LINNORM

The lindworm, or lindwurm, has Germanic linguistic roots, meaning "dragon" or "wingless dragon." Norse mythology contains numerous references to these serpents in the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda*. The Vikings believed lindwürms feasted upon their dead, inherent in their creation myth, *Völuspá*, regarding the corpse tearer Nídhögg. Jörmungand, the linnormlike Midgard Serpent that encircles the world consuming his own tail, is one of the centerpieces of Ragnarök, the end of the world, when he and Thor are fated to kill one another. Another tale gives the account of Fáfnir, the giant who murdered his brother and then turned himself into a great serpent to hoard his stolen gold.

The introduction of lindwürms into *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* came in 1991 with the release of the *Vikings Campaign Sourcebook*. Although rather concise and containing few game mechanics, the linnorm entry set the tone for Jean Rabe's compelling two-part article, "The Vikings' Dragons," that appeared in the pages of *DRAGON* 15 years ago in *DRAGON* #182 and *DRAGON* #183. These articles greatly expanded the linnorm by detailing ten different breeds and were the basis for all material that was to come thereafter.

scales depending on its mood, causing them to darken as its temper sours.

Two volatile compounds are stored in a dread linnorm's saliva glands, which combust with explosive force when they make contact with air. The first compound bursts into flame and the second freezes instantly. Using their enormous lungs, a dread linnorm's two heads can blow forth either compound with sustained force.

**Corpse Tearer:** Corpse tearers are the most revolting of all linnorms, exuding a stench of death so overwhelming it is impossible to ignore. Having a splotched, brownish hue, corpse tearers sprout patches of hair seemingly at random, giving them the appearance that they were once covered in hair but large clumps of it have since fallen out. Moss and slime hang from their scales, which they use to camouflage themselves, making them resemble enormous dead trees while still. Their claws are broken off at the ends, with nothing remaining but soiled shards that are jagged and deadly.

These horrific serpents can spit two deadly toxins. The first is a magic-infused venom that can paralyze any living creature and the other is an airborne disease called linnorm fever that attacks the central nervous system.



## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE LINNORM

There is no empathy or compassion in linnorms' spiteful hearts. They care nothing for the life or death of other intelligent races and would not even lift a claw to save their own race if threatened. The attitude of a linnorm boils down to very basic terms: it is the linnorm against the world. This single-mindedness results from

abandonment as a hatchling, centuries of solitary living, selfishly putting its own agenda before all others, and refusing to trust anyone—especially other linnorms. This ultimately takes its toll on the minds of linnorms and once they reach their venerable ages they are quite insane with rampant paranoia.

A linnorm has one sole purpose in life, driven by instinct: to amass wealth and power at all costs. They are

loners, usually refusing to ally with any living thing. When they do, they turn upon their collaborator as soon as they achieve their goals. They make their lairs in deep tunnels and outfit them with elaborate traps so they can stash their hoards away from the world. A linnorm spends long, forlorn centuries coveting and guarding its treasure, calculating its value and memorizing its contents.

Linnorms have no societal structure to speak of and do their best to ensure that their territories do not encroach upon one another—an unusual event in most regions considering these creatures' rarity. The only contact among the species occurs during mating. Once every decade, a female linnorm releases pheromones tuned to the heightened senses of a male, indicating that she is ready to breed. Potentially, the breeding of linnorms is a repulsive sight, as they engage in a "mating ball," entangling each other with their long bodies until observers cannot determine where each begins or ends. More often than not, though, this instinctual call goes unanswered.

Should mating occur, soon after, the female lays her clutch of eggs and cares for them until they hatch, abandoning the young to their fates immediately thereafter. The life of a hatchling is often short and cruel, with the weakest perishing from exposure or the predations of its kin. This is ultimately the cause of the race's scarcity and aggressive behavior.

A linnorm doesn't hesitate to raze the landscape out of spite, and intruding upon linnorm territory is the quickest way to draw its attention. Linnorms study their foes from a distance to plot their attacks, which are often quick and decisive. They exploit their strengths to the utmost advantage, raining destruction down upon their enemies while targeting the strongest foes, moving in close when they deplete their magical and long-range attacks. Even then, linnorms only directly engage in battle when they have a clear and decisive advantage. A wounded linnorm usually retreats, as none are gallant enough to have pride.

**Gray Linnorm:** Grays are the most spiteful and hostile of all the linnorm breeds, reveling in deception. They make their lairs in elevated locations so they can see any fool who dares approach. Paranoid to an extreme, grays assume any intruder to be after their hoard and attack on sight.

Grays love to kill with their claws and tail stingers, and frequently close with enemies after initial batteries of long-range attacks, preferring improvisation

## OTHER LINNORMS

Aside from the commonly described linnorms, at least seven others are storied to exist.

**Flame Linnorm:** Radiant, fire-breathing beasts, these linnorms lair in deep caverns and dote over massive treasure hoards.

**Forest Linnorm:** Like gigantic snakes, these linnorms possess no limbs, slithering through the wildness and tricking prey with their ability to mimic noises.

**Frost Linnorm:** Incredibly territorial, these furred, blue-white linnorms employ strange magics and attempt to freeze any creature that ventures into their domains.

**Land Linnorm:** Greedy in the extreme, these hill-dwelling linnorms are the most likely to manipulate humanoids into their service.

**Midgard Linnorm:** The direct offspring of Jormungandr, the Midgard Serpent, this powerful, elusive linnorm—possibly the only of its kind—has incredible control over water and lairs upon the ocean floor.

**Rain Linnorm:** Arrogant land and swamp-dwelling dragons, these weather-manipulating linnorms exhibit incredible greed, even for members of their covetous race.

**Sea Linnorms:** Cold and vicious, sea linnorms terrorize the waves of the deep ocean, seeking to keep sentient creatures confined to their tiny continental homes.

to planning. They often take a wounded foe into the deep tunnels of their lairs, where they play a cruel game of "escape the dragon" before finishing off the poor soul.

Exceptions to their species, gray linnorm parents remain together until their hatchlings can fend for themselves, pairing to mate again in another 30 years.

**Dread Linnorm:** None of the linnorms bear more of an irrational hatred for humanity than dread linnorms. These linnorms make their lairs as far from human settlements as they can, typically in dangerous and barren climates. Nevertheless, history has recorded several incidents of dread linnorms completely annihilating towns or villages and making their lairs in the resulting devastation. Thankfully, these occurrences are few due to the rarity of the breed.

A dread linnorm considers everything around its lair to be under its rule, which usually consists of laying everything to waste so it can plunder the spoils. It spends much of its time afterwards surveying the devastation, scanning for intruders. If someone does encroach upon its domain, or worse, steals some of its treasure, the linnorm stops at nothing to locate the trespassers and exact horrific retribution.

A dread linnorm accumulates wealth solely from instinct and does not feel the stir to catalog its hoard

or put it to use. While other linnorms might alter their combat strategies so that no harm comes to their foes' loot, a dread linnorm thinks nothing of unleashing the full force of its fury. On the other hand, this lack of regard does not extend far—like all linnorms, a dread linnorm spends most of its days defending its hoard.

**Corpse Tearer:** Thought by some to be direct descendants of Nidhoggr, corpse tearers are the most feared of the linnorms, and rightly so, as few other serpents or dragons are powerful enough to oppose them. Having developed a taste for rotting flesh, these linnorms make their lairs deep beneath ancient burial sites and battlefields, leaving the surface to the desecrations of other linnorms. Defending their underground lair are countless undead minions, stirred from their eternal sleep by corpse tearers' excavations or the remains of fallen adventurers brave or foolish enough to have once challenged the linnorms.

Always striving to increase their wealth, corpse tearers send their minions out to raid graveyards and human settlements, the undead invaders returning with ever-increasing numbers and more treasure. All manner of undead form the morbid society of a corpse tearer's abode—skeletons, wraiths, wights, banshees, vampires, and even the animated corpses of dragons and other linnorms.

## SEA LINNORM

A massive snake, finned and frilled in all the colors of the angry sea, splits the waves in a spray of stinging salt water. From above a mouth full of sharklike fangs, a pair of pupilless, ruby eyes narrow menacingly.

### SEA LINNORM CR 21

Always LE Gargantuan dragon (aquatic)  
Init +0; Senses blindsight 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +23, Spot +23

Languages Aquan, Draconic, Infernal

AC 42, touch 6, flat-footed 42

(+36 natural, -4 size)

hp 403 (26 HD); DR 30/magic

Immune all enchantment spells, paralysis, sleep

SR 36

Fort +24, Ref +15, Will +20

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 80 ft.

Melee bite +36 each (4d6+14) and 2 slams +34 (2d8+7) and tail slam +34 (2d8+21)

Space 20 ft.; Reach 20 ft.

Base Atk +26; Grp +52

Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Snatch; breath weapon, capsize, tail sweep (2d6+21)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th):

At will—fog cloud, water breathing

3/day—control water, gust of wind (DC 17), reverse gravity, solid fog

1/day—shapechange

Abilities Str 38, Dex 10,

Con 29, Int 14, Wis 20, Cha 21

Feats Alertness,

Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch

Skills Appraise +11, Bluff +23,

Diplomacy +27, Gather Information +23, Hide +6\*, Intimidate +25, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (geography) +20, Listen +23, Sense Motive +21, Spellcraft +22, Spot +23, Swim +51

Advancement 27–40 HD (Gargantuan); 40–53 HD (Colossal)

**Keen Senses (Ex)** A sea linnorm sees four times as well as a human in low light conditions and twice as well in normal light.

**Breath Weapon (Su)** 60-foot cone of caustic acid droplets, once every 1d4 rounds; damage 24d6 acid, Reflex DC 32 half; only effective above water. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Capsize (Ex)** A submerged sea linnorm that surfaces under a boat or ship less than 30 feet long capsizes the vessel 95% of the time. It has a 50% chance to capsize a vessel from 30 to 70 feet

long and a 20% chance to capsize one more than 70 feet long.

**Tail Sweep (Ex)** This special attack allows a sea linnorm to sweep with its tail as a standard action. The sweep affects a half-circle with a radius of 30 feet, extending from an intersection on the edge of the linnorm's space in any direction. Creatures within the swept area are affected if they are four or more size categories smaller than the linnorm (Small size or smaller for a sea linnorm). A tail sweep automatically deals the indicated damage plus 1-1/2 times the linnorm's Strength bonus (round down). Affected creatures can attempt DC 32

Reflex saves to take half damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Skills** A sea linnorm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

\*Sea linnorms have a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when submerged.



Maritime tales speak of mighty sea serpents that are large enough to capsize galleys. These seafaring linnorms are exceedingly vindictive and seek retribution for the harm done to the ocean's marine life. The sea linnorm traverses both land and sea with ease, terrorizing shipping lanes and fishing villages. Accounts told from shell-shocked survivors tell of a whirlwind fury of dreadful fogs, crushing fins, and a haze of acid lingering behind the barely glimpsed form of a terrible serpent slithering back out to sea.

Sea linnorms speak Aquan, Draconic, and Infernal, although some have been known to learn Common. ☐

by Amber E. Scott and F. Wesley Schneider  
 illustrated by Peter Bergting and Mike Schley



## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# LIZARDFOLK

**H**idden behind walls of tangled vines, towers of primordial willows, and moats of slow-moving waters brimming with a thousand different deaths, lizardfolk claw out their savage domains. From the hearts of the deadliest swamps, dark places where sinister things crawl and forgotten evils lurk, these reptilian primitives thrive in savage solitude. Often numbered among the evils that stalk such wetland wilds, lizardfolk are far more than simple-minded raiders and territorial murderers—although they are exactly those things too.

### HISTORY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

Lizardfolk have a strong oral tradition, and the story of how they came to exist is the first legend taught to hatchlings.

Semuanya, the breeder of all lizardfolk, had a mate in the long ago times. Kecuala and Semuanya lived in harmony together, neither one dominant. Each of them was a Watcher who prowled the primordial jungles, seeking

out their enemies, a Survivor who plucked edible things from the ground and slew wild beasts for their flesh, and a Breeder who bore clutches of soft eggs and buried them in the ground to keep them warm and safe.

While Semuanya settled contentedly into its life, Kecuala did not. Kecuala worked its soft, gray brain with pointless questions. It made no decisions, squatting and thinking while life went on around it. When Semuanya chided Kecuala, Kecuala cried, "How can I watch or hunt or breed without first thinking? The decisions are so many and so great! What if my actions bring trouble? I must be cautious, must be careful, must think things through!"

Semuanya shook its head and went out to hunt, and when it returned it found Kecuala gone. Unable to conquer its indecisiveness, it had split in half and left two smaller Kecualas behind. One of the small new lizardfolk waved its sharp claws in the air, growling its desire to fight



and hunt. The other hid behind its partner, hissing its will to stay home and breed, and to cover its clutch with earth to keep it warm and safe.

Semuanya in its wisdom called the aggressive Kecuala “male” and the passive Kecuala “female” and helped them to build a place to live and breed. Semuanya watched over the Kecualas—which lizardfolk still call themselves to this day—and continues to guard their progeny, hoping that one day Kecuala will stop thinking so much and join its halves together again so it can watch and hunt and breed with Semuanya once more.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

While at first glance lizardfolk bodies seem as straightforward as their culture, in reality they are much more complex. Lizardfolk weigh from 200 to 280 pounds and possess powerful builds. Their stout frames stand 6 to 7 feet tall—in addition to 3-to-4-foot-long nonprehensile tails that they use for balance.

Lizardfolk skin is a thin white membrane that grows hard scales

## KNOWLEDGE OF LIZARDFOLK

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to lizardfolk. Those who live in or near swamps, hunt the marshes, or have dealings with lizardfolk communities might possess this information.

### Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
10	Lizardfolk are monstrous scaled humanoids that stalk swamps and live in small, primitive tribes.
15	As skilled warriors, lizardfolk respect strength and martial prowess, but most seek peaceful existences. Many settlements of lizardfolk live harmoniously alongside communities of other humanoids.
20	Lizardfolk are not amphibious, but they can remain underwater for long periods of time. Separate lizardfolk tribes vary greatly in technological advancement, alignment, physical stature, and racial abilities.
25	Lizardfolk revere an androgynous deity named Semuanya. Their tribal leaders are commonly the most powerful of the tribe’s warriors. Lizardfolk almost never count arcane spellcasters among their ranks.

ranging in color from onyx black to olive green to mud brown, sometimes with mottled or even striped patterns. As their eggs have porous shells, the pigmentation of mud and water seeps in during development, determining a hatchling’s coloration. This means that if lizardfolk move from one area to another, new hatchlings might possess different colorations than their

parents, although body size, eye color, and the number of serrations on their crests are inherited traits.

The jaws of lizardfolk bear a unique construction of solid bone plates with a serrated front edge. The sharp edge of the jawbone protrudes through the gum line, functioning as canines for ripping meat while molarlike ridges run along the rear of the jawbone.



Crests are another distinctive physiological trait of lizardfolk. Males possess large crests that run from the tops of their heads down between their shoulder blades, while females have two smaller crests running parallel along their heads down to the backs of their necks.

Lizardfolk reproduce sexually. A female lizardfolk lays a clutch of

one to three eggs several weeks after mating and buries them in mud and composted plant matter. These eggs, each just larger than a foot in diameter, absorb water and plant matter to feed the growing embryo inside. The fetus does not develop genitalia until approximately a week before it hatches, which develop in response to the type and amount

of nutrients the fetus receives. A prosperous tribe that has an abundance of compost hatches an equal number of males and females. A less well-off tribe that has few scraps to bury its eggs in produces mostly males. This adds valuable hunters to the tribe while reducing the number of needy offspring the next generation hatches. Irregularly, lizardfolk

## SEMUANYA

### Lesser God (Neutral)

The dualistic deity of the lizardfolk, Semuanya embodies the chief facets of lizardfolk life: hunting and breeding. During times of peace and plenty they speak of Semuanya as “she” and worship her as the Breeder. During times of strife and hardship they speak of Semuanya as “he” and offer sacrifices to him as the Watcher or the Seeker.

**Symbol:** A reptile egg.



**Portfolio:** Fertility, the hunt, lizardfolk, swamps.

**Domains:** Animal, Plant, Water.

**Favored Weapon:** Greatclub.

**Clerical Training:** New shamans learn at the feet of the previous generation’s healers, replacing them when they can no longer fulfill their duties.

**Quests:** Semuanya instructs its worshipers to serve where needed, frequently questing them to aid warbands or recover a tribe’s lost eggs.

**Prayers:** In times of war, prayers to Semuanya take the form of short hisses and reptilian barks made before battle. When a tribe is at peace

there is time for longer chants and epic songs intoned in Draconic.

**Temples:** Semuanya’s only temples are in the hearts and minds of its worshipers. Only the occasional symbol or idol is made as a physical representation of its worship.

**Rites:** Breeding and battle as they benefit lizardfolk tribes.

**Herald and Allies:** Semuanya’s herald is an 18th-level albino lizardfolk druid called Spirit Scale. Semuanya’s allies and those it most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are celestial or fiendish dinosaurs, giant crocodiles, hydras, or tendriculoses.

hatchlings are born with both male and female sex organs—neither set functional. Such sterile offspring often possess female crests, unusually complex brains, and correspondingly greater intellects.

Several atypical varieties of lizardfolk exist, the most common being brutish blackscales and the cunning pygmy poison dusks (see the *Monster Manual III*). Each breed exhibits traits suited to the lands it inhabits, as well as customs and practices that vary radically from tribe to tribe. As such, it proves as difficult to predict the temperament and actions of lizardfolk as it would be to do so for humans or elves. Varying breeds of lizardfolk rarely occupy the same areas, but when they do, tribal conflicts prove just as likely as unified societies.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

The societies of most lizardfolk tribes seem simple by the standards of non-lizardfolk, but this simplicity has developed as a reflection of their deep-rooted faith. The story of their origins has led most lizardfolk to condemn intelligence as pointless and wasteful. Lizardfolk believe, like their deity Semuanya, that life is meant to be lived and that hunting, fighting, and breeding matter most. Intelligence leads to overthinking situations and to the corruption of their straightforward culture.

The exception to this philosophy comes in the form of the occasional sterile, hermaphroditic lizardfolk hatched with superior intelligence. Often taking up the mantle of shaman, lizardfolk of this uncommon breed advise the tribe but rarely rise to positions of true power. Lizardfolk revere such shamans as touched by the divinity of Semuanya—paragons closer to returning the broken halves of Kecuala to a unified state. As these shamans cannot breed, and lizardfolk females reject mates who display above-average intellects, lizardfolk technology rarely advances.

Survival is of key importance to lizardfolk society, and so the tribe

## DOGON TO DUNWATER

References to lizardlike people exist in the mythology of many different cultures. The Dogon tribe of Africa believes that human beings are descended from a race of reptilian aliens called the Nummo. The Hopi tribe supposedly has legends about a race of lizard people who lived on the earth five thousand years ago, and who all died in a rain of fire. In D&D, lizardfolk (formerly lizard men) made their first appearance in 1976's *Supplement I: GREYHAWK*. They are also prominently featured in the first edition adventure *U2: Danger at Dunwater* and more recently in Chapter 4: Saltmarsh of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide II*. Check out the most recent lizardfolk incursion in the Age of Worms Adventure Path adventure, "Encounter at Blackwall Keep," in *DUNGEON* #125.



treats the strongest and hardest males and females with the greatest respect. The most powerful male warrior takes command of the tribe and selects the healthiest and strongest females to mate with. Although exceptional intelligence is disdained, cunning and tactics in battle are highly respected, especially when combined with the prowess to implement such strategies. Thus, many lizardfolk leaders show exceptional canniness in leading their people, both on and off the battlefield. When multiple lizardfolk lay claim to the position of leader—or there is any dispute within the tribe—the feuding parties fight to the death, the victor proving that Semuanya favors him.

Due to their martial culture, most other humanoids view lizardfolk as a violent, cannibalistic, savage race, but in reality lizardfolk tribes vary in their methods of dealing with outlanders. Lizardfolk as a whole have no strong leaning toward any extreme alignment or particular ruling philosophy other than survival of the fittest. They

defend their territories ferociously, but when approached respectfully most tribes trade and negotiate with other races willingly. Some tribes, however, attack strangers on sight—especially those of the primal blackscale tribes—but such aggression usually results from years of fighting off invading races.

Lizardfolk disdain intricate deceptions and politics. If they desire something another race possesses, they might try to trade for it or take it by force. A few nomadic tribes—largely among the poison dusk—prefer stealth and theft over diplomacy or aggression. Each tribe differs, but most broadcast their intentions straightforwardly and openly.

In general, lizardfolk make permanent homes in temperate, swampy lands, although the differing breeds prefer some variations. Some of the more advanced tribes build crude huts, but most find natural shelters in underwater caves containing air pockets or large copses of swamp trees with canopies big enough to shield the tribe from the elements.

## ADVANCED LIZARDFOLK

Most lizardfolk tribes adhere to proud warrior traditions. As such, advanced lizardfolk regularly take levels in barbarian, fighter, or ranger. Lizardfolk following the path of the shaman might instead take levels of adept, cleric, druid, or—rarely—sorcerer.

Whether the guard of a tribe's chieftain or the leader of a scout party, the swamp stalker presented here is an advanced version of the lizardfolk presented on page 169 of the *Monster Manual*. The scaled horror prestige class and its example Saebeohrt Rippling Death on page 84 of *Savage Species* presents an even deadlier lizardfolk foe.

**SWAMP STALKER CHAKSHAEL CR5**  
Lizardfolk barbarian 2/fighter 2

LN Medium humanoid (reptilian)  
*Monster Manual* 169  
**Init** +0; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1  
**Languages** Draconic  
**AC** 22, touch 12, flat-footed 20; uncanny dodge  
**hp** 45 (6 HD)  
**Fort** +8, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1  
**Spd** 30 ft. (6 squares)  
**Melee** 2 claws +7 melee (1d4+2) and bite +5 (1d4+1); or mwk trident +9 (1d8+2) and bite +5 (1d4+1)  
**Ranged:** javelin +7 (1d6+1)  
**Base Atk** +5; **Grp** +7  
**Special Attack** Rage 1/day  
**Combat Gear** *Oil of bless weapon, potion of bear's endurance*  
**Abilities** Str 15, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10  
**Feats** Multiattack, Point Blank Shot,

Weapon Focus (trident)  
**Skills** Balance +6, Handle Animal +2, Intimidate +5, Listen +5, Jump +6, Ride +3, Survival +3, Swim +8  
**Possessions** combat gear, masterwork studded leather armor, spiked heavy wooden shield, masterwork trident, 4 javelins, 2 *potions of pass without trace*, 39 gp.  
**Rage (Ex):** When he rages, Chakshael has the following changed statistics: **AC** 20, touch 10, flat-footed 18  
**hp** 55 (5 HD)  
**Fort** +10 **Will** +3  
**Melee** 2 claws +9 melee (1d4+4) and bite +7 melee (1d4+3); or mwk trident +10 (1d8+4) and bite +7 melee (1d4+3)  
**Grp** +9  
**Abilities** Str 19, Con 18  
**Skills** Climb +4, Jump +10, Swim +7

Females and children guard the settlement and gather edible roots and plants for the tribe. Males serve as scouts, hunters, and warriors.

### LIZARDFOLK IN EBERRON

The best-known lizardfolk in EBERRON are the blackscales, poison dusk pygmies, and twenty-four Cold Sun Tribes of normal lizardfolk living in Q'barra. All three varieties are extremely dangerous, although some of the Cold Sun Tribes have made peaceful overtures toward nonlizardfolk. Many of the Q'barra lizardfolk serve the great black dragon Rhashaak and seek to protect their lands and holy grounds from outsider settlers new to the region. Lately, black-scale raiders have captured numerous residents of Newthron's outlying lands and even Cold Sun lizardfolk to sacrifice to Rhashaak in the great volcano-city of Haka'torvhak. This especially disturbs the Cold Sun lizardfolk as they fear some dark plot on the part of Rhashaak. In addition, the agents they dispatched to investigate the blackscales' plots have returned with broken minds and terrible mutations.

### LIZARDFOLK IN FAERÛN

Large lizardfolk tribes exist in the southernmost reaches of Faerûn, mainly in the swampy areas of the jungles of Chult and Rethild, the Great Swamp, between Halruaa and Dambrath. Rumor has it that a ruined city in the heart of Rethild has had a corrupting influence on the lizardfolk tribes, spawning demonic lizard kings and queens. These half-fiends have united many tribes of their weaker kin and are slowly conquering the enormous swamp (see *Serpent Kingdoms*).

Lizardfolk also populate the warm marshes of the Western Heartlands, most notably the Lizard Marsh and the Marsh of Chelimber. Some lizardfolk have recently started singling out and attacking Zhentarim caravans that pass too close to the Marsh of Chelimber. In response, the Zhents now spread rumors of lizardfolk assaulting and devouring innocent travelers, hoping that someone eliminates the reptilian threat for them.

### LIZARDFOLK FEATS

The new feats presented here are frequently used by lizardfolk but might

be suited to any creature that meets the prerequisites.

### DEEP BREATHER [GENERAL]

You can hold your breath much longer than normal.

**Prerequisites:** Con 16.

**Benefit:** You can hold your breath for double the normal number of rounds before you risk drowning (see page 304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). For example, a human with this feat can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to four times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

**Normal:** A human can normally only hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to two times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

### CHAMELEON BLOOD

Lizardfolk with this feat can slightly shift the color of their scales, aiding them in blending in with dense vegetation.

**Prerequisites:** Lizardfolk, Cha 14.

**Benefit:** Lizardfolk with this feat gain a +6 racial bonus on Hide checks made in forested or swampy environments.

## REPTILIAN HEALING

Lizardfolk with this feat heal at an increased rate, much like many lesser reptilian creatures.

**Prerequisites:** Lizardfolk, Con 16, Great Fortitude.

**Benefit:** Lizardfolk with this feat regain hit points from normal healing at double the normal rate. For example, a full night's rest allows a lizardfolk with this feat to regain 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest restores 4 hit points per character level or Hit Die. This ability does not allow a lizardfolk to regenerate or reattach lost limbs.

**Normal:** A full night's rest normally only restores 1 hit point per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest usually only restores 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die.

## LIZARDFOLK TACTICS

Skilled guerilla combatants, lizardfolk warriors are experienced at fighting in small hunting parties or warbands. In such groups they make use of a variety

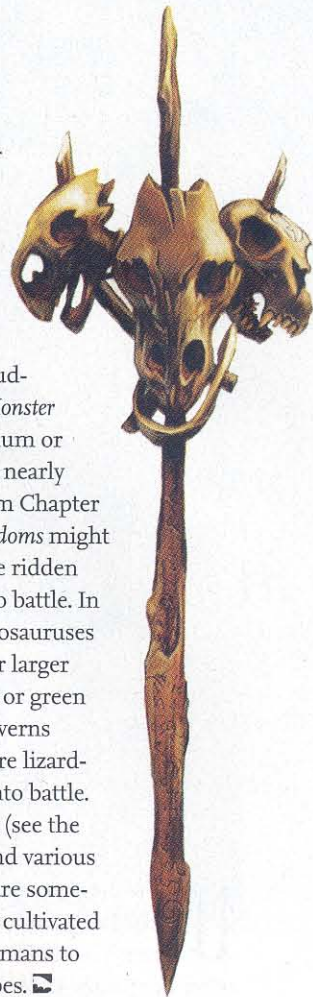
of tactics effective against prey, whatever shape it might take.

**Scaled Squads:** Obedient to powerful leaders, warbands of six to ten lizardfolk commonly follow commanders with barbarian or ranger levels. Skilled ambushers, frequently only half of a lizardfolk warband charges from cover into melee, leaving a reserve group to attack from range and cover the vanguard's retreat. Lizardfolk rarely fight to the death and commonly withdraw once reduced to half their hit points.

**Deep Divers:** Lizardfolk prefer to engage enemies in or near water. Using their hold breath ability to hide or retreat underwater, they regularly take advantage of the improved cover wading in water provides (see page 93 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). Heavily armed lizardfolk often drop their shields to fight underwater, as shields hamper their swimming abilities.

**Swamp Stalkers:** While the dense vegetation of their swampy homes makes the mounts of other humanoids impractical, lizardfolk frequently

domesticate animals for their cunning in battle. Creatures like crocodiles, deinonychuses, megaraptors, mudmaws (see the *Monster Manual II*), Medium or larger snakes, or nearly any creature from Chapter 6 of *Serpent Kingdoms* might follow or even be ridden by lizardfolk into battle. In addition, tyrannosaurus or other Huge or larger dinosaurs, black or green dragons, and wyverns might carry entire lizardfolk warbands into battle. Skeletal dragons (see the *Draconomicon*) and various plant creatures are sometimes created or cultivated by lizardfolk shamans to protect their tribes. ■



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**PS238**

## TO THE CAFETERIA... FOR JUSTICE!

**COMING THIS SUMMER!**

A COLLECTION OF THE BEST GAMING BOOKS, VOLUME 10 - ISSUE 10 OF THE GAMES AND



## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# MOONCALF

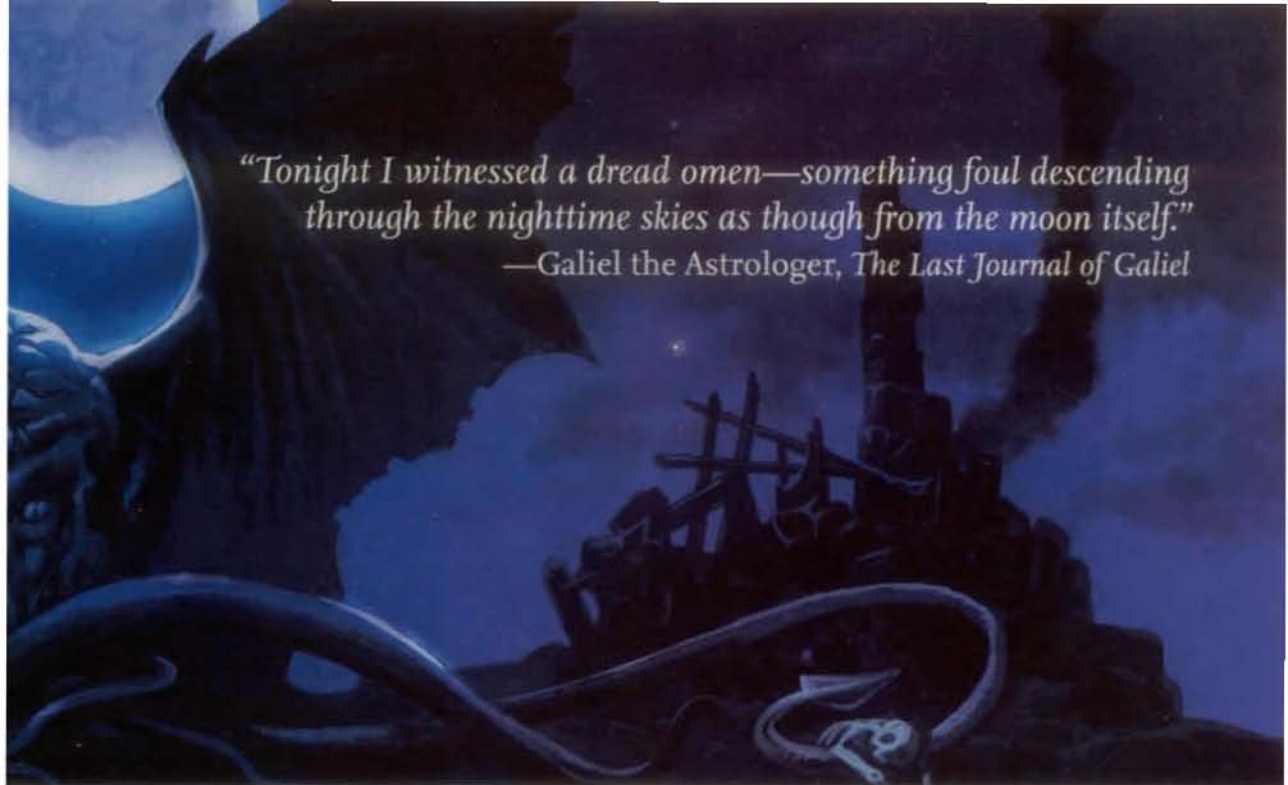
**M**assive and alien, rumored and feared, where the shadow of a mooncalf falls, tragedy follows. The living tools of beings distant and unfathomable, these flying terrors—masses of wings, tentacles, and sopping rubbery flesh—possess great intellect and even greater powers. Beholden of philosophies, goals, and motivations incomprehensible to any humanoid race, they cling to the highest reaches of the world, watching and waiting, malformed voyeurs and harbingers of doom.

### HISTORY OF THE MOONCALF

It is no surprise that mooncalves seem otherworldly, for their racial origins trace back to beings beyond any world. From the airless voids between worlds, titanic things of immense power known only as “moongods” came into being.

While other races first developed awareness on worlds nurtured by water, air, and earth, only endless expanses of cold and darkness nursed the moongods. Learning from the motion of the stars, their thoughts formed in ways utterly alien to any creature bound beneath a single sky, harmonizing them to the secrets of heavenly motions. Thus, the moongods developed astrology before any other art, holding the constellations themselves as deities of a kind.

Guided by their sacred stars, the moongods drifted through the void, eventually coming upon whole worlds of other beings. Fascinated by these blue-green orbs, the moongods sought to explore them but discovered they could not survive in the thick chemicals of air and water. Overly curious, though, many moongods peered too close, being drawn to their deaths like moths to a flame.



*"Tonight I witnessed a dread omen—something foul descending through the nighttime skies as though from the moon itself."*

—Galiel the Astrologer, *The Last Journal of Galiel*

Thus, the moongods created mooncalves—lesser aspects of themselves—better suited to explore these worlds. The mooncalves were given wings to fly through the thick resistance of air, as well as forms enabling them to survive and experience these new expanses of soft wetness. Birthed into the upper reaches of each world the moongods wished to explore, these creatures—half children, half living tools—were left to make whatever discoveries they could. As such, the first mooncalves came to ground, fully aware of their racial quest, the orphans of great powers that they only instinctually understand and can never reach.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE MOONCALF

Winged, tentacled masses of muscle, cartilage, and mucus, mooncalves are horrors to behold. Bulbous and uneven, their bodies resemble large brains fixed with dead white eyes, two thick tentacles longer than their wingspan, and a protective cluster of numerous smaller tentacle arms. Nestled at the base of this mass of smaller tentacles is a razor-sharp beak similar to a squid's, within which coil a pair of long, whip-thin tongues.

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOONCALF

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to mooncalves. Diviners, astologists, and others who study omens and the stars might possess this information.

#### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
15	A mooncalf is an intelligent, flying monstrosity that prefers high, solitary places and is often seen as an omen of ill fortune.
20	Mooncalves have keen senses and can see without the need for light. They hold control over storms and can command animals. Their strange flesh proves resistant to all but magical weapons.
25	Mooncalves are drawn to witness epic disasters. If they cannot find one occurring on their own, they are willing to manipulate events to create one. Thus, spotting one is not just an omen, but likely evidence that something cataclysmic might soon happen nearby.
30	Mooncalves believe themselves to be the tools of strange, otherworldly beings known as the moongods.

The flesh of a mooncalf is much denser than most terrestrial creatures, making it strangely resistant to nonmagical attacks. Awkward flyers, mooncalves jerk about like bait dangling on an invisible lure, but their powerful wings allow them to move like this at great speeds. Ill adapted to ground movement, earthbound mooncalves seem vulnerable. In truth their long tentacles have more than enough strength to drag their bodies

about in swift, yet ungainly twitches and wet flops. A typical mooncalf's core body measures 8 feet in diameter, with a total body weight of approximately 600 pounds.

Mooncalves don't have dietary needs like other creatures. Rather than requiring certain materials and minerals to survive, mooncalves flourish by consuming any substance—organic or inorganic. While they still starve if they don't consume



at least their body weight in materials every week, such a possibility seems unlikely. Mooncalves prefer a variety of food sources, and actively avoid eating the same material twice. Living organisms, however, seem to prove different enough that a mooncalf considers two different beings two different meals. Those few who have examined dead mooncalves have found that their bodies are essentially alchemical laboratories, capable of distilling and dissolving nearly any substance the creatures consume. In effect, they can digest nearly anything that they can eat. Thorough physical examination and observation of their eating habits, some scholars have proposed that

mooncalves are capable of “memorizing” whatever they eat, becoming familiar with not just their meals’ tastes and textures, but gaining intimate knowledge of every element and chemical that comprised the substance or being.

These powers of perception also reveal themselves in mooncalves’ telepathy, allowing them to communicate with any being within 100 feet. Although they rarely converse with creatures they deem food or part of their experiments, more cunning mooncalves sometimes use this ability to manipulate lesser beings. Their strange minds also provide them with a variety of powerful abilities, allowing them to

dominate the senses of weak-willed creatures and even alter their environments, either to better suit their needs or drive off threats.

Mooncalves do not sleep, although they have no immunity to magical sleep. Many mooncalves fly constantly, spending days or even weeks in the air. On worlds where low-hanging moons or floating chunks of land can be reached through flight, mooncalves prefer these as homes, but otherwise they find high mountains, hills, or ominous abandoned towers to serve as their lairs.

No young mooncalves have ever been sighted, leading to the belief that all mooncalves are the same age, spawned from the same single

## THE MOONGODS

### Demigods (Neutral Evil)

Although distant, uncaring deities, the moongods do attract a small number of humanoid worshippers. Mostly, these worshippers are those seeking power through knowledge—evil diviners and astrologers who form small cults, revering the secrets the moongods possess as much as the deities themselves. Occasionally, a mooncalf forms a cult to aid it in sowing dissent and disaster.

The moongods are symbolized by a moon shrouded by the shadows of tentacles. They have no true enemies, and no driving goals, making them unusually apathetic for deities.

**Portfolio:** Astrology, disasters, hidden knowledge, mooncalves.

**Domains:** Darkness\*, Evil, Knowledge, Travel.

**Favored Weapon:** Tentacle (for creatures that possess them) or spiked chain.

**Clerical Training:** Worshippers must learn all the constellations, and witness at least one major disaster during the course of their training.

**Quests:** The moongods are uncaring and unhearing, so they do not give their followers specific quests.

**Prayers:** Silent intonations of events the cleric has witnessed, which must be done while open to the night sky.

**Temples:** Windswept peaks far from any other habitation, with astrological signs and constellations carved into great circles of rock.

**Rites:** A major event, one that impacts no fewer than a thousand living, thinking creatures, must be witnessed at least once a decade. If such an event does not occur naturally, the cleric is required to arrange for one.

**Herald and Allies:** The moongods' herald is a massive 60 Hit Die moonlord known only as the Endless One. It has appeared over numerous epic disasters, many of which it is thought to have manipulated in their masters' names. The moongods have no planar allies, and clerics often summon common fiends with *planar ally* spells.

\*Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).

mass birth. Only slight color variations, differing numbers of tentacles, and size distinguish between individuals. Size variation among mooncalves also proves strange, as it appears to relate to experience, events witnessed, and variety of creatures consumed. In short, every tidbit of information a mooncalf gathers seems to imperceptibly add to its

bulk, eventually adding up, increasing its size as well as its already considerable powers as a moonlord.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE MOONCALF

Mooncalves were spawned fully knowledgeable and aware of their uncaring gods. Each inherited the drive to observe and the dispassionate

superiority its parents hold over all other living creatures. As such, they often seek homes upon high mountains or spires—comforted by the nearness of the stars—close to areas densely populated with animals and sentient creatures, between which they make no distinction.

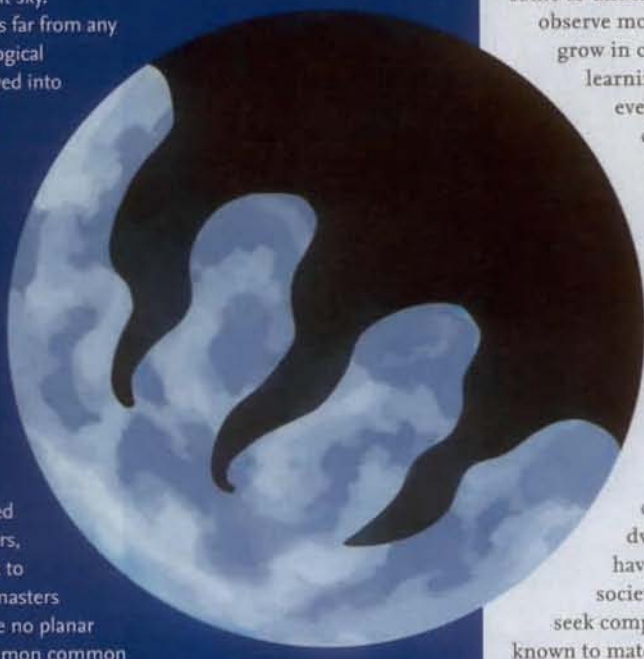
Thus, mooncalves spend their lives in research and observation, but they are rarely unobtrusive onlookers. Mooncalves seek to witness major events—particularly conflicts. While a small skirmish or minor fire might sate their curiosity for a few days, mooncalves seek truly epic battles, natural disasters, and upheavals of broad scope. As they come to understand the beings they observe more thoroughly, they grow in cunning and power, learning to engineer such

events. Some even turn to divination magic and astrology to predict such catastrophes, ranging far to witness titanic calamities. Regardless of their methods, those who know of mooncalves know them as harbingers of dreadful events.

With no need for tools, equipment, companionship or dwellings, mooncalves have no need to develop a society of their own, never seek companionship, and are not known to mate. Rarely, more experienced mooncalves build cults or networks of spies to help them find or create the disasters they seek. Besides such exceptions, however, the only company mooncalves long for is the return of the moongods and the cold embrace of the stars above.

### MOONLORDS

Although all mooncalves begin life as large creatures, as long as they continue witnessing and experiencing new events they never stop growing.



## ADVANCED MOONCALF

Most commonly, mooncalves advance by Hit Dice, gaining power as they witness more and greater tragedies, becoming titanic moonlords. Sometimes, however, they take levels of cleric, worshiping the enigmatic moongods, or adopting the path of the diviner to magically learn of impending calamities.

### MOONLORD

CR 16

Advanced mooncalf

NE Gargantuan magical beast

*Monster Manual II* 150

**Init** +6; **Senses** blindsight 100 ft., darkvision 100 ft., keen senses, telepathy; **Listen** +15, **Spot** +19

**AC** 27, touch 8, flat-footed 25

**hp** 465 (28 HD); **DR** 10/magic

**Fort** +23, **Ref** +21, **Will** +16

**Spd** 40 ft. (8 squares); fly 150 ft. (poor)

**Melee** 2 tentacle rakes +27 **melee** (4d6+23/19–20) and 6 tentacle-arms +22 (2d6+16)\*

**Space** 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft., 50 ft. with tentacle rake

**Base Atk** +28; **Grp** +53

**Attack Options** Cleave, Power Attack

**Special Attack** bite, improved grab

**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 9):

1/day—*call lightning* (DC 13), *control weather*, *control winds* (DC 15), *dominate animal* (DC 13), *greater magic fang*, *protection from elements*, *quench* (DC 13), *resist elements*

**Abilities** Str 36, Dex 14, Con 32, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 11

**SQ** Tentacles

**Feats** Alertness, Blind-Fighting, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle rake), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will<sup>B</sup>, Lightning Reflexes<sup>B</sup>, Omen of Crows, Omen of Storms, Power Attack, Toughness<sup>B</sup>

**Skills** Concentration +39 Hide +26, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (history) +36, Knowledge (local) +36, Listen +36, Spellcraft +36, Spot +36

**Bite (Ex):** With each successful grapple check a mooncalf automatically hits a grabbed opponent with its bite attack, dealing 4d8+6 points of slashing damage.

**Improved Grab (Ex):** If a mooncalf hits an opponent of Gargantuan size or smaller with a tentacle rake attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it automatically hits with its bite attack in the same round. Thereafter, the mooncalf has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use its tentacle to hold the opponent (–20 penalty on grapple check, but the mooncalf is not considered grappled). In either case, each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals tentacle rake and bite damage.

**Tentacles:** An opponent can attack either of a mooncalf's tentacles as if they were weapons (see Sunder on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*). Both of a mooncalf's tentacles have 20 hit points. If the mooncalf is currently grappling a target with a tentacle, it usually uses another limb to make its attack of opportunity against the sunder attack. Severing a mooncalf's tentacle deals damage to the creature equal to half the limb's hit points. A mooncalf regrows a severed limb in 1d10+10 days.

**Keen Senses (Ex):** A mooncalf sees four times as well as a human in low-light conditions and twice as well in normal light.

**Spell-like Abilities:** A mooncalf's spell-like abilities are Charisma based.

\* Includes adjustment for 10-point Power Attack.

Some mooncalves have been documented as having grown to nearly 20 feet in diameter with tentacles more than 50 feet long. As the creature grows, it becomes more and more like the unknowable moongods that spawned it, gaining a touch of their otherworldly abilities. Many mooncalves turn to spellcasting at some point in their lives, channeling their innate power into magic. Those that don't, however, eventually become Gargantuan and are considered moonlords, creatures that challenge even evil dragons as threats to the world around them.

## HARBINGER FEATS

Upon advancing to 28 Hit Dice, a mooncalf becomes a moonlord and gains the potential to actually bring about evil omens. These are acquired in the form of harbinger feats, motes of otherworldly power moonlords use to tap into their moongod heritage. All harbinger feats are supernatural abilities, and require an hour to use, creating an aura centered on the moonlord that lasts for 24 hours. A moonlord can only use one harbinger feat per week. Characters within an affected area may make a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check to realize the omens they are seeing point toward a single, magical source for the ill fortune befalling the area.

## MIXED OMENS

Multiple bad signs appear throughout the land.

**Prerequisite:** Any three harbinger feats, mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Mixed Omens can use two different harbinger feats in one week. The feats may be used concurrently.

**Normal:** A mooncalf can only use one harbinger feat a week.

## OMEN OF BONES

A faint breath of rot pervades the land.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with this feat taints the region in an aura of death. All undead within a 50-mile

radius gain turn resistance +2. This stacks with any turn resistance the creature might already possess.

Ghostly glimpses, distorted reflections, and eerie mirages haunt an area under an Omen of Bones.

## OMEN OF CROWS

The land seems dark, as though it were but one vast graveyard.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Omen of Crows can create an aura that dampens healing magic. Within a 50-mile radius, all *cure* spells heal one less hit point of damage per casting.

An area under an Omen of Crows is often infested with crows or similar scavenging birds.

## OMEN OF FLIES

Pestilence spreads through the land.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Omen of Flies can create an aura that strengthens diseases of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against disease take a -2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Flies is often infested with flies, maggots, and other insectile vermin.

## OMEN OF LOSS

Memories become lost and history fades away.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Omen of Loss can create an aura of forgetfulness. All creatures within a 50-mile radius take a -2 penalty on all bardic knowledge rolls and Knowledge skill checks.

A thick mist and haunting lights settle over a land afflicted by an Omen of Loss.

## OMEN OF SNAKES

Poison becomes more virulent.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Omen of Snakes can create an aura that strengthens poisons and venoms of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against poison take a -2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Snakes is often infested with snakes.

## OMEN OF STORMS

A feeling of dread settles over the land.

**Prerequisite:** Mooncalf, 28 HD.

**Benefit:** A mooncalf with Omen of Storms can create an aura that spreads fear and unease. Within a 50-mile radius all creatures with an Intelligence score of 3 or lower must make a DC 15 Will save or be shaken for the whole day.

An area under a Omen of Storms has cloudy, stormy weather.

## ALTERNATIVE MOONCALF ORIGINS

The idea of mooncalves being spawned by a race of alien gods that exist in the void between worlds isn't appropriate for all cosmologies. Without changing their basic behavior, it's possible to use an alternative origin for mooncalves to bring them more in-line with any campaign world. A few examples are presented here:

**Aberrant Creations:** Although mooncalves believe themselves to be the spawn of otherworldly deities, they might in truth have been constructed as servants of illithids, grell, or any number of other aberrant creatures. Mooncalves might have escaped their original masters, or they might be unknowingly vulnerable to the magic or psionic powers their progenitors use to secretly control them.

Alternatively, within recent memory the illithid god Maanzecorian was destroyed. The moongods might embody the lingering fragments of that deity's sundered divinity, or be the remnants of Maanzecorian's orphaned herald.

**Fiendish Origins:** The moongods might actually be a single evil deity who uses mooncalves as its primary agents in the mortal realm. Alternatively, mooncalves might be a new breed of fiendish inhabitant belched from the pits of Carceri, Gehenna, or Hades.

**Other Planes:** The unknowable creatures that created the mooncalves




## ORIGINS OF THE MOONCALF

The otherworldly mooncalf first appeared in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* in the opening scenes of the adventure *Heart of Nightfang Spire*. Alien and unknown, this monstrosity graced the module's cover with its pseudonatural presence.

Besides merely being a creation of D&D, however, the word "mooncalf" appears in many dictionaries, defined as a fool, a freak, or an deformed embryo, afflicted by the corruptive influence of the moon. The word also appears most notably in the works of Shakespeare as an insult leveled toward the character Caliban in Act III of *The Tempest*.

The mooncalf currently appears in the *Monster Manual II* and has statistics updated to D&D 3.5 available at [wizards.com/dnd/files/DnD35\\_update\\_booklet.zip](http://wizards.com/dnd/files/DnD35_update_booklet.zip).

might actually be natives of the Astral Plane. It's not the space between worlds they inhabit, but the space between realities. Mooncalves seek high places because the rarified air is more like astral space, which they have no innate way of returning to.

Alternatively, mooncalves are inscrutable, alien horrors, making them perfect vanguard agents of some intelligence from either the depths of the Ethereal Plane or the Far Realm (see *DRAGON* #330). 

# Shrouded in

# DEATH

## The Ecology of the Mummy

by Terry Edwards · illustrated by Wayne Reynolds

*They were the stuff of legend in lands half a world away. It was unheard of that a mummy should exist in the tropical southern continent, but there I was in the cavern tombs of the Mazteceta, frozen in fear as the undead monster pounded the life from my companions. At the time I didn't realize that the creature, with painted black skin stretched over clay molded in the shape of a man, was a mummy. When my wits were about me, I fled the cavern alongside the guide who had led our company to the tombs. He was injured, struck by the mummy, but nothing beyond my ability to heal, or so I thought. Within two days, the young man turned to dust before my eyes, cursed by the ancient guardian of an extinct civilization.*

*Years later I would return with the knowledge and power to master the monster. It now stands on display among my own creations and mummies collected from around the world.*

—Uleram Zehad, Author of *You Live Again, Forever*

### Ecological Notes

Mummification is the state of a corpse in which bacteria and fungi are unable to grow and cause decay. This preserved state can occur naturally in the proper conditions or can be imposed upon a corpse artificially. Whether a mummy is created by natural or artificial means, there are only two ways to animate it into as undead: an act of the gods or a create greater undead spell.


Three natural settings consistently mummify a corpse given enough time. The hot climate and salty sand of the desert are ideal conditions to preserve a corpse. Buried in the sand, a corpse loses all moisture in a matter of weeks. Another ideal condition combines the freezing temperature and dry winds found in many glacial and mountain regions. The bitter cold prevents decay as the dry wind slowly dehydrates the corpse, leaving a “freeze-dried” mummy. A corpse can be frozen without being dehydrated, but a mummy created in such a fashion is subject to decay if temperatures rise above freezing. One last natural mummy type that bears mention is the bog mummy. Peat bogs, found in most temperate coastal regions, are ideal for mummy creation. Peat bogs are highly acidic beds of decaying moss. A corpse left in the cold, wet peat is preserved as its muscle dissolves and its skin cures to a leathery texture. Buried in the acidic peat, the bones of a corpse lose calcium, leaving them spongy; the result is often a deformed mummy.

Many methods have been established to preserve the dead. The best known of these comes from an ancient desert civilization. Following the guidelines perfected over millennia, the first step in creation is to wash the corpse in palm wine, although any disinfecting alcohol suffices. The brain and internal organs of the corpse are then removed, leaving only the heart, which is said to be a vital organ for rebirth of the body. Canopic


jars are used to store the preserved organs, one jar each for liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines. It is believed that each jar represents a different god, and they are faced in one of the four cardinal directions. Some sages claim these jars store an animated mummy's life force much like a lich's phylactery. This is a misconception that has cost many a tomb robber his life.

After removing the organs, the skull is rinsed with palm wine and the abdominal cavity is stuffed with bags of incense and spices. Salt is then packed around the body to dehydrate the corpse (an average human corpse requires 400 pounds of salt to dehydrate). The corpse is left in a hot, dry room until mummified, a process that generally takes 35 days. According to the ancient method, the mummy is rubbed with frankincense and myrrh and wrapped with strips of linen held in place with a liquid resin. These linens are often inscribed with spells to protect the mummy in the afterlife. Gold caps on the fingers and toes are the finishing touches prior to the rituals and spells allowing the mummy to live again.


Clay mummies predate even the earliest wrapped mummies, and their creation process is very different. For this type of mummy, the skin is carefully removed from the mummy to be used later, and the internal tissues (fat, muscle, organs) are discarded. After being stripped of all flesh, the skeleton is meticulously cleaned and then reassembled with support sticks



**THE SKULL:** the brain is removed through the nasal passage and the skull rinsed with palm wine.



**ABDOMINAL CAVITY:** All internal organs are removed except the heart. The chest and abdominal cavity are then stuffed with bags of herbs and incense.



**ORGAN JARS:** Canopic jars are used to store the preserved organs. Unlike a lich's phylactery, these jars give the possessor no ability to harm the mummy.

tied to the bones where needed. Reeds are stuffed into the skull, and clay is molded around the skeleton to replace lost tissues. Skin is then reapplied over the clay and painted black with a water-resistant pigment.

These are just two examples of preparing a corpse for animation as a mummy. As long as the basic elements of preservation are present, a mummy can be made. For instance, in a tropical climate, one could wrap special plants around the corpse to dehydrate and cure it. Smoking a corpse could be another way to preserve the dead for animation as a mummy. In a futuristic campaign, a corpse could be soaked in a formaldehyde-like concoction, preserving the corpse with a more life-like appearance.

Mummies are most often found in ancient ruins, the strongholds of powerful clerics, and areas conducive to natural mummification. When created, mummies serve primarily as guardians of tombs, temples, and other important religious sites. Natural mummies tend to wander aimlessly, destroying all life that crosses their path. Most mummies do not actively collect treasure, but their lairs might accumulate treasure left by slain intruders. Ancient cultures often entombed their dead with treasures collected throughout the deceased's life, believing that you could take your belongings with you into the afterlife. Depending on the wealth the mummy possessed in life, tomb robbing could be a very profitable endeavor.

### Society Notes

Mummies usually have a close spiritual connection to the people who created them. Many cultures mummified their dead to protect the deceased's spirit in the afterlife. Others placed the mummies of family members in the home so that they could be together forever. In all cases, the mummy is a link between the living and the dead.

In cultures that mummify their dead, an animated mummy might be venerated as a living god. In this case, the mummy could be housed in a temple and placated with offerings and sacrifices. The mummy would likely be very important to its people, representing the vengeful wrath of the gods when worshipers were unable to please it or serving as a protector of the village in times of attack.

To appease the gods, some cultures resort to human sacrifice, either leaving the exposed corpse of the unfortunate victim on a frozen mountain peak or submerging it in a swamp. These sites become important religious locations, oracles where those in need can breach the veil between worlds and petition the dead. The dead are mummies animated by the god to whom they were sacrificed, serving the living as ancestral advisors or in other ways as the deity decrees.

A mummy's relationship with humanoids is dependent upon how the humanoids view death or the undead. Creatures without negative cultural views of the undead generally find the mummies beneficial to their existence.

### Killer Creature Combos

Mummies are known to associate or share lairs with many different creatures, both living and nonliving.

**Mummy and Will-O'-Wisp:** Bog mummies are prized companions to the swamp-dwelling will-o'-wisp. When seen at a distance, this pair looks like a lantern-bearing traveler having difficulty navigating the swamp. The will-o'-wisp can even call out to potential victims to lure them closer. By the time their victims are near enough to discern their real appearance, the will-o'-wisp is feeding on the emotions of those who have succumbed to the mummy's despair ability. While the mummy engages combatants, the will-o'-wisp can appear where most needed to deliver its shock attack.

A single will-o'-wisp and one mummy is an EL 6 encounter.

**Mummy and Mimic:** Mummy tombs are often stuffed with treasures, offerings, statues, and sarcophagi. Mimics are sometimes sealed in tombs to protect the deceased's wealth from grave robbers. A mimic hidden among the tomb's contents is almost impossible to spot until it is too late. A foe paralyzed by the mummy's despair ability is easy prey for the mimic's grapple, and a grappled opponent is an easy target for the mummy's slam attack.

A single mummy and two mimics is an EL 8 encounter.

**Mummy and Brown Mold:** Brown mold is often found growing abundantly in a mummy's lair. A mummy is immune to the mold's cold subdual damage, and when PCs employ fire against the mummy, the mold doubles in size.

Two mummies and a patch of brown mold is an EL 6 encounter.

**Mummy and Zombie:** Other undead are immune to the mummy's despair ability, which is essential if one plans to share space with them. While the abilities of these monsters don't make for a fantastic combination, the strength of pairing these two undead lies in deception. With a little work prior to animating the zombies, their creator can disguise them as mummies. A zombie corpse can undergo the same mummification process as a true mummy and then simply be animated as a zombie instead of being the recipient of a *create greater undead* spell. With any luck, the deception will lure PCs into using unnecessary resources they would never waste on foes as weak as zombies.

A single mummy and two zombies is an EL 4 encounter.

### Vs. PCs

The information below describes how best to use a mummy's abilities and is intended to help a DM run a mummy NPC. Players should skip this section and instead read the Vs. Mummies section later in this article for information on battling mummies.

**Despair, Use It or Lose It:** A mummy's despair ability can only affect a given creature once per day and only for 1d4 rounds. To put this ability to its best use, make sure the mummy is in melee with the PCs when they first see it. If any of the PCs are paralyzed with fear, the mummy should move in for a coup de grace, even if it must risk attacks from other foes to do so.

**Trigger Your Traps:** A crafty rogue can all too often find and disable the traps that litter a mummy's lair. The best way to prevent this is to have the mummy set off the traps. A mummy is completely unaffected by poison gas and takes little to no damage from most other traps after factoring in its resistance to blows and damage reduction.

**No Holds Barred:** If a particular PC is giving the mummy trouble, start a grapple. If successful, the mummy will still be able to deal damage with its slam attack, but the grappled PC will be forced to break the grapple or use a light weapon. Grappling also places severe restrictions on what spells a PC can cast and requires the caster to make a Concentration check. The loss of the mummy's Dexterity bonus to AC while

grappling is inconsequential since the mummy has no bonus.

**A Helping (Magical) Hand:** Generally used as guardians of tombs or treasures, a mummy's creator usually invests a little time crafting traps and casting spells to aid his undead sentinel. Magic traps such as *glyph of warding*, *greater glyph of warding*, and *symbol* are favorites of the evil clerics who animate mummies. Common choices for glyphs include *bane*, *circle of doom*, *desecrate*, and *doom*. For areas that are maintained, *unhallow* is a very effective spell, and if *protection from elements (fire)* is the spell effect tied to the site, the mummy's biggest weakness is practically eliminated.

**Tactics:** If possible, initiate combat when the mummy is in melee range of the PCs. The mummy's slow movement and lack of a ranged attack leave it vulnerable if spotted at a distance. Spellcasters are the biggest threat, so charge the cleric, sorcerer, or wizard, overrunning other PCs if necessary.

### **Vs. Mummies**

If your party runs into a mummy, don't despair—there's plenty you can do to overcome a mummy's abilities.

**Do Not Despair:** If the party fails to overcome a mummy's despair ability, the resulting paralysis could give the mummy enough time to pound them into dust. A paladin's aura of courage is the best defense against despair. Paladins of at least 2nd level are immune to fear effects and grant all who remain within 10 feet of them a +4 morale bonus to their saving throws against fear effects. If you have no paladin in your group, you can still bolster Will saves with spells or bardic music. *Bless*, *protection from evil*, *remove fear*, and *aid* all improve saves against fear effects. If a party member has already succumbed to despair, the *remove fear* spell allows a new saving throw with a +4 morale bonus. *Remove paralysis* negates the effect for one person or allows a new save with a +4 resistance bonus for two people or +2 for three to four people.

**This Guy's Tough:** Mummies are resistant to blows, taking half damage from physical attacks. After damage is halved, the remaining damage must exceed the mummy's damage reduction to actually harm it. There is no way around the mummy's resistance to blows, but you can increase your damage to

compensate. Weapons with high damage capability are an obvious choice. Using weapons two-handed allows you to add one-and-a-half times your Strength bonus to damage, making the most of each attack. Power Attack is also a good option; don't be afraid to use this feat to maximum effect since a hit that deals little damage won't harm the mummy anyway. To overcome the mummy's damage reduction, it is wise to have a weapon with at least a +1 enhancement. If you do not have a magic weapon, try the *magic weapon* or *shillelagh* spells.

**Fire and Magic:** Mummies are particularly vulnerable to magical and non-magical fire-based attacks. Although expensive at low levels, alchemist's fire is a great weapon against the dry husk of a mummy. Damage spells are good, but fire spells are better. The most effective low-level spells include *burning hands*, *flame blade*, *flaming sphere*, and *produce flame*. Keep in mind that cure spells damage undead, so feel free to dump useless spells for spontaneous cure spells. *Disrupt undead* can come in handy, dealing just enough damage to finish off a badly wounded mummy.

**Rotten Mummy:** Mummy rot is arguably the most devastating disease known. Successful saving throws do not allow a character to recover, and the DC of 20 makes preventing damage a hard task at best. A *remove disease* spell is the best cure for mummy rot, but at low levels you might be relying on the local temple for help. Remember that a Heal check can replace a saving throw to buy time until the disease is removed.

**Tactics:** When combating undead, a turning attempt should always be the first action. If the cleric is successful, the party should follow up with fire-based attacks to destroy the mummy.

A rogue is often most useful searching for and disabling traps that are all too often present in a mummy's lair. Bolster the Fortitude saves of melee combatants; the best defense against mummy rot is to not contract it. Mummies move slowly, so take advantage of their speed with hit-and-run tactics. If you expect to fight mummies, have the party druid rig a *fire trap* on a door through which you can lure the mummies.

### **NPC Mummies**

The standard mummy as presented in the *Monster Manual* is great for challenging

low-level PCs or as a random encounter in ancient ruins or isolated dungeons. However, when faced with PCs of higher level, the mummy needs a few more tricks to challenge the group.

Advancement in Hit Dice is an option, but adding a character class increases the mummy's power and can provide a good story for an adventure. Below are some example adventure scenarios:

**Sorcerer:** A naturally mummified corpse animated by an evil god is a horrid villain. It's even more of a horrid villain when the mummy is granted the power of a sorcerer to help carry out whatever plans the animating god has.

Since mummies generally have high Charisma scores, they make good sorcerers. Mummy sorcerers animated by a deity, as in the above scenario, know the spells that will best aid the mummy in its particular mission. In general, mummy sorcerers prefer damage spells, especially from the Necromancy school, but they never use spells with the fire descriptor.

**Blackguard:** Great heroes and champions of war are highly revered by the people they fight for. Often immortalized through mummification upon their demise, the preserved icon serves as a symbol of hope to the living. Unfortunately, conflict on the Material Plane tends to have repercussions in other planes. A powerful outsider wronged by the deceased hero could take vengeance by animating the mummy of the hero.

Under the tutelage of an evil outsider, such a mummy can become a foul agent of evil, a blackguard. The blackguard's abilities are based on Wisdom and Charisma, both of which are typically high scores for mummies. A mummy blackguard's aura of despair combines well with its despair ability, paralyzing enemies for an advantage to its smite good and sneak attacks. Preferred mummy blackguard spells include inflict spells (to heal its wounds), *bull's strength*, (to boost its combat abilities), and *protection from elements* (to offset its fire vulnerability). A mummy blackguard who was a paladin in life might gain the fallen paladin blackguard abilities as though it retained its paladin levels.

**Cleric:** The religious leaders of ancient civilizations were often perceived as the physical manifestation of the gods. These clerics were the bond between their people and the immortals they served,

so they were the representation of the gods if not the true manifestation. Some clerics wish to continue leading their people as a divine conduit even beyond death. These clerics ensure that after death, their flesh is preserved and their spirit "reawakened."

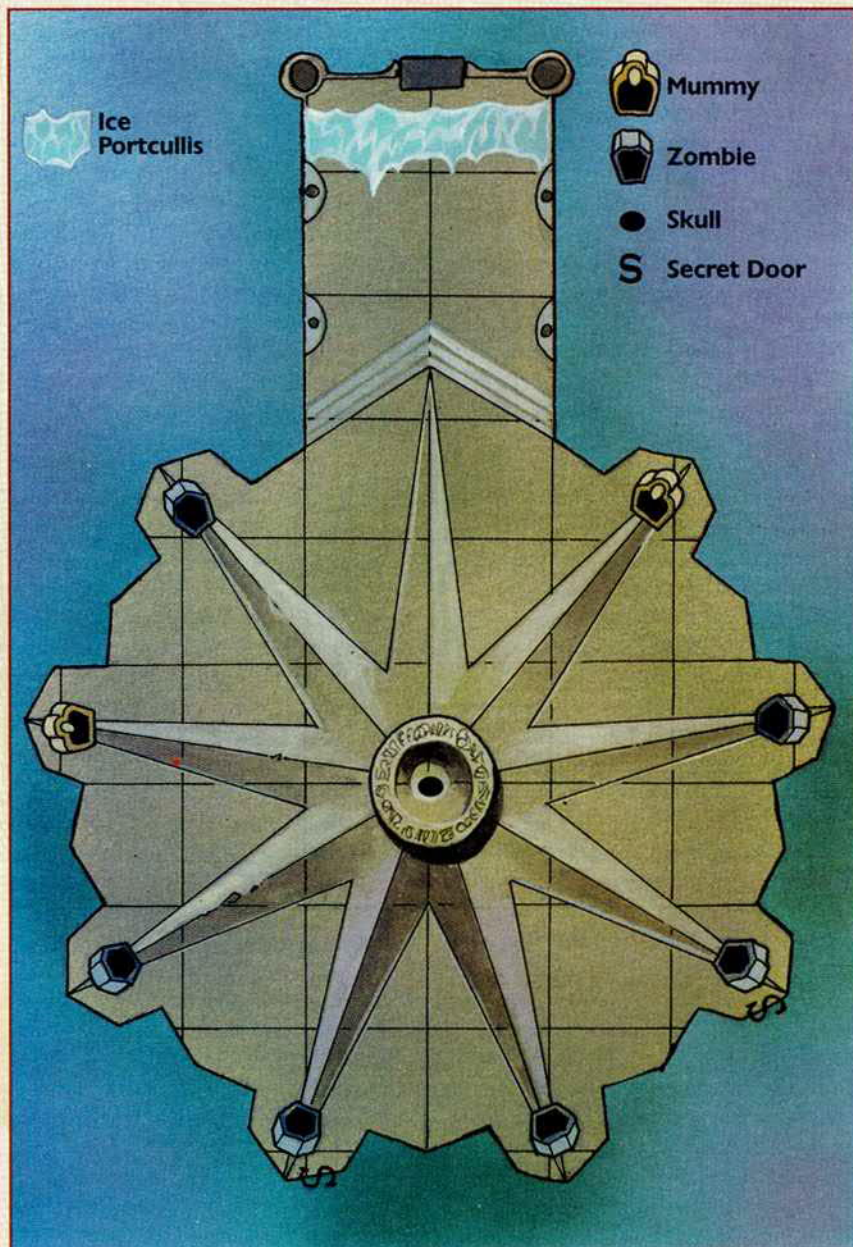
Mummy clerics are fearsome creatures, usually commanding a group of lesser undead and fanatic acolytes. Common domains of mummy clerics include Death, Destruction, Evil, Law, and Protection, but this is dependent on the deity worshiped. Mummy clerics prefer spells that weaken opponents (*bane, doom, bestow curse*), protect or strengthen their immortal bodies (*deseccrate, resist elements, spell immunity*), or spells that cause suffering (*blindness/deafness, contagion, poison*).

**Monk:** Within secluded monasteries, monks strive for perfection of body, mind, and spirit. The road to perfection is a long one, requiring discipline and patience. Those seeking a shortcut can find it among some unscrupulous orders that use mummification to attain perfection of the body. Free from the demands of the flesh, the monk can focus exclusively on the balance of mind and spirit.

This might seem an odd class for undead creatures to take, but the mummy meets the alignment qualification, and the abilities of the monk compliment, or compensate for, the mummy's. Flurry of blows and the monk's unarmed base attack bonus provide the mummy with potent pummeling power along with a stunning attack and more chances to spread disease. The monk's unarmored speed makes up for the mummy's poor mobility, and evasion provides protection from fire spells.

### ☞ Magic Items

Many mummies are preserved with the belief that the deceased will require its body in the afterlife. To aid mummies in their journey to the next life, they are often entombed with items of protection. *Rings of protection* and *rings of elemental resistance* are common, as are *scarabs* and other magical jewelry. Scrolls offer protection to spellcasting mummies, and jewels in the form of *ioun stones* can be found in the tombs of wealthy individuals. Tombs are often filled with guardian statues, some of which can serve the mummy as *figurines of wondrous power*. Mummies highly prize



any treasures they possessed in life and do not take lightly the theft of their belongings.

### ☞ Mummy Variations

All mummy variations presented are identical to the mummy found on page 138 of the *Monster Manual* with the following exceptions:

**Clay Mummy:** Clay mummies do not have the fire vulnerability special quality. Instead, they have the bludgeoning vulnerability ability described below.

**Bludgeoning Vulnerability (Ex):** A clay mummy takes normal damage from bludgeoning weapons. The mummy's immunity to blows does not apply to bludgeoning weapons.

**Ice Mummy:** A creature that succumbs to an ice mummy's rot freezes and shatters, melting into nothing at the first thaw. Ice mummies have the cold subtype ability described below.

**Cold Subtype (Ex):** Cold immunity; double damage from fire except on a successful save.

**Bog Mummy:** A creature that succumbs to a bog mummy's rot breaks down into a moist, compost-like substance, washing away at the first rain.

### Lair of the Ice Mummy

This lair is fairly typical of mummy tombs presenting common traps, enchantments, and monsters. In this case, the lair is the guard station to the

secret treasure rooms of Dem Hazed, glacial stronghold of the evil cleric Ameran of the North.

Frosty white mist hangs lazily in the chill air of the room, which is carved from solid ice. The floor is covered with a thin layer of sand, providing some traction on the slick surface of the ice. A dim light glows softly through the mist from the room; it emanates from an altar of dark ice in the center of the room, upon which sits a black skull.

The altar is carved from a block of frozen unholy water and glows due to a *continual flame* placed within it. The black skull atop the altar is enchanted with an *unhallow* spell and trapped with a *greater glyph of warding*. As per the *unhallow* spell's description, there is a spell effect tied to it. In this case, the site provides *protection from elements (fire)* to undead within the spell's radius. Destroying the skull has no effect on the *unhallow* spell but does trigger the glyph.

The temperature within the room hovers around 23 degrees Fahrenheit.

While undead are immune to subdual damage caused by the cold temperature, unprotected PCs are subject to cold effects (see page 86 of the *DUNGEON*

*MASTER'S Guide*) if they stay in the area too long.

**Trap (EL 2):** An ice portcullis is triggered when either of the mummies steps on a trigger stone directly in front of their alcoves. The portcullis is a 2-foot-thick wall of ice (72 hp/10 ft. square) that falls directly in front of the door.

**Ice Portcullis Trap:** CR 2; +10 melee (3d6/x2 crit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). Note: Damage applies only to those underneath the portcullis. The portcullis blocks the passageway.

**Trap (EL 6):** *Greater glyph of warding* has been cast on the black skull that rests upon the altar in the center of the room and is set off when touched or otherwise disturbed.

**Greater Glyph of Warding:** CR 6 spell, no reset, 20-ft-radius burst; *circle of doom* (1d8 + 15 points of damage, Fortitude save DC 17 halves); Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 30). Note: The negative energy released by *circle of doom* cures undead rather than harming them.

**Creatures (EL 6):** The undead guardians of Ameran maintain a ceaseless vigil over this area. They wait in their alcoves until they see or hear the


PCs, at which point they attack. Two ice mummies are mixed in with a group of zombies. The zombies and mummies are indistinguishable from each other since the corpses were all mummified by freezing prior to animation.

**Ice Mummies (2):** CR 3; Medium-size undead; HD 6d12+3; hp 42 each; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (-1 Dex, +8 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 17; Atk +6 melee (1d6+4, slam); SA despair, mummy rot; SQ undead, resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, fire vulnerability, cold subtype; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 8, Con -, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 15.

**Skills:** Hide +8, Listen +9, Move Silently +8, Spot +9. **Feats:** Alertness, Toughness.

**Zombies (6):** CR 1/2; Medium-size undead; HD 2d12+3; hp 16 each; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (-1 Dex, +2 natural) touch 9, flat-footed 11; Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, slam); SQ undead, partial actions only; AL N; Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 8, Wis 10, Cha 1.

**Feats:** Toughness.

**SQ—Partial Actions Only (Ex):** Zombies have poor reflexes and can perform only partial actions. 



The advertisement is set against a dark red, textured background. At the top, three banners read "Of Gods and Henchmen", "TWO NEW COLLECTIONS", and "Livin' La Vida Dorka!". In the center, the "DORK STORM" logo is above two cartoon characters. Below the logo, text says "Ask your game or comic retailer to carry your favorite titles from Dork Storm Press!". At the bottom, a banner says "HUZ-FREAKIN'-ZAH!". On the left is the cover of "The Nodwick Chronicles II: OF GODS AND HENCHMEN". On the right is the cover of "LIVIN' LA VIDA DORKA" by John Kovalic, "The complete DORK TOWER comic strip collection, Vol. 1".

**The Nodwick Chronicles, Volume Two** continues the saga of Nodwick the Henchman and his adventurer employers! Thrill as they battle evil deities, unravel the mysteries of alternate dimensions, grapple with cosmic power and delve into the darkest dungeons! Collecting issues 7 through 12 of the fan-favorite comic book, this volume is a must-have for hench-heads everywhere! Only \$15.95, on sale this summer!

**At last! ALL the DORK TOWER comic strips** from *Scrye Magazine*, *Gamespy.com* and *Interactive Week*, collected together for the first time in a beautiful trade paperback that just screams **"IT MUST BE MINE!"** Most of this collection has never been reprinted before! As *USA Today* said, "Lighten up with some fun 'toons courtesy of the prolific John Kovalic!" Just \$15.95 for this tome of hilarity!

by F. Wesley Schneider  
 illustrated by Peter Bergting

# THE ECOLOGY OF NIGHT HAGS

*Begone, you hag who lurks in dreams, who drains our life through cries and screams. Gods bless this ward to keep me whole, and keep the night hag from my soul.*

—Van Richter's Guide to Witches

INnumerable fears plague mortals, but among them fear of the dark, the intangible, and the unknown rank as some of the greatest. Hailing from the bleakest hells of the Outer Planes' endless infinities, countless creatures embody these most potent of fears. Among these extraplanar terrors, no one cruel breed so seeks to wreak horror and spread suffering as the nightmare queens of Hades, the sinister and hateful night hags. With a lust for power that rivals even the most ambitious devils combined with the hungry bloodlust of demons, night hags insatiably crave that which only the living provide. Commoner or prince, human or elf, all have reason to fear, as night hags hunger equally for the souls of all mortals.

Having preyed upon the living for countless centuries, warnings of night hags and their powers have become the stuff of superstitions and old wives' tales. Although little truth

remains in such country advice, many such tales find their basis in actual practices capable of warding off a night hag's predatory wrath. This article examines the nature of night hags, collecting an assortment of such rumors, legends, and advice, to best prepare those who would face these otherworldly horrors.

## HISTORY OF NIGHT HAGS

For many extraplanar creatures, it is enough to say that they always were, and thus they are now. However, night hags are as ancient as any fiend, and their similarities to the hags of the Material Plane raises the peculiar question of their origins.

Many scholars speculate that night hags are merely planar relatives of normal hags; another breed, native to the Outer Planes, and different only in the same ways that annis hags differ from green hags or sea hags. However, the fearful abilities and cruel cunning of night hags make them seem like ideals of the hag race. Regardless of their origins, most of those who investigate the specifics of night hags are interested in a much different history: the countless stories and towering records of terrorized countries and lifeless villages that owe their ruin to these hag queens.



## PHYSIOLOGY OF NIGHT HAGS

Even when compared to other hags, night hags appear as grotesque crones. Said to look like extraordinarily ugly human women, such a statement does an irreparable disservice to the gender of that species. Thus, a more apt description might compare them to small, female trolls; their skin ranging from a light purple-blue all the way to near black and blistered with the foul planar diseases they carry.

Nearly all night hags wear wild manes of coarse black hair with bones, severed fingers, and small trinkets woven into it in whatever manner they believe makes them appear most threatening. This grotesque coif often dangles over a night hag's face and much of her body, possibly hiding her rows of awkwardly protruding pointed teeth dripping with diseased saliva. Above, a pair of deep hollows veil hellish red pupils, little more than maddened pinpricks looking out over a sharply pointed nose.

To augment their fearsome appearances, night hags often cover their grotesquely emaciated bodies in self-inflicted tattoo-like scars. This sickly, tormented facade belies a night hag's significant strength and the threat of her wicked claws. However, many of a night hag's joints seem to bend in awkward ways, disturbing to mortal witnesses, which make them relatively slow and ungainly creatures.

## NIGHT HAG KNOWLEDGE

A character might know something about night hags from stories or prior studies. The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to night hags.

### Knowledge

(the planes)

DC	Result
10	Some foul creatures haunt the dreams of mortals, wearing them down with increasingly horrible nightmares that eventually kill.
15	Night hags are fearful beings from the Outer Planes, more powerful than other hags, that take the forms of mortals and hunger for the flesh and souls of innocent creatures.
20	Night hags are mistresses of nightmares that put their enemies to sleep and strangle them while unconscious. They are immune to many forces that affect mortals, such as fire and cold, and they never sleep.
25	Night hags are far different creatures from normal hags, with vast knowledge of forbidden secrets and the power to become ethereal. Fortunately, night hags are vulnerable to weapons of magic cold iron.
30	Night hags form alliances with a multitude of evil extraplanar creatures, know much of their ways, and afflict their enemies with the diseases of the lower planes. All night hags carry <i>heartstones</i> , which they need to become ethereal and which hold the power to cure any disease.

Night hags reproduce in a manner exceedingly foul to mortal minds, creating young to serve in their coveys or as servants. Using their *polymorph* spell-like ability to disguise themselves as mortal women, night hags seduce men into a meeting that as likely as not culminates in the males' deaths. After such a coupling, a night hag becomes pregnant for a length of time normal for women of her mate's species. At the end of this period, the night hag gives birth to a dark-haired female child otherwise indistinguishable from others of her mate's species. Having no concept of

maternal instincts, night hags always foster their children, usually to unsuspecting good-aligned creatures and even with the child's father if he still lives.

At any time between the child's first birthday and puberty, a night hag might return to perform a series of despoiling rites that culminates in the child's transformation into a normal night hag. The process begins with an initial visitation during which the night hag must engage her child in a foul ceremony for an uninterrupted hour. After this initial ritual, the night hag must return three times, each visit thirteen days after the



last. On these visits, the night hag must suckle the child and feed it the flesh of a living larva, a process that takes an hour. If any of these feedings are interrupted, or if the night hag can't access the child by the end of the proper day, the child cannot be transformed into a night hag. Otherwise, the end of the final feeding initiates a rapid and irreversible transformation, and within an hour the child becomes a full-grown night hag. Uncaring of their daughters but covetous of their uses, night hags often foster more children than they have any intention of transforming into full-blooded night hags, essentially keeping spare children littered across the planes should their plans require more servants or their current broods dwindle.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF NIGHT HAGS

Naturally cruel beings, night hags obsess over dreams of power and endless feasts of mortal souls. They think nothing of other creatures except in how they relate to the night hags' desires. This leads night hags to relegate any creature less powerful than them to the position of either slave or meal, with slaves often merely serving as future meals. Night hags manipulate and bargain with creatures they don't believe they can defeat, in the hopes of extorting as much use as possible and perhaps leaving them vulnerable.

Night hags pay little respect to the concept of racial privilege and contend with others of their race in the same manner they deal with all other creatures, with strong night hags subjugating their weaker sisters. Night hags sometimes deal with the hags of the Material Plane but never as equals and always as masters. These extraplanar hags maintain a deeply rooted sense of superiority when it comes to normal hags and cruelly dominate either an individual or whole covey. Selfish and supercilious in the extreme, night hags rarely form coveys with their own kind and most assuredly never with lesser hags of the Material Plane. When a covey of night hags does form, it most often consists of a dominant night hag and two weaker night hags or even three night hags forced by a more powerful night hag to do her bidding.

These weaker night hags might be hags the leader subjugated or, more often, the dominant hag's own daughters. A covey of night hags has the same abilities of a covey of normal hags, as noted on page 144 of the *Monster Manual*.

## NIGHT HAG LAIRS

Night hags most commonly inhabit the grim plane known as the Gray Waste of Hades, but their cruel ambitions cause them to roam far. Using portals, powerful magic items, and other planar connections, night hags often travel quite extensively and know much of the planes.

Only the most powerful night hags make lairs on their native planes, using legions of lesser fiends, extraplanar horrors, and their own daughters to carve out small personal empires. Weaker hags prefer nomadic existences in such infernal realms but more often haunt wooded ruins and lonely crags near secluded towns and villages on the Material Plane. A night hag's lair often consists of two lairs, one on the Material Plane and another on the Ethereal Plane. Using their *etherealness* ability to drag materials with them from the Material Plane, they construct simplistic towers of stone and iron—grim, hard edifices among the ghostly vapors. These terrible lairs are little more than planar prisons, holding captives a night hag particularly values or protecting her uncorrupted children during their crucial transformation period. Although these lairs might leave hostages victim to unpredictable planar dangers, night hags often delight in trapping their captives in the dual prisons of their grisly lair and the ghostly Ethereal Plane.

With the ability to shift from lair to lair using her *etherealness* spell-like ability, a night hag spends much of her time on the Ethereal Plane scheming and performing all manner of foul rites. A night hag would probably lair solely on the Ethereal Plane, rendering herself nearly undetectable to most hunters, if not for that plane's numerous threats. Between sporadic ether cyclones and the countless powerful creatures that lurk in that misty realm, the Material Plane sometimes offers a safer place to store possessions and captives.

## NIGHT HAGS AND LARVAE

Night hags engage in a strange connection to the rare petitioners of Hades known as larva (see page 108 of the *Manual of the Planes*). The manifested souls of unquestionably evil creatures reborn as bloated, yellow, wormlike beings, the existence of these creatures presents one of the great mysteries of the planes. With distorted faces reminiscent of those they had in life, larvae ooze a sickening, bilious fluid and constantly writhe like giant, squirming maggots. Although the specifics of their use remain vague, night hags require these abominations to reproduce. Some night hags even gather and trade larvae to other powerful evil creatures, which use them as food, currency, and as "soul stuff" for unspeakable projects.

Night hags possess an uncanny ability to determine which mortals become larva upon their deaths and perhaps even know what foul deeds a soul must commit to damn it to eternity as a larva. Knowing that these irredeemably corrupt souls hold value among the most depraved creatures of the planes, night hags often seek out powerful evil individuals, either to slay them and claim the newly spawned larva or to corrupt their immortal beings into the abominations they covet. As creatures with more Hit Dice spawn more powerful larvae, night hags are an incessant threat to powerful evil creatures, especially to spellcasters who bargain with infernal powers.

From her strategically chosen lair, a night hag ventures into the homes of her victims nightly and with ease, afflicting one creature at a time, savoring its torment as its body weakens and dies. As a night hag's dream haunting can only affect chaotic or evil creatures, a night hag often preys first upon the outcasts of a settlement. Few become concerned when the criminals and rabble-rousers of their community die in their sleep—many even consider it a blessing—until the night hag's nocturnal assaults kill a notable person or someone considered innocent. Often, a community with a night hag lairing nearby believes some kind of plague resistant to all forms of natural and magical healing afflicts them. Such a belief might even cause a country to quarantine an area, effectively dooming it to a slow death at the claws of a voracious night hag. As some of the populace sickens and dies from the hag's dream haunting, even those who suspect

an otherworldly force can rarely hope to survive a combat against a night hag.

On the rare occasions a night hag is suspected or discovered, actually finding her lair presents a formidable challenge. Night hags prefer small, secluded caves, hollows, or ruins, choosing a lair both difficult to reach and that elicits fear from those who come near. Riddling the areas near their homes with magic traps and their servants, and with no need to sleep, night hags are rarely caught unaware. Night hags take great offense to intruders and often possess a variety of unique magic traps and weapons to deal with interlopers (see "By the Hands of Hags" in *DRAGON* #300).

## VS. NIGHT HAGS

When facing a night hag, be prepared to face what might be the most dangerous and unrepentantly evil threat you could ever encounter. A night hag employs every advantage she commands and gladly makes even the most dire sacrifices to save her own life. Thus, extreme caution, devotion to your cause, and the blessings of whatever gods you pray to are the only things that might see you through.

**Revealing Nightmares:** Beings suffering from dream haunting gradually lose Constitution and often appear physically weaker. Although many diseases cause similar effects, night hags only haunt the dreams of chaotic and evil creatures, thus spells like *detect chaos* and *detect evil* might reveal a hag's potential victims. *True seeing* most definitively reveals the presence of a dream haunting night hag, however, as she lurks on the Ethereal Plane while terrorizing her victim.

**Locate the Lair:** Although a night hag most likely travels ethereally, the tracks of her allies or those she's captured might offer a hint about the creature's whereabouts. Once you locate it, a night hag's lair might be guarded by almost any threat culled from the mortal world or from the outer planes. Thus, divination spells and high Listen, Spot, and Search bonuses help protect you from any manner of attack.

**Prepare for Etherealness:** Upon encountering a night hag, you must

prepare to defend yourself from a creature capable of becoming ethereal. *Shield* spells and items like a *broach of shielding* defend against her ability to cast *magic missile* at will. *True seeing* helps immensely, both to locate the night hag on the Ethereal Plane and to detect her attempts to *polymorph* herself into another form and hide. Spells and magic items capable of ensnaring even ethereal creatures, such as *forcecage*, prove exceptionally useful.

However, the best way to face an ethereal night hag is confronting her on equal footing. This makes the ability to become ethereal, as per the *ethereal jaunt* or *etherealness* spell, exceptionally useful, although trapping a hag on the Material Plane, via *dimensional anchor* or *dimensional lock* spells or with *dimensional shackles*, could be an even more potent tactic.

The best way to deal with a night hag's *etherealness* is to take or destroy her *heartstone*. Without it a night hag loses her ability to become ethereal and bonuses to her saves.

**Face Your Fears:** Many novice hunters turn to the *dismissal* spell as a swift way of dispatching outsider threats—a method fraught with potential for failure when used against a night hag. The primary danger is that *dismissal* forces its target to make a Will save, which the night hag holds the highest chance of succeeding at. Also, even if the spell does work, it only returns the night hag to the Gray Wastes of Hades. Being immortal creatures with a penchant for hatred, cruelty, and revenge, a banished night hag often remembers those who slighted her and might spend the rest of eternity searching for whomever banished her to repay the slight.

**Stay Grounded:** Although night hags often use it to spy upon and retreat from hunters, their *etherealness* ability provides one of their most threatening attacks. Upon grappling a target, a night hag that shifts to the Ethereal Plane might trap an opponent there, potentially cutting him off from his allies. Knowing that sorcerers and wizards have the highest likelihood of detecting and harming them while ethereal, as well as having the least chance of resisting a full-on assault,

night hags watch for chances to ambush and slaughter spellcasters in this manner. Protect your spellcasters from this strategy by giving them a better chance at avoiding and resisting grapple attempts. Spells such as *blur*, *bull's strength*, *displacement*, and *grease* might help. Also, keep *scrolls of ethereal jaunt* or *scrolls of etherealness* on hand to allow other characters to come to the trapped character's rescue. You might even cast *dimensional anchor* on yourself and party members if you anticipate an encounter with a night hag.

**Strike While the Iron is Cold:** Only magic cold iron weapons ignore a night hag's damage reduction. Consider owning such a weapon or using the *magic weapon* spell on mundane cold iron.

**Protect Hostages:** Night hags often hold captives on the Ethereal Plane and use them as bargaining chips to manipulate hunters or others who care about the hostage's safety. Ruthless crones, night hags brook no insolence, and they swiftly shift to the Ethereal Plane to dispatch their prisoners, often taking several captives to allow them to easily make a gory example of one or more. In such cases, your primary concern should be keeping the night hag away from her hostages. The *dimensional anchor* and *forcecage* spells again prove useful, allowing the party to combat the hag without fearing for the safety of innocents.

**Beware Waking Nightmares:** Night hags often enlist the aid of the fiendish steeds known as nightmares, especially prizing half-fiend cauchemars. With the aid of a creature that is both a plane-shifting mount and a powerful ally in combat, night hags gain all the benefits of mounted combat and the ability to hide not just on the Ethereal Plane, but on any plane connected to the Astral Plane. Your best hopes rely on swiftly dispatching the night hag's nightmare or casting *dimensional anchor* upon either the mount or the rider to limit their planar mobility.

**Deal with the Disease:** Upon dispatching a night hag, liberally applied Heal checks and *cure disease* spells ward off the effects of demon fever. You should also watch for multiple afflictions contracted from the night hag's allies or traps, as they favor poisoned and diseased guardians. ■



## the Ecology of the

# OGRE MAGE

Physically powerful, viciously cunning, and incredibly egotistical, ogre mages number among the most cruel and intimidating of the mortal races. Possessing an array of potent unnatural abilities, these lesser giants' terrible appearances and fearsome natures seem more akin to fiends than the crude ogres of the Material Plane. In truth, ogre mages hold connections to both their brutal namesakes and darker powers, rising from pits of savagery to forge barbarism and brutality into a weapon pointed at the heart of civilization.

### HISTORY OF THE OGRE MAGE

While the libraries of sages and the lore of civilized peoples hold varied

suppositions on the lineage of ogre mages, members of this cruel race refute all claims penned by humanoid hands—dismissing them as fearful lies and jealous insults. Through their varied bloodlines ogre mages carry their own tale, claiming it as the sole truth of their sorrowful history. Only one written copy of this tale is rumored to exist, tattooed upon the petrified skin of a gigantic primordial ancestor they call Muaj, the Last Immortal.

In those eldritch times, when man was closer to beast, many barbarous mortal tribes revered Vaprak the Destroyer above all other gods, as pain and violence served as the only absolute laws of existence. It was a time of

ceaseless war, and Vaprak's followers called upon his favor with dark rituals and bloody sacrifices. In turn, the Destroyer rewarded his devotees with unholy blessings. His disciples birthed great warriors, hulking brutes twice the height of ordinary men with great claws and thick skin. For centuries, Vaprak's tribes remained locked in brutal and bloody conflict while deep in his Abyssal realm he greedily feasted upon the souls of the fallen.

Having endured ages of blood, many of the weaker tribes slowly turned from Vaprak and sought the salvation of more merciful deities. Over time, thousands abandoned the Destroyer, converting to benevolent faiths and—to Vaprak's disgust—they prospered.

*"Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!" —Setsubun festival incantation*



Eventually, only those tribes descended from Vaprak's blessed warriors remained devoted to him, creatures the emerging civilized races reviled and called ogres and trolls—driving them to the harshest and most remote places of the world.

Still Vaprak refused to accept defeat. Deep in the Abyss, from the ranks of his demonic spawn, Vaprak summoned his three most powerful sons—Anori, Hakuni, and Muaj. He promised to make them feared and worshiped and raise them as gods in his own bloody pantheon if they'd perform a solitary task for him: be born as mortals for a single lifetime and lead his armies to victory over civilization. Greedy and destructive, the bloody-minded siblings bowed to their father's will.

Soon after, the shamans of Vaprak's three greatest remaining tribes received a vision. In it, each foresaw a champion born unto his tribe, a terrifying creature whose leadership would usher in a new age of conquest. The vision proclaimed that the three tribes were Vaprak's chosen

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE OGRE MAGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to ogre mages. Barbarian tribes, border guards, and other residents of savage frontiers are most likely to possess this information. The ogre mage appears on page 200 of the *Monster Manual*.

### Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
18	More intelligent than normal ogres and with strangely colored skin, ogre mages possess great physical strength and a number of potent magical powers.
23	Ogre mages rely on a variety of spell-like abilities to charm and confuse their enemies. They are more lawfully minded than normal ogres.
28	Ogre mages possess the uncanny ability to fly, as well as the ability to take many forms. They generally live in cold mountainous regions alone or in small clans.
33	Ogre mages quickly regenerate lost limbs and other physical damage, although fire and acid affect them normally. They also often prove resistant to magical attacks. Ogre mages can typically speak Common and Giant.
38	At will, an ogre mage can unleash a blast of flensing ice. Many ogre mages worship the cruel god Vaprak the Destroyer, patron of ogres and trolls. This respect often comes grudgingly, however, as many ogre mages believe their god holds them in disfavor.

ones, and under the tyranny of his own sons they would spill forth from the mountains and swamps to slaughter the weak and reclaim the world in the Destroyer's name.

Shortly thereafter, under the light of a full, blood-red moon, the sons of

Vaprak were born to each tribe. Strange creatures of demonic appearance, they grew with unnatural quickness, supplanting the chieftains of each tribe within a month. Great armies of trolls and ogres formed around these fiendish warlords and, as the Destroyer

prophesied, hoards of savage giants raged forth from the broken places of the world.

Vaprak's war did not, however, proceed as the Destroyer has foreseen. Although the savage legions left countless dead and untold ruin in their wake, the devotion, invention, and magic of the rising civilized races ultimately drove back the beastlike hordes. Thus, even under the leadership of Vaprak's own once-immortal sons, the ogres and trolls were routed into the wilds where they have ever since remained, persecuted and hunted.

Witnessing this staggering defeat, Vaprak flew into an unending rage. In his fury, he blamed the hated civilized races for his defeat, but his damnation fell most directly upon Anori, Hakuni, and Muaj. Stripping them of their greatest powers and their immortality, he cursed his three failed sons and exiled them from the Abyss forever.

From these outcast, semi-divine lines the first ogre mages were spawned, belched up from the bowels of the planes, possessing the ambition of their godlike heritages yet eternally lacking the power and time to give their profane wills form.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE OGRE MAGE

Much speculation occurs over the fearsome and seemingly fiendish forms of ogre mages. As giants, they loom more than 10 feet tall and weigh upward of 700 pounds, their tremendous size only augmenting the terror of their grim forms and strange coloring. Hints of fiendish heritage seem evident in much of the race's gruesome physicality, such as their strong, curved horns, blackened teeth and nails, and stark white pupils. An unnaturally fast healing rate and metabolism provides these creatures with their regenerative properties as well as a notably high body temperature, offering a possible explanation for their preference for settling in colder climates. As trolls possess a similar physiology, some suspect that ogre mages might evidence some primal connection between both the ogre and troll races.

### THE REAL HISTORY OF THE OGRE MAGE

While no tales exist about creatures specifically called ogre mages, stories about ogres are pervasive throughout Western folklore. Although the word "ogre" has French roots, the name is thought to be derived from the Latin name *Orcus*, the Roman god of the Underworld. The ogre mage, however, finds its origins more closely tied to the *oni* of Japanese folklore—spirits, some dangerous, some benevolent, with great strength, strangely colored skin, and sharp horns. Even today, during the Spring *Setsubun* festival, some people toss soybeans out their door, chanting "*Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!*" ("*Demons out! Luck in!*")! In *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, the ogre mage originally appeared in the first edition *Monster Manual* (subtitled "Japanese ogre" therein), and recently appeared in the *D&D Miniatures: Angelfire* set.



sometimes resulting in the growth of spiky protrusions of bone armor and weaponry. Regardless of such exploitation, ogre mages' regenerative abilities are not absolute, as fire and acid burn and scar them just as they do natural creatures.

The other abilities of ogre mages, such as their ability to fly without wings or produce a number of spell-like effects, have no evident relation to their physiology, marking some lingering supernatural or extraplanar connection.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE OGRE MAGE

Believing themselves forsaken by Vaprak, many ogre mages hold that their physical bodies are mere vessels for ancient, outcast souls. Upon death, one of these immortal souls passes from the ogre mage to its most powerful offspring. The soul thus remains trapped in a state of slow transcendence. With each new life it tries to attain a state closer to the foul divinity it lost—ever striving to appease a fickle, savage god. In this regard, the spirit or self proves of utmost importance, with many ogre mages worshiping themselves as divine vessels—in addition to the grudging respect they offer Vaprak. These beliefs fuel great acts of savagery and destructiveness as they seek to regain their fabled lost immortality.

Ogre mage culture is strictly patriarchal, with males seizing dominant roles over spouses and offspring. Within their small clans, adult males allot few rights

## DESCENDANTS OF THE THREE

The ogre mages described in the *Monster Manual* represent the descendants of Muaj, the most commonly encountered scions of Vaprak's forsaken sons. Although less common, the lineages of Agmori and Hakuni are equally powerful, dangerous, and evil.

### Cereborg

The fearsome descendants of Agmori live far to the north in castles carved from solid ice. Common folk refer to them as cereborgs for their renowned mastery of the psionic disciplines and identify them by their seemingly frost-bitten blue skin. Cereborgs typically progress as psions, psychic warriors, or soulknives, some advancing into the psion incarnate, thrallherd, and warmind prestige classes (*Expanded Psionics Handbook*).

Cereborgs replace the spell-like abilities of normal ogre mages with the following psionic-like abilities (see *Expanded Psionics Handbook*):

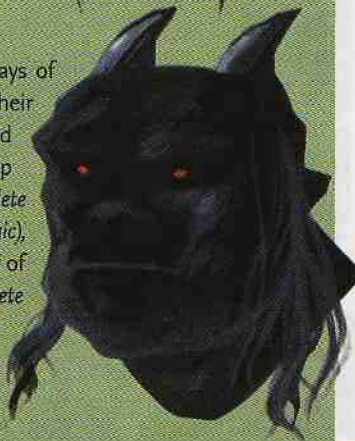
**Psionic-Like Abilities:** At will—*cloud mind* (DC 15), *empathy* (DC 14); 1/day—*death urge* (DC 17), *dimension swap* (DC 15), *mental disruption* (DC 15), *psionic dimension door*. Manifest level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

### Ogre Umbramage

The banished demigod Hakuni excelled in the ways of deception and assassination. Ogre mages tracing their lineage to him make unusual use of stealth and many dye their already darkly pigmented skins deep black. They often progress as rogues, ninjas (*Complete Adventurer*), and even shadowcasters (*Tome of Magic*), some advancing into the ghost-faced killer, master of shadow, or shadowblade prestige classes (*Complete Adventurer* and *Tome of Magic*).

Ogre umbramages replace the spell-like abilities of normal ogre mages with the following spell-like abilities:

**Spell-Like Abilities:** At will—*darkness*, *invisibility*; 1/day—*detect thoughts* (DC 15), *enervation* (DC 17), *scare* (DC 15), *shadow walk* (DC 19), *waves of fatigue* (DC 18). Caster level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.



to weaker individuals and in many instances treat them little better than slaves. When an elder dies, he bequeaths his wealth and social position to the oldest son. Because males define themselves by social status, the eldest son changes often, and infanticide is both a culturally acceptable and expected method of ruling out potential threats. Still, strength is what is valued in the society, and many female ogre mages notoriously rise against their spouses, slay them, and assume their wealth and tribal position. Rather than ruling the

clan, these matrons hold their position in escrow until such a time that a son reaches maturity and seizes it.

The responsibility of child-rearing falls upon the male clan leader's spouses or consorts. Male offspring are typically named after Vaprak's mythic sons, Anori, Hakuni, or Muaj—or variations thereof—while females garner demeaning titles, if any name at all. Mothers often raise their offspring in secret locations to prevent males from observing their children's growth. Typically, mothers lie about a male

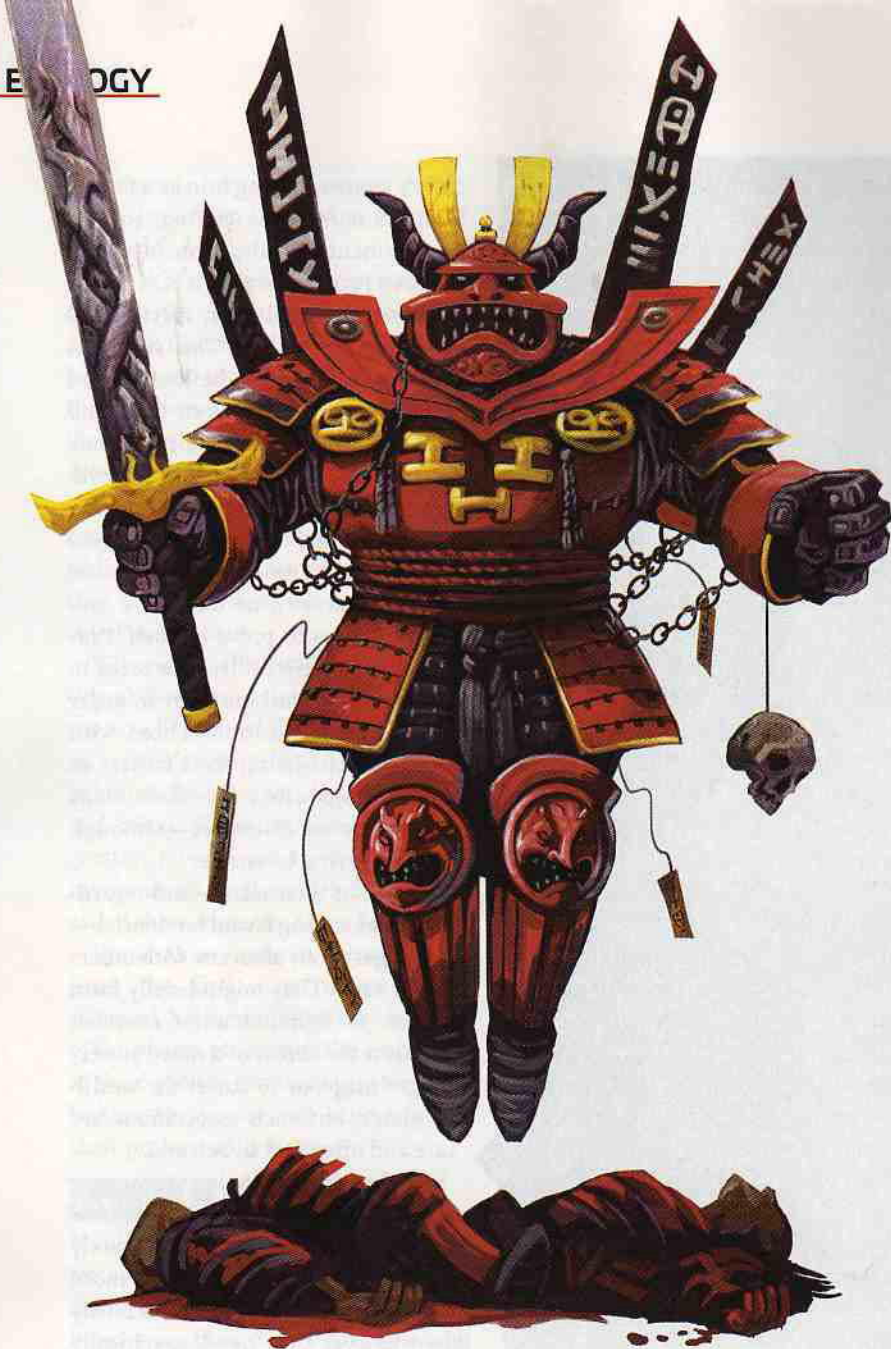
child's gender, raising him as a female to limit murderous culling. In this environment, females, consorts, and children form close alliances, with the relationship focusing on survival and defeating the father. The strongest bonds occur between the mother and the eldest son, or between male and female siblings. Young males become particularly devoted to whomever sheltered and provided for them in earlier years and many choose spouses incestuously. Regardless, once a male reaches maturity, he displays a violent eagerness to prove himself. Provided his father still lives, he seeks to hunt down and kill his elder in order to assume his position. Those with little hope of besting their fathers or elder siblings often flee their clans and seek power elsewhere—although many die trying to escape.

Outside of their clans—and regardless of their strong lawful tendencies—ogre mages rarely associate with others of their kind. They might briefly form alliances to fight common enemies, overthrow the threat of a more powerful ogre mage, or to barter for wealth and slaves, but such associations are rare and often end in betrayal.

Self-absorbed by their nature, ogre mages possess an unyielding sense of personal entitlement and rarely view other beings as anything more than commodities. They rapaciously take whatever they need, specifically preying on those weaker than themselves, whom they force into slavery or subjugate into worshipers—dual states with little real distinction. Ogre mages spend enormous effort cultivating groups of followers and slaves. Such minions are kept for both their menial uses and as a quantifiable way for their master to measure his power and influence.

### ADVANCED OGRE MAGE

Ogre mages typically advance as sorcerers, their favored class. They prefer to rely on their inborn talent and only rarely pursue the more scholarly path of the wizard. Because of their natural regenerative powers, ogre mage



spellcasters focus on prestige classes that allow them to manipulate their bodies, such as the acolyte of the skin or blood magus (*Complete Arcane*). Those of a more martial disposition become fighters, monks, or samurai (*Complete Warrior*). Other classes hold little appeal to them. Given their history, clerics are exceptionally rare among ogre mages although some become ur priests (*Complete Divine*).

Although rare, fiendish and half-fiend ogre mages exist. Revered by others of their kind, they often become great leaders or warriors. Ogre mages view such individuals as proof of their immortal ancestry and females sometimes secretly

breed with fiends in order to give their offspring a higher status.

### SIMPLE ADVANCED OGRE MAGE

A sadistic mercenary, Muaj-Ruhlor lives only to watch lesser beings die. He seeks out wars and conflicts, indiscriminately hiring himself to either rival. He arrogantly takes pleasure in battlefield dramatics, cutting down both allies and enemies to sate his bloodlust.

#### MUAJ-RUHLOR CR 17

Male ogre mage fighter 5, kensai 3  
LE Large giant

Init +5; Senses darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision; Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages Common, Giant, Infernal, Orc

AC 25, touch 10, flat-footed 24

hp 131 hp (13 HD); regeneration 5

SR 19

Fort +16 Ref +6, Will +8

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee +3 Large human bane, thundering greatsword +21/+16 (4d8+10/17-20)

Space 10 ft; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +10; Grp +14

Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Power Attack

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds, potion of haste, potion of resist energy (fire)* 20

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th)

At will—*darkness, invisibility*

1/day—*charm person (DC 16), cone of cold (DC 19), gaseous form, polymorph, sleep (DC 16)*

Abilities Str 26, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 20

Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

Skills Concentration +15, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +14, Listen +7, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +8, Spot +7, Ride +6

Possessions combat gear plus +3 great armor, +3 Large human bane thundering greatsword, cloak of resistance +2

Flight (Su) Muaj-Ruhlor can cease or resume flight as a free action. While using gaseous form, he can fly at his normal speed and has perfect maneuverability.

Regeneration (Ex) Fire and acid deal normal damage to Muaj-Ruhlor.

Signature Weapon (Su) Muaj-Ruhlor's greatsword is his signature weapon. This ability grants his +1 Large human bane thundering greatsword a +3 enhancement bonus.

Power Surge (Ex) As a move action, Muaj-Ruhlor can make a DC 15 Concentration check. If he succeeds, he gains a +8 bonus to his strength for 1 round. Each time after the first that he successfully uses this ability in a 24-hour period, the check DC increases by 5. ☞

by Eric Cagle  
 illustrated by Peter Bergting

# THE ECOLOGY OF THE RAKSHASA

Considered by some the very embodiment of evil, rakshasas dominate all they encounter as masterful manipulators, powerful sorcerers, and terrible foes. Greedy, treacherous, immortal beings, rakshasas delight in plotting the downfall of others while raising their own status, making them consummate arch-villains in a sufficiently high-level campaign. In addition to their own abilities, rakshasas are charismatic individuals who draw large numbers of minions into their service, surrounding themselves with cadres of deadly and varied servitors. Clever and deceitful by nature, rakshasas are the bane of righteous creatures, as they prefer hiding in the shadows and using layers of lies, corruption, and double-crosses to keep themselves safe.

This article examines the rakshasas' history, physiology, and psychology, as well as ways in which player characters can combat such deadly adversaries.

## HISTORY OF THE RAKSHASA

A cloud of uncertainty conceals the rakshasas' origins. Numerous tales and legends say that they came from "a distant land,"

slowly corrupting the societies they encountered before moving on to richer grounds. Rakshasas possess all the earmarks of having the same lineage as devils, although they dwell primarily on the Material Plane. Even if they know their actual background, no rakshasa willingly parts with such information, and they often spin intricate webs of lies to further confuse the issue. The most popular theories include a race of fiendish animals somewhere in the rakshasas' distant past, intermingled with some unknown breed of devils. However, even this possibility seems unlikely considering rakshasas' uniquely insidious natures.

There exist countless documented cases of the rakshasas' sinister impact upon the world, even if some only suggest the fiends' claws manipulating major political players. Although vain and egotistical, rakshasas favor staying behind the scenes, pulling political strings with aplomb. They are linked to the toppling of untold organizations, merchant houses, churches, and even entire governments. Scholars who go through the effort of untangling the skeins of history discover rakshasas lurking behind some of the most deplorable crimes and tragedies imaginable. Those who delve too



deeply, however, risk drawing the attention of one or more rakshasas, who might briefly band together in order to quash an investigation before it uncovers too much.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF RAKSHASAS

A rakshasa possesses the same size and build as an average human, but with the head of some savage animal, most commonly that of a Bengal tiger, although those of carnivorous apes, mantises, and crocodiles are only slightly less common. Rakshasas' eyes vary vastly, from the gold and black slits of tigers to the multifaceted protruding orbs of insects, depending on the individual's specific animalistic visage. Regardless of their shape, rakshasas' eyes burn with a slight infernal light, filled with a deep cunning and intellect that most mortals find extremely disturbing.

A rakshasa's hands is easily its most unnerving feature. The joints on both hands are reversed, causing the creature to bend its fingers to grasp objects in the opposite direction to how most humanoid hands grasp. The rakshasa suffers no difficulty doing this and grips things in the same way as other humanoids, although it enjoys horrifying others with this unnatural feature.

## VARIANT BREEDS

Originating in the legends and lore of India, rakshasas initially appeared in D&D among the creatures of the first edition *Monster Manual*. Several recent products present new variations on these popular villains, each with deadly new abilities and sinister motivations all their own.

### Rakshasas in Eberron

The *EBERRON Campaign Setting* unleashes a new rakshasa variant, known as the zakya. While still capable of casting spells, this breed of vicious fighters wades into hand-to-hand combat with relish. Zakyas once ruled the continents of Khorvaire and Sarolona, serving under powerful rajahs who commanded massive armies. Brought to heel by the combined might of the dragons of Argonneseen and the couatls of Xen'drik, the zakyas are a broken race, driven beneath the earth to plot and scheme. Their rulers, the Lords of Dust, fulfill many of the same roles as rakshasas in other settings—highly intelligent and vile schemers who use subterfuge, moral decay, and lies to further their plans. However, the zakyas are much more openly violent and bloodthirsty than their cousins and spoil for the chance to end lives on their blades and spears in combat.

### Rakshasas in Monster Manual III

*Monster Manual III* introduces two new breeds of rakshasa, the ak'chazar and the naztharune. The ak'chazar seem most like the traditional rakshasa, deadly and manipulative schemers with powerful magical abilities and the heads of white tigers. Unlike their kin, however, ak'chazars hold dominion over the undead with a vast array of potent necromantic abilities and a cunning that even their fellow rakshasas begrudgingly respect. Besides these natural necromancers, *Monster Manual III* also presents the naztharune. These night-black rakshasas are master predators, applying their malicious racial ingenuity to the assassin's arts. With unnatural power over shadows, the naztharune strike from the darkness and vanish back into it without a trace. Along with their round-by-round tactics, *Monster Manual III* also provides suggestions for undead ak'chazar entourages, using naztharune as characters, and suggestions for both of these races' schemes in *EBERRON* and the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*.



Rakshasas prefer their food in the form of raw meat, preferably while the animal still lives, and flavor such meals with rare spices, exotic side dishes, and other expensive delicacies disgusting to the eyes of mortals. Many of their movements and behaviors straddle the line between that of a human and a large feline, as they enjoy long rests and prowling about unseen like a cat but also savor the finer things in life, such as music, works of art, and literature. They relish fancy, expensive clothing, jewelry, and the finest weapons and armor. Similar to cats, rakshasas enjoy long naps and lazy moments surrounded by comfort and luxury.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF RAKSHASAS

Greedy than most devils, rakshasas insatiably desire wealth and power. However, more than just taking what they can, rakshasas prefer stealing and looting from those who would suffer most from such actions—the destitute, the desperate, and those who rely on specific items. Rakshasas take great pride in ruining the lives of mortals, stealing everything from them, killing their families, and spreading horrible lies and rumors.

When a rakshasa first enters a territory, it does its best to maintain a low profile, seeking out weak-willed individuals that it uses as pawns and lackeys. It finds a base to host its insidious dealings, often fronted by an innocuous business or even a temple to some neutral deity. Over time, however, the rakshasa tightens the reins on both his victims and his lackeys, demanding larger and larger portions of their freedom, wealth, and power.

Rakshasa society could be described as a malevolent meritocracy, where only the fittest survive. Rakshasas constantly rank each other based on the power they accumulate, their cunning and subtlety, and their willingness to show a complete lack of morals. Female rakshasas raise their young alone, punctuating their children's lives with dotting praise, constant tests, harsh discipline, and ruthless training. As a young rakshasa matures, it learns the meanings of both loss and power—that which is gained

## RAVANNA

### Lesser God (Lawful Evil)

Ravanna is the ten-headed lord of all rakshasas and embodies the ideals of that race. Decadent and egomaniacal, he possesses a cruel intellect, diabolical cunning, and patient subtlety that all of his minions aspire to.

**Portfolio:** Deception, intrigue, lies, rakshasas, tyranny

**Domains:** Destruction, Evil, Trickery

**Favored Weapon:** Javelin ("Yamafang")

**Clerical Training:** Few creatures willingly choose to serve Ravanna. Rather, the cunning god chooses his clerics based on their potential to serve him or advance his existing clergy's ambitions. Few who know of Ravanna refuse a summons into his service, as his fury is great and such commands commonly come from a group of powerful existing priests.

**Quests:** Ravanna demands that his servants constantly expand their power and influence while remaining unseen. This in effect makes his clergy more like a powerful and far-reaching criminal network than most priesthoods.

**Prayers:** Prayers to Ravanna are lengthy and self-deprecating affairs that extol his wonders while accentuating the unworthiness of his followers.

**Temples:** Ravanna demands few actual temples, but those that do exist tower as grand complexes made nearly entirely of precious materials and rife with terrible artistry. More common are the personal shrines Ravanna requires all his servants to maintain. These shrines are often ornate but portable affairs, both so his worshippers can conceal them at a moment's notice and transport them to their meal tables to commit his gory worship.

**Rites:** Ravanna demands daily sacrifices of both wealth and blood. Devotees of Ravanna make these sacrifices without any specific weapon or tool, but rather their own teeth and claws, regardless of race.

**Herald and Allies:** Ravanna's herald is a powerful rakshasa maharajah named Loliadac. With five heads—those of an ape, crocodile, mantis, tiger, and human—he commands an army of servants that travel Acheron, the Plane of Shadow, and the Material Plane at their god's command, acting as Ravanna's vengeful claw. Ravanna's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are bone devils, hellcats, and of course rakshasas.

might easily be taken away, often by those who gave it in the first place.

Once a rakshasa reaches maturity, it's already well on its way to carving out an empire of crime and evil. Newly independent rakshasas commonly head out for unknown territories, far from its parents'—or any other rakshasa's—reach. Using a variety of disguises, the rakshasa spends years investigating a new area. A rakshasa instinctively seeks out a safe house from which to operate, decorating its interior in ostentatious displays of its wealth. It then begins creating a network of spies, informants, and easily bribed officials from which to establish its domain, as well as creating a small cadre of loyal, easily influenced lackeys. The rakshasa then creates or takes over local thieves guilds, mercenary units, and other undesirables, often doing so under one disguise or another. It rarely reveals its true nature to anyone but utterly dedicated lieutenants whose loyalty the rakshasa constantly monitors both via spies and its own ability to read thoughts.

Should a rakshasa encounter another of its kind, a shadowy war of intrigue and misinformation often begins. This

battle of criminal politics culminates in one rakshasa dominating the other and subjugating its network or in the death of the weaker rival. As a rakshasa grows in power and dominates more and more of its kin, it takes on more and more prestigious titles, rising to *ruhk*, *rajah*, and all the way to maharajah after subjugating all other rakshasas in a region.

Notoriously cruel slavers, rakshasas collect slaves with the same relish they do exotic and rare art. A rakshasa surrounds itself with dozens of slaves who cater to its every whim. This serves to stroke the rakshasa's enormous ego as well as to show a level of status among others of its kind—the more slaves at its beck and call, the more powerful the rakshasa.

Using its detect thoughts ability, as well as information provided by spies and informants, a rakshasa searches out every weakness, sin, and secret about its enemies as possible. It then uses bribes and offers of power to attempt to bring its target into its web. If this fails, the rakshasa extorts, blackmails, or slanders its target to bring about his destruction. It loves nothing more than to see an otherwise good and upstanding citizen

brought down by others of its kind due to some dark secret.

Rakshasas are natural spellcasters with a deep lust for the acquisition of arcane lore and magic items. They spend a great deal of time researching lost tomes and following up bits of rumors and legend to find powerful spells, especially those of an evil nature. Rakshasas sometimes sponsor adventuring groups to delve into forgotten tombs and forbidding lands in the quest for such items, often portraying themselves as kindly patrons of arcane organizations or ambitious merchants.

### VERSUS THE RAKSHASA

Although they rarely engage in physical battle, rakshasas are powerful and deadly opponents. Once adventurers tear away the myriad veils of magic and lies a rakshasa hides behind, only preparation and skill will assure survival against one of these evil masterminds.

**Beware of Deception:** The most difficult part of fighting a rakshasa is realizing that you are opposing one in the first place. Rakshasas excel at deception, lies, and deceit. They use their change shape ability to keep opponents guessing, while also adopting a range of favorite particular disguises. Adventurers hoping to ferret out a shape-changing rakshasa should make frequent use of divination spells like *detect evil*, *detect thoughts*, and especially *true seeing*.

**Turn Enemies into Allies:** The hordes of lackeys and bodyguards rakshasas employ often present just as great a threat as rakshasas themselves. Because they can read the thought of others, rakshasas allow only the most loyal beings to get close to them. As such, characters attempting to shift the loyalty of a rakshasa's lieutenants through trickery or charm almost always fail. However, enchantment spells such as *charm monster*, *charm person*, and *geas/quest* prove far more successful. Magically turning a rakshasa's allies against it weakens its defenses while bolstering those of the characters.

### RAKSHASA KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to the rakshasa. Those who hunt these beings or work under their control might possess this information.

#### Knowledge (The Planes)

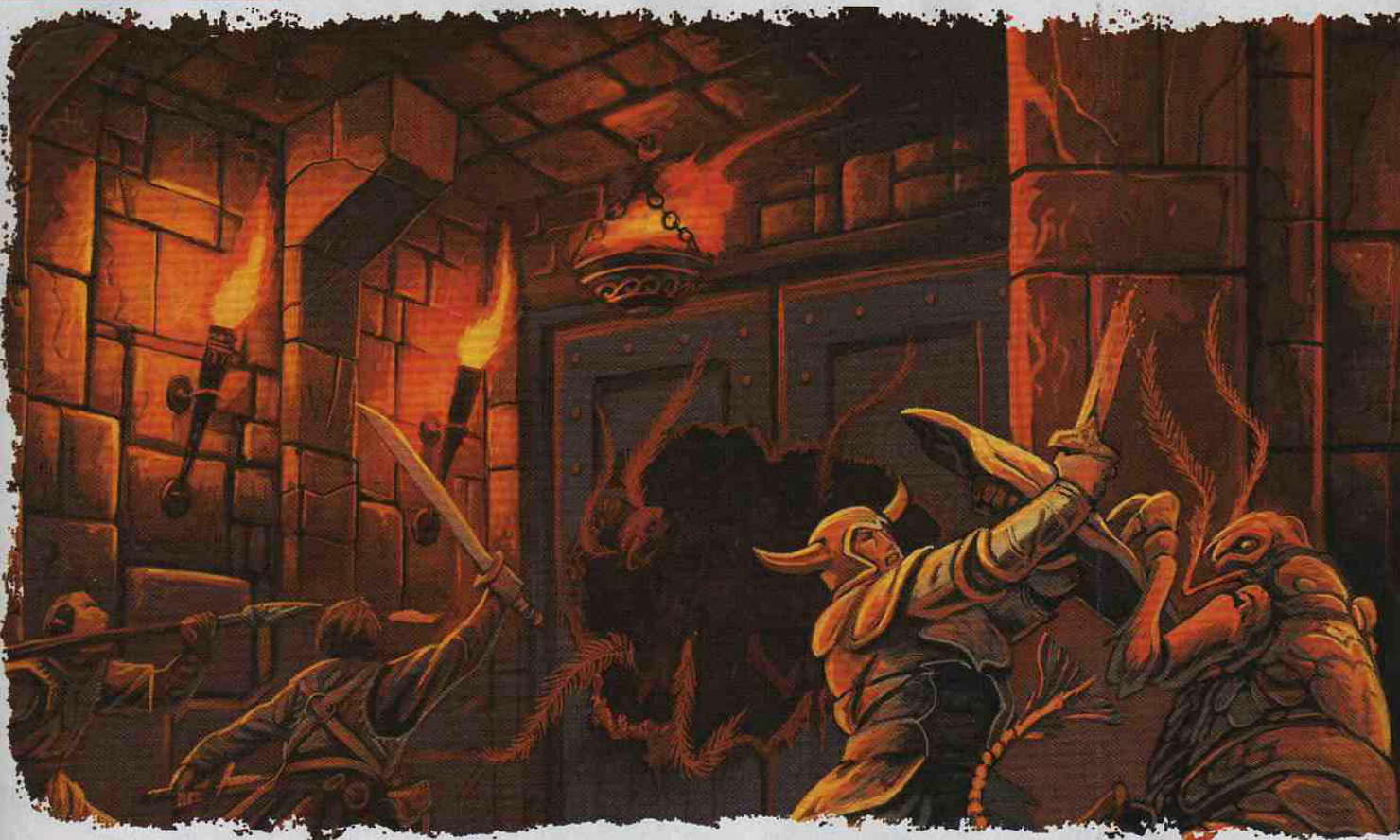
DC	Result
10	Rakshasas are hideously evil, animal-headed creatures whose malevolence is on par with most devils.
15	Rakshasas can take the form of almost any humanoid and use this ability to hide among unsuspecting groups in order to sow lies and corruption. They bully or bribe weak-willed individuals to do their bidding.
20	Rakshasas have the ability to read the thoughts of others, which allows them to discover a person's deepest fears and desires. They are resistant to most forms of attacks.
25	Rakshasas are extremely fractious beings that spend as much time fighting among themselves as they do plotting against other creatures.
30	Rakshasas are vulnerable to good-aligned piercing weapons, such as crossbow bolts benefiting from the spell <i>bless weapon</i> .

**Guard Your Thoughts:** A rakshasa's detect thoughts ability is often its most useful tool and weapon. Its constant awareness of the presence of thinking minds within the area forces its enemies to use spells such as *mind blank* (or, less powerfully, *nondetection*) and magic items such as *amulets of proof against detection and location*. As its detect thoughts ability requires at least three rounds of concentration for the rakshasa to read the surface thoughts of a creature, it does its best to stay within range for at least that long to reveal a person's intentions (but only if it is safe to do so). Those hunting rakshasas should remain mindful of the ability's 60-foot cone-shaped area. As a rakshasa must focus this ability in a specific area each round, a stealthy group of adventurers might keep their opponent's attention diverted long enough to get close enough to attack. As this ability also requires concentration to maintain, a rakshasa involved in combat often forgoes this ability in order to cast spells or attack. As fitting such an intelligent creature, a rakshasa often employs hit and run tactics, pulling back to someplace safe in order to read the thoughts of its enemies and change its tactics accordingly.

**Destroy Magical Defenses:** Rather cowardly by nature, rakshasas commonly cast spells that bolster themselves, such as *bear's endurance* and *haste*, or improves their defensive

abilities, such as *mage armor*. Rakshasas also make judicious use of *charm person* or *suggestion* to change the attitude of anyone with ill intentions toward them. They reserve their offensive spells, such as *Melf's acid arrow*, as a last resort. Rakshasas that take character levels almost always take several levels in sorcerer. Spells like *dispel magic* are necessary to negate a rakshasa's defensive magic and perform counterspells, while several castings of *protection from evil* should defend an entire party against enchantment spells.

**Beware of Resistances:** Spellcasters should remember that rakshasas possess impressive spell resistance, which foils many magical attacks against them. Also, the rakshasa's damage reduction (15 good and piercing) seriously reduces any damage not dealt by a weapon that is both piercing and good aligned. A rakshasa uses these facts to its advantage, often attacking spellcasters first (who must overcome its spell resistance and are unlikely to deal physical damage that gets past the rakshasa's DR). Blessed bows and crossbows prove the most effective weapons when employed against rakshasas, allowing the attacker to fire from a safe distance while negating the rakshasa's formidable damage reduction. The spell *bless weapon* is also integral, as it gives any weapon the good quality, although it must be cast on a piercing weapon to totally overcome a rakshasa's damage reduction. ☐



## The Ecology of the

# RUST MONSTER

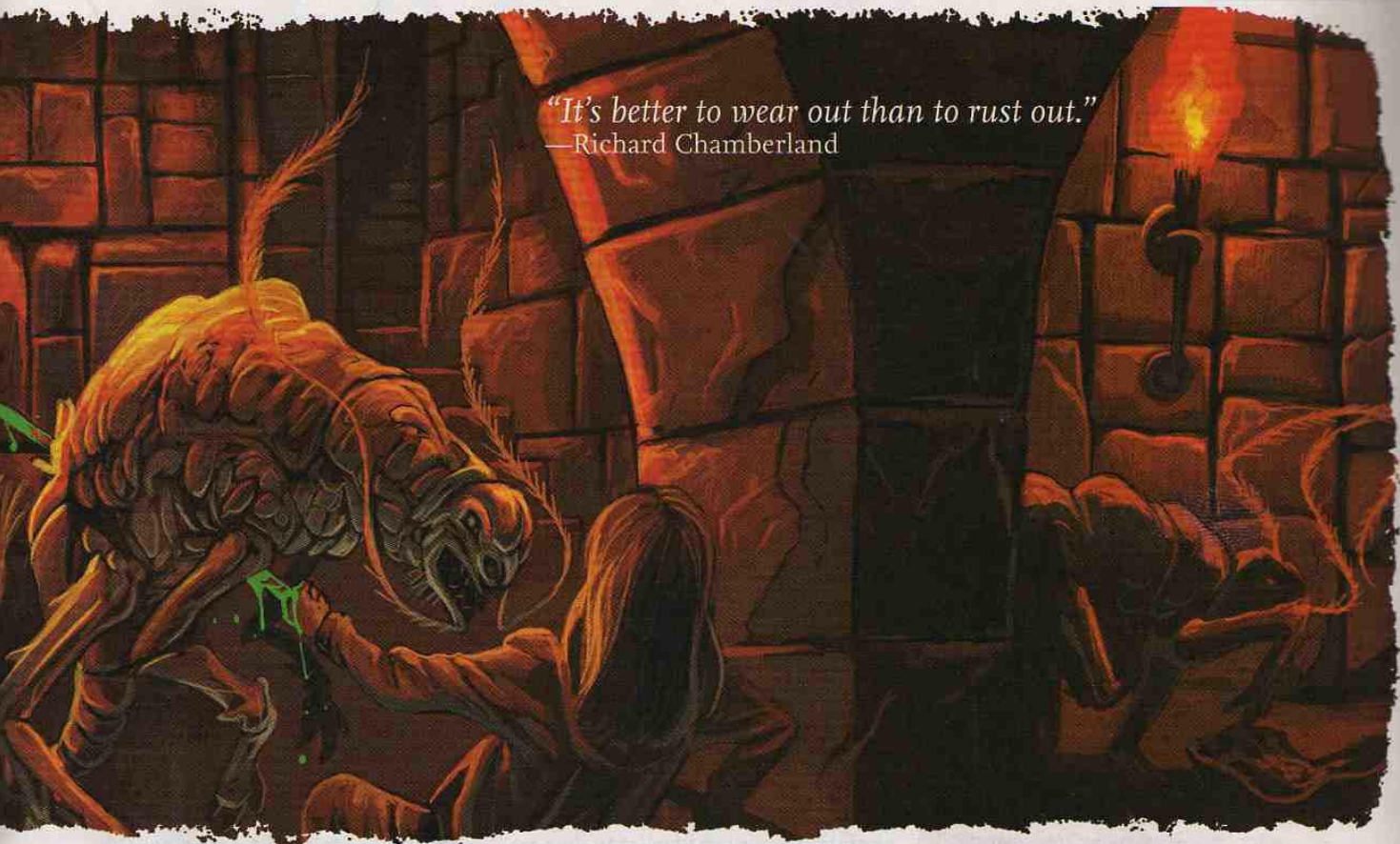
When magic and metal determine one's prowess, a beast capable of crumbling even artifacts with its merest touch holds the power to ruin armies and shatter kingdoms. Such is the might of the universally dreaded rust monster.

As the cost required to imbue even a simple weapon with magical power greatly outweighs that necessary to return life to the dead, many warriors consider tangling with rust monsters a fate worse than death. Ironically, rust monsters become more dangerous as adventurers become more powerful. As adventurers increase in wealth and experience they possess much more to lose—expensive weapons, magic armor, wonders of sorcerous might, and artifacts from the planes and beyond. While adven-

turing neophytes might see rust monsters as nothing more than nuisances, hardened veterans speak of these pervasive beasts with a specially held dread—for ruin might be a mere antenna swipe away.

### HISTORY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters are woefully under-studied, as most adventurers would rather avoid the beasts than observe them. Even more frustrating, the creatures' peculiar physiology resists dissection by metal scalpels, and such dull-witted beasts have no records or stories of their own. Among the many fanciful theories proposed to explain the origin of rust monsters, scholars favor two.



*"It's better to wear out than to rust out."*  
—Richard Chamberland

The majority view holds that rust monsters originated on the harsh plane of Acheron, having carved out a successful niche there. With an infinite number of metal cubes, rust monsters could feast freely on the essence of the plane itself. Some scholars believe that Acheron's crashing cubes were not always the rusted and pitted wrecks seen today, their pristine geometries eroded over the eons by rust monsters' insatiable hunger.

On Acheron, the native bladeling tribes treat rust monsters with respect and dread. The jagged pages of bladeling holy scriptures predict an apocalypse ensuing when these marauding aberrations bore a planar hole into Mechanus and rust away several key gears, bringing the multiverse to a grinding cataclysmic halt. Lending credence to this belief, some of the best-traveled planar explorers tell tales of planet-sized cubes on Acheron's farthest frontiers, skeletal hulks reduced to little more than rusted frames and home to populations of rust monsters that dwarf the number residing on all

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE RUST MONSTER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to rust monsters. Underdark explorers, those who study aberrations, and most veteran adventurers are likely to possess this information.

#### Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC Result

- 10 Rust monsters are dog-sized insectal creatures best known for their mothlike antennae, the touch of which corrodes metallic objects.
- 15 A rust monster's carapace destroys metal—even rare minerals like adamantine—just as its antennae do. Wood, stone, and nonmetallic substances are unaffected by these creatures' touch.
- 20 While dull-witted, rust monsters are tenacious. They can smell metal at great distances and relentlessly pursue their meals, favoring rare and valuable materials to crude metals.
- 25 Although they are more resistant than normal metal wares, magic weapons and armor are also vulnerable to a rust monster's corrosive powers.

the Material Plane. Whether this doomsday paranoia is founded or not, rust monsters seem to have fared quite well on the Material Plane and now feast upon its metals as ravenously as on Acheron's.

A divergent view of the origin of rust monsters holds that they were specifically bred to prevent the rise of technol-

ogy. Some scholars believe an unnamed entity who once ruled several demiplanes far from the Great Wheel pronounced technology and technological creatures to be inimical to magic and the existing planar order. This intelligence—allegedly an amalgam of sentient plant life—created rust monsters from tiny planar parasites in the hopes of eliminating the

**TALES OF RUST AND DOOM**

From humble beginnings, rust monsters have been plaguing D&D players (and pleasing DMs) for nearly three decades. Ed Greenwood even presented his take on the rust monster twenty-two years ago, in *DRAGON* #88, with the first "Ecology of the Rust Monster." Presented here are a few industry insiders' reminiscences regarding D&D's romance with rust.

*"There isn't much to relate regarding the rust monster, truth be told. When I picked up a bag of plastic monsters made in Hong Kong at the local dime store to add to the sand table array—we were playing Chainmail Fantasy Supplement miniatures at a 1:1 scale, there was the figurine that looked rather like a lobster with a propeller on its tail.*

*"As we assigned names and stats to these critters, bulette and owl bear for instance, nothing very fearsome came to mind regarding the one with the projecting feelers. Then inspiration struck me. It was a "rust monster," a thing whose touch turned ferrous metals to ferrous oxide, even magical steel armor or enchanted iron or steel weapons.*

*"The players soon learned to hit one with spells and arrows so as to slay it at a distance. When one appeared in the D&D game, usually in a dungeon setting, there was great haste to remove from its vicinity if there was no sure and quick means of destroying it at hand.*

*"Sadly, although I do recall that there was an amusing incident or two involving a rust monster in the early days of dungeon crawling, the details are lost to my memory."*

—Gary Gygax



metal fundamental to many technologies. This rumor is supported in several ancient poetic sagas and songs, especially among nature-loving races and societies. Supposedly, a large concern of adventurers once sought to track down the entity responsible for

the genesis of rust monsters. All they found, though, was a land reduced to a crumbled ruin—all vitality sapped from an entire realm collapsed in upon itself.

Despite their base intelligence and manner, rust monsters have come to be potent symbols. Nihilistic groups like the Doomguard favor these beasts as manifestations of the inherent weakness of all matter, while anarchists, freedom fighters, and slaves across the planes cherish the rust monster as a herald signaling the end of shackles and tyranny.

**PHYSIOLOGY OF THE RUST MONSTER**

Aberrant creatures, rust monsters appear to be equal parts overgrown crustacean and impossibly large insect. While most grow to the size of powerful mastiffs or even small ponies, specimens comparable to rhinoceroses in size, weight, and armor thickness are sometimes found in metal-rich areas.

The most noteworthy part of a rust monster is its antennae. Covered with minuscule, stiff hairs, these antennae tie to a number of complex capillary tubes that stretch into the stomach. Rust monsters breathe in carbon dioxide and convert it into oxygen and other caustic gases. These gases are pumped into the small hairs where, upon contact with metal, the gases quickly initiate an oxidation reaction that corrodes the metal. The name "rust monster" is something of a misnomer, though, as they corrode any metal, not just iron; iron turns into rust, while other metals merely become coarse, worthless dust. A rust monster's carapace is covered in the same hairs as the antennae, corroding all metal coming into contact with its body. Only the boney flanges of a rust monster's tail are devoid of these hairs, a trait useful in the creatures' mating process.

Rust monsters are natural trackers, capable of seeking out an armored opponent as easily as a vein of



valuable metal ore. When around bloodshed, the scent of iron in the blood drives hungry rust monsters into a frenzy, and starved specimens have been known to viciously attack wounded creatures.

A rust monster's tail is used for stability and breathing, with a gill-like structure that helps take in—along with the mouth and nostrils—enough carbon dioxide to produce the large supplies of oxygen they need to corrode metal. Males possess larger tails than females, which in addition to breathing they use to attract the attention of potential mates.

Rust monsters hatch from spherical, iron-colored eggs. After a brief pregnancy, a mother lays her clutch of eight to twelve sticky, melon-sized eggs into deposits of metal rich rock. Although the eggs require no special attention, both of the parents stay nearby to ward away any hunters (particularly umber hulks, which view all rust monsters—but particularly their young—as delicacies). After approximately a month the eggs hatch, each spilling out a tiny larval rust monster about the length of a man's forearm. These young have no appendages and look like nothing more than bloated, brownish maggots with moist antennae approximately a foot long. These antennae possess the same corrosive effects as an adult rust monster's, and over the next two years grow in size, along with legs, a bony tail, and a hardened carapace.

Some adventurers hunt juvenile rust monsters as they are more easily handled and turned to specific purposes than adults.

Being aberrations, mutation is natural to rust monsters, and several regional variants exist. Shaggy, blue-white frostfell rust monsters prowl some arctic regions, supplementing oxidation with extreme cold to shatter metals. Moss rust monsters dwell in damp rainforests and swamps, their infected hides riddled with dripping, mossy spores. Dun and khaki-hued waste rust monsters roam desert landscapes, reducing metal they encounter into sand instead of rust. Legends even say the al-Khalid desert was actually once the great sprawling city of a learned and terrible race that raised buildings made of steel, but a horde of rust monsters reduced it to sand in one fell night.

A few unconfirmed theories imply that rust monsters are the larval stage of some other creature. With little evidence, such theories propose obvious links between rust monsters and destructive rust dragons (see page 186 of the *Draconomicon*) or similarly formed annihilators (see page 79 of

*Underdark*). Certainly many metals have magical properties, which in concert with aberrations' penchant for mutation could have caused strains of rust monsters to evolve into different creatures. Many sages believe a missing link in a rust dragon's origin might be explained by some connection—or processes—involving rust monsters and metallic dragons. Some studies claim that certain breeds of rust monsters seek out the eggs of metallic dragons and either taint the wymling within or transform themselves after feasting on the yolk.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF RUST MONSTERS

Rust monsters are solitary creatures. Males are uninterested in reproduction until they come into contact with a rare metal—often adamantite or mithral—that triggers psychological changes. The male harvests bits of the metal and scoops uncorroded chunks up with its tail and travels until it finds a female to present it to. Several males often compete to bring a female the largest amounts of the rarest metals, with but one earning her attention. After winning a mate, the male remains with the female until their eggs hatch, then departs. Adventurers with exotic metal items might find themselves harried by waves of hopeful male rust monsters seeking the rare metals they need to impress a female.

Like underground-dwelling locusts, rust monsters wander the depths searching for metal in any form. Upon finding a place with suitable

*"The party was a typical [first edition] bunch... exploring a typical [first edition] hackfest of corridors and idols and rabid lizardmen, when they threatened to go off the map of what I had prepared earlier.*

*"I was being a cheesy bastard that day, so I said: 'There's a corridor there, but you see an iron golem standing in front of it.' You know, nothing challenges players like the sure-TPK encounter, so they were convinced that was the way to go. I tried, but I couldn't talk them out of it. 'There's supposed to be rich treasure in the temple section' got me nowhere. 'Your henchman are refusing to go fight that thing' didn't work either. They were determined.*

*"Then one of the players... remembered the rust monster they had avoided in a prior session. 'I bet we could capture that thing and kill the iron golem with it!' he says. [So] that's the way it worked out. Of course, the party demanded full experience for the kill. I refused, saying 'The rust monster killed it. It gets the XP.' Like I said, I was a cheesy bastard that day."*

—Wolfgang Baur

*"The rust monster... makes me recall my first experience with D&D. I don't even know what edition it was, but my best friend lent me the books, and one had a solo adventure in it. Each section had it's own portion of map drawn on graph paper that you could transfer to your own map. I don't recall much of the dungeon save for the map sections with a statue represented by a star and a rust monster. I fell in love with the concept of roleplaying (and with graph paper) that day. I must have run through the solo adventure about fifteen times in a row, each time faithfully redrawing the map... and pretending I didn't know what lay around the corner. To this day rust monsters give me a warm, fuzzy feeling (and stars make me nervous. Designers never mark a statue on a map unless it's trapped or a golem)."*

—Amber E. Scott



metallic food sources, a rust monster seeks out a den, preferring cramped, defensible tunnel complexes with several exits useful for evading predators—particularly umber hulks. When injured by metal-using enemies, rust monsters hide in their tunnels, relying on the cramped space to force as much contact with their corrosive carapaces as possible.

Aside from their native Underdark, rust monsters might make their homes in a variety of other regions, eagerly relocating to any environment with an abundant metal food source. While mountains and ore-rich hills attract many of the creatures, the debris and metal-strewn sewers of most cities prove especially hospitable. Many civil officials dread rust monsters and the damage they can do on a community's substructure. Rumors of rust monsters infesting a city's depths often precede retellings of the tale of Haven City, a cliff-side port, half of which supposedly slid onto the sea when rust monsters devoured its underground supports.

Many societies with access to rust monsters seek to domesticate them, hoping to deny their enemies the advantage of metal weaponry (see page 86 of the *Arms and Equipment Guide*). In addition to war, rust monsters serve other uses. Many duergar train rust monsters to track veins of ore or employ the aberrations against enemy fortifications and spells like *wall of iron*. In some societies, enterprising surgeons use rust monster larva to dissolve and eliminate shrapnel, barbed arrowheads and other invasive metal weaponry. Rust monsters are also extremely useful for destroying cursed items, and many adventurers laden with malignant magic items seek them out. Creatures vulnerable to specific metals also often exploit the defensive potential of rust monsters. Noble fey houses and packs of lycanthropes sometimes train rust monsters as guardians, eager to destroy the substances that would do their masters harm. 🐞

## ADVANCED RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters advance exclusively by Hit Dice, growing in size as they age. Such oversized specimens might be found wandering metal-rich regions or as domesticated war beasts.

Like a personification of the rage warriors feel toward rust monsters, o-Akasabi-sama is an ancient and cunning creature. Over the decades this monstrosity has destroyed the weapons and holy katanas of numerous master swordsmen, many of whom committed ritual suicide in disgrace. Now the ghosts of these dishonored warriors haunt the seemingly oblivious rust monster, bitterly goading others into o-Akasabi-sama's corrosive reach.

### O-AKASABI-SAMA

CR 8

Advanced rust monster

N Large aberration

Init +3; Senses darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +10, Spot +10

AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 17

hp 142 (15 HD)

Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +11

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee antennae touch +16 melee (rust) and bite +11 melee (1d6+3)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk +10; Grp +20

Abilities Str 22, Dex 16, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 6

Feats Ability Focus (rust), Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Track

Skills Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +8

**Rust (Ex)** When o-Akasabi-sama makes a successful touch attack with its antennae, it causes the target metal to corrode, falling to pieces and becoming useless immediately. The touch can destroy up to a 10-foot cube of metal instantly. Magic armor and weapons, and other magic items made of metal, must succeed on a DC 28 Reflex save or be dissolved. A metal weapon that deals damage to a rust monster corrodes immediately. Wooden, stone, and other nonmetallic weapons are unaffected.

**Spectral Entourage** o-Akasabi-sama is attended at all times by at least three rust-colored wraiths that harry well-armed opponents and try to draw them into the rust monster's clutches. With his undead entourage, o-Akasabi-sama is EL 10.





# SEARING FLAMES

## THE ECOLOGY OF THE SALAMANDER

by Christopher Campbell · illustrated by Anne Stokes

**S**inuuous and sinister, wreathed in flames like the classic image of a soul-burning in Hell, the salamander is truly the stuff of nightmares. Combining two common representations of evil—snakes and fire—salamanders do their best to live up to their opponents' preconceived notions. These cruel, rapacious predators destroy all they encounter, leaving nothing but devastation in their wake. Even when such destruction is not their goal, it is nevertheless inevitable, for little can withstand prolonged exposure to a salamander's consuming flames.

Native to a harsh environment where only the strong can survive, salamanders devote much of their time to games of warfare and social dominance. Largely because they themselves are prey for more powerful beings, such as the efreet, salamanders take great delight in venting their frustrations on weaker races.

### PHYSIOLOGY

A salamander's form combines the well-muscled torso of a humanoid with the lower body of a constrictor snake. Individuals might range in length from a mere 4 feet (for a flamebrother) to a whopping 32 feet (for the oldest noble salamander). Although salamanders are

asexual, their thin faces have a distinctly masculine appearance. A typical salamander's craggy features include a hooked nose and jutting chin.

A salamander's entire body is covered in thick scales of red and black that provide excellent protection from physical attacks. Spines of chitinous material poke out from between a salamander's scales. The oily liquid that oozes from the tips of these barbs is a natural waste product of the salamander's metabolism. When exposed to the intense heat generated by the creature's body, this substance bursts into flames, creating a fiery aura that radiates no more than 1 inch from the salamander. The temperature of this aura is so great that direct contact with it deals fire damage, boils away liquids, and incinerates paper.

Because of their similar appearances and close association, many believe that flamebrothers are juvenile salamanders, but in fact they are a separate species. Knowledgeable sages compare this relationship to that of goblins and hobgoblins. Although just as intelligent, flamebrothers tend to savagery and tribalism when left to their own devices. Salamanders act as a civilizing element to flamebrother society, and as with hobgoblin control of goblin tribes, salamander domination offers an often welcome stability.

### LIFE CYCLE

A salamander reproduces asexually by budding, splitting off one larva every ten years. Budding is an automatic function over which the salamander has no control. The process takes 1 week, after which the salamander is particularly vulnerable to attack until its body has recovered.

The first sign of budding is a swelling at the tip of the salamander's tail. The lump grows and spreads upward through the tail, increasing in size each day. Salamanders are extremely irritable and more vicious than normal during this time. From the second to the fifth day, the lump slows the salamander's movement by one-half and prevents it from constricting. By the sixth day, the salamander's entire body is swollen, and the creature is practically immobile. It cannot attack, it loses its Dexterity bonus (if any) to AC, and its speed is reduced to 5 feet. On the seventh day, the salamander's skin splits open, releasing the original adult salamander (with a new skin) plus one larva.

For one week following budding, the parent salamander's natural AC bonus is reduced to +3 while its new scales harden. It generally tries to avoid making constriction attacks during this time, since sustained pressure is extremely painful on the newly formed skin. Once

its scales have reached their full hardness, the salamander is ready to resume its former activities.

A larva must incubate within a fire source for one full year to evolve into a mature salamander. Although dangerous in its own right, it cannot survive for long outside a fire. If prevented from



## A SALAMANDER HAS NO DRIVE TO OBTAIN SUSTENANCE...

returning to its nurturing flames for more than 1 minute, a larva cools rapidly and dies as its body hardens into a substance resembling charred wood. Because of this vulnerability, larvae incubation chambers (called blazes) are heavily guarded and defended unto death.

The maturation process works much the same as budding. At the end of its year in the flames, the larva swells, tripling in size over the course of one week. It loses its Dexterity bonus (if any) to AC during this time, and it can't move. At the end of the week, the larva's skin splits, releasing an adult salamander. Newly formed salamanders have the same vulnerabilities and restrictions as those that have just budded, and those limitations last for the same period of time.

### Noble Salamanders

Noble salamanders do not reproduce. If an average salamander is lucky enough to survive for fifty years, it goes through yet another metamorphosis. Just like a maturing larva, it swells up, becoming completely immobile and helpless. At the end of one week, its skin splits, and a noble salamander emerges from the husk.

Not only is a noble salamander much larger than an average one, it also has a set of antlerlike projections on its forehead. These antlers are not for combat, as many sages believe. Rather, they somehow focus or channel the arcane energy that noble salamanders require for their spell-like abilities. Properly prepared, a noble salamander's antler can serve as the basis for a wand for any spell of the noble salamanders spell-like abilities, cutting the item's usual cost of materials by 25%. (See the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* for complete details on magic item creation.)

### Young Salamanders

Juvenile salamanders come in two forms—the flamebrother larva and the average salamander larva. Each kind of larva must spend one year in the flames to mature. At that point, it splits to release the corresponding adult salamander.

### Flamebrother Larva

**Tiny Outsider (Extraplanar, Fire)**  
**Hit Dice:** 1d8 (4 hp)  
**Initiative:** +2  
**Speed:** 10 ft.  
**AC:** 17 (+2 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 15  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +1/-8  
**Attack:** Bite +2 melee (1d3-1 plus 1d3 fire)  
**Full Attack:** Bite +2 melee (1d3-1 plus 1d3 fire)  
**Space/Reach:** 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Heat  
**Special Qualities:** Camouflage, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, vulnerability to cold  
**Saves:** Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3  
**Abilities:** Str 8, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 5, Wis 13, Cha 12  
**Skills:** Craft (blacksmithing) +5\*, Hide +14\*, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Spot +7  
**Feats:** Alertness  
**Climate/Terrain:** Elemental Plane of Fire  
**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or cluster (3-5)  
**Challenge Rating:** 1/2  
**Treasure:** None  
**Alignment:** Usually evil (any)  
**Advancement:** 2-3 HD (Tiny)

*The creature resembles a fat snake or worm with a pink hide and a mouth filled with needle-like teeth.*

A flamebrother larva measures about 1 foot long. Because they require a constant fire source to mature, these larvae are encountered only on their native plane or in areas of sustained high heat, such as volcanoes. The occasional sorcerer or wizard might keep one or two as pets in a carefully tended fireplace, but this practice is exceedingly rare.

If ever forcibly removed from its fire, a flamebrother larva immediately attempts to return to it. Fire deprivation for longer than 1 minute results in death as the flamebrother larva's body stiffens and hardens into a wood-like substance.

Flamebrother larvae understand Ignan, but they cannot speak.

### Combat

Flamebrother larvae use their environment to their advantage, blending into the dancing flames and striking to catch opponents by surprise.

**Heat (Ex):** A flamebrother larva generates so much heat that its mere touch deals 1d3 points of additional fire damage.

**Camouflage (Ex):** The outline of a flamebrother larva in a fiery or extremely hot area (flames, lava, burning embers, or the like) appears to shift and waver. This distortion grants it concealment (20% miss chance).

**\*Skills:** A flamebrother larva receives a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks made within a fire source. Although incapable of using the skill, flamebrother larvae still possess the salamander's +4 racial bonus to Craft (blacksmithing).

### Average Salamander Larva

**Small Outsider (Extraplanar, Fire)**  
**Hit Dice:** 3d8+3 (16 hp)  
**Initiative:** +1  
**Speed:** 10 ft.  
**AC:** 17 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 16  
**Base Attack/Grapple:** +3/+0  
**Attack:** Bite +5 melee (1d4+1 plus 1d3 fire)  
**Full Attack:** Bite +5 melee (1d4+1 plus 1d3 fire)  
**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.  
**Special Attacks:** Heat  
**Special Qualities:** Camouflage, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, vulnerability to cold  
**Saves:** Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4  
**Abilities:** Str 13, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 12

**Skills:** Bluff +7, Craft (blacksmithing) +2\*, Hide +11\*, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Search +4, Spot +9

**Feats:** Alertness, Power Attack

**Climate/Terrain:** Elemental Plane of Fire

**Organization:** Solitary, pair, or cluster (3-5)

**Challenge Rating:** 1

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Usually evil (any)

**Advancement:** 4-8 HD (Small)

*The creature resembles a fat maggot with a fang-filled maw.*

An average salamander larva ranges from 2 to 3 feet long. Like the flamebrother larva, it requires a constant fire source to mature, so these creatures are encountered only on the Elemental Plane of Fire or in areas of sustained high heat, such as volcanoes.

If ever forcibly removed from its fire, an average salamander larva immediately attempts to return to it. Fire deprivation for longer than 1 minute results in death as the larva's body stiffens and hardens into a woodlike substance.

Average salamander larvae understand Ignan, but they cannot speak.

### Combat

Like flamebrother larvae, average salamander larvae can blend into the dancing flames in which they live for defense.

**Heat (Ex):** A average salamander larva generates so much heat that its mere touch deals 1d3 points of additional fire damage.

**Camouflage (Ex):** The outline of a average salamander larva in a fiery or extremely hot area (flames, lava, burning embers, or the like) appears to shift and waver. This distortion grants it concealment (20% miss chance).

**\*Skills:** A average salamander larva receives a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks made within a fire source. Although incapable of using the skill, average salamander larvae still possess the salamander's +4 racial bonus to Craft (blacksmithing).

### MINDSET

As a native of the Elemental Plane of Fire, a salamander does not think like a creature of the Material Plane. It has no drive to propagate because budding is an automatic process. It has no drive to obtain sustenance, since smoke and flames provide all the nutrients it

requires. It has no need to secure shelter because its environment poses no danger to it. What then motivates a salamander? In a word: fire.

Born of fire, nurtured by it, and surrounded by it constantly, salamanders live by its rules and embrace its strengths. Fire burns. Fire consumes. Fire destroys. Fire represents the ultimate in strength and power, and salamanders judge all things by their interactions with it. Earth and stone smoke and crack beneath a salamander's fiery form but withstand destruction, and so they earn its respect. Metal bends to the will of fire but resists complete annihilation, and so the salamander employs it as a tool. Gems capture and reflect the light of fire, splitting it into a dazzling display of color and brilliance, and so the salamander prizes gems. All else is of little consequence. At the touch of fire, liquids boil away, paper turns to ash, and the creatures of the Material Plane cower. Thus, all of these earn only contempt from a salamander.

### SOCIETY

Salamanders are most often encountered in clusters—small groups of three to five individuals, all of the same kind. On the Elemental Plane of Fire, clusters belong to a tribe, which in turn might owe allegiance to either a king or a council. Away from their home plane, salamander groupings rarely expand beyond the cluster, since the local environment usually cannot support a larger population.

A salamander tribe consists of six to eight clusters that share a communal larvae blaze and metalworking facility. A lone average salamander might take charge of a tribe of flamebrothers, but such tribes might also exist without leaders. Noble salamanders almost always rule over average salamander communities, either singly or as a group. Such oligarchies often owe allegiance to even more powerful creatures of fire, such as red dragons or efreet.

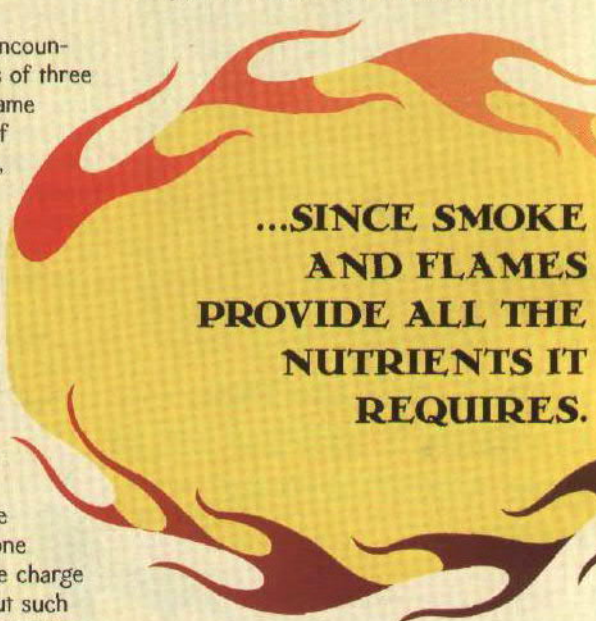
The worship of fire as both a creative and a destructive force is not a concept unique to salamanders, but as creatures born and refined to maturity in flames, they claim part of fire's divinity for themselves. As divine

creatures in their own right, they feel it only natural that they have dominion over lesser beings. This attitude leads to the practice of slavery as a means of reinforcing the dominance of salamanders over inferior races.

### LAIRS

The Elemental Plane of Fire is an endless expanse of flame. Huge sheets of black basalt float in oceans of magma, and all of it has been ablaze since the creation of the multiverse. This environment is the natural habitat of salamanders and the one with which they are most familiar.

The curse of being an outsider, however, is that lesser creatures from other planes can call on you to do their bidding, if even only for a short period of time. Summoning spells expose salamanders to a wide variety of terrains and settings, and they are capable of surviving in any kind of natural environment except underwater. Sometimes, however, the summoning magic goes awry, and a salamander is unable to



**...SINCE SMOKE  
AND FLAMES  
PROVIDE ALL THE  
NUTRIENTS IT  
REQUIRES.**

return home. In such a case, the creature sets about making its surroundings feel more comfortable. Such adjustments are always made at the expense of the environment, but salamanders have no regard for anything that cannot withstand the ravages of fire.

Given a choice, salamanders gravitate toward the hottest, driest locales they can find to establish their bases of operation. A subterranean lair makes an ideal refuge, second only to an active

## FAMILIARS FOR SALAMANDERS

As an optional rule, you can give the standard familiars in the *Player's Handbook* the fire subtype to make them viable as familiars for salamander sorcerers and wizards. The ability to have a familiar is an integral part of those classes, and it's unfair to restrict a salamander's choices to creatures that could not survive in its normal habitat. These fire-based familiars might also have cosmetic changes—such as orange and red coloring, an aura of flickering flames that causes no damage, or an altogether alien appearance—that differentiate them from their Material Plane counterparts.

volcano. The dryness of the desert appeals to salamanders, but the distinct lack of fuel in such a terrain poses a major drawback, since a long-term blaze is vital for raising young. Hilly areas make good salamander lairs, providing easy access to underground areas but still offering a good amount of fuel. The mining that sometimes happens in such

## SALAMANDERS' METAL WEAPONS CONDUCT THEIR HEAT FOR ADDITIONAL DAMAGE.

terrain also attracts salamanders, and a cluster might try to take over a mine-shaft to gain access to metal ore. The opportunity to work metal helps keep a salamander's mind off the alien environment in which it is trapped, and fortunate is the miner who can convince one to aid in smelting his ore.

Mining operations also make mountains attractive sites for lairs. Stranded salamander clusters sometimes offer their metalworking expertise to dwarven clans in exchange for sanctuary and a semblance of normal life. Many dwarven clans regularly summon creatures such as salamanders or fire and earth elementals to help run their mining operations, and such spellcasting ability might also provide a means to return stranded salamanders to the Elemental Plane of Fire.

Perhaps the most homelike place that a stranded cluster of salamanders can find on the Material Plane is the smoking caldera of an active volcano. An added bonus is the prevalence of *portals* that usually link the Material Plane with the Elemental Plane of Fire in such environments. Experienced salamanders, especially nobles, know that the best chance of getting home is locating such a *portal* within a bubbling lava pool or a fiery jet of ignited gas.

### KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

Salamanders are often found in the company of more powerful fire creatures. Many also command their own slaves.

**A Red Dragon Wyrmling and Flamebrothers:** Flamebrothers stranded on the Material Plane sometimes offer to watch over a red dragon's eggs or hatchlings in exchange for protection. A red dragon wyrmling raised with such creatures as its nannies and playmates not only develops a close attachment to them but also learns to exercise effective group tactics in conjunction with them. While the wyrmling uses its breath weapon, the flamebrothers attempt to flank or overbear opponents. A red dragon wyrmling and three flamebrothers constitute an EL 6 encounter.

**A Salamander and Azers:** Kept as slaves by many salamander communities, azers act as beasts of burden and blacksmithing assistants. Both salamanders and azers are kept as servants by the efreet. Whatever their association, these two kinds of creatures can cooperate to make flanking attacks, and both can take full advantage of their heat

special attack by employing metal weapons and making grappling attacks. One average salamander and two azers are an EL 7 encounter.

**Salamanders and a Fire Elemental:** Kept as pets by the various denizens of their native plane, fire elementals make ideal guards for salamanders because they are often difficult to see when at rest in the fire sources in which they lair. Two average salamanders and a Large fire elemental constitute an EL 8 encounter.

**A Noble Salamander and Rasts:** Noble salamanders often travel the planes in search of hidden knowledge, and often such a pilgrim keeps rasts as watchdogs. These vicious creatures readily engage opponents in melee, allowing the salamander to hang back and use its fire-based spell-like abilities without fear of harming its pets. One noble salamander and a pair of rasts make an EL 10 encounter.

**A Noble Salamander Sorcerer and A Young Adult Red Dragon:** This pair makes a near-perfect match. The dragon looks to the salamander for guidance in the development of its sorcerous powers, and the noble takes advantage of the dragon's superior combat expertise and ability to act as a mount. Since these two creatures work together by mutual agreement, they split treasure, with the dragon claiming items that are too fragile to withstand the salamander's heat. A 5th-level noble salamander sorcerer and a young adult red dragon constitute an EL 15 encounter.

### SALAMANDERS VS. PCS

The superiority of fire can be effectively demonstrated through combat, and salamanders enjoy destroying creatures that are clearly inferior. They usually target the strongest-looking opponents first, thereby prolonging the inevitable for the weaker opponents. As fire leaps from building to building, so too does a salamander pursue its enemies. The sections below demonstrate good uses of a salamander's abilities and are intended to help a DM run a salamander NPC.

**A Warm Welcome:** The touch of a salamander deals fire damage—1d6 points in the case of a flamebrother or average salamander and 1d8 points in the case of a noble. Salamanders capitalize on this characteristic by employ-

ing metal weapons that conduct their heat for additional damage. A dropped weapon no longer conveys the salamander's heat, but in an environment such as the Elemental Plane of Fire, a dropped weapon never cools.

Salamanders know what materials can and cannot withstand their intense heat. A favored tactic is to wrest a weapon or other object from an opponent's grasp with a disarm attack (using a wielded weapon or its tail), then either toss it into the nearest flames or keep hold of it. Items in the salamander's possession take fire damage each round. There is no saving throw, but object hardness affects the fire damage normally.

**Abacadabra:** A noble salamander has access to a number of spell-like abilities that it can use to its advantage. *Dispel magic* takes care of those pesky spells that adventurers like to use to protect themselves from fire. Thereafter, the noble salamander can use a *wall of fire* to divide and conquer. The creature can use *wall of fire* three times per day, and multiple barriers of this sort can eat up spells such as *resist energy* and *protection from energy* very quickly.

*Flaming sphere* is a good choice for setting opponents aflame, but only if the salamander can devote some time to directing it. Summoning a Huge fire elemental to keep opponents busy can provide such time, and it also ensures that the salamander has an ally for flanking purposes if melee combat becomes necessary.

Since a noble salamander has no fear of fire damage, dropping a *fireball* on itself is a smart way to take out multiple opponents in melee. Like *wall of fire*, this ability is usable three times per day. *Burning hands* is the least useful of the noble's abilities, since the spell's range doesn't exceed its reach with its tail or weapon. Thus, it is best kept as a last-ditch defense.

## PCS VS. SALAMANDERS

With sufficient preparation, a party can survive and even triumph over an equivalent force of salamanders.

**Turn Down the Heat:** *Resist energy* and *protection from energy* are the most logical choices for self-preservation in combat with a salamander. Layer them on; they might not stack, but any melee combat is going to involve a lot of heat. Also, if a character is unlucky enough to be targeted by a noble sala-

mander's *dispel magic* effect, chances are that at least one spell will survive.

**A Cool Reception:** Fight fire with cold. Salamanders have the fire subtype, which means they're particularly vulnerable to cold damage. *Cone of cold*, *Otiluke's freezing sphere*, and *ice storm* are all good offensive spells, and *ray of frost* is a good cantrip choice for low-level adventurers fighting flamebrothers, since it allows no saving throw if it hits.

**Energy Substitution** (a feat from *Tome and Blood*) allows spellcasters to change one energy type into another specified by the feat without using up a higher-level spell slot. Make *fireballs* cause cold damage, and watch the salamanders scatter!

**From a Distance:** The best way to avoid a salamander's constriction attack is to stay back. Of course, average and noble salamanders have damage reduction, so be sure to load up on magic ammunition and ranged spells. If you must close the gap for combat, use the Tumble skill to avoid provoking attacks of opportunity and try to maneuver for flanking bonuses. Also, you can try to get rid of a noble salamander's magic long spear by making disarm and sunder attacks.

**Alacazam:** If you're facing salamanders on the Material Plane, a cleric, sorcerer, or wizard can be your greatest asset. Forget trying to kill the fiery outsiders—just send them back to their home plane. Spells such as *banishment*, *dismissal*, and *holy word* exist for just such a purpose. *Dictum* or *word of chaos* can also achieve the same effect, but since salamanders can vary in alignment along the law-chaos axis, those spells carry an inherent risk of failure. In any case, salamanders don't have spell resistance, so the odds are on your side.

## NPC SALAMANDERS

Salamanders can advance as outsiders, making the NPC classes poor choices. With all good saves, d8 Hit Dice, fighter base attack advancement, and 8 skill points per Hit Die, advancing as an outsider is a good choice even when compared to PC classes. A salamander that advances in a PC class should do so to take advantage of the class's special abilities. Below are some additional suggestions for making unique and interesting classed salamanders.

**Barbarian:** Barbarian salamanders embrace the destructive force of fire,

# SALAMANDER FEATS

*These feats are recommended for constructing unique salamanders. At the DM's option, the prerequisites may be adjusted to make these feats available to other races as well.*

## BURNING RAGE [General]

Your rage stokes the flames of your body's heat.

**Prerequisites:** Con 13, heat special attack, rage.

**Benefit:** While raging, the fire damage of your heat special attack increases by +1d6.

## GOUT OF FLAME [General]

You gain a breath weapon usable once per day.

**Prerequisites:** Con 13, heat special attack.

**Benefit:** Once per day, you can regurgitate a mouthful of flaming bile and spit it at an opponent. Your breath weapon is a 15-foot line of fire that deals 2d6 points of fire damage (Reflex half). The saving throw DC is 10 + 1/2 your HD + your Constitution modifier.

## TAIL SNAP [General]

You can use your tail to hurl a globule of fire as a missile weapon.

**Prerequisites:** Con 13, heat special attack, snakelike tail.

**Benefit:** As an attack action, you can snap your tail like a whip, hurling a flaming globe at a target up to 100 feet away. This ranged touch attack has no range increment, and the globe deals fire damage equal to that of your heat special attack. Physically tiring to perform, this attack can be used a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Constitution modifier.

channeling its all-consuming power into a rage that can terrify even their own kind. Such a character is a formidable force indeed, since the Strength boost provided by rage increases the damage for all its attacks and raises its grapple bonus for constriction.

**Bard:** Delicate instruments such as lutes, lyres, and wooden flutes cannot withstand contact with a salamander, and while the blaring of bugles or horns might provide a pleasing accompaniment to the crackling of flames, brass cymbals or iron bells would probably make better instrument choices for a salamander bard.

**Cleric:** It should not be surprising that salamanders feel a strong connection with divinity, given that they are creatures of fire and therefore divine in their own eyes. Salamander clerics

can choose among the domains of Destruction, Evil, and Fire.

**Fighter:** Fighter is the preferred class for salamanders. Combat is the most direct way to demonstrate superiority over other beings, and in larger tribes, entire clusters might be trained as fighters. Levels of fighter can also allow a DM to give a salamander additional feats without sacrificing its current abilities.

**Monk:** A salamander monk makes a truly deadly opponent, especially since it has the Multiattack feat. Not only do

monk levels boost the salamander's already impressive AC, but the additional unarmed attacks it gains are even more devastating with the added damage from its heat ability.

**Ranger:** Ranger is a perfectly reasonable class for a salamander, especially from the standpoint of favored enemies. Many salamander rangers would select outsider (fire) in order to combat azers and efreet, their most ardent competitors on the Elemental Plane of Fire. Still others might choose humanoid (human) to exterminate the arrogant creatures that trespass on their plane and drag them across reality with summoning spells.


Since bows and arrows cannot withstand their heat, most salamander rangers select the two-weapon combat style.

**Rogue:** The need for weapons that are effective against their predatory neighbors and the desire to keep such weapons out of the hands of others naturally lead to the development of salamander rogues. If the owner of a *frostbrand* sword won't trade for it and is too tough to kill, the only choice left is to

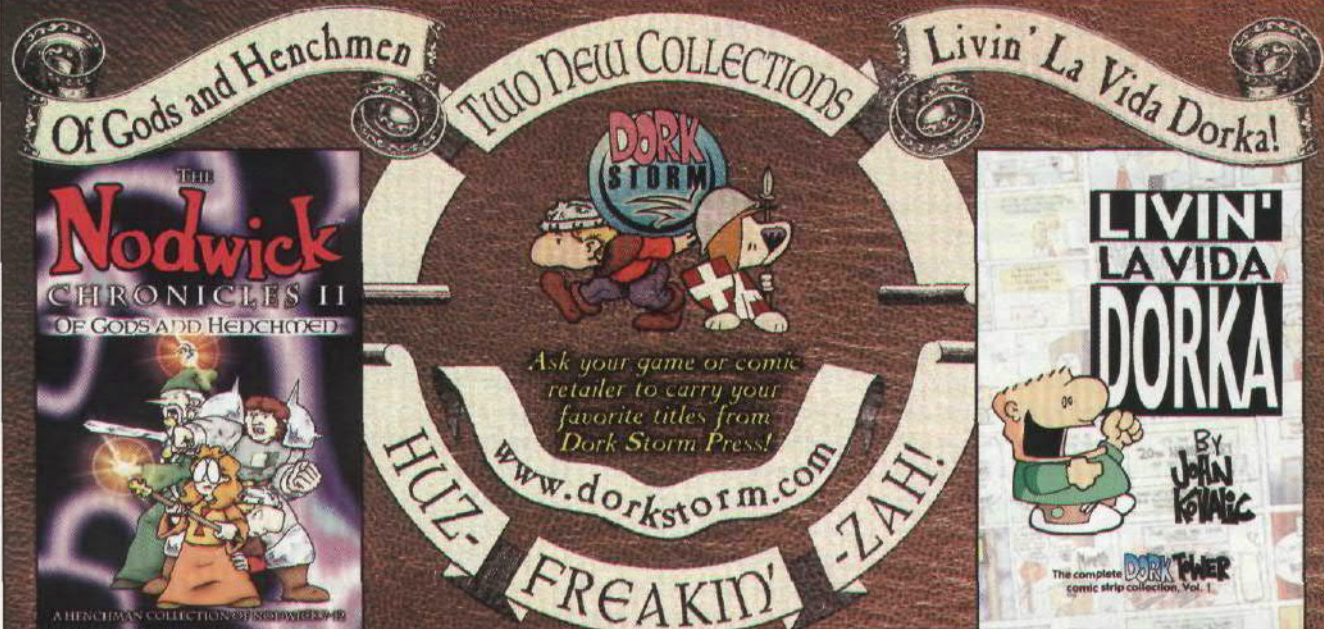
steal the weapon. The rogue's evasion class ability is a great boon to salamanders because of their susceptibility to cold-based attacks. Sneak attacks can make salamander teams much more deadly, giving them the ability to deal regular damage, heat damage, and sneak attack damage all at once when flanking opponents.

**Sorcerer:** Sorcery is the most common form of arcane spellcasting among salamanders. The inborn talent for summoning and manipulating magical energy is considered a gift. An average salamander nearing its metamorphosis into a noble sometimes explores the magical side of its nature by taking several levels of sorcerer before gaining its spell-like abilities.

**Wizard:** Wizards are virtually unknown among salamanders because of the spellbook requirement. A rare few craft spellbooks out of thin sheets of brass embossed with the arcane symbols necessary for dweomercraft, but such a book costs three times the normal amount to create. Add to that the difficulty of obtaining new spells (because conventional spellbooks and scrolls are combustible), and the number of salamander wizards dwindles to a negligible level. ♣



**FORGET TRYING  
TO KILL THE FIERY  
OUTSIDERS. JUST SEND  
THEM BACK TO THEIR  
HOME PLANE.**



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by Jesse Decker • illustrated by Peter Bergting

*There are no shadows in this world save those  
that serve the will of the shadar-kai.*  
—Sallan Kath-Moran, shadar-kai adept



**THE ECOLOGY OF THE**

**SHADAR-KAI**

**C**ursed by shadow, the shadar-kai hunt in twilight. They seek revenge for some half-forgotten wrong, emerging to steal power and information then slipping back into the shadows. The shadar-kai, also known as the shadow fey, have a great affinity for subtlety, cruelty, and stealth, yet they also carry a deadly curse, a curse that dooms their souls to a netherworld of shadows. Like many fey, they are bound to nature and despise those who despoil it, but where other fey protect nature for its own sake, the shadar-kai do so that they alone might draw upon nature's wealth and power.

**HISTORY OF THE SHADAR-KAI**

What joy and light once dwelt within the hearts of the shadar-kai was long ago lost to the shadows of their own history. In the early days of the world the shadar-kai lived

as other fey, bound in peace to nature and life. Yet always shadow and shadar-kai were as one, the pale-skinned fey harboring secrets of and influence over the mysterious Plane of Shadows. As eons passed and mortal creatures began to rise in power, the greatest spellcasters of the shadar-kai gazed deep into the swirling, timeless tides of that darkened plane, revealing a prophetic vision of nature pillaged by the mercurial whims of lesser races. The mighty among the shadow fey called for some strike against the races that would one day wreak this destruction, but the shadar-kai were never great in number and they could not through might or guile alone prevent the future they foresaw.

Thus, while their goal to prevent a ruinous future might have seemed innocent, their solution was not. Calling upon their innate intimacies with shadow and potent magical



skills, the shadar-kai sought a way to darken the world.

The legends of the shadar-kai tell of a hundred shadow fey—each a master of ancient magics—joining together to perform a ritual, one that would irreversibly bind the world of mortals and the Plane of Shadow together. From this twilight, their innate bond with shadow and their long-practiced rituals would give the shadow fey mastery over this new environment, allowing them to secure the sanctity of nature as they saw fit.

Yet even the shadar-kai could not see the dangers lurking within the shadow.

As their mighty ritual progressed, the shadow fey stared into the depths of the realm of shadow and learned that they as an entire race would become that place's conduit into their world. Forming a darkened nexus upon the Plane of Shadow, the shadow mages' magics bound the souls of every living shadar-kai to this single point. At the culmination of their great ritual, the very essences of the shadar-kai would drag this shadowy

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check regarding shadar-kai. Those who study the magic of the natural world, the Plane of Shadow, and the most ancient of histories might possess this information.

#### Knowledge (nature)

##### DC Result

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | The shadar-kai are evil fey with a strange relationship to shadow and darkness.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 15 | Shadar-kai are extremely stealthy and skilled at attacking from the shadows. It is their stealth and cruelty rather than physical or magical might that makes them dangerous.                                                             |
| 20 | An ancient curse draws the souls of the shadar-kai to the Plane of Shadow, where they cannot escape without great magic. They make special devices called <i>gal-ralan</i> to help combat this curse.                                     |
| 25 | The shadow curse affects the shadar-kai constantly, making them partially out of touch with the material world. Certain magic and rendering them unconscious can weaken the shadow fey and eventually banish them to the Plane of Shadow. |

anchor into the Material Plane along with the entire dark realm, joining the two forever.

There were those, however, who opposed the shadow fey. Heroes of this forgotten age, servants of primeval orders, and outsiders guarding what their masters had created sought to stop the shadar-kai and their dark ritual. Through countless shadow

fey guardians, these bygone warriors entered the Plane of Shadow and found the cyst the shadar-kai were creating, the nexus of extraplanar darkness bound to the very souls of the shadow fey. At the apex of the shadow mages' ritual the opposing heroes made a great and forgotten sacrifice, interrupting the rite to bind the two realms. The resulting magical backlash was

### THE MAGIC OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Since the ritual that brought the shadow curse down upon them, the shadar-kai have struggled to escape its incessant pull, developing a variety of magic—like the *gal-ralan*—meant to loosen its grip or strengthen their own waning abilities.

#### Shadowslip

Illusion (Shadow)

Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Targets: Creature touched

Duration: 1 round/level

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)

Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

Shadows twist and twine about the target, forcing many blows directed against it to go awry. The subject of this spell benefits from a 20% miss chance as if it had partial concealment.

In addition, any time the creature moves, it can move through the Plane of Shadow rather than through the Material Plane. Moving in this manner slows the creature to half speed, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The creature moves only through the fringes of the Plane of Shadow and cannot pass through any barriers or other obstacles on the Material Plane. The creature remains in the Plane of Shadow only while moving and returns fully to the Material Plane at the end of each move action.

*Special:* Shadar-kai under the effects of a *shadowslip* spell do not suffer the effects of the shadow curse. While any negative levels they had gained as a result of the curse previous to casting this spell still affect them, they cannot gain further negative levels from the shadow curse for the duration of the spell.

#### Shadowlight Oil

Shadowlight oil is a slow-burning oil that contains some small touch of the Plane of Shadow and can be burnt in any regular lantern. A lantern filled with shadowlight oil does not provide bright illumination over any area, but instead provides double the area of shadowy illumination that a lantern burning normal oil would. The table below summarizes the effects of shadowlight oil in normal lanterns.

Lantern	Bright	Shadowy	Duration
Common	n/a	60 ft.	6 hr./pint
Bullseye	n/a	240-ft. cone	6 hr./pint
Hooded	n/a	120 ft.	6 hr./pint

One pint of shadowlight oil weighs 1 pound, costs 5 gp, and requires a DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check to create.

titanic, scattering and killing countless shadar-kai and scouring both planes of any evidence of the sinister shadar-kai mages and the mortal realm's champions.

While the eternal twilight of the Plane of Shadow remained apart from the mortal realm, what ties the shadar-kai had forged could not be undone, only altered. The shadowy chains

bound to the souls of the shadar-kai reversed their pull, dragging their very essences into the realm they had hoped to enslave, forever corrupting the bond into the dreadful shadow curse.

Today, their homes decaying and empty as their populations are claimed by a darkened netherworld, the shadow fey obsess over their past folly and failure. Turning crueler

with each generation, the shadar-kai have largely become a race of scavengers and unrepentant murderers, all desperately searching for some means to keep their souls from the shadow's grasp.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Shadar-kai stand slightly taller than the average human and move with a speed and grace that few mortals can hope to match. The slender shadow fey weigh about 10 pounds lighter than humans of equal height and their long limbs are swift and flexible rather than delicate. The shadar-kai have extremely keen vision, allowing them to see twice as far through shadow or weak light as even the most keen-sighted elves. Being fey creatures, shadar-kai have incredibly long life spans, possibly even bordering on immortality. Although no—or extremely few—shadar-kai still live who remember the time when the shadow curse was bestowed upon their race, there are many who heard the ancient tale from their ancestors first hand.





Darkness is always with the shadar-kai and their bond with the twilight is easy to see. Shadows seem to bend to conceal the soft movements of the pale fey and with the slightest effort they can wrap this shade around them. This almost physical manipulation of shadow allows the shadar-kai to be seen only when they wish, and even the most wary sentries have failed to notice groups of shadar-kai slipping by in the darkness.

Yet, despite their control over darkness, every shadar-kai lives in fear of the debilitating shadow curse and the ghostly Plane of Shadow. As muted visions and dulled sensations pervade the realm of shadow, the shadar-kai have found that vivid and sharp sensations serve as precious handholds to the Material Plane. While moments of ecstasy and joy might serve their needs, the embittered mindset of the shadow

#### SHADAR-KAI ON THE PLANE OF SHADOW

Only a small population of shadar-kai actually exists on the Material Plane, the vast majority having been drawn to the Plane of Shadow over the centuries. While shadow fey regain lost levels and abilities upon submitting to the shadow curse, this is of small comfort. Being fey, shadar-kai are creatures of the Material Plane, specifically bound by nature to the world they dwelled upon. Separation from this home is an endless torment and all shadow fey feel like devoted guards forcibly separated from their posts, ever awaiting news of some calamity they've lost all opportunity to oppose.

The shadar-kai of the Plane of Shadow are more subdued than their brethren who still struggle upon the Material Plane. While some still toil to find a way back to their natural homes, most have submitted to a kind of race-wide despair. Living either as crazed brigands or despairing vagabonds in the shadowy doubles of their ruined cities, no passion, happiness, or hope fills the lives of these fallen fey. While these shadar-kai no longer scar and torture themselves, their hatred of all humanoid races is even greater than that of those on the Material Plane, and travelers through their shadowy domains are mercilessly hunted and gruesomely punished. The merest suggestion of a way back to the Material Plane, however, results in the immediate attention—even subservience—of the shadow fey, although those who make and fail to follow through on such claims meet lengthy and unimaginably agonizing ends.

fey makes extreme pain one of the most useful tools for keeping their souls anchored to the mortal realm. As such, shadar-kai regularly scar themselves with deep and complex tattoos, pierce their bodies with hoops and nails, and cut their flesh with blades of cold iron—the bane of all fey. The last of the shadow mages have even invented wearable torture devices called gal-ralans, excruciating cold iron armlets enchanted to further aid their struggle to remain on this world (see page 151 of the *Fiend Folio*).

Shadar-kai hunt and eat much as many humanoids do. With their bodies numbed by the touch of shadow, they seek out the strongest flavors and tastes they can find. Even the most powerful spices seem bland and distant to the shadow fey, though, and few take to food with any joy. For shadar-kai, eating is but another reminder that they will someday be drawn into shadow.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The shadow fey were never great in number, raising only a handful of small hidden cities even at the height of their numbers. Once the shadow curse took hold the shadar-kai's sparsely populated holdings began to empty and decay. Now, what shadar-kai redoubts remain are elegant half ruined dwellings cut into the sides of shadowy cliffs and slender towers rising beneath the densest forest canopies, home only to the oldest and most crazed shadow fey.

In the centuries since the fall of their homes, the shadar-kai have lived on the fringes of other societies, clustered in small groups and cabals, often led by skilled shadow mages. These groups of spies, assassins, and the occasional spellcasters haunt the shadows, hunting for any means of escaping the shadow curse. Rarely numbering more than fifty members, they steal what they need to survive, eagerly attacking any humanoids they encounter along the way.

### ADVANCED SHADAR-KAI

Desperate to make the most of their dwindling numbers, shadar-kai frequently train as assassins, rogues, and deadly shadow dancers. The most cunning of shadar-kai society take up the mantle of the shadow mage, wizards skilled in the arts of illusion and darkness. Some even adopt the shadow adept (see *Player's Guide to Faerûn*), daggerspell mage, or shadow-mind prestige classes (both from the *Complete Adventurer*), giving them far greater control over darkness and their enemies' perceptions.

#### SHADOW MAGE AGAZTRE CR 8

Male shadar-kai wizard 7

NE Medium fey (Extraplanar)

*Fiend Folio* 150

**Init** +3; **Senses** superior low-light vision; **Listen** +11, **Spot** +11

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal, Sylvan, Undercommon

**AC** 14, **touch** 13, **flat-footed** 11

**hp** 28 (10 HD)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +12; +2 bonus on all saves against death effects, energy drains, and the shadow curse

**Spd** 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +1 *kukri* +8 (1d4/18–20 + large scorpion venom)

**Base Atk** +4; **Grp** +3

**Special Attack** sneak attack +1d6

**Combat Gear** *wand of magic missiles* (3rd, 22 charges)

**Spells Prepared** (CL 7th, ranged touch +8):

4th—*shadow conjuration* (DC 18)

3rd—*haste*, *keen edge*, *shadowslip*

2nd—*darkness*, *mirror image*, *silent magic missile*, *Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 15)

1st—*disguise self*, *mage armor*, *shield*, *ray of enfeeblement* (DC 14), *ventriloquism*

0—*daze* (DC 13), *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

**Spellbook** all prepared spells; 0—all; 1st—*cause fear*, *grease*, *identify*, *unseen servant*, *shield*, *sleep*; 2nd—*blur*, *minor image*, *scare*, *sound burst*, *web*; 3rd—*invisibility sphere*, *major image*; 4th—*phantasmal killer*

**Abilities** Str 8, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 12

**SQ** hide in plain sight, shadow curse, summon familiar (Azae)

**Feats** Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (*kukri*), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain)<sup>B</sup>, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (illusion), Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Craft (alchemy) +11, Hide +13 (+23 in dark or shadowy conditions), Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +14, Move Silently +13, Search +11, Spellcraft +13, Spot +11, Survival +5 (+7 following tracks), Tumble +9

**Possessions** +1 *kukri*, *amulet of natural armor* +1, +2 *gal-ralan*, hooded lantern, 2 doses large scorpion venom (one on *kukri*, see page 297 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*), 2 pints of shadowlight oil, spellbook, spell components

**Azae, bat familiar:** 1 hp, *Monster Manual* 268.

Despite the bloodthirstiness they indulge upon others, shadow fey bands are savagely loyal to one another, like traumatized siblings clinging to their orphaned brethren. Passions run deep between shadar-kai, but the heights of tenderness this might manifest as in some races

instead gives rise to masochistic relationships, sometimes between merely two individuals but just as likely incorporating an entire band. These affairs culminate in agonizing orgies of tattooing, piercing, scarification, and mutilation. Yet, despite their painful nature, these trysts prove just as



Gal-Ralan

intimate and cherished to the shadar-kai as do the romances of other races.

As passionately as shadar-kai guard one another, centuries of loss and festering anger have left the shadar-kai intent on taking revenge on the civilized races that drove them to their doom. That the shadar-kai brought the shadow curse upon themselves is of little import to the cunning hunters and devious adepts of the shadow fey. It was the pain of nature giving way to younger races that caused the shadar-kai to seek aid in shadow and it is those younger races that the shadar-kai blame for their curse.

Regardless of their lack of race-wide organization, the shadow fey have universally adopted the spiked chain as their weapon of choice. Both a tool and a symbol of their wrathful crusade against the younger races, the shadar-kai delight in the spiked chain's versatility to mete out a variety of painful deaths, from brutal strangulations to slowly carved mutilations. As such, all shadow fey are skilled in the use of these weapons.

## ENEMIES AND ALLIES OF THE SHADAR-KAI

As a result of their attempt to radically alter the natural world, even if just to protect it, shadar-kai are not well liked by other fey. While the shadar-kai still respect and honor their people and their courts, the shadow fey have been disowned from the hearts and minds of their brethren. As such, the shadar-kai have little to do with other

fey, instead utilizing a wide variety of other shadowy creatures in their plots.

While shadow mastiffs most commonly appear alongside shadar-kai hunters, shadow asps (see the *Fiend Folio*) and creatures with the shadow template (see the *Manual of the Planes*) might also be trained to serve the shadow fey. Powerful shadow creatures, like darkweavers (see the *Fiend Folio*), shadow dragons (see the *Draconomicon*), and shadow fiends (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*, mature audience only) have also been known to bend shadow fey to their whims, at least for a time. Shadar-kai ally with humanoids only when it serves some greater purpose or to eventually betray and steal from them.

Of all the fey, only the murderous redcaps (see the *Monster Manual III*) willingly have dealings with the shadar-kai, but only out of their wild bloodlust and not out of any sense of kinship. Embodiments of rage and natural bloodletting, redcaps eagerly indulge the shadow fey's fall into frustration and revenge. Sadistic voyeurs, redcaps flock to groups of shadar-kai, opportunistically hoping to bathe themselves in the vengeful ways of shadow fey warriors.

Despite their overlapping tactics and abilities, dark ones (see the *Fiend Folio* and "The Ecology of the Dark One" in *DRAGON* #322) and shadar-kai share a violent hatred of one another. While the dark ones revile the shadow fey out of jealousy and their isolationist tendencies, the shadar-kai seem to hold a deeper grudge. Some researchers speculate that this hatred perhaps ties to some new shadar-kai revelation of the

future or the dark ones' own inscrutable connection to the Plane of Shadow. Others, however, hold that the dark ones' mysterious history might lie with the ancient mortal heroes who thwarted the shadar-kai adepts' dark ritual so long ago and that a potent racial enmity remains.

## SHADAR-KAI TACTICS

As skilled as they are stealthy, many of a shadow fey's opponents never even see their attacker, at least not until they're restrained for a protracted and agonizing revenge.

**Advanced Ambushers:** Both cunning and stealthy, the shadar-kai use their hide in plain sight ability to launch surprise attacks whenever possible, appearing and sneak attacking only to melt into the shadows. The shadar-kai regularly repeat this tactic, dropping foes one by one over the course of multiple ambush encounters, each lasting little more than a single round. Such ambushes most commonly occur in shadowy surroundings as shadar-kai gain a significant bonus to hiding in such areas.

**Cursed Combatants:** Above all things, shadar-kai fear the shadow curse. Forced to make DC 15 Will saves or suffer negative levels whenever they are stunned, dazed, staggered, or unconscious, shadow fey adepts constantly seek out spells like *owl's wisdom* and magic items like *cloaks of resistance*, *peripets of Wisdom*, various *ioun stones*, and similar saving-throw augmenting and Wisdom-bolstering magics. Shadar-kai swiftly flee from opponents, making use of spells such as *daze*, *sound burst*, or *word of chaos* that capitalize upon this failing. ☐

*“For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but farts and instructs the very worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth’s pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl.”*

—H. P. Lovecraft, “The Festival”

THE ECOLOGY OF THE

SPAWN OF KYUSS

The journals of Anadan the Reader make for singularly depressing yet morbidly intriguing study. An enthusiastic member of the crusading knights known as the Scions of the Hale, Anadan’s surprisingly literate account of his group’s encounters with the unliving contain valuable information on the behavior, combat tactics, and weaknesses of no fewer than seven undead breeds. Unfortunately for Anadan, it was this seventh undead, the spawn of Kyuss, that would prove to be not only his end, but the end of the Scions of the Hale. The last several pages of his worm-eaten journal tell of how his company was ambushed by a group of these horrific monsters, and how their very appearance drove fear into the hearts of many of his companions. Those who fled the combat were the lucky ones—they were able to live the rest of their humbled lives as broken men. The three who stayed to fight, including poor Anadan, managed to destroy the spawn, only to succumb, one by one, to the worms that infested their bodies during the battle—worms that leapt

and lunged from the undead flesh of their enemies to burrow hungrily into living meat.

Anadan tells of how one soldier cut off his own arm at the shoulder to try to stave off the gnawing approach of a worm, only to bleed to death as a result. The other man, Anadan’s captain, fled into the mist-cloaked bog and for the next several pages, Anadan writes of how the man’s screams grew more and more frantic and incoherent until they suddenly ceased. Throughout the entire account, Anadan writes of how he can feel the worms inside him burrowing through his body. Anadan was not lucky enough to have an arm to lop off. His worms swam through his torso, upward, into his neck. The reader can see in his text when the worms reached his brain, for his writing slowly grows sloppy, his ability to spell degrades, and his very vocabulary becomes stunted and almost illegible as the teeming intruders did their hungry work. His last words (for by this point he had apparently lost the skill to scribe complete



sentences) are particularly chilling: “...captain... back... he see me... drool... not drool... worm... chew... no... me live... not want die... hurt... hrrrrttt... hhungrrreee...”

Scholars and priests often refer eager adventurers who inquire about the undead to the journals of Anadan the Reader, for if they aren't warned off by Anadan's doom, they might learn a thing or two about perhaps the most terrifying and relentless enemy they'll ever face.

## HISTORY OF THE SPAWN

The spawn began with Kyuss, an ancient priest of a forgotten deity who ruled an empire before the advent of modern civilization. Little remains in writing of the details concerning Kyuss and his rule, but it seems clear his skill at creating undead was unsurpassed. Eventually, the necromancer-priest vanished into parts unknown, leaving in his wake an empire of the dead. Yet while relatively little information survives to inform the modern scholar about the man himself, of his spawn much has been documented.

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPAWN OF KYUSS

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (religion) check related to the spawn of Kyuss. Any cleric, graveyard keeper, or scholar of necromantic arts might know some or all of this information, although those who don't know the true nature behind these undead sometimes (unintentionally) spread inaccurate information about them (as evidenced by information provided for a DC of 10).

### Knowledge (religion)

#### DC Result

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Some zombies are just plain harder to kill than others. You can tell the really tough ones by the worms that infest them. Their wounds close up as fast as you can hack them apart.                                                                                                                                                       |
| 15 | Worm-infested zombies are dangerous, for there's a good chance such a monster is in fact a spawn of Kyuss, a disease-festering menace whose writhing green worms can transform those they infest into undead horrors.                                                                                                                     |
| 20 | A spawn of Kyuss exudes a supernaturally potent aura of fear. Worse, their touch not only infects victims with a terrible disease known as Kyuss' gift, but it can also infest others with the worms that gnaw on their bodies. The touch of silver and deft hands might pluck these worms away before they burrow into a victim's brain. |
| 25 | Magic that removes curses or diseases can save someone infested with the worms of Kyuss even if they have reached the victim's brain. Such a magic effect directed at the spawn itself can transform all but the most powerful into normal zombies.                                                                                       |
| 30 | Some of Kyuss' spawn are much more powerful than the typical spawn and possess strange powers like the ability to exhale clouds of noxious grave wind or the ability to spray the surrounding area with infectious worms. Not all spawn of Kyuss are humanoid in shape and might infest a variety of natural and monstrous forms.         |

The first reports of free-willed spawn of Kyuss came from adventurers who dared explore a forgotten and shadowed spur of the great Rift Canyon. Known now as the Wormcrawl Fissure, this region is reputed to have once been the seat of Kyuss' power. Certainly, the area was infested with his spawn. Strangely enough, explorers in the Amedio Jungle to the south began to report encounters with identical creatures in the western reach of the jungles.

As time wore on, the spawn began to appear in other regions as well, usually in large urban areas. These spawn were spread deliberately by cultists who proclaimed that Kyuss himself had not vanished from the world. Indeed, they believed that he had become a god, and it was their duty to spread his spawn throughout the world to herald his imminent return.

### NECROLOGY OF THE WORM

Like most undead, the spawn of Kyuss have a host of potent supernatural abilities. They radiate fear, they cause disease with a touch, and they heal damage to their undead flesh with shocking speed. Yet their most notorious and fearful aspect isn't properly a feature of their undead bodies at all, but is in fact the source of their scourge.

The green worms that infest each spawn of Kyuss are not themselves undead. Rather, they are a strange symbiotic form of vermin that subsists upon the decaying flesh of the spawn. The worms are voracious, but as fast as they consume the flesh of their host it regrows and replenishes. Theoretically, if a spawn of Kyuss could be separated from its infesting host, its fast healing would increase dramatically. Fortunately, the spawn themselves are inexorably tied to their wormy symbiots and without one the other quickly dies. The spawn's flesh provides sustenance for the worms, while the worms provide—in some unknown way—the animating energies the spawn requires to exist.

Scholars and necromancers have long been fascinated with these worms. None have managed to keep a spawn animate after harvesting its

worms but the reverse is a simple task. A Kyuss worm plucked from the body of its host can survive for several minutes before it melts into a reeking green stain. At one end, the worm is a gaping toothy hole of razor-sharp teeth set in concentric rings around the inside of the throat. A Kyuss worm on the ground is nearly helpless; it cannot slither, instead moving impotently by violently flopping its body. A Kyuss worm goes dormant indefinitely if stored in a *potion of gentle repose*, yet rumors hold that the cult of Kyuss has perfected methods of hiding worms in other liquids as well.

When a Kyuss worm contacts living flesh, it enters a state of violent excitement. The worm's mouth unfolds around itself, turning inside-out and prolapsing so that the teeth along its throat become concentric rings of outward-pointing teeth that take up half its length. These rings of teeth then twist back and forth with such ferocity that

the worm can drill through flesh and even bone with nauseating swiftness, slithering through tissue like a metal screw through soft wood. Although itself mindless, the worm's lower reaches are sensitive to nervous tissue and can feel the transmission of pain created from its fleshly burrowing as it is transmitted through the nervous system to the victim's brain. The worm follows these transmissions like a roadmap, unerringly arriving in the creature's brain only a few moments later.

Once the worm reaches the brain, its mouth reverts to its normal state and it begins to consume, slithering its way at random through the victim's mind as it consumes his memories, personality, and horror-filled final thoughts. The victim soon dies and the worm immediately begins to multiply inside the body's now empty skull via an unnaturally swift asexual process. As the number of worms exceeds the skull's capacity, they burst from the victim's mouth, eyes, nose, and ears. It is at this moment that the supernatural vermin transform the body into a new spawn of Kyuss. Additional worms immediately begin feasting on the victim's flesh and organs, while the original clot of writhing symbionts remain lodged in the undead creature's skull. While individually unintelligent, the worms retain corrupted fragments of the original creature's intelligence and memories. This nest of worms serves the creature as an unholy replacement for the devoured brain. Although this hivemind usually possesses only a fraction of the original creature's intellect, it is more than enough to give the spawn of Kyuss a sinister cunning and drive it to spread its taint among new victims.

### CREATING A SPAWN OF KYUSS

Any evil cleric can create a spawn of Kyuss by casting *create undead* as long as he is at least 15th level. The material component for creating a spawn of Kyuss, however, is slightly different than normal. This version of the spell must be cast over the grave



## KYUSS

### Demigod (Neutral Evil)

Once an obscure deity associated with creating and mastering the undead, Kyuss and his cult are rising in prominence with the coming of the apocalyptic Age of Worms. Classically, his appearance has been likened to a gaunt man with hands of bone and eye sockets filled with writhing worms, but many religious scholars believe that Kyuss has shed all remnants of his once mortal body, and is now composed entirely of a humanoid-shaped mass of writhing green worms.

**Symbol:** A human skull with green worms writhing from the eye sockets and jaw.

**Portfolio:** Creation and control of the undead, decay, unholy transformation of the flesh, worms.

**Domains:** Corruption\*, Death, Destruction, Evil.

**Favored Weapon:** Club.

**Clerical Training:** New cultists must drink a *potion of inflict light wounds* that contains a preserved Kyuss worm in a deadly ritual known as First Ingestion.

**Quests:** Kyuss encourages his cultists to not only lure powerful individuals to his fold but to trick members of other cults and religions into furthering his unknowable goals.

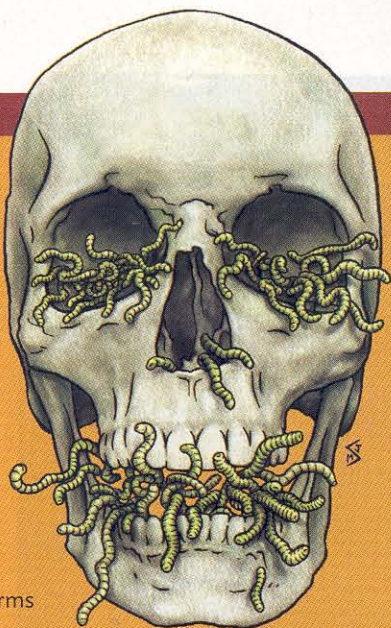
**Prayers:** Servants of Kyuss offer their prayers on a personal level once a month in a rite involving the ingestion of living worms.

**Temples:** Huge subterranean cathedrals and tabernacles dedicated to Kyuss exist in remote locations far from civilized lands.

**Rites:** Kyuss' cult anticipates the return of their god, a time they call the Age of Worms. In preparation, cultists undertake a variety of vile missions ranging from the creation of spawn of Kyuss to world-spanning manipulations.

**Herald and Allies:** Kyuss' herald is a undead terror known as Dragotha, once a red dragon and consort to Tiamat. Kyuss most commonly sends demons that bear the favored spawn of Kyuss template in response to *planar ally* spells.

\* Consult the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).



worm's direct interest. In recent years appearances of the favored spawn have risen, evidencing the impending Age of Worms.

## SAMPLE FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

### MASTIFF OF KYUSS

CR 3

Favored spawn of Kyuss fiendish riding dog

CE Medium undead

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +6, **Spot** +6

**Aura** fear (DC 13, 40-ft. radius)

**Language** Abyssal

**AC** 19, **touch** 12, **flat-footed** 17

**hp** 13 (2 HD); **fast healing** 5; **DR** 5/silver

**Immune** undead traits

**Resist** cold 5, fire 5; **SR** 7

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

**Spd** 40 ft. (8 squares)

**Melee** bite +5 (1d6+6 plus worm plus Kyuss' gift) or worm +5 touch (special)

**Ranged** worm +3 touch (special)

**Base Atk** +1; **Grp** +3

**Atk Options** smite good 1/day (+2 damage against good foes)

**Special Atk** create spawn

**Abilities** Str 19, Dex 15, Con —, Int 5, Wis 14, Cha 8

**SQ** infested skin, turn resistance +3

**Feats** Alertness, Improved Unarmed Strike<sup>B</sup>, Track<sup>B</sup>

**Skills** Jump +10, Listen +6, Spot +6, Swim +5, Survival +2 (+6 when tracking by scent)

**Possessions** masterwork spiked studded leather barding

of a killer who was buried without a coffin in unhallowed ground (a DC 25 Knowledge [local] check can usually determine if such a body lies near a specific settlement). If the caster has a preserved or live Kyuss worm he may substitute that for the 250 gp black onyx gem that is otherwise required to animate the body. As the spell is cast, the grave blooms with worms and maggots as the newly created spawn of Kyuss rises from within. Favored spawn of Kyuss cannot be created with this spell or with *create greater undead*; the secrets of their creation

reside only with Kyuss and his most trusted minions.

## FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

While the spawn of Kyuss are bearers and victims of their master's corruption, those who garner the demigod's favor are blessed by worms. Former fanatics, crazed visionaries, and purposefully sacrificed beasts, these favored spawn of Kyuss wreak his terrible will with an array of corruptive abilities. Found either alone or enslaved to the service of mad prophets, favored spawn take a vast array of forms and imply the demigod of

*An unnaturally mangy mastiff skulks forward, much of its fur and flesh having fallen away leaving gaping, diseased holes. A sickly green light streams from its empty eye sockets and strands of writhing green worms replace drool in equally copious ribbons.*

Plague-spreading hunters and harbingers of the demigod of worms, mastiffs of Kyuss stalk the enemies of their master's favored servants. Tireless and riddled with deadly Kyuss worms, a single mastiff might range over hundreds of miles, inevitably striking a single target with



precision or seeding its god's ruinous corruption throughout an entire offending town.

**COMBAT**

Mastiffs of Kyuss are barely-thinking killers, slaves to the wills of their masters. Their method of combat varies greatly depending on their commands, using their create spawn ability, fighting alongside pack mates, or avoiding confrontations depending on their orders' dictates. Mastiffs without instructions, however, know only the compulsion to spread their god's taint and seek to use their create spawn ability as often as possible.

**Create Spawn (Su):** Once per round as a free action, a spawn of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. See the following template for a complete description of these effects.

**Fear Aura (Su):** A mastiff of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. All creatures within a 40-foot radius must make a DC 13 Will save or be affected as if by the spell *fear*. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of the mastiff of Kyuss for 24 hours.

**Smite Good (Su):** Once per day a mastiff of Kyuss can make a normal melee attack to deal 2 extra points of damage against a good foe.

**Infested Skin (Su):** A mastiff of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square of the mastiff (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check)

must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

**CREATING A FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS**

"Favored Spawn of Kyuss" (known simply as the "favored" to cultists of Kyuss) is an inherited template that can be added to any living, corporeal creature. A favored spawn uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

**Size and Type:** The creature's type changes to undead. Do not recalculate Hit Dice, base attack bonus, or saves. Size is unchanged.

**Special Attacks:** A favored spawn retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special attacks.

**Create Spawn (Su):** Once per round as a free action, a favored spawn of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. It can do this whenever it hits with a natural attack or an unarmed attack, but it can also make the transfer by means of a successful melee touch attack or a ranged touch attack, hurling a worm at a foe from a distance of up to 10 feet.

Each worm is a Fine vermin with AC 10 and 1 hit point. It can be killed with normal damage or by the touch of silver. On the spawn's next action, the worm burrows into its host's flesh. A creature with a natural armor bonus of +5 or better is immune to this burrowing effect. The worm makes its way toward the host's brain, dealing 1 point of damage per round for 1d4+1 rounds. At the end of that period, it reaches the brain. While the worm is inside a victim, a *remove curse* or *remove disease* effect destroys it, and a *dispel evil* or *neutralize poison* effect delays its progress for 10d6 minutes. A successful DC 20 Heal check extracts the worm and kills it.

Once the worm reaches the brain, it deals 1d2 points of Intelligence damage per round until it either is killed (by *remove curse* or *remove disease*) or slays its host (death occurs at 0 Intelligence). A Small, Medium, or Large

creature slain by a worm rises as a new spawn of Kyuss (not a favored spawn) 1d6+4 rounds later; a Tiny or smaller creature quickly putrefies, and a Huge or larger creature becomes a normal zombie of the appropriate size. Newly created spawn are not under the control of their creator, but they usually follow whatever favored spawn of Kyuss created them.

If a creature is infested with multiple worms, a single *remove curse* or *remove disease* destroys all the worms infesting the creature at once.

A favored spawn attacking a helpless opponent may use its foul embrace ability instead of this ability.

**Fear Aura (Su):** A spawn of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. This ability functions like a *fear* spell (caster level 7th, Will save DC 14 + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier), except that it affects all creatures within a 40-foot radius. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of that favored spawn of Kyuss for 24 hours.

**Foul Embrace (Su):** By pressing its face against a helpless victim, the favored spawn of Kyuss can infest the victim with a rain of 2d6 worms. This ability is treated the same as the create spawn ability, but a victim slain by the resulting infestation rises as a favored spawn of Kyuss rather than a normal zombie.

**Kyuss' Gift (Su):** Any creature hit by a favored spawn of Kyuss' natural attack or unarmed attack must succeed at a DC 12 Fortitude save or contract this supernatural disease. The incubation period is 1 day, and the disease deals 1d6 points of Constitution damage and 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. These effects manifest as rotting flesh and dementia. An affected creature gets only half the benefits of natural and magical healing, though a *remove disease* effect removes the affliction.

In addition to the previously described abilities, a favored spawn with 10 HD or more gains one of the following additional special attacks

as a gift from Kyuss himself. Saving throws against these effects are against a DC of 10 + half the favored Spawn's Hit Dice + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier.

**Infested Skin (Su):** The favored spawn of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square as the favored spawn (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check) must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

**Noxious Breath (Su):** Once every 1d4 rounds, as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can exhale nauseating vapor from its mouth in a 15-foot cone. All creatures in this area must make a Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds.

**Wormburst (Su):** Once per day as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can expel a 10-foot-radius burst of worms from its body. All creatures in this area of effect must make a Reflex save or become infested by 1d6 Kyuss worms.

**Special Qualities:** A favored spawn retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains the following.

**Damage Reduction (Ex):** A favored spawn of Kyuss gains damage reduction 5/silver. If the favored spawn has 10 or more Hit Dice, this increases to damage reduction 10/silver.

**Fast Healing (Ex):** A favored spawn of Kyuss has fast healing 5.

**Turn Resistance (Ex):** A favored spawn of Kyuss has turn resistance +3.

**Abilities:** Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +2. Favored spawn are undead, and as such do not have a Constitution score.

**Feats:** A favored spawn of Kyuss gains Improved Unarmed Strike as a bonus feat.

**Challenge Rating:** +2 (for creatures with 9 HD or less) or +3 (for creatures with 10 HD or more).

**Alignment:** Always chaotic evil. ☠

## AGES OF WORMS



Kyuss and his spawn first appeared in official D&D terms in 1981's *Fiend Folio*. Designed by Michael MacDonald, the high-indestructible sons of Kyuss were created by the then priest Kyuss for his own dark purposes. Since then, Kyuss' influence and his namesake minions have spread, appearing in numerous campaign settings, adventures, bestiaries, and—most unexpectedly—as the name of the rock band Kyuss. The minions of Kyuss have taken numerous forms since the *Fiend Folio*'s original sons of Kyuss, appearing most recently in the *Monster Manual II* as the spawn of Kyuss, in *DRAGON* #307 as the scion of Kyuss template, and in this article as the nauseating favored spawn of Kyuss template.

In all of their long history, though, the most epic of Kyuss' plots is unfolding now in *DUNGEON*'s Age of Worms Adventure Path. As foul tidings coincide unlikely heroes stumble upon far-reaching plots of the foul demigod.

Further information about Kyuss, his various spawn and servitors, and their dark plots can be found every month in the pages of *DUNGEON*, *DRAGON*'s ongoing "Wormfood" series, and the massive free *Age of Worms Overload* PDF, available at [paizo.com](http://paizo.com).



## ECOLOGY OF THE

# SPELLWEAVER

**M**agic is the birthright of many creatures; powers in excess of most mortals' abilities that seem to grant them dominion over lesser races. Dragons, beholders, titans: these beings all manipulate the world through magical might, but none hold mastery over and refine their powers to the degree of the enigmatic and elusive spell weavers. Natural sorcerers, as potent as they are alien, spell weavers are the orphans of an ancient empire, ruined seemingly by happenstance. Collectors, traders, and instigators, spell weavers ever seek a way to reshape the present, which has perhaps gone terribly wrong.

## HISTORY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Only seen on rare occasions, and always because of their involvement in some scheme to obtain magic items by trade, persuasion, or force, spell weavers are a mysterious race of powerful sorcerers. These elusive beings evidence the last descendants of an ancient, magically advanced empire that, millennia ago, spanned numerous worlds and planes.

In this forgotten time, the spell weaver empire consisted of a vast league of colonies, called nodes, which spanned the multiverse. Huge pyramids of stone and steel powered

*"Now I am my death and my decay, and soon I shall be nothing... but the scheme of my causes will repeat itself, and generate me again. I lived six times to breed six new lives, and I shall be the same, identical life. I shall be born again as six recurrences of myself."*

—From the Breeding Tablet



by gigantic magical furnaces, these nodes were widely separated, often with only one existing on any single world or plane of existence. All of them, however, connected to one another through a complex matrix of magical portals. Thus, each node served as a huge planar travel installation, capable even of instantly moving with all of its inhabitants to other locations or planes.

The so-called spell weaver empire was largely a noninvasive one—an advanced community of intellectual watchers who only occasionally subjugated more primitive creatures to carry out menial chores and hard labor. What few races they encountered that posed threats the spell weavers gifted with powerful magic items and artifacts, allowing these cultures to destroy themselves from within (an act some spell weavers still practice in modern times). Yet, above all, the spell weavers

were interested in semantics, a subject they had researched for thousands of years, traveling through the multiverse to meet and observe nearly every culture imaginable. Through the tireless study and practice of innumerable symbol and language codes, the spell weavers learned to avail themselves of their physical attributes and natural talents like no other race, developing an uncanny telepathy and the ability to cast multiple spells at once.

Few know if the spell weaver plan to acquire total knowledge of all existing communication was their ultimate goal or if they had some other purpose. What is known is that, at the height of their prosperity, the spell weavers conducted a grandiose and dangerous experiment, possibly an attempt to alter reality across the entire multiverse. This experiment, however, met with tragic failure and caused a catas-

trophe of colossal proportions. For unexplained reasons, the furnaces within every spell weaver node exploded one after the other in a terrible chain reaction, obliterating the pyramidal colonies and all their inhabitants within seconds, effectively purging the multiverse of the spell weaver empire in a single moment. Only the few members of the race who were away from the nodes survived, becoming the ancestors of all modern spell weavers.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Averaging 5 feet in height and 100 pounds, spell weavers are six-armed alien-looking creatures. Their genderless bodies are smooth and hairless, varying between numerous shades of gray and occasionally splotched or speckled with light colors such as beige, pink, or yellow. Their necks are long and exceptionally nimble, allow-

ing spell weavers to turn their heads completely around with no effort. Further adding to their alien nature, spell weaver blood is metallic blue in color, similar to quicksilver.

All spell weavers carry chromatic disks, thin, 6-inch-diameter circular objects made of a silvery substance that is stronger than steel. At a spell weaver's will, the disk can change color and show a variety of patterns and designs on its dark surface. These objects are intimate creations of spell weavers, actual living extensions of their beings. In the rare case that a chromatic disk is lost or destroyed, a spell weaver can quickly replace it through meditation, exuding blood and fluids from the palm of its hands in the form of a metallic resin. The resin is manipulated to form the disk shape and solidifies quickly. This process takes only an hour but leaves the spell weaver exhausted.

Spell weavers are extremely long-lived creatures, with a lifespan near six centuries. Age does not seem to significantly affect their physical abilities, and only lighter skin tones distinguish older individuals from younger ones. Aging, however, is directly tied to reproduction for spell weavers in a complex and mysterious pair of rituals.

Upon reaching the end of its life—a time spell weavers seem to instinctually know—an elder spell weaver can rejuvenate its body through a special hibernation trance requiring the draining of a near-priceless amount of magic items. In preparation, the spell weaver sacrifices the energies within its accumulated magic treasures, destroying them to create a cylindrical “coffin.” It then finds a secure location, as the rite leaves it effectively helpless for the trance's entire duration. Upon sealing itself within the

coffin, the spell weaver enters a state of suspended animation from which it cannot be awakened. This process usually takes only a month, but sometimes lasts far longer, with evidence of spell weavers languishing within their coffins for centuries at a time. At the end of this ritual, the spell weaver is physically restored, its skin darkened and its life renewed for another six centuries. This restorative process only seems to function for spell weavers, yet even so they keep its specifics a mystery from all other races. This trance only functions six times, providing no benefit beyond that. Despite their lengthy lifespans and these renewing trances, however, spell weavers are far from immortal.

To reproduce—an act that is for spell weavers little more than a final act of self-regeneration—an elder specimen who has gone through all six rejuvenation processes may perform a complex, ritual self-sacrifice that results in the “birth” of six new adult spell weavers. The rite requires a special array of breeding vessels found only in a few rare spell weaver sites. To perform the ceremony, the parent creates six new chromatic disks and places them into the vessels where the new individuals form and grow in a few hours. During that time, the parent dies and decays, eventually disappearing into nothingness. The newborn spell weavers rise from the vessels with the full memories and mental abilities of the parent.

Spell weavers do not speak, for their law forbade speech millennia ago as part of the training to develop their telepathic faculties. They seldom emit noises, and only as a consequence. When they suffer pain, for example, they might squeal or grunt in a high-pitched tone, but nothing more. Spell weavers have their own incredibly complex language of clicks and whistles, which they know only from distant memories. In modern times, the spell weaver language is experienced only in its written form, as node hieroglyphs.

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPELL WEAVER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check related to spell weavers. Those most likely to know such information are the few people who have researched the ancient spell weaver empire or have knowingly done business with them. Other sources of information might also exist near the site of a node's destruction, wastelands usually marked by a crater or rift of some sort.

As spell weavers are an extremely rare race, Knowledge checks resulting in less than DC 15 reveal no information about them. Also, considering their ancientness and magical aptitude, DMs might wish to change the skill check required to learn about spell weavers from the standard for monstrous humanoid—Knowledge (nature)—to Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (history).

#### Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
15	Spell weavers are exotic, six-armed sorcerers who constantly search for magic items.
20	Spell weavers are silent and aloof creatures. They sometimes enslave physically powerful monsters to serve them. Spell weavers excel in magical combat and can sling many spells simultaneously.
25	Spell weavers are powerful telepaths, although they seem to shun contact with all but their own kind. Part of spell weaver communication relies on the shifting colors of their strange chromatic disks.
30	Spell weavers can rejuvenate themselves multiple times, each potentially living multiple lives. New spell weavers are spawned through a complex ritual in which an elder spell weaver dies.
35	The telepathic powers of spell weavers includes the ability to read the “memories” of certain magical objects. Their race-wide search for such items is likely tied to some greater, mysterious purpose.



## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Although they still comply with the dogmatic prohibition not to speak, modern spell weavers are free from the rigid social structure of their ancient empire. Sometimes a few individuals band together to pursue the common goal of acquiring magic items, but most members of the race are essentially loners.

Spell weavers have two complementary ways to communicate exclusively among themselves—a sign language that makes use of their flexible neck and six hands and a visual language based on the colors of their chromatic disks. Both of these communication methods can convey very complex and articulate

meanings, and are totally incomprehensible to other races. They are not redundant, though, for through the combination of sign language, chromatic disks, and telepathy, spell weavers can deliver hours of explanation and dialogue in a few minutes.

Spell weavers have no religion and actively shun the worship of deities, refuting these beings' divinity and mysteriously hinting at some undermining secret of their powers. Despite this disbelief, spell weavers do revere their ancestors and often meditate to better understand the will of past generations. As all spell weavers share the memories of their forebearers, this spirituality is less like actual devotion and more a kind of pious reminiscence.

During these recollections, spell weavers often recall the Time of Nodes, the golden age of their race when their pyramidal cities still existed. They refer to the catastrophe that wiped out their empire as the Disjunction, and the following age, up to the present day, as the Scrabbling. In the hopes of restoring this Time of Nodes, spell weavers seek out particular magic items or, more specifically, ancient gems imbued with "memories" that spell weavers can telepathically read. By inspecting these rare and specific gems, many spell weavers try to collect pieces of what they call the Code of Reversion, a magical formula devised before the final experiment that destroyed the spell weaver empire. The pieces of the formula were psychometrically inscribed on a series of precious stones for security reasons, and distributed in multiple copies to different keepers throughout the empire. Any spell weaver could activate the formula, but it had to read and memorize all the pieces first. The Code of Reversion essentially formed an incredibly powerful multipart spell, designed to revert time in the entire multiverse to the point when the formula was inscribed. Aware of the risks involved in their final experiment, the spell weavers devised the Code of Reversion as a chance to restore their empire if something went wrong. The catastrophe, however, exceeded their worst expectations, and the inscribed gems were scattered and lost. As such, no spell weaver has yet been able to locate and perform the Code of Reversion. Even the spell weavers are not sure if a complete copy of the formula has survived, and most gems suffer gaps in their memory that cannot be filled. Needless to say, the successful activation of the Code of Reversion would inevitably mean the erasure of thousands of years of history and the effective annihilation of all present things.

Not all spell weavers obsess over the past, however. While some accept the



The tablet illustrates the spell weaver breeding.

*Top Left* - a spell weaver goes through his disks (numbered with the canonical binary numerals).

*Top Right* - the older spell weaver produces six disks and places them into as many breeding vessels; the disks shine in the middle of the vessels, as spell weaver embryos develop overhead; the frontal position of the older spell weaver signifies "last".

*Bottom Left* - the newborn spell weaver (their life cycle marked "zero") are grown to full adults.

### NODE HIEROGLYPHS

SAMPLE CYRILIC TRANSCRIPT

А	В	Г	Д	Е	Ж	З	И	Й	К	Л	М	Н	О	П	Р	С	Т	У	Ф	Х	Ц	Ч	Ш	Щ	Ъ	Ы	Ь	Э	Ю	Я
а	в	г	д	е	ж	з	и	й	к	л	м	н	о	п	р	с	т	у	ф	х	ц	ч	ш	щ	ъ	ы	ь	э	ю	я

### NODE NUMBERS

#### SIXTIL WEAVER DIGITERALS

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

#### SAMPLE NUMBERS

GRANDERIAL SIXTIL DIGIT	SIXTIL WEAVER/DIGIT	CYRILIC
• 0 •	□ □	37
0 П Л •	□ □ □ □	1243
• П Л 0	□ □ □	378

This phonetic transcript is part of the results of a comprehensive languages spell cast on a spell weaver tablet.

The vowels change from tables to tablets, however, and interpreting the text is always a matter of intuition and luck.

The language of the tablets seems to imply a system of encoding patterns stored in the brain, which are perfectly natural to spell weavers, but totally alien to other creatures.



## NODE HIEROGLYPHS

The node-dwelling spell weavers of ancient times used special hieroglyphs to record the specifics of their lives, their travels, and their research. Since most spell weaver tablets date to this Time of Nodes, they are often blackened and badly damaged. The spell weavers of modern times rarely use node hieroglyphs, but can still understand them perfectly. The hieroglyphs can be read aloud with spells like *comprehend languages*, but the text is encoded in a way that its literal translation inevitably reveals nonsense to non-spell weavers. To successfully make sense of the text, a reader must succeed at a DC 25 Decipher Script check in conjunction with *comprehend languages*.

Spell weavers sometimes illustrated their tablets with simple line block drawings. The tablet presented here is the Breeding Tablet, one of the most famous spell weaver documents ever discovered. It shows the sequence of a spell weaver's six-life cycle and its final self-sacrifice.

ruin of their civilization and attempt to live peacefully, others strive to rebuild the spell weaver empire. To them, the greatest impediment to renewed spell weaver mastery is the world's infestation by innumerable humanoid races, which dominate it through their verminous fecundity alone. Harkening back to offensive strategies utilized during the Time of Nodes, these spell weavers are all too glad to supply such races with the instruments of their annihilation.

## THE DISJUNCTION

No spell weaver or researcher from any other race knows what accident caused the ruin of the spell weaver empire and brought about the end of the Time of Nodes. While spell weavers acknowledge that their leaders were attempting some far-reaching magical feat, they remain universally secretive of its specifics. Two commonly held possibilities follow:

**Ascension:** Through their study of language, spell weavers discovered the prime form of communication, words of reality capable of manipulating all existence. Revealing that deities were little more than bickering entities with knowledge of this language, the spell weavers attempted to take their place among the powers en masse. Their intentions discovered by the existing deities, these covetous beings warped the spell weavers' attempt to elevate the population of an entire node, creating a magical backlash that rippled through and destroyed the spell weaver

## NODE NUMBERS

Numbers—especially the number six—are sacred to spell weavers, and they have a senary numerical system. Spell weavers also have a decimal system, developed to cooperate with the nerra (the enigmatic rulers of the Plane of Mirrors; see page 127 of the *Fiend Folio*) at some point of their history. The purpose of this cooperation was the construction of a mirror-based, short-range teleportation device. This device consisted of several pentagonal gates that connected spell weaver nodes with selected locations in the surrounding areas. Successful transit through the gates was achieved by navigating through a maze of extradimensional rooms, using a numerical code for direction (see the *Shackled City Adventure Path* for more on this and other spell weaver artifacts).

empire, along with all knowledge of the prime language.

**Unification:** Spell weavers came to believe that, at the beginning of creation, all of the planes and countless worlds were in fact one single, balanced reality. This equilibrium, however, was shattered by the mercurial whims of the deities. Traveling to all of these fragmented existences and creating their nodes as anchors, the spell weavers hoped to cast a multiverse-spanning spell capable of drawing the shattered planes back together. The power of infinite infinity

## LEGENDARY SPELL WEAVER ELDER

**Advanced Spell Weaver of Legend Archmage 3  
Medium Outsider (Augmented Monstrous  
Humanoid, Native)**

**Hit Dice:** 3d4+30d8+198 (340 hp)

**Initiative:** +13

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**Armor Class:** 38 (+9 Dex, +10 natural, +6 armor, +2 deflection, +1 insight), touch 22, flat-footed 29

**Base Attack/Grapple:** +31/+34

**Attack:** Slam +34 melee (1d6+3)

**Full Attack:** 2 slams +34 melee (1d6+3)

**Space/Reach:** 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Frightful presence, spell-like abilities, spells

**Special Qualities:** Arcane reach 30 ft., chromatic disk, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 5, fire resistance 10, immune to mind-affecting effects, mastery of elements, mastery of shaping, reflective hide, shielded mind, spell weaving, SR32, telepathy  
**Saves:** Fort +20, Ref +30, Will +27

**Abilities:** Str 17, Dex 28, Con 23, Int 22, Wis 19, Cha 32

**Skills:** Concentration +26, Diplomacy +23, Knowledge (arcana) +37, Knowledge (planes) +15, Listen +20, Move Silently +20, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +48, Spot +37, Tumble +15, Use Magic Device +44

**Feats:** Empower Spell, Improved Initiative (B), Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Skill Focus (spellcraft), Spell Focus (conjunction), Spell Focus (evocation), Still Spell

**Epic Feats:** Automatic Quicken Spell (0-3), Epic Spellcasting, Improved Metamagic, Multispell (x2)  
**Challenge Rating:** 21

**Treasure:** Ring of protection +2, ring of minor fire resistance, dusty rose ion stone, cloak of charisma +2, gloves of dexterity +2, amulet of health +2, wand of cure serious wounds

**Alignment:** Usually neutral

**Frightful Presence (Ex):** All creatures within 20 ft. must make a DC36 Will save or become shaken for as long as they stay within 20 ft. Creatures with 30 HD or more are immune.

**Reflective Hide (Su):** This monster of legend has a permanent *spell turning* effect.

**Spell-like Abilities:** Always active – see *invisibility*, at will – *detect magic*, *invisibility*, 1/day – *plane shift*. CL35.

**Spells (6/999/887/767/3):** As 35th-level sorcerer, DC21 + spell level +1 for evocation and conjunction spells (\*). It can cast 3 epic spells per day. It can cast 3 quickened spells per round (excluding spell weaving) and all 0th-3rd level spells are automatically quickened. All metamagic spell level adjustments are reduced by 1 (min. +1).  
Typical Known Spells: 0th – *acid splash\**, *detect poison*, *read magic*, *dancing lights\**, *ray of frost\**, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *message*, *open/close*; 1st – *burning hands\**, *magic missile\**, *obscuring mist\**, *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*; 2nd – *locate object*, *hideous laughter*, *mirror image*, *touch of idiocy*, *scorching ray\**; 3rd – *greater mage armor\** (already cast), *fireball\**, *fly*, *suggestion*; 4th – *locate creature*, *charm monster*, *fire shield\**, *greater invisibility*; 5th – *cone of cold\**, *feeble mind*, *teleport\**, *wall of force\**; 6th – *chain lightning\**, *disintegrate*, *greater dispel magic\**; 7th – *finger of death*, *force cage\**, *mage's sword\**; 8th – *maze\**, *polar ray\**, *trap the soul\**; 9th – *gate\**, *meteor swarm\**, *time stop*; Epic – *let go of me*, *lord of nightmares\**, *ruin*.

For other spell weaver abilities, see the following page. High arcana abilities are detailed in DMG.

## BATTLE WEAVER

Some spell weavers train themselves to make use of an extra pair of hands in combat.

**Prerequisites:** Spell weaver, Str 15.

**Benefit:** Spell weavers with this feat gain two additional slam attacks. These additional attacks are primary attacks and have the same attack bonus as the spell weaver's other slam attacks.

**Normal:** Spell weavers can normally only make two slam attacks.

**Special:** A spell weaver can take this feat twice, allowing it to make use of all six arms in combat. This feat makes spell weavers eligible for the Multiweapon Fighting feat (see page 304 of the *Monster Manual*).

## ADVANCED SPELL WEAVER

Seeking to master greater magic, most spell weavers advance as sorcerers or wizards, making the archmage or nearly any prestige class from *Complete Arcane* natural paths for many. Adhering to a strict atheism, spell weavers never advance as clerics. More martially minded spell weavers benefit greatly from the eldritch knight and spellsword (see *Complete Warrior*) prestige classes.

### SCHAVRA

CR 12

**Abilities** Str 14, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 16

Spell weaver fighter 4

N Medium monstrous humanoid

*Monster Manual* II 187

**Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., telepathy; Listen +11, Spot +11

AC 27, touch 12, flat-footed 25

hp 85 (14 HD)

SR 21

Immune mind-affecting effects

Fort +8, Ref +9, Will +14

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

**Melee** +2 spell storing longsword +15/+10/+5 (2d6+6/18–20) and 3 +1 longswords +14 (2d6+5/18–20)

**Base Atk** +14; **Grp** +16

**Special Attack** spell-like abilities, spells

**Combat Gear** *potion of bull's strength*

**Spells Known** (CL 16th, ranged touch +16):

6th (5/day)—*chain lightning* (DC 20), *wall of iron*

5th (6/day)—*cone of cold* (DC 19), *prying eyes*, *telekinesis*

4th (6/day)—*confusion* (DC 17),

*dimension door*, *fire shield*, *stone skin*

3rd (6/day)—*dispel magic*, *fly*, *haste*, *rage*

2nd (6/day)—*alter self*, *blur*, *web* (DC 15),

*resist energy*, *scorching ray* (DC 16)

1st (6/day)—*burning hands* (DC 15),

*identify*, *jump*, *magic missile*, *shield*

0 (6/day)—*dancing lights*, *detect magic*,

*flare*, *light*, *mage hand*, *message*, *ray of*

*frost*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 13), *resistance*

**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 16th):

Always active—*see invisibility*

At will—*detect magic*, *invisibility*

1/day—*plane shift*

**SQ** chromatic disk, immunity to mind effects, shielded mind, spell weaving

**Feats** Battle Weaver, Empower Spell,

Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten

Spell, Multiweapon Fighting, Spell Focus

(abjuration), Spell Focus (evocation), Spell

Penetration, Weapon Focus (longsword),

Weapon Specialization (long sword)

**Skills** Climb +12, Intimidate +15, Jump +10,

Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge

(history) +15, Knowledge (religion) +10,

Knowledge (the planes) +15, Listen +13,

Search +9, Spellcraft +19, Spot +14, Use

Magic Device +14

**Possessions** +4 *mithral shirt*, +2 *spell storing longsword*, 3 +1 *longswords*, *amulet of natural armor* +2, chromatic disk, backpack

**Chromatic Disk:** Schavra's chromatic disk

holds ten additional spell levels of energy.

By holding the disk in one hand the spell weaver can cast a spell that it knows and expend spell levels from the disk rather than from its number of spell slots

**Shielded Mind (Ex):** Schavra's mind cannot be read by any means. Those that try must make a DC 17 Will save or be *confused* for 1d6 days.

**Spell Weaving (Ex):** Schavra can cast multiple spells at a time as long as the sum of their spell levels are equal to or less than the number of hands it has free.

**Telepathy (Su):** In addition to the basic effects of telepathy, Schavra can communicate by thought with any other spell weaver within 1,000 miles.

ties proved too great for even the bold spell weavers, though, and their first trial wiped their empire from the reality they hoped to save.

## SPELL WEAVER RUINS

Ravaged by the Disjunction, the ruins of spell weaver nodes are thousands of years old—relics of an empire lost to time. Extraordinarily scarce, multiple nodes rarely exist on a single world and never on the same continent.

Every node has a similar structure, with a main pyramid that towers more than 500 feet tall. At the top perches a great crystal lamp once capable of illuminating the surrounding landscape with a pulsing azure light. With all probability, these lamps acted as a magical homing beacon for other spell weaver planar travel facilities.

Inside, the most important room of any node was the breeding chamber, the home of the magic cylinders necessary for spell weavers to reproduce. Only a few of these rooms survived the Disjunction intact, and they are desperately sought out and jealously guarded by modern spell weavers. Secondary to the breeding chamber was the mortuary, a many-floored hall that protected spell weavers undergoing their rejuvenating stasis. Deeper than these rooms slept the heart of the node, a gigantic magical furnace. While those in every node ever discovered have been destroyed, an active spell weaver furnace is capable of producing effects on par with the powers of the deities. As such, spell weavers throughout the planes dream of finding a near-mythic live node furnace.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, the Tortured Lands and the Fallen Lands both make likely spots for spell weaver ruins. In EBERRON, a spell weaver node might appear somewhere in the Demon Wastes or deep within mysterious Xen'drik. The *Shackled City Adventure Path* and the adventure "The Spire of Long Shadows," in *DUNGEON* #130, also suggest further spell weaver plots and designs. ■



THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# TARRASQUE

Ancient, ageless, and unstoppable, all know to fear the unrelenting devastation that is the tarrasque. A creature of legend, associated with the greatest of heroes and the darkest of times, little is known of the beast widely held as the greatest of monsters. Reports of the monstrosity's powers and ways to slay it have changed over time, but tales of its brute destructive force remain ever constant. Yet, even the least likely rumors and purported banes are comforts for those who must face that which is ruin unleashed.

## HISTORY OF THE TARRASQUE

Some of the oldest elven records are *ahltrekauth*, or "speaking gems." The few magically-accomplished elves and human loremasters who can awaken such stones hear voices of elves

## TARRASQUE HUNT

Bam-bam-bam! Dreelix slammed the gavel down hard three times in rapid succession. "This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened," he intoned.

He pressed on with uncharacteristic haste: "We'll worry about the normal preliminary stuff later. What I want to know—" and here his eager gaze fell upon Willowquisp, Spontayne, and Buntleby, to whom he had given an assignment the previous meeting—"is what can you tell me about the tarrasque?"

dead for eons, telling tales so old that the worlds those speakers inhabited have themselves died, crumbling to dust around extinguished stars.

One such gem holds an account that might describe the first appearance of a tarrasque, in a kingdom of elves, half-elves, humans, and halflings known as Aeritueur. This is its tale:

The Starfall Shield gleamed and sparkled day and night. The mightiest spell-crafting Aeritueur had ever seen—a wall of devouring magics to keep the Orgog and the Gnawing Ones out, that the valiant strength of our land not be sapped in ceaseless fighting

against such marauding monsters. There was much rejoicing, and wonderment at the titanic achievement—particularly after the fell dragon Larau Thoon sneeringly



dived deep into the Starfall, only to be caught, held frozen, and slowly melted away, despite every magic the wyrm hurled. Truly the Starfall was a barrier beyond compare, that girt fair Aertitueur on all of its mountain flanks, to keep us all safe.

Yet at the rising of the third moon after the crafting of the Starfall, something emerged from the dark woods in its most remote location, in the demesne known as Rondaeral, for he who lorded over it. An elf in tatters, with a shattered arm and so wracked with pain that he could scarcely shuffle, appeared out of the dying sparks of a *farstride* spell, to gasp out that Rondaeral was gone, devoured with all his household by a gigantic thing, a beast of great jaws that tore through castle towers and hill-tombs with ease, hurling down Rondaeral's castle and the town of Phondaeray around it.

"Rondaeral is laid waste," said he, "for the creature ate every shining knight who rode against it, without pause nor prudence, as it stalked on down the

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE TARRASQUE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to the tarrasque. Information about the tarrasque is often held by scholars of ancient history, lore books from fallen kingdoms, and wild-eyed refugees many pray are mad. The tarrasque appears on page 240 of the *Monster Manual*.

### Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
30	The creature you face is none other than the tarrasque, a powerful monster known for its unstoppable destructive capabilities.
35	The tarrasque sleeps for months or years at a time, awakening for several days between slumbers. During such time, it attacks and destroys all that it sees.
40	Mere sight of the tarrasque when it attacks can inspire terror in those who witness its destructive abilities, and its thick carapace keeps it safe from most spells.
45	The tarrasque has the most powerful regenerative abilities known, and can regenerate even after succumbing to a <i>disintegrate</i> spell or a death effect. The only known way to permanently destroy the tarrasque is to use a <i>wish</i> or <i>miracle</i> spell immediately after rendering it unconscious.

road devouring every elf, horse, housecat, and passing beast in the hamlets of Tauront, Aladriel's Gate, Narnath, and Luel's Tomb. I fled before it, and in the market-town of Oraunghlieir only just found time enough to prepare the *farstride* casting that brought me here, as

it gnawed and clawed its way through the buildings toward me, dashing down shops and turreted mansions alike with great sweeps of its tail. A hail of arrows they hurled against it, and a bright lance of brilliant-armored knights, and it ignored the one and smashed the



other with its talons ere eating the remnants. So much I saw before my magic snatched me away.”

Now in the bright court of Shelaralieir, Highqueen of Aeritueur, tall and wise courtiers scoffed at this telling. Oh, their swift spells told them the one in tatters truly believed what he said—but they held that he must have been driven mad, or been enspelled, to see things far from the truth.

Yet no sooner had they dismissed his words than the chamber where far-striders appeared rocked at the arrival of a fair elven knight in scorched and riven armor, whose pleas for aid were shouts none could ignore. From Lothaund this one came, and he cried that they had seen Oraunghlieir torn apart and toppled from afar, and mustered all the battle-might of Lothaund, mages and swordwielders alike, to make war on whatever had hurled down Oraunghlieir.

A great beast they saw, stalking toward them like a wingless dragon larger than any seen before, ponderous and slow.

At first they could scarce believe that this one beast, however monstrous, could alone have been the bane of Oraunghlieir. Yet they hurled their spells at it, rode at it with lance and sword, sought to pierce it with volleys from their greatbows, and even spell-hurled savage monsters into its path, to force it to fight them—yea, even great dragons!

But the Great Beast devoured and slew and prevailed, laying waste to all before it, until it came at last to Lothaund, and breached its walls, and started to hurl it down. Thousands of elves perished fighting it, and more fled, this knight among them.

This time the wise courtiers looked troubled, and did not scoff when this sorry knight warned them that the bright court could not be saved, and perhaps not even Aeritueur itself.

War-trumpets blared and spells cried warnings afar, calling all the mailed might of Aeritueur to fight this one foe.

Yet even as a realm rose up in alarm, swords flashing, the Great Beast

strode out of riven Lothaund and into the nearest mountain—into it, sinking down into the solid stone as a swamp-snake glides down under inky waters. As suddenly as it had come, the Great Beast was gone.

For the first time. For all too soon, it came again.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE TARRASQUE

By its physical build alone, a tarrasque might easily be mistaken for a dinosaur, towering more than 50 feet tall and measuring at least 70 feet from nose to tail. It stands upright on its powerful hind legs, with its body thrust forward and its long tail providing a counterbalance. In general stance, it moves much like a tyrannosaurus, although its front limbs are significantly larger: while a tyrannosaurus has stumpy forelimbs unable even to reach its own head, the tarrasque’s arms are long enough to touch the ground as it stands erect, and in fact the creature has been known to “knuckle walk” in the manner of some apes.

## TARRASQUE PLOTS

The tarrasque is legendary for its single-minded rampaging and the fearsome destruction it wreaks. Here are a few ways to introduce this destroyer into a campaign.

**Arcane Glutton:** A sudden surge in spellcasting or the use of a rare magic item in an area "awakens" a tarrasque. It cuts a path of destruction toward the center of the heaviest magic use, devouring all living things. It continues its rampage until either it is sated or no magical source exists in the region for it to consume.

**Artifact's End:** The PCs come into the possession of a powerful but evil magical treasure that can only be destroyed within the tarrasque's stomach. Unfortunately, the tarrasque was last spotted mere months ago and is not likely to reawake for years.

**Defending the Realm:** The tarrasque has a special relationship with a kingdom, serving as its monstrous defender. Stealing a crown or other royal regalia, spilling royal blood on a throne, or slaying or kidnapping royalty causes the appearance of a tarrasque that stalks those responsible.

**Ritual of Ages:** A group of nihilistic tarrasque monster cultists (see *DRAGON* #296) seek to permanently awaken and worship the tarrasque as it brings about the end of civilization.

Covering the tarrasque's dorsal half is an exceptionally thick, highly reflective armored carapace covered in massive spikes, while twin horns of similar size and shape jut forth from the creature's head. The horns are used offensively, while the carapace serves a defensive role—not only against physical attacks, but also against many magical attacks as well.

The tarrasque's carapace has been described as looking like "melted diamond" (by those lucky enough to have encountered the creature and lived to tell the tale), which accurately describes the carapace's toughness, reflectivity, and overall smoothness. In truth, the tarrasque's carapace is not made from diamond—melted or otherwise—having a unique composition.

The bodily processes of a tarrasque can readily digest all organic matter, living and dead, creatures and plants—even wood that has been painted or varnished. The lone destroyer's immunity to poison leaves it unharmed by dyes, paints, molds, other growths on decaying organic matter, and so on. A tarrasque has an expanding gullet that holds creatures and objects swallowed whole, which tumbles such devoured items around and around in a continuous spiral, working them down into a succession of three stomachs. These stomachs are among the most effective destructive engines in the multiverse and little—even the most powerful magical artifacts—can survive within.

The uppermost stomach is a hot, wet place of tumbling stones and internal spines (the stomach wall seems lined with thousands of bony knife-blades) that breaks down large objects; its walls are durable and very strong, with moving knots of muscle that can literally punch, squeeze, and claw at swallowed items. This stomach can shatter large rocks down into smaller stones, break clods of earth into scattered motes,

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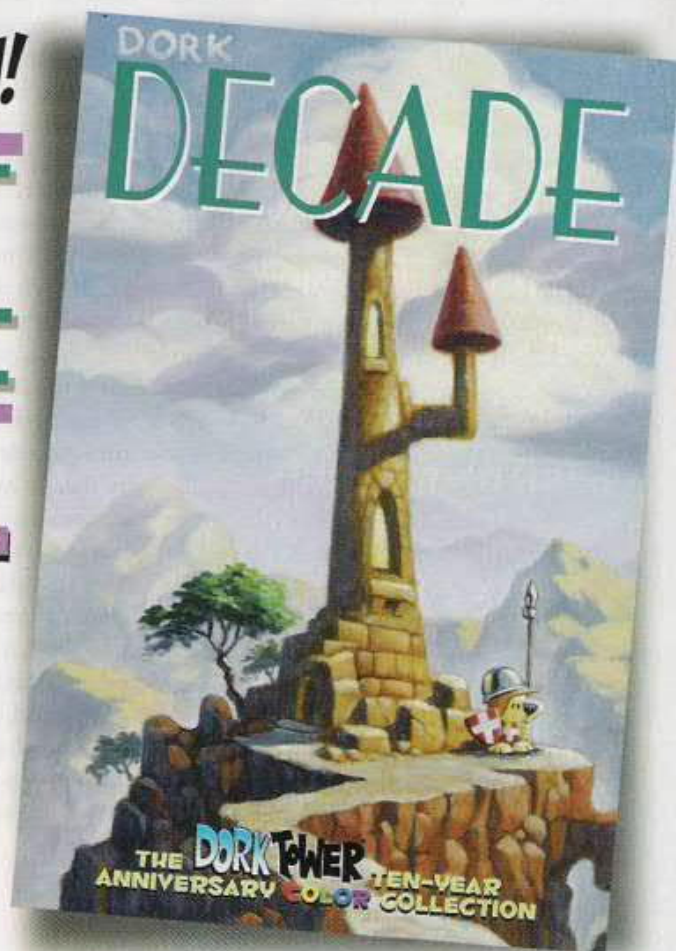
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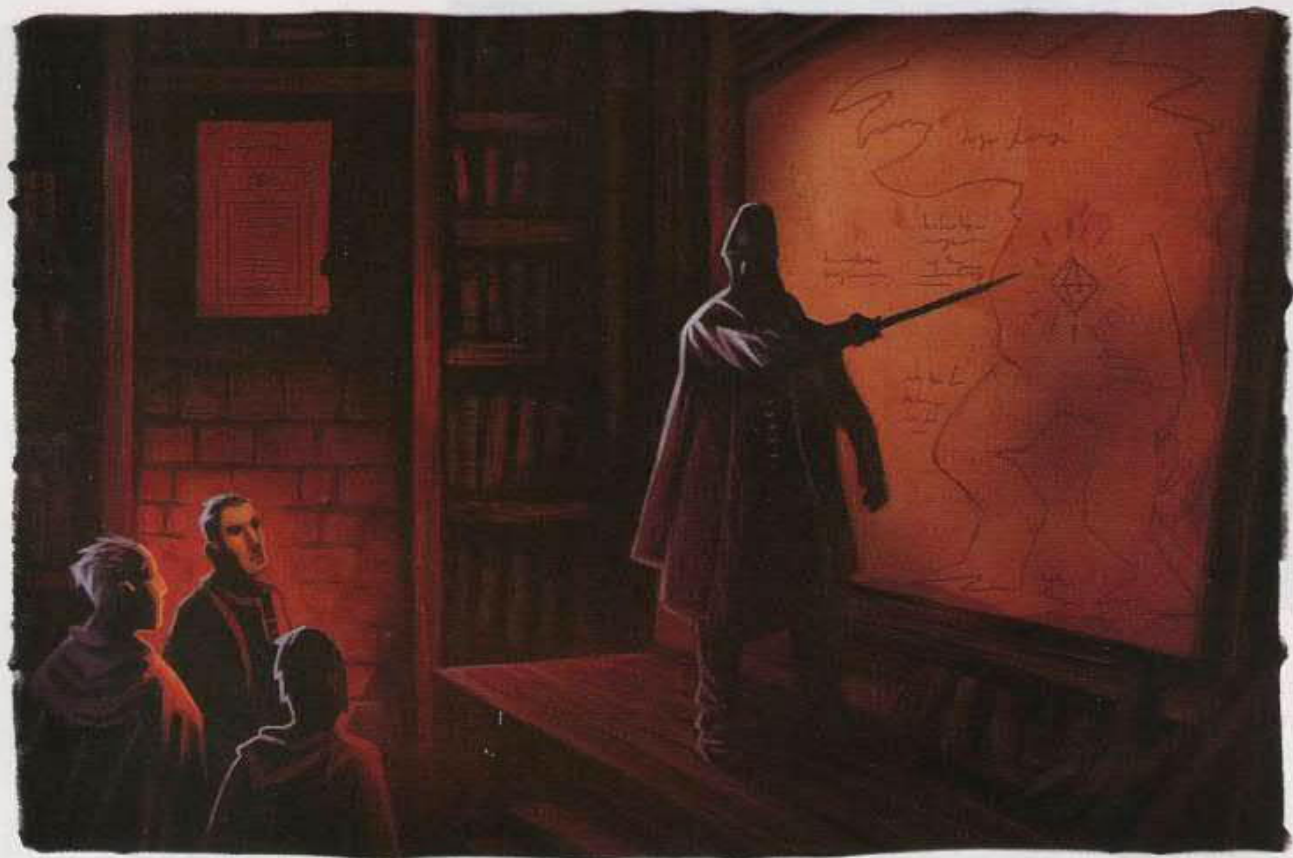
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crack bark and bones, dismember bodies, and puncture containers so as to spill out and separate the contents. Belts and ropes are typically sawn into shorter lengths in this stomach, and glass is shattered. Metal items and glass shards are typically moved on swiftly to the deeper stomachs.

The middle stomach of a tarrasque is a churning, energetically pulsing fleshy cauldron of corrosive acid. Unique in all the planes, this fluid possesses a disjunctive property, capable of stripping the magical powers from consumed magics. Here everything breaks down.

The last stomach of a tarrasque is a long, winding, rhythmically-thrumming tube of great heat, where anything that survives the previous stomachs—typically only the strongest and rarest metals—meets its end. The acidic slurry boils off and is absorbed by the creature.

It takes a tarrasque mere moments to force what it consumes through its devastating digestive process. Despite the swiftness of this metabolism,

the vast majority of the energy is stored. While it takes a great deal of food to keep an active tarrasque sated, tarrasques are actually quite docile—this stored energy sustaining them through deep, decades-long hibernations.

When preparing for such a hibernation, a tarrasque employs one of its most unusual and rarely witnessed abilities. Once fully gluttoned and ready to go back to sleep, a tarrasque gains the ability to earth glide in much the same way as xorns do: it burrows through stone, dirt, or any sort of earth except refined metal or continuous veins of pure metal as easily as fish swim through water, without disturbing or dislodging anything or leaving a tunnel or hole in its wake. This lets the beast access subterranean caverns its bulk would normally not allow it to reach. Lacking a large enough cavern to lair in, it can earth glide until buried, to “be at one with the stone” (sharing space with solid rock, a condition referred to as “arnstone” by some dwarven sages). This

is why there is so much debate and mystery surrounding the location and nature of a tarrasque’s lair.

While in arnstone state, a tarrasque does not suffocate, but sinks rapidly into a torpor in which its bodily processes slow and it hibernates until the need for new nourishment awakens it into the “burrowing” state again. In damp rock, where mineral-laden waters percolate, and with a belly filled with the ruins of a large town or city, this need might not arise for as long as 50 years. In dry or caustic rock, or if a tarrasque is disturbed by tremors (including the relatively minor vibrations of nearby rock or creature movements), shifts in temperature, or actual wounding (direct damage from the pick of a dwarf prospector or the weapon of an adventurer, for example), awakening might come much sooner.

A tarrasque’s carapace and outer hide are clearly visible to earth gliding or quarrying creatures who reach one’s immediate vicinity. Earth gliding creatures cannot glide into or through the volume of earth or rock occupied

by an arnstone tarrasque; its body seems "solid" to such creatures, who are deflected aside from it.

A tarrasque comes out of torpor with astonishing speed if disturbed, typically taking only 1d4+1 rounds to become fully aroused. While awakening, a tarrasque has the same properties and vulnerabilities as when sinking into torpor. A waking tarrasque is unpredictable; it might move away from the disturbance, turn to confront it, or "flee" at high speed for some time and then try to settle down into torpor again.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE TARRASQUE

A tarrasque's actions are all driven by one need: nearly insatiable hunger. It has an intellect just above that of an animal and instinctively sees all other creatures as food. (Of course, it also sees trees and plants as food, buildings as food, rocks and dirt as food, and so on.) Given its powerful regenerative abilities, it has little to fear from combat with most creatures, and even those that have the capability of killing it—like high-level spellcasters—don't register as anything other than another type of potential food. Thus, a tarrasque never retreats from battle, no matter how events might turn against it.

A tarrasque is by no means an evil or vindictive force. It is no more a source of evil than a hungry wolf or lion, although this view is difficult to maintain by those whose homes, families, and entire lives have been destroyed by such a ravenous beast. The only real enmity the tarrasque ever feels toward its living victims is reserved for creatures capable of flight. Since the tarrasque has no method of ranged attack, any creature capable of flying beyond its reach has nothing to fear—a fact that annoys a hungry tarrasque to no end.

Once the tarrasque has its fill—a process that can normally take up to a week, during which time it remains completely awake and continually alert—the creature begins to get drowsy and prepares for a long sleep.

So long as it is not currently in battle (as its primitive brain refuses to allow it to depart from a fight while there is still living morsels to ingest), it finds the nearest chunk of solid rock big enough to support its massive bulk and settles down within for a lengthy hibernation.

### ADVANCED TARRASQUE

The tarrasque is widely held as the toughest monster in *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*, despite there being creatures in the *Monster Manual* of higher CRs, not to mention dozens of other deadlier beasts in other books. As the tarrasque can be advanced to have any number of Hit Dice, presented here is a CR 30 version ready to challenge even epic-level heroes.

#### The Tarrasque CR 30

Advanced tarrasque

N Colossal magical beast

Init +7; Senses scent; Listen +25, Spot +25

AC 40, touch 5, flat-footed 32; Dodge  
hp 1,539 hp (78 HD), regeneration 40;  
DR 15/epic

SR 32

Immune ability damage, disease, energy drain, fire, poison

Fort +50, Ref +39, Will +28

Speed 20 ft.

Melee bite +89 (6d8+19/16–20/x3)  
and 2 horns +87 (2d8+9)  
and 2 claws +87 (3d6+9)  
and tail slap +87 (4d8+9)

Space 30 ft. Reach 20 ft.

Base Atk +78; Grp +94

Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Multiattack, Power Attack; improved grab, rush, swallow whole

Abilities Str 48, Dex 16, Con 39, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 14

SQ augmented critical, carapace, frightful presence

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Armor (x5), Improved



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Natural Attack (bite),  
Improved Natural Attack (claws),  
Improved Natural Attack (horns),  
Improved Natural Attack (tail slap),  
Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Power  
Attack, Toughness (x6)

**Skills** Listen +25, Search +16, Spot +25,  
Survival +21 (+23 following tracks)

**Regeneration (Ex)** No form of attack  
deals lethal damage to the tarrasque.  
The tarrasque regenerates even  
if it fails a saving throw against a

*disintegrate* spell or a death effect.  
If the tarrasque fails its save against  
a spell or effect that would kill it  
instantly (such as those mentioned  
above), the spell or effect instead  
deals nonlethal damage equal to  
the creature's full normal hit points  
+10 (or 1,549 hp). The tarrasque  
is immune to effects that produce  
incurable or bleeding wounds, such  
as mummy rot, a sword with the  
wounding special ability, or a clay

golem's cursed wound ability.

The tarrasque can be slain only by  
raising its nonlethal damage total to  
its full normal hit points +10 (or 1,549  
hit points) and using a *wish* or *miracle*  
spell to keep it dead.

If the tarrasque loses a limb or  
body part, the lost portion regrows  
in 1d6 minutes (the detached piece  
dies and decays normally). The  
creature can reattach the severed  
member instantly by holding it to  
the stump.

**Improved Grab (Ex)** To use  
this ability, the tarrasque  
must hit a Huge or smaller  
opponent with its bite attack.  
It can then attempt to start  
a grapple as a free action  
without provoking an attack  
of opportunity. If it wins the  
grapple check, it establishes a  
hold and can try to swallow the  
foe the following round.

**Rush (Ex)** Once per minute, the  
normally slow-moving tarrasque can  
move at a speed of 150 feet.

**Swallow Whole (Ex)** The tarrasque can  
try to swallow a grabbed opponent  
of Huge or smaller size by making  
a successful grapple check. Once  
inside, the opponent takes 2d8+8  
points of crushing damage plus  
2d8+6 points of acid damage per  
round from the tarrasque's digestive  
juices. A swallowed creature can cut  
its way out by dealing 50 points of  
damage to the tarrasque's digestive  
tract (AC 25). Once the creature exits,  
muscular action closes the hole;  
another swallowed opponent must  
cut its own way out. The tarrasque's  
gullet can hold 2 Huge, 8 Large, 32  
Medium, 128 Small, or 512 Tiny or  
smaller creatures.


**Augmented Critical (Ex)** The  
tarrasque's bite threatens a critical  
hit on a natural attack roll of  
18–20, dealing triple damage on  
a successful critical hit. Improved  
Critical doubles this to 16–20.

**Carapace (Ex)** The tarrasque's armorlike  
carapace is exceptionally tough and  
highly reflective, deflecting all rays,  
lines, cones, and even *magic missile*

spells. There is a 30% chance of reflecting any such effect back at the caster; otherwise, it is merely negated. Check for reflection before rolling to overcome the creature's spell resistance.

**Frightful Presence (Su)** The tarrasque can inspire terror by charging or

attacking. Affected creatures must succeed on a DC 36 Will save or become shaken, remaining in that condition as long as they remain within 60 feet of the tarrasque. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Skills** The tarrasque has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. 

*"...That's all the information we have," explained Willowquisp, closing his oversized tome of unusual creatures. "Might I inquire as to your interest? Surely you don't intend a tarrasque hunt?"*

"Why not?" asked Dreelix, puffing out his chest. "We are, after all, the renowned Monster Hunters, and the tarrasque is merely an oversized monster. You yourself said it could be killed with two spells in quick succession, a vindication of the power of spellcraft over brute force if ever I heard one."

"We'd be well out of our league..." began Spontayne.

"Pshaw!" scoffed Dreelix. "Two wish spells and we're in business!"

"Sadly," pointed out Spontayne, "wish is beyond our capabilities."

"So we take some money out of the coffers and pick up a couple of scrolls," dismissed Dreelix. "No big deal." At that, Grindle the Coin-Counter expelled an involuntary "Eep!" As the Association's treasurer, he was well aware of the current sad state of their coffers.

"What, may I ask, is the sudden fascination with killing the tarrasque?" asked Buntleby.

"As it happens," replied Dreelix, "I was cleaning out my study, and discovered this ancient tome from my old mentor." He pulled a dusty manual out from under the head table, opening it to a diagram of the fabled beast and flipping it around so the others could see. While Spontayne and Willowquisp leaned forward to examine the book, Buntleby instead studied their illustrious President. Dreelix seldom mentioned his old mentor, preferring that others assume he had never needed such assistance in mastering—if that was indeed the appropriate word—the wizardly arts. For him to so casually mention he had once required tutoring could only mean his attention was focused elsewhere.

"Look at this passage here," Dreelix said, pointing at a fading section. "Killing the tarrasque releases a fortune of diamonds hidden in its shell!"

"Why would it have diamonds in its shell?" queried Spontayne, puzzled.

"It's not as easy as you make it out to be," scowled Buntleby. "The tarrasque isn't a piñata—you can't just whack it open and get your toy surprise."

"In any case," scoffed Willowquisp, "This book is rather outdated. It was useful for its time, but now the 'facts' contained therein are considered to be mere legends and fables nowadays, nothing more."<sup>1</sup>

"Hmmp!" glared Dreelix, grabbing back his tome.

"Tell you what," suggested Spontayne. "If you can find it, we'll kill it."

"Hmmp," Dreelix repeated, then pressed on with the rest of the evening's agenda.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Apparently Dreelix's tome is similar to the 1983 version of *Monster Manual II*, written by Gary Gygax for first edition AD&D. In that venerable work—the tarrasque's first appearance in D&D—treating the monster's carapace with acid and heating it in a furnace yielded 10d10 diamonds valued at 1,000 gp each!

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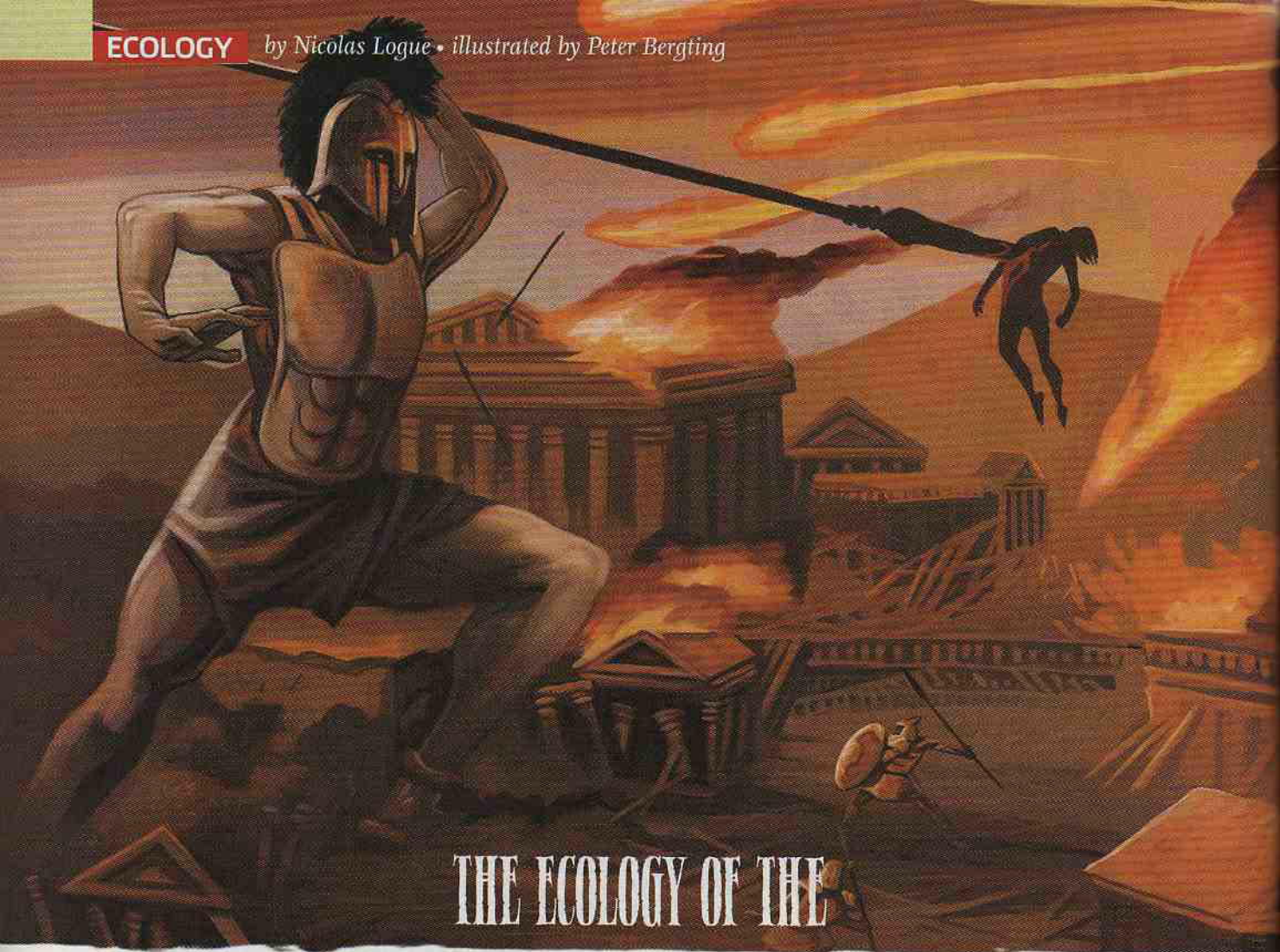
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## THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# TITAN

*"I will advance a terrible right arm  
"Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,  
"bid old Saturn take his throne again."  
—"Hyperion," John Keats*

Few beings can contend with the children of the multiverse. What are even angels or demons—mere spawn of mortal virtues and vices—to do in the face of a titan's godlike fury? Dragons, as old as mountains and wise as the wind, are revealed as mewling babes when matched to a titan's timeless intellect. Immortal, brimming with untold power, and as unpredictable as a storm-tossed sea, the titans are feared even by deities, and are understood by few. Theirs is a tale of divine

battle, divine vengeance, and eternal exile. Cast out of paradise to brood, rule, and destroy, they walk the world. Only fools do not bow before them or flee at their approach.

### HISTORY OF THE TITAN

In a time before time, long before the churning cosmos found its form, gods and goddesses reached into primordial chaos and sculpted perfection from its mutable essence. Thus, the titans were born. The deities adored them more than creation itself. The titans' every whim was doted upon. Their wishes were granted even before they formed in their minds. As time wore on, the titans grew more demanding of their divine progenitors. No boon seemed too great to ask.



The titans rose to a respected place at their masters' sides to help rule over creation. As feuds broke out among the gods and goddesses, the titans led their divine armies in battle. The mightiest among them grappled with deities, proving victorious on too many occasions to comfort godkind at large. As the greatest titans realized their power rivaled the gods, their demands became increasingly unsettling.

Eventually, the titans committed offenses their makers could no longer ignore. The titans created children of their own nearly equal to themselves in glory and power, birthing the first giants into the world out of shards of their own celestial essence. The titans loved their new children as dearly as the gods once lavished affection upon them. They promised their offspring an entire plane of existence, a world where the giants would rule as deities in their own right.

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE TITAN

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to titans. Information about titans is most likely to come from servants of ancient deities, planar scholars, and residents of Arborea or Carceri. The titan appears on page 242 of the *Monster Manual*.

### Knowledge (the planes)

#### DC Result

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 31 | This gigantic creature is a titan, a being of fickle whims and unbridled power. This result reveals all outsider traits.                                                                                       |
| 36 | Titans are incredibly strong, capable of destroying nearly anything they encounter with their physical strength and magical prowess. This result reveals several of a titan's noteworthy spell-like abilities. |
| 41 | The titans were among the first creations of the deities and rebelled against them. Those who survived this war were scattered across the planes.                                                              |
| 46 | Cronus, the most powerful of the titans, still rages against the deities in a Carcarian prison forged millenia ago.                                                                                            |

The gods were outraged. The power to create was theirs alone. The deities looked on the giants as abominations and their fury was boundless. Still, they could not bring themselves to punish their beloved titans. The deities offered a compromise:

they would spare the giants but cast them down to the Material Plane, not to rule, but to exist among thousands of other lesser races. The deities had begun to regret their mistake in creating children rivaling themselves in might and begat

**POWER OF THE TITANS**

Some titans possess unique sets of spell-like abilities different from those given in the *Monster Manual*. These titans lose *etherealness*, *levitate*, *meteor swarm*, *persistent image*, and *summon nature's ally IX* but gain the following spells in their place.

**Stormbringer:** Some titans are tied to the fury of the storms. They gain the following spell-like abilities:

At will—*control weather*, *gaseous form*, *water breathing*, *wind wall*

3/day—*whirlwind*, *wind walk*

1/day—*storm of vengeance*

**Iconoclast:** Refusing to be shackled or controlled, some titans possess powers that make them impossible to manipulate.

At will—*break enchantment*, *freedom of movement*, *greater teleport*

3/day—*mind blank*, *destruction*

1/day—*freedom*

new offspring, far inferior to the titans in power. The titans were not satisfied. Their rage at the offer was doubled by the gods' designs to spawn new children to vie with the titans. The titans saw the creation of these new races as an attempt to supplant them. For the first time, the titans felt their place in the cosmos threatened. They raised their mighty fists against their divine masters. The gods found themselves under attack.

The heaven-shaking conflict that followed lasted an age. Thousands of titans and hundreds of gods perished before the conflict finally came to a halt. The face of creation was savaged, and the multiverse nearly unraveled. Finally, though, the gods emerged victorious.

Realizing they could never risk such a cataclysmic event again, the deities convened a divine tribunal and after much deliberation decreed the titans would be scattered across the infinite planes—the most dangerous among them imprisoned on Carceri for all time. The gods and goddesses also summarily hurled the giants to the Material Plane, robbing them of any vestige of divinity. Those few titans who stood by their makers during the war earned reprieve and were allowed to remain on Arborea. Slowly they earned back their fickle divine masters' trust, while their brethren were condemned to wander for eternity, forever scorned by their deific parents.

**PHYSIOLOGY OF THE TITAN**

Titans are specimens of absolute physical perfection. They are the pinnacle of

might, agility, mental acuity, and will. Their form is a mirror to glory. The vainest mortals labor through staggering regimens of exercise and employ epic magic in hopes of even drawing close to the physical magnificence and comeliness of titankind. These sad fools always fall dismally short. Titans' muscles are denser than adamantite and more pliable than the supplest bamboo. They see in the dark as well as any fiend, and in light a hawk is nearly blind by comparison. When pleased, their voices are like honey poured over a golden lute's strings. When enraged, their bellows shatter mountains and shout-down any tempest's thunder.

Among the strongest of any other creatures, titans delight in their varied prowess. They revel in their near-godly might and enjoy flouting their physical superiority over creatures twice their size. Titans take great pride in besting gargantuan dragons in contests of physical mastery.

Titans are as eternal as their divine masters. They do not age, nor do they require sleep or sustenance, although they often enjoy rich food and guzzle barrels of sweet-nectar spirits for sheer pleasure alone. More malicious specimens enjoy eating those who dare an audience, casually picking them up and pulping their heads as a man might enjoy a succulent grape.

**PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE TITAN**

Titans were birthed from raw chaos. There is no constant by which one might rate a titan's emotions, and

predictability is definitely not among their flaws. For a titan, a morning of towering rage begets a mirthful midday meal, and an evening of unquenchable lust. What pleases them one moment is just as likely to draw their ire the next. Parlaying with a titan is dangerous, and pity those who must negotiate terms with these frenzied forces of the universe. A titan's courtesy might be more civil than any king's at first, but guests can never tell when their hosts might take it upon themselves to mash them flat, just to see what shape the stains their pulped bodies make on the floor.

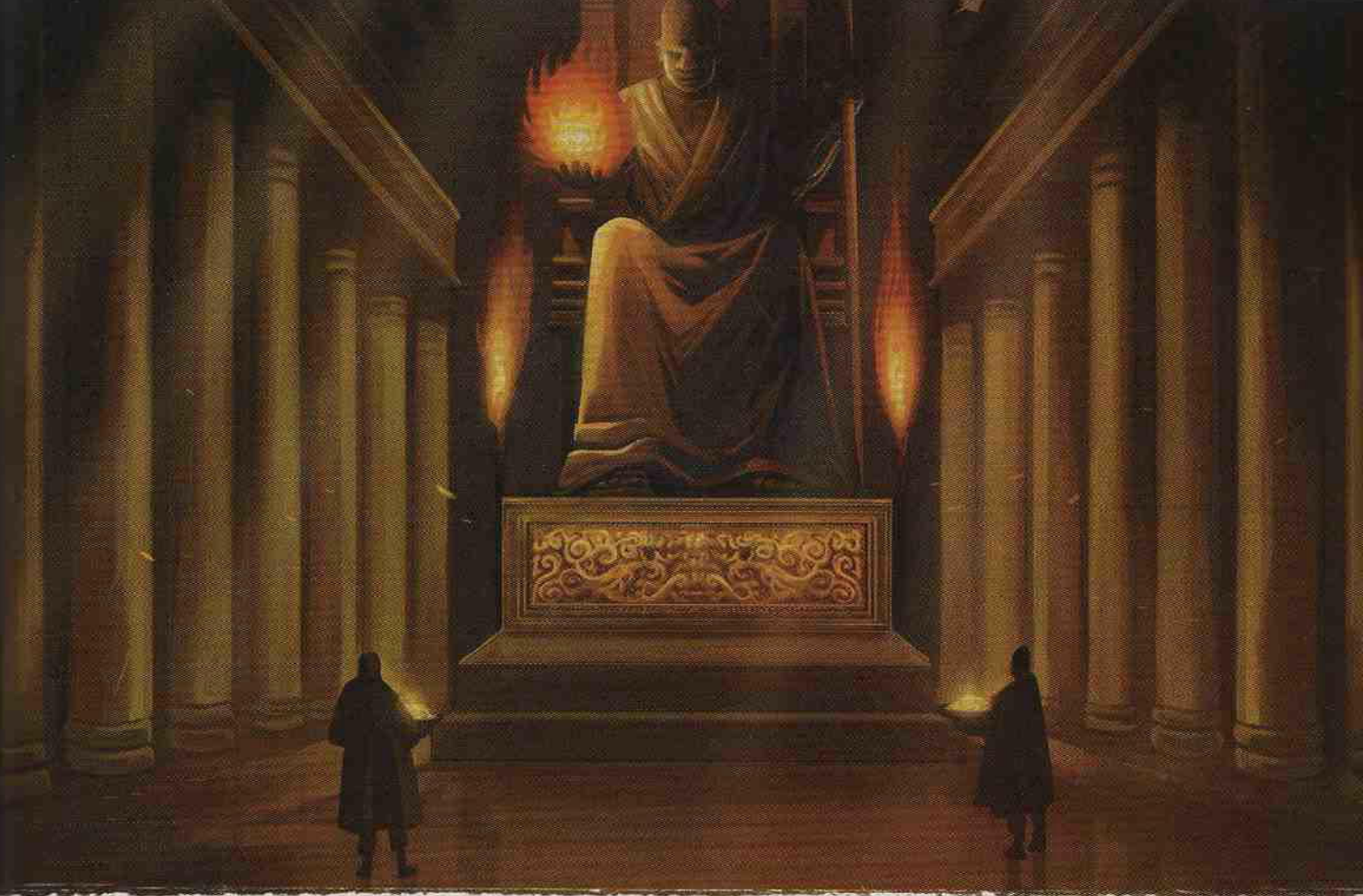
The only exception comes when titans treat with one another. For some inexplicable reason, titans (even those with divergent takes on good and evil) regard each other with great civility and respect at all times. No titan knowingly crosses another unless a direct challenge is made. These challenges are almost always accepted. When titans clash, the world trembles and others would do well not to come between them.

A key factor in titans' views of the world is their immortality. They are timeless and have existed since the dawn of creation. They have watched civilizations rise and fall, borne witness to the extermination of entire races, and seen gods dethroned. They are blessed with a god's lifespan and unburdened by any responsibilities of divinity. Needless to say, little surprises a titan and nothing impresses one. A novelty they have not before witnessed, with which to stave off the tedium of eternity, is worth more than a mountain of diamonds. Many bards risked their lives in attempts to earn a titan's favor with an unheard tale or song. Most ended up smeared into gory paste as punishment for their failure.

Titans believe (rightly so) that they are superior to all mortal beings. They love to challenge mortals to impossibly difficult (and often deadly) competitions. Defeating a titan in one of these contests earns respect—and a possibly a boon.

**ADVANCED TITAN**

Cronus first gained his moniker of God-slayer after he castrated and killed his



own father, Uranus, a god of the Sun. His act of patricide ignited the war between gods and titans, and Cronus led his people's revolt for centuries. He felled more than one hundred gods in personal combat. He basked in the fiery rays of Pelor's hottest flames, mocked Obad-Hai's mightiest blast of tree-rending wind, and fought five thousand passes with Heironeous and Hextor long before the half-brothers forsook their kinship and swore eternal enmity. His fury could not be slaked, and time and time again he repelled the gods' assaults and shattered every attempt of theirs to imprison him.

Finally, the deities bent their ear to Kurtulmak, cunning kobold god of traps, who concocted one of the most brilliant snares ever conceived. The gods ambushed Cronus en force. While the dwarf gods drew his ire, Bocco, Garl Glittergold, Olidimmar, and Wee Jas wove their most powerful enchantments, melded flawlessly with potent illusions. Fharlanghn leveled powerful translocation magic upon the titan as well. Cronus was instantly transported to a powerful prison the gods prepared

in Carceri. There, Cronus, his mind vexed and eternal form weakened by powerful spells and illusory effects, believes he still wages his war against the gods. For millennia he has "battled" in a dreamscape of the gods' collective design, ensorcelled for all time.

Or so the gods hoped. They believed eventually the titan would tire of his war or, better, be slain in phantom combat. Instead, Cronus has fought through the ages, brutally slaying the gods one by one in his phantasmal prison. The gods watched grimly as each of them fell to Cronus' glaive, and now their numbers dwindle. If the titan slays every phantom god, the potent magic befuddling his mind might crumble. When it does, Cronus' rage at the gods' trickery promises their doom. He will shrug off the mighty shackles of Carceri's greatest prison and regain his powers to menace the heavens. The gods have seen their doom in their own illusionary trap, and they fear they might not be able to stand against Cronus. Perhaps a band of mighty champions whose powers rival the deities themselves are creation's only hope.

## CRONUS

CR 56

Advanced titan barbarian 20, legendary dreadnought 10

CE Gargantuan outsider (chaotic, extraplanar)

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 feet.; Listen +64, Spot +61

**Languages** Abyssal, Common, Celestial, Draconic, Giant

**AC** 64, touch 9, flat-footed 61; **Dodge**, Mobility; improved uncanny dodge  
**hp** 1,578 hp (61 HD), fast healing 3; **DR** 15/lawful, 23/—

**SR** 32

**Fort** +54, **Ref** +31, **Will** +37

**Speed** 70 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

**Melee** +15 *Colossal adamantine glaive*  
+99/+94/+89/+84 (6d8+58/19–20/x3 + 2d6 + DC 69 Fort save or die)

**Space** 20 ft. **Reach** 20 ft.

**Base Atk** +56; **Grp** +97

**Atk Options** Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, rage 6/day

**Special Actions** unmovable 2/day, unstoppable 2/day

**Spells-like Abilities** (CL 20th)

1/day—*Bigby's crushing hand* (DC 27),

## EPIC FEATS EXPLANATION

Cronus employs several feats from the *Epic Level Handbook*, here is a brief summary of their effects:

**Chaotic Rage:** Your weapon deals +2d6 points of damage while you rage.

**Damage Reduction:** You gain damage reduction 3/—. This feat stacks with itself.

**Devastating Critical:** When you score a critical hit with the weapon you have selected, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + 1/2 your character level + your Str modifier) or die instantly. Creatures immune to critical hits can't be affected by this feat.

**Epic Weapon Focus:** Add a +2 bonus on all attack rolls you make with the selected weapon.

**Fast Healing:** You gain fast healing 3.

**Overwhelming Critical:** You deal +1d6 points of extra damage on a successful critical hit. If the weapon's critical multiplier is  $\times 3$ , add 2d6 points of extra damage instead.

**Terrifying Rage:** Any enemy that views you while you are raging must make a Will save opposed by your Intimidate check or become panicked (if it has fewer Hit Dice than you) or shaken (if it has Hit Dice equal to or up to twice yours) for 4d6 rounds.



*gate, maze, meteor swarm* (DC 27) 3/day—*etherealness, word of chaos* (DC 25), *summon nature's ally IX*  
At will—*bestow curse* (DC 22), *chain lightning* (DC 24), *charm monster* (DC 26), *cure critical wounds, deeper darkness, fire storm* (DC 26), *greater dispel magic, hold monster* (DC 23), *invisibility, invisibility purge, levitate, persistent image* (DC 23), *unholy blight* (DC 23)

**Abilities** Str 69, Dex 16, Con 50, Int 20, Wis 28, Cha 27

**SQ** change shape, greater rage, mighty rage, outsider traits, oversized weapon, shrug off punishment, thick skinned, tireless rage, trap sense +6

**Feats** Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Chaotic Rage, Cleave, Damage Reduction  $\times 4$ , Devastating Critical (glaive), Epic Weapon Focus (glaive), Fast Healing, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (glaive), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Overwhelming Critical (glaive), Power Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (*chain lightning, firestorm, greater dispel magic*), Terrifying Rage, Weapon Focus (glaive)

**Skills** Climb +61, Diplomacy +33, Hide +16, Intimidate +72, Jump +66, Knowledge (history) +37, Knowledge (religion) +25, Knowledge (the planes) +25, Listen +64, Move Silently +34, Survival +41 (+43 on other planes), Swim +55, Spot +61, Tumble +39

**Possessions** +20 *masterwork breastplate*, +15 *adamantine glaive*, *ring of epic protection* +7, *belt of epic strength* +12, *ring of regeneration*, *wings of flying*

**Rage (Ex)** When he rages, Cronus's stats change as follows.

AC 62, touch 7, flat-footed 59  
hp 1822

**Fort** +58, **Will** +41 (+45 versus enchantments)

**Melee** +15 *Colossal adamantine glaive* +103/+98/+93/+88 (6d8+62 +2d6 against creatures of lawful alignment)/19–20/ $\times 3$  + 2d6 + DC 69  
Fort save or die)

**Grp** +101

**Abilities** Str 77, Con 58

**Skills** Climb +65, Jump +70, Swim +59

**Unmovable (Ex)** Twice per day, Cronus can add a +20 bonus to: avoid being grabbed with the improved grab ability; avoid the effects of a bull rush, trip attempt, or similar effect; a Strength check to avoid being moved physically or magically; or a saving throw.

**Unstoppable (Ex)** Twice per day, Cronus can add +20 to his Strength check to break or burst a door or item, make a DC 32 Strength check to break a wall of force, or apply a +20 bonus on a single attack roll.

**Change Shape (Su)** Cronus can assume the form of any Small or Medium humanoid. He retains his oversized weapon special attack regardless of form.

**Oversized Weapon (Ex)** Cronus can wield an oversized weapon one size category larger than himself (Colossal) without penalty.



# Malignant Growth

## The Ecology of the Troll

by Paul Leach · illustrated by Monte Moore

Trolls are bestial giants driven by unrelenting hunger, occupying a niche between animal predators and the rest of giantkind. These rubber-skinned brutes prize strength, and they lust for slaughter and destruction, caring little for anything else. Secure in the knowledge that most creatures cannot inflict lasting injuries on them, they fight fearlessly. Despite these characteristics, trolls have the capacity to reason, and they can think beyond their next meal—although when one is at hand, they tend to concentrate on it to the exclusion of everything else.

It's easy to come to the conclusion that trolls aren't much more than regenerating eating machines, but the role they play in your campaign doesn't have to be as simple as that. They can be found skulking about the wilderness alone or in small gangs, but they are also encountered in the service of evil humanoids, giants, or even more powerful monsters. Exceptional trolls that advance in character classes can be encountered as well; most often they are leaders or otherwise special members of a tribe, but they might also be unique NPC enemies or allies.

### Trolls in the World

Trolls live in every climate on the surface and inhabit the Underdark as well. They typically operate within a 10-mile radius of their lairs, although those that live in subterranean areas are often more restricted in their excursions.

They are not overly territorial with creatures other than trolls, considering any creature willing to place itself within the reach of their claws and teeth a good thing. They often live semi-nomadic lives, moving on when they have depleted a nearby settlement of all humanoids and domesticated herds, and if wild fish and game are scarce. Unless driven away by powerful enemies, a troll will most likely return to its former haunts when food is plentiful again.

Trolls have no natural enemies, but some monsters prey on trolls like they would any other creature. Only a few of these actually give a troll cause to fear for its life: ankhegs, dragons, oozes, remorhazes, and purple worms. Any creature large enough to swallow a troll (whole or in pieces) and digest it with strong stomach acids encourages caution in a troll. Trolls are fearful of incorporeal undead as well, especially shadows. Most good races seek to kill or drive away trolls whenever they encounter them, as it is a fair assumption the trolls will eat them if given the chance.

### A Troll's Life

The natural lifespan of trolls is approximately 100 years, and they reach maturity after just 10 years, although they can hunt and fend for themselves within a year after birth. The young learn mostly by harsh experience, but they are taught to fear fire and to revere only the evil gods

they emulate, namely Vaprak the Destroyer and Erythnul the Many. Trolls grow up nasty and determined, scornful of other races, whom they consider food.

A troll's ability to express itself is often limited to asserting dominance over the weaker members of its tribe through violence, although some like to draw on cave walls or other similar surfaces as a pastime. The drawings (etched in charcoal, blood, clay, or filth) are usually scenes of hunts or wars, and they often contain references to the dark gods the trolls worship. Trolls do not typically engage in crafts of any sort, most of them not even bothering to fashion crude garments for themselves.

Much of their activities focus on acquiring food, whether exploring their habitats for sources of meat, preparing ambushes, or actually tracking prey. These hunters tend to be nocturnal, but they can be active any time of the day. Their scent and darkvision abilities allow them to hunt prey at night, when some of their intended meals might be at a disadvantage. If possible, a hungry troll will attempt to consume a meal on the spot, but it will take food back to its lair if necessary.

Trolls mate irregularly, and their birth rate is low as a result. The courtship ritual is initiated by a dominant female and is often nothing more than a brawl with any competing females to impress prospective mates. Sometimes the female presents her intended with a kill



for them to share (a troll otherwise never shares a meal if it can help it). A mating is most likely to produce offspring when the mother has access to enormous amounts of food, since pregnant trolls become even more hungry and vicious. The year-long gestation rarely results in more than one troll newborn.

### Wealth

Trolls do not normally learn a craft, nor do they engage in commerce or till the soil as a way of life. They collect treasure, usually by theft or plunder, but sometimes they earn it. They don't view coins as a means to acquire material comforts and goods, but as something to measure their power and worth. Trolls love magic items, and they are considered more valuable than platinum coins when it comes to measuring one's worth, especially if the item can be used as a powerful weapon to intimidate other trolls.

### Society

Troll society is limited to small clans or even single families, as they are too

chaotic and violent to sustain order in a larger group. Small family groups allow for manageable hunting parties and provide some kind of mutual protection for the individual members. As females are stronger than males, most clans are matriarchal.

Inter-tribal relations are normally limited to random meetings to share news or to trade males or valuable magic items. In other societies, family members are ritualistically given to other families in formal fosterage or marriage alliances. Most clans do not trespass on another clan's territory unless spoiling for a fight. Temporary agreements can be reached when fighting a common enemy or if there is plenty of humanoid prey to go around.

Troll culture and history is maintained through oral tradition. Each clan attributes a divine origin to its founder, with its Great Mother often being a daughter of Vaparak. They believe themselves superior to the other giant races because they have maintained their connection to the primal, chaotic forces of the earth by emulating its ability to destroy and regenerate.

Several giant mythologies acknowledge elder creator gods, many of whom are no longer actively worshiped. The trolls are no different, and their legends speak of a dark Earth Mother.

### Lairs

Troll dens are often a series of two to four connected natural caverns. They do little to improve the living conditions in their caves, although they might conceal or bar the entrance to their lairs. They generally look for caves that have small mouths (about 5 ft. x 5 ft.) and narrow, winding entry tunnels.

Trolls typically disguise the entrance to their lairs with large boulders or a pile of earth and brush. Trolls like dens that offer strewn boulders or stalactites and stalagmites, as they can use these to set ambushes, and the tribal adept can fling spells while protected by their cover.

Trolls prefer caves that have two entrances, especially if they allow the trolls to leave by one and easily return by the other. Such a troll den presents a greater threat to adventurers, since they might find themselves quickly cut off from escape once a troll circles

around behind them. The second entrance to a troll's lair is usually a natural crevice or shaft, as it can also serve as a trap to unwary adventurers. A troll can turn the shaft into a trap simply by not disguising its tracks when returning from hunting and then making sure its trail leads over the brush-covered hole. The trap can be made more dangerous by setting wooden spikes or even a *glyph of warding* on the cave floor.

### Killer Creature Combos

Trolls are often found in the company of other creatures, either serving as henchmen and servants or as partners.

**Troll and a Trap:** Trolls aren't particularly concerned with falling damage, so they are often willing to grapple a PC and take the foe over the edge of a pit or cliff. A single troll and a 60-foot-deep pit trap is an EL 6 encounter.

**Troll and Troglodytes:** A troll can add some extra muscle to a troglodyte encounter. With the troll's good Fortitude saving throw, it's not likely to succumb to their stench. Although these two species don't normally associate with one other, the drow often employ both races, giving them cause to work together. This group might be found in drow service, or they might simply be veterans who have left the drow but continue to work together. A troll and six troglodytes make for an EL 7 encounter.

**Ogre Mage and Trolls:** An ogre mage might use trolls to soften up its opponents while it remains invisible, waiting for an opportune moment to cast *cone of cold* into the melee (the trolls don't like this, but they can regenerate the damage). If the PCs easily resist the trolls' attacks, the ogre mage makes its cold attack before the trolls take too much damage. Otherwise, it waits until the PCs are thoroughly weakened before it frosts them and charges into melee. An ogre mage and three trolls is an EL 10 encounter.

**Drow Wizard and Trolls:** An 8th-level drow wizard could support her troll servants (four regular trolls and one 4th-level troll rogue) in combat by keeping the PCs occupied with her strong defensive position while she sets them up for an ambush. Surrounding herself with her regular trolls, she casts *minor globe of invulnerability* to protect

them from magical fire attacks and mind-controlling spells. She casts *fly* and *improved invisibility* on the troll rogue so that it can deliver sneak attacks to the PC spellcasters. The wizard further assists her trolls with such spells as *bull's strength*, *haste*, or *protection from elements*. This is an EL 12 encounter.

**Fire Giant Cleric and Trolls:** A 5th-level fire giant cleric might deploy his troll slave guards (six regular trolls with a 7th-level barbarian leader) against the PCs. He uses *protection from elements* to ward himself against cold-based attacks, and he casts *resist elements* on the troll barbarian to help against fire-based attacks. The remaining trolls simply work to distract the party and help the giant and the barbarian make flanking attacks. This is an EL 16 encounter.

### Vs. PCs

Troll combat tactics revolve around their multiple attacks, regeneration ability, and their hunger. They rarely use weapons, as their natural attacks are comparable, if not superior, to most weapon damage. The exception is a troll that has received special training and taken a level in a character class, or if the weapon is magical and particularly powerful. Trolls typically don't have a reason to hang back from a melee unless prevented from closing by fire or other powerful barriers.

The information below describes how best to use a troll's abilities and tactics, and is intended to help a DM run a troll NPC. Players should skip this section and instead read the Vs. Trolls section later in this article for information on battling trolls.

**Entrapment:** Trolls like to set ambushes if the terrain allows, attempting to herd prey into a dead end or over a deep pit. This tactic is most often used in their cave lairs and is easily accomplished by overrunning the PCs and cutting off their only means of escape. When hunting humanoids in the wilderness, trolls might be patient enough to wait until



HALF-FIEND/HALF-TROLL

their prey reaches difficult or impassable terrain, such as rivers, thick brush, or canyons. When the trolls' patience runs out, if they get too hungry, or if they suspect they have been detected by their prey, they give up on the ambush and simply charge.

**Into the Fray:** The overrun tactic mentioned above has other uses, as it is a good way to reach enemy spellcasters who use magical fire. Most trolls are not concerned about provoking attacks of opportunity when they charge the front rank of warriors. As trolls have extended reach, they can also do some damage to PCs who hope to gain protection behind the group's fighters.

**Bring 'Em Down:** After charging in to reach its prey, a troll usually attempts to grapple it. With the troll's high Strength, it's likely that the troll will succeed. It can then use its natural attacks with grapple checks, following up with its rend ability.

**To Each His Own:** There is little cooperation among trolls, each being concerned with feeding itself. Trolls rarely give aid to their allies unless they are following the commands of a fearsome leader.

### Trolls With Class

There are some trolls who stand out above the others in brute strength, intelligence, or determination. These trolls seek specialized training and advance in character classes. While a troll can take a level in any class, assuming it meets the alignment and ability requirements, trolls generally only train as barbarians, clerics,



ROCK TROLL

fighters, and rogues. Below are suggestions and tactics for NPC trolls that have levels in these classes.

**Barbarian:** This class is well suited to trolls, the ability to rage and quickly pursue fleeing opponents at 1st level makes these monsters more menacing than usual. For their feats, troll barbarians tend to take Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Run, and Weapon Focus (claw). Climb, Swim, and Wilderness Lore are the best skills for a troll barbarian, as they allow the creature to better navigate natural obstacles between it and its prey.

**Cleric:** Only exceptional trolls take a level in this class, mainly because of the high Wisdom required to cast even the weakest divine spells. Most clerics are leaders of their small tribes. Their spellcasting abilities offer them more flexibility than the battle tactics used by

### VAPRAK THE DESTROYER

Vaprak is the chaotic evil patron deity of trolls and ogres, and he embodies the strength and ferocity that both races find appealing. Other giants worship him as well, especially brutish ettins and hill giants. The Destroyer appears as an extremely large troll (about 15 feet tall) and his claws are stained with the blood of those he has slaughtered. Vaprak is worshiped in caves and where the enemies of his followers are killed and eaten. His clerics have access to the domains of Chaos, Destruction, Evil, and Strength. The claws is his favored weapon.

most trolls, but like other trolls, they eagerly jump into melee combat as soon as possible. They cast protective spells on themselves before combat and then proceed to attack enemy spellcasters or exceptionally dangerous fighters with offensive spells. Once they have exhausted their repertoire (it's possible a troll might withhold a spell or two), they make melee attacks. Clever clerics who've encountered

adventurers before might employ special tricks, such as using the ready action to cast *shatter* on the first PC to pull out a flask of alchemist's fire, causing the PC to suffer a direct hit when the flask explodes in his hands. The PC's problems are compounded if he carries other flasks, as they are subject to the spell's radius. Trolls with access to *summon monster III* are likely to bring a water elemental to the fight, giving some measure of control over PC pyrotechnics. Troll clerics often cast *hold person* on fighters and other strong melee-minded opponents, but some trolls attempt to use this spell against spellcasters, hoping to overcome a good Will save for a very dramatic success. Troll clerics do not worry about missing any early kills, as they have sufficient power to force lesser trolls to give up a meal.

Troll clerics favor the Combat Casting feat, but they've also been known to take the Brew Potion and Empower Spell feats, along with any of the feats commonly taken by troll barbarians. They allot most of their skill points to Concentration but occasionally take ranks in Knowledge (religion) and Spellcraft.

Trolls prefer spells that protect them from fire and acid, enhance their combat abilities, and harm enemies. Outside of their ability to rebuke undead, troll clerics do not care much for spells that combat or create undead; they don't hunt undead for food, and they don't leave much of their victims to animate. Many troll clerics worship either Erythnul or Vaprak, allowing them

access to domains that support bloodletting, with most choosing Evil and War (Erythnul's clerics) or Destruction and Strength (Vaprak's clerics). Like PC clerics, trolls might choose to worship religious concepts, but care should be taken in allowing domain choices to favor game advantages over good roleplaying. For instance, the Water domain is appropriate for scraggs (aquatic trolls), but to give it to a land troll seems only like a way to give it the ability to rebuke fire creatures.

Listed below are common spell choices for a troll cleric of up to 5th level.

0: *inflict minor wounds, resistance*;  
1st: *bane, bless, divine favor, doom, endure elements, magic stone, protection from good, shield of faith, summon monster I*; 2nd: *bull's strength, darkness, endurance, hold person, inflict moderate wounds, resist elements, shatter, summon monster II*; 3rd: *deeper darkness, dispel magic, glyph of warding, inflict serious wounds, prayer, protection from elements, stone shape, summon monster III*.

**Fighter:** This class is not as popular with trolls as the barbarian class, but its disciplined style appeals to trolls that serve as mercenaries to hobgoblins and fire giants. Troll fighters take many of the same feats as troll barbarians, but especially Power Attack, Cleave, and Great Cleave. Many also take the Weapon Specialization (claw) feat. Troll fighters spend their skill points on Climb, Jump, and Swim, rarely taking ranks in any other skill.

**Rogue:** The ability to make sneak attacks and evade *fireballs* comes in handy. A troll rogue usually spends most of its skill points on the Hide and Move Silently skills, and a few clever rogues use the Craft (trapmaking) skill to set traps in their lairs for unwary adventurers.

### PC Trolls

This is not an easy race to integrate into a campaign, especially if most of the PCs are from the standard races listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Since they have an ECL of 11, the PC troll should be introduced only when the other characters are of similar level. A PC troll shouldn't be restricted to the chaotic evil alignment, but even a good troll will be viewed with suspicion and hatred by most civilized folk. Trolls are not socially acceptable except in the

roughest of company, such as mercenary or adventurer bands. If traveling alone, a troll PC should expect to be driven from town.

A troll might take a chance outside of barbarian lands to amass wealth, fame, and power to enable it to better control its savage kin when it decides to go back home (not unlike some half-orcs). A small kingdom bordering monster-inhabited lands could be a source of employment, offering coins and cattle to gain a mercenary who is intimately familiar with the kingdom's enemies. As another possibility, the troll might join the PCs in a quest against a common enemy.

### Vs. Trolls

Trolls rarely show restraint when given the opportunity to eat humanoids. Adventurers willing to go on troll hunts often find themselves as the quarry. With luck, the right armory of spells and weapons, and some good strategic planning, your adventuring company can defeat these monsters, or at least escape with their lives.

### Preparation

Although fire and acid are what ultimately destroy a troll, every member of an adventuring party can contribute to the demise of this bloodthirsty, regenerating foe.

**Fire spells:** *Fireball* is an excellent choice to use against trolls, but there are other fire-based spells to employ against these brutes. Area effect spells are best, such as *acid fog*, *fire storm*, and *flame strike*. If these spells aren't available, cast *web*. Once the troll is trapped by the spell, any member of the party can quickly set the creature on fire with a simple torch. *Flaming sphere* is useful for impeding trolls, and *fire shield* and *wall of fire* might keep them at bay, or at the very least, do some damage to them if they can't be swayed from charging in to eat your PC. *Fire seeds* and *glyph of warding* (set for fire damage) are useful to cover a retreat or set an ambush, as is *fire trap* if there is a door between you and the trolls. Don't forget *burning hands*, *flame arrow*, or *flame blade*. The Empower Spell feat improves these damaging spells. Since trolls don't have great Reflex saves (only +4), they will take the heat most of the time.

**Other spells:** Trolls have poor Will saves but great Fortitude saves, so take advantage of spells that require Will saves. Some that are useful for incapacitating or driving away trolls include: *charm monster*, *fear*, *hold monster*, *sleep*, *slow*, and *suggestion*. *Command* and *color spray* are good for only a short while, but they are still handy at times. Surprisingly, *bestow curse* might be the best spell for

knocking out trolls; with their low Intelligence and Charisma scores (typically a 6 for both abilities), a failed save drops a troll to 0 points in either ability, putting the monster in a "comalike stupor," (see the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). Used cleverly, an illusion can save the day by drawing the trolls away from the party or into a trap, but don't forget that they have the scent ability or your illusion might be useless.

**Melee:** When fighting a troll, it is important to have feats and weapons that cause a lot of damage, otherwise it's almost impossible to keep up with the troll's regeneration ability. The Power Attack feat is a must, and Weapon Specialization, with its additional +2 to damage, is useful for fighters. Greatswords and greataxes are ideal for close combat, but don't underestimate longswords and polearms, which are useful for their reach capabilities. Preventing just one of the troll's claw attacks from hitting can save a character from the troll's deadly rend attack, so good armor or magic protection is paramount. Dwarf and gnome fighters get a +4 Dodge bonus against giants and should have a healthy number of hit points to boot, making them ideal companions to have around when hunting trolls.

**Ranged Attacks:** Most normal missile attacks are worthless against trolls unless they are followed by some of the more powerful tactics and attacks listed above; it does no good to rely on only shooting a handful of arrows at a troll, because before you can do more damage on your next turn, the troll has



FIENDISH TROLL

most likely regenerated and is back to its normal hit point total. Flasks of alchemist's fire and acid are noteworthy exceptions to this guideline, despite their short range. Tanglefoot bags can be useful as well.

**Coup de Grace:** Be sure to save some fire and acid for coup de grace actions on fallen trolls. Only an attack that deals normal damage to a troll (fire and acid) can be used for a coup de grace.

### Tactics

Once you find some trolls, or they find you (as is most often the case), the encounter will likely continue until the trolls are completely wiped out or flee when they come to the conclusion they are truly outmatched and you can destroy them. Don't expect parley attempts to bring much success unless you back it up with magical mind control or obvious raw power.

**Fire Away:** Use long-range fire attacks on any trolls you encounter. This causes them normal damage not subject to their regeneration ability. If you cannot blast them with high-damage, area-effect spells, consider concentrating weak fire attacks against one or two trolls instead of trying to reach the entire gang. Area effect spells are most efficient when the trolls are squeezed into confined tunnels and dungeon halls.

**Within Claw's Reach:** It's wise to take advantage of ranged fire attacks when fighting trolls, but don't be afraid to put tough fighters right next to them. Fighters should be backed up with a second rank of characters who have



SLIME TROLL

it is possible to surround a troll, do so unless it opens you up to flank attacks. If you have no other choice but to let the fighting front ranks administer a torch or acid coup de grace, sacrifice the next melee attack and chance an attack of opportunity from the next troll; if the downed troll regenerates back to 1 hp, he inflicts as much damage as the fresh troll.

**Attack, Evade, or Feign Retreat:** If your

party can reduce the trolls' ranks or at least a lot of their hit points with ranged attacks, consider charging the trolls while they are weakened. If you need to fall back due to losses or you want to

trick your enemy and feign retreat, spellcasters can make things unpleasant for pursuing trolls by using the *glyph of warding* and *fire seed* spells. This is a good time to counter attack if the trolls are sufficiently damaged, even if you do intend to run again.

**Defensible Positions:** Don't let the trolls push you into a dead end or surround you. Once they've managed to do so, you have no choice but to fight your way through them. If a troll manages to get in close to your spellcasters while others are attacking your fighters, your spellcasters might have no other choice but to hit the nearby troll with melee weapons or magic spells that hit only one target. Meanwhile, the other trolls don't have to face the attacks of your spellcasters while they chew up the fighters. This is a good time for the rogue to make some flank attacks; it should be the rogue's responsibility to provide security for the spellcasters.

reach weapons and spells. Be sure to save the alchemist's fire for desperate situations: Unless your melee combatants have hit points to spare, they'll want to avoid splash damage. If

## THE SAVAGE CLAW

The savage claw (cleric/barbarian) is a religious devotee who revels in divinely inspired rages. A savage claw worships either Vaprak or Erythnul, assuming the title of Savage Claw of the Destroyer or Savage Claw of the Slayer, respectively. A savage claw is often the leader of his tribe and sometimes has enough power to rule several tribes of trolls and ogres, at least for a limited time.

At lower levels, the savage claw spends more time focusing on his cleric levels, although he does take a level of barbarian early in his training. This progression allows him to gain spells quickly and improve his weak Will save while still gaining the ability to rage. As the savage claw advances, he follows a more even progression of training, alternating between the cleric and barbarian classes. This progression works well since most trolls do not have the necessary Wisdom scores to take full advantage of the more powerful cleric spells.

Savage claws usually begin combat by placing protection spells upon themselves or targeting enemy spellcasters with offensive spells. They then fly into a rage and hurl themselves into melee.

## SAVAGE CLAW STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

(Compared to the single-classed barbarian)

### Advantages

Ability to cast spells

Better Will saves

### Disadvantages

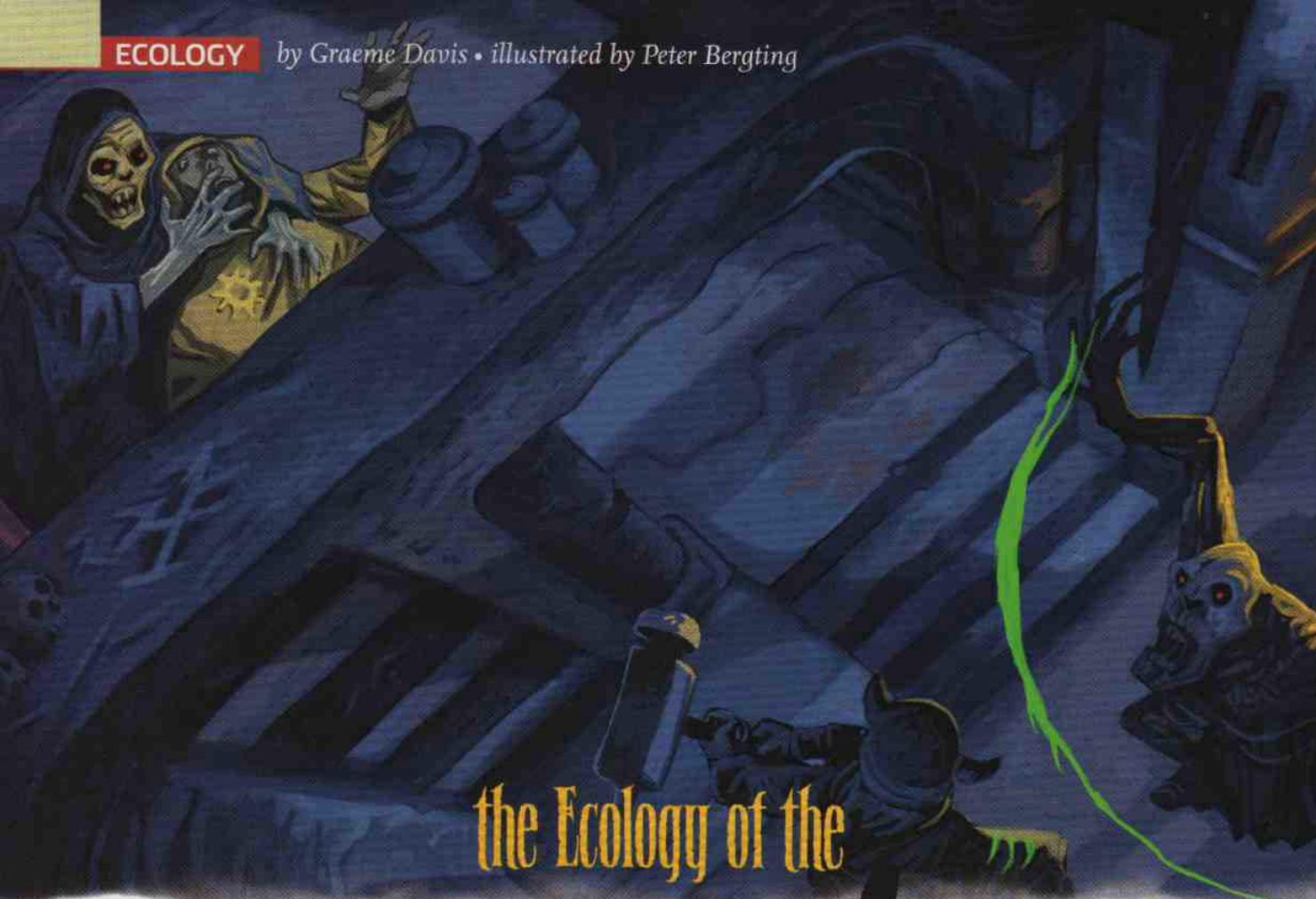
Fewer hit points (this is not a big disadvantage considering a troll's starting HD, Constitution bonus, and regeneration ability)

Can't rage as often

Does not gain access to barbarian's higher-level abilities

## SAVAGE CLAW ADVANCEMENT

Level	Class Level	Base Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	Abilities Gained
1	Clr 1	+0	+2	+0	+2	0- and 1st-level spells, rebuke undead
2	Clr 1/Bar 1	+1	+4	+0	+2	Rage 1/day, fast movement
3	Clr 2/Bar 1	+2	+5	+0	+3	Feat
4	Clr 3/Bar 1	+3	+5	+1	+3	2nd-level spells
5	Clr 3/Bar 2	+4	+6	+1	+3	Uncanny dodge
6	Clr 4/Bar 2	+5	+7	+1	+4	Feat
7	Clr 4/Bar 3	+6/+1	+7	+2	+5	
8	Clr 5/Bar 3	+6/+1	+7	+2	+5	3rd-level spells
9	Clr 5/Bar 4	+7/+2	+8	+2	+5	Rage 2/day, Feat
10	Clr 6/Bar 4	+8/+3	+9	+3	+6	



## the Ecology of the

# wight

**A**mong all the fell creatures of creation, few inspire greater horror than the walking dead. Their very existence violates nature, and in their decomposing bodies we see something of ourselves. They once lived like us, and some day we shall become rotting shells like them—moldering, if lucky, in an unviolated grave.

Some feel pity for skeletons, zombies, and other lesser undead, doomed to the mindless service of evil. Yet, when one looks into dead eyes and sees a spark of malign self-awareness, possessed of an undying hatred for what they once were; when one feels a chill touch colder than death, a touch that robs away life itself, only then does one know the true horror that is the wight.

### HISTORY OF THE WIGHT

While even casual scholars of the undead know that wights create more of their kind from those whose life-energy they steal, the ultimate origins of these creatures remains a matter of much debate. There is no known necromantic spell for creating wights and little help comes from the diverse and contradictory legends that seek to explain how the first wights came to exist.

Some believe dark deities sometimes grant the gift of undeath to their favored servants, who continue to serve them throughout eternity, and wights of a theological inclination claim that Orcus, Nerull, or some other evil power created the first of their kind. Others, both living and dead, call the state a curse, stemming from powerfully worded maledictions, punishment for dark deeds, or the result of hatreds and cruelties so strong they refuse to find rest.

The barbarians who live in the foothills of the Winter's Teeth Mountains tell a different tale. These people still bury their dead beneath great mounds of earth and stone, in the manner of their ancestors since time immemorial. To outsiders, the hill folk pridefully explain that the size of these



barrows reflect the glory of those who rest beneath them. Among themselves, though, they argue fiercely and fearfully over the weight of the stone laid upon the buried dead, and whether it will suffice to prevent the body from rising. Many are the tales of warrior chieftains who stubbornly refuse to die and return from their barrows to trouble their living kin. Many, too, are the stories of heroes who set out to try their strength against these mound-dwellers, seeking glory by stealing their treasure, and end up slaves to deathless princes of old.

Elsewhere, ancient scrolls tell of a race of sorcerer-kings who sought to live forever and in doing so made a crucial mistake. They achieved eternal life, but eternal youth eluded them: their minds decayed and bodies died around them, becoming the first wights.

These tales exist across many worlds in endless minor variations, but one

### THE REAL HISTORY OF THE WIGHT

Wights in D&D draw mainly upon legends of mound-dwelling undead from Anglo-Saxon and Norse sagas. The Vikings called these vampirelike creatures *haugbui*, meaning "mound-dwellers," and one of the most famous, Karr the Old, appears in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien translated *haugbui* into English as "barrow-wight." The word "wight" derives from an Anglo-Saxon word simply meaning "person" or "being," and survives today in the German word *wicht*, sometimes meaning "unpleasant person."

truth remains constant: the living fear the passing of the unrepentantly merciless and malevolent, for death is not always an end.

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE WIGHT

Most wights are humanoid and typically look like a long-dead individual of its original race, with dry, parchmentlike skin drawn tightly over brittle bone. Their fingernails are long, sharp claws and their eyes burn with a malevolent intelligence. Although popular belief associates them with barrow-mounds and other burial places,

scholarly research shows that wights spread across many places, times, and cultures, without favoring a particular race, background, or gender.

Although their bodies are bereft of life, a powerful source of negative energy animates wights. This energy seems internal to their bodies, rather than drawing on animating necromantic magic, some integral relic or phylactery, or tapped from another plane. This self-sufficiency, however, does not afford a wight any special protection and, as with most undead, their reliance upon negative energy makes them vulnerable to

positive energy—typically in the form of turning and holy magic. This fundamental trait also provides them with their best-known and most dreaded power: a deathly cold touch that saps life energy. More than a terrifying attack, this fearful power empowers wights, allowing them to feed off victims' lives, corrupt that vitality, and add it to their own. While wights seem to hunger for life energy, this desire has more in common with an addiction than a need for sustenance, as wights have been known to lie buried or trapped in tombs for centuries with no contact with the living. This leads some to posit that the act of draining life provides wights with a rush of mortality, euphorically reminding them of the existences they lost long ago. The desire to recapture even such fleeting glimpses of the past compels many wights to acts of incredible depravity.

When a wight's energy drain kills a living foe, the wight who delivered the deathblow can command the fallen one to rise as a wight, bound to obey its will. Necromantic scholars agree that the transformation relies upon the negative energy of the wight's touch overcoming and replacing the victim's life energy, but they debate why the newly-created wight is enslaved to its maker. A popular reasoning suggests that the act of creating a new wight imparts a portion of the creator's noxious will upon the victim, causing the newly risen wight to become more an appendage of its creator than the individual it once was.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE WIGHT

A wight's main psychological characteristic is a burning hatred of the living. The reasons for such enmity vary—a jealous longing for a life long past, a general distrust of the living arising from encounters with tomb-robbers, or simply a cruel disposition lingering from the creature's life—but no wights ever regard living creatures as equals. Mortals might be regarded as slaves to be ruled by fear, cattle to slake the wight's hunger for life-energy, lesser beings to be elevated with the "gift" of undeath, or enemies to be destroyed

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE WIGHT

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (religion) check regarding wights. Those who study necromancy, worship powers of death and the dead, or are well versed in ancient lore might possess this information. At the DM's discretion, characters with the Knowledge (history) or Knowledge (local) skill might know tales of nearby barrows or other places wights might haunt. The wight appears on page 255 of the *Monster Manual*.

#### Knowledge (religion)

##### DC Result

- 13 This creature is a wight, an undead being like a zombie but smarter and more powerful. This result reveals all undead traits.
- 18 Wights are most often found in barrows and other ancient burial-places. They hate all living creatures and sap the life energy of those they touch.
- 23 Cunning and quiet, wights are deft ambushers, intelligent enough to make use of their surroundings and skilled at moving without a sound.
- 28 Although savage, wights can often speak Common and might know much about the past. One slain by a wight rises soon after, transformed into a new wight enslaved to its undead murderer's will.
- 33 Numerous different kinds of wights exist—some with strange powers over death and decay and others being stronger than even ancient lichs.

on sight, but they are never highly regarded and never trusted.

The basic unit of wight society consists of a master or mistress wight and its spawn. Highly territorial, wights rarely venture far from their burial-places or the lands they knew in life, unless commanded to do so under duress. Exceptions do exist, however. Some wight bands, like the Reavers of Arkenfell, consist of notorious robbers and pirates who became undead together, through the curse of a slain high priestess. Similar groups might travel widely, perhaps out of habit, in search of a cure, or to engage in life-hungry rampages.

In barbarian lands, a common organization for wights mimics that of a barbarian chieftain and his warband. The strongest wight rules, and the others serve as warriors, with the weakest relegated to menial roles. Rare promotion occurs by displays of prowess, just as in many barbarian cultures. As such cultural mockeries often occur in secluded burial places, elevation through such largely arbitrary ranks happens rarely or at the whim of the chieftain.

Spawned wights are usually regarded as inferior to those who rose spontaneously—or by the favor of the gods, as many see it. Spawn are defeated enemies, after all, so they toil as servants

or slaves until they prove themselves by their deeds. Although many spawned wights hate their masters, their murderer's fundamental control prevents them from rising against him. Thus, mock challenges and duels prove the most common means for these lesser wights to gain status.

Wight spellcasters often command awe and respect. Some—especially those found in lost temples or large tomb complexes—regard themselves as the favored servants of various dark powers. Wights with clerical abilities prove more common than arcane spellcasters, although both are rarities. Other wights seem indifferent to religion, prizing only their own strength and ability.

Scholars still debate why wights prefer to dwell in tombs. One theory maintains that they find such funereal surroundings a welcome reminder of their condition—perhaps as a source of pride, rather than sorrow. Others point out that the dark, winding, and cramped quarters of a tomb complex give the wights who dwell there a significant tactical advantage by allowing them to approach intruders stealthily, using the shadows and wandering passages to cover their deadly approach. Some wights might also simply long for death, meditating in their tombs on their final



freedom from the mortal world, reacting to any distraction or interruption with frustrated rage. Despite their association in many people's minds with ancient barrow-fields on mist-shrouded moors, wights might arise anywhere the living place their dead. There are even rumors of aquatic varieties, related to wights as lacedons are related to ghouls, inhabiting shipwrecks and dangerous reefs in some places. With no need to breathe, though, it is entirely possible such tales stem from waterlogged wights encountered at the bottom of the sea.

## WIGHT LAIRS

Unless under the command of a necromancer, more powerful undead, or some other master, wights normally lair in tombs. As their traditional name (barrow wights) suggests, they often lurk in earthen burial mounds,

but they might make their lairs in any kind of tomb complex or necropolis. (Chapter 7 of *Libris Mortis* presents several maps well suited to serve as wight lairs, particularly those on pages 169 and 179.) A wight lair usually serves as the original burial-place of the oldest wight in the pack, sometimes known as the master wight (or other pompous title), who is served by less powerful undead and his own spawn.

Wight lairs are usually cramped, dark places where the wights can pick off enemies one by one, leisurely draining their life energy and turning them against their former comrades as newly reborn wight spawn. Narrow passages hamper weapon-using intruders and favor unarmed wights. These cunning undead use their knowledge of their lair's layout, along with secret doors and passages, to spring close-quarters attacks without

having to advance under fire from spellcasters or ranged weapons. Labyrinths of short passages allow a pack of wights to surround intruders and attack from all sides, their Hide and Move Silently skills affording them a high chance of surprising interlopers. Cleverly employed shifting walls and pits dropping to lower levels are also frequently used to confuse and disorient outsiders.

## ALTERNATIVE LAIRS

Wights are not only found in dark barrows on lonely, mist-wrapped moors, but might arise in any number of far-flung houses of the dead.

**Al'hammadah:** A hidden valley in the Desert of Al'hammadah conceals an extensive tomb complex constructed by the ancestors of the region's savage nomads. Adventurers who expect to find mummies here are often surprised to encounter linen-wrapped wights and dust wights, their bandages purposefully confusing their true nature. From this morbid palace it is said that an undead despot known as the Black Pharaoh holds court and somehow controls the desert winds.

**Fang Island:** Remnants of a lost civilization slowly decay upon the fabled Fang Island. Some catastrophe devastated the society, transforming thousands of living souls into life-hungry wights. Any hapless wayfarers who set foot upon the island find themselves drawn into a morbid game of cat and mouse. The wights quickly disable any watercraft or other means of escape from the island and then pick off stragglers or scouts to reduce the visitors' numbers and strengthen their own forces before mounting an all-out attack by night. Thus, it is well known that anyone who ventures to Fang Island never returns.

**Ice Soul:** From a frozen throne deep within a hoary catacomb the winter-wight Virmaxis rules a kingdom of ice-encrusted dead and enslaved lichs. Having captured the phylacteries of these lichs in ice, the wight orders that they scour the world for unique magical creatures and creations to fill his glacial museum of arcane curiosities. It is said that the winter-wight's

labyrinthine collection includes a piece of the *regalia of neutrality*, a copy of the infamous *Demonomicon of Iggwilv*, and the titanic first owlbear, frozen but still very much alive. Other rumors claim that Virmaxis is not his own master, and that he in turn serves a more powerful being hailing from a doomed place called Moil.

### WIGHTS IN EBERRON

In Droam, the Daughters of Sora Kell maintain a force of wights to impose their will. Organized into warbands of ten to twenty individuals, they serve the annis Sora Katra, whose barbarian heritage commands respect and fosters mutual understanding.

During the Last War, the Karrnathi military experimented with wights as

### WIGHTBLADE [MONSTROUS]

You can use your energy drain attack while using a melee weapon.

**Prerequisite:** Energy drain ability.

**Benefit:** On a successful melee hit against a living opponent, you may use your energy drain ability in addition to dealing normal damage for your weapon.

**Normal:** You may only use your energy drain ability when you strike with your natural weapons.

troops, following the success of their programs to create enhanced skeletons and zombies. While superior as combat troops, wights were harder to control and more prone to regard all living humanoid as the enemy, including nearby Karrnathi warriors. The Ministry of the Dead trained a few small groups of wights as potent commando teams, and with the end of the war they face an uncertain future. The government has announced the demobilization of all undead troops, but rumors persist that a strategic reserve

remains in secret locations around the country.

### WIGHTS IN FAERÛN

In ancient times, barrow burial proved common among human societies across most of north-western Faerûn. Today, the best-known barrow-fields can be found on the Moonshae Islands, the Dalelands (particularly Battledale, Deepingdale, and Shadowdale), and Rashemen, with wights occasionally rising to trouble the living.

The Battle of Bones in the Western Heartlands serves as the most prolific source of wights (and many other kinds of undead), but they might be found haunting any ancient tomb complexes or serving powerful necromancers.

### ADVANCED WIGHTS

Besides advancing them by Hit Dice or adding class levels, there are a number of ways to create more powerful and unique encounters using wights. Often, this simply means choosing the right wight for the job. Omitting the basic CR 3 wight presented on page 255 of the *Monster Manual*, the following list compiles a number of optional wights from disparate sources.

**Dust Wight:** From page 47 of *Monster Manual III*, these wights possess the earth subtype and lack the typical abilities of most other wights to drain energy and create spawn. Instead, these CR 7 creatures siphon life from metal and stone and can petrify any creature that draws too near them.

**Gravewight Template:** From page 31 of the adventure *The Standing Stone*, this early third-edition template provides the abilities of a wight to any humanoid, giant, or monstrous humanoid. See the King Beneath the Hill for an example.



**Lavawight:** A CR 23 menace from page 200 of the *Epic-Level Handbook*, this fiery twin of the winterwight burns anything that comes near and can permanently drain a creature's hit points.

**Slaughter Wight:** With the increased ability to deal critical hits and an inescapable craving for life force, these CR 8 wights appear on page 121 of *Libris Mortis*.

**Vilewight:** Appearing on page 183 of the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only), this CR 8 wight attacks with blasts of dark energy, ravenous animate intestines, and a disease that prevents the afflicted from seeing the living.

**Wight Template:** Found on page 136 of *Savage Species*, this template allows DMs to turn any humanoid into a wight.

**Winterwight:** A frozen skeleton crowned by a ring of black flame, this CR 23 terror from page 227 the *Epic-Level Handbook* possesses a range of freezing defenses, incredible speed, and the devastating blightfire ability, which drains Constitution over several rounds.

While they can advance by Hit Dice, leaders often have class levels. The rogue class complements a wight's stealth skills, and the wight's energy drain ability produces a devastating sneak attack. With their intelligence, spellcasting wights are not unheard of, but most prize fighting ability above all other skills, resulting in a preponderance of fighter, ranger, and even blackguard wights.

Several accessories also prove particularly useful when advancing wights, most notably: *Libris Mortis*, with its evolved undead template and feats like Improved Energy Drain, Life Drain, and Spell Drain enhance a wights' energy drain ability; *Monster Manual II* and the spellstitched template; and *Savage Species's* emancipated spawn prestige class.

## SAMPLE ADVANCED WIGHT

In the fertile highlands, tales of the King Beneath the Hill have circulated for centuries, telling of a time long past when an iron-hearted tyrant ruled over

the people with cruelty and fear. Upon his passing, the people buried him deep within a mound of black stone, part barrow crypt and part prison to bind his evil should it ever find its way back from the land of the dead. Even now, the Black Barrow stands as a shunned site of dread and dark magic, where some say they've heard hollow howls and terrible commands echoing from within. What none remember, though, is that the ancient tyrant was no man, but a malicious storm giant outcast, who a rebellious people bound and buried alive within his black tomb. As the fiend raged and starved, buried alive, his foul will fended off the hand of death, transforming him into a titanic wight that still struggles against his rusting bindings today. Woe to any who intrude upon the resting place of the ancient king and release him from his centuries-old prison, for to free him is to unleash the rage of ages.

### THE KING BENEATH THE HILL CR 14

Storm giant gravewight  
LE Huge undead

**Init** +7; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +15, Spot +25

**Aura** fear aura (sight, Will DC 23)

**AC** 35, touch 11, flat-footed 32  
(-2 size, +3 Dex, +16 natural, +8 armor)

**hp** 123 (19 HD); **DR** 2/bludgeoning

**Immune** electricity

**Resist** cold 20, fire 10

**Fort** +17, **Ref** +8, **Will** +13

**Spd** 35 ft. (7 squares), swim 30 ft.

**Melee** +2 unholy greatsword +30  
(3d6+16 plus energy drain) or  
slam +28 (1d6+16 plus energy drain)

**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

**Base Atk** +14; **Grp** +36

**Atk Options** Awesome Blow, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 15th)

1/day—*call lightning* (DC 17), *chain lightning* (DC 20)

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 20th)

2/day—*control weather*, *levitate*

**Abilities** Str 43, Dex 16, Con —, Int 16, Wis 20, Cha 19

**SQ** Freedom of movement, rock catching, turn resistance +4, undead traits

**Feats** Awesome Blow, Blindfight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack

**Skills** Climb +22, Concentration +20, Craft (any one) +13, Diplomacy +6, Intimidate +14, Jump +26, Listen +15, Move Silently +11, Perform (sing) +14, Sense Motive +15, Spot +25, Swim +20\*

**Possessions** +3 *breastplate*, +2 *unholy greatsword*, jewelry and adornments worth 3,000 gp

**Energy Drain (Su)** Living creatures hit by the King Beneath the Hill's slam attack gain one negative level. The DC is 23 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based. For each such negative level bestowed, the King Beneath the Hill gains 5 temporary hit points.

**Fear Aura (Su)** Any viewer who sees the King Beneath the Hill must succeed on a DC 23 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by the King Beneath the Hill's despair ability for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Frightful Presence (Su)** Whenever the King Beneath the Hill attacks, its target must make a DC 23 Will save or become frightened (if 4 HD or Fewer) or shaken (if more than 4 HD) for 4d6 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Freedom of Movement (Su)** The King Beneath the Hill has a continuous *freedom of movement* ability as the spell (caster level 20th). The effect can be dispelled, but the gravewight can create it again on its next turn as a free action.

**Skills** The King Beneath the Hill has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line. \*Storm giants ignore weight penalties for gear carried when swimming. ☐

by Amber E. Scott • illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE

# Will-o'-Wisp

Most monsters prove frightening because of the things they have—fangs, spikes, and ichor-dripping claws—but will-o'-wisps are terrifying because of the things they lack: empathy, pity, and mercy. Brilliant creatures without a hint of conscience, will-o'-wisps possess voices but choose not to speak. Alien beings without body language or expressions to hint at their unknowable agendas, all that one can truly know of will-o'-wisps is their insatiable hunger for grief, terror, and death.

## HISTORY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

Terrified peasants huddled in dark huts first whispered stories about will-o'-wisps. Struggling to place the unnatural creatures in the natural order of the world, the peasants spun tales about cursed men's spirits doomed to wander the marshes and lure travelers to their deaths. Others say they are evil fairies with tiny lanterns who chuckle to themselves as they tempt followers toward sinkholes or precipices.

One of these stories distinguishes itself from the rest, surfacing repeatedly with only minor variations from region to region. It is the tale of a good woman who married a wicked man—a drunkard and a womanizer with a cruel streak in him. He found no greater pleasure in life than tormenting his young wife, breaking her heart at every opportunity.

His wife, a sweet-tempered and gentle woman, had an infinite capacity for forgiveness and often prayed that her husband would change his wicked ways. When her husband fatally burned down their house one night in a drunken stupor, his wife's piety and devotion granted him a second chance. The gods allowed his spirit to return to earth in the form of a glowing ball of light. If the wicked husband truly repented his evil ways and strove to live a good life, he would then join his wife in the afterlife.

So far the creatures supposedly related to that spirit show no intention of living such lives.



Pious scholars sometimes whisper darker tales, suggesting that will-o'-wisps are the corruptions of the purest souls in existence. These investigators postulate that will-o'-wisps are descended from fallen lantern archons, tempted angels who succumbed to evil. Cast out of the celestial realms for their crimes, these fallen angels have flourished and now wander the Material Plane, indulging in their wicked desires.

Whatever their origins, the most dedicated researchers know will-o'-wisps to be a unique race of living aberrations strongly tied to the most primal forces of wind, lightning, and air. Peasants have many nicknames for these creatures, such as corpse-candles, bobalongs, and spooks. Will-o'-wisps are also often nicknamed after notorious criminals or evildoers of their region; for example, a small village terrorized years ago by a bloodthirsty green hag might call will-o'-wisps "hag lanterns."

### PHYSIOLOGY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

The alien forms of will-o'-wisps prove particularly confusing to those who seek to destroy them. Their small size—the body of a will-o'-wisp measures only 8 to 12 inches across—combined with the flickering, yellow, blue, green, or white glow that surround them give

them an insubstantial, ethereal look as their flames hide their bodies.

A will-o'-wisp's body is not a single solid mass, but rather a cluster of twelve to fifteen gas-filled nodes stuck together in a spherical shape by a transparent, spongy substance. These clear nodes are covered with porous membranes that pulse as the wisp breathes.

Will-o'-wisps gain sustenance from two sources: natural gas and emotional energy. A wisp inhales the gas formed by decomposing plant and animal matter and processes it in several ways. It expels some of the gas to propel itself through the air with great precision and speed while absorbing the rest of the gas to fuel its biological functions. Digesting gas in this way produces a by-product that ignites in a heatless light when it comes into contact with air. When a will-o'-wisp exhales, this by-product flares up on the surface of its skin, creating its flickering flames and the faintest smell of sulphur. The wisp's alien digestion process also results in an internal buildup of electricity, which the will-o'-wisp uses as an attack form.

Superstition holds that will-o'-wisps feed off emotional energy, particularly negative emotions, in an almost vampiric manner. Some researchers claim

it is not a supernatural process but a biological one; that the wisp actually feeds off the chemicals released through a victim's skin when frightened. These theories are vague and unsupported, but all sages agree that will-o'-wisps gain sustenance from negative emotions in some fashion.

Nodal membranes contain tiny, multipurpose sensory organs, which wisps use to see and hear. A healthy will-o'-wisp grows new nodes at the rate of one a month. These nodes form at the creature's core and push the other nodes outward. Exposed nodal membranes age and tear quickly, and deflated nodes slough off the creature at a rate of about one a month.

A will-o'-wisp that feeds daily for at least six months grows three extra nodes on the outside of its body. It takes a week for these extraneous nodes to mature before they break off and become a new, wholly independent creature. The new wisp develops more nodes over the next two weeks until it matures into an adult-sized wisp. There is no limit to the number of times a will-o'-wisp can reproduce, and it cannot control this process. It only occurs when there is enough sustenance to support reproduction, and thus will-o'-wisp populations naturally control themselves.

Each of a wisp's nodes can think for itself, although they die if separated from the rest of the wisp (except in the case of reproduction). A wisp can think with all its minds at once, which gives it an incredibly advanced intelligence even when it is very young. Also, being that the nodes of a newborn wisp stem from its parent, a young wisp has the same thoughts, memories, and much of the same personality as its progenitor. Thus, will-o'-wisps in the same region are often interrelated and, sharing the same memories, think of themselves as a single creature.

Will-o'-wisps do not seem to have a natural lifespan, but their unique dietary requirements make it easy for them to starve. They must feed on gases once a day and on emotions at least once a week. A solitary will-o'-wisp with constant access to gases but not to emotions breaks down and dies in about three months. A wisp that cannot feed on gases dies in a week, regardless of whether it has access to emotional trauma.

The decomposing materials in a 1-mile-square section of swamp or an average small town graveyard can produce enough gases to sustain a single wisp.

### PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE WILL-O'-WISP

A will-o'-wisp sees little difference between a solitary existence and one with related wisps, as they share the same memories, objectives, and similar personalities. In areas capable of supporting a large number of will-o'-wisps strings of 3-4 wisps commonly form, working as insidious, incredibly mobile hunting parties. If a string forms naturally by reproduction, there is no need for the wisps to compete for resources, as reproduction only occurs when there is enough sustenance to support multiple wisps. Naturally forming strings work together to concoct brilliantly evil plans.

If a wisp enters another wisp's territory, neither has any compunctions about killing its rival if necessary. Wisps have no sense of community or racial solidarity and often perceive foreign will-o'-wisps with dissimilar thoughts and memories as a threat. Should its motives prove compatible, an outsider wisp might be welcomed into a local string. Adventurers set upon by a string of wisps consisting of



wisps of different minds can try to trick or persuade the wisps to attack one another. Wisps are wise enough to see through amateur attempts to fool them but a talented adventurer might play them against each other. Will-o'-wisps delight in betrayal and backstabbing and could be receptive to such negotiations if they can be suitably convinced. However, it might prove exceptionally difficult for non-will-o'-wisps to tell apart wisps of different parentages, although the color of the light they shed might provide a clue.

Above all else, wisps love causing pain. Years of practice and their immense intelligence hone particularly insidious and creative tactics. The standard will-o'-wisp tactic is to lure a traveler into a dangerous area by pretending to be a guiding light. Adventurers traveling in graveyards or boggy areas must beware and never follow such

lights. Tales of these deadly marshlights have spread far through the years, forcing wisps to be more creative with their plans.

Wisps pride themselves on their intelligence and cunning. A wisp might follow a party invisibly for a day or more to evaluate the group's skills and learn its weaknesses. One tale tells of a wisp following a large group of mercenaries for a week as the group traveled through a huge marsh. The wisp chose a victim—a young fighter on his first mission. Every night the wisp flitted into camp invisibly during the young man's watch and killed one of the other mercenaries in his sleep. When the group had lost half its members in this fashion the survivors turned on the watchman and accused him of being the murderer. In vain he tried to defend himself; his companions beating him mercilessly and then hanging him. The wisp, lurking nearby, sucked up the condemned innocent's terror with glee. When the company moved on, the wisp followed and killed one last victim in his sleep. The invisible wisp remained long enough to absorb the horrified emanations from the survivors as they realized they had executed an innocent man and then flew back to its home, satisfied. Adventurers would be wise to set double watches every night when traveling through areas where wisps might live.

On the rare occasions when will-o'-wisps work together the results are truly terrifying. Three strings of wisps once collaborated on a stormy night, clustering together at the top of a rocky cliff and glowing as brightly as possible. Two ships, mistaking the wisps for a lighthouse, were dashed to pieces against the cliffs. Fortunately such collaborations are rare, but good-hearted adventurers who hear tales of wisps working in tandem often seek them out and destroy them for the good of the land.

If necessary, a will-o'-wisp is willing to work with other creatures, but its capricious nature and inherently evil mind make most partnerships short lived. Adventurers who strike deals with wisps should be on guard, as the alien creatures care nothing for keeping promises and enjoy betraying their companions whenever possible.

Since wisps rarely occur in groups larger than four, their society is extremely simple, focusing on survival, reproduction, and causing suffering. Wisp hierarchies, when they exist, make few distinctions between individuals, but give superiority to exceptionally old wisps and those that have executed the most diabolical plans and caused the most terrible deaths—often the same creature.

Will-o'-wisps are unique in that they are one of the few races without religious beliefs. Wisps do not worship any deities and do not have any beliefs about an afterlife. While wisps understand divine magic, they don't believe they have souls. In fact, there have been no recorded instances of wisps returning from the dead by means of divine magic, although whether this is because they have no souls or because the wisps simply do not want to return to life no one can say.

Worshippers of evil gods, particularly chaotic ones who revere slaughter and deception, sometimes see will-o'-wisps as embodiments of their god's doctrine and seek out alliances with them. Wisps are happy to aid such depraved individuals and are more trustworthy when working with evil priests than when dealing with other beings. Wisps understand the dogma of death and destruction and, while they are not worshippers, they eagerly aid devotees of the powers of lies, trickery, and evil.

Some scholars once feared that a race full of such evil and cunning intelligence as will-o'-wisps would grow more powerful, form complex societies, and dominate large areas of the world, much like mind flayers or drow. This has not happened, and scholars are beginning to understand why. Although wisps are keenly intelligent, they possess no extremities or telekinetic powers. They cannot use tools, manipulate

## WILL-O'-WISP KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks related to will-o'-wisps.

### Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Will-o'-wisps are glowing balls of light that lure victims into sinkholes and quicksand.
15	Will-o'-wisps feed off of negative emotions and use electricity attacks.
20	Tracking will-o'-wisps is difficult due to their ability to fly and turn invisible. Wisps are intelligent and sadistic creatures, yet still might be reasoned with.
25	Will-o'-wisps are immune to all magic except <i>magic missile</i> and <i>maze</i> spells. They can speak Auran and Common but rarely do so.
30	A will-o'-wisp's invisibility is natural and cannot be dispelled. Also, wisps living in the same area often share the same memories, experiences, and goals.

items, or construct lairs or fortresses. Wisps might learn tactics and hone their skills, but they are doomed to remain static as long as they stay trapped in their current forms. Their society will never develop further, a reality which frustrates the wisps and drives them to commit ever greater acts of cruelty and depredation. Their reputations as sadistic monsters are all they have.

### WILL-O'-WISP LAIRS

Will-o'-wisps live in swamps and graveyards where decomposing plant and animal matter is common. Will-o'-wisps are likely to be less aggressive in graveyards, as there are plenty of corpses around and the emotional anguish of mourners proves quite satisfying. Adventurers seeking to confront a wisp should do so among the resting sites of the dead, particularly if they seek to strike a bargain or converse with one.

Wisps sometimes work with the undead that haunt burial sites, particularly ghouls or wights. The wisp patrols the area invisibly and if it sees a living being it floats above the trespasser's head, glowing brightly. The ghouls and wights learn that following the light leads them to prey, and the wisp feeds off the victim's resulting horror.



Unilluminated  
Will-o'-Wisp

Will-o'-wisps must sleep for a few hours each day, and since they must be conscious in order to fly or maintain invisibility, a safe resting place is a necessity. Fortunately, their small size makes it easy for them to hide in hollow logs or mausoleums, or even to float just under the marshy surface of a bog (the gases permeating the mud around it keep the wisp from suffocating). Adventurers hunting for a will-o'-wisp should look for a faint glow coming from small hiding places or the distinct smell of sulphur (the will-o'-wisp's emissions).

These lairs are nothing more than sleeping holes and may change from day to day. There is nothing of interest in such places; even if a wisp wanted to personalize its lair, it has no way to manipulate objects. For the same rea-

son, the lairs hold no gathered treasure; however, a search of the surrounding area often reveals the decaying corpses of previous victims and their possessions.

### Vs. WILL-O'-WISPS

Despite all the research done on them, will-o'-wisps remain enigmatic. Sages have cut them open, separated the clear globes from the transparent sponge, dissected them and studied them, but questions still remain.

**Beware Magic Immunity:** The most pressing mystery surrounding will-o'-wisps is how they remain almost completely immune to magic. They do not possess the resistance to spells that certain extraplanar creatures have, and they do not have elemental resistances. They are simply and fully immune to most magic in an incredibly baffling way.

Only two spells can overcome a wisp's immunity to magic: *magic missile* and *maze*. Adventurers stalking a wisp would be wise to arm themselves with *wands of magic missile*, even to the point of equipping characters with Use Magic Device. Since wisps have no way of protecting themselves from

*magic missiles* (being unable to use items like *brooches of shielding*), they tend to target obvious wizards first. While the wizard occupies the wisp, a rogue can use her wand. If the party is of sufficient level to cast *maze*, wisps probably won't pose much of a challenge.

**Invisible Threats:** Less mysterious but no less dangerous is the wisp's ability to turn invisible at will, as a natural ability. By ceasing to exhale, a will-o'-wisp can extinguish the flames that surround its body, leaving an effectively invisible transparent globe behind. The will-o'-wisp can remain invisible as long as it likes by breathing very shallowly and slowly. This is more dangerous than regular invisibility, as *detect magic* and *dispel magic* have no effect on wisps. The only ways to see an invisible will-o'-wisp are through the *see invisibility* and *invisibility purge* spells or by making a Spot check. (Which is very unlikely. An invisible, moving will-o'-wisp has an effective Hide bonus of +33. An invisible, stationary will-o'-wisp has an effective Hide bonus of +53.) Party spellcasters must prepare *see invisibility* and *invisibility purge* if they have access to it, or the

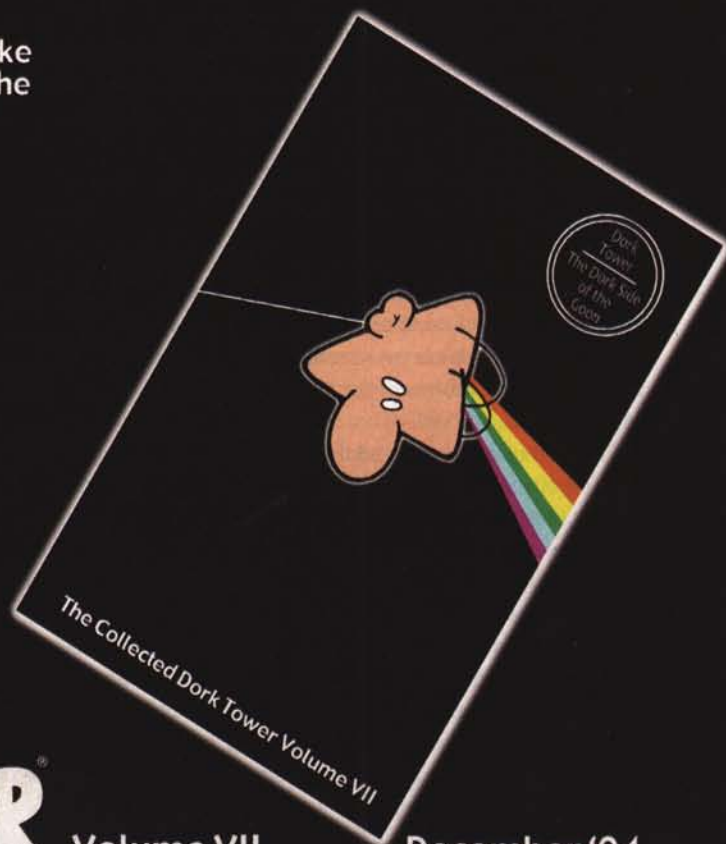
party must obtain scrolls and wands of those spells.

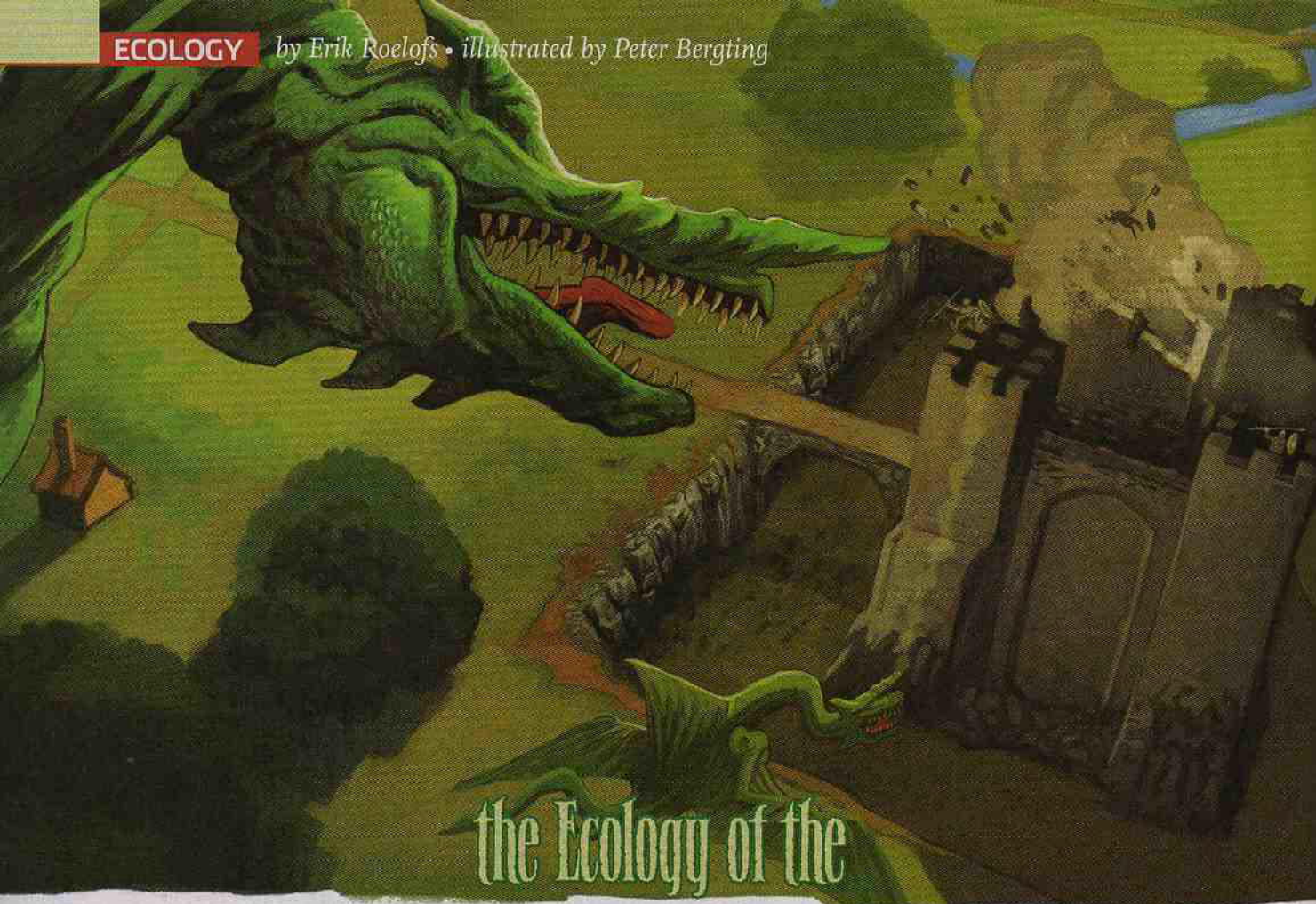
**Flying Frighteners:** Hunters should be wary of wisps appearing from nearly any direction, especially from above. Wisps have perfect maneuverability and a fast fly speed. In this case, ranged weapons are necessary and wizards and sorcerers without other useful spells to cast should use them. Even with their low base attack bonus, wizards and sorcerers have access to *true strike*, and thus have a good chance of hitting their target. Adventurers should create or seek out scrolls and wands of *true strike* if possible.

Archers should forgo use of the Manyshot and Rapid Shot feats and melee fighters should never use Combat Expertise or Power Attack. Hitting the wisp is the primary goal, and adventurers must avoid anything that lowers their attack bonuses.

**Resist Electricity:** Will-o'-wisps only possess one attack form, a touch attack that deals electricity damage. Adventurers should increase their touch Armor Class as much as they can and use items or spells that grant resistance to electricity. ☐

If you don't kill the MEAT GOLEM, you can't take on the black pudding! HOW can you take on the BLACK PUDDING if you don't KILL THE MEAT?





## the Ecology of the

# YRTHAK

Capable of detecting prey from miles away and crumbling whole castles with their blaring cries, yrthaks (YEER-thaks) are masters of the sky and sound. Known for their ability to focus noise into a terrible and unexpected weapon, these extraordinary beasts are feared as much for their alien appearances as for their unique powers. Yet, yrthaks are not merely mindless monsters or freakish interlopers upon the natural world. Rather, beyond such clouds of fear and misinformation soar magically gifted beasts as clever and intriguing as they are deadly.

### HISTORY OF THE YRTHAK

The ancient myths passed down by the mystery cult of Nyx speak of Brannius of Apollo, a man who many considered the greatest and kindest bard of his age. Yet even with this

fame and appeal, he knew that his uplifting music could not reach everyone. This tormented Brannius, who hoped to brighten the lives of all he could. Although he traveled far and sought magic to spread his song, he knew that even all the magic he could muster would never allow him to play for the entire world.

Desperate for a way to acquire the power to have his song reach around the world, he offered a week-long hymn of devotion to any deity who would listen, praying for a way to accomplish his dearest wish. As the final note faded, at the precise moment the sun vanished behind the horizon, two powerful entities answered Brannius's call.

A beautiful, winged trumpet archon with her brilliant instrument held in hand arrived from the Seven Mounting Heavens of Celestia. Soothing the humble bard with



*“In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.”*

—Desiderius Erasmus, *Adages*

the promise that his legend would last forever, she told him that his beautiful songs would be played by great bards throughout the ages, and—some day far in the future—all the people of countless kingdoms would know his music. With that, she held out her radiant trumpet to Brannius.

At the same moment, a succubus arrived from the Infinite Layers of the Abyss. Holding a long, slender horn crafted from bone, the temptress promised Brannius the power to create music that would change the lives of all who heard it, songs no living thing could deny and that even the deaf would notice, and do so within his lifetime. After making her offer, she extended her terrible bone horn to the mortal.

Tormented by the choice, Brannius searched his heart, but his ego intervened. Finally, he reached for the fiend’s gnarled horn. Before he could touch it, though, the succubus drew him close and, with a wicked grin, slammed the

### KNOWLEDGE OF THE YRTHAK

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to yrthaks. Mountain dwellers, fearful musicians, and researchers of strange anatomies are most likely to possess this information. The yrthak appears on page 262 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (arcana)	DC	Result
19		Yrthaks are dragonlike creatures capable of blasting prey with lances of destructive noise.
24		Yrthaks often target land near their prey with their sonic lance attack, creating explosions of debris. With their incredible senses of hearing, rhythmic noises attract yrthaks.
29		Despite their lack of eyes, yrthaks can detect creatures through their sense of hearing. Deafening yrthaks effectively blinds the creatures, and they prove vulnerable to all manner of other sonic attacks.
34		Yrthaks nest high in mountain crevasses, often near areas of soothing natural noise. Stories tell of yrthaks becoming enamored with musicians’ music and kidnapping them.
39		Yrthak parents avoid using their sonic attacks when near their eggs. The echolocation of bats also seem to confuse their senses of hearing.

gnarled horn into the bard’s forehead, splitting his skull. Yet, Brannius did not die. His flesh warping and bones shattering and realigning, the horn

changed the very nature of his being. The archon averted her eyes as the screams of Brannius died away and the first yrthak was born.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF THE YRTHAK

Yrthaks are like no other creatures in existence. Somewhat resembling flying crocodiles or sickly green dragons, adult yrthaks grow to approximately 14 feet long, with lengthy, leathery wings nearly 40 feet wide. A mouth disproportionate to the beasts' size splits the end of a long, muscular neck—the predominate characteristic of an almost featureless head crowned by a spiraling green horn. While the creature's body looks frail, even sickly with its jaundiced green skin, its tough hide and numerous cartilaginous barbs provide yrthaks with considerable defenses. Easily the creature's most distinctive trait and defense, however, is its twisting horn, the source of its well-known sonic abilities.

The process by which yrthaks create their devastating sonic blasts involves surprisingly little magical influence, relying more on a complex network of interior structures and unique organs. The weapon's use begins with the creature's detection of potential prey. Within a yrthak's mouth bobs a strange tongue. Marked by a bulbous swell called the aural lobe (1 on the anatomical diagram), this sensitive cluster of nerves detects sound as most creatures' tongues sense taste. Incredibly powerful, this organ can detect noises beyond most humanoid's abilities to notice, such as the beating of a creature's heart, the flow of air around nearby forms, or loud noises as far as 30 miles away. Using its strong support muscle, the lobe can lower into the apical depression (2), a protective divot at the front of the creature's mouth filled with thick, protective saliva. Copious amounts of this viscous gel seep into the hollow and spread throughout the creature's mouth from a large salivary gland (3). With the aural lobe lowered, a yrthak can drink, eat, or attack with its powerful jaws with little fear of harming the organ. During such acts and, in fact, whenever its mouth is closed, the creature is effectively blind.

Once a yrthak's tongue has detected a presence, the information is transferred to the creature's primary brain (4). This organ functions much like those of

normal creatures, interpreting sensations and providing a yrthak with an intellect and cunning far greater than that of just an animal—an oft underestimated fact. Aside from the primary brain, though, yrthaks possess a secondary, or acoustic, brain (5). This organ possesses peerless capability to distinguish variations in sound and allows a yrthak to choose what to hear, filtering through countless background noises to listen to those it deems relevant or useful. The acoustic brain also controls the creation of the beast's sonic attacks and protects it from creating sounds damaging to itself.

The creation of a yrthak's sonic lance begins in the creature's lungs. Air is forced into the yrthak's head, much like the act of whistling, except that in these creatures, the air is forced into special sinuses by a unique group of organs called harmonic diaphragms (6). Within these resonating sinuses (7), a number of tones are created and echo back upon one another through fleshy tubes and connected echo chambers. The effect is like a number of whistles being simultaneously created and amplified over and over. The cacophony builds in volume until it is then echoed back into a chamber of the harmonic diaphragms. There, in an action not fully understood and likely without any natural explanation, the noise is violently forced into the yrthak's horn. The horn houses a cartilaginous structure referred to as a tonal multivibrator (8), a mostly hollow structure pocked with holes and tunnels seemingly at random, but which actually serve to focus the noise. Now directed, the noise escapes from the horn through the thin flesh, blasting forth in a line of discordant tones and vibrations. This entire process occurs in a matter of seconds.

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE YRTHAK

Yrthaks typically roost in areas that thrum with regular noise, such as near waterfalls, bubbling volcanoes, and seaside cliffs. With their incredible hearing, they sometimes dwell in areas humanoids don't consider noisy, such as amid the rustling sounds of

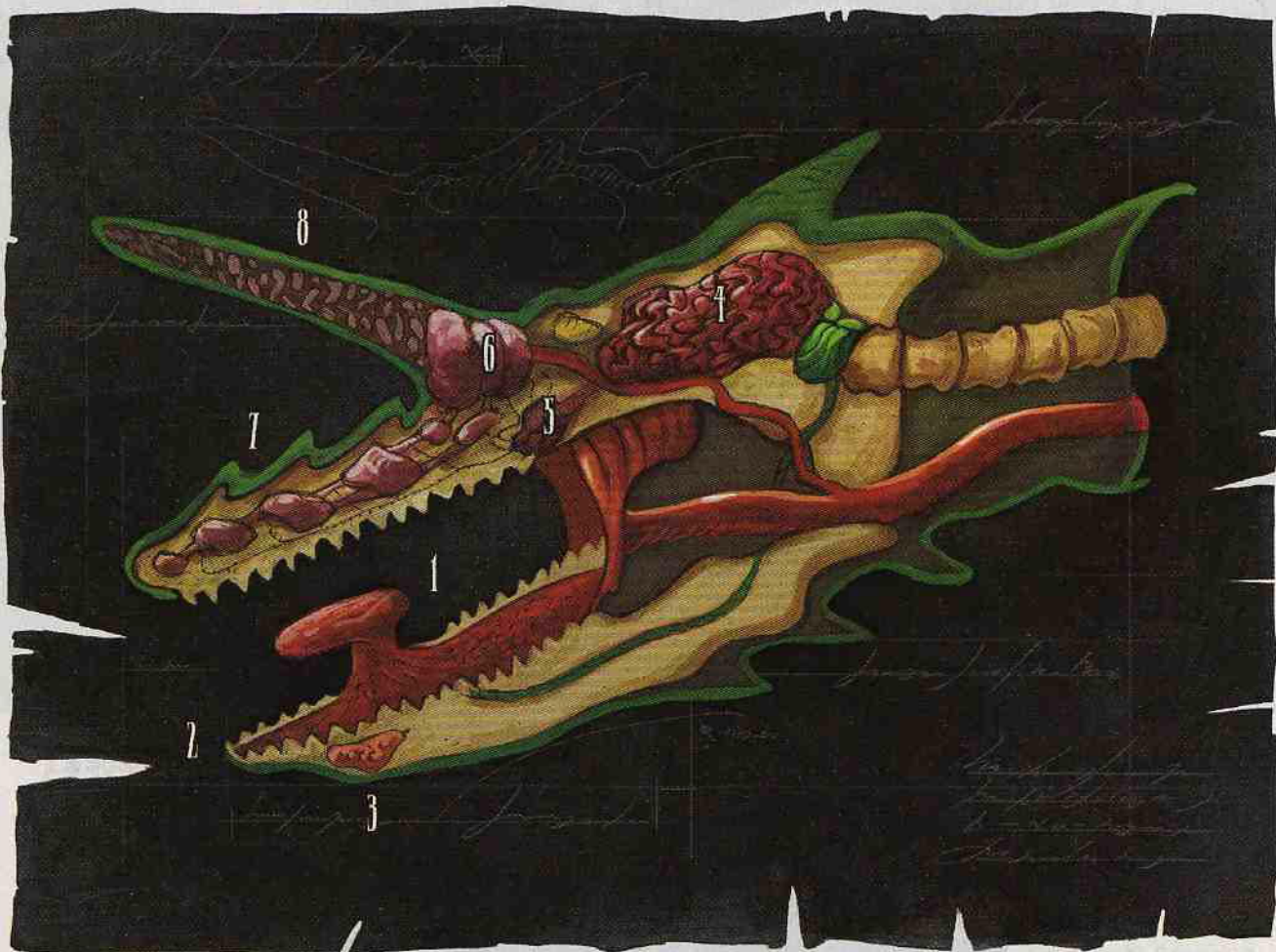
the deep forest, upon high mountains where they can listen to brewing thunderheads, and—rarely but most dangerously—atop towering buildings amid bustling cities.

Concerned primarily with survival, yrthaks spend most of their time away from their lairs searching for food. Although omnivorous, they prefer eating meat over plants, but they are intelligent enough to refrain from attacking creatures obviously too powerful for them, such as rocs, stone giants, and red and silver dragons, which often frequent their preferred mountainous habitats. When they do roost, these lairs most often take the form of deep fissures in rocky cliffs, packed with leaves and wood sonically splintered to fine chips.

Incapable of humanoidlike speech, yrthaks possess a strange language of subtle rustles, flaps, clicks, and subharmonic tones. No humanoid can reproduce the Yrthak language, although some races of the deep Underdark—particularly destrachans and nycters—can hear and potentially learn it. Making use of a variety of faculties and being perceived by the keenly receptive hearing of other yrthaks, great amounts of information can be exchanged far more swiftly than through vocal speech, allowing cooperating yrthaks to have an almost instantaneous knowledge of their allies' movements and tactics.

Yrthaks appear to spend much of their time in solitude, but their incredible sense of hearing means that those occupying the same region as others are never far apart. Being able to communicate over vast distances, yrthaks can swiftly respond to one another's calls for aid. In fact, some researchers believe the creatures' sonic explosion ability serves double duty as both a devastating attack and an invigorating cry of warning and call for aid—much like the scream of most humanoids.

Yrthaks do come together, however, during their mating seasons, roughly once every three years and usually sometime during autumn. Attracting each other by creating pleasing sounds, couples return to the male's nest



or roost. Several weeks after a complicated and notably silent mating, the female lays one to four sizable eggs, each weighing around 25 pounds and being roughly 2 feet in diameter. The couple stays together until the eggs hatch, remaining relatively quiet for the entirety of the required 4 months so as not to damage the developing young's sensitive auditory system. Upon the whelps' hatching, the female chases off the male, retaining his territory and using it to rear their young, while the male goes in search of a new home.

While yrthaks typically avoid one another, they often exhibit a marked curiosity regarding other creatures, especially those capable of producing music. Where noise soothes yrthaks, music stimulates them. Wildly changing notes and tones excite their sensitive hearing, resonating through their bodies in a kind of tonal ecstasy. In the wild, the closest yrthaks come to

music are the pulse of storms or rare natural disasters. Thus, the music of civilized areas and wandering musicians are quick to attract nearby yrthaks, even from miles away. While intelligent enough to fear the threats of humanoid cities, yrthaks have been known to follow and even abduct travelers who openly sing or play instruments, terrifying such wayfarers and sometimes whisking them away to treacherous lairs. There, the abductee might be able to survive for some time if it placates the beast with music. Some performers of particular talents find they have a skill for lulling yrthaks to sleep and have survived months, even years, living with their monstrous hosts, while others have made daring escapes by lulling their beastly captors to sleep.

Yrthaks are also capable of detecting the sound made by bats and other creatures with sonar or sound-based perception. They commonly blast

entire swarms of bats with their sonic attacks, as the flying mammals interfere with the sounds the yrthak are listening to and possibly disrupt their "sight."

### ANAK KRAKAU

Beneath the volcano-island of Anak Krakau slumbers a living disaster, a yrthak of incredible size, which likely came to rest on the isle centuries ago when the volcano still spewed strange smokes from the Underdark's deepest depths. None can say how long the creature has slept there, the sediment and jungle having gradually overgrown it. When humans came to Anak Krakau and discovered the buried creature, only its 30-foot-tall horn jutted from the earth—a strange humming green monolith. The tribe settled around it, revering the totem as a god, playing music for He-Who-Hums every day. In actuality, the yrthak dreams centuries-long dreams, oblivious to the earth and village that has

been built upon its body. Should the volcano ever erupt again, though, He-Who-Hums will doubtlessly wake, destroying the entire village and unleashing one of the most cacophonous catastrophes the world has ever known.

**HE-WHO-HUMS**

**CR 24**

Male kaiju yrthak

CE Colossal magical beast

*Monster Manual* 262, *DRAGON* #289

**Init** +2; **Senses** blindsight 120 ft.; Listen +14, Spot +14

**Languages** Yrthak

**AC** 36, touch 4, flat-footed 34

**hp** 754 hp (52 HD); **Die** Hard, fast healing 20 **DR** 25/magic

**Immune** gaze attacks, illusions, mind-affecting effects, all sight-based or visual effects

**Resist** electricity 50; **SR** 34

**Fort** +38 **Ref** +31, **Will** +18

**Weakness** vulnerable to sonic

**Speed** 20 ft. (4 squares); fly 60 ft. (poor)

**Melee\*** bite +44 (3d8+30) and 2 claws +42 (2d6+22)

**Ranged** sonic lance +46 (6d6)

**Space** 40 ft; **Reach** 20 ft.

**Base Atk** +52; **Grp** +83

**Atk Options** Cleave, Fly-By Attack, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Snatch, swallow whole, trample (4d12+7)

**Special Actions** explosion, sonic lance, windstorm

**Spell-like Abilities** (CL 20th)

1/day—*control weather*, *whirlwind*  
\*15-point Power Attack

**Abilities** Str 40, Dex 14, Con 29, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 20

**SQ** absorb electricity, death throes, no breath

**Feats** Die Hard, Endurance, Flyby Attack, Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch

**Skills** Hide -1, Listen +14, Move Silently +15, Spot +14

**Swallow Whole (Ex)** He-Who-Hums can

swallow Huge or smaller opponents by making a successful grapple check. Once swallowed, the opponent takes 2d8+15 points of crushing damage, plus 3d6 points of acid damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out using claws or a light weapon by dealing 50 points of damage to He-Who-Hums's stomach (AC 20). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed creature must cut its own way out.

**Trample (Ex)** As a standard action while on the ground, He-Who-Hums can run over an opponent of Gargantuan or smaller size. He-Who-Hums merely has to move over the opponent and deals 4d12+7 points of damage.

Trampled opponents can attempt attacks of opportunity, but these incur a -4 penalty. If they do not make attacks of opportunity, trampled opponents can make DC 51 Reflex saves for half damage.

**Explosion (Su)** A yrthak can fire its sonic lance at the ground, a large rock, a stone wall, or the like to create an explosion of shattered stone. This attack deals 2d6 points of piercing damage to all within 10 feet of the effect's center. This counts as a use of the sonic lance attack and thus is usable only once every 2 rounds, and never on the round following a sonic lance attack.

**Sonic Lance (Su)** Once every 2 rounds, a yrthak can focus sonic energy in a ray up to 60 feet long. This is a ranged touch attack that deals 6d6 points of damage to a single target.

**Windstorm (Ex)** As a standard action, He-Who-Hums can blast an area with powerful gusts of wings by flapping its wings. The blast of wind creates a 100-foot-long cone of hurricane force wind (see page 95 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

**Absorb Electricity (Ex)** He-Who-Hums can absorb electricity damage. Electricity damage that bypasses He-Who-Hums's energy resistance is absorbed and converted into temporary hit points that last for 10 minutes.

**Death Throes (Su)** If killed, He-Who-Hums explodes, dealing 20d6 points of electricity damage to everything within 100 feet. DC 45 Reflex save for half.

**No Breath (Ex)** He-Who-Hums does not breathe and is immune to gas-based attacks that require Fortitude saving throws. It can also exist buried in the earth, underwater, or in airless environments with ease. 