# GOD FORSAKEN Nonte cook Sean K. Reynolds





Designers Additional Designers Creative Director Managing Editor Editor/Proofreader Art Director Cover Artist Monte Cook and Sean K. Reynolds Bruce R. Cordell and Shanna Germain Monte Cook Shanna Germain Ray Vallese Bear Weiter Roberto Pitturru

Cartographer Hugo Solis

#### Artists

Jacob Atienza, Bethany Berg, Milivoj Ćeran, Biagio D'Alessandro, Sarah Dahlinger, Rachel Denton, Jason Engle, Felipe Escobar, Michele Giorgi, Alexander Gustafson, David Hueso, Baldi Konijn, Katerina Ladon, Eric Lofgren, Raph Herrera Lomotan, Patrick McEvoy, Federico Musetti, Mirco Paganessi, Angelo Peluso, Michael Phillippi, Roberto Pitturru, Riccardo Rullo, Martin de Diego Sádaba, Audre "Charamath" Schutte, Lie Setiawan, Joe Slucher, Lee Smith, Matt Stawicki, Cyril Terpent, Cory Trego-Erdner, Chris Waller, Cathy Wilkins



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## INTRODUCTION

# WHAT'S YOUR FANTASY?

f all the genres, fantasy is almost unquestionably the oldest. Tales of gods, demons, heroes, and magic extend back much farther than any of them were ever written down. Not surprisingly, then, fantasy is also probably the most flexible genre. You can have fantasy set in the distant past, in the far future, in the present day, on another world, or even in a different dimension with entirely different physics and cosmology. That's a lot of choices (and a lot to cover in one book). To say that you're going to play in or run a fantasy roleplaying game prompts a lot of additional questions. Where will it take place? Is it inspired by a particular book or movie? Is it modern day or something with dragons and castles (or is it modern day with dragons and castles)? Can I play an elf?

And therein lies the fun, I think.

Because you get to decide the time and place. You get to decide how and why there's magic, supernatural creatures, strange mystical phenomena, or all of them together (and probably a lot more). You can base it on Tolkien, the father of modern fantasy, or you can throw him out the window and change it all around. Whatever you choose is the right choice. The only thing you don't want to be is boring. With literally no boundaries other than those you set, there's simply no excuse to make fantasy dull. If you or your friends are tired of goblins and dwarves, swords and fireballs, don't use any of them. Set your fantasy game on an infinitely long bridge connecting Heaven and Hell, and have stories about those who travel this bridge.

Or set your game in the modern world, where the players take on the roles of secret espionage wizards and wizard-slayers, combatting foreign agents who also wield magic. Or develop a fantasy game where the characters are undead pirates deep beneath the sea in the nineteenth century, struggling over the true treasure of Davy Jones's Locker.

Whatever your choice, the Cypher System should be able to help you make it a reality. That's what we set out to do with Godforsaken. If your game has magic or the supernatural of any kind, it's fantasy, and this book provides rules, tools, and insights that hopefully will make your game better. It may lean toward traditional fantasy-elves, dragons, and so on-because that's what most people are interested in, but the information in this book extends to any sort of fantasy you want. And remember, even within the bounds of "traditional," you can always do something untraditional. Maybe the dragons are the good guys, out to preserve their peaceful lands from marauding elves. With the Cypher System, you can make anything happen.



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## CHAPTER 1

# BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

For a home game, anything goes. But if you publish your world, do some extra work to update your in-jokes and homages so they aren't plagiarism or a copyright or trademark violation.

he first step in running a fantasy game is figuring out what setting you want to use-what you want the world of your game to be like. This involves asking all the basic questions you need to answer about a setting. Is it on Earth, another world, or something in between? Is it the present day, the past, or the future? Fantasy adds other questions to that list, such as: are there any fantasy creatures in it (dragons, orcs, goblins, demons, and so on)? Do regular people know about magic and the fantasy aspects of your setting, or are their lives completely mundane? This chapter walks you through ways to quickly put together a fantasy setting that draws on other sources, how to craft your own setting from scratch, and how to mix the two.

## BORROWING FROM OTHER SOURCES

There are thousands of fantasy novels, television shows, and comic books out there, and more new ones being created every day. Maybe one, two, or a handful of them inspired your love of fantasy, and

Throughout this book, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to the *Cypher System Rulebook*, where you can find additional details about that rule, ability, creature, or concept. you want to assemble pieces of those favorites into your own world.

You might feel a little guilty about taking parts of other people's work and putting them into your home game. But don't. It's not stealing-it's an homage, and it's been happening in worldbuilding since forever. At the dawn of fantasy roleplaying (in the 1980s), it was common for heroes to quest to find Excalibur, go on heroic adventures with Sinbad, and try to destroy an evil ring of invisibility. The fantasy genre is full of fertile soil, and different stories and settings cross-pollinate each other all the time. One author inspires another to make derivative fiction. Another author opens up their world as a shared world and other authors write for it. Named characters make cameo appearances in famous works, or are name-dropped as hints that they're in the same stories. Riffing on someone else's work is a natural step toward learning how to create something that's completely yours, just like people who learn to draw often practice by studying and tracing other drawings.

If you like a particular fantasy movie, TV show, or comic book, and you want to make a setting or a one-shot adventure based on that, do it. If you're excited about the source material, your players will feel it too. If you prefer, you can change names, change the time period, or change the motivation for one of the major NPCs—it'll obscure what you're referencing and keep your well-read players from guessing what your source material is. It's okay if your players think

## BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

(or even say) that the world or scenario reminds them of something else. There are a lot of common tropes in fantasy, many famous fantasy stories borrow concepts from more obscure sources, and sometimes stories repeat in cycles. What makes your story unique (even if it's based on something else) is the personal touch that you and your players bring to the table.

## ÚSING A PÚBLISHED Fantasy game setting

Sometimes you don't want to take pieces of settings and fuse them together you just want to run a game set in your favorite fantasy world. If that world exists only as fiction, you'll have to do some extra work to fill in details and options, but if that world has already been published as an RPG setting, that work has mostly been done for you. Likewise, if you don't have the time or inclination to create your own fantasy world, using a published setting gives you everything you need without all of the legwork.

Fantasy is probably the most popular RPG genre, and dozens of fantasy roleplaying games out there include a detailed setting. Using that setting (whether you use its rule system, the Cypher System, or something else) is an easy way to have a world ready to run a game in, and most of them also include adventures that are ready to play. Here are a few examples of fantasy RPGs that you can use immediately:

**7th Sea:** A swashbuckling fantasy setting in a world reminiscent of early modern Europe, with real and fictitious secret societies working behind the scenes.

**Forgotten Realms:** A high-magic fantasy setting that started out as a home campaign by its creator and grew to be

incredibly popular, with multiple novels, comics, and videogames set here. It has a little bit of everything—wild lands for exploration, large cities for intrigue, secret societies, and mysterious evil cults set on world domination—so you can run any sort of game you want here.

**Gods of the Fall:** The old gods died when their home realm fell from the sky and brought the world into a dark age. A generation later, a few people (including the PCs) have awoken with a spark of divinity and must fight to enact prophecies that restore order to the world and elevate themselves to be the new pantheon of gods.

**Lord of the Rings:** Several publishers over the past forty years have created RPGs set in the most famous fantasy world, with the most recent being *The One Ring Roleplaying Game*.

**Numenera:** Science fantasy set on the Earth of one billion years in the future, where remnants of ancient technology and bioengineering are treated as magic by the pseudo-medieval humans trying to survive in a weird and dangerous world.

**Shadow of the Demon Lord:** This game presents a fantasy world on the brink of an apocalypse. Amoral PCs balance sanity and corruption as they complete quests, earn their legacy, and perhaps delay the ascension of the Demon Lord that wants to consume everything.

**The Strange:** A modern setting with dimension-hopping to parallel worlds called recursions that are based on myths, legends, and fiction. Characters can jump from the modern world to Camelot, a magical land called Ardeyn, the world of Sherlock Holmes, and any other fictional realm the GM decides to include. There's a saying that there are only two basic fiction plots: someone goes on a journey, and a stranger comes to town. This saying has a corollary: it's the same story, told from two different perspectives.

#### GODFORSAKEN

When we discuss fantasy in your world, we deliberately don't use labels like "high fantasy" and "low fantasy" because those mean different things whether you're talking about fiction or roleplaying games, not everyone agrees on the definitions, and there's a lot of overlap in various fantasy genres. These labels are useful only if they help you summarize your setting for your players.

> Chapter 5: Fantasy Gaming Inspiration, page 43

Warhammer Fantasy: An RPG set in the grim near-Renaissance world of the Warhammer Fantasy Battles wargame, where Chaos is on the rise, firearms mix with magic, and secret cults and mutants undermine civilization.

Remember that you can always change elements of a published setting to suit what you want for your fantasy game. Not only does this let you put your own stamp on the world you're creating, but it makes sure the players can't predict what awaits them. For example, you could wipe out a major city with a plague, start

LADON

a war between two neighboring kingdoms over a petty disagreement, replace all the humans in one country with elves, or kill off a popular god, and let the PCs deal with the consequences of these changes.

## <u>CREATING A NEW SETTING</u>

If you're willing to put in the work, there's nothing quite as satisfying as developing your own fantasy setting. This section has advice for creating the foundation of your world and tips for jump-starting other aspects of the design process. Even if you already have a good idea of what you want your world to be about, this can help you fill in some broad strokes or think up a unique twist.

Chapter 5 summarizes many fantasy worlds presented in novels, films, and TV shows that can give you ideas (or even easily lifted large chunks) for your own setting.

One general bit of advice for worldbuilding: it's okay to change things, even tearing it all down and starting from scratch. If something doesn't work, or if you don't like how it's turning out, fix it. If you've already been running games in that world, and the players want to keep playing the same PCs, let them—it's a common staple of fantasy to have radical changes in a magical world or introduce portals that take the heroes to an entirely different world. Discard what doesn't work, polish up the parts that do, and add in something new for variety.

#### THE ROLE OF MAGIC

The first thing to think about when creating your own fantasy setting is how much magic is in the world. However, that is a big, broad topic, and the answer is probably very long and complex. To simplify things, we'll split this discussion into more specific topics.

## BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

#### KNOWLEDGE OF MAGIC

In a typical fantasy setting where PCs can be wizards, wield magic swords, and fight dragons, magic is common knowledge. It's important to realize that this is different than superstitions, psychics, fate, gods answering prayers, and other beliefs that aren't necessarily magic. Unlike those things, magic is as provably and undeniably real as fire, the earth under your feet, or the sun in the sky. A typical farmer or city-dweller might not understand how it works, have personally seen any magic performed, or know anyone who can do magic, but they know it is a real thing, just as a person on Earth knows that England is a real place even if they've never been there.

If magic isn't common knowledge, then it is a secret known only to some people. The general population of the world believes that magic isn't real-or they believe it is real, but the only "magic" they have access to is unreliable superstitions, prayers to gods who never provide clear answers, and so on. The number of people who know about real magic could be small or large; a world with a cabal of only nine wizards who know about the existence of magic is a very different place than a world where a few thousand wizards secretly live among a million mundane people. How the secret-keepers deal with outsiders learning the secret is likely to become a story plot for the campaign.

It is possible for different kinds of magic to be more or less secret than others. For example, the world at large might know that demons and gods are real, but not that there are wizards who can control the weather. A typical peasant may know that healing magic exists, but not that necromancers can turn bodies into zombies.

#### MAGIC POWER LEVEL

Magic might be limited to small changes—heating and cooling, illusions, sending messages over long distances, making light, healing small injuries, helping plants grow, and so on. Magic might be able to make large changes letting people fly, controlling the weather, changing a creature's shape, or controlling minds. Even more powerful magic might be able to do things that we consider impossible according to normal Earth physics—restoring the dead to life from just a fingernail, teleporting across the world, creating force fields, or altering the flow of time.

In a world where magic can make large and impossible changes, it is difficult to acquire the skill and knowledge to enact those changes, whether through years of study, making strange pacts with powerful entities of pure knowledge, or going on heroic quests to defeat horrific monsters and find remarkable treasures. In other words, small changes are more likely and less difficult than large changes, and large changes are more likely and less difficult than impossible changes.

As with the general knowledge of magic, the various branches of magic might have different power levels. You can have a world where healing magic can cure disease but not raise the dead, fire magic can burn down a house but not ignite a volcano, and mental magic can change emotions but not read or control thoughts.

#### MAGIC AVAILABILITY

Even if magic is well known, that doesn't mean that everyone has access to it.

Magic could require training, either one-on-one study with a magical mentor, or attending some sort of wizard college, priestly cloister, or mysterious guild. Potentially anyone could learn the proper skills if they study hard enough.



In a fantasy game, use GM intrusions to make magic unpredictable or difficult to quantify. Cast a spell or use a magic item just a bit incorrectly, or under the wrong phase of the moon, and something wild happens. Magic might require some sort of internal criteria, such as being a member of a specific family or having a particular gene. In these situations, it is very difficult or impossible for someone who doesn't meet these criteria to learn magic.

Magic might be a gift, such as a blessing from a nature goddess or a pact with a demon. Someone who wants to learn magic might be able to persuade an entity with the power to grant them this gift. A current recipient of the gift might be able to transfer it to another person, in whole or in part, perhaps diminishing their own power in doing so.

Magic might be costly, either in terms of finances or by taking a physical or mental toll on those who study and practice it. This tends to limit magic to those who have the financial means to learn it, or who are willing to suffer harm in exchange for its power.

Even with all of the limitations described above, it is likely that magic

becomes a specialized commodity that nonmagical people can access by using other resources. Much like technology in the real world, magic becomes just another tool. A typical person on Earth might not know how a mobile phone works or how to build one, but that knowledge isn't necessary to buy a phone or make calls with it.

#### **MAGIC HISTORY**

Another question to consider: how old or new is magic? That is, at what point before the current time period of the campaign did it become available?

Magic can be primordial, meaning it has been part of the universe (or multiverse) since its inception or creation. It is likely that ancient magical knowledge and items exist and may have a role in the present story.

Magic can be transitory, rising and falling over time so that it worked at some point in the past, then stopped working "Science fiction is the improbable made possible, and fantasy is the impossible made probable."

#### ~Rod Serling

for a while, and now is back again. Magic might face an upswing (increasing as the story progresses) or downswing (decreasing as the story progresses), and these cycles might be seasonal, annual, centennial, or longer. Magic from earlier cycles might work normally, fail completely, or act erratically if the specific rules for magic change with each iteration.

Magic can be recent, perhaps because of some event that changed the laws of the universe. Magical lore is scarce because magic was impossible before, and magic items might be scarce unless the recent arrival of magic triggered spontaneous changes in certain objects. Depending on how recently magic became possible, the PCs might be some of the earliest practitioners of it.

#### MAGIC AND TECHNOLOGY

How long magic has been available can have an interesting role in shaping the development of technology in the world.

Magic might have no effect on technology and be treated much like a specialized kind of scientific knowledge. A wizard might carry a pistol and a wand, a nuclear physicist might use a magical device to gain insight into subatomic particles, and a police detective might use forensics and spells to find clues for solving crimes.

Magic might oppose technology, and vice versa. Prominent magic might automatically limit technological development to a specific historical time period or exclude certain branches of technological advancement (such as "no gunpowder" or "no electrical devices"). If magic is easier to use than science, magic might trivialize technology enough that scientific breakthroughs are inferior compared to their magical equivalent. There's little point in inventing an internal combustion engine if a wizard can enchant a carriage to move by itself, nor is there much reward in inventing a flintlock

#### CAMPAIGN IDEA: THE GREAT CITY

Many adventures take place entirely within a city. Why not take that idea to the next level and run a city-based campaign? Whether the PCs are locals or new arrivals, any community with thousands of people is full of opportunities for adventure. Suddenly the PCs have homes and history, and they can't avoid the consequences of their actions by moving on to the next tiny village. Crime, politics, and cosmopolitan issues like social class and species become important factors when the characters don't spend most of their time miles away from civilization. Are the PCs heroes, trying to clean up a slum or oust a corrupt official? Are they antiheroes or vigilantes, skirting the edges of the law? Or are they outright criminals, such as members of a thieves' guild trying to secure more territory without attracting too much attention from the authorities? Your hometown and local news can be fodder for city-based adventure ideas, and the PCs are sure to develop personal connections in their communities-a very different experience for those who are used to drifting from village to village like tumbleweeds.



Adept, page 24

Bears a Halo of

Ward, page 196

Onslaught, page 167

Fire, page 64

#### DIFFERENT KINDS OF MAGIC

Some fantasy settings distinguish between different kinds of magic. Eldritch spells versus mentalist abilities, or divine (having a godly power source) versus arcane (powered by something other than a deity). The Cypher System doesn't categorize magical abilities and items in that way. It's possible to have two characters with the same type, focus, and abilities, and one of them could be a divine-powered character while the other uses arcane magic. For example, if there are two Adepts who have the Bears a Halo of Fire focus, and they've both chosen Onslaught and Ward, one of them might be a priestess of the goddess of fire and the other might be a wizard who has an affinity for fire magic, but all of that is character flavor and doesn't change how the abilities work. Likewise, one character who wields a hammer and throws lightning bolts might be a priest of Thor (a divine spellcaster), and a similar character might be a warrior-wizard who has an innate talent for electricity magic—different character flavor, same game mechanics.

The GM may decide that the campaign world has specific roles for different kinds of magic, and that might affect some character choices. For example, maybe all illusion magic comes from the god of illusions, and only his priests can use that kind of power. Maybe only divine magic can heal and only arcane magic can teleport, or perhaps arcane magic can heal but it is more difficult to use than divine magic (so a healing ability costs more Pool points or is a higher tier for arcane magic). Maybe each magic scroll cypher uses a different kind of power depending on what kind of spellcaster created it, and only a character with the right kind of magic can activate the scroll. These kinds of campaign world choices can impact what the PCs can learn or do, so once you decide these issues, talk to the players so they know if there are any restrictions or special requirements for some character abilities.

pistol if fire wands are more reliable, more accurate, and don't require ammunition.

Magical advancement might replace technological advancement as the norm, with magical trains crossing a kingdom or bound servitor-spirits carrying messages from city to city. In places where magic doesn't work (such as a magic-dead area created by a disaster), true technology can gain a foothold, which tends to make the conflict between magic and technology a factor in the campaign story.

#### HISTORY PLUS FANTASY

Most of us aren't historians or experts on international conflicts, feudalism, or any of a dozen other fields that would make us especially skilled at inventing countries for a fantasy world, filling in their back history, and figuring out how their old conflicts and pacts influence the current state of affairs. Fortunately, history itself provides an excellent shortcut if you want to create your own fantasy game world: take a period of history that you know about, add some fantasy elements (especially if you keep magic on the low-powered end), and run with it.

One way to do this is to assume that the fantasy aspects have always been there in our history; they've just been erased from modern storytelling or are so old that truth, myth, and legend are intertwined. Pick a location and historical period you're interested in, do some reading to understand what was happening at that place and time, and add appropriate fantasy elements. Warring faiths, incursions by dangerous monsters, and despotically minded wizards become the antagonists

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## BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

in the story, with the secret or forgotten fantastical aspects underpinning the actual historical events. Use the Earth names, or create your own to add more flavor.

If magic is a recent development, it's even easier to take a historical setting and turn it into a fantasy world. Pick a specific event in history and use that as the dividing line between a world of no magic and a world with magic. How would the Hundred Years' War have gone differently if England and France had discovered magic at the Battle of Agincourt? What if d'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers were a paladin, priest, wizard, and warlock? What if the Tokugawa Shogunate held power due to mystical alchemy as well as diplomacy?

Using actual Earth history also lets you jump forward or backward in time as part of your campaign's narrative. For example, if you run a game set in a fantasy Musketeers era, you can wrap up a campaign arc and jump forward a few decades to the reign of Louis XIV, known as the Sun King, or even farther to Louis XVI and the French Revolution (perhaps the PCs are the offspring of earlier heroes or long-lived beings such as elves, or perhaps they were in an enchanted sleep until the realm needed them again). A game set in a fantasy version of the American colonies can wrap up at the end of the American Revolution, jump to a fantasy version of the War of 1812 (or cross the ocean to fight or aid Napoleon Bonaparte), and jump again to a fantasy version of the American Civil War.

Another way of looking at this topic is to think about how Earthlike your fantasy setting is. Is it literally a version of Earth with magic, or an alternate history with magical analogues to Earth countries and civilizations? Is it a what-if scenario based on a point in history? If it's set in the past, how will important future events (from Earth's past) affect the fantasy world?

#### SETTING PARADIGMS

Choosing an overarching paradigm for your setting helps smaller details fit into place, particularly if you phrase them in the form of opposing forces, like good vs. evil or law vs. chaos. Here are a few common and not-so-common themes to consider for your campaign, and ways to flip them around to create a new perspective.

Arcane vs. Divine: Divine magic is natural, and arcane magic is corrupting. Or divine magic is a blessing of the gods, and arcane magic is a gift of the demons. For an interesting twist, perhaps practitioners of both kinds of magic came together a generation ago to defeat a great evil, and now the world is a safer and kinder place, with only grognards from the old times still bearing a grudge against "rival" spellcasters.

**Classical Greek Elements:** Air opposes earth and fire opposes water. For an interesting change of pace, push the four "pure" elements into the background and have their mixed offspring create a different four-way conflict: ice vs. magma and smoke vs. mud.

Elves vs. Dwarves: Elves love trees and green things, dwarves love rocks and the underground, and never shall the two agree. This trope and its prejudices are common in most fantasy RPGs that have elves and dwarves. To make things more interesting, amplify the conflict so that an elven kingdom and a dwarven kingdom are openly at war, and all other groups of elves, dwarves, and their allies are forced to take sides. Alternatively, invert this concept by having elves and dwarves be close allies who have no interest in each other's territory, and the other prominent species of the world compete for space with this powerful alliance.



Almost any of your favorite science fiction or horror stories, books, and movies can be used as the basis for a fantasy game. Just replace the technology with magic and change the setting to whatever setting you choose. Stephen King's Salem's Lot works well in a fantasy town, and Frank Herbert's Dune could easily be a fantasy world where magic comes from a rare spice.

Imagine how strange it would be to have a TV show with so many character fatalities that by the end of the first season, none of the principal actors from the first episode are on the show anymore. This happens in fantasy RPG campaigns with no resurrection magic.

> It's the authors' perspective that in a high-magic game, coming back from the dead is a thing that heroes do, although it may not be easy, immediate, or quickly forgotten.

See also Death and Resurrection, page 54

The book Your Best Game Ever also talks about character death, restoring characters, making room for grief, and high-lethality games.

Five Elements: Adapted from traditional Chinese philosophy, this is a system where wood, fire, earth, metal, and water are phases in a cycle of creation and destruction. A world based on these concepts could have seasons, years, or decades associated with each phasewood means growth and abundance, fire means flowering and increasing energy, earth means leveling and moderation, metal means harvesting and collecting, and water means stillness and retreat. Creatures, magic, and even the PCs might be tied to these cycles, easing and hindering tasks as different phases gain ascendency.

**Shadow vs. Light:** Light is positive and good, and darkness is sneaky and evil. For a change of pace using this duality, perhaps light is represented by a tyrannical sun god who blasts the desert realms with his rays, and darkness is his gentle, protective offspring who provides safe shelter from his wrath. As a third option, perhaps light and darkness are both dangerous extremes, and the balance represented by dawn and dusk is the source of peace and kindness.

#### **IS DEATH PERMANENT?**

One big question about designing your own fantasy setting is whether people can use magic to revive the dead. Player characters engage in risky behavior, and sometimes a PC dies because of a poor die roll. There have been many debates about resurrection magic in games, most of which is based on opinions ("It lessens the sacrifice of a character who dies to save others" and "It makes death a trivial obstacle") or corner cases ("Some players will throw themselves at tough challenges because they know they can try again if they fail" and "If you resurrect the previous king, that's a threat to the current king"). Regardless

of your position in that debate, there is one definite fact about character death: it penalizes the *player*, because while their character is dead, they aren't able to play. They have to wait until the character is revived or they create a new PC.

As you think about whether you want this sort of magic in your world and your feelings about PCs making heroic sacrifices, remember to consider whether permanent PC death is part of the story you want the campaign to tell, or an obstacle to it. It doesn't hurt to talk with the players about it before starting the campaign. When you've made a decision about the presence or absence of resurrection magic, inform the players and tell them what their PCs would know about death in the campaign world-whether it is always permanent, easily reversible, only for heroic souls, expensive and debilitating, has some kind of attrition, and so on.

#### MAPMAKING

Much of the fun of creating a fantasy world is making a map and filling in the empty parts with the bones of story ideas that will get fleshed out over the course of the campaign. Some people find the initial step of making a map to be intimidating; after all, there are rules for where mountains go on a planet, where rivers flow, the best places to found cities, and so on.

Most of those rules go away if you're creating a fantasy setting, especially if it isn't limited to Earthlike conditions that shaped the terrain over millions or billions of years. Your world may have been built by a god who slowly went mad and put terrain features in strange places, or by a pantheon of warring gods who claimed and shaped their favorite territories. The world may have had a magical disaster or an invasion from the realms of chaos that altered the landscape

## BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

in strange ways. In other words, it's okay if some aspect of your fantasy world's geography doesn't make sense in terms of Earth climate and tectonics—your world isn't Earth and doesn't have to follow its rules. Your world can be a cube, a flat plane, a circle, a Möbius strip, a ringworld, the inside of a hollow sphere, or anything else.

Of course, the more Earthlike your world is, the easier it is for your players to understand it and for you to fill in details when the PCs literally go in a direction you didn't expect. It's easy to start with part of an Earth map, loosely trace it to create your own coastline, and use the terrain features and major settlement locations. Omit or add a major landform here and there, and your players may never realize it's based on Europe or the United States or Central America or southern Asia. To obscure your source even more, rotate the Earth map 180 degrees so the lands have the opposite north-south orientations than they do on Earth. If your heroes are adventuring in a country geographically similar to Korea and they decide to travel to the mainland, you can always take a peek at the terrain and settlements of northeastern China and come up with rumors of what the PCs might find there. For more inspiration, look at a map that's a few centuries old and use those borders and names for ideas so they're not so obviously drawn from modern Earth sources.

## ADVISING PLAYERS About your setting

Now that you've created the foundation for your setting and added details about where the campaign will begin, it's time to tell the players about it so they can start preparing for the game. This might involve getting in the right mindset for high, low, or dark fantasy; thinking about what sort of characters they want to create; doing research beforehand; and so on. One weird almost-Earth variant in the 1980s was taking the Earth map and inverting the high and low points, so that land is water and water is land.



#### GODFORSAKEN



Huge battles and even wars, like those found in The Lord of the Rings, can easily be used in your fantasy game. Rather than worry about complex mass battle mechanics, treat it all as a narrative backdrop. The PCs might get involved in a small part of it, or even at the center of it against the enemy's champions, but you can just describe anything that's going on beyond their ability to affect.

#### CAMPAIGN IDEA: YOUR CHARACTER IS YOU

One day, you're a regular person with a job and a family and a car, and the next you're an awkward rogue wielding a magic blade against a death-priest's zombie army. This trope is fairly common in early fantasy stories (it's basically the plot of the Narnia novels by C. S. Lewis, the Guardians of the Flame novels by Joel Rosenberg, the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant books by Stephen R. Donaldson, the 1980s Dungeons & Dragons cartoon, and a million other fantasy stories), and some RPG campaigns picked up that idea and ran with it.

It's fun to think about what your game stats would be if you were a PC, and one of the main plot ideas could be about trying to get back to your old, safe life in a world without demons and dragons. Of course, one morbid drawback to this sort of campaign is the possibility that a character-based on a player at the table-gets killed in the fantasy world, but the GM can avoid that by having the "dead" character wake up in the real world, perhaps out of a coma, and maybe have a one-shot solo adventure to go back to the fantasy world to help their friends or pull said friends back to Earth.

The simplest way to do this is to go over the material you've created, topic by topic, and decide what the characters in the setting would know. Not only does this reduce what the players have to learn to a small, digestible amount, but it also allows you to avoid spoiling things that you plan to reveal to them during the campaign. Be sure to include any relevant game information they'll need to know when creating their characters, such as a list of allowed foci, what kind of cyphers the campaign will have (subtle, manifest, or both), what kinds of nonhuman characters are allowed (if any), and so on.

If any fictional sources inspired the look and feel of the world, including a short reading or viewing list can help the players understand the setting they'll be playing in. Be sure to give them time to do this research; otherwise, they'll make generic fantasy characters and adapt them to your world as they encounter specific details during play.

Your setting can be described according to four simple categories: the location, the time period, the awareness of magic, and belief in the reality of magic.

**Location Examples:** Fantasy Europe, fantasy New York, generic medieval fantasy world, Middle-earth.

**Time Period Examples:** Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Empire, European Middle Ages, Elizabethan Era, American Colonial Period, American Revolution, American Civil War, Gilded Age, World War I, Roaring '20s and the Great Depression (Lovecraftian era), World War II, 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, modern day (internet age), near future (within thirty years), far future (a hundred or more years), distant future (one thousand or more years).

Magic Awareness: Nonexistent, basic (most people are familiar with the idea of magic and dragons but couldn't explain the difference between an enchanter and a necromancer), informed (people know about magic and related elements, such as banshees, curses, the evil eye, genies, and werewolves, mainly from myths, folklore, and popular fiction), high (people can name a few famous spells and monsters as easily as they can name celebrities or popular songs).

## BUILDING YOUR FANTASY SETTING

Magic Reality: Denied (there is no believable evidence that magic exists), suspected (there's enough indirect evidence that most people believe it exists and is real, with guardian angels, fortune-telling, and exorcism being common examples), absolute (everyone believes magic is as real as trees and humans).

By combining these concepts, you can give the players (and their characters) a solid one- or two-sentence foundation about what to expect in the game. Here are several examples:

- Fantasy Los Angeles, modern day, high magic awareness, absolute magic reality. This is a version of Los Angeles where orcs, elves, and other fantasy species live next door to humans, and magic is real but limited to those with a special talent for it.
- Fantasy England, modern day, basic magic awareness, denied or suspected magic reality. In this setting, magic-aware wizards, witches, and magical creatures hide their true nature from unknowing humans, essentially living double lives or in a secret world where they remain unseen.
- Middle-earth, near the end of the Second Age, informed magic awareness, absolute magic reality. Sauron has the One Ring and is warring against the humans and elves, and people know magic exists but it is mainly in the form of items and creatures rather than spells that humans can learn.

If your setting is based on or inspired by existing material, and it wouldn't be a spoiler for the players to know that, you can name-drop it as part of your summary. You might say that your game is "Middle-earth just after *The Return of the King*, and the people of Gondor are clearing out pockets of orcs and looking forward to a future of peace and prosperity." Or "*The Magicians* just after season one, and the PCs are recent graduates of the university that teaches magic."

## CHAPTER 2

# FANTASY PLOTS

Character arcs, page 238

Warrior background connection, page 22

GMs should try to always have important events happen "on stage." Rather than having a messenger delivering the news that the king has been murdered, it's much more exciting if the PCs happen to be at court when the foul deed is done.

antasy is such a staple of modern entertainment that everyone is generally familiar with common fantasy plots, and players usually can recognize the plot hooks the GM puts in front of them (even if they don't immediately take action to connect their characters to the plot). Often the motivation for the players depends on which of several available plots interests them the most-treasure, justice, glory, and avoiding certain death are the most common motivators. A smart GM plans ahead enough to have the seeds of multiple plots growing at the same time in different stages so flighty PCs can change what they're interested in doing without stalling the entire campaign.

## **CREATING A PLOT**

There are three tricks to setting up a game world or campaign that your players want to visit over and over again.

The Human Element: Including an emotional element that the players and their characters can connect to is usually a stronger motivation than greed or glory. This doesn't have to be an overused trope like "Orcs are attacking and you hate orcs because they killed your parents" or "The evil wizard is killing all firstborn to thwart a prophecy," but good stories often come from plucking at a real-world emotional bond like protecting a family member, locating an heirloom, or righting an injustice. If you can create a general overarching plot and give the players room to specify their characters' initial role in the story (such as by selecting a

relevant character arc to pursue or using one of the background connections for their character type), their connection to the plot is strong, even if it changes over the course of the campaign.

Switching It Up: The presence of a fantasy or supernatural element gives you many more opportunities to switch around aspects of the plot to create something new and interesting that the players won't be able to predict. Instead of a dragon kidnapping a princess, have an adventure about a princess who kidnaps a dragon (or a dragon egg). Instead of an antagonist NPC searching for a lost artifact because they want to create an army of undead, have them desperate to find it because they want to bring their true love back from the dead. Instead of a warlord forcing peasants to swear fealty with an ancient oath because it empowers the tyrant with magic, have them do it because the warlord needs to protect them against an upcoming psionic invasion from the realm of nightmares. Note too that not every campaign plot needs to be switched around; having a few traditional adventures with bandits extorting tolls, assassins threatening the king, or wererat thieves in the sewers helps make the unusual adventures more unique and memorable.

**Translating From Other Sources:** If you're short on ideas, look at non-fantasy films and television shows you like, select a story you enjoy, and add fantasy elements to it. Run a game based on *Hamlet*, but set it in a fantasy village with real ghosts and plenty of local intrigue. Instead of

starting a campaign with a war about to break out, borrow the plot of a World War II film and set your campaign in the last weeks of a fantasy war. Flip the script of your favorite heist film and put the PCs in the role of protecting a cache of magical treasures from the greedy hands of master thieves. Published adventures particularly for a different game setting or system—can be full of surprises that you never would have thought to add to your campaign. You don't need to reinvent the wheel; take the work that other people have done and put your own spin on it.

## SAMPLE FANTASY PLOTS

The following is a selection of common or traditional fantasy plots. If you're in a hurry to put something together for a game, picking up one of these ideas and adding a fantasy aspect is an easy way to get the action rolling, whether you're running a one-shot event, a filler episode for an ongoing campaign, or a key point in the main story arc.

**Betrayal:** Someone has brought harm to something they should have protected, such as a friend, lover, business, guild, or kingdom. The PCs need to find out the truth of the betrayal and decide whether they want to assist in bringing the perpetrator to justice.

**Family Troubles:** Blood feuds, undesirable romances, desperate measures to retain or regain power, and hiding or covering for a black sheep are all fun stories that can go in many directions with a dash of fantasy. If a PC is related to the family in question, even better.

**Fugitive:** Someone is on the run and another is attempting to capture them. The PCs can take a role on either side of this conflict, or they may be forced into becoming the hunter or the hunted. If the PCs get involved after the fugitive has been caught, it becomes a story about an abduction. **Mistake:** Someone's deliberate or accidental action has brought about suffering and conflict for another. Jealousy, greed, and anger are common motivations that lead to this, and it's possible that the PCs are the instigators who now need to clean up their own mess.

**Mystery:** An unusual event or creature brings with it change and confusion. The PCs need to investigate and take action, either to stop or to assist the change.

**Rebellion:** An oppressed group is in conflict with a powerful one and is trying to evade persecution or elevate their status to something closer to parity. If strong enough, the rebellion may become a revolt and try to topple the oppressor.

**Rescue:** Someone is trapped, being held prisoner, or otherwise in great need of assistance. The PCs might be the agents of that person's freedom, or their help is needed to maintain the status quo by restricting that person's freedom.

**Revenge:** Someone has been wronged by another party and they need help to make it right. The wronged party might be one or more NPCs, or the PCs themselves. Getting revenge might be in line with the law or contrary to it.

**Sacrifice:** Something or someone is going to be sacrificed (willingly or unwillingly) for a greater purpose, such as to mollify an angry god, forestall a curse, or save the harvest. The PCs might try to find a replacement for the sacrifice (who might be one of their group) or a way to negate the need for one entirely.

**Unkind Fate:** One or more creatures are suffering through no fault of their own and could use some help to survive or thrive. Natural disasters, plague outbreaks, petty gods, war, and bouts of madness often lead to this kind of story. These plots are inspired by The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations (Georges Polti), a descriptive list that categorizes dramatic situations in stories.

## CHAPTER 3

# FANTASY CHARACTER OPTIONS

This section is particularly useful for players who are familiar with RPGs like D&D and Pathfinder, but are new to the Cypher System and unsure how to make their favorite kind of character.

Flavor, page 34

t's very common for players who like fantasy roleplaying games to have a particular kind of character they like to play. Sean likes playing healers, Tammie likes playing fighters, and Bear and Charles like playing rogues with a little bit of magic mixed in. This chapter discusses many of these common fantasy RPG archetypes and gives suggestions about how to create characters like that in the Cypher System.

In some cases, the ideas here require minor changes to the flavor described in the character options; you should work with your GM to make sure these changes are suitable for the campaign. Most of the foci in this section appear in the *Cypher System Rulebook*; foci with an asterisk (\*) are found later in this chapter. Some of these options recommend swapping out a type ability for an ability from one of the character flavors such as combat, magic, or stealth.

Alchemist: In the sense that an alchemist is someone who makes magical items or similar types of things, Adept and Explorer are appropriate type choices for academic alchemists. For a general sort of alchemist who makes potions of magical effects, choose the Masters Spells focus (instead of spells, you learn potions). For one who transforms into a powerful and dangerous creature, choose Howls at the Moon. For one who loves throwing bombs, choose Bears a Halo of Fire. For a healer, choose Works Miracles. **Assassin/Spy:** Explorer and Warrior are good type choices for an assassin character. Appropriate foci are Masters Weaponry, Moves Like a Cat, Murders, and Works the Back Alleys.

**Barbarian:** A barbarian character is probably a Warrior or (to focus a little more on skills than combat) an Explorer. Good foci to choose from are Lives in the Wilderness, Masters Weaponry, Needs No Weapon, Never Says Die, Performs Feats of Strength, and Rages.

**Bard:** Bards in fantasy fiction and games are troubadours, minstrels, and storytellers, perhaps with a supernatural element. Bards are usually Explorers or Speakers. Appropriate foci are Entertains, Helps Their Friends, Infiltrates, and Masters Spells.

**Cleric or Priest:** Academic clerics are usually Adepts or Speakers, but martial clerics are often Warriors (perhaps with magic flavor). For a typical cleric with a versatile set of abilities, choose the Channels Divine Blessings focus. For more specific kinds of clerics, see the following foci:

- *Cleric (death):* Consorts With the Dead, Shepherds Spirits
- *Cleric (knowledge):* Learns Quickly, Sees Beyond, Would Rather Be Reading
- *Cleric (life):* Defends the Weak, Shepherds the Community, Works Miracles

- *Cleric (light):* Blazes With Radiance, Channels Divine Blessings
- *Cleric (storm):* Rides the Lightning, Thunders
- Cleric (trickery): Takes Animal Shape\* (also see options for rogues)
- *Cleric (war):* Masters Weaponry (also see options for fighters)

**Druid:** As a very specific sort of nature priest, a druid character is usually an Adept or Explorer (in either case probably using the magic flavor). A typical druid probably has Channels Divine Blessings or Lives in the Wilderness as a focus, but for more specific options, see the following foci:

- *Druid (animal companion):* Controls Beasts, Masters the Swarm
- *Druid (elemental):* Abides in Stone, Bears a Halo of Fire, Moves Like the Wind, Rides the Lightning, Wears a Sheen of Ice
- Druid (nature affinity): Speaks for the Land
- Druid (transformation): Abides in Stone, Takes Animal Shape\*, Walks the Wild Woods\*

**Fighter:** Fighters almost always have the Warrior type, but some are Explorers. A typical fighter probably has a direct focus like Masters Weaponry or Wields an Enchanted Weapon\*. For additional options based on choosing a specific fighting role, see the following:

- Fighter (guardian): Brandishes an Exotic Shield, Defends the Gate, Masters Defense, Never Says Die, Stands Like a Bastion.
- Fighter (melee): Fights Dirty, Fights With Panache, Looks For Trouble, Needs No Weapon, Wields Two Weapons at Once
- Fighter (ranged): Is Licensed to Carry, Throws With Deadly Accuracy

**Gunslinger:** A gunslinger is probably a Warrior or Explorer, but some are Speakers with combat flavor. Appropriate foci are Is Licensed to Carry, Masters Weaponry, Sailed Beneath the Jolly Roger, and Wields an Enchanted Weapon\*.

**Inquisitor:** Inquisitors are usually Explorers, Speakers, or Warriors, depending on whether their inclinations are for having many skills, being good at interacting with people, or combat. Appropriate foci are Infiltrates, Metes Out Justice, and Operates Undercover.

**Merchant:** An Explorer with a focus dealing with social interactions, like Entertains or Leads, would make a good merchant character, but the more obvious choice would be a Speaker. Even more than in a sci fi setting, fantasy offers the opportunity to play anything as a character. A magically animated sword, a talking cat, or a lumbering troll could all be PCs in a fantasy game. Just figure out rules for their descriptor that make the character fun to play but neither too over- or underpowered. Monk or Martial Artist: As masters of unarmed combat, monks are usually Warriors or Explorers (perhaps with a combat flavor). Appropriate foci are Fights With Panache, Needs No Weapon, and Throws With Deadly Accuracy.

Paladin/Holy Knight/Paragon: As holy warriors who mix martial prowess and magic, paladins are usually Warriors or Explorers (in either case, perhaps modified with the magic flavor). Good foci for this type of character include Defends the Gate, Defends the Weak, Metes Out Justice, Slays Monsters, and Wields an Enchanted Weapon\*.



**Ranger:** Rangers mix combat and skills, and therefore are usually Explorers (perhaps with combat flavor) or Warriors (perhaps with skills and knowledge flavor). Appropriate foci for a ranger are Controls Beasts, Hunts, Lives in the Wilderness, Slays Monsters, Throws With Deadly Accuracy, and Wields Two Weapons at Once.

**Rogue or Thief:** Most rogue-type characters are Explorers, but an interaction-focused rogue could easily be a Speaker (perhaps with stealth flavor). Good foci for rogues are Explores Dark Places, Fights Dirty, Hunts, Infiltrates, Is Wanted by the Law, Moves Like a Cat, Sailed Beneath the Jolly Roger, and Works the Back Alleys.

**Sorcerer:** Sorcerers, for our purpose here, are mages who have inherent magical abilities (as opposed to wizards, who study long and hard to get their spells). Most sorcerers are Adepts, but some are Explorers or Speakers. The Masters Spells focus gives a typical sorcerer an effective set of abilities, and most foci choices provide a themed set of spells. For sorcerers of various magical bloodlines, see the following:

- Sorcerer (angel): Blazes With Radiance, Channels Divine Blessings, Keeps a Magic Ally
- *Sorcerer (destiny):* Descends From Nobility, Was Foretold
- *Sorcerer (dragon):* Bears a Halo of Fire, Rides the Lightning, Wears a Sheen of Ice
- *Sorcerer (elemental):* Abides in Stone, Bears a Halo of Fire, Employs Magnetism, Moves Like the Wind, Rides the Lightning, Wears a Sheen of Ice
- Sorcerer (fey): Takes Animal Shape\*
- Sorcerer (fiend): Bears a Halo of Fire, Keeps a Magic Ally
- Sorcerer (undead): Consorts With the Dead, Shepherds Spirits

**Trickster or Con Artist:** These clever folks are typically Speakers, although they could be Adepts if they are very magical (or Explorers if they aren't magical at all). Foci choices include Fights Dirty, Works the Back Alleys, or Entertains.

**War-wizard:** For those unusual characters who use a mix of weapon attacks and spells, play a Warrior with magic flavor or an Expert with combat or magic flavor. Appropriate foci include Fights With Panache, Masters Weaponry, and Wields an Enchanted Weapon\*.

**Warlock or Witch:** For the purposes of this list, warlocks and witches are mages who gain magical power from pacts they make with otherworldly entities. Most warlocks are Adepts, but Explorers and Speakers (perhaps with magic flavor) can be interesting options. Fun foci for a warlock include Dances With Dark Matter, Keeps a Magic Ally, Masters the Swarm, Separates Mind From Body, and Was Foretold, but (depending on the patron and pact) most sorcerer and wizard foci work just as well.

**Wild Mage:** Those who use chaotic magic are usually Adepts, but a dabbler might be an Explorer or Speaker with the magic flavor. The best focus that suits this theme is Uses Wild Magic\*. **Wizard:** For the purposes of this list, wizards study magical lore at length to learn the ways of spellcasting (as opposed to sorcerers, warlocks, and so on). Wizards are usually Adepts, but a person-oriented wizard might be a Speaker (perhaps with the magic flavor). For a generalist wizard who has a variety of spells, choose the Masters Spells focus. For more specific kinds of wizards, see the following:

- *Wizard (abjurer):* Absorbs Energy, Focuses Mind Over Matter, Wears a Sheen of Ice
- Wizard (conjurer or summoner): Controls Beasts, Keeps a Magic Ally
- *Wizard (diviner):* Learns Quickly, Sees Beyond, Separates Mind From Body, Solves Mysteries
- Wizard (enchanter): Commands Mental Powers, Leads
- *Wizard (evoker):* Bears a Halo of Fire, Blazes With Radiance, Rides the Lightning, Thunders, Wears a Sheen of Ice
- Wizard (illusionist): Awakens Dreams, Crafts Illusions
- Wizard (necromancer): Consorts With the Dead, Shepherds Spirits
- *Wizard (transmuter):* Controls Gravity, Focuses Mind Over Matter, Takes Animal Shape\*

#### PREPARED VS. SPONTANEOUS SPELLCASTING

Some prominent fantasy RPGs divide spellcasters into two categories: prepared spellcasters who have a very specific list of spells they can cast each day (you might call them "wizards"), and spontaneous spellcasters who are more flexible about what combinations of spells they use each day (let's call them "sorcerers").

In the Cypher System, this dichotomy doesn't really exist. Magical characters get their abilities (which might be spells, rituals, or something else) from their type and focus, and they can use these abilities as they see fit as long as they spend the required Pool points. This technically makes them more like spontaneous casters. If you'd like to play something more like a prepared-caster wizard with a large selection of abilities that you narrow down each day, consider a spellcasting-oriented focus like Channels Divine Blessings, Masters Spells, or Speaks for the Land, and consider augmenting it with the optional spellcasting rule.



Blessings, page 65

Masters Spells, page 72

Speaks for the Land, page 77

Wizards and the Optional Spellcasting Rule, page 260



If you want to play a cursed werewolf who can't control their changes and is a danger to everyone nearby, take the Howls at the Moon focus instead.



If you want to play an animal shapechanger who keeps their abilities a secret, take the Sheds Their Skin focus from We Are All Mad Here (page 176).

> Greater Beast Form applies to using Animal Shape.

## NEW FOCI

This section presents new fantasy foci that can be used as-is in most fantasy campaigns. As these were created specifically for the fantasy genre, each of them has an expanded description with more story details than the foci in the *Cypher System Rulebook* (which have short, broad descriptions suitable for other genres). The GM and player should adjust these details to suit the specific campaign they'll be playing. The foci presented here are as follows:

**Takes Animal Shape:** A shapechanger who can take the form of various animals.

**Uses Wild Magic:** A spellcaster who learns a variety of spells instead of focusing on just one kind of magic.

Walks the Wild Woods: An adherent of nature magic who draws on the power and strength of trees.

**Wields an Enchanted Weapon:** One who channels magic through or from a weapon to create a unique fighting style.

As with the foci in the *Cypher System Rulebook*, the numbers listed after the abilities for each tier are the page numbers where those abilities are described. If an ability doesn't have a page number listed, it is new to this book and is explained at the end of this chapter.

#### TAKES ANIMAL SHAPE

You are a shapeshifter, a being that can take the form of an animal. Maybe you're a werewolf, selkie, kitsune, swan maiden, or similar magical creature that has full control over their transformation and mind in either form. Maybe you're descended from a trickster god, gifted with the power of shapeshifting. Or maybe you're a devotee of nature magic and have learned to mimic the creatures of the wilds.

You might wear clothing and jewelry that hints at or emphasizes your animal side, give no sign of your shapeshifter nature, or wear practical items that are useful for living in the wilderness. Unless your magic transforms your clothes as well, you might favor wearing things that are easy to tear off or remove when you change, so they end up looking worn and ragged after multiple transformations.

- C Tier 1: Animal Shape
- C Tier 2: Communication (121)
- C Tier 2: Soothe the Savage (184)
- Tier 3: Bigger Animal Shape or Greater Beast Form (146)
- C Tier 4: Animal Scrying
- C Tier 5: Hard to Kill (148)
- Tier 6: Blurring Speed (115) or Lend Animal Shape

**GM Intrusions:** The character unexpectedly changes form. An NPC is frightened by or aggressive toward the shapeshifter. The transformation takes longer than expected.



## USES WILD MAGIC

You love the unpredictability of magic and know that if you leave yourself open to the flows and currents of magic, spells will appear in your head. You don't know what magic the universe will send you, but that's part of the appeal—every day is different and so is your selection of spells.

Some spellcasters may dismiss you as a dabbler, but your magic is potent even though much of it is left to chance. Many people give you a wide berth because they've heard about wild magic going wrong and harming the caster or someone nearby, but to you that's an acceptable risk.

You might wear typical wizard or priestly garb to remind others that you are a legitimate practitioner of magic, or you might dress against convention to show that you don't have to follow someone else's rules. Your clothing might be a mishmash of many styles, representing that your magic can be almost anything, or you might dress a specific way to confuse your opponents (such as a fiery theme when you don't know any fire magic).

- C Tier 1: Magical Repertoire
- C Tier 1: Cypher Casting
- C Tier 2: Expanded Repertoire
- Tier 3: Cypher Surge or Faster Wild Magic
- C Tier 4: Expanded Repertoire
- C Tier 5: Magical Training
- Tier 6: Maximize Cypher or Wild Insight GM Intrusions: A spell performs

erratically or rebounds upon the caster. Something interferes with preparing spells. Spellcasting attracts the attention of a powerful creature or potential rival. The cypher spell being cast is replaced with that of a random cypher.

#### WALKS THE WILD WOODS

You feel a kinship for the trees and woods. Some people who channel the power of nature focus on protecting animals or wielding storm magic, but your interest is in the swaying dances of branches and the quiet creaking music of old timber. Maybe you have a dryad in your ancestry, or you were raised by druids, or you drank from a mystic pool that nourished the World Tree. Resilient sap flows through your veins like blood, and you shrug off injuries as if your flesh were hardwood. You might see yourself as a shepherd of trees, moving them out of harm's way and tending their illnesses, or as the hand of their vengeance, smiting axe-wielding intruders and striking primordial fear into mortal hearts. You speak for the trees, and your voice is loud and defiant.

As one who walks the wild woods, you probably wear rough, rugged clothing that is made for practical use rather than the quirks of human fashion. You might decorate yourself with things that remind you of your favorite trees or help you hide while observing strangers.

- C Tier 1: Wilderness Life (199)
- C Tier 1: Patient Recovery
- C Tier 2: Wooden Body
- C Tier 3: Tree Companion or Wilderness Awareness (198)
- C Tier 4: Tree Travel
- C Tier 5: Great Tree
- Tier 6: Dreadwood or Restorative Bloom

**GM Intrusions:** A wooden character catches fire. A wild swing from a tree branch hits or trips an ally. Some trees have evil hearts and hate all walking things.



#### WIELDS AN ENCHANTED WEAPON

You have a magical weapon with strange abilities, and your knowledge of its powers has allowed you to create a unique style of combat with it. Perhaps the magic is something within you, and you merely channel it through a weapon you like. Perhaps the weapon is magical and semi-sentient, and it chose you to be its bearer. Perhaps you and the weapon are two halves of the same soul, complete only when working together. Regardless, there is more to you and it than just martial skill.

Your attention may be more focused on the appearance and battle-readiness of your weapon than on what your clothing and armor look like. You probably keep your weapon in a beautiful scabbard, harness, belt, case, or something similar. You might wear things that match or complement the design of your weapon, or display a symbol—a badge, a pin, a tattoo, an amulet, certain colors, or the like—that indicates where you learned this power or who gave you the weapon.

- C Tier 1: Enchanted Weapon
- C Tier 1: Innate Power
- C Tier 1: Charge Weapon
- C Tier 2: Power Crash
- Tier 3: Rapid Attack (174) or Throw Enchanted Weapon
- C Tier 4: Defending Weapon
- C Tier 5: Enchanted Movement
- C Tier 6: Deadly Strike (125) or Spin Attack (185) GM Intrusions: A weapon breaks or is dropped. The weapon loses its connection to you until you use an action to reestablish the attunement. The weapon's energy discharges in an unexpected way.



## MAKING FOCI FANTASTIC

The Cypher System Rulebook has nearly one hundred character foci to choose from, but some of them aren't particularly suited for a fantasy campaign because they refer to cars, spaceships, or robots. A focus such as Drives Like a Maniac is a reasonable choice for a modern or sci fi game, or even a modern fantasy campaign where automobiles and magic are both available, but it would be out of place if used as-is in a typical historical or pseudo-medieval fantasy setting.

For many of those foci, making them fantasy-appropriate is as easy as saying the focus and its powers are magical rather than mutations, cybernetics, or weird science. For example, Abides in Stone becomes a focus for a half-golem or someone descended from earth genies, Bears a Halo of Fire becomes a fire wizard, Commands Mental Powers becomes a master of enchantment, Wears a Sheen of Ice is a devotee of the goddess of winter, and so on. Even if the concept of a focus (such as gravity) wouldn't exist in the fantasy world, its effects are easily explained as a specialized kind of magic, so changing its name is enough to make it ready for play.

Some foci that lean heavily on technology require a little more work to use in a fantasy game. This section gives advice on adapting and reflavoring these particularly "unfantastic" foci for a fantasy setting.

**Battles Robots:** You battle a dangerous kind of creature such as demons, golems, or undead. Abilities like Tech Skills give training in skills like magical lore or religion instead of computers and vehicles. Deactivate Mechanisms might temporarily banish a demon, render a golem inert, or repel an undead creature.



Tech Skills, page 189

Mechanisms, page 125

Deactivate

**Builds Robots:** You create golems or other animate things out of inanimate materials (and perhaps you choose a specific kind of material to work with, such as cloth, leather, metal, stone, or wood). As an alternative to the Consorts With the Dead focus, you could create undead, which makes you a necromancer who is more concerned with crafting than talking to spirits and learning death magic.

**Calculates the Incalculable:** Instead of an incredible intellect, you have a gift of prophecy, a helpful spiritual companion who whispers knowledge in your ear, or a magical sense that lets you read and understand people. Abilities that give training in mathematics instead give training in magical lore.

**Conducts Weird Science:** You are an alchemist, an inventor, or a hedge magician, using your knowledge of weird and exotic materials to solve problems and improve contemporary technology like crossbows and lanterns.

**Dances With Dark Matter:** You manipulate shadow and darkness, substances that in a fantasy world are as real as classical "elements" like air, earth, fire, and water.

Drives Like a Maniac: Instead of a car, you have a semi-intelligent mount or a magical vehicle such as a flying carpet or an animated couch with a trophy animal head tied to the front. Instead of skill with driving a vehicle, you are skilled in riding or flying this creature or thing.

**Exists Partially Out of Phase:** You have one foot in the land of ghosts or some kind of shadow realm. You might be an exile from that place and able to return only for brief periods, or an interloper from the mortal world who can cross over. Flies Faster Than a Bullet: You have a powerful supernatural creature (such as an angel, deity, or demon) as a recent ancestor.

**Fuses Flesh and Steel:** Portions of your body have been replaced with magically animated prosthetics, parts from undead creatures, or one or more weirdly inhuman demons. Enhanced Body might require magical powders or distilled souls to repair damage to your unnatural parts. Interface gives you insight about magic that you touch, sniff, or eat.

**Fuses Mind and Machine:** Some or all of your brain and nerves have been augmented or replaced with something that isn't alive in the conventional sense, such as flesh harvested from a dead god, a sentient crystal, or a demon.

**Grows to Towering Heights:** You have giantish blood or are descended from something bigger and more primordial, such as a titan or proto-deity.

**Is Idolized by Millions:** Perhaps your fans don't quite number in the millions, but you are well known no matter where you go. You might be the bastard offspring of a king or queen, an accidental hero who saved a religious figure from assassination, or a mortal child of a popular deity. Or maybe you have a unique magical gift that makes people like you and want to be around you.

**Is Licensed to Carry:** You have an unusual weapon, either something mundane (like a repeating crossbow you made or found) or something magical (like a legendary bow or throwing star). Any focus abilities relating to firearms instead apply to this weapon.

Enhanced Body, page 134

Interface, page 155

In The Marvelous Land of Oz, the Gump is a cobbled-together creature brought to life with a magic powder. Its body is two sofas, its head is a taxidermized elk, its tail is a broom, and its wings are palm trees. Sometimes fantasy is really weird.

#### GODFORSAKEN



Loves the Void: If the setting doesn't have magical ships that travel from planet to planet, perhaps you're a creature of the deep sea or a huge subterranean cave where gravity and density are very different from that of the surface world. Instead of a spacesuit, you have a magical helmet, ring, or suit of armor that lets you move around in the human world—an environment that would quickly kill you without suitable protection.

**Pilots Starcraft:** Although this focus is strongly attached to many sci fi concepts, you could play a fantasy character with this focus if the setting has magical spaceships (or dimension ships). Or perhaps you have a small, unique magical vehicle that can sense its environment and communicate with you over long distances. Whether this vehicle is something like a boat, a metal lobster, a crystalline egg, or a devoted dragon depends on the setting.

Scavenges: You come from a place or time that suffered a world-ruining disaster. Whether it was a magical or technological calamity, and whether your home is another land, dimension, or timeline depends on what secrets the GM wants to add to the setting. For example, you might be from thousands of years in the future when technology has advanced and magic has waned, and were somehow catapulted back in time to the present (which to you is the distant past of myth and legend), or perhaps you came from a parallel universe where technology, not magic, is supreme.

**Shreds the Walls of the World:** Much like the Exists Partially Out of Phase focus, you can partially cross over into another dimension. Your connection to that realm (and its inhabitants) is fodder for your personal story of discovery and survival. **Siphons Power:** You are a magic-vampire; instead of draining mechanical devices and machines, you draw magic out of items and ongoing spells. Eventually you'll learn how to pull raw magical energy out of creatures, too—and maybe certain creatures have a better "taste" than others.

**Talks to Machines:** Rather than having a connection to machines, you coax loyalty and affection out of seemingly nonsentient magic items, as well as magical constructs like golems (and perhaps even other creatures created or sustained by magic, such as undead).

Wears Power Armor: Instead of armor made of circuits and motors, your armor is magical, a relic of a lost empire or a gift from a war goddess. Over time, you awaken a limited intelligence in it and learn how to activate its more unusual and powerful abilities.

Works the System: You have an instinctive or trained understanding of how magical divinations, locks, and secrets work. This gives you the ability to pull on the loose threads at the edges of spells and magical items to find a way through or around them or to tweak what they're capable of. Instead of Computer Programming giving you training in software and computer programs, you're trained in magical lore, bypassing magic, deciphering magic items, and commanding magical constructs.



Computer Programming, page 121

## NEW ABILITIES

The following are new abilities for the foci in this book. They are otherwise similar to the abilities in chapter 9 of the Cypher System Rulebook.

#### C Animal Scrying (4+ Intellect points):

If you know the general location of an animal that is friendly toward you and within 1 mile (1.5 km) of your location, you can sense through its senses for up to ten minutes. If you are not in animal form or not in a form similar to that animal, you must apply a level of Effort to use this ability. Action to establish.

C Animal Shape (3+ Intellect points): You change into an animal as small as a rat or up to your own size (such as a large dog or small bear) for ten minutes. Each time you transform, you can take a different animal shape. Your equipment becomes part of the transformation, rendering it unusable unless it has a passive effect, such as armor. In this form your stats remain the same as your normal form, but you can move and attack according to your animal shape (attacks from most animals this size are medium weapons, which you can use without penalty). Tasks requiring hands (such as using door handles or pushing buttons) are hindered when in animal form. You cannot speak but can still use abilities that don't rely on human speech. You gain two minor abilities associated with the creature you become (see the Animal Form Minor Abilities table). For example, if you transform into a bat, you become trained in perception and can fly up to a long distance each round. If you transform into an octopus, you are trained in stealth and can breathe underwater.

If you apply a level of Effort when you use this ability, you can either become a talking animal or take a hybrid shape. The talking animal shape looks exactly like a normal animal, but you can still talk and use any abilities that rely on human speech. The hybrid shape is like your normal form but with animalistic features, even if that animal is something much smaller than you (such as a bat or rat). In this hybrid form you can speak, use all of your abilities, make attacks like an animal, and perform tasks using hands without being hindered. Anyone who sees you clearly in this hybrid form would never mistake you for a mere animal.

Action to change or revert.

• **Bigger Animal Shape:** When you use Animal Shape, your animal form grows to about twice its normal size. Being so large, your beast form gains the following additional bonuses: +1 to Armor, +5 to your Might Pool, and you are trained in using your animal form's natural attacks as heavy weapons (if you weren't already). However, your Speed defense tasks are hindered. While bigger, you also gain an asset to tasks that are easier for a larger creature to perform, like climbing, intimidating, wading rivers, and so on. Enabler.

• Charge Weapon (2+ Intellect points): As part of making an attack with your enchanted weapon, you charge it with magical power, inflicting 2 additional points of energy damage. If you make more than one attack on your turn, you choose whether to spend the cost for this ability before you make each attack. Enabler.

• Cypher Casting: You can cast any of your subtle cyphers on another creature instead of yourself. You must touch the creature to affect it. Enabler.

• **Cypher Surge:** When you use a subtle cypher spell, as part of that action you can expend one other subtle cypher. Instead of the second cypher's normal effect, you add one free level of Effort to the first cypher spell. Enabler.



"Similar" is a broad term. Lions are similar to tigers and leopards, hawks are similar to ravens and swans, dogs are similar to wolves and foxes, and so on.

Even if your animal shape has multiple attack types (such as claws and bite), you can attack only once per round unless you have some other ability that lets you make additional attacks on your turn.

Animal Shape variant: If your character concept is that you always take the same animal form instead of being able to choose from multiple kinds of animals, double the duration of the Animal Shape ability (to twenty minutes per use). The GM may allow characters with this restriction to learn additional animal forms by spending 4 XP as a long-term benefit.

Animal Form Minor Abilities table, page 30



Subtle cyphers, page 378

Free level of Effort, page 209

#### ANIMAL FORM MINOR ABILITIES TABLE

Use the following as examples or suggestions of what a character gains when in the shape of an animal. If an animal shape lists two skills, the character chooses which one they want each time they take that shape.

Animal	Skill Training	Other Abilities
Аре	Climbing	Hands
Badger	Climbing	Scent
Bat	Perception	Flying
Bear	Climbing	Scent
Bird	Perception	Flying
Boar	Might defense	Scent
Cat	Climbing or stealth	Small
Constrictor snake	Climbing	Constrict
Crocodile	Stealth or swimming	Constrict
Deinonychus	Perception	Fast
Dolphin	Perception or swimming	Fast
Fish	Stealth or swimming	Aquatic
Frog	Jumping or stealth	Aquatic
Horse	Perception	Fast
Leopard	Climbing or stealth	Fast
Lizard	Climbing or stealth	Small
Octopus	Stealth	Aquatic
Shark	Swimming	Aquatic
Turtle	Might defense	Armor
Venomous snake	Climbing	Venom
Wolf	Perception	Scent

**Aquatic:** The animal either breathes water instead of air or is able to breathe water in addition to breathing air.

Armor: The animal has a thick hide or shell, granting +1 to Armor.

**Constrict:** The animal can grip its opponent fast after making a melee attack (usually with a bite or claw), easing attack rolls against that foe on later turns until the animal releases the foe.

**Fast:** The animal can move a long distance on its turn instead of a short distance. **Flying:** The animal can fly, which (depending on the type of animal) may be up to a short or long distance on its turn.

Hands: The animal has paws or hands that are nearly as agile as those of a human. Unlike with most animal shapes, the animal's tasks that require hands are not hindered (although the GM may decide that some tasks requiring human agility, such as playing a flute, are still hindered).

**Scent:** The animal has a strong sense of smell, gaining an asset on tracking and dealing with darkness or blindness.

**Small:** The animal is considerably smaller than a human, easing its Speed defense tasks but hindering tasks to move heavy things.

**Venom:** The animal is poisonous (usually through a bite), inflicting 1 additional point of damage.

The GM can mix up the combinations of skills and other abilities for these animal shapes to create other Earth animals, or create animals in the campaign setting that don't exist on Earth.

• **Defending Weapon:** When using your enchanted weapon, you are trained in Speed defense tasks. Enabler.

• Dreadwood (6 Intellect points): You manipulate wind, mist, and shadows to embody the primordial fear of mysterious woods. For the next minute, you gain an asset on intimidation tasks. Creatures within short range may become frightened; make a separate Intellect attack roll for each creature (if you are larger than normal from using Great Tree or another source, these rolls are eased). Success means that they are frozen in fear, not moving or taking actions for one minute or until they are attacked. Some creatures without minds might be immune to this fear. Action.

**C** Enchanted Movement (4+ Intellect

points): You use your enchanted weapon to move yourself to any location within a long distance that you can see, as long as there are no obstacles or barriers in your way. The exact way this happens depends on your weapon; you might throw your magical hammer and be pulled along after it, shoot an arrow from your bow that pulls you forward like a grapple line, and so on. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the distance traveled; each level of Effort used in this way increases the range by another 100 feet (30 m). If you have another ability (such as from your type) that allows you to cross a long distance, the range of that ability and this one increases to very long. Action.

C Enchanted Weapon (1 Intellect point):

You attune yourself to a physical weapon, such as a sword, hammer, or bow. You know exactly where it is if it is within a short distance of you, and you know its general direction and distance if farther away. All of your other focus abilities require you to be holding or wielding this weapon. You can be attuned to only one weapon at a time; attuning yourself to a second weapon loses the attunement to the first one. Action to initiate, ten minutes to complete. Enabler.

• **Expanded Repertoire:** The number of subtle cyphers you can bear at the same time increases by one. Enabler.

• Faster Wild Magic: If you spend ten minutes preparing your magic, you can fill any of your open cypher slots with subtle cyphers chosen randomly by the GM (this time can be part of a ten-minute, one-hour, or ten-hour recovery action if you are awake for the entire time). You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. You can still use Magical Repertoire to fill your cypher slots. Action to initiate, ten minutes to complete.

• Great Tree: When you use Wooden Body, you may grow to up to 12 feet (4 m) in height. In this larger form, you add 7 points to your Might Pool and +2 to your Might Edge. If you chose to grow, when Wooden Body ends you subtract 7 points from your Might Pool (if this brings the Pool to 0, subtract the overflow first from your Speed Pool and then, if necessary, from your Intellect Pool).

When you use Wooden Body, whether or not you choose to grow, instead of looking like a wooden version of your normal self, you can take on the full appearance of a humanoid tree creature or an actual tree (including growing additional branches, extra foliage, and so on). This does not affect any of your abilities—in tree shape, you can use type abilities, other focus abilities, and so on. In tree shape, pretending to be a tree and hiding among normal trees are eased by two steps. Enabler. If you attune yourself to a different weapon, come up with a story reason for why you are able to do that and why you chose this new weapon.

#### GODFORSAKEN



A creature that takes animal form with Lend Animal Shape counts as an animal for the use of Animal Scrying.

A character might be able to take the shape of a creature that is similar to a common animal, such as a unicorn instead of a horse or a basilisk instead of a lizard, but doing so should require applying at least one level of Effort to the change, and the character wouldn't gain any of the creature's magical abilities.

If a character has Magical Repertoire, the GM should give the PC frequent opportunities to gain new subtle cyphers, whether from preparation or by gaining them automatically as explained in the Cyphers chapter.

> Discovering Subtle Cyphers, page 379

• Innate Power: Choose either your Might Pool or your Speed Pool. When spending points to activate your focus abilities, you can spend points from this Pool instead of your Intellect Pool (in which case you use your Might Edge or Speed Edge instead of your Intellect Edge, as appropriate). Enabler.

C Lend Animal Shape (6+ Intellect points): You change into an animal, and one willing creature within immediate range also transforms into an animal of that type (bear, tiger, wolf, and so on) for ten minutes, as if they were using your Animal Shape ability. For each level of Effort applied, you can affect one additional creature. All creatures transforming with you must be your size or smaller. A creature can revert to its normal form as an action, but it cannot then change back into the animal form. One creature (whether you or someone else) changing form does not affect any other creature affected with this ability. Action.

• Magical Repertoire: The number of subtle cyphers you can bear at the same time increases by two. If you spend one hour preparing your magic, you can fill any of your open cypher slots with subtle cyphers chosen randomly by the GM (this hour can be part of a one-hour or ten-hour recovery action if you are awake for the entire time). As part of this preparation process, you may discard any number of subtle cyphers you carry to make room for more subtle cyphers. Enabler.

• Magical Training: You are trained in all of your spells. As a result, you ease any task involved in the use of your spells. Enabler. C Maximize Cypher: Choose one subtle cypher you bear. Its level becomes the maximum level possible for that cypher. For example, a meditation aid has a level range of 1d6 + 2, so maximizing that cypher changes its level to 8. You can have only one maximized subtle cypher at a time. You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. Enabler.

• Patient Recovery: You gain an extra ten-minute recovery roll each day. Enabler.

C Power Crash (3 Intellect points): You strike your enchanted weapon against the ground (or a similar large surface), creating an explosion of energy that affects an area up to immediate range from that point. (If your enchanted weapon is a ranged weapon, you can instead target a point within close range to be the center of the explosion.) The blast inflicts 2 points of damage to all creatures or objects within the area (except for you). Because this is an area attack, adding Effort to increase your damage works differently than it does for single-target attacks. If you apply a level of Effort to increase the damage, add 2 points of damage for each target, and even if you fail your attack roll, all targets in the area still take 1 point of damage. Action.

• Restorative Bloom (5 Might points): When Wooden Body or Great Tree is in effect, you produce a flower, acorn, fruit, or similar plant-based edible item. A creature that eats this food is nourished for a full day and restores their Might Pool, Speed Pool, and Intellect Pool to their maximum values, as if they were fully rested. Eating a second food produced by this ability in a day has no effect. If the food is not eaten within ten minutes, it spoils. Action to produce, action to eat.

• Throw Enchanted Weapon: You can throw your enchanted weapon up to short range as a light ranged weapon. Whether it hits or misses, it immediately flies back to your hands, and you can automatically catch it or allow it to land at your feet. Enabler.

C Tree Companion (5+ Intellect points):

You animate a tree of approximately your size or smaller, creating a level 3 creature with 1 Armor. The tree follows your verbal commands for one hour, after which it reverts to a normal tree (and roots itself where it stands). Unless the tree is killed by damage, you can animate it again when the ability duration expires, but any damage it has carries over to its newly animated state. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to affect more trees; each level of Effort used affects one additional tree. Action.

C Tree Travel (4+ Intellect points): You enter one tree and instantaneously and safely emerge from another one within long distance. You don't need to specify which tree you're exiting from (if you know there are trees in that direction, you can decide how far to go and you will step out of a tree in that area). If the starting tree's trunk isn't as large as your body, you must apply a level of Effort to enter it. You can choose to use Effort to increase the distance you travel; one level of Effort used in this way increases the range to very long, two levels raise it to one mile (1.5 km), and each additional level of Effort beyond that increases it by an additional mile. Action.

• Wild Insight: You gain a momentary perfect understanding of the flow of magic around you at this moment. When preparing your magic, choose one specific subtle cypher and make a magical lore skill roll against level 6. If you succeed, you gain that subtle cypher (the cypher's level is 6); if you fail, you get a random subtle cypher. If you aren't sure what specific subtle cypher you want, you can ask for a broad category such as "healing," "movement," or "skill"; this eases the magical lore task, and if you succeed, the GM chooses a random cypher that fits that category. You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. Enabler.

• Wooden Body (1+ Might points): You transform your body into living wood for ten minutes, which grants you several benefits. You gain +1 to Armor and you are practiced in using your limbs as medium weapons. You need about one-tenth as much air as a human. Hiding among trees or on a tree is eased. However, in your wooden form you move more stiffly than a creature of flesh, hindering your Speed defense rolls. Action to change or revert.

Your wooden body might be smooth like a polished board, rough like tree bark, or a mix of both.

## CHAPTER 4

# MEDIEVAL FANTASY EQUIPMENT

Obviously, the equipment in this chapter works best in a traditional fantasy game, in a quasi-medieval setting. Equipment in a modern-day fantasy game would likely be much different. The Cypher System Rulebook is a good resource for such settings.



The exchange rates for money in this chapter are in multiples of 10: 10 copper = 1 silver 10 silver = 1 gold 10 gold = 1 platinum 10 platinum = 1 mithral 10 mithral = 1 adamantine

So 1 adamantine coin is worth 1,000 gold coins.

n a fantasy campaign, magic items (like cyphers and artifacts) are the best treasure, but mundane equipment can still play an important role. Weapons, armor, and basic equipment like rope, lockpicks, and a lantern might be the key to survival or an amazing discovery. This chapter includes a wide selection of armor, weapons, and miscellaneous adventuring gear that characters can purchase or find as part of the story.

#### PRICE CATEGORIES OR PRECISE COSTS

The Cypher System Rulebook uses price categories as an abstract way of defining equipment prices so players don't have to deal with precise amounts of currency. However, a fantasy game often uses precise currency for equipment-starting characters have to decide whether it's worthwhile to spend their last few coins on a backup weapon or extra lamp oil, and treasure hoards include piles of money and gems. Fantasy games are often all about questing for gold and fighting magical beasts to get at ancient treasures, so this chapter uses the more precise method. Equipment is sorted according to the type of item (weapon, armor, adventuring gear, and so on) and priced in copper, silver, and gold pieces. Players will want to keep track of their currency. For GMs who prefer the general categories in the Cypher System Rulebook, use the following guidelines.

Category	GP Value	
Inexpensive	Less than 1 gp	
Moderate	1–10 gp	
Expensive	100–500 gp	
Very expensive	1,000–10,000 gp	
Exorbitant	10,000+ gp	

#### STARTING GOLD PIECES FOR CHARACTERS

If your campaign is using precise costs for equipment instead of general price categories, new characters should begin with the following items and money to purchase additional gear.

#### Warrior Starting Equipment:

Appropriate clothing and two weapons of your choice, plus 6d6 + 100 gp.

#### **Adept Starting Equipment:**

Appropriate clothing, plus 3d6 + 80 gp.

#### **Explorer Starting Equipment:**

Appropriate clothing and a weapon of your choice, plus 3d6 + 90 gp.

**Speaker Starting Equipment:** Appropriate clothing and a light weapon of your choice, plus 3d6 + 90 gp.
MEDIEVAL, FANTASY EQUIPMENT

# WEAPONS

Price	Notes
5 gp	Short range
1 sp	
2 gp	Can be thrown up to short range
75 gp	Short range
1 gp	
5 gp	Can be thrown up to short range
ו gp	Can be thrown up to short range
25 gp	
ı gp	Short range
1 sp	Short range
5 cp	
5 cp	Short range
—	
2 gp	
	5 gp 1 sp 2 gp 75 gp 1 gp 5 gp 1 gp 25 gp 1 gp 1 gp 1 sp 5 cp 5 cp 5 cp

Medium Weapons (4 points of damage)	Price	Notes
Battleaxe	10 gp	
Bow	30 gp	Long range
Arrows (20)	1 gp	
Broadsword	15 gp	
Club	1 sp	
Crank crossbow	250 gp	Long range
Crossbow bolts (20)	1 gp	
Light crossbow	25 gp	Long range
Crossbow bolts (20)	1 gp	
Flail	10 gp	
Hammer	15 gp	
Javelin	5 sp	Can be thrown up to long range
Mace	10 gp	
Pick	10 gp	
Polearm	10 gp	
Quarterstaff	2 sp	
Scimitar	25 gp	
Spear	ı gp	Can be thrown up to long range
Trident	5 gp	

Heavy Weapons (6 points of damage)	Price	Notes	
Greataxe	30 gp		
Greatsword	50 gp		
Heavy crossbow	50 gp	Long range	
Crossbow bolts (20)	1 gp		
Heavy mace	15 gp		
Maul	10 gp		



#### GODFORSAKEN

#### WEAPON DESCRIPTIONS

**Battleaxe:** A wooden pole with a blade on one end.

**Blowgun:** A long hollow tube used to shoot darts. You can fire it with one hand, but you need two hands to load it.

**Bow:** A bent piece of flexible wood with a taut string connected to each end. It fires arrows. You need two hands to fire it.

**Broadsword:** A long-bladed sword, longer than a dagger, heavier than a rapier, but not as large as a greatsword.

**Club:** A simple bludgeon, such as a sturdy tree branch, board, or improvised weapon.

**Crank crossbow:** A weapon similar to a light crossbow, but it has a magazine that holds five bolts. You turn a small crank to advance to the next bolt (this is not an action). Action to load an empty magazine with five bolts, action to reload the crossbow with a new magazine. It can be used as a rapid-fire weapon.

**Dagger:** A very short blade for stabbing or slicing.

**Flail:** A handle with a chain on one end and a ball or spiked ball at the end of the chain.

**Greataxe:** A larger, heavier version of the battleaxe, sometimes with two opposing blades instead of one.

**Greatsword:** A two-handed version of the broadsword.

Hammer: A wooden handle with a heavy metal head, either one-sided (like a carpenter's hammer) or two-sided (like a sledgehammer).

Hand crossbow: A smaller and weaker version of a light crossbow. It fires crossbow bolts. You can fire it with one hand. You need two hands to load it.

Handaxe: A light, one-handed axe that's good for melee or throwing.

Heavy crossbow: A heavier, more powerful version of a light crossbow. You need two hands to fire or load it. Action to reload.

Heavy mace: A larger, two-handed version of a mace.

**Javelin:** A light spear that's designed to be thrown.

Light crossbow: A bow with a handle and mechanism for drawing and holding the string. It fires crossbow bolts. You can fire it with one hand. You need two hands to load it. Action to reload.

**Mace:** A wooden handle with a heavy metal head that's spherical, flanged, or knobbed.

**Maul:** A larger version of the hammer, such as a sledgehammer.

**Net:** A net designed for battle rather than fishing. It has metal hooks at each intersection to help catch your enemy. You can throw it with one hand. Action to refold it so it can be thrown again. If you hit an opponent with the net, all of their physical actions are hindered until they take an action to remove it.

**Pick:** A hafted weapon with a sideways metal spike on the end, similar to a miner's tool.

**Polearm:** Various kinds of spears, sometimes with hooks or additional blades for special purposes like tripping a foe or pulling an opponent from their mount.

**Quarterstaff:** A wooden pole about 4 to 5 feet (1.2 to 1.5 m) long.

**Rapier:** A light sword with a thin blade used for stabbing and slashing.

**Scimitar:** A medium-length sword with a strongly curved blade.

**Sickle:** A one-handed hafted weapon with a sharply curved blade, originally used for harvesting crops but adapted for use as a weapon.

**Sling:** A small pouch connected to two cords. You put a stone or bullet (metal slug) in the pouch, hold the end of the cords, spin it, and let go of one of the cords to hurl the projectile. You can fire it with one hand. You need two hands to load it. Action to reload.

**Spear:** A one-handed pole about 3 to 5 feet (1 to 1.5 m) long with a stabbing blade on the end.

**Throwing dart:** A very short, light spear meant to be thrown rather than used in melee.

**Trident:** A three-pronged spear, often used for spear fishing.

**Unarmed:** A typical punch, kick, or other weaponless attack.

**Whip:** A leather cord with a handle, used more for tricks and inflicting punishments than for deadly combat.



## RANDOM WEAPON TABLE

If the GM needs to randomly determine the weapon a creature or treasure trove has, use the following table.

use the it	nowing table.			
dıoo	Weapon	62–63	Javelin	
01–06	Battleaxe	64–67	Light crossbow	
07	Blowgun	68–71	Mace	
08–13	Bow	72–74	Maul	
14–20	Broadsword	75	Net	
21–23	Club	76	Pick	
24	Crank crossbow	77-79	Polearm	
25–31	Dagger	80–81	Quarterstaff	
32-34	Flail	82–84	Rapier	
35–36	Greataxe	85–87	Scimitar	
37-42	Greatsword	88	Sickle	
43–48	Hammer	89–91	Sling	
49	Hand crossbow	92–96	Spear	
50-55	Handaxe	97	Throwing dart	
56–59	Heavy crossbow	98–99	Trident	
60–61	Heavy mace	00	Whip	

It's more fun if a character finds an improved version of a weapon they like instead of a weapon they're not familiar with.

## ARMOR

Shield

Light Armor	Armor	Speed Effort Additional Cost	Price
Heavy cloth	ן*	0	3 gp
Hides and furs	1	1	10 gp
Leather jerkin	1	1	10 gp
Padded	1*	0	5 gp

Medium Armor	Armor	Speed Effort Additional Cost	Price
Beastskin	2	2	10 gp
Breastplate	2	2	400 gp
Brigandine	2	2	200 gp
Chainmail	2	2	75 gp
Dwarven breastplate	2	1	8,000 gp
Elven chainmail	2	0	8,000 gp
Heavy Armor	Price	Speed Effort Additional Cost	Price
Full plate	3	0	1,500 gp
Scale	3	0	50 gp

If the GM prefers the simpler method of not tracking whether an attack is bashing, slashing, or stabbing, heavy cloth and padded armor should provide no Armor at all.

10 gp

\* Only against piercing and slashing attacks

\*\* Using a shield provides the wearer with an asset on Speed defense tasks

asset\*\*

#### **ARMOR DESCRIPTIONS**

You can wear only one kind of armor at a time (wearing more than one only gives the Armor from the best one and the Speed Effort cost of the worst one).

**Beastskin:** An improved form of hides and furs, usually crafted from a creature with especially tough skin such as a giant lizard or rhinoceros.

**Breastplate:** A fitted metal plate or set of plates that protect your torso but not your arms or legs, giving you greater movement than full plate at the cost of some protection.

**Brigandine:** Long strips of metal attached to a cloth or leather backing. Often called "splint mail."

**Chainmail:** Mail armor made from hundreds of interlocking metal rings or links. Often called "chain" or "chain armor."

Dwarven breastplate: A high-quality breastplate crafted by a skilled dwarf, providing good protection and great mobility. Dwarven breastplate is medium armor (2 Armor) but encumbers the wearer as if it were light armor (it has a Speed Effort cost of 1). Not all dwarf-crafted breastplates count as this type of armor (only exceptionally skilled dwarven smiths know how to make it).

**Elven chainmail:** A high-quality suit of chainmail crafted by a skilled elf, providing good protection and excellent mobility. Elven chainmail is medium armor (2 Armor) but is no more encumbering than a typical outfit of normal clothing (it has no Speed Effort cost). Not all elf-crafted chainmail counts as this type of armor (only exceptionally skilled elven smiths know how to make it).

**Full plate:** A complete suit of fitted metal plates that give excellent coverage and protection against attacks. The joints are protected by small layered plates over flexible chain. Sometimes called "plate mail."

Heavy cloth: Clothing that's heavy enough to reduce the effect of attacks against you, such as winter clothing or a fashionable leather outfit. Heavy cloth provides 1 Armor against piercing or slashing attacks like arrows and swords, but not bashing attacks like clubs or hammers. Heavy cloth doesn't have a Speed Effort cost. It can't be worn with other kinds of armor.

**Hides and furs:** Made from thick or poorly cured animal skins. It's heavier and bulkier than other kinds of leather armor, but easier to make, especially by resource-poor crafters.

Leather jerkin: Armor made of hardened pieces of leather (usually boiled or treated with chemicals) that mainly covers your torso. It's stiffer than leather used for clothing, but still flexible enough that you can bend and twist in it. Some jerkins are reinforced with metal studs (and may be called "studded leather"), and brigandine improves upon that concept.

Padded: Cloth armor that is deliberately designed with multiple layers to be thick and protective. This is sometimes called "quilted armor" because it is a layer of padding sewn between two layers of cloth. Padded armor provides 1 Armor against piercing or slashing attacks like arrows and swords, but not bashing attacks like clubs or hammers. Padded armor doesn't have a Speed Effort cost. It can't be worn with other kinds of armor.

**Scale:** Mail armor made from overlapping scales or plates attached to a leather or cloth backing. Often called "scale mail."

**Shield:** Provides an asset to Speed defense. Shield sizes vary from a small buckler to a large kite shield (in the Cypher System, the difference is mainly flavor, and for game purposes they all grant the wearer the same benefit).

#### RANDOM ARMOR TABLE

If the GM needs to randomly determine the armor a creature or treasure trove has, use the following table.

dioo	Armor
01–04	Heavy cloth
05–08	Padded
09–14	Hides and furs
15–21	Leather jerkin
22–25	Beastskin
26–40	Breastplate
41–47	Brigandine
48–65	Chainmail
66	Dwarven breastplate
67	Elven chainmail
68–75	Full plate
76–85	Scale
86–00	Shield

## ADVENTURING EQUIPMENT

This is a sample of equipment that adventurers and explorers use. Of course, many other mundane items exist in the world (such as chalk, ladders, and winter clothing) and might have applications in a dungeon, ruin, or haunted forest, but it's within the GM's purview to decide if such things cost a few copper, silver, or gold coins, depending on how common they are in a typical village, town, or city. This is especially true as heroes tend to accumulate money rapidly, so the cost of mundane equipment like chalk quickly becomes trivial whether it's 1 cp or 1 sp per unit.

Item	Price
Acid (flask)	25 gp
Adventuring pack	6 gp
Alchemist fire (flask)	50 gp
Alchemist tools	50 gp
Backpack	2 gp
Bag of heavy tools	25 gp
Bag of light tools	10 gp
Battering ram	10 gp
Bedroll	1 gp
Book	25 gp
Caltrops, bag	1 gp
Candle	1 sp
Climbing kit	25 gp
Crowbar	2 gp
Disguise kit	25 gp
Grappling hook	2 gp
Healing kit	5 gp
Hourglass	25 gp
Ink (flask)	10 gp
Ink pen	2 cp
Iron spikes (10)	1 gp
Ladder (10 ft. / 3 m)	1 sp
Lamp	5 sp
Lantern	5 gp
Lockpicks	25 gp
Manacles	2 gp
Mirror	5 gp
Musical instrument	2–50 gp
Oil (flask)	1 ср
Piton	5 cp
Pole, wooden	5 cp
Pouch or other small	5 sp
container	
Rations (1 day)	5 sp
Rope (50 ft. / 15 m)	1 gp
Sack	1 ср
Signal horn	2 gp
Spyglass	1,000 gp
Tent	2 gp
Torch	1 ср
Waterskin	2 sp



#### ADVENTURING EQUIPMENT

Acid: A flask of strong acid. Can be thrown up to short range, inflicting acid damage as a light weapon (ignores Armor). If poured carefully, it can damage or destroy a small item or areas made of stone or metal.

Adventuring pack: Includes 50 feet (15 m) of rope, three days' iron rations, three spikes, small hammer, a set of warm clothes, boots, and three torches.

Alchemist fire: A flask of chemicals that burst into flames upon contact with air. The flames burn out after one round. Can be thrown up to short range, inflicting fire damage as a light weapon (ignores Armor).

Alchemist tools: A sturdy wooden case with tiny flasks, stirring rods, droppers, and other materials used in alchemy. It grants an asset for identifying potion cyphers and similar mysterious liquids.

**Bag of heavy tools:** Contains a hammer, six spikes, crowbar, large tongs, chisel, and 10 feet (3 m) of strong rope.

**Bag of light tools:** Contains a small hammer, small tongs, pliers, small pry bar, awl, lockpicks, 10 feet (3 m) of string, 3 feet (1 m) of metal wire, and a handful of nails.

**Battering ram:** This sturdy plank is capped with hard metal. It provides an asset for breaking down doors.

**Book:** A book with information on a particular topic, such as geography, history, magic, or religion. Provides an asset on appropriate rolls if the character reads or skims the book for at least ten minutes before attempting the task (this assumes the character has already read the book and is looking for relevant information).

**Caltrops, bag:** A bag of hard things you scatter on the ground to slow or injure anyone walking through an area. One bag covers an immediate area and makes that area count as difficult terrain. A creature can safely move through it as if it were difficult terrain (half speed). If a creature moves through the area at normal speed, they must make a difficulty 2 Speed defense roll or take 2 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor).

**Candle:** A candle burns for one hour and creates dim light in an immediate area.

**Climbing kit:** A set of crampons, pitons, ropes, and tools. Provides an asset on climbing tasks.

**Crowbar:** This bent length of metal grants an asset on tasks to open doors, treasure chests, and similar objects.

**Disguise kit:** Makeup, simple prosthetics, and a wig or two, suitable for disguises for a theatrical production. Provides an asset on disguise tasks. Some parts are reusable, but the kit runs out after about five uses.

Healing kit: A collection of bandages, needles, thread, and basic medicines. Provides an asset on healing tasks. Some parts are reusable, but the kit runs out after about five uses.

**Lamp:** A hollow container filled with oil that slowly burns to provide light (often resembling a "genie lamp"). A lamp creates normal light in an immediate area and dim light out to the short area beyond that. It burns for three to four hours on 1 pint (.5 L) of oil. If dropped, it might spill oil, break, or both.

Lantern: An improved version of a lamp, with a wick that draws oil and glass or metal panes to protect it from wind. A lantern creates normal light in an immediate area and dim light out to the short area beyond that. It burns for three to four hours on 1 pint (.5 L) of oil. If dropped, it is less likely to spill than a lamp.

**Lockpicks:** Also known as thieves' tools, this set provides everything a skilled person needs to pick locks and disarm traps.

**Manacles:** Metal or heavy wooden restraints that hold an enemy's wrists or ankles in place and are secured with a pin. A common set of manacles is level 5.

**Oil:** A pint (.5 L) of lamp oil in a leather flask. It burns for three to four hours in a lantern or lamp. If prepped with a burning wick, it can be thrown, inflicting fire damage as a light weapon (ignores Armor). If poured on a flat surface, it makes an immediate area slippery.



## MEDIEVAL FANTASY EQUIPMENT

A creature can safely move through the oil slick as if it were difficult terrain (half speed). If a creature moves through the area at normal speed, they must make a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll or slip on the oil and fall prone. Lighting the oil slick makes it burn for one or two rounds and inflicts 1 point of fire damage (ignores Armor) on anyone in or moving through the area.

**Signal horn:** This horn can be heard up to a mile away.

**Spyglass:** This device grants an asset on perception tasks to see things at long range or longer.

**Tent:** This has enough room for two humans or three smaller people.

**Torch:** A wooden stick with some kind of fuel on one end (such as burlap and wax). It burns for one hour, creating normal light in an immediate area and dim light in the short area beyond that. A torch is fragile and usually breaks if used to hit something.

#### CLOTHING Item Price Artisan's outfit 2 gp Ascetic's outfit 1 gp Cold-weather outfit 6 gp Entertainer's costume 3 gp Explorer's outfit 8 gp Fancy outfit 25 gp Peasant's outfit 1 sp Priestly vestments 5 gp Traveler's outfit 2 gp

#### **CLOTHING DESCRIPTIONS**

Wizard's outfit

Specific pieces of clothing vary by climate and local custom, but usually include a hat, shirt, belt, pants or skirt, shoes, and underclothes.

5 gp

**Artisan's outfit:** A suitable outfit for a person who performs a trade (blacksmith, cobbler, and so on). Often includes an apron and a belt for holding tools.

**Ascetic's outfit:** A simple outfit worn by monks and other people who

eschew displays of wealth and status. Specific styles vary by climate and the philosophical tenets of the wearer, but a typical example is a loose shirt, loose breeches, sandals, a cap, and several cloth straps that can serve as a belt, scarf, or simple adornments.

**Cold-weather outfit:** A heavier set of clothing for protection against cold weather.

**Entertainer's costume:** Interesting (and usually colorful) clothing appropriate for an entertainer such as an actor, bard, juggler, or acrobat.

**Explorer's outfit:** A set of sturdy clothing for adventurers and experienced travelers who want to be prepared for various activities and environments.

**Fancy outfit:** A stylish set of clothes according to the local fashions and customs. Generally the minimum required for meeting with important townsfolk such as a mayor or noble. Higher-status events require outfits that cost up to four times as much.



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**Peasant's outfit:** Very simple clothing for free people of low social status. Includes a kerchief or cap, shirt or blouse, trousers or skirt, and heavy cloth shoes or foot wrappings.

**Priestly vestments:** Garments appropriate for performing ceremonies for a specific religion. A common example is a hat or headdress, long tunic or dress, tabard or stole, and shoes, with the outer pieces marked with appropriate symbols.

**Traveler's outfit:** A comfortable set of clothes that includes gloves, a protective hat, a jacket, and a cloak with a hood.

**Wizard's outfit:** Clothing that identifies the wearer as a practitioner of arcane magic. A typical outfit includes an interesting hat or cap, a robe with long sleeves and many pockets, and shoes, often adorned with runes or representations of magical creatures such as dragons. Scholars and sages wear very similar garments that lack the mystical aspects of wizard clothing.

#### Draft horse: level 3

**Guard dog:** level 3, attacks and perception as level 4

Pony: level 2

Riding horse: level 3; moves a long distance each round

Warhorse: level 4; moves a long distance each round

## ANIMALS AND GEAR

Item	Price
Draft horse	50 gp
Guard dog	25 gp
Pony	30 gp
Riding horse	75 gp
Saddle	10 gp
Warhorse	300–500 gp

#### ANIMALS AND GEAR DESCRIPTIONS

**Draft horse:** A strong horse able to carry or pull heavy loads.

**Guard dog:** A dog specially trained to guard. Better suited for watching or patrolling an area against thieves and intruders than it is for accompanying adventurers into dangerous locations.

**Pony:** A smaller type of horse, suitable for pulling a cart, carrying smaller loads than a full-sized horse, or serving as a mount for a smaller-than-human creature such as a dwarf or halfling.

**Riding horse:** A horse trained for riding and able to carry a typical adult human. Riding horses tend to panic in combat.

**Warhorse:** A horse trained to be calm during the noise and action of combat, used either as a mount or to pull a vehicle such as a chariot.

## FOOD AND LODGING

Item	Price
Ale, gallon	2 sp
Ale, mug	4 ср
Banquet (one person)	10 gp
Bread, loaf	2 ср
Inn stay (per night)	
Good	8 sp
Common	5 sp
Poor	1 sp
Meals (per day)	
Good	5 sp
Common	3 sp
Poor	6 ср
Meat (one serving)	3 sp
Wine (bottle)	10 gp
Wine (pitcher)	2 sp

## CHAPTER 5

# FANTASY GAMING INSPIRATION

e're fortunate to live in a time when there is a large number of high-quality fantasy books, films, and TV shows to experience and enjoy. Some of these are classic stories about mythical heroic figures, others created or defined fantasy, and some break expectations or view fantasy from a new perspective. Each of them has stories to tell and things to teach GMs and players about what can be done in fantasy gaming.

There are many different genres of fantasy within the general concept of fantasy gaming—high fantasy, dark fantasy, urban fantasy, and so on. This chapter offers a simple overview of some of the more prominent fantasy genres and notable examples in that genre. Keep in mind that many popular settings belong in more than one category, and some of these genres are subsets of other fantasy genres.

If you're a GM, it's likely that your fantasy game world draws on elements from multiple kinds of fantasy, and that's perfectly fine—the combination you choose creates something unique with your personal creative stamp. If you're a player, you probably used an interesting character from fantasy media as the inspiration for one of your PCs. By looking at other fantasy media in the genres you know, you can find new perspectives and keep things interesting. And by learning about other kinds of fantasy, you unlock entirely new kinds of gaming to explore, either by switching genres or by adding elements from a new (to you) genre to your existing game.

High Fantasy: Magic is a common and well-known thing, even if practicing it is limited to a small subset of the population. The stories and adventures often have an epic and world-affecting scope. The setting often has intelligent fantasy species and cultures like elves, dwarves, trolls, and so on. Also known as epic fantasy. Examples include The Lord of the Rings (J. R. R. Tolkien), The Chronicles of Narnia (C. S. Lewis), the Discworld series (Terry Pratchett), The Chronicles of Prydain (Lloyd Alexander), The Neverending Story (1984 film), The Chronicles of Amber (Roger Zelazny), the Ethshar series (Lawrence Watt-Evans), The Wheel of Time series (Robert Jordan), the Earthsea series (Ursula K. Le Guin), the Shannara series (Terry Brooks), The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant (Stephen R. Donaldson), the Dragaera/Vlad Taltos series (Steven Brust), Shadow of the Fox (Julie Kagawa), A River of Royal Blood (Amanda Joy), Avatar: The Last Airbender (2005 TV series), and Three Hearts and Three Lions (Poul Anderson).

Low Fantasy: A more subdued counterpart of high fantasy, with an Earthlike setting (medieval, antiquity, or corresponding to some other historical time period). Magic exists, but isn't necessarily something the heroes wield directly or easily. The PCs tend to be



martial-focused (warriors or thieves), the magic they use tends to be in objects (such as weapons or potions), and wizards and priests with true magic are usually mentors, antagonists, or monsters. "Sword and sorcery" is part of this genre. Examples include Conan the Barbarian (Robert E. Howard), Red Sonja (Marvel Comics), Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser/Lankhmar (Fritz Leiber), The Sword of Truth (Terry Goodkind), the Book of Swords series (Fred Saberhagen), Willow (1988 film), Dragonslayer (1981 film), The Beastmaster (1982 film), Rebel of the Sands (Alwyn Hamilton), A Song of Ice and Fire (George R. R. Martin), Spin the Dawn (Elizabeth Lim), and We Hunt the Flame (Hafsah Faizal).

**Dark Fantasy:** A gloomier setting than high fantasy, usually with darker elements or a sense of horror and dread. The protagonists may even be monsters such as vampires. Sometimes called Gothic fantasy or horror fantasy. Examples include the Sandman comic series (Neil Gaiman), the Dark Tower series (Stephen King), *The Sword and the Sorcerer* (Norman Winski), the Elric series (Michael Moorcock), the Kane series (Karl Edward Wagner), *Children of Blood and Bone* (Tomi Adeyemi), *The Dark World* (Henry Kuttner), and the works of Gertrude Barrows Bennett.

**Dying Earth:** The setting is in the end times of its existence, either as a planet or an entire dimension, when natural laws begin to fail (which may explain the existence of magic in the setting, or why magic is starting to fail). Magic may exist alongside the remnants of technology. Common themes are weariness about the state of the world, entropy's effect on the world, yearning for the better times of the past, decadence, fatalism, and the hope of renewal. Examples include *The Dying Earth* (Jack Vance), the Zothique stories

## FANTASY GAMING INSPIRATION

(Clark Ashton Smith), *The Magic Goes Awa*y (Larry Niven), and the Lords of Dûs series (Lawrence Watt-Evans).

Fairy Tales: Folk narratives, beast fables, and moral lessons presented as entertainment. Although fairy tales are their own genre, they share many common elements with traditional fantasy-magical creatures, spells, curses, and so on. The goals of a fairy tale story or RPG often diverge from those of a fantasy RPG; for example, it's typical for a fantasy campaign to feature the same characters going on many adventures, whereas fairy tales often end after just one, with the heroes living "happily ever after." Examples include Undine (1811 novella), Jack and the Beanstalk (folklore), Robin Hood (folklore), Alice in Wonderland (various forms of the story), The Brothers Grimm (2005 film), and Pan's Labyrinth (2006 film).

Historical Fantasy: Earth in a historical period, with the addition of magic. This might be a small change (such as a medieval Europe where legendary items are real and a few wizards still practice ancient magic) or a large one (such as magic being as common and well known as technology, or the presence of actual gods and supernatural beings). Examples include The Princess Bride (1987 film), the Knights of the Round Table (folklore), the Sinbad films animated by Ray Harryhausen, Ladyhawke (1985 film), Xena: Warrior Princess (1995 TV series), Clash of the Titans (1981 film), The City of Brass (S. A. Chakraborty), and Time Bandits (1981 film).

**Contemporary Fantasy:** A fantasy version of Earth set in the time period it was created. Magic may be a secret or out in the open. Many contemporary fantasy sources feature an occult detective, either eliminating magical threats or using magic as part of their work. Examples include *The Dresden Files* (Jim Butcher), the Harry Potter franchise, *The Magicians* (Lev Grossman novels and TV series), *Hellboy* (comics and films), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 TV series), the Anita Blake series (Laurell K. Hamilton), *Wicked Fox* (Kat Cho), *Supernatural* (2005 TV series), and *Bright* (2017 film).

**Paranormal Romance:** Usually a historical or modern Earth, with stories focusing on characters, romantic love, and relationships with supernatural creatures such as vampires, ghosts, or shapeshifters. The setting may involve other fantasy elements such as time travel or psychic abilities. Examples include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 TV series), the Twilight saga (Stephenie Meyer), and the Anita Blake series (Laurell K. Hamilton).





#### GODFORSAKEN

These fantasy genre definitions can overlap with one another, as experts disagree on some of the definitions, and RPGs use different definitions than novels. Whimsical Fantasy: A more light-hearted look at the fantasy genre, often aimed at a younger audience. Examples include the Discworld series (Terry Pratchett), the Mouse Guard franchise, the Harry Potter franchise, the MythAdventures series (Robert Asprin), *Good Omens* (Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett), *The Dark Crystal* (1982 film), and *Labyrinth* (1986 film).

**Wuxia:** Semi-historical adventures in a fantasy historical China, usually with

martial heroes as the protagonists. Magic swords, impossible fighting techniques, curses, and ghosts are common elements. Technically this is a subset of historical fantasy, but its popularity and many stories merit its mention as a separate genre. Examples include *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000 film), *Hero* (2002 film), *The House of Flying Daggers* (2004 film), *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008 film), and many others popular in Asia that haven't received wide distribution in other parts of the world.

#### FANTASY ART INSPIRATION

If you're planning a new campaign or filling in details on your current one, looking at fantasy art can be a great source of inspiration. The following people are some of our favorite fantasy artists. Among these talented folks are those who shaped the early years of fantasy and others who bring incredible creativity and talent for fantasy drawn from many other fields of interest.

Chris Achilléos Thomas Baxa **Denis Beauvais Julie Bell Bruce Brenneise** Gerald Brom Liz Danforth Roger Dean Jeff Dee Julie Dillon Tony DiTerlizzi Vincent Dutrait Jeff Easley Larry Elmore Jason Engle Frank Frazetta Brian Froud Donato Giancola Rebecca Guay Greg and Tim Hildebrandt John Howe Naohisa Inoue

Jennell Jaquays Jeffrey Catherine Jones David Lanham Stephanie Pui-Mun Law Alan Lee Todd Lockwood Raven Mimura Peter Mohrbacher **Erol Otus** Keith Parkinson Roberto Pitturru Randy "rk" Post Arthur Rackham Wayne Reynolds Robh Ruppel Cynthia Sheppard Matt Stawicki Boris Vallejo Michael Whelan Patrick Woodroffe **Kieran Yanner** 

It's also worth mentioning a couple of great annual art books that feature a wealth of inspiring fantasy art: *Spectrum* and *Infected by Art*.

## CHAPTER 6

# MAGICAL RULES MODULES

antasy stories include all manner of mystical aspects, many of which might not be entirely covered by the Cypher System Rulebook. This chapter presents suggestions for how to handle common magical elements in the game. In many cases, the information here is a summary of the most common ways these effects work in the game, and the group is free to alter the specifics. For example, the Possession section of the chapter says that a creature inhabiting a host body usually can't use its own magical abilities (it is limited to actions the host could take), but the GM may want to scrap that limitation for the sake of creating an interesting encounter, such as a powerful demon that can possess its cultists and still use its full demonic abilities (either at full strength or at a lower level than when it is manifested in its own form).

This chapter describes many optional rules (called "magical rules modules") that deal with special events and situations in fantasy games, usually as the result of magic or supernatural power.

Some modules are meant for the GM's eyes only—things that happen behind the scenes, or that are secrets the PCs might find out over the course of the game. For example, in a game where an angry ghost is linked to an old ring, the players don't need to know beforehand that the GM is using the Cursed Items module and the ring will keep showing up if they try to get rid of it (it also spoils the secret that the ring is the root of the problem). The players also don't need to know if the GM is using Possession, as that spoils the fact that the PCs will end up facing a creature that can possess others.

If a module changes the options that players or PCs have, the GM should work with the players when the game begins. For example, if the GM is using the **Crafting Magic Items** module, the players should know about it at the start of the game so they can decide if they want to create a character who likes making magic items. Likewise, players should know if the world they're playing in has magic that can bring the dead back to life, or how prophecy magic works.

Everything presented in this chapter is an option, not a requirement. The group can change or ignore any aspect of these modules for their own campaign.

## ANTIMAGIC

A world that has magic often has a way of suppressing or negating that magic, which might be called "antimagic." The sword meant to kill wizards absorbs and ignores all magic in the area. The place where a god was murdered is cursed and no magic will ever work there again. The magical creature creates a cone-shaped area in front of it that no magic (even its own) can penetrate. Antimagic is a powerful narrative concept for a novel, TV show, or film where the author has sole creative power over the world and all the This chapter is intended for GMs, but gameplay may go more smoothly if the GM tells players to read and understand how these game mechanics work.

Possession, page 69 Crafting Magic Items, page 49

Cursed Items, page 53

Adapting PCs to an underwater, lava, or space environment with equipment or magic that lets them survive there is essentially giving them the tools to play "in the normal way." characters in it. In an RPG, it introduces a large number of complex problems, partly because of game mechanics issues and partly because (unlike characters in a novel) the PCs aren't following a script, so every unexpected action they take may require the GM to make another ruling about how antimagic affects them.

From an overall game perspective, antimagic takes away much of what a magical character can do, which means it takes away the fun of playing that character. For example, a player in a fantasy game chooses the Bears a Halo of Fire focus because they want to play someone who throws around fire magic. Even if the character has other options (such as a nonmagical weapon), depriving them of their main set of abilities feels more like a punishment than a challenge. Magic in a fantasy game seems to be the only thing that is an on-off switch for huge numbers of character abilities. In character terms, it's like an Explorer or a Speaker entering a dungeon and finding out that they can't use any of their skills, or a Warrior entering an arena and discovering that all they're allowed to do is punch things. For magical characters, taking away magic is like taking away air—it's something that can happen in a game (such as in an underwater adventure), it's something a prepared character can deal with, but it's generally not fun and the players try to get past that obstacle as soon as possible so they can



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go back to playing their character in the normal way.

The Cypher System doesn't specify whether character abilities are nonmagical, magical, or fueled by some other nonmagical supernatural source (such as psychic powers). This means that as soon as the characters encounter a place where magic doesn't work, the GM has to make a lot of rulings on the fly about whether a type or focus ability works there. A Warrior's abilities are probably nonmagical and unaffected, and an Adept's abilities are probably magical and affected, but it's not clear whether some Explorer and Speaker abilities are magical or not.

The GM needs to decide whether things influenced or manipulated by magic are "magic enough" that they stop working in an antimagic area. A spell that creates a burst of fire obviously wouldn't work, but what about a spell that hurls a boulder or causes an earthquake? A magical crossbow with an accuracy spell wouldn't work in an antimagic area, but what if it fired into that area from a place with magic? Does a skeleton or zombie animated by magic revert to a corpse, or does it have an independent undead life force that keeps it animated? What about a magically animated statue or a demon summoned by a ritual? An active mind-control spell probably stops, but what about a quick magical suggestion to convince a guard to grant access to the inner sanctum? If a character is cursed, are they free of the curse effects while in the antimagic area, or does it only prevent them from getting worse?

Another important question is whether the antimagic is destructive toward ongoing magic, canceling it entirely (like an electromagnetic pulse knocking out electrical devices), or if it merely suppresses ongoing magic for a while. Cancellative antimagic means ongoing magical effects stop or are broken forever, and potions and other items become completely nonmagical. Suppressive antimagic means that when the antimagic ends or the affected magic leaves the area, it becomes active again. An inert zombie resumes its shambling, a flying spell cast on a character starts working again, a conjured demon reappears, and a person hypnotized by a vampire reverts to being its thrall.

In the Cypher System, cyphers and artifacts are important aspects of a character's abilities. If antimagic suppresses these items, suddenly every character is struggling to get by without them. Even basic fantasy staples like healing potions don't work, making characters vulnerable to death from attrition in their Pools that they can't cure (other than by using recovery rolls).

Antimagic effects can present interesting challenges for an encounter, but they require significant forethought and prep by the GM, and can be frustrating for players who made magic-using characters in a magical world under the expectation that they'd be able to use that magic. The GM should keep antimagic effects in the campaign limited in scope and frequency.

## CRAFTING MAGIC ITEMS

Many players love the prospect of being able to create magic items for their character and other PCs in the group. There are some character abilities in the *Cypher System Rulebook* that allow crafting of specialized items, but these mostly focus on creating robots or modifying existing technological objects. In a fantasy RPG, crafting usually means brewing potions, scribing scrolls, and imbuing wands, staves, weapons, and armor with magic. Potions, scrolls, and other one-use items are cyphers, and longer-lasting items are generally artifacts. Larry Niven's novella The Magic Goes Away takes place in a world where magic is fading, and other stories in that world have interesting consequences for magical creatures such as werewolves.



#### **CRAFTING CYPHERS**

Crafting magical cyphers such as potions or scrolls is a slightly more complicated task than climbing or persuading. Once you've found the game stats for a cypher you want to make, creating it involves five steps.

1. Choose Cypher Level. Creating a low-level cypher is easier than creating a high-level one. The character decides what level of cypher they're trying to create, which must be in the level range for the cypher as listed in the Cypher System Rulebook. Note that some cyphers have the same effect no matter what level they are, so the character could make crafting easier by creating the lowest-level version of that cypher, but the GM is always able to rule that a particular cypher must be crafted at a certain level or higher for it to work. In particular, a stim is very strong for its level range, and should always be treated as a level 6 cypher when crafted by a PC.

**2. Determine Materials.** Just as crafting an axe requires iron and wood, crafting a magical cypher requires strange and exotic materials—powdered gems, ink from monsters, mysterious herbs, and so on. The level of the cypher determines how expensive these materials are, according to the following table.

Cypher Level	Materials Cost
1	One inexpensive item
2	Two inexpensive items
3	One moderate item
4	Two moderate items
5	Three moderate items
6	One expensive item
7	Two expensive items
8	Three expensive items
9	One very expensive item
10	Two very expensive items

**3. Assess Difficulty.** The difficulty of a magic item crafting task is always equal to 1 + the level of the cypher. The crafter can reduce the assessed difficulty of a crafting task with skill training (such as being trained or specialized in brewing potions or scribing scrolls), assets, special abilities provided by their focus or type, and so on. Using a formula, recipe, or other guideline for a specific cypher counts as an asset for this purpose.

Because this is an activity requiring special knowledge, it is not possible for a character with no skill (or with an inability in this skill) to do this sort of crafting; the character cannot attempt the task at all.

For example, Jorum the alchemist wants to create a level 6 healing potion. A level 6 potion has an assessed difficulty of 7 (1 + the level of the cypher). Jorum is trained in brewing potions, so the assessed difficulty is lowered to 6. If they also use a potion recipe they found in a book of magic, the assessed difficulty becomes 5.

**4. Determine Time to Craft.** The amount of time it takes to craft a magical cypher is determined by the assessed difficulty, so decreasing the assessed difficulty not only means the character is more likely to succeed, but also that they have to spend less time on crafting it. See the table below.

For any time in excess of nine hours, the process is assumed to have stages where the character is not actively working on it, just checking on it occasionally to make sure everything is going as planned allowing the base ingredients of a potion to cook for a few hours, stirring to make sure the ingredients don't congeal, allowing ink on a scroll to dry, and so on. In other words, the character is able to perform other actions in the vicinity of the crafting (such as studying, resting, eating, and so on), but couldn't craft on the road or in the middle of a dungeon.

If there is a crafter PC in the group, the GM can include crafting materials as part of the treasure for an adventure.

Stim, page 398

In our previous potion example, the assessed difficulty is 5, so Jorum's time to craft is one day.

Assessed Difficulty	Time to Craft
1	Ten minutes
2	One hour
3	Four hours
4	Nine hours
5	One day
6	Two days
7	One week
8	Three weeks
9	Two months
10	Six months

**5. Complete Subtasks.** The crafting character must complete multiple subtasks that are steps toward finishing the process. The number of subtasks required is equal to the assessed difficulty of the crafting task attempted. So a crafting task assessed as difficulty 5 requires five subtask successes.

The difficulty of each individual subtask begins at 1 and increases by one step for each remaining subtask, until the crafter succeeds on the final, highest-difficulty subtask. Generally, subtask attempts occur at equally divided intervals over the course of the full time required to craft the item.

If at any point the crafter fails on a subtask, the item isn't ruined. Instead, the character only wasted the time spent on that subtask, and can spend that much time again and then try to succeed at that same subtask. If the crafter fails twice in a row on the same subtask, the character can continue crafting, but in addition to losing another interval of crafting time, more crafting material (equal to one of the kind of item needed to craft it) is destroyed in a mishap and must be replaced before crafting can continue.

For example, Jorum's potion brewing (assessed difficulty of 5) is divided into five subtasks, each taking about five hours (twenty-four hours in a day divided by five subtasks). The first subtask is difficulty 1, the second is difficulty 2, the third is difficulty 3, and so on. If Jorum fails on the difficulty 3 subtask, they've lost five hours of work but can try again. If they fail a second time, they lose another five hours of work and have to use another expensive item to proceed (as noted in step 2 of the crafting process, a level 6 cypher requires an expensive item as material). When Jorum succeeds at the last subtask

-

(difficulty 5), the potion is finished.



A player may ask to apply Effort to each subtask. Applying Effort is something they do in the moment, not over the course of days or weeks. Generally speaking, Effort cannot be applied to any crafting task or subtask that exceeds one day.

#### **CRAFTING ARTIFACTS**

Crafting an artifact is similar to choosing a new type or focus ability—the character has many to choose from, they select the one that best fits their intention, and thereafter they can use the artifact much like they'd use any of their other character abilities. The main difference is that most artifacts don't cost Pool points to activate, and character abilities don't have a depletion stat that eventually removes the item from play.

Crafting artifacts is handled as a long-term benefit of character advancement; the character and GM agree on the artifact to be crafted, and the character spends 3 XP. If the item is fairly simple, the GM can skip the crafting details and just say that after a period of time, the PC creates the artifact.

For an item that significantly alters gameplay—granting the character vast telepathic powers or giving them the ability to teleport at will—the GM can give the item an assessed difficulty equal to 3 + the artifact level and require the character to follow the crafting steps for creating a magical cypher. Crafting this kind of artifact takes up to five times as many materials and up to twenty times as long as crafting a cypher of the same assessed difficulty.

#### WHETHER TO CRAFT OR FIND CYPHERS

As explained in the Awarding Treasure section, characters should have many opportunities to replace cyphers by finding them as treasure or receiving them as rewards for their actions. However, there are a few reasons why PCs

Awarding Treasure, page 72

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might consider crafting cyphers instead of relying on whatever ones they find.

**Preparation:** The PCs might know they're about to face a specific threat or obstacle and want to be sure they have certain cyphers to deal with it. For example, if they know they'll be facing a demon-scorpion cult, they may want to have enough antivenom for everyone in the group. The GM could let them discover a cache of antivenom before they approach the cult hideout or have a friendly temple provide the cyphers, but it's acceptable for a crafty PC to make the items the group needs.

Character Theme: A character might consider a specific cypher part of their theme and want to keep it on hand. For example, a ninja character might always want a supply of gas bombs to confuse and distract enemies. The ninja guild might have a stockpile of gas bombs they're willing to trade to PCs for other cyphers, but a traveling ninja PC isn't likely to keep finding gas bombs whenever their supply runs out, so it's reasonable for the character to learn to make them. In this situation where repeated use of a kind of cypher is almost like a character's type or focus ability, the GM should consider designing a character ability that duplicates it and allow the character to learn that ability. For example, the ninja PC can gain the ability to create a burst of smoke. (Create Deadly Poison is an ability somewhat like this.)

**Favorite Skill:** Some players just like the idea of playing a character who can craft things for themselves and their allies—crafting is their theme. For these players, finding the cyphers they need isn't as fun as knowing that their character crafted the items. Even if crafting isn't as fast or efficient as finding a cache of potions and scrolls, the appeal to the player is their

personal connection with the creative process. As with the other two examples, it's good to enable this sort of character option—let the player have fun playing the kind of character they want to play.

**Power:** The PCs might find a cypher that's especially useful—and perhaps it's too powerful to let them have easy access to it. The GM can limit this somewhat by increasing the level at which it must be crafted, which increases the time and material cost needed to make it; the GM should explain to the players that the change is being made to prevent things from getting too easy for the PCs. Alternatively, the GM could limit access to the expensive materials required to make that cypher. Perhaps the rare herb is becoming scarce because people have been harvesting too much of it, or there's a seasonal blight, or it's a favorite snack of the warbeasts ridden by an orc tribe that has moved into the area. The trick is to reduce access to the cypher through story elements so the crafting player doesn't feel like they're being punished.

## CURSED ITEMS

An unwanted or dangerous object (such as a cursed artifact) keeps turning up, no matter how many times the PCs try to discard or destroy it. In many cases, there might be only one way to rid themselves of the item (such as by dousing it with holy water or burying it in a graveyard) or only one way to destroy it (such as by burning it in a specific temple or stabbing it with a magical dagger). The item might slowly repair itself—and depending on the item, it might be more frightening if it shows up fully intact or still bearing some of the damage from how the PCs tried to destroy it.



The GM could design an ability that lets a character craft smoke bomb cyphers, but that's basically a smoke bomb character ability with extra steps. A better solution might be to have the ability allow the PC to use a level of Effort to create a smoke bomb that can be used by other characters, perhaps with a limited duration (such as one day).



Create Deadly Poison, page 123

#### GODFORSAKEN

In the horror book Stay Alive! from Monte Cook Games, a similar section on cursed items is called "Bad Penny."



In Steven Brust's novels featuring the assassin Vlad Taltos, resurrection is fairly easy if the brain isn't harmed and the body isn't three days cold—easy enough that criminals sometimes pay to have someone assassinated and revived as a warning to show that they don't care if the target is alive or dead.



The reappearance usually isn't because the item literally walked itself to wherever the PCs are. In most cases, it just happens to be where they went or is found in an unexpected but unobtrusive place like the bottom of a mug of ale or in their coin pouch. If the item is intelligent (or controlled by a hostile intelligence), it might use NPCs to bring itself back to the characters, and might sacrifice those NPCs in dramatic and gory ways to make sure it ends up in the hands of the PCs. For example, if the PCs threw away a cursed ring, an accident-prone NPC thief wearing the ring might try to rob them in an alley and fall on their own sword.

Another way to handle a cursed item that doesn't want to be abandoned is to use each attempt as a free GM intrusion (with no XP offered). If a PC throws the cursed sword off a bridge into a river, they get a GM intrusion where they slip and fall off after it, and by the time they get to dry land, the sword is back on their hip. If a PC tries to give a cursed necklace to an NPC, they get a GM intrusion where that NPC's angry lover suddenly arrives, misinterprets the gift as a seduction attempt, and—cursed necklace in hand challenges the PC to a duel.

#### **DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

In a fantasy world, magic can cure wounds, enable travel to the realms of gods and demons, and create undead out of corpses. All of these abilities are pieces of the puzzle that is how to revive a dead person so they live again, and with that puzzle comes a lot of baggage about risk, rewards, penalties, and fun. The *Cypher System Rulebook* and *Your Best Game Ever* discuss character death, its impact on the campaign, and what to do about it, but that discussion is largely from a genre-neutral viewpoint. In a fantasy world, magic makes the impossible probable.

Modern science is capable of reviving people who, under similar circumstances fifty years ago, would definitely be dead. Drowning, massive blood loss, or a stopped heart are all lethal situations that nowadays people often recover from. If magic can instantly cure a disease, neutralize a poison, repair a sword wound, or summon a dead spirit for a conversation, convincing a dead person's soul to get back in their recently vacated body is a quite plausible magical effect. The question is how to allow for resurrection magic without death becoming a farce where PCs take ridiculous, painful risks because they know there are no lasting consequences for dying. Here are a few ways to handle the game aspects of resurrection without trivializing the death of a character.

Drawback: Similar to the not quite dead option of sparing a mortally wounded character, perhaps coming back from death is an imperfect process, and the PC is left with a serious injury, weakness, inability, or other limitation. Even something as simple as having the newly alive character debilitated and down to just a couple of points in each Pool creates this sort of tension. If the death happens in the middle of an adventure, a quick-fix resurrection gets the PC back in the game but requires expending other resources (healing cyphers or abilities, recovery rolls, and so on).

**Lasting Damage:** The character has several kinds of lasting damage relating to the injuries that caused their death, each of which is a setback toward being fully healthy. The revived PC and their allies might want to get right back into the action, but being down 5 or 10 Pool points for days or weeks is enough to make them wait until their friend is fully healed.



**Permanent Damage:** The revived character has some kind of permanent damage or affliction that won't heal on its own. This might be a permanent version of the Pool point costs from lasting damage, or an incurable version of one of the drawback options.

**XP Deficit:** Depending on how traumatic the character's death and resurrection were, they have a deficit of 2 to 4 XP, representing a shock to their soul that must be dealt with before they move on with their new life. Before the PC can choose any one of the four benefits required to advance to the next tier, they must pay off this deficit.

**Unlucky:** Maybe a jealous ghost has attached itself to the formerly dead PC, a trickster god is meddling with their new life, or death itself is annoyed at the character for returning to the world of the living. Whatever the cause, the character experiences bad luck a little more often than before, represented by increasing their GM intrusion range by 1 (so the GM gets to make a free intrusion when the player rolls a 1 or a 2). A character who has died more than once therefore becomes increasingly unlucky. Depending on the source of this bad luck, the character has different options for overcoming it. For example, the ghost might leave if exorcised or if the PC resolves its unfinished business. The trickster god might move on to another character after a while or if the PC performs a service for them. Death might be mollified if the character finds a suitably powerful person to die in their place.

Note that some players enjoy playing characters who have survived a terrible ordeal, and how the PC overcomes these challenges and picks up the pieces is an opportunity for intense roleplaying. Coming back from the dead and dealing with the physical and mental



For a discussion about how the presence of resurrection magic affects the campaign world, see Is Death Permanent?, page 14.

#### GODFORSAKEN



Accelerated Performance, page 59

It's possible that some preparation steps aren't needed at all or are unnecessarily specific, and were included in the ritual as a memory aid or personal preference by whoever wrote it down. Maybe a blue candle is as good as a white candle, or the detail was meant to specifically exclude using red candles.

Much like hand-waving long-distance travel, not all ritual magic needs rolls or rules. For example, if the PCs know a ritual to restore their dead friend to life, and there aren't any obstacles preventing it from working, the GM can just let it happen as part of the story narrative instead of making it a ritual that the PCs have to roll for. consequences is an excellent reason to choose the Recover From a Wound (or Trauma) character arc.

## RITUAL MAGIC

PCs in a magical world have magical abilities that are relatively straightforward-the character spends the Pool points to activate the ability, the magical effect happens, and maybe the player rolls to see if the target is affected. However, fantasy literature, films, and television shows have many examples of complex magic that takes minutes or hours to complete, involves multiple participants, and is at risk of being delayed, disrupted, or otherwise interfered with by entities who don't want the magic to succeed. For example, a priest might read a long prayer out of a holy book to banish a powerful demon, a necromancer might recite a long spell to raise an army of skeletons, or a spiritualist might carefully draw a magic circle around a building to ward out hostile ghosts. This longer form of magic is called ritual magic, and adding it to a fantasy game creates interesting encounter opportunities and world flavor, showing that magic is a process as well as an outcome.

#### TÌME

Ritual magic has two aspects related to time: how long it takes to prepare the ritual, and how long it takes to perform it.

The preparation time is how long it takes to get ready to perform the ritual. This might involve drawing a magic circle, setting up a pattern of red candles, writing the targeted creature's name on a specially prepared parchment, and so on. Anything that takes place before the ritual starts is part of the preparation and not part of the ritual, and it could happen minutes, hours, or days in advance of the ritual itself. For example, PCs exploring an abandoned wizard's tower might find a prepared ritual in the basement, untouched for years and ready to be performed. Some rituals require no preparation at all—they can be started immediately, just about anywhere.

The performance time is how long the ritual takes from start to finish, once the preparations (if any) are complete. It may be possible to perform the ritual more quickly than this typical amount of time.

Preparation time and performance time are mostly flavor and can be whatever the GM thinks is appropriate. Two different rituals with the same goal (such as banishing a demon) might have different preparation and performance times, which, if the PCs are in a hurry, may influence which one they want to do. The time may be based partly on the ritual's difficulty; it's reasonable to expect that using a ritual to banish a level 6 demon will take longer than using it to banish a level 3 demon, even if the extra time is just from repeating the same phrases.

#### DIFFICULTY AND SUBTASKS

Completing a ritual has an overall difficulty level, usually equal to the level of the challenge. If the PCs are trying to banish a level 5 demon, the overall difficulty of the ritual is 5. If the necromancer's army of skeletons would be a level 7 horde, the ritual to assemble them is difficulty 7. If the most powerful ghost in the salt maze is level 6, the ritual to make the maze is difficulty 6.

Sometimes there isn't a clear idea of what level the challenge should be teleporting a group of people to a nearby city and raising a person from the dead don't have an obvious task level. In these cases, the GM should choose a level for the ritual based on what would make an interesting experience for the players.

Instead of having the success or failure of this sort of magic come down to one roll, ritual magic lets the GM build tension by requiring the players to make rolls for multiple subtasks. The subtasks start at difficulty 1, and the subtask difficulty increases by 1 each time until the players make a final roll at the highest difficulty. A ritual with an overall difficulty of 4 has four subtasks, with the first one at difficulty 1, the second at difficulty 2, the third at 3, and the last one at 4.

Generally, these subtasks occur at equally divided intervals over the course of the full time required to complete the ritual. For example, if the overall level 4 ritual takes an hour, each subtask takes about fifteen minutes. The GM is free to adjust any of these subtask times, especially if it means increasing the dramatic tension of the encounter. For example, the GM might decide that the first three subtasks of an hour-long level 4 ritual take twenty minutes each and the last subtask takes six rounds, with the idea being that enemies will appear during that last step and the game will switch to round-by-round combat as the PCs try to prevent them from thwarting the ritual.

If at any point the PC fails a subtask, the ritual isn't automatically ruined, but it costs time—a failure means the time spent on that subtask was wasted, but the character can spend that much time again and try to succeed at that same subtask. The GM may decide that later attempts at that subtask are hindered, or that a certain number of failures during the ritual (perhaps equal to half the ritual's overall level) means the whole thing needs to be started again.

Skills, assets, and other special abilities can ease subtasks just like they do with any other task (which might make some of the subtasks routine and not require a roll at all). Characters may apply Effort to each subtask. Applying Effort is something characters do in the moment, not over long periods of time, so it's generally impossible to apply sustained Effort on a task or subtask that takes longer than a day.

For example, the PCs find an ancient magical skull that is a prison for a group of level 6 ghosts. A recent mishap (perhaps a GM intrusion) cracked the skull, and within a few hours the ghosts will break free and terrorize and kill all of the people in a nearby village. The PCs have found a decaying tome that explains how the ghosts were snared long ago in a maze of white salt and black ash for a day or so, and doing that again will give a repentant necromancer NPC time to repair the skull and bind the ghosts within it. The book says it takes an hour to draw the maze, and since the PCs are dealing with level 6 ghosts (which means six subtasks), each subtask will take ten minutes (60 minutes divided by 6). The first subtask's difficulty is 1, the second's is 2, and so on, up to the sixth subtask at difficulty 6. If the PCs fail at a subtask, they've wasted ten minutes of time and have to try that subtask again if they want to continue. Once they succeed on the last subtask roll (difficulty 6), the maze is finished and the ghosts are hedged infor a while.

#### LEARNING A RITUAL

A ritual might require little or no effort to learn, or it could take considerable time and effort. For example, a religious litany to repel a demon for a few moments might just be one sentence repeated over and over, but to banish a demon back to Hell might require memorizing the exact placement of candles in a circle, a sequence of musical notes, and a speech in the language of angels. Depending on the complexity of the ritual, the GM might decide that learning it is a medium- or long-term benefit and a PC must spend 2 or 4 XP to fully understand and master the ritual, or their efforts may be hindered.

Characters can select "magical rituals" as a skill, becoming trained or specialized. As with any skill training, this eases the ritual subtasks by one or two steps. The GM may allow a character skilled in magical lore to ease some ritual subtasks.



Spending Experience Points, page 239

#### GODFORSAKEN



GMs should always keep in mind that when a player tries to find another way to get what they want rather than the one presented to them, it probably means that player doesn't like that kind of encounter. If you have a magic door with a puzzle on it they have to solve, but the players are doing everything they can to dismantle the door, look for another entrance, etc., it probably means they don't like puzzles. Alternatively, the PCs could use a reference that fully describes all the necessary steps of the ritual, such as a runestone, sacred scroll, spellbook, monograph, or knowledgeable NPC. Using the reference to guide them through the ritual means the PCs will need to have it on hand when they perform the ritual (unless a PC has a photographic memory or a similar ability). Otherwise, some or all of the ritual subtasks may be hindered, or the ritual might automatically fail.

#### TEAM EFFORT

The GM should decide if a given ritual needs only one person to perform it or is something that other PCs can help with. Even if it initially seems like a solo venture (like reading a spell from a book), the ritual might benefit from assistants who repeat a chant, burn candles, perform arcane gestures, or hold the acting character upright as the ritual drains their strength. In general, giving multiple PCs something to do is better than having everyone wait on the sidelines while one character holds the spotlight. Having multiple characters participating also means more opportunities for GM intrusions that can complicate the encounter.

For example, if there are five PCs performing the ghost-maze ritual, one character might read the directions out loud from the book, two more carry the containers of salt and ash, and the last two use the salt and ash to draw the lines of the maze—which means any character might make an error that requires an additional task roll to avoid botching a step in the ritual and delaying its completion. Even something as simple as needing PCs to defend the performer from hostile creatures can make an otherwise simple ritual exciting and dangerous. If multiple PCs are actively participating in the ritual, the GM can allow different characters to make each subtask roll.

#### TIME PRESSURE

To make the situation more interesting, the GM can introduce a time challenge unrelated to the time needed to perform the ritual. For example, the PCs might need to finish by a specific time (perhaps a midnight deadline for blocking the ghosts that are escaping the skull, or banishing a demon that's inflicting damage to an NPC every round it possesses them). This gives the PCs an additional incentive to complete the process as soon as possible, using cyphers, assets, Effort, and other abilities to reduce the chance of failure for each subtask.

#### SIDE EFFECTS FOR FAILURE

The GM can add side effects for failed rolls or as intrusions. For example, a gap in the salt maze might allow a small or powerful ghost to break free, an error in the banishing spell might painfully enrage the demon and hinder the next subtask, electrical or magical energy might lash out and harm a nearby character, and so on. Some side effects might affect equipment, consuming a cypher or forcing an artifact to make a depletion roll, or create harmless but obvious cosmetic changes (such as altering a character's skin or eye color, burning off a character's hair, and so on). An interesting choice is letting a failure side effect create the seed for a later adventure, even if the overall ritual is a success. For example, a weak but clever demon might escape in the last moments before a portal is closed, a PC might be cursed with a rotting sickness as a skeleton army collapses into dust, or a splinter of fey magic might make an important NPC paranoid or hostile to the PCs.

## MAGICAL RULES MODULES

## **RITUAL REAGENTS**

A ritual might use up quantities of a limited resource, such as holy water, silver powder, human blood, or rare herbs. If the PCs have only enough materials to complete the ritual (perhaps with a little extra in case they make one mistake), that forces them to use Effort, XP, and other tricks to be sure they don't fail too many times and expend all of the reagents. Gathering the materials for the ritual might be the motivation for one or more adventures.

The GM should decide if each reagent is required, important, or helpful. A required reagent must be included in the ritual, or the ritual fails. An important reagent can be left out (such as if the PCs weren't able to locate any of it), but doing so hinders the ritual subtasks by one or more steps. A helpful reagent is completely optional—using it eases the ritual by one or more steps, but not using it doesn't hinder the ritual in any way.

The GM should also decide if a reagent applies to the entire ritual or just some of its subtasks. For example, the PCs might find blessed salt from the tears of a sea goddess, which eases subtasks to draw the ghost maze, or ash from the cremated mortal body of a very powerful ghost, which eases the last subtask by two steps. If the PCs have only a limited amount of a reagent, and it can be used on different subtasks, they'll need to prioritize which subtask to use it on (perhaps saving themselves an early roll by making it a routine task, or turning an impossible difficulty into something they have a chance of rolling on a d20).

Most reagents should be things that are consumed by the ritual—ink, herbs, strange powders, and so on. Some items, particularly reusable or durable ones such as a crystal ball, glass knife, or engraved silver bowl, might be reusable.

#### POOL INVESTMENT

Some rituals might require the PCs to spend points from their Pools on each subtask, with Might representing blood or vitality, Speed representing energy, and Intellect representing will or sanity. Other physical or mental tolls could also require points from Pools. Multiple PCs involved in the ritual could collectively contribute to this cost (and if a ritual costs many points, spreading out the cost in this way may be necessary to prevent a participating PC from dying during the ritual). As with other reagents, the GM should decide if these investment costs are required, important, or helpful.

#### ACCELERATED PERFORMANCE

The GM may allow a character to speed up a ritual, reducing the time required for one or more subtasks. Generally, reducing a subtask's time by half should hinder the subtask, and reducing it by half again (reducing the time needed to a quarter of the normal amount) should hinder the subtask by an additional step (two steps total). The minimum amount of time for a subtask is 1 round (unless the subtask is routine, in which case the GM may allow it to take no time at all).

#### **OTHER ASSETS**

If a character has an ability that seems especially appropriate for a ritual, the GM can ease one or more subtasks by a step or two. For example, if the PCs are performing an exorcism to drive an angry ghost out of a child's body, and one PC has the Command Spirit ability (which allows them to give orders to spirits), the GM probably should ease that character's subtask rolls if they're performing the words or gestures of the ritual. This might require spending Pool points to gain this benefit for the entire ritual, similar to the initial cost of a taxing task.

Command Spirit, page 121

Initial Cost, page 212

#### EXAMPLE RITUALS

The following are examples of common magical rituals suitable for many fantasy settings. Specific details of a ritual may vary depending on what the characters are trying to accomplish; for example, a ritual to ask a demon for a favor might be similar to one used to ask an angel, but the exact details are probably very different.

Everything listed in a ritual is merely a suggestion, and the GM should alter, add, or remove whatever they like to suit their campaign.

#### BESEECH

Call upon a powerful supernatural entity such as a deity, archangel, demon lord, or ancient elemental to ask for a favor that the entity can and is likely to do (nothing it would ethically oppose). If the ritual is successful, the entity makes its attention known, such as by manifesting as a light, noise, or visible spirit. It may ask for more information, for a task or favor in return, or for a service to be named later. The entity is not compelled to do the favor; the ritual merely gains its attention and gives the characters the opportunity to speak their case.

Level: The level of the entity

**Time:** Four hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, lighting candles, holding gifts/reagents

**Side Effects:** Curse, hallucination, prerequisite quest (a challenge or task the characters must perform before the entity will consider answering)

**Reagents:** Scroll giving the history of and important details about the entity, offerings of gratitude or appeasement

Pool: Might or Intellect

Other Assets: Knowledge or control of similar entities

#### UNDERSTANDING THE EXAMPLES

Each ritual is described in the following format.

**Level:** The overall level of the ritual, which determines how many subtasks it has.

**Time:** The preparation time (if any) and performance time.

**Roles:** Things other characters can do to participate and help.

**Side Effects:** Negative consequences for failed rolls or GM intrusions.

**Reagents:** Resources that can help success.

**Pool:** What kind of Pool points the ritual costs.

**Other Assets:** Kinds of abilities that can help success.

Beseech only draws the entity's attention; the various Conjure rituals bring the summoned entity bodily to the ritual space to talk in person.

#### CONJURE THE DEAD

Summons the spirit of a dead person or creature (commonly called a "ghost"), which appears in the summoning circle prepared for the ritual. The spirit remains there for about a minute, during which time the summoners can interrogate them or persuade them to share information. The spirit usually wants something in return (such as messages conveyed to the living or unfulfilled tasks completed). If the characters don't comply, they must magically threaten or compel the spirit to obey.

Level: The level of the dead spirit

**Time:** Three hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, holding hands in a circle, manipulating a spirit device

Side Effects: Haunting, possession

**Reagents:** Mementos of the spirit's life, the spirit's former physical remains, a person or creature to possess

Pool: Might or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Knowledge or control of similar entities, religious or cultural connections, secret name of the spirit

#### CONJURE DEMON

Summons a demon (an evil supernatural creature from another dimension, plane, or realm) to command or convince it to perform a task. The demon is primitive and bestial, not a creature of great wits and charm. The demon remains there for about a minute, during which time the summoners must bargain with or command it to perform a deed that takes no longer than an hour and requires it to travel no more than about 50 miles (80 km)-spying, murder, and destruction of property are common tasks. Usually the demon has to be threatened or magically coerced into obeying. If the summoners fail to get it to comply, it makes one attack against them and then returns to wherever it came from (and

probably bears a grudge for the unwanted summoning).

Level: The level of the demon

**Time:** Three hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Bloodletting, chanting, lighting candles, holding gifts/reagents, tracing the summoning circle

**Side Effects:** Aggression, bad smell, curse, equipment damage or theft, possession

**Reagents:** Blood; meat; magical inks or paints for a summoning circle; contracts; a person to possess; objects representing anger, destruction, or hatred (according to the desired service)

Pool: Might or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Knowledge or control of similar entities, secret name of the demon

#### CONJURE DEVIL

Summons a devil (an evil supernatural creature from another dimension, plane, or realm) to command or convince it to perform a task. The devil remains there for about a minute, during which time the summoners must bargain with or command it to perform a deed that takes no longer than an hour and requires the devil to travel no more than about 50 miles (80 km)—spying, stealing, guarding, and murdering are common tasks. The devil usually wants something in return (even if just an agreement for a later favor); otherwise, the characters must threaten it or have some way to force it to obey. If the characters fail to strike a bargain, the devil returns to wherever it came from (and probably is annoyed at the interruption).

Level: The level of the devil

**Time:** Three hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Bloodletting, chanting, lighting candles, holding gifts/reagents, tracing the summoning circle

**Side Effects:** Bad smell, curse, infernal mark, possession

A ghost remembers much of its life, including whether it knows, likes, or hates the people summoning it, and will act accordingly.

Secret names, page 70

#### GODFORSAKEN

**Reagents:** Blood; magical inks or paints for a summoning circle; contracts; a person to possess; objects representing betrayal, deception, or greed (according to the desired service)

Pool: Might or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Knowledge or control of similar entities, secret name of the devil

#### CONJURE ELEMENTAL

Summons a primordial elemental spirit of air, earth, fire, or water, which appears in a physical form. The elemental remains for about a minute, during which time the characters must attempt to bribe, threaten, or bargain with it. An elemental is usually summoned to do something that takes no longer than an hour and requires it to travel no more than about 50 miles (80 km)-attack, guard, and scout are common tasks. The elemental typically wants something in return for its service, usually a gift or bribe appropriate to its nature-incense for air, gems for earth, oil for fire, salts for water, and so on. If the summoners can't come to an agreement with the elemental, it might make one attack before it leaves.

Level: The level of the elemental

**Time:** Three hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, music, using ceremonial objects, holding gifts/reagents, tracing the summoning circle

**Side Effects:** Damage, weakness toward one kind of attack

**Reagents:** Gifts (black powder, gems, ice, incense, oil, salt, soil, water, wood), destroying opposing items or creatures

**Pool:** Might, Speed, or Intellect, depending on the kind of elemental

Other Assets: Elemental power, knowledge or control of similar entities, nature magic, secret name of the elemental

#### CONSECRATION

Wards a location against evil influences and unwanted magic for a year and a day. The ritual affects an area up to a very long distance across. Evil creatures and magical effects of less than the ritual's level can't enter the area or use abilities against it. If the PCs are warded out of the designated area, they must make an Intellect defense roll to enter it (and another each minute while within the area, or retreat) and all their actions inside or targeted within the area are hindered by two steps.

**Level:** The level of the effects to protect against

**Time:** One hour of preparation, two hours of performance

**Roles:** Drawing lines and symbols along the border, chanting, calling out local features (with candles, runestones, or other suitable markers)

**Side Effects:** Lights, sounds, weak spots or "back doors" in the barrier

**Reagents:** Silver dust, sacred oil, buried blessed gemstones

Pool: Intellect

**Other Assets:** Warding magic, religious knowledge

#### ENCHANT WEAPON

Enchants a light, medium, or heavy weapon with magical power, granting an asset on attack rolls with the weapon for the next day.

Level: 3 or 4

**Time:** Thirty minutes of preparation, one hour of performance

Roles: —

**Side Effects:** Weapon attack hindered, higher GM intrusion rate

Reagents: Rare oils, gem dust

Pool: Speed or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Battle tactics, weapon crafting

Elementals are simple creatures whose interests and attentions are focused on themselves and their element. Flattery and playing up their strengths are the key to bargaining with them.

In a high-magic campaign, a higher-level version of the Enchant Weapon ritual might grant a second asset on attack rolls, grant extra damage, affect multiple weapons at once, or all of the above.

Secret names, page 70

#### ENTOMBMENT

Imprisons a creature in a vessel (usually a valuable box, clay pot, or other closeable container, but it might be a gem, the heart of a tree, or another atypical object) for as long as the vessel remains closed and undamaged. The ritual forces the creature into the vessel, either in a spiritual form or by shrinking it to a size that will fit within the vessel.

Level: The level of the creature

**Time:** Sixteen hours of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, carrying or protecting the vessel

**Side Effects:** Bystander imprisoned with the target, containment has a flaw, target lashes out

**Reagents:** Vessel, symbolic bindings (chains, ropes, shackles, and so on), anathema objects

Pool: Intellect

**Other Assets:** Control magic, grappling, imprisoning magic, wards

#### EXORCISM

Drives out unwanted spirits (ghosts, demons, or something else) from an area up to a long distance across. Once cast out, the spirits cannot return for a year and a day (although most of them decide to move on long before that time comes). Completing the ritual doesn't prevent other spirits from entering or inhabiting the area, but it is likely that they can sense that an exorcism happened there, and most choose to avoid such an area so they don't suffer the same fate.

The ritual can also be used to cast out spirits from a possessed creature, preventing those spirits from returning for a year and a day. As with using the ritual to cleanse a location, this doesn't prevent other spirits from afflicting the creature, but later spirits can sense the recent exorcism and prefer to avoid that creature. **Level:** The level of the most powerful hostile presence to be exorcised

**Time:** Two hours of preparation, two hours of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, positive emotions, presenting holy objects, restraining afflicted individuals, tracing the area with incense

**Side Effects:** Lights, sounds, hideous physical transformations, injuries, telekinesis

**Reagents:** Bindings, candles, holy water, religious icons and books, scapegoats **Pool:** Intellect

**Other Assets:** Warding magic, religious knowledge

#### FLESH FOR KNOWLEDGE

Sacrifices some of the ritualist's flesh, inflicting Might and Speed damage equal to the level of the ritual and permanently reducing the character's Pools by 4 points (the character can divide this loss between Might and Speed as they see fit). The character experiences painful hallucinations that give them insight and understanding. They immediately learn one type or focus ability available to them (any ability they could learn by spending 4 XP as an advancement).

**Level:** Twice the tier of the ability the character wishes to learn

**Time:** One hour of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, restraining the subject of the ritual

Side Effects: Lasting damage,

permanent damage, scarring

Reagents: Silver knife, silver vessel Pool: See above

Other Assets: Pain tolerance, surgery

#### PURIFICATION

Rids a creature of an ongoing affliction, such as a disease or poison, or any unwanted magical effect, such as a curse or charm spell. In some versions of this Instead of permanently reducing a character's Pools by 4 points, the GM could allow other permanent penalties such as reducing an Edge stat by 1 (to a minimum of o), gaining an inability in a useful skill, or permanently reducing all points gained through recovery rolls by 2.



Lasting damage and permanent damage, page 436

Using an exorcism ritual on an area is mainly for getting rid of spirits afflicting the area in ways other than possessing a creature throwing objects, causing nightmares, making noises, and so on.



ritual, whatever is ailing the creature gets forced into a nearby specified creature or object, which is then discarded or safely destroyed.

**Level:** The level of the affliction or effect to remove

**Time:** One hour of preparation, two hours of performance

Roles: Applying reagents, chanting

**Side Effects:** Affliction or effect spreads to another creature, target moves a step down the damage track

**Reagents:** Anointing oils, healing herbs, objects repellent to the source of the affliction, magical paint for writing on the target, scapegoat, silver dust

Pool: Might

**Other Assets:** Healing magic, resistance to the target's affliction

#### RESURRECTION

Damage track, page 218

A lesser version of the Resurrection ritual

back to life, but only to the debilitated or

impaired state on the

damage track instead of hale, requiring

further rest or healing.

might bring the creature

Restores a dead being to life. The creature is restored to full health and is ready to act as soon as the ritual is completed. Depending on how they died and the nature of death in the setting, the creature may or may not remember anything that happened after they died.

**Level:** The level of the deceased (at least tier 6 if a PC)

**Time:** Five hours of preparation, two hours of performance

**Roles:** Applying reagents, chanting, prayers, shielding the corpse from hostile entities

**Side Effects:** Creature moves a step down the damage track, enmity of a death god, lasting damage, scarring, sympathetic damage

**Reagents:** Deceased's corpse, healing ointment, items of emotional significance (such as devotion, hope, or regret), items of importance to the deceased, parchment extolling the deceased's history and deeds, soul-sympathetic items

Pool: Might or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Close relationship with the deceased (such as a connection

## MAGICAL RULES MODULES

or family relation), healing magic, necromancy, spirit knowledge, secret name of the deceased

#### SACRIFICIAL RITE

A creature is ritually killed and its soul is placed in an object. The soul object might be a temporary destination so the soul can be transported and used elsewhere (such as an offering to a demon or as part of a spell), or it might be the final destination for the soul (such as placing it in a sword to create a magic item).

**Level:** The level of the creature (at least tier 6 if a PC)

**Time:** One hour of preparation, one hour of performance

**Roles:** Chanting, playing instruments, bearing the soul object, restraining the creature, slaying the creature

**Side Effects:** Creature rages or escapes, damage, dying curse, haunting

**Reagents:** Bindings, creature to be sacrificed, drum, flute, silver knife, soul object (its level must be at least as high as the creature's level)

Pool: Might or Intellect

**Other Assets:** Death spells, instant-kill abilities, soul manipulation

## MAGICAL TECHNOLOGY

Some fantasy settings use a sort of "magitech," where magic powers devices that would otherwise use technology. For example, the police in such a place might have magical devices that allow them to communicate with each other over long distances. People might get from place to place via magical trains or ships that fly in the sky. This kind of thing is common in the Harry Potter novels and movies, for example, where they have a postal system of magical owls, animated newspapers, and more. To use this idea, turn to the Modern or Science Fiction chapters of the *Cypher System Rulebook* and draw ideas for equipment as well as artifacts. Cyphers in such a setting are likely all manifest.

A hallmark of this kind of setting is that magic is at least somewhat commonplace. Magical items are produced in great enough quantity that some are considered equipment rather than cyphers or artifacts. Magical weapons that fire demon-infused bits of metal are just firearms with a different flavor, for example, and allowing them to be fairly commonplace will strongly influence the setting, but it won't unbalance the game. If a PC can use their magical "talk-stone" to call their friends when they're in a jam, it's no different than if the group was playing in a modern setting where everyone has a cell phone.

To craft items of magical technology in a setting where they are commonplace, use the standard rules for crafting regular (nonmagical) items.

## <u>Magic plus technology</u>

Some games have both magic and technology. An example is Jim Butcher's modern fantasy series *The Dresden Files*. And of course, there's the flying Ford Anglia from *Harry Potter and the Chamber* of Secrets. (The Harry Potter books use both magical technology and magic plus technology in the same world!)

Even some far-future science fiction settings might also include magic. Consider the novel *Gideon the Ninth* by Tamsyn Muir, for example. Or to go a very different way, the 1980s animated TV show *Thundarr the Barbarian*.

If you can have a magical sword, why not a magical pistol? If you can have a mystical amulet, why not a mystical stopwatch? An enchanted smartphone? A magically warded starship? Whatever technology exists in the setting could be magically enhanced if magic is also present. Such items would almost Secret names, page 70

Manifest cyphers, page 379

Settings that use magical technology can get hokey if there's a magical equivalent for everything we're used to in the modern world. Stressing the fantasy flavor is the way to keep it from seeming silly. If everyone has "talk-stones" to communicate but the items allow users to pass messages via the spirits of the dead, and the flying ships people travel in use a mystical negative-mass metal and engines powered by trained psychics, that has its own unique flavor rather than just being technological analogs.



Science fiction, page 270

### GODFORSAKEN

certainly be manifest cyphers or artifacts. Here's an example cypher:

TYPES OF CYPHERS





# I PROZEN TIMEPIECE

#### Level: 1d6 + 2

Effect: Creates or transforms into a pocket watch that seems to be made of ice. Upon activation of the cypher, the user can take normal actions, but everything and everyone around them is frozen in time. The user cannot affect anything else, but they can move through the world and take actions that affect themselves or their own belongings (bandage a wound, repair a broken item, and so on). The effect lasts for one round per cypher level.

And here's an example artifact:

#### TRUTH BINOCULARS

#### Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: Pair of binoculars with a large runic symbol on them
- **Effect:** Not only do these make it easy to see things far away, but looking through them also allows the viewer to see through illusions and see things that are normally invisible, assuming the effect has a level lower than that of the binoculars.

**Depletion:** 1–2 in 1d100 (check each use)

To craft items that are both technological and magical, either you need to make the device first and then enchant it, or you need to enchant it as it is made. Either way, the skills for making the device and for making it magical are likely very different.

## TECHNOLOGY THAT Interacts with magic

You might have equipment, cyphers, or artifacts that are technological but built to deal with magic. Look no further than the proton packs of the Ghostbusters for an example of this kind of tech. In a world with scientists and engineers faced with the presence of real magic, some of them would develop ways to interact and cope with it.

Technological devices that are not magical but deal with magic could include:

**Magic detector (expensive):** This simple white badge glows purple in the presence of magic. Once it detects something magical, it does not function again.

**Mystical hazard suit (very expensive):** This full-body protective suit is cumbersome and clumsy, not unlike a hazmat suit. However, all of the wearer's tasks to resist magical effects are eased. If the wearer takes even 1 point of physical damage, the suit rips and no longer functions until it is repaired and resealed.

#### Spellscrambler (very expensive):

Essentially a sonic grenade, this device produces a variety of strange electromagnetic signals—some audible and very loud, some not—on a number of frequencies. The mental processes needed to cast a spell are impossible to achieve for one round within a short distance of the device. Like any grenade, it can be used only once.

## MAGIC THAT INTERACTS WITH TECHNOLOGY

No self-respecting mage is going to let some mechanical device show them up. In a world where magic and technology coexist, wizards will have spells and effects that protect them from shotgun blasts as well as sword blades, and radiation as well as fire or frost. Consider, for example, these effects as cyphers:

## **O** FINDING PRYING EYES

Level: 1d6 + 3

Effect: Magically discovers if anything is watching or listening to the user right at that moment, and reveals the source. Electronic surveillance devices, long-range scopes, hidden cameras, and magical scrying attempts all trigger this effect. In all these cases, the "source" is the nearest representation. So a hidden microphone is revealed, but not the location of the listener.

## **O POWER DEVICE**

Level: 1d6 + 2

**Effect:** Magically powers one device that can fit within an area a short distance across. The device is now fully powered, charged, or fueled. If the cypher is used on an automobile, for example, the gas tank is full. If used on a flashlight, the battery is fully charged.

## SCREEN CONTROL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Effect: A technological screen (a television, computer monitor, smartphone, or the like) within short range shows whatever the user wishes for up to one minute per cypher level. The display can be pictures, text, or meaningless shapes and colors.

Because magic works on intuitive rather than scientific levels, mages could have spells that disrupt technology, even though the technology involved might not have any common principles. For example, a tech-disrupting spell cast on a fighter jet could cancel the plane's computers, machine guns, and engine, even though those devices don't share much in the way of underlying principles. In effect, these disruptive attacks would basically be antitechnology rather than antimagic, and you could reference the rules for antimagic and apply them just the same.

Antimagic, page 47

## MIND CONTROL

Magic that controls or influences minds is very common in fantasy. Fey creatures, vampires, succubi, and many other monsters have the ability to magically seduce or control another being, and even beginning magical characters may have abilities that allow them to convert a stranger to an ally.

From a rules perspective, mind control is fairly straightforward: one creature decides what actions another creature takes (perhaps limited in that the controlled creature won't take actions that harm them or go against their nature, such as attacking friends). But what's happening inside the controlled creature's head—whether during the effect or afterward—often isn't specified. There are several options for the GM to consider, either for all kinds of mind-control magic or on a case-by-case basis.

- **Confusion:** The controlled creature doesn't understand why they're doing things they normally wouldn't do, but they aren't aware of any outside influence on their thoughts and actions. Once the control is over, the creature may admit that they don't know why they did those things, or come up with an explanation justifying (to themselves and others) their reasons for those actions.
- Dream: The controlled creature is aware of what's going on but perceives it in a dreamlike state. They may believe that they're in control of themselves the entire time, or

In popular culture, wuxia is a genre of fiction featuring martial-artist heroes with fantastic abilities, such as running across water, balancing on an outstretched sword, or jumping dozens of feet from a standing start.

> For more information and guidelines about consent in RPGs, read the free Consent in Gaming PDF at myMCG.info/consent

A rule for any game: don't use mind control (or anything) to make a character have sex without the player's permission. somewhat aware that they're not fully in control (similar to being intoxicated by drugs or alcohol or disoriented by an illness). Afterward, the creature might feel strange about the events but may not realize that someone else was controlling them.

• **Trapped:** The active thoughts in the controlled creature's head come from the controller, but the creature still has a small voice or awareness in the background, like they're a prisoner in their own mind. This horrible situation usually means the controlled creature reverts to normal once the control is gone, and is probably very upset that their mind and body autonomy were violated.

Mind control is problematic from a gameplay standpoint because it means the player loses control of their character for a while-essentially, they're no longer playing the game, just observing it. Furthermore, some players may get upset if mind control makes their PC (often seen as an extension of themselves) do something out of character, whether that's attack a friend, harm themselves, or allow themselves to be victimized. The GM should always be careful when introducing mind control to the campaign (whether by PCs or NPCs) and make sure that the actions a controlled character takes aren't something the player doesn't consent to. Even something like using emotion-manipulating magic for seductive purposes may cross a line that a player doesn't want to cross.

One way to present mind control more safely is to disallow certain actions but otherwise leave the character in control. For example, being charmed by a vampire might mean the PC can't attack the vampire (or its allies) or run away, but is still able to call for help, heal themselves, leave at a normal pace, and take other actions. Alternatively, the character can be given a specific command, and until they comply with that command their other actions are hindered by one or more steps. If the player is willing to engage with the parameters of the mind control, the GM may award them an additional 1 XP (or, to approach it from the opposite direction, the GM can offer them a GM intrusion that the mind control is happening, and allow the player to spend 1 XP to refuse it, or go into XP debt if they want to refuse it but have no XP to spend).

## <u>mystical martial arts</u>

If the setting calls for wuxia-style fantasy martial arts or similar types of action, you can make a few rule changes to portray the kinds of things characters in such stories can accomplish.

- Running and climbing speeds and jumping distances are doubled. For those trained in running, climbing, or jumping, the speeds and distances are tripled instead of doubled. For those specialized, they are *quintupled*. For all intents and purposes, this means that everyone can run up a wall or jump very high in the air, and masters can practically fly or run across water.
- Everyone knows kung fu. Unless a person is a simple farmer, herder, or merchant, they know how to fight with elaborate and powerful martial arts styles. This doesn't change anything in the game mechanically—no one gets the ability to use weapons that they wouldn't normally have under the rules. But it does change the flavor, suggesting that no PC is entirely ignorant of weapons or close combat.
- Players are encouraged to come up with interesting names for their martial arts abilities. Instead of using a Bash attack, perhaps it is "The

## MAGICAL RULES MODULES

Three-Flower Fist," and instead of Fury, a character uses "The Rage of the Sevenfold." It is reasonable for high-tier martial abilities such as Amazing Effort, Jump Attack, or Finishing Blow to be described with a magical flare blazing auras of fire, brilliant cascades of light, ethereal figures overlaying the character, and so on.

- Materials and objects are easier to destroy. For the purpose of attacking objects, subtract 2 from the level of any material (minimum of o). It should be relatively simple for any character to smash through a plain wooden door with little effort, and true warriors can shatter stones with their blows.
- Wounds heal faster. Everyone gains +1 to all recovery rolls.
- Superhuman abilities exist. Consider adopting some of the superhero rules from the Cypher System Rulebook, in particular the power shift optional rules. These may derive from almost supernatural levels of training in various techniques (such as dianxue) but probably mostly from neili.

#### POSSESSION

Some creatures (demons, ghosts, entities of living mental energy, and so on) have the ability to possess a living person, taking over a character's body as if it were the creature's own. The creature must touch the character to attempt possession (even if the creature's touch normally inflicts damage, the possession attempt doesn't inflict damage). The character must make an Intellect defense roll or become possessed, whereupon the creature's immaterial form disappears into the character. The first round in which a character is possessed, they can act normally. In the second and all subsequent rounds, the possessing creature can try to control the actions of the host, but the character can attempt an Intellect defense roll to resist each suggested action. Successful resistance means that the character does nothing for one round. When the creature isn't trying to control the host, the character can act as they choose. Usually, a possessing creature's actions are limited to controlling its host and leaving the host (the creature's own abilities are unavailable to

it while in someone else's body). While wuxia and similar types of stories are fun, remember that they are fantasy and don't portray real-world cultures any more accurately than The Lord of the Rings or Conan the Barbarian do.



Optional Rule: Power Shifts, page 292

**Dianxue:** The touch of death—killing by using precise nonlethal force on key points of the body.

**Neili:** Internal force building up and cultivating the energy known as qi and using it for supernatural effects.

LADON

Possession is like mind control in that it takes away a player's ability to control their character, and that can make some players very uncomfortable. See the section on mind control and consent for more information (page 67).

While it possesses a character, the creature is immune to most direct attacks (though not so the host; killing the host will eject the creature). For example, hitting a demon-possessed human with a sword hurts only the human, not the demon controlling them. Mental attacks and special abilities that only affect possession or the type of possessing creature usually work normally. For example, a psychic Onslaught can damage a possessing demon within its host, and a spell that drives out a hostile mind will force a demon out of its host. In some cases, a special attack might harm both the possessing creature and the host, and these wounds might persist after the character is no longer possessed. For example, pressing an anti-demon amulet against the skin of a possessed person might burn the host and the demon within them, and banishing the demon might completely heal the wound from the talisman, not affect the wound at all, or leave behind an interesting scar.

A possessed character is allowed an Intellect defense roll to eject the creature once per day. The defense roll is hindered by one additional step each day of possession after the first seven days. An ejected, cast-out, or exorcised demon is powerless for one or more days. One way to exorcise a demon is to command it out in the name of an entity that has power over the demon. This can be attempted once per day and grants the possessed character an additional Intellect defense roll to eject the demon.

## SECRET AND TRUE NAMES

Names are power. Even knowing the common name of a knight or wizard makes it easier for some kinds of magic to find them or discover things about them. But there is a deeper magic of names, names written on a creature's soul in the ink of its very essence. Some call this name a true name, soul name, or secret name, and it is never the same as the name that they're known by in the world.

Most creatures don't know their true name; a barkeep in a large city could go their whole lifetime not knowing it, and even a powerful sorcerer might never care to discover it. Some people learn their true name so they can safeguard it from others, use it to enhance their own magical practices, or imbue a powerful item with a connection to their soul.

It is commonly understood that knowing a demon's true name gives a person power over that demon; what is not as well known is that this applies to *any* creature. A necromancer wanting to speak to the soul of a long-dead queen is more likely to succeed if he can call her by her secret name. Warding a city against a rampaging dragon is easier if the spellcaster knows the dragon's true name. Binding a demon with a magical ritual might require its true name to have any chance to succeed.

Learning a creature's true name comes with a subtle and instinctive awareness and understanding of that creature, including its strengths and weaknesses. In general, this eases all tasks related to that creature (including attacks, defenses, and interactions) by two steps. In some cases, confronting a creature with knowledge of its true name might be enough to convince it to perform a service without compensation.

A creature doesn't automatically know if someone has learned its true name
### MAGICAL RULES MODULES

(although there is magic that can reveal this knowledge), but they can usually figure out that an informed opponent has some kind of advantage against them and deduce that their secret name is involved.

Learning a true name is difficult and takes time. A character wanting to discover a creature's true name might choose the Uncover a Secret character arc to do so.

### WISHES

In many ways, wishes are the ultimate form of magic—they can literally do anything, which makes them an incredible treasure or reward for characters. However, that open-endedness makes them a problem for GMs who don't know how to evaluate the limits of a wish or handle its effects in the game. Furthermore, many players (particularly "old-school" players) are used to the idea that the wording of a wish must be extremely precise or the creature granting the wish will twist the intent, like "I wish for a bag of gold" granting them ownership of a bag in a faraway dragon's lair, or "I wish for a priceless diamond in my hand" physically embedding the diamond within their hand. Fortunately, wishes don't have to work that way, and the Cypher System has an easy way to determine what a wish can do.

First, consider the source of the wish. Is it granted by a resentful genie who is only doing so because they're compelled by a magic lamp? Or is it a boon from a grateful wizard or god who sincerely wants to reward the character for a service? An angry, reluctant, or otherwise hostile creature may try to twist a wish, but someone favorably disposed toward the character won't (unless the PC tries to take advantage of the situation). Unless the GM's intention is to make the players regret that their characters were offered a wish, it's best to give them what they ask for, as much as it is within the power of the creature to do so. If the GM wants to twist the wish, do so as a GM intrusion that way, the character still gets a reward, and they can either accept the twisted wish (which isn't as good as they had hoped) or pay 1 XP to reject the intrusion (which represents them coming up with airtight wording that can't be twisted).

Second, consider the level of the creature granting the wish-that's basically the level of the wish, as the creature shouldn't be able to grant a boon more powerful than itself. Therefore, it's reasonable that a level 6 creature could create a level 6 effect. The GM could look at the creature's other abilities (or abilities of other creatures of its level), decide if what the PC is asking for is within its power, and either grant the requested wish or adjust the result downward until it's appropriate for the creature's power. In this way, the GM can offer "little wishes" from weak creatures like fairies, enchanted lobsters, and so on, and still have "big wishes" granted by gods and powerful genies.

Another benchmark for a wish's power is to compare it to a cypher of the source's level—if there is a cypher that can do what the PC wants, and that cypher is equal to or less than the source's level, it could be a wish. For example, if the PCs use a wish from a level 5 demon to teleport back to their home city 100 miles away, the GM can look at the list of cyphers and see that a **teleporter (traveler)** cypher can transport one character up to 100 miles per cypher level, so transporting a group of PCs 100 miles is probably within the demon's power.



This section also applies to other abilities that can have multiple effects that are up to the GM's interpretation. Not every wish is called a wish.

Wishing for more wishes doesn't work because a creature shouldn't be able to create something more powerful than itself—at least not without some investment of time and other resources, like a character using XP to acquire an artifact.

Teleporter (traveler), page 398

### CHAPTER 7

# FANTASY RULES MODULES

This chapter is intended for GMs, but gameplay may go more smoothly if the GM tells players to read and understand how these game mechanics work. ven if you discount anything having to do with magic (which we covered in chapter 6), fantasy still has its own conventions: castles and dungeons, treasures guarded by monsters or terrible traps, and so on. This chapter provides guidance and mechanics for handling these elements and situations.

### AWARDING TREASURE

"Treasure" in a fantasy roleplaying game usually means two things: mundane wealth (gold, jewels, land, and so on) and magic. Part of the appeal of being an explorer or adventurer is the opportunity to loot chests full of gold and magic items. It's best to think of gold and magic as two different kinds of currencies that characters have access to.

### GOĻD

Coins, gems, jewelry, trade goods such as silk or spices, and all kinds of things that are valuable but aren't magical fall into the category of mundane wealth or "gold." The Cypher System Rulebook abstracts item costs into general categories inexpensive, moderate, expensive, and so on. Starting characters generally have access to only a few inexpensive and moderate items and perhaps one or two expensive items. In a typical fantasy campaign, the characters should become wealthier as they advance.

There are no hard and fast rules for this wealth advancement, but in effect

the relative cost of the lower categories should become trivial to the characters over time. One way to structure this progression is to say an experienced tier 1 character (partway toward becoming tier 2) shouldn't have to save up to get more arrows, candles, torches, or other inexpensive items, but a moderately priced item might still feel like a big purchase. A tier 2 character should have enough resources to acquire a backpack, lantern, or other moderately priced items whenever they need them, but the cost of an expensive item might be the reason they go adventuring for more gold. A tier 3 character should be able to easily replace an expensive item like a battleaxe or a suit of chainmail, but not a very expensive item. A tier 4 or higher character can afford very expensive items but might never own an exorbitant item.

This is one way of handling gold wealth, but depending on the campaign world and the role of the PCs, there might be a very different setup. In a setting where the PCs are heroes with powers beyond those of normal peasants (and peasants lack the talent to become PCs), by the time the characters reach tier 2, they may already be wealthy, with only nobles having more coin than they do. In a grim fantasy setting, survival might be more of a long-term struggle, and a tier 4 character might be only slightly better off than a starting character.

Chapter 4 presents an alternative method for tracking wealth and

Cyphers are gained with such regularity that the PCs should feel that they can use them freely. There will always be more, and they'll have different benefits.

~Cypher System Rulebook, *page 377* 

equipment costs with specific prices instead of categories. Whichever method the GM uses, the principle is the same: in a typical fantasy campaign, the effective cost of cheaper items becomes trivial. A starting character might carefully keep track of their silver and copper coins, but a higher-tier character probably is a big spender, paying a bartender one gold coin for a one-silver drink and telling them to keep the other nine silver as a tip.

#### **MANIFEST CYPHERS**

Expendable magic items like manifest cyphers are a category perpendicular to the concept of mundane wealth. Most of them are things useful more to adventurers than to regular people, so it's hard to determine a fair sale price for them—a catholicon potion is something a city merchant might want, but a detonation runestone probably isn't. Furthermore, the expectation is that PCs will use cyphers often because they'll have many opportunities to get more; if the players can exploit this mechanic by selling off most of their cyphers in town, they're abusing the rules to make gold. The GM might be tempted to discourage this behavior by reducing how often the PCs gain new cyphers, but that goes against the premise of cyphers in the game: they should be common enough that the PCs use them freely instead of hoarding them.

It bears repeating: characters should have many opportunities to gain replacement cyphers. Some GMs like to keep things lean, with the PCs in their campaign spending long periods of time with few or no cyphers, but that goes against the game's expectation of a high turnover of cyphers. In other words, cyphers shouldn't be scarce, and PCs should spend most of their time close to their cypher limit.

The key to addressing this selling-cyphers wealth problem is to make it harder to sell or trade cyphers for gold. After all, adventurer-focused cyphers aren't usually things that easily fit into the life or economy of a typical community, and most small communities don't have the resources to pay a fair price for them. An adventurer trying to pay for a meal worth 1 gold coin with a healing potion might be able to find an innkeeper willing to accept that as payment, but it's unlikely that the innkeeper will be able to make change for it, nor would they try to compensate for the overpayment with other services. Even if the innkeeper and the PC agree that a healing potion is worth 100 gold coins, the innkeeper probably won't offer the PC a hundred free meals for it-that's just not an acceptable or practical cost for the innkeeper to bear.

The PCs can have opportunities to trade their cyphers with NPCs in town, whether that's at a magic item shop, the tower of a mentor wizard, a thieves' guild, a temple, other adventurers, or the local government. The kinds of cyphers these NPCs can offer may be limited in theme (such as a benevolent church that makes healing potions and trades them for other useful cyphers) or quantity (such as having only one or two cyphers available each month). Two cyphers of the same level are generally considered to be about A GM who wants to keep things lean might want to make manifest cyphers rare, but subtle cyphers common. That way, PCs still have a good roster of cypher abilities, but the number of magic items lying about remains low.

Catholicon, page 385 Detonation, page 386

Magic item shops are a controversial trope in fantasy RPGs that may not be appropriate for some worlds. Some people feel it cheapens the mystery and wonder of magic, others feel it turns magic into a commodity, and some say that large communities would have such shops just as they have other luxury goods stores like jewelers and horse breeders.

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the same value, although local biases and NPC interests may affect their willingness to trade certain items despite or because of a level disparity. For example, a city with a plague outbreak tends to appraise a disease-curing potion as more valuable than an amulet that dissolves metal.

All of the above means that cyphers are treasure for adventurers and it's hard to come up with a gold equivalent for their value. In a pinch, a cypher is probably worth the equivalent of one or two expensive or very expensive items.

It's worth repeating one more time, just so this is extra clear: *characters should have many opportunities to gain replacement cyphers*. Reducing access to replacement cyphers is like reducing the number of recovery rolls characters get each day. You can play the game that way, but it's a more difficult play style than what the game is expecting.

#### ARTIFACTS

Artifacts are the high end of magical currency, and in terms of buying and selling them, they're like manifest cyphers: not something a typical NPC can use, and beyond what a typical NPC can afford, but they could be traded for a different artifact of about the same level.

Unlike cyphers, the game doesn't assume that PCs have frequent opportunities to gain new artifacts or replace the ones that deplete. But artifacts—magic items—are fun for players when they're in the hands of the PCs, and fun for GMs when players use them creatively. A good rule of thumb for a typical fantasy campaign is to make sure that each PC ends up with their own artifact somewhere in tier 2 or 3, a second artifact by tier 4 or 5, and perhaps a third one by tier 6. If an artifact depletes, the GM can use that as an opportunity to place another interesting artifact in the



### FANTASY RULES MODULES

character's path, or wait a while before bringing another one into the game so the player gets over the loss and can fully appreciate having a new artifact.

The GM should understand that the selection of artifacts in the Cypher System Rulebook and chapter 12 of this book is just the start-there are many, many other magical items from myths, legends, stories, and other RPGs that could be written up as artifacts. The GM should also keep in mind that artifacts don't have to be over-the-top impressive items like a staff that shoots fireballs, a flying ship, or demonic armor. Sometimes it's enough for an artifact to grant an asset on a particular kind of task-attack rolls for a weapon, Speed defense for armor, a skill for a ring, and so on. Some characters prefer quiet utilitarian items over flashy items. It's also fair for a character to have two weak artifacts even though a different PC in the same group has one strong one. Most of the time, it's not a question of what level the item is or how powerful it is, but whether the item is suitable for the character and the player is happy that they have it.

In a pinch, an artifact is worth the equivalent of one or two very expensive items or one exorbitant item, depending on what the artifact can do. An artifact that grants an asset to one kind of roll is probably worth about as much as a very expensive item, one that adds +1 Armor might be worth two expensive items, and a strong defensive or offensive artifact could be worth about the same as an exorbitant item.

### DUNGEONS, CASTLES, AND KEEPS

Fantasy characters are often sneaking or breaking into homes, forts, castles, and dungeons. When they encounter an obstacle such as a door or an inconveniently placed wall, there is often the temptation to destroy it instead of going around it or finding a gentler way to proceed, even though these attempts are noisy and take time. The PCs might also encounter traps and other dangers. This section describes several kinds of common physical features and their game stats. Any of these levels can be adjusted up or down by the GM—a wall made from soft wood can have a lower level than a typical wall, stone can be reinforced by magic so its level is higher, and so on.

### WAĻĻS

Walls are generally either constructed (intentionally built by a creature) or natural (already existing without any work by a creature). Anything describing walls in this section also applies to ceilings and floors.

**Paper wall (level 1):** This thin wall only blocks sight. Creatures can attack through a paper wall as if attacking blindly (hindered by four steps), but it's usually easier to break a hole in the wall and attack through the hole. Paper walls are vulnerable to piercing and slashing weapons (attacks are eased). A gauzy curtain is equivalent to a paper wall, and a cloth wall is probably level 2.

**Wooden wall (level 4):** This is a typical wall for an average wooden house. The walls of a decrepit shack or a partition within a dungeon might be only level 2 or 3, but the exterior palisade wall of a fort or a log cabin might be level 5.

Wooden walls are vulnerable to fire (attacks with fire are eased) but resistant to bashing and piercing weapons (attacks are hindered).

**Stone wall (level 6):** Constructed stone walls are bricks or masonry (fitted stones), with or without mortar to hold them in place, or hewn stone (dug into existing natural rock). Natural stone walls are usually unworked stone (like a cave wall or cliff face, which tend to be uneven)



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but might have areas where creatures smoothed or modified them to suit their needs for a living space.

Some constructed stone walls are reinforced with metal bars on the surface or built inside, increasing its level to 7.

Stone walls are vulnerable to piercing weapons (attacks are eased) but resistant to bashing and slashing weapons (attacks are hindered).

**Iron wall (level 7):** These expensive walls are usually reserved for protecting something important, like a vault.

#### DOORS

Doors are access points for encounters and (if trapped or infested with dangerous creatures) can be encounters all on their own. In most cases, trying to break through a door involves damaging its latch or hinges rather than destroying the main portion of the door (trying to destroy the door instead of the latch and hinges is a hindered task).

**Simple wooden door (level 2):** This is a fragile door meant to close off an interior space for privacy rather than to keep out a determined intruder. Instead of a single piece of wood, a simple wooden door is usually made of multiple planks nailed together on a frame or with support struts.

Wooden doors of all strengths are vulnerable to fire (attacks with fire are eased) but resistant to bashing and piercing weapons (attacks are hindered).

**Good wooden door (level 3):** This is a stronger door meant to provide some security, such as for a typical house or shop.

**Strong wooden door (level 4):** This is a heavy door reinforced with wood or metal to make it difficult to break. An especially strong wooden door, such as the main entrance to a fort or castle, is probably level 5.

**Stone door (level 5):** These heavy doors are usually carved from a solid block of stone

and designed to pivot on a center point. They are common in places like dungeons where wood and metal are scarce.

Stone doors are vulnerable to piercing weapons (attacks are eased) but resistant to bashing and slashing weapons (attacks are hindered).

**Iron door (level 6):** A solid iron door is meant to protect something very valuable or vulnerable, such as a vault or a king's tomb. In a damp environment like a dungeon, they tend to rust and stick in place.

Wooden portcullis (level 3): The gaps in a portcullis present more defense opportunities than a door, such as allowing archers to fire at the creatures trapped by it. They're also useful in closing access to a waterway without impacting its flow. A wooden portcullis is relatively fragile and usually isn't meant to keep anyone out for long.

**Iron portcullis (level 6):** Much sturdier than wood, an iron portcullis is meant to keep creatures in place as long as necessary. Often the best way to get past a portcullis is to lift it instead of breaking it, but some are designed to lock in place to prevent this. A door to a prison cell is essentially a type of iron portcullis.

### <u>TRAPS</u>

One common element of fantasy exploration—particularly for castles and dungeons—is the danger of traps. Hidden crossbows, trapdoors in the floor that open to reveal a spiked pit, exploding magical glyphs, and poison needles in locks are common ways that people (and monsters) try to make things difficult for invaders and thieves.

### TRIGGERING TRAPS

Mechanical traps have a triggering mechanism—something set up to react when an unauthorized creature is in the area. The most common mechanisms are

A secret door might be a simple wooden door with concealed hinges, covered in plaster and painted to match its surroundings.



### FINDING TRAPS

Most characters won't notice traps unless actively looking for them; they don't know a trap is in the area until their presence, movement, or action triggers it. Characters can passively or actively search for traps if they suspect such dangers are present.

Passive searching for traps means one character (usually in the front of the group) is carefully checking the area before moving forward. This means the group moves at about half normal speed, but they get to make a search roll for any traps the GM has in their path. Allowing characters to passively search in this way means the players don't have to keep stating over and over that they're looking for traps. The drawback for them is that it takes them more time to get anywhere (which means time-based special abilities and cyphers will run out sooner).

Active searching is used when the characters worry or suspect that there is a trap in the area and want to find it. Active searching takes about one round for each immediate area searched. Rather than having the players make separate rolls for each immediate area, the GM should have them make one roll for the entire room; if successful, they find the trap, and if they fail, they don't find it. If there is a second trap, the GM can have them make another roll after they've resolved the first trap.

No matter how well built or well concealed a trap is, searching characters should have a chance to find it. For example, a dungeon might have a sturdy door with an axe on a hinge on the far side so that when the door is pulled open, the axe swings through the doorway and hits the character who opened the door. Even though it's possible to build such a trap so there's no obvious evidence of its existence on the near side of the door, give the character a chance to find it if they're searching for traps. It might be a step or two more difficult than normal, but it should be possible. Perhaps a successful search roll means that instead of finding a trap mechanism, the PC gets a "sixth sense" or hunch that there's something dangerous about the door. If the GM wants a trap to affect the PCs without a roll, they should use a GM intrusion to spring the undiscovered trap.

pressure plates (something a character steps on or presses) and tripwires (an easy-to-miss wire, usually around ankle height). Depending on how the trap is constructed, it might activate when the mechanism is triggered (such as by stepping on a trapped floor tile) or when the trigger is released (such as by lifting the weight off a floor tile after it has been stepped on). A devious trapmaker might place an interesting heavy object (such as a treasure chest) on a pressure plate so the trap springs when intruders release the pressure on the trigger by moving or lightening the object. Some traps are activated when a creature uses a device

in the intended fashion (such as opening a trapped door), and others combine the trigger and trap into one unit (such as a false floor that breaks when stepped on to dump the intruder into a pit).

Magical traps have triggers that are usually based on proximity—if a creature enters the area the trap is "watching," it activates. Some magical traps automatically allow safe passage for certain kinds of creatures (such as a dark elf in a trapped temple where dark elves live), those wearing a specific insignia (such as a bloodstone amulet), or those who speak a magic word before they approach the trap. Multiple searching rolls in the same general area doesn't add to the excitement or tension of playing—it just uses up game time.

In other words, if the GM wants a trap that can't be found with searching, it should be a GM intrusion.

Even if a trap has a magical trigger, a character searching for it should have a chance of finding it. Rather than finding a physical mechanism, they might notice a faint rune scratched or painted on the floor, sense energy building in the air, or just have a hunch that there's a threat in the area.

### DISABL, ING, DAMAGING, AND BYPASSING TRAPS

A character can attempt to disable a trap so it's no longer able to activate or harm anyone. Normally this task has the same difficulty as the trap's level, but some traps are rickety and easy to disable, while others are carefully crafted and much harder to disable.

Object Damage Track, page 116

Attacking Objects, page 223 Traps are objects and use the object damage track. Characters can attack a trap with weapons or special abilities to damage or destroy it. Some traps may be vulnerable to certain attacks or unusual means of sabotage (such as hammering a piton into a groove where a blade springs out). Magical traps can be damaged or disabled with special abilities. Instead of disabling a trap, a character can try to bypass it so they and their allies can get past it without triggering it but still leave it as a danger to anyone else who passes through the area. The task to bypass a trap is hindered by two steps.

Failing an attempt to disable, bypass, or sabotage a trap means it activates. Usually the trap's target is the acting character, and the trap's attack is eased because the character placed themselves in harm's way.

Unless a character has the ability to manipulate magic, it's very difficult to bypass a magical trap (the attempt is hindered by two additional steps). Most explorers find a way to trigger a magical trap from a safe distance or disable it entirely rather than trying to bypass it.

### **COMMON TRAP GM INTRUSIONS**

Some GM intrusions are common to many kinds of traps. The GM should feel free to use any of the following as a GM intrusion for a trap.

**Creatures:** The trap attracts the notice of nearby hostile creatures who arrive in a couple of rounds, or said creatures are intentionally part of the trap (a pit trap drops characters into a room full of snakes, the space behind a deadfall is full of zombies, and so on).

**Delay:** The trap does something (perhaps something only the characters hear, like a grinding gear noise behind the walls), stops for a few rounds, then fully activates just as the characters assume that it was a dud or false alarm.

**Illusion:** An important part of the trap is concealed by an illusion, such as an illusory floor over an open pit trap or the illusion of a statue covering a crossbow trap. Destroying, disabling, or bypassing the trap requires realizing that an illusion is present.

**Lasting Damage:** Some aspect of the trap inflicts lasting damage on the attacked character, such as disabling a hand, foot, or eye; breaking a bone; or causing a concussion.

**Noisy:** The trap makes a lot of noise. The characters must make a Might defense roll or be deafened for a few minutes (which might play into a sound-based trap later). Creatures living in the area recognize the sound and know that it means intruders are present.

**Poison:** In addition to its primary effect, the trap includes poison, perhaps on an arrow, a scything blade, or gas in a spiked pit. If the trap is already poisoned, this intrusion might increase the difficulty or require an additional defense roll.

**Secondary Trap:** Another trap activates, either doing the same thing or having a separate effect that complicates the situation of the first trap (a pit trap starts to fill with live spiders, an oily surface catches on fire, and so on).

**Surprise:** The trap was so well hidden that the character didn't realize it was there, or it was built so well that it activates despite the character trying to stop it.





### UNDERSTANDING THE LISTINGS

The rest of the chapter presents a large number of traps with game stats. Every trap is presented by name, followed by a standard template that includes the following categories. If an entry doesn't apply to a particular trap, it is omitted from the listing.

**Level:** Like the difficulty of a task, each trap has a level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to find, evade, or disable the trap. In each entry, the difficulty number for the trap is listed after its level (always three times the trap's level).

**Description:** This general description explains what the trap does, how it operates, whether it resets automatically, if it has a limited number of uses, and so on.

**Damage Inflicted:** Generally, when a trap hits a creature, it inflicts its level in damage regardless of the form of attack (arrow, poison, collapsing ceiling, and so on). The entries always specify the

amount of damage inflicted, even if it's the normal amount for a trap of its level.

**Modifications:** Use these numbers when a trap's information says to use a different target number. For example, a level 4 trap might say "defends as level 5," which means PCs attacking it or trying to disable it must roll a target number of 15 (for difficulty 5) instead of 12 (for difficulty 4). Typical modifiers are to the trap's attacks, defenses, and stealth (how hard or easy it is to notice the trap).

**GM Intrusion:** This entry suggests one or more ways to use GM intrusions in an encounter with the trap. It's just one possible idea of many, and the GM is encouraged to come up with their own uses of the game mechanic. The stats given here are typical examples of traps; the GM can set the level and damage higher or lower as needed for a particular group of PCs.

Characters can become trained or specialized in the traps skill, which applies to all tasks dealing with traps (including defending against them).

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### **COMMON TRAP POISONS**

**Blindness:** The poison blinds the creature if they fail a defense roll. Typical durations are one minute, ten minutes, and one hour.

**Choking:** The poison makes the creature choke and cough if they fail a defense roll. Typical durations are one minute, ten minutes, and one hour. Severe versions of choking poison might make a creature start to suffocate.

**Damage Track:** The poison moves the creature down one step on the damage track if they fail a defense roll.

**Debilitating:** The poison hinders all of the creature's actions by one or two steps if they fail a defense roll. (Some poisons may affect only certain kinds of actions, such as Speed defense rolls or Might-based tasks.) Typical durations are ten minutes, one hour, and ten hours.

**Instant Damage:** The poison inflicts damage (Might, Speed, or Intellect) one time if the creature fails a defense roll.

**Ongoing Damage:** The poison inflicts damage (Might, Speed, or Intellect) immediately. When a certain amount of time has passed (such as every round or every minute), it inflicts damage again if the creature fails its defense roll. The ongoing damage usually ends on its own (such as after five additional rounds of damage) or after the creature makes a defense roll against it. Usually the ongoing damage is a much smaller amount than the initial damage, such as 1 point every round.

**Paralysis:** The poison prevents the creature from taking any physical actions if they fail a defense roll (this might leave them standing in place like a statue, or make them go limp and collapse to the floor). Typical durations are ten minutes, one hour, and ten hours.

**Sleep:** The poison knocks the creature unconscious if they fail a defense roll. Typical durations are ten minutes, one hour, and ten hours. The poison might also make the creature groggy, hindering all actions for an additional amount of time equal to how long the unconsciousness would have lasted (for example, knocking out a creature for an hour and then making them groggy for an hour, even if they're awakened early).





### FANTASY RULES MODULES

#### ARROW

Fires an arrow or crossbow bolt. The simplest one-use trap of this kind is an actual crossbow (perhaps hidden behind a hole in a wall or door) rigged with a tripwire to pull the trigger; a creature would need to manually reset this trap for it to be a danger again. More complex traps might automatically reload from a supply of bolts so the trap can be triggered multiple times, or fire automatically once triggered until the ammunition is expended.

A variant of this trap releases a volley of arrows into the targeted area, affecting multiple creatures or the same creature more than once.

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

**Modifications:** Defense and stealth as level 6 (if hidden behind a hole in the wall)

**GM Intrusion:** The arrow is barbed, and removing it inflicts 3 points of damage. The arrow is attached to a string, cord, or wire, with the other end tied to something dangerous like a falling block or an electrical shock.

#### CRUSHING WALL

A section of a wall falls over onto the targeted character. This is usually a one-use trap (although a similar trap could be built in its place).

A variant of this trap is a deadfall, where something heavy (such as a log, huge stone block, or cart full of rocks) falls from a higher position onto the character. Sometimes the falling block is made to exactly fit a trapped corridor so that triggering the trap makes the area impassible.

A less lethal variant drops a large amount of sand or dirt, inflicting 3 points of ambient damage (ignores Armor). Another variant releases oil (perhaps burning) or marbles, inflicting 3 points of ambient damage and making the area difficult terrain.

4 [12]

Damage Inflicted: 6 points (ignores Armor)

**GM Intrusion:** The fallen wall blocks access to an exit. The wall debris buries the character, who is trapped until they can dig free. Another trap, hazard, or threat is behind the fallen wall (such as arrow traps or a room full of zombies) and can now reach the characters.

#### DISINTEGRATION

A magical ray of eerie energy blasts the character, disrupting their physical matter. Any creature killed by the ray (or any object destroyed by it) turns to dust.

Damage Inflicted: 15 points

**GM Intrusion:** In addition to inflicting damage, the ray moves the character one step down the damage track. Part of the ray splits or ricochets off the character and strikes a second creature, inflicting 10 points of damage.

#### EXPLOSIVE GLYPH

6 (18)

A magical rune activates when touched or passed over, exploding in an immediate or short area. Typical glyphs inflict acid, cold, electricity, or fire damage, but more unusual versions include ones that inflict holy, shadow, thorn, unholy, or stranger types of magical energy damage.

A nonmagical variant of this trap sprays a mist of acid, a jet of electrified salt water, or a gout of burning oil.

**Damage Inflicted:** 4 points of energy damage (ignores Armor); all creatures in the area take 1 point of damage even if they make their defense roll.

Modifications: Stealth as level 5

**GM Intrusion:** The glyph marks the character's face with a symbol indicating they are a thief. The glyph makes the character run away in fear for one minute. The character is cursed, and all of their actions are hindered until the curse is removed.

Traps should always be exciting surprises (GM intrusions work great for this). They shouldn't be so frequent that the PCs feel the need to search and check everything they come upon, because that gets dull quickly.

7 (21)

4 [12]

Difficult terrain, page 224

#### FLOODING ROOM

Exits to the room close off and the area starts to fill with water. Within a few minutes, the entire room is flooded and creatures in it begin to drown.

A variant of this room reduces the air pressure (either by pumping it out through tiny holes or by retracting the floor or ceiling). As the air gets thinner, characters are hindered by one, two, or three steps before falling unconscious and starting to suffocate. (Restoring the air allows the characters to awaken, but doesn't move them back up the damage track.)

Damage Inflicted: None until drowning starts

Modifications: Defends as level 7 GM Intrusion: Hostile creatures such as piranhas or electric eels are in the water and attack all creatures. The room fills with water faster than expected because the floor and/or ceiling are also moving toward each other.

3 (9)

A small hole in the wall extends sharp blades or weights when a creature reaches into it, mangling their hand and hindering all actions requiring that hand by one or two steps.

A floor variant is a small trapdoor over a closed compartment, which mangles the character's foot when they step on the trapdoor, reducing their movement speed by half.

Another variant is a needle trap attached to a small peephole or spyhole in a door or wall. The trap springs when the character touches the area around the hole (even a slight touch with their face as they look is sufficient), inflicting lasting damage to the character's eye and partially blinding them.

A gentler variant traps the character's limb in glue instead of inflicting damage. The character's extremity might be glued to the hole, or they may be able to pull free but have a glue pot stuck on their hand or foot.

**Damage Inflicted:** 3 points, plus lasting damage

Modifications: Stealth as level 4 GM Intrusion: The trap has hooks, holding the character in place and inflicting damage when they try to escape if they fail a Speed defense roll. The glue attracts a swarm of fire ants or wasps. The glue is also a slow-acting acid or poison.

#### NET

4 [12]

A net suspended above the character drops and constricts (and perhaps lifts the character off the ground). Large net traps can affect multiple creatures at once. This kind of trap usually requires a creature to manually reset it.

3 (9)

4 [12]

A variant of this trap is a snare made of sturdy cord or wire.

**Damage Inflicted:** Entanglement (trapped character cannot move until they use an action to make a Might or Speed defense roll to break or escape the net)

**Modifications:** Attacks as level 5, defends as level 2

**GM Intrusion:** The net is barbed, inflicting 1 point of damage each round that the trapped character tries to move. The net is the nesting place for biting **insects**, which swarm and attack the trapped character and all nearby creatures each round.

#### PIT

A trapdoor in the floor opens, dropping the triggering character into a pit. Larger versions of this trap can catch multiple characters at once. The trap can be reset by moving the trapdoor back into its closed position. In outdoor areas, this trap is more likely to be a pit covered in leafy branches (or a tarp) and camouflaged by soil and other debris.

A variant of this trap is a bridge over a chasm, river, or other dangerous location

#### Fire ant or wasp swarm: level 1

A creature that has run out of air must make a Might defense roll each round or move down one step on the damage track; the difficulty starts at 1 and increases by 1 each round.

#### Piranha swarm: level 3

Electric eel swarm: level 3; bite inflicts 2 points of damage plus 1 point of electricity damage (ignores Armor)

MANGLER

Insect swarm: level 1

An obvious, open pit isn't a trap, just an obstacle.



### FANTASY RULES MODULES

that is rigged to collapse when enough weight reaches the middle section.

**Damage Inflicted:** 1 point of ambient damage per 10 feet fallen (ignores Armor)

**GM Intrusion:** The trapdoor is slippery with oil, hindering attempts to catch the edge and avoid falling. The trapdoor closes after the character falls through, trapping them inside in the darkness. The walls of the pit are greased, hindering attempts to climb out by two steps. A dangerous creature is at the bottom of the pit (or in a room adjacent to it). The pit is filled with poison gas. The trapdoor detaches and falls into the pit, inflicting 1 point of ambient damage per 10 feet it falls. The pit has spikes at the bottom, inflicting an additional 4 points of damage to anyone who falls in.

#### POISON GAS

The area slowly fills with poison gas. Because it takes a minute or more for the poison to become thick enough to cause harm, it is likely that the character won't realize at first that they've sprung a trap.

3 (9)

A variant of this trap fills the room with flammable gas, which explodes if there is an open flame (such as from a torch) or a spark (such as a metal weapon against metal armor), inflicting fire damage equal to the trap's level. A further variant fills the room with dead air (containing no oxygen), which slowly extinguishes flames and suffocates creatures.

Damage Inflicted: As poison Modifications: Stealth as level 5

**GM Intrusion:** The character has an allergic reaction to the gas, which hinders all their actions for an hour after exposure because of sneezing, watery eyes, or itchy skin. The gas makes the character hallucinate, mistaking their companions for enemies, until they make an Intellect defense roll. The gas is flammable.

#### POISON NEEDLE

A poisoned needle jabs at a character touching the trapped object (usually a lock or treasure chest) or is fired from a mechanism similar to an arrow trap. It may have a reservoir of poison that allows it to attack several times.

Damage Inflicted: 1 point (plus poison) Modifications: Stealth as level 6 GM Intrusion: The trap releases acid into the lock mechanism, making the trapped object impossible to unlock. The trap releases acid into the container, destroying some of the valuables inside. The trap releases a puff of poison gas instead of a poisoned needle, affecting all nearby characters.





### PORTCULLIS

An iron portcullis drops from the ceiling to block access to an area or separate a character from others nearby. If the creature dodging the falling portcullis wants to choose which side of the trap they end up on, the Speed defense roll is hindered. Otherwise, it is even chances what side they end up on.

A variant of this trap is a solid wall. A magical variant is a force field.

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

**CM Intrusion:** The portcullis impales the character, trapping them beneath it until it is lifted or destroyed. The portcullis is electrified, inflicting 1 point of damage each time it is touched or attacked with flesh or a metal object. A second portcullis drops nearby, trapping a character in a small area. Murder-holes in the ceiling allow enemies to make ranged attacks on the trapped character.

### ROLLING BOULDER

5 (15)

A large boulder, wheel, or barrel rolls into the area, crushing anything in its path. Depending on the configuration of the area, the boulder might follow a specific path, ricochet erratically, break open pit traps, or get stuck somewhere.

6 (18)

A variant is a large iron weight on a chain that swings from the ceiling. The weight swings back and forth several times, giving it multiple chances to hit the characters, but decreasing its damage with each swing until it stops and becomes an obstacle.

Damage Inflicted: 6 points Modifications: Defends as level 7

**GM Intrusion:** The boulder crashes through a door or wall, giving other dangerous creatures access to the character's location. The boulder blocks the way out. The boulder carries a character along with it for some distance. The boulder is hollow and full of burning oil, leaving a fiery trail behind it. The boulder is hollow and contains undead skeletons, which jump out as it moves and attack nearby creatures.



### FANTASY RULES MODULES

### SLICING BLADE

A thin blade slices out from a gap in the wall, floor, or ceiling. The trap might be designed to sweep the entire area (such as the width of a corridor) or leave a tiny safe space just beyond the blade's reach so a creature who knows of the trap can get past it. This kind of trap is usually designed to reset automatically after a minute or has a lever nearby that allows a creature to reset it manually.

Damage Inflicted: 5 points Modifications: Attacks as level 6

**GM Intrusion:** The blade is a magical weapon with an additional effect, such as inflicting 3 points of fire damage. The blade is rusted and breaks off when it hits the character, inflicting 1 point of damage (ignores Armor) each round after the initial attack until it is healed.

#### sliding stair

4 (12)

4 [12]

5 (15)

A stairway or section of stairs unexpectedly turns into a ramp. Anyone who makes a Speed defense roll can catch hold near where they were standing; otherwise, they slide or tumble to the bottom and take damage. This kind of trap usually resets after a minute or has a manual reset lever at the top or bottom of the stairs.

**Damage Inflicted:** 1 point of ambient damage per 20 feet slid (ignores Armor)

**GM Intrusion:** The trap releases oil, hindering attempts to climb the ramp or stairs by two steps. Tiny blades stick out between the sections of the ramp, inflicting an additional 3 points of damage. The trap releases a boulder to roll down the stairs after the sliding character, inflicting an additional 3 points of damage.

#### SNAKE PIT

The trap drops the character into a pit full of snakes or drops a large number of snakes on the character. The snakes immediately attack the character and perhaps others in the area.

Damage Inflicted: As per the swarm of snakes

**GM Intrusion:** The snake poison is especially potent, moving the character one step down the damage track if they fail a Might defense roll. The snakes constrict the character, hindering their actions until the snakes are defeated.

#### SPEAR

The trap fires a spear, javelin, or other large projectile. (In many ways, this is a scaled-up and more dangerous version of an arrow trap, and the same suggestions for that trap apply to this one.)

Damage Inflicted: 6 points Modifications: Defense and stealth as level 5 (if hidden behind a hole in a wall)

**GM Intrusion:** The impact of the spear knocks the character prone. The spear is barbed, and removing it inflicts 3 points of damage. The spear is attached to a string, cord, or wire, with the other end tied to something dangerous like a falling block or an electrical shock.

#### TELEPORTER

The trap magically moves the character to another location within about 1,000 feet (300 m), typically a prison cell, an oubliette, or a very deep pit. It's more efficient to kill an intruder than to teleport them, so teleportation is usually reserved for trapping creatures for interrogation.

Damage Inflicted: None

**GM Intrusion:** The teleport destination is above the ground, causing the character to fall some distance and take damage (1 point of ambient damage per 10 feet fallen). The destination is dangerous, such as a tiny room lined with spikes, a shark tank, or a boulder in a lava lake. Swarm of snakes: level 4; bites inflict 6 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor)

Arrow trap, page 81

#### 6 (18)

4 [12]

Lava, page 217

### **CHAPTER 8**

# FANTASY SPECIES

Species Descriptors, page 258

Descriptor, page 38

he Cypher System Rulebook presents common fantasy humanoids such as dwarves and elves as options for a character's species. For many fantasy worlds, there is a plethora of sapient creatures suitable for player characters. Here we present additional options, which a player can choose for their character in place of their descriptor.

### <u>CATFOLK</u>

You are unmistakably feline. Your people have fur; large, pointed ears; sharp teeth and claws; and even tails. You are nimble, graceful, and quick. An ancient and sophisticated culture, your people have their own language, customs, and traditions developed in relative seclusion over the centuries. Neither conquerors nor conquered, the success of your society has come from the fact that you have given most others a wide berth. As a

### VARIANT RULE: TWO DESCRIPTORS

By having dwarf, elf, or other species take the place of a character's descriptor, it creates a situation where only human characters have the variability of choosing a descriptor that suits their personality. The GM might instead allow all human characters to have two descriptors, and nonhuman characters to have a standard descriptor in addition to their species descriptor. For example, Shanna might play a Clever Clumsy (human) Warrior and Bruce might play a Graceful Elf Explorer.

If a human character has two descriptors, one might represent their cultural heritage and the other their personal inclinations. For example, people from an isolationist human city may have Guarded as their descriptor, but a specific human from that city might also be Inquisitive. A human kingdom ruled by benevolent wizards might have Learned citizens, but an individual from that realm might still be Foolish (despite their Learned background).

Sometimes contradictory descriptors might weaken or negate each other's benefits and drawbacks. If one descriptor gives training in a skill and another gives an inability in that skill, they cancel each other out and the character doesn't have any modifier for that skill at all.

Having two descriptors means that the PCs in that campaign are slightly more powerful than in games where everyone gets only one descriptor. The difference is usually only a couple of steps in the character advancement path (comparable to getting slightly ahead of a character who missed a few sessions and hasn't acquired as much XP as the rest of the group) and shouldn't have much of an impact on their ability to overcome in-game challenges.

### FANTASY SPECIES

people, you almost never get involved in wars or similar matters, which has given other cultures the idea that you are aloof, unapproachable, or mysterious. As long as they leave you alone, what they think is fine with you.

You gain the following characteristics:

Agile: +4 to your Speed Pool.

**Skill:** You are trained in climbing and balance tasks.

**Bared Claws:** Even unarmed, your claws are light weapons that inflict 4 points of damage.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You were curious as to what the other PCs were up to.

2. You needed to get out of town, and the PCs were going in the same direction as you.

3. You are interested in making a profit, and the other PCs seem to have a lead on doing just that.

4. It seemed like a lark.

### DRAGONFOLK

You have scales, fangs, claws, and magic—gifts of the dragons. You might have been born of dragonfolk parents, willingly transformed in a magical ceremony, or chosen by a dragon to be their agent or champion. You have a great destiny before you, but it is your choice whether to make it your own or bend to the will of those who made you what you are. Some people mistrust or fear you, and others consider you a prophet or wish to exploit your power for their own goals.

You gain the following characteristics: **Sturdy:** +2 to your Might Pool. **Skill:** You are trained in intimidation.

### **DESCRIPTOR AS SPECIES**

If a player wants to play a nearly human species without any exceptional or unique special abilities, it's easy for a GM to pick an appropriate descriptor and use it as that species' descriptor. A greyhound-like species might have the Fast descriptor. A leprechaunlike species might have the Lucky descriptor. A stone-skinned humanoid species might have the Resilient descriptor. A half-elf might have the Appealing, Exiled, or Graceful descriptor. A half-orc might have the Brash, Hardy, or Vicious descriptor. **Dragonbreath (3 Might points):** You breathe out a blast of energy in an immediate area. Choose one type of energy (arcane, cold, fire, thorn, and so on); the blast inflicts 2 points of damage of this kind of energy (ignores Armor) to all creatures or objects within the area. Because this is an area attack, adding Effort to increase your damage works differently than it does for single-target attacks. If you apply a level of Effort to increase the damage, add 2 points of damage for each target, and even if you fail your attack roll, all targets in the area still take 1 point of damage. Action.

**Draconic Resistance:** You gain +2 Armor against the type of energy you create with your dragonbreath.

Scaly: +1 to Armor.

**Inability:** You have difficulty relating to non-dragons. Tasks to persuade non-dragons are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.



1. You believe the other PCs can help you solve a mystery about your heritage.

2. You needed to get out of town, and the PCs were going in the same direction as you.

3. Your creator, master, or mentor told you to help the PCs.

4. You want to make a name for yourself, and the other PCs seem competent and compatible.

### GNOME

You are curious and love discovering ways to turn found things into art, tools, or weapons. You might be a sculptor, smith, artist, chef, storyteller, or inventor. Alchemy, magic, and engineering fascinate you. Other beings may see you as a strange mix of a nature-loving elf and a craft-obsessed dwarf, but you and your kind are unique people with a passion for life, exploration, and creation.

You gain the following characteristics: **Genius:** +2 to your Intellect Pool.

**Skill:** You are trained in two skills that suit your creative nature, such as alchemy, smithing, poetry, cooking, woodcarving, or pottery.

**Skill:** You are practiced in using hammers. **Natural Affinity:** You gain one of the following abilities: Communication, Eyes Adjusted, or Minor Illusion.

**Inability:** Your small size makes some physical tasks difficult. Might-based tasks are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a bag of light tools or a bag of heavy tools.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You think an object or material you've been looking for can be found where the other PCs are going.

2. You were recruited because of your knowledge on a particular subject.

Practiced, page 207 Communication,

Eyes Adjusted, page 138

Minor Illusion, page 162

page 121

### FANTASY SPECIES

3. You were bored and it sounded like the PCs were going to do something interesting.

4. You owe one of the PCs a favor for a useful gift in the past.

### HALFLING

Three feet tall and proud, you are fond of the comforts of home but itching for a little adventure now and then. Small and quick, you have a way of getting along with everyone. You might have been raised in a halfling village, a mixed community where humans and the small folk work and eat side by side as friends, or a less welcoming environment where your people get things done using deception and criminal activity. You and humans have a lot in common—you're just more compact and efficient about it.

You gain the following characteristics:

Agile: +2 to your Speed Pool.

**Skill:** You are trained in pleasant social interactions.

**Skill:** You are trained in stealth.

**Skill:** You are trained in Intellect defense. **Advantage:** When you use 1 XP to reroll a d20 for any roll that affects only you, add 3 to the reroll.

**Inability:** Your small size makes some physical tasks difficult. Might-based tasks are hindered.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You were fleeing someone and literally ran into the other PCs.

2. You were invited (or invited yourself) as a good luck charm.

3. You were tricked into going with the other PCs or were brought along despite your very reasonable objections.

4. You're very protective of another PC and want to make sure they get through the upcoming challenges.

### <u>Lizardfolk</u>

You are from a long line of fierce reptilian predators. You show your fangs and scales proudly. Your people survive and thrive in the wetlands, guarding their eggs, raising their hatchlings, and protecting their territory. City-builders may call you a savage and your culture primitive, but there is grace in your hunting, artistry in your crafting, joy in your songs, and reverence in your worship.

You gain the following characteristics: **Agile:** +2 to your Speed Pool.

**Skill:** You are trained in balancing, jumping, and swimming.

**Skill:** You are trained in hunting and tracking.

**Skill:** You are practiced in using javelins and spears.

Scaly: +1 to Armor.

**Inability:** Your slightly clawed hands make fine detail work difficult. You have an inability with picking locks, picking pockets, and other manual dexterity tasks (but not crafting).

Additional Equipment: You have a spear and a pair of javelins.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The other PCs were lost in your territory and you were sent to escort them out.

2. Something has been attacking your community and you want to find and destroy it.

3. You were exiled from your community and need to prove your worthiness before you can return to it.

4. You or your priest had a vision of you traveling with the other PCs.

Lizardfolk native to desert or jungle environments instead of wetlands may be trained in climbing instead of swimming.

If you change the training in Intellect defense to Speed defense, you could use the halfling descriptor for a classic fantasy goblin.

### CHAPTER 9

# CYPHER SHORTS

### <u>TAVERN BRAWL</u>

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

For directions on how to run a Cypher Short, as well as information on the types, descriptors, and foci, please visit this link and download the free Cypher Shorts PDF: mymcg.info/cyphershorts

No one has any special equipment that they wouldn't have in a tavern. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.



Sheriff and her recruited helpers: level 3; health 12; Armor 1



**The Premise:** The characters are just looking to get a drink or working their shift at a tavern in a low-magic fantasy setting when a fight breaks out. But the fight serves as a distraction for all sorts of larger goings-on.

### CHARACTER CREATION

Characters can be "adventurers" or just normal people—some might even be employees of the tavern. This Cypher Short is assumed to be a low-magic setting, so none of the characters use magic and all are human. Character suggestions include:

**Warrior:** This is probably someone with the Performing Physical Actions type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and what weapons they favor. They should also decide if they're an adventurer or mercenary looking for a drink between adventurers or a bouncer who works in the tavern. They have their weapons and probably some light armor.

**Entertainer:** The Talking type would work well for this character. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and what sort of entertaining they do (sings, recites epic poems, tells jokes, plays the lute). They have whatever they need for their performance—and perhaps a hidden weapon, because tavern brawls aren't that uncommon.

**Thief:** This is probably someone with the Sneaking type. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and why they're in the tavern (perhaps just for a drink, to meet a contact, or to pick patrons' pockets). They have a dagger, some lockpicks, and a large (empty) bag. **Local:** This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name, brief personality, and profession. They have little in the way of equipment, although someone whose job involves tools might have them.

**Waitstaff:** This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name and brief personality. They have a key to the storeroom and intimate knowledge of the place and even many of the patrons.

### THE SETUP

The characters are all at the Muscled Moose tavern one night. It's a crowded evening, and the stewpot over the fire in the hearth is already half empty. Ale and harder drinks flow freely.

The tavern is a simple wooden and stone structure, with a large taproom with a hearth and a bar, a back room that serves as a kitchen with a back entrance, and a locked storeroom. The waitstaff (and a Warrior who is a bouncer) know that there are weapons and medical supplies in the storeroom.

Other facts:

- As it is late at night, the local sheriff will take at least fifteen minutes to round up help to come in and shut the brawl down.
- When the brawl begins, the front door is magically barred by the mage, although the magic has no visible manifestation. Breaking it down is a difficulty 5 task. The back door is not sealed, but it's not immediately obvious to patrons that it exists.

### CYPHER SHORTS

### **POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS**

**Before the Brawl:** The GM should take the time to let the PCs interact with others in the tavern. Patrons order food and drinks, waitstaff serves, and so on. The PCs should have a chance to take notice of the prominent NPCs there and possibly even interact with them.

**The Instigation:** Surreptitiously, the mage Ducien Arkash uses psychic manipulations to cause two burly men to start arguing. The argument soon leads to fisticuffs, and quickly the bar erupts into chaos. The PCs are free to take part or try to avoid the melee.

Soon after the fight breaks out, the PCs may notice other strange things going on, as described below.

**The Barbarian: Viniara** hails from a savage land to the north and is spoiling for a real fight. As soon as trouble starts, she gleefully fights anyone who is near—PCs or NPCs.

**The Crafty Mage:** Ducien Arkash is a practitioner of the dark arts. He needs a confined area filled with chaos and violence to work a foul spell. While the fight rages, he sits in the middle of the room under a table and chants. If he manages to do so for five straight minutes uninterrupted, he conjures a bestial demon that looks like a cross between a man, a bull, and a spider. He and the demon leave the tavern, with the demon protecting the mage from harm.

**Bar:** Shelves behind the bar hold many bottles of liquor, and under the bar are many glass and wooden mugs (all light weapons). A cash box holds 33 gold pieces, 152 silver pieces, and 230 copper pieces.

The tavern keeper, Iolla, is an older woman who spends the first part of the brawl behind the bar, yelling at people to stop fighting, and the second half hiding. If the Warrior is a bouncer, she orders them to stop the fight. She offers a reward of 2 gold coins to anyone who will help keep the brawl from destroying her tavern.

Iolla also has a medium-sized dog that usually stays behind the bar with her.

**Kitchen/Back Room:** This area has various improvised light and medium weapons (knives, platters, pots and pans).

**Storeroom:** This locked room contains food and drink as well as a crossbow and bolts, two spears, a sword, a healing kit with bandages, and some healing herbs.

The Assassin and the Noble: One patron is actually a minor noble traveling incognito. Lord Monberrie will try to stay out of the fight, but there is an assassin after him who will use the opportunity to murder him. Anyone who helps save the noble will be duly rewarded.

### **GM INTRUSIONS**

- Fire! Something or someone falls into the hearth and catches on fire, and the flames spread into the room. The ongoing fire automatically inflicts damage each round to anyone within immediate range, and if not extinguished by the fifth round, it begins to seriously spread.
- The Stray Bottle: During the melee, a bottle comes flying toward a character from somewhere else in the fight. They must make a Speed defense roll or take 2 points of damage and be knocked prone. Further, they're now covered in grain alcohol, and if there's already a fire raging, they catch fire (2 points of damage each round until they use an action to extinguish themselves). All tasks are hindered while they're on fire.
- The Injured Patron: An innocent bystander is seriously hurt, lying on the ground and about to be trampled.
- The Bully: A brawler takes a serious dislike to a PC and attacks.
- The Pickpocket: A thief tries to steal from a PC while they are otherwise occupied, and then flee.

#### CONCLUSION

The whole thing is likely over in ten or fifteen minutes, perhaps when the sheriff arrives or when everyone is unconscious or exhausted. Storeroom lock: level 3

**Healing kit:** provides an asset to healing tasks

Lord Monberrie: level 3, disguise as level 4

Assassin: level 4, stealth as level 5

Viniara: level 6; health 30; Armor 1; can attack two close foes as a single action (using one as a weapon to strike the other)

**Ongoing fire:** level 3

Ducien Arkash: level 4, fast talking and deception as level 5; dagger with level 4 poison (3 points of Speed damage); can conjure minor visual and auditory illusions

Flying bottle: level 4

**Demon:** level 6; health 35; Armor 3; venom that inflicts 3 points of Might damage

Brawler bully: level 4

**Iolla:** *level 2, persuasion and perception as level 4* 

**Thief:** *level 3, stealth and pickpocketing as level 4* 

Iolla's dog: level 3; protects Iolla and follows her commands

Remember, characters can choose to make their attacks nonlethal, so that reducing an NPC to o health or moving another PC three steps down the damage track means unconsciousness rather than death.

### GODFORSAKEN

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> The zombies in this scenario are not infectious.



No one starts with any special equipment beyond what's listed. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.

Subtle Cyphers, page 378 Rejuvenator, page 395 Zombie, page 371

> Constable or other ally: level 3

### THE THING ON THE PRECIPICE

**The Premise:** Two necromancers are raising the dead in a cemetery outside of town in the hopes of resurrecting their mother. But they might be conjuring more than they bargained for as a powerful entity of death seeks access to the land of the living.

### **CHARACTER CREATION**

Characters should be residents of a small fantasy town. Most, if not all, should be human. Cypher Short character suggestions include:

**Guard:** This is probably someone with the Performing Physical Actions type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and what weapons they carry. They have their weapons and wear medium armor.

**Merchant:** The Talking type would work well for this character. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and what sort of commerce they engage in. They have a fair bit of money and perhaps a small weapon for self-defense.

**Priest:** This character should be portrayed by the Wielding Supernatural Powers type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and the name and nature of their religion. They have a holy symbol and vestments and a manifest rejuvenator cypher (a potion) in addition to the subtle cyphers that everyone gets.

**Thief:** This is probably someone with the Sneaking type. The player decides the character's name and a brief personality. They have three daggers, some lockpicks and other tools of the trade, and a large (empty) bag.

Worker: This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player decides the character's name, brief personality, and profession (farmer, herder, carpenter, or wilderness guide are all good choices). They have little in the way of equipment, although they have tools and probably a serviceable light or medium weapon, even if it's a pitchfork, wood axe, or hammer.

### THE SETUP

The dead rise! A pair of twin necromancers has cast a powerful spell in the cemetery outside of the small town of Northbank. The scenario starts at night, when zombies shuffle into town from the direction of the cemetery. Initially, each PC is alone (or with an NPC who is significant to them, like a family member they need to protect) when they are the victims of sudden but random attacks. It is these attacks that draw the PCs together to investigate and deal with this problem.

The priest knows about the holy water in the temple.

### **POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS**

**Night:** One zombie per PC enters town and attacks. These initial attacks are random. Each subsequent night, the number of zombies that wander into town increases by two. By the third night, the necromancers start sending zombies directly to attack the PCs, wherever they are.

**Day:** The PCs can use the daytime to rest, recuperate, and investigate. They will never find any zombies or the necromancers during the day.

If the PCs ask around, a few of the townsfolk know the story of Mariene, who died years ago. Her strange twin children were obviously traumatized but then disappeared.

**Looking for Help:** Although the town constable is frightened of the undead, he can be persuaded to help those defending Northbank. There might be three or four other able-bodied adults in town who can help, but each would need to be found and convinced individually. Most people are terrified of the walking dead and would rather hide in their houses.

The Cemetery in the Day: Just over a hill outside of town; a river runs along the edge. Searching PCs might find a few dug-up graves, black candle stubs, and strange symbols etched into gravestones.

**The Cemetery at Night:** Eight zombies roam the cemetery each night, in two groups. They attack if they see anyone alive.

**The Temple:** The temple has two level 4 cyphers in the form of holy water. Each will immediately destroy a zombie of level 3 or lower it touches. If there is no PC priest, a kindly aged priest named Olian will give the cyphers to capable defenders. Olian might also have advice about the undead and necromantic magic.

**The Necromancers:** Beginning on the third night, the necromancers can be found in the cemetery at midnight. They are performing their rituals and spells.

Elias and Novara are identical twin siblings, gaunt and pale. They seek to open the door to the land of the dead to bring back their mother, but all they are doing is stirring the entity that dwells on the precipice between life and death. Each has an undead assistant that defends them, performs manual labor, and will intercept an attack aimed at them as a GM intrusion.

If the PCs can convince the necromancers that they can't bring back their mother, but instead will bring a death entity into the world, the twins might stop their plans. **The Entity at the Precipice:** At some point, at night, the necromancers finish their long rituals, hoping to be reunited with their mother, but instead bring forth a horrible entity of death that waits just outside the living lands. It emerges and kills Elias and Novara, and its presence puts the entire town in jeopardy.

### **GM INTRUSIONS**

I Know Them: The character recognizes one of the animated dead. If they fail a difficulty 4 Intellect defense roll, they cannot act for one round and suffer 3 points of Intellect damage from shock and horror.

**Spectral Vision:** The veil between worlds thins, and the character gets a brief glimpse into the land of the dead. If they fail a difficulty 5 Intellect defense roll, they cannot act for one round and suffer 5 points of Intellect damage from shock and horror.

**From Below:** A zombie bursts up from the ground beneath the character and immediately attacks. The character's Speed defense roll is hindered by two steps.

**Open Grave:** The character trips and falls into an open grave. They suffer 1 point of damage and must use an action climbing out.

### CONCLUSION

The conclusion won't come any sooner than the third night because the necromancers have to be stopped before the zombie attacks will stop. Once that happens, the town should be safe. The Entity: level 6; victims touched move one step down the damage track



**Olian:** *level 3, knowledge of religious matters (including the undead) as level 5* 

Elias and Novara: level 4, necromantic magic and lore as level 5; health 16; Armor 1 (magical wards); cast spells, including ones that cause a nearby target to lose their next action or suffer 4 points of chilling cold damage. They can also use an action to turn a corpse (even a destroyed zombie) into a zombie.

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If the GM prefers, they can use any dungeon map they might have from another adventure.



No one starts with any special equipment beyond what's listed. Give each PC two subtle cyphers.

> Subtle Cyphers, page 378 Manifest Cyphers, page 379 Skeleton, page 353

Locked door: level 4



### LOST IN THE DUNGEON

**The Premise:** Nonhuman dungeon dwellers are lost in an unexplored section of a huge underground labyrinth. Can they make it to safety?

#### **CHARACTER CREATION**

Characters should be nonhuman subterranean monsters. They can all see well enough in the dark that it shouldn't hinder them. Cypher Short character suggestions include:

**Ogre:** This is probably someone with the Performing Physical Actions type. The player decides the character's name, a brief personality, and what weapons they carry. They have their weapons and wear medium armor.

**Satyr:** The Talking type would work well for this character. The player decides the character's name and a brief personality. They have a bow, a sword, and six doses of a level 4 poison that inflicts 4 additional points of damage.

**Fae:** This character should be portrayed by the Wielding Supernatural Powers type. The player decides the character's name and a brief personality, as well as their magical power(s). They have 5 Armor against any magical attack but suffer 1 additional point of damage from iron weapons. They also have a random manifest cypher in addition to the subtle cyphers everyone gets.

**Goblin:** This is probably someone with the Sneaking type. The player decides the character's name and a brief personality. They have three daggers, a small bow, light armor, some lockpicks, various tools, and a burlap sack.

**Griffin:** This is probably a Searching and Discovering type of character. The player should decide the character's name and brief personality. They have no equipment and can't use tools (no hands), but they can fly, have 1 Armor, and make two medium attacks with their claws or beak as a single action. They can talk, but only using very basic "squawking" words. They can carry any one other PC on their back except the ogre.

### THE SETUP

The characters are monsters that dwell in a dungeon-like labyrinth underground. They were not necessarily allies, but now they have to work together to survive as an earthquake has just caused their section to collapse. Rather than being buried in rubble like many of the dungeon denizens, each PC has been dumped into a lower level they didn't even know existed. They can't return the way they came because the path is blocked with tons of rock, so they have to find their own way.

There is no map for this dungeon; the GM makes up the layout as they go along. The layout doesn't matter, and the PCs should pass through plenty of empty rooms and corridors quickly and uneventfully until they reach an encounter. There should be enough dead ends and twisting paths so the adventure never feels linear, even though the PCs' goal is straightforward.

### **POSSIBLE ENCOUNTERS**

**Empty Gallery:** This long, wide, pillared hall has many alcoves, each of which holds a small art object. A few are ruined with age, but at least six are still quite valuable.

**Crypt:** This large room holds many sarcophagi. Twelve of them contain skeletons that will animate and attack, but only six at a time. The door leading out is locked.

There are many objects of value and even a few small casks of coins stored here as grave goods around a simple shrine. **Greedy Dwarves:** Three dwarven mining scouts are exploring, looking for gold. They hate goblins and dislike ogres, but could be reasoned with if the PCs try (particularly if they offer bribes). They have two manifest cyphers.

**Two Pools:** A large room holds two pools of water. One is normal, but the other is magical. Drinking from the magical pool will either give the drinker a new subtle cypher or transform them into a goblin (equal chance of either, difficulty 3 Might defense roll to resist the transformation).

**Abandoned Storeroom:** This room has nothing particularly valuable, but there are some usable tools, rope, barrels, and crates, should they be necessary. There are also a few rats here, which aren't a threat but could be a meal for most of the PCs.

**Chasm:** The earthquake created a chasm that now cuts through the passage ahead. It is 30 feet (9 m) across and 60 feet (18 m) deep.

**Troll:** The PCs hear a horrible monster rumbling around, clearing rubble that has collapsed into its lair. Luckily, this troll is not too hungry, so if they try to flee, it probably won't follow.

**Shifting Room:** The floor of this very large magical room is made of shifting plates. Each time the PCs try to cross it, the plates shift, and the characters are back where they started or pushed into a far corner (GM decides). It is a difficulty 5 Intellect task to see the pattern and move to the right places in the right order to get across.

**Adventurers:** An elf, a human bard, and a human paladin explore the dungeon. They attack ruthlessly and have four random manifest cyphers. They also have a map to the surface, which the PCs can use to get out if they want (and thanks to the adventurers, the way is clear of danger).

### **GM INTRUSIONS**

**Aftershock:** Group intrusion. The ground shakes and parts of the ceiling collapse. Failed Speed defense rolls (difficulty 4) result in 3 points of damage, and one character struck is trapped, requiring a difficulty 6 Might task to free them.

**Locked Door:** If a PC is trying to get somewhere quickly (perhaps fleeing a foe), the door they need to get through is locked or the passage is suddenly blocked by a dropping portcullis. Level 4.

**Arrow Trap:** Level 4. Inflicts 4 points of damage.

**Pit Trap:** Level 4. Drops 20 feet (6 m) down to spikes, inflicting 6 points of damage.

**Magical Trap:** The room or corridor bursts with magical fire, inflicting 5 points of damage to everyone who fails a difficulty 4 Speed defense roll.

### CONCLUSION

The scenario ends when the PCs reach someplace safe. That might be a new, empty section of the dungeon or the surface, where they can hide in the dark forest, away from the gaze of humanity. Dwarves, page 135

Troll, page 129

The troll is a dangerous foe for the PCs in this scenario, and if they try to fight it head on, things could go very poorly.

Elf, page 135 Bard, page 133 Paladin, page 136

### GODFORSAKEN

### **CHAPTER 10**

# CREATURES AND NPCs

This chapter is intended for GMs only.

Understanding the Listings, page 312 Chapter 22: Creatures, page 312 Chapter 23: NPCs, page 372

hese creatures and NPCs are provided to help you populate your own fantasy setting. The most important element of each creature or NPC is its level. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the target number for the creature is listed in parentheses after its level. The target number is three times the level.

A creature's target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level. For more detailed information on level, health, combat, and other elements, see the Understanding the Listings section in the Cypher System Rulebook.

### **CREATURES AND NPCs BY LEVEL**

Level Name

- Goblin\* 1
- Shadow 1
- Guard\* 2
- Morlock 2
- Orc\* 2
- Skeleton\* 2
- Wraith 2
- Bard 3
- 3 Berserker
- Crime boss\* 3
- 3 Deinonychus\*
- Faerie 3
- Giant rat\* 3
- 3 Giant spider\*
- 3 Halfling
- 3 Harpy
- 3 Merfolk
- Sapient tree 3
- 3 Thug\*
- Transitional vampire\* 3
- Zombie\* 3
- Deep one\* 4
- Devil\* 4
- Druid 4
- Dwarf 4
- Elemental, air 4
- Elemental, fire\* 4

Elemental, water 4 Elf 4 Ghost\* 4 Ghoul\* 4 Giant snake\* 4 Hollow knight 4 Minotaur 4 Ogre\* 4 Paladin 4 Shadow elf\* 4 Thief 4 Werewolf\* 4 Basilisk 5 5 Cambion 5 Demon\* 5 Elemental, earth\* Fallen angel\* 5 5 Gorgon Mi-go\* 5 5 Necromancer Occultist\* 5 5 Prince(ss) of summer\* Satyr 5 Soul eater 5 Wendigo\* 5 Witch\* 5 6 Assassin\* 6 Blackguard

Chimera\* 6

- Elemental, thorn
- 6 Golem\*
- 6 Hag

6

- 6 Jotunn, fire
- 6 Jotunn, frost
- 6 Manticore
- Puppet tree\*
- Vampire\*
- Wyvern
- 7 Corrupt mage
- Cyclops
- Djinni\*
- Dragon\*
- Evil priest
- Giant\*
- Hydra
- Noble knight
- Sphinx
- Statue, animate\*
- Tyrannosaurus rex\*
- Worm that walks
- 8 Wizard, mighty\*
- Demigod\*
- 9 Demon lord
- Kaiju\* 10

\* Creature or NPC found in the Cypher System Rulebook

- 9

### **BIGGER AND TOUGHER**

If you need a larger or tougher version of a creature, such as a dire wolf or a giant crocodile, you can just increase the creature's level (and all of its modifications) by 1 or 2. For example, if a regular wolf is level 3 with perception as level 4, a dire wolf might be level 4 with perception as level 5, or it might be level 5 with perception as level 6.

If the creature has a damage or health stat that isn't the default for its level, take that into account at the modified creature's new level. For example, a level 5 grizzly bear has 20 health instead of the usual 15 (5 more health than the default), so a level 6 grizzly bear should have 23 health (the default 18 for a level 6 creature plus the extra 5). A level 2 viper inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (1 more than the default), so a level 3 viper inflicts 4 points of Speed damage.

A simple rule of thumb is to double a creature's size (length, width, and height) for every level it increases. So a rat becomes as big as a cat, a cat becomes as big as a dog, a dog becomes as large as a human, a human becomes as large as a horse or ogre, and an ogre becomes the size of an elephant or giant.

### <u>OTHER CREATURES AND NPCs FOR A FANTASY GAME</u>

Bat: level 1 Black bear: level 3, attacks as level 4 Blacksmith: level 2, metalworking as level 4; health 8 Cat: level 1, Speed defense as level 3 due to size and quickness Catfolk: level 3, balancing and climbing as level 4; damage inflicted 4 points Centaur: level 4; health 15; moves a long distance each round Crocodile: level 4; Armor 1; swims a short distance each round Dire wolf: level 4, attacks and perception as level 5; Armor 1 Dog: level 2, perception as level 3 Dog, guard: level 3, attacks and perception as level 4 Elephant: level 5; health 20; Armor 1 Farmer: level 2, animal handling as level 3; health 8 Gargoyle: level 3; Armor 5; damage inflicted 5 points; flies a short distance each round Giant ape: level 3, climbing and attacks as level 4 Giant crab: level 6; Armor 4; pincer attack holds prey and automatically inflicts damage each turn until the target succeeds at a Might or Speed defense task Giant frog: level 3 Giant octopus: level 5, Might defense and stealth as level 6; health 25; attacks four times as an action Giant scorpion: level 4; Armor 2; damage inflicted 4 points plus 4 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Might defense task Giant snake: level 4; health 18; Armor 2; damage inflicted 4 points plus 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Might defense task Gnoll: level 2, Speed defense as level 3 due to shield; health 8; Armor 2 Gorilla: level 2, attacks as level 3; damage inflicted 3 points Griffon: level 4, perception as level 5; Armor 1; flies a long distance each round Grizzly bear: level 5; health 20; Armor 1 Hawk: level 2; flies a long distance each round Hippogryph: level 3, attacks as level 4; flies a long distance each round

Alternatively, keep the proportions of its health the same by dividing the creature's health by its old level and multiplying that number by its new level. This would give a level 6 grizzly bear 24 health (its health of 20, divided by its old level of 5, multiplied by its new level of 6).

### GODFORSAKEN

Horse: level 3; moves a long distance each round

Leopard: level 4; climbing, jumping, stealth, and attacks as level 5; Armor 1

Lion or tiger: level 5, attacks as level 6; Armor 1

Lizardfolk: level 3; Armor 1

Merchant: level 2, haggling and assessment tasks as level 3

**Mummy:** level 6; ancient history, ancient religion, climbing, and stealth as level 8; health 24; Armor 2; damage inflicted 7 points

Nymph: level 3, stealth and positive social interactions as level 6

**Pegasus:** level 3, Speed defense as level 4; moves or flies a long distance each round **Pterodactyl:** level 3; Armor 1; flies a long distance each round

Rat: level 1

**Roc:** level 6; health 25; Armor 2; flies a long distance each round; attacks twice as an action

Shark: level 3, attacks as level 4; health 15; Armor 2

**Undead claw:** level 1, attacks as level 3, Speed defense as level 3 due to quickness and size; health 5; Armor 1

**Unicorn:** level 4; Might defense, perception, and attacks as level 5; health 15; Armor 1; makes two attacks as its action; once per hour can teleport up to 1 mile; once per hour can heal a creature for 4 Pool points (or health) and remove poisons up to level 4

Villager: level 1

Viper: level 2; bite inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor)

Warhorse: level 4; moves a long distance each round

**Werebear:** level 5, attacks as level 6; Armor 1; damage inflicted 6 points; regenerates 2 health per round (unless recently wounded by silver)

Wererat: level 3, Speed defense and stealth as level 4; regenerates 2 health per round (unless recently wounded by silver)

Wereshark: level 4, attacks as level 5; health 15; Armor 2; regenerates 2 health per round (unless recently wounded by silver)

**Weretiger:** level 5, attacks as level 6; Armor 1; damage inflicted 6 points; regenerates 2 health per round (unless recently wounded by silver)

Wolf: level 3, perception as level 4

Yeti: level 3; attacks, perception, and stealth as level 4; Armor 1



# BASILISK

## 5 (15)

A basilisk is a magical kind of serpent that resembles a cobra, has a series of scales on its head like a crown, and crawls upright instead of slithering on its belly. It feeds on snakes and other creatures smaller than itself, relying on its poisonous aura to weaken and kill its prey. It is known to make an unnerving growl instead of a typical snake hiss. An adult basilisk is 10 to 18 feet (3 to 5.5 m) long.

Motive: Hunger Environment: Forests and plains Health: 15 Damage Inflicted: 5 points Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Perception and stealth as level 6

- **Combat:** A basilisk bites like a snake, inflicting 5 points of damage and injecting a poison that moves the target one step down the damage track if they fail a Might defense roll. The basilisk can spit its poison up to short range, inflicting 1 point of damage and moving the target one step down the damage track if they fail a Might defense roll.
- The basilisk's venom affects its breath, and on its turn, anything within immediate range of it must make a Might defense roll or take 1 point of poison damage. Because of this constant invisible cloud of poison, a basilisk's lair is surrounded by a stinking area of dead vegetation, blasted earth, and etched stone.
- Basilisk venom is so potent that even creatures that are immune to poison can still be harmed by it, taking 5 points of Speed damage instead of moving down the damage track. (A creature that is immune to poison and acid is fully immune to the venom.)
- Anyone within short range of a basilisk who meets its gaze and fails a Might defense roll turns to stone. In combat, when a character within short distance attacks a basilisk, they must either avert their gaze to attack safely (which hinders their attack by two steps) or make a Might defense roll. On a failed Might defense roll, the character takes 5 points of ambient damage as their flesh partly mineralizes; if the character is killed by this damage, they are turned to stone.
- Interaction: Basilisks act like simple animals and respond threateningly if disturbed or provoked. If not hungry, a basilisk avoids conflict and hides in its lair.
- **Use:** A blighted area in a field, briar, or forest suggests that a basilisk has moved into the area. Swarms of snakes enter a village, fleeing an approaching basilisk.
- **Loot:** Basilisk venom is valuable, but it must be stored in a strong, sealed container or the bearer will succumb to the poison. Its blood has alchemical properties relating to transmuting metals.

Weasels are completely immune to basilisk venom. Weasel-like creatures such as otters, ferrets, and badgers may have limited immunity.

**GM intrusion:** The basilisk strikes quickly, biting the same creature twice on its turn.

## BLACKGUARD

# 6 (18)

Blackguards are evil knights who serve dark entities or their own corrupt agendas. Some were once honorable knights who fell to temptation and have abandoned their original principles, but many were raised under evil circumstances and have never known anything but hatred and conflict.

Motive: Power, domination of others, slaughter

**Environment:** Almost anywhere, either alone or as part of a cult or evil organization **Health:** 30

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 2 or 3

Movement: Short; long when mounted

Modifications: Perception and Intellect defense as level 7

Zombie, page 371

Might and Intellect

defense as level 5

Fiendish beast: level 4, stealth as level 5,

#### GM intrusions: The blackguard's weapon

flares with unholy power, inflicting an additional 6 points of damage (ignores Armor).

A slain blackguard rises as an undead or is possessed by a demon and continues to fight. **Combat:** Blackguards use high-quality armor and weapons (usually decorated with symbols depicting death, demons, or evil gods). Many wear heavy armor and prefer weapons that inflict bleeding wounds, but some take a more subtle approach and act more like assassins than knights. A blackguard typically has two or three of the following abilities:

Fiendish Beast: The blackguard has a companion creature such as a dog, horse, or raven with an eerie, unnatural look (in the case of small animals, the creature may also be an exceptionally large specimen of its kind). The creature is actually a semi-intelligent fiend in animal shape (and therefore immune to abilities that affect only normal animals) that can understand the blackguard's commands, and may even be able to speak. If the

beast is a horse or similar creature, the blackguard might ride it as a mount.

Necromancy: The blackguard uses a ten-minute ritual to animate a human-sized corpse as a zombie under their control. The zombie becomes a corpse again after a day. *Poison:* The blackguard coats their weapons with a level 6

poison; a foe who fails a Might defense roll moves one step down the damage track.

Spells: The blackguard knows several spells granted by an evil entity, typically spells that cause a foe to flee in fear for one minute, restore 10 health, create an eerie darkness or fog in long range, or grant +5 Armor against energy and magical attacks for an hour.

Surprise Attack: When the blackguard attacks from a hidden vantage, with surprise, or before their opponent has acted in combat, they get an asset on the attack and inflict +4 points of damage.

*Unholy Aura:* Defense rolls by foes within immediate distance of the blackguard are hindered.

Unholy Blessing: The blackguard's defense rolls are eased. Interaction: Blackguards enjoy killing righteous paragons of good and are often cruel for the sake of cruelty itself.

**Use:** A blackguard has united various groups of bandits into a small army. An evil wizard sends her blackguard lieutenant to kill the people interfering with her plans.

**Loot:** Blackguards usually have treasures equivalent to three or four expensive items, a few useful manifest cyphers, and an artifact weapon or armor.

5 (15)

# CAMBION

Fine ebony scales cover a cambion's perfectly athletic figure. Two reddish horns grow from its brow, and the tips of fangs emerge from between its dusky lips. Its eyes, absent iris and pupil, are the color of driven snow. Cambions are cursed creatures, born of mortal and demonic parentage, and are also sometimes called helborn. Most cambions give in to what everyone expects of them, and embrace evil.

Motive: Defense, conquest, revenge on a world that's rejected them

Environment: Anywhere, often hiding in plain sight

Health: 25

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Disguise as level 7

**Combat:** Cambions sometimes wield heavy weapons in combat, especially if they come across an artifact that can enhance their attacks.

Some cambions develop their natural and magical abilities to become powerful sorcerers, but most can call up hellish energy merely by willing it at least once per day, as follows.

Finger of Torture: A ruby ray lances out from the cambion's

finger to strike an enemy prone with torturous pain on a failed Might defense task. The target automatically takes 6 points of damage each round until they can escape the effect with an Intellect task.

- Soulfire Blast: An explosion of soul-rending black and crimson fire explodes around up to three targets standing next to each other within short range, inflicting 4 points of damage and stunning the targets so that they lose their next action on a failed Speed defense task.
- **Interaction:** Cambions are bleak, depressed, and misunderstood. Most have turned to evil, but a few can be redeemed.
- Use: A great fire is seen burning on the horizon. The next day, travelers come across a burned region with a crater that has destroyed a farmhouse. At the center of the crater is an unconscious human with hornlike growths on its head.
  Loot: Powerful cambions sometimes wield artifacts as weapons.

**GM intrusion:** The character's cypher explodes when touched by cambion demon fire on a failed Speed defense task.

## CORRUPT MAGE

# 7 (21)

Some wizards and sorcerers are tempted by dark magic, inevitably damning their souls and corrupting their flesh as they cut corners and delve into forbidden lore. Their research and experimentation create new kinds of rampaging monsters and turn people into misshapen horrors. They sometimes modify their own bodies in order to gain demonic or draconic powers, or make pacts with such creatures for knowledge and magical ingredients. **Motive:** Magical knowledge at all costs

Fleshbeast: level 4, attacks as level 5; health 15; Armor 1



#### GM intrusions:

A desperate or dying corrupt mage transforms their own body into several new fleshbeasts, which retain fragments of the mage's intelligence and immediately attack.

The mage's attack spell is incredibly painful, stunning the character for one round if they fail a Might defense roll. **Environment:** Almost anywhere, usually with fleshbeast minions **Health:** 35

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1 Movement: Short

Modifications: All tasks related to knowledge of arcane lore, demons, and altering bodies as level 8

**Combat:** Corrupt mages blast opponents with beams of energy that blister, slash, and rot flesh, attacking up to three creatures as an action. Many of them have given themselves long claws and teeth that they can use to make up to three melee attacks per action.

- A corrupt mage knows many spells, such as the following:
  - Armor: Covers a creature with ugly scales, granting them +3 to Armor for an hour.
  - *Madness:* Wracks the brain of one creature within short range for one hour, reducing them to a babbling catatonic state in which they can't recognize friend or foe. If disturbed or harmed, the creature is likely to lash out with lethal force at what it perceives as its tormentors.
  - Organ Request: Extracts a handful of internal organs from an opponent within short range, moving the creature one step down the damage track if it fails a Might defense roll.
  - *Polymorph:* Transforms one foe within short range into a tiny, helpless creature such as a cockroach, fish, or snail for one hour.
  - Summon Demon: Summons a demon to serve the mage for one hour.
    - *Teleport:* Moves the mage up to 100 miles (160 km) away, or less far if they bring additional creatures with them.
      - Twist Flesh: Reshapes the flesh of a creature within close range, turning it into a hideous monstrosity for one hour. The transformed creature's actions are hindered, but its physical attacks inflict +3 points of damage. The mage's control over the creature is limited to indicating which target it should attack.
      - A corrupt mage usually has several cyphers useful in combat and perhaps an artifact as well.
    - Interaction: Corrupt mages generally can't be trusted and see other creatures as things to experiment on and vivisect.
       They might negotiate with someone who brings them a rare specimen or spell. Many are mentally disturbed by their research and self-alterations and may fluctuate between calm clarity, obsession, paranoia, and rage.

**Use:** The strange hybrid monsters emerging from the forest are said to be the creations of a corrupt mage. A corrupt mage in a calm state presents themselves as a neutral or benevolent wizard seeking assistance on a task.

Loot: A corrupt mage has 1d6 cyphers and perhaps a wizardly artifact.

### CREATURES AND NPCs

# CYCLOPS

Cyclopes resemble massive humans that stand 50 to 60 feet (15 to 18 m) tall and weigh about 10,000 pounds (4,500 kg). Everything about these giants is exaggerated, from the thick features of their faces to their oversized hands and lumpy, corpulent bodies. They clothe themselves in animal skins, scraps of cloth, or canvas stolen during their travels. A cyclops's most distinctive feature is the single eye positioned in the center of its forehead.

Cyclopes live on the edges of civilized areas or on remote islands. For all their power and stature, they aren't especially brave, and most have a dim idea that puny humans have an advantage when they have numbers on their side.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Almost anywhere

Health: 32

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Attacks targets within immediate range as level 5 due to poor eyesight; Speed defense as level 5 due to size; Intellect defense as level 4

- **Combat:** A cyclops can always resort to using its fists in melee, pummeling opponents with knuckles the size of large hogs. However, most cyclopes carry
  - a tree trunk and use it to sweep enemies from their path. Due to its massive height, a cyclops can make a melee attack against creatures within short range.
- Cyclopes can pry up boulders from the ground and throw them at targets within long range. A thrown boulder inflicts 8 points of damage to all targets in an immediate area.
- Killing a cyclops can be dangerous. When killed, it falls away from the attacker that delivered the killing blow. Any creature under it when it falls must make a successful Speed defense roll or be pinned under its corpse and take 7 points of damage. Escaping from under a dead cyclops requires a successful Might roll.
- Interaction: Cyclopes know the language of the lands they inhabit, but they are notoriously dim and easily fooled. A cyclops thinks about its belly first and foremost and doesn't pay much attention to what it stuffs in its mouth.
- **Use:** A cyclops has been rampaging across the countryside, and warriors sent to deal with it have been vanquished. PCs who investigate learn that the cyclops has been robbed and is trying to find the stolen item.
- Loot: Most cyclopes carry sacks filled with things they find interesting or plan to eat. Aside from the rubbish, a typical sack contains 1d100 coins of the realm and a couple of cyphers.

**GM intrusions:** The cyclops hits a character so hard that they fly a short distance away and land prone.

A character struck by the cyclops's fist is grabbed and stuffed in the creature's sack.

# 7 [21]

## DEMON LORD

# 9 (27)

Demon lords are mighty demons, commanding hundreds of lesser fiends and often ruling an entire hellscape dimension. No mere brutes, they are smart, wield powerful magic, make centuries-long plans of conquest against rival demons, and seek to corrupt and enslave powerful mortals. Some are nearly as powerful as gods and are worshipped as such by cultists or evil creatures, claiming ownership of a concept like murder, rot, undeath, or seduction. A few are known to mate with mortals to produce cambion offspring.

Cambion, page 101

Demon lords sometimes use noble or royal titles such as duke/duchess, prince/princess, king/queen, and so on. Many demons have no gender or can change gender, and use whatever title they prefer.

#### Possession, page 69

Wishes, page 71 Demon, page 322 Devil, page 323

### **GM** intrusions:

The demon lord offers the character something so tempting (an artifact, immortality, and so on) that they lose their next action and must make an Intellect defense roll to resist trying to bargain for it.

The demon lord creates a portal and retreats to its own dimension; the portal remains open for one round.

Motive: Power, conquest, souls Environment: Any hell dimension, sometimes called by mortal magic Health: 100

Damage Inflicted: 12 points

Armor: 5

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: History and magical knowledge as level 10

**Combat:** A demon lord attacks with a bolt of evil energy or fire up to a long distance away, inflicting 12 points of damage on one target or 9 points of damage on all targets within short range of the primary target. Targets caught in the area attack who succeed on a Speed defense roll still suffer 5 points of damage. A demon lord can make melee attacks on all targets within immediate range as an action.

They can also call on a variety of other magical abilities that mimic the effect of any cypher of level 5 or lower-usually destructive, painful, and transformative effects.

- A demon lord automatically regains 3 points of health per round. They typically have the following abilities:
  - Change Shape: The demon lord can take the form of a human or similar humanoid as its action, or return to its regular shape. When so changed, its disguise is nearly impenetrable without special knowledge. As a human, the demon lord is a level 7 creature.
  - Possession: The demon lord can possess a creature and still use its own abilities.
  - Summon Demon: Summon a demon or devil to serve it for one day.
  - Wish: The demon lord can grant a mortal a wish (up to level 9) in exchange for an appropriate payment or service, but the wish is often twisted or has hidden consequences.
- Interaction: Demon lords are willing to bargain with mortals if it leads to the mortal's corruption or advances the demon's agenda in some way. They sometimes respond to flattery or bribes of powerful souls or magic items.
- Use: A mad cult wants to summon a demon lord in order to end the world. A mysterious stranger offers aid in exchange for a favor to be named later.
- Loot: A demon lord often has an artifact relating to some aspect of its nature or interests, such as a weapon, ring, or armor, as well as 1d6 cyphers.





# ELEMENTAL, AIR

Air elementals are capricious pieces of air with simple minds. They spontaneously appear in clouds and high mountains, and often resemble an area of mist or a cloudlike humanoid shape.

Motive: Mischief and destruction Environment: Anywhere the wind blows Health: 24 Damage Inflicted: 4 points Movement: Long when flying Modifications: Stealth as level 6 Combat: Air elementals slice foes up to a sh

**Combat:** Air elementals slice foes up to a short distance away with blades of fierce wind, or use blasts of air to throw small objects.

Once every other round, an air elemental can turn into a tornado-like vortex that inflicts

4 points of damage to all creatures within immediate range. In this form, the elemental gains +1 to Armor and an additional +2 to Armor against physical projectile weapons such as arrows and javelins. The elemental reverts to its normal form at the start of its next turn.

- An air elemental can disperse itself over a short area as an action. In this form it is invisible, unable to attack, and can't be attacked except with area attacks. The elemental can remain in this form indefinitely, but must use an action to return to its normal form.
- Air elementals are elusive opponents and hard to destroy. If an air elemental is reduced to o health, there is a 50 percent chance that it rejuvenates a few rounds later with 6 health. The elemental then continues to fight or flees to cause trouble elsewhere.
- **Interaction:** Air elementals see and hear many things, but they are flighty and what they remember usually isn't important or relevant. They can be summoned with magic but don't like being controlled, and there is a 10 percent chance that they free themselves and strike out on their own.
- **Use:** A safe mountain trail has become hazardous due to unseasonal winds that threaten to push travelers off a cliff. An old tree is surrounded by whispers of conversations that took place recently and has started hurling sticks and fruit at anyone who comes too close.

**GM intrusion:** A violent blast of wind disarms a character and sends whatever they were holding up to a long distance away (depending on the object's size and weight).

# 4 (12)

# ELEMENTAL, THORN

# 6 [18]

The grisly sign of an active thorn elemental in areas of heavy woods or jungle is the presence of shriveled bodies dangling from vines, dead of strangulation and poison. Thorn elementals take form in areas dense with woody growth under threat by hatchet, axe, saw, and, sometimes, human-caused climate disruptions.

Motive: Defense of forests

Environment: Anywhere trees grow

Health: 36

Armor: 2

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Movement: Immediate

**Combat:** Thorn elementals batter foes with thorny, vine-wrapped fists. Targets who suffer damage must make a successful Might defense roll or take 2 points of Speed damage from a paralytic poison transmitted by a thorn's prick. Worse, the poison continues to inflict 2 points of Speed damage each round until the victim succeeds at a Might defense roll.

Woody vine: level 4; Armor 1

**GM** intrusion: A

character within

short range of a thorn

roll or be hauled into

around their neck. They can try to cut the

the air by a vine noose

woody vine or attempt

a Might task to break

Each round after the first in which they fail

move down one step

on the damage track.

free before they strangle.

to break the noose, they

elemental must make a successful Speed defense

As its action, a thorn elemental can disentangle its form and reassemble a new body anywhere within long range where trees and plants grow. A thorn elemental regains 2 points of health each time it travels in this fashion.

Interaction: Thorn elementals communicate through speech, though

they generally disdain talking to creatures of the animal kingdom. Thorn elementals exist within a hierarchy; those that have a greater capacity for communication are also usually more powerful. Summoned thorn elementals have about a 5 percent chance of breaking the geas and turning on their summoner.

Use: Adventuring characters journey through a forest that is under threat of destruction by an encroachment of other humanoids. Thinking the PCs are part of the encroachers, a thorn elemental attacks them. If communication is opened, it might break off hostilities and instead ask the

characters to help.

Loot: The bodies of those previously defeated by thorn elementals dangle from the forest or jungle canopy with all their former possessions. One or two might have a cypher and other tools and treasure.
### CREATURES AND NPCs

# ELEMENTAL, WATER

Water elementals are animate masses of water. When swimming, they are nearly indistinguishable from their surroundings, but when they have to move on dry land, they usually take the form of a curling wave, amorphous blob, or large puddle. They can spontaneously appear in locations with pristine salt or fresh water. **Motive:** Flood, drown, and wash away

Environment: Anywhere there is flowing water

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Short; long if swimming

Modifications: Swimming and aquatic maneuvers as level 6; stealth as level 6 when in water

**Combat:** Water elementals bash opponents with heavy limbs of water or spray jets of water out to short range.

Instead of a bashing attack, a water elemental can use its action to attempt to envelop, smother, and crush one opponent, who can resist with a Might defense roll. If the opponent fails, it takes 4 points of damage immediately and every round on the elemental's turn. Each following turn, the enveloped character must attempt a new Might defense roll every round or move one step down the damage track from drowning as the elemental forces itself into the creature's lungs. The creature can free itself with a Might defense roll. An elemental with an enveloped opponent can move up to a short distance as its action; a common tactic is to dive deep, release their opponent to drown normally, then return to its previous position to fight other opponents. Any attack that inflicts 6 or more points of cold

damage hinders a water elemental's actions on its next turn.

- Interaction: Water elementals are somewhat intelligent but think very differently from humans, so they often seem distracted and dull. They are generally compliant when summoned with magic, but there is about a 5 percent chance that they break free of the spell and lash out against their summoner.
- Use: Offerings left at a sacred pond have gone missing, and the water itself seems threatening. Garbage or dead bodies have polluted a water source, spawning an angry elemental that attacks everyone until the mess is cleaned up.

page 326 Earth elemental,

page 327

Fire elemental,

**GM intrusion:** The force of the elemental's attack knocks over a character, sweeps them a short distance away, or both.



#### GODFORSAKEN

Skeleton, page 353 Zombie, page 371 Demon, page 322 Giant snake, page 334 Giant spider, page 335

#### Swarm of bugs: level 3

GM intrusions: The dying evil priest utters a curse that attempts to pull the character's soul into the afterlife with them, moving them one step down the damage track if they fail an Intellect defense roll.

The evil priest ignores, avoids, or immediately recovers from an attack that would have killed or greatly harmed them.

## evil priest

# 7 (21)

Evil priests are worshippers of evil gods, demons, devils, strange malevolent forces from beyond known dimensions, or even death itself. They lead cults, corrupt the innocent with lies and twisted ideologies, and enact the will of their patron in the mortal world. The most insidious ones are able to infiltrate good churches and secular organizations in order to tear them down from the inside.

**Motive:** Domination of others, divine rule **Environment:** Almost anywhere that people live **Health:** 28

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1 Movement: Short

Modifications: Deception, persuasion, and religious lore as level 8

- **Combat:** Evil priests make one or two short-range magical attacks as an action, which are thematically appropriate to the god or entity they serve, such as blasts of hellfire, grasping shadowy tentacles, or disruptive necromantic energy. They often rely on zealous minions to protect them from melee opponents.
- Priests usually know several spells, such as how to banish or control creatures from other dimensions, create an area of darkness, see and hear remote locations, speak with the dead, mesmerize or paralyze a person, cause blindness, or create a ward against energy damage. They also have the following magical abilities:
  - *Curse:* The priest curses a foe within short range, hindering all of the foe's actions by two steps.
    - *Heal:* The priest heals a touched creature for 10 health or removes an affliction such as a disease or curse.
      - Necromancy: The priest uses a ten-minute ritual to animate up to four human-sized corpses as skeletons or zombies under their control. The undead revert to corpses after a day.
        - Sacrifice: The priest uses a ten-minute ritual to kill a helpless, restrained, or unconscious creature of level 4 or higher, using its soul to grant one ally an asset on all actions and defenses for one day.
          - *Summon:* Once per hour the priest can summon a demon or one level 3 or 4 creature (such as a giant snake, giant spider, or swarm of bugs). The summoned creature serves the priest for an hour before vanishing.
        - An evil priest usually has one or two combat-useful manifest cyphers and often has an artifact appropriate to their religion. Most also wear armor or have an ongoing defensive spell that grants them Armor.

**Interaction:** Evil priests tend to be knowledgeable, arrogant, and condescending toward heroes and members of rival faiths. They might

strike a bargain to save their lives or the life of a valuable minion, or to gain an advantage later on.

**Use:** An evil priest is converting frightened peasants into followers, and turning those who refuse into zombie slaves. A new religious figure in the city is acting suspiciously, and members of rival faiths have been disappearing or turning up dead.

**Loot:** Evil priests usually have mundane treasures equivalent to three or four expensive items, a few useful manifest cyphers, and an artifact.

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### CREATURES AND NPCs

# FAERIE

Faeries are magic creatures of music, mirth, tricks, and taunts. Some might only perform a silly song or follow people for a while, flitting around and asking questions like an annoying young child. Some faeries are crueler and delight in stealing clothing, equipment, or prized objects. And a few are downright malicious and, under the guise of a helpful guide or a pretty light in the distance, lure lost travelers to various dooms.

Motive: Unpredictable

Environment: Alone or in a flutter of three to twelve

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Immediate; long when flying

**Modifications:** Tasks related to performance and deception as level 5; Speed defense as level 5 due to size and quickness

- **Combat:** A faerie can hurl damaging magic dust at any target within short range, but sometimes it wields tiny weapons such as bows, spears, or swords.
- If a faerie is touched or struck by a melee weapon, more magic dust puffs away from the faerie and clouds the attacker, who must make a Speed defense roll or take the same amount of damage they just dealt to the faerie.
- A faerie can see in the dark, but it can also emit bright light and appear as a glowing humanoid or an illuminated sphere.
- Faeries regenerate 1 point of health per round while their health is above 0.
- Some faeries can attempt to use a song or light display to charm others within short range. The target must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or fall into a suggestible state for one hour. During this period, the target can be led by the faerie at their regular movement rate. The target can be brought out of the spell early if they take damage or are heartily slapped and shaken for a round or two, causing the glamour to fade. A faerie can use this power once per minute.
- Interaction: Faeries are mercurial creatures, but except for the malicious ones, they can be negotiated with, especially if offered sweets, wine, or other gifts. However, faerie attention spans are limited, so even one that means well could end up leaving the PCs in the lurch at just the wrong moment.
- **Use:** The dancing light in the distance, leading curious PCs deeper and deeper into the dark woods, is a faerie. And the destination could be a wicked witch or other unpleasant location.
- **Loot:** The tiny pouches that faeries carry are stuffed with forest bric-a-brac, but some of those pouches are ten times larger on the inside and might hold a handful of shiny coins or a cypher.

A flutter of dozens of faeries can swarm foes, but those kinds of tactics aren't the norm because faeries in such large groups rarely get along well enough to act in concert.

**GM intrusion:** Another faerie appears, and if the character fails a Speed defense roll, it flies off with their weapon or another important possession.

#### GODFORSAKEN

A PC turned to stone may be as good as dead, but certain magic effects or spells might return them to life. However, if the statue is shattered, they cannot be revived unless the statue is repaired first.

GM intrusion: A character glimpses a gorgon's eyes, and a sheen of stone covers their body for one minute, during which time they gain +1 to Armor but can't move farther than an immediate distance in one round.

## GORGON

Statues littering the grounds outside a ruin are meant to deter savvy robbers and explorers. The statues, ranging in size from birds to warriors astride steeds, all depict creatures in states of fright and pain, the final image of death. These pieces are not the work of a fevered mind, but the fates of those who braved a gorgon's lair.

Gorgons were humans once. After they offended the gods with their vanity, they were transformed into hideous monsters. A gorgon has the upper body of a human of perfect form and physique, but the lower body of a giant serpent, complete with rattling tail. One who dares look at a gorgon's face can see traces of the old beauty beneath a weary veneer, darkened by hatred. Instead of hair, serpents crown a gorgon's head, snapping and hissing at anyone who draws near. Yet the most terrible aspect of a gorgon is its gaze, which can turn any creature to stone.

Motive: Isolation, defense

**Environment:** Alone, sequestered in the isolated ruins of old cities and castles **Health:** 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

#### Movement: Short

**Combat:** A gorgon has a long-range bow attack. Since creatures that see the gorgon often turn to stone, it must take down its prey at long range so it can get fresh meat.

In close combat, a gorgon lashes out with a long dagger or, rarely, a sword. As part of the action the gorgon uses to attack, the serpents on its head can also attack one target within immediate distance. A target that fails its Speed defense roll takes 2 points of damage from the bite and must immediately make a Might defense roll to resist the poison (which deals 4 additional points of Speed damage that ignores Armor).

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Anyone within short range of a gorgon who meets its gaze and fails a Might defense roll turns to stone. In combat, when a character within short distance attacks the gorgon, they must avert their gaze (which hinders the attack by two steps) or make a Might defense roll. On a failure, they take 5 points of ambient damage as their flesh partly mineralizes. If the character is killed by this damage, they are turned to stone.

Some gorgons carry a couple of cyphers and perhaps an artifact that they can use in combat.

**Interaction:** Bitterness consumes gorgons. They lead lonely lives, cut off from everyone they have loved. Negotiating with one would be something of a feat.

**Use:** A gorgon's head retains its power to petrify for several days after being cut from the creature. The PCs might brave the gorgon so they can use its head to defeat an even more powerful foe.

**Loot:** A gorgon typically has a few cyphers and may have an artifact as well.

### CREATURES AND NPCs

# HAG

## 6 [18]

Hags are evil magical creatures distantly related to the fey. They resemble withered ancient humans with obvious inhuman features—dead eyes, green or purple skin, metal teeth, webbed fingers, and seaweed-like hair are common traits. They love corrupting pure and innocent things, and feast on the dreams and flesh of their victims.

Motive: Power, treachery

**Environment:** Forests, swamps, mountains, and unpleasant natural locations **Health:** 25

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Lying, haggling, magical lore, mimicking voices, and Intellect defense as level 7

**Combat:** Hags can attack with their iron-hard claws and teeth, but often rely on their magic abilities in combat.

Hags can breathe water, and usually have three or more of the following abilities:

- Arcane blast: Use magical energy to blast one foe within short range and inflict 6 points of damage, or divide this energy (and damage) among several foes as the hag sees fit (each foe makes their own Speed defense roll against this attack).
- Change shape: Transform into a humanoid or common animal, or return to their own form.
- Curse: Curse a creature within long range, hindering all physical actions by two steps.
- *Fear:* Terrify all creatures within short range who look upon them, causing the creatures to flee for one minute if they fail an Intellect defense roll.
- *Illusion:* Create an illusion affecting a small area that includes light, sound, and smell. They can use this to disguise themselves as any humanoid creature (such as a human, dwarf, or elf). Changing or maintaining the illusion is not an action.
- *Invisibility:* Turn invisible for ten minutes. When invisible, they are specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks.
- *Murderous glare:* Glare at one opponent, causing bloody wounds that inflict 6 points of damage if the creature is within short range (3 points if within long range).
- *Question:* Get an answer to a very simple, general question about a creature or place within 1 mile (1.5 km).
- Scrying eye: View any familiar location within 1 mile as if they were observing it directly.
- *Sleep:* Make a creature fall asleep for one minute. Damage or loud noises will wake the creature.
- Three or more allied hags form a coven, which allows them to use each other's magical abilities, and usually grants the coven (when working together) one or two additional abilities.
- **Interaction:** Hags are evil, greedy, hateful, and cruel. They rarely do things for others unless they benefit in some way, and they like to trick fools into dangerous tasks that end up profiting the hag instead of anyone else. If shown proper respect and bribed or paid, a hag can be a valuable source of lore.
- **Use:** The smell of cakes lures children to a mysterious woodland shack. The hag of the swamp is said to kill anyone who enters their territory without carrying a specific gift.
- **Loot:** In addition to coins and jewels, a hag usually has several scrolls or potions and may have an artifact.

In folklore, hags are usually represented as female, but their kind probably has other genders as well.

**GM intrusion:** A creature becomes afraid and reluctant to oppose the hag, hindering all actions against the hag by two steps for one day. Modern fantasy has blended two different kinds of bird-human creatures from Greek myths: sirens (which are alluring and sing an enthralling song) and harpies (which are disgusting and don't sing at all).

## HARPY

A harpy is a hideous, filthy creature with the body of a large vulture and the neck and head of an ugly human. Their breath reeks of decay, their wings and talons drip with an unpleasant oil, and their eyes shed acrid tears. They love to torment people and lure them to their deaths.

3 (9)

Motive: Hungers for flesh, causing anguish

Environment: Coastline, forest, and mountains

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: Perception and Speed defense as level 4

- **Combat:** Harpies are fast and strong, capable of carrying off a light adult human. They attack with their long talons.
- Anything a harpy touches becomes fouled with their smelly fluids, and one harpy energetically flapping their wings is enough to contaminate an immediate area. Their fluids are repulsive but not directly harmful, and the smell persists even after a casual washing. Any food touched by harpy filth is inedible to anyone but a harpy. Creatures with a sensitive sense of smell (such as dogs and wolves) are hindered when within a short distance of a harpy. It is common for a group of harpies to attack a campsite or festival, spread their

stink over everything, and fly away with whatever food they can carry.

A harpy can sing a weird, entrancing song that hypnotizes whoever hears it. Anyone within long range who hears the song must make an Intellect defense roll or stop whatever they are doing and attempt to approach the harpy. If the creature comes within an immediate distance of a singing harpy, they stand there dumbly even as the harpy attacks them. The creature can make another attempt to break free each round on its turn, and taking damage from anything other than a singing harpy allows them another attempt to break free. Five or more harpies can work together on the same song (treat as a level 5 effect). Harpies are cruel and have been known to lead an entranced creature into a pit, off a cliff, or over the railing of a ship.

Interaction: Other than their singing, harpies do not usually speak with other creatures. They are more likely to jeer and screech at people like an angry bird than try to communicate.

- Use: A flock of harpies torments a village during its harvest festival, ruining the celebration and some of the food set aside for the winter. Sailors speak of a lonely island where an old, blind king starves because harpies steal or foul any food set out for him.
- Loot: A harpy nest may have one or two cyphers or other valuables, but the items will smell disgusting unless carefully washed.

GM intrusion: A harpy snatches something a character is wearing or carrying on a failed Speed defense roll. The harpy throws away or flees with the stolen item.

4 [12]

# HOLLOW KNIGHT

In haunted castles and among the armies mustered by those with power over life and death, sometimes walk hollow knights. These animated suits of armor move just like living people, and many who encounter these dread revenants mistake them for living foes only to realize in horror that there's nothing inside except for the memory of the warrior that once donned the suit.

Brought into being by binding the spirit of a dead warrior to its panoply, hollow knights behave in much the same way they did in life—disciplined, loyal, and battle ready. Clad head to toe in full plate armor, with battered shields strapped to their arms and rusty swords gripped in lobster gauntlets, the knights stand ready to face any foe, heedless of the danger, driven to serve the necromancer that made them.

Hollow knights might ride on the backs of skeletal steeds and wield lances. Motive: Obedience to its master Environment: Anywhere

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points Armor: 3

**Movement:** Short; long while mounted on a skeletal steed **Modifications:** Resists fear and intimidation as level 10 **Combat:** A hollow knight usually fights with a sword

or mace.

- When mounted on a steed, a hollow knight charges its enemies whenever possible. As an action, its steed moves a short distance, and the hollow knight can make a single attack at any point during this movement. When attacking in this way, the knight inflicts 7 points of damage.
- A hollow knight is fearless and fights until destroyed or ordered to pull back. The magic animating its armor is slow to fade, so armor components may continue to twitch and jerk even after the knight has fallen. Usually, when defeated, the suit of armor falls apart, and wisps of
- grey smoke curl up from the remains. Interaction: Hollow knights cannot speak. They
- obey any orders given to them by their creators.
- **Use:** The necromancer or other magician that binds the spirit to the armor also imbues the armor with specific commands—tasks the knight must carry out until destroyed. Some knights may stand guard at citadels or mansions, keeping a vigil until their armor finally falls apart. Others are more active and may function as the core of a dark wizard's army.

#### Skeletal steed: level 4

Five mounted hollow knights can line up in formation and charge one target, making a single attack roll as one level 6 creature, inflicting 9 points of damage.

The armor of hollow knights is sometimes painted with the insignia and heraldry of whomever they serve.

**GM intrusion:** When a hollow knight is destroyed, a gauntlet flies up, grabs a character, and won't let go. A difficulty 7 Might task is required to pry it loose. Sometimes newly encountered hydras have seven or more heads instead of "just" five.

In a game using power shifts, GMs could provide the same advantage to hydras.



GM intrusion: The character reacts poorly to the poison in the air or a bite and goes into helpless convulsions for one round if they fail a Might defense task. HYDRA

This mythological reptile has five writhing serpent heads, each of which constantly exhales a venomous plume. Well over 20 feet (6 m) long from the tip of its longest head to its thrashing tail, the toxic beast's most discomfiting feature is its magical ability to sprout new heads when it's wounded.

Some hydras dwell on land, others in water. Most seem to have been set as guardians of important places by higher powers, which is probably why they're so difficult to kill. **Motive:** Hungers for flesh, defend a location **Environment:** Swamps, coasts, and forests

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short when walking or swimming

**Modifications:** Perception as level 8 due to its many heads; Speed defense as level 5 due to size

**Combat:** Even approaching a hydra is dangerous; the air around it is poisoned by its venomous breath. Each round a creature is within immediate range of a hydra, they must succeed on a Might defense task or take 1 point of Speed damage (ignores Armor).



All five of a hydra's heads can simultaneously bite foes in immediate range. If three or more heads coordinate their attack, the heads make one attack as a single level 9 creature dealing 9 points of damage. A target bitten by the venomous hydra must also succeed on a Might defense task or take an additional 2 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor).

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Whenever the hydra takes 4 or more points of damage from a single attack, a healing pulse surges through the creature a round later. The pulse returns the health just subtracted due to the attack and triggers the immediate growth of two additional heads that sprout from the creature. (The same thing happens if one of the creature's snakelike heads is decapitated.) The new heads are just as effective as the original ones in a fight. Fire, electrical, and other extreme energy attacks do not trigger the healing pulse and head genesis.

Interaction: A hydra is a cunning predator, but not intelligent. It can't bargain or negotiate.

**Use:** The PCs investigate an ancient ruin hoping to find artifacts of the gods. A hydra saw them enter and trails them through the crumbling structure at a considerable distance, waiting for them to take a rest or become otherwise distracted before attacking.

**Loot:** Hydras sometimes collect cyphers and artifacts in their lair, or failing that, they guard something of value.

# JOTUNN (NORSE GIANT)

Jotunns are a type of giant—large, somewhat intelligent, bad-tempered, and cultured in their own way, but generally hostile to humans and other "little folk." Jotunns range from 9 to 20 feet (3 to 6 m) tall, are strong, have long hair, and wear armor and use weapons like humans do. Some are hideous, some are attractive by human standards, and some have multiple heads. They live in caves, lodges, or large castles. There are two main types of jotunns: fire and frost.

JOTUNN, FIRE

Fire jotunns are often called fire giants. Their skin is coal-grey or black; their hair is red or gold and may be metal or actual flames. They prefer hot mountainous climates (particularly volcanoes), wear plate armor, and use greatswords that glow with the natural heat of their bodies.

Motive: Destruction, hungers for flesh, honor

**Environment:** Hot mountains, volcanic areas, supernatural fires

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 6 points plus 3 points from fire

Armor: 3 (immune to fire)

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 5 due to size; breaks and throws objects as level 8 **Combat:** A fire jotunn uses weapons appropriate to its size (which would be two-handed for a human but can be wielded one-handed by the giant), inflicting 6 points of damage

plus another 3 points of ambient fire damage conducted from the jotunn's body. Jotunns throw boulders up to very long range, inflicting 6 points of damage plus 3 points of fire damage.

A jotunn can inflict 1 point of fire damage with a touch, and anyone touching it without protection against fire takes damage as if the jotunn had touched them. A slain fire jotunn and its equipment are too hot to safely touch for several minutes.

Fire jotunns are immune to fire damage, but take additional damage from cold (equal to the attack's normal damage, up to a maximum of 5 additional points of cold damage).

Fire jotunn leaders sometimes have magical powers, usually related to earth and fire.

- **Interaction:** Fire jotunns tend to be hostile, but they may agree to a nonlethal challenge to allow visitors to pass through their land or join them for a feast.
- **Use:** A fire jotunn decides to cause trouble for intruders in its territory. A clan of jotunns wages war against a fortified village or town, hurling boulders, starting fires, and stealing livestock.
- Loot: Jotunns like fine things, and their homes usually have utensils, plates, weapons, and trophies made of precious metals and decorated with gems. They may have cyphers, and a leader may carry an artifact.

In Old Norse, the plural of jötunn is jötnar, but the English language likes to pummel loan-words and their plural forms.

Multiheaded jotunn: Perception as level 7

6 [18]

**GM intrusion:** The jotunn's attack inflicts a serious burn, making a limb useless for an hour or until healed.

### JOTUNN, FROST

### 6 [18]

Frost jotunns are often called frost giants or ice giants. Their skin is pale white, pink, or blue, and their hair is usually white, pale blond, or actual ice. They prefer cold mountains and tundra, wear chainmail and furs, and use metal axes that channel powerful cold from their bodies.

Motive: Destruction, hungers for flesh, honor Environment: Cold mountains and plains Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 6 points plus 3 points from cold

Armor: 2 (immune to cold)

Movement: Short; long when skiing

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 5 due to size; breaks and throws objects as level 8 **Combat:** A frost jotunn uses weapons appropriate to its size (which would be two-handed

GM intrusion: The jotunn's attack numbs one of the character's limbs, hindering all actions with it by two steps until it is healed. for a human but can be wielded one-handed by the giant), inflicting 6 points of damage plus another 3 points of ambient cold damage conducted from the jotunn's body. Jotunns throw boulders or chunks of ice up to very long range, inflicting 6 points of damage plus 3 points of cold damage.

A jotunn can inflict 1 point of cold damage with a touch, and anyone touching it without protection against cold takes damage as if the jotunn had touched them. A slain frost jotunn and its equipment are too cold to safely touch for several minutes. Frost jotunns are immune to cold damage, but take

additional damage from fire (equal to the attack's normal damage, up to a maximum of 5 additional points of fire damage).

Frost jotunn leaders sometimes have magical powers, usually related to illusions and weather.

**Interaction:** Frost jotunns tend to be hostile, but if in a generous mood, they may allow visitors to dine with them or rest in their halls. Once they grant someone hospitality, they are loath to break it unless they are attacked, robbed, or tricked.

**Use:** A frost jotunn throws a boulder just to be threatening. A clever jotunn offers to share a story in exchange for food and conversation.

A clan of jotunns uses the cover of a storm to raid a village.

Loot: Jotunns like fine things, and their homes usually have utensils, plates, weapons, and trophies made of precious materials and decorated with gems. They may have cyphers, and a leader may carry an artifact.

# **LICH**

## 8 [24]

A lich is a powerful wizard or priest who has used their knowledge of necromancy to bind their soul in a magical object called a phylactery, making them immortal and undead unless their soul object is found and destroyed. Having corrupted its own life energy in an obscene ritual, a lich can pursue its other magical goals, usually the acquisition of more wealth, magic, and power. A newly made lich may look like a recent corpse, but maintaining its physical vessel becomes less of a priority as the centuries pass, so over time they tend to look withered or even skeletal. Liches often work with or command other undead, such as wraiths, skeletons, vampires, and zombies.

#### Motive: Magic, immortality, power

**Environment:** Wherever they can remain hidden and work undisturbed **Health:** 45

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Intellect defense and magical lore as level 10

- **Combat:** A lich can shoot blasts of necromantic energy that inflict 8 points of damage on a target and 4 points on any creature within immediate range of the target.
- A lich knows many spells, such as the following:
  - Animate guards: Animate ten corpses as skeletons or zombies, which obey the lich for one hour before turning back into corpses.
  - Armor: Gain +5 Armor for one hour.
  - *Death:* Inflict 8 points of damage on a creature within short range; if the creature fails a Might defense roll, it also moves two steps down the damage track.
  - *Fly*: For one hour, move through the air as effortlessly as walking.
  - *Paralyze:* One target within short range is held motionless for two rounds, unable to take any physical actions.
  - *Polymorph:* Transform a creature within short range into a harmless creature like a fish or frog for one minute.
  - *Scrying eye:* View any familiar location within 1 mile (1.5 km) as if the lich was observing it directly.
  - *Teleport*: Move instantly up to 1 mile.

A lich also likely carries several cyphers useful in combat.

Liches are undead, and therefore immune to anything that affects only living creatures, such as disease and poison.

- Unless its well-hidden phylactery is destroyed, a lich that is killed reforms a new body near its phylactery over the next week or so, returning at full health and with all of its abilities and memories.
- **Interaction:** Liches hate being interrupted and have more important things to do than answer questions from mortal weaklings. A lich may be convinced to teach a character a spell, especially if given a spell, cypher, or artifact in trade.
- **Use:** A lich is planning a ritual to raise an army of skeletons or zombies to attack the kingdom. A lich has made a pact with a demon to unleash a plague in exchange for obscure magical knowledge.

Loot: A lich has 1d6 cyphers and usually an artifact.







Vampire, page 362

Zombie, page 371

#### **GM** intrusions:

The lich casts a spell in addition to taking other actions on its turn.

The lich uses a cypher, spell, or other ability to nullify an attack that otherwise would have affected it. Classical manticores were not described as having wings. Modern interpretations often give them wings (perhaps due to crossbreeding with chimeras) but say they are poor fliers. Flying manticores have **Movement:** Long; short when flying.

The GM can combine multiple barb attacks against the same creature into one attack, inflicting damage equal to the number of barbs plus additional Speed damage from poison equal to the number of barbs.

GM intrusion: The manticore attacks with its bite, then spins around to lash its opponent with its barbed tail.

## MANTICORE

# 6 (18)

A manticore is a fearsome predator that resembles a maned red lion with a human head and a scorpion's tail. The head is bearded and has three rows of teeth in the upper and lower jaws, like a shark. The scorpion tail is covered in multiple barbs, and the creature can flick its tail to hurl these barbs at its prey. Manticores eat all of their prey, including the bones, clothing, and equipment, leaving nothing but a bloodstain as evidence of their hunting.

Motive: Hungers for flesh (especially human flesh) Environment: Mountains and plains Health: 22

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Armor: 1 Movement: Long

Modifications: Ranged attacks as level 5

- **Combat:** Manticores attack with their powerful bite, seeking to incapacitate or kill one opponent quickly so they can eat. Some are content to attack and consume a single target, but a large, hungry manticore prefers to wait until two or three creatures are nearby before attacking. A manticore has powerful legs and can leap up to a short distance in any direction, and often surprises its prey by leaping from concealment.
- Instead of biting, a manticore can use its poisonous scorpion-like tail to strike one creature in melee with a cluster of barbs, inflicting 4 points of damage (plus 4 additional points of Speed damage if the target fails a Might defense roll). With a flick of its tail, it can hurl up to four barbs up to a short distance away, striking one or more creatures in an immediate area. Each barb inflicts 1 point of damage, and the target must succeed on a Might defense roll or take 1 additional point of Speed damage.
- **Interaction:** Manticores can make trumpet-like noises that resemble speech, but this seems to be a trick to lure prey. Most of them are not intelligent enough to know how to speak human languages.
- **Use:** Weird musical noises resembling speech are heard from the nearby hills. People have been disappearing in fields and on the road, with only bloodstains on the ground suggesting that they were harmed.
- **Loot:** A manticore's stomach might contain a piece of treasure or a cypher from a recent meal, and its lair may have one or two small objects it was unable to digest.



# MERFOLK

Merfolk are intelligent creatures with humanlike bodies from the waist up and scaly fish bodies from the waist down. They are able to breathe air or water but prefer the sea for its beauty and their better mobility. Merfolk have great underwater cities ruled by a king or queen, but most land-walking species interact only with the common or soldier merfolk who visit the ocean surface and coastlines. Merfolk societies are much like those of surface humans; their inability to use fire limits them in some ways (such as blacksmithing), but they have compensated for this with water magic and other skills.

Merfolk skin ranges from all human colors to green, blue, and grey. Some have small fins on their heads and elbows or webs between their fingers. They dress for comfort and wear jewelry made of shells, coral, pearls, polished gemstones, and metals they can salvage or trade for. Most of them are content to be hunters or cultivators of kelp and other aquatic plants, but some are curious about land-walkers (and their sunken ships) or fiercely territorial about protecting their waters against outsiders. **Motive:** Defense, entertainment **Environment:** Oceans, seas, and coasts **Health:** 9

Damage Inflicted: 4 points Armor: 1

Movement: Immediate; short when swimming
Modifications: Perception as level 4 while in water
Combat: Merfolk use spears, tridents, daggers, and other stabbing weapons that are effective underwater. They may create traps using nets to confine or direct foes into an ambush. A few lucky or clever ones have

- acquired or adapted light crossbows designed to fire underwater up to a short distance away.
- About once every ten minutes, a merperson can swim a short distance as their action and still make a melee attack, or swim up to a long distance as their action.
- About one in ten merfolk have the magical ability to harden water until it is as strong and durable as wood, taking about an hour to make a spear or similar tool that lasts for several days. Some noble merfolk can create short-range bolts of electricity as an action and make limited alterations to the weather (stilling, increasing, or dispersing wind and clouds in a very long area) by concentrating for several minutes.
- **Interaction:** Merfolk react according to their role in merfolk society—farmer, rancher, guard, explorer, noble, and so on. Some merfolk are more aggressive or hostile and dislike the presence of land-walkers in their territory. Most merfolk are amiable to conversation and trade with people who treat them with fairness and respect.
- **Use:** Merfolk are often seen sunning themselves on a small island off the coast. Merfolk warriors accompanied by trained large fish have been harassing boats and ships that stray too far from the shallows and shores.
- **Loot:** In addition to several small pieces of jewelry, a group of merfolk might have a manifest cypher. A noble or royal merperson usually has a cypher and might have an artifact.

## 3 (9)

The merfolk as described here come from western European folklore; other cultures have their own stories about fish-humans with different configurations (such as shark-humans, scaly torsos, split tails, and so on).

Some people use the term "merman," "mermaid," or "merperson" for one creature and "mermen," "mermaids," or "merfolk" for multiples of them.

**Trained large fish:** level 2, attacks as level 3; swims a long distance each round

#### GM intrusions:

The merfolk's weapon injects poison, inflicting 5 points of Speed damage if the character fails a Might defense task.

Another merperson or an allied aquatic creature arrives and joins the fight against the character.

#### GODFORSAKEN

Mastercraft weapon, page 154

#### **GM** intrusions:

A minotaur smashes a nearby wall, causing part of the ceiling to collapse on one or more characters, inflicting 6 points of damage and trapping them until they can escape from the rubble.

A minotaur grabs a character, who can resist with a Might or Speed defense roll; if they fail, the minotaur takes them up to a short distance away and disappears (behind an obstacle, into a maze, or in some other hiding spot).

## MINOTAUR

Minotaurs are aggressive bull-humanoids who enjoy human flesh. Some legends say the first minotaur was the result of a curse from a god, and others suggest it was created by a demon, but the truth is lost to antiquity. Minotaurs care little about history or their origin, preferring to hunt for meat and spar with each other for dominance and trophies.

Minotaurs live in small tribes of up to a dozen adults. Solitary minotaurs are exiles, last survivors of their tribe, or younger individuals claiming their own territory. **Motive:** Hungers for flesh **Environment:** Caves, plains, and labyrinths **Health:** 19

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 1 Movement: Short

Modifications: Hunting and tracking as level 5

**Combat:** Minotaurs attack with their horns or use large weapons. A minotaur can charge up to a short distance and then make an attack, which inflicts an additional 3

points of damage.

Minotaurs are interested in mazes and mazelike spaces and like to wander within them, memorizing the paths and finding good places to stage ambushes. They leave out piles of equipment and useless treasures from previous victims to lure people into the maze and give the minotaur time to corner their prey.

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Sometimes one minotaur in a tribe develops simple magic powers and is able to create illusions of smoke or mist in an area a short distance across, turn invisible for a few moments, or enchant weapons to inflict

bleeding wounds.

Interaction: Minotaurs can speak, usually in their own language or another crude humanoid language. However, they typically choose not to speak to weaker creatures (such as humans).

**Use:** A wandering gang of minotaurs has been stealing livestock from a local village and is ready to start hunting humans. A minotaur gladiator escaped from a secret underground arena and is stalking prey in the city. Something lurks in a corn maze, leaving nothing but bones and bloodstains.

Loot: Minotaurs don't have much use for coins but keep a few small trophies, such as ivory dice, gems, or simple jewelry. The most powerful minotaur in the tribe may have a cypher or even a mastercraft weapon.

# MORLOCK

2 (6)

Morlocks are degenerate, blind cannibal humanoids that avoid light. They have prominent teeth, piglike eyes, loose skin, and stooped postures. They avoid bright daylight and prefer to hunt and forage when it is dark out (or at least under the twilight-like canopy of a heavy forest). Morlocks eat any sort of meat, even carrion and their own dead.

Morlocks build piles of stones to mark their territory. On nights of the new moon, they create unnerving music by playing simple drums made out of skulls and logs. They lack the foresight to store food for lean times, so they range farther from home in winter and times of famine. They are sometimes enslaved by more powerful creatures such as ogres or a vampire.

Motive: Hungers for flesh, defense

**Environment:** Caves, forests, hills, and underground **Health:** 6

Damage Inflicted: 2 points

Movement: Short; short when climbing

Modifications: Stealth and tracking as level 4

- **Combat:** Morlocks fight with their nails and teeth, but sometimes they use simple weapons like clubs, stone knives, spears, and javelins if they have observed other humanoids doing so. Some tribes dig simple pit traps and chase prey into them.
- Morlocks dislike strong light but are not harmed by it. Their hearing and sense of smell is strong enough that they can "see" in dim or very dim light as if it were normal light. They can track scents as well as a trained dog.
- Interaction: Morlocks have a simple language of hoots, howls, and growls that communicate basic concepts like food, fire, danger, and cold. If enslaved by a more powerful creature, some of them can manage to learn a few words in that creature's language.
- **Use:** Town elders warn that the drums and near-human howls on dark nights are signs of morlocks who'll steal away foolish children. Stacked piles of stones are found in the forest, each surrounded by bare humanoid footprints.
- **Loot:** Morlocks don't value what they can't eat, but their lair may have a cypher or two from a recent victim.

Morlocks may be descended from humans or near-human creatures, twisted and ruined by inbreeding and mutation.

**GM intrusion:** An unnoticed morlock drags away an unconscious character or animal to be eaten once they're out of sight.

## NECROMANCER

# 5 (15)

The ability to influence, command, and call up the dead is an impressive power, given how many more people are dead than living. Since the only thing separating a living person from a dead one is a well-aimed knife or death spell, the number of dead always rises. **Motive:** Magical power, mastery over death

**Environment:** In places where dead are interred, usually with some number of undead servitors

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 6 due to shroud of undead protective spirits **Combat:** Necromancers can blast a foe within long range with the cold of the grave or flesh-decaying magic.

A necromancer can cast a death spell on a foe within short range once every minute; the victim must succeed on a Might defense roll or move down one step on the damage track. This ability could be an innate power or come from an artifact.

A necromancer who isn't already accompanied by undead spirits or shambling,

Spirit: level 3; flesh-decaying touch inflicts 3 points of damage

Necromancers who figure out the trick of commanding hundreds or thousands of undead use that ability, almost without fail, to build undead armies for campaigns of conquest.

GM intrusion: A bony hand erupts from the ground at the character's feet. On a failed Speed defense roll, they are held in place until they can succeed on a Might task to escape. Each round the character fails to escape, the hand squeezes them for 3 points of damage. spirit-inhabited corpses under their command can call up a spirit as an action. A necromancer can command up to five spirits (or newly allied undead, as described below) at a time.

A necromancer can attempt to take command of a spirit or undead creature within short range. They automatically succeed against an unaligned undead target of level 4 or less. If a targeted spirit is already allied with or in service to a PC, the PC must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or lose control of the spirit to the necromancer's will for one minute.

- Interaction: Necromancers are feared for their nonchalant attitudes toward life, especially the life of normal people (such as peasants and city folk). They will negotiate but usually don't have the capacity to care about another person's well-being; they're sociopathic.
- Use: A character has died, and their allies must find a necromancer to help retrieve their spirit. Of course, the necromancer wants something in return for this aid—perhaps an artifact pilfered from whatever underworld or hell the dead character is imprisoned within.

**Loot:** Necromancers have one or two expensive items, a cypher, and possibly an artifact.

7 [21]

# NOBLE KNIGHT

Whether noble or ignoble, some knights achieve an amazing mastery over weapons, combat, and courtly graces, eclipsing lesser warriors and champions. The quests of some noble knights can lead them far across the land into strange new territories where they encounter and defeat various magical creatures.

Motive: Accomplish noble (or ignoble) deeds

**Environment:** Almost anywhere, often alone, sometimes with followers **Health:** 50

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

- **Modifications:** All tasks related to heraldic lore and chivalry as level 8; Speed defense as level 8 while holding shield
- **Combat:** Noble knights are armed with massive weapons they can wield in one hand, which means they can also hold a shield. They are skilled with melee weapons (such as a battleaxe, broadsword, or mace) and inflict lethal damage on a hit.
- Noble knights can also rely on a magic artifact or two to aid them, and possibly a noble steed. The artifact might be the very weapon a knight wields in combat and could grant them one or more of the following additional abilities:
- Legendary Strength. The noble knight can call upon the artifact to grant them great strength or fortitude to accomplish a particular physical task (such as breaking down a door, lifting a boulder, or knocking down pillars holding up a structure), which they attempt as if they were level 10.
- Regeneration. The noble knight regenerates 2 points of health per round while the weapon is drawn.
- *Resistance.* The noble knight is immune to effects that would influence their mind, charm them, or put them to sleep.
- Interaction: Flowery language and impeccable manners show a knight's noble background. Those who negotiate with one in good faith are likely to come away with something of value. However, sometimes a noble knight is corrupt and betrays trusts.

Use: A noble knight has decided that they must guard a bridge against any who would cross it.Loot: Noble knights carry weapons, heavy armor, and perhaps a cypher or even an artifact.

Noble steed: level 5; moves a long distance each round

GM intrusion: The character damaged by a noble knight's attack must succeed on a Might defense roll or be knocked off a mount, a bridge, or a cliff, or, if nothing suffices, they are knocked to the ground and out of immediate range of the knight.

## SAPIENT TREE

# 3 (9)

Guardians of the wood, sapient trees stand eternally vigilant, often on the outskirts of their grove or forest to keep out those who might seek to do them—or other, ordinary trees—harm. They look like normal trees until they reveal their true nature, with limb-like branches and faces in the bark of their trunk. They don't always move, but with effort, they can uproot themselves and walk about. However, they usually do so only when no one is looking. The origin and temperament of sapient trees varies; they might be haunted trees possessed by spirits, trees animated by magic spells, or ancient mythical beings. Some are peaceful and noble, but others are downright wicked and cruel.

tree grabs the character and holds them fast, shaking them. They take 4 points of damage each round and can do nothing but attempt to escape (the task is hindered by two steps because of the shaking).

GM intrusion: The

**Environment:** Found in groves or copses of five to twenty **Health:** 16

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

#### Armor: 3

Movement: Short

- **Modifications:** Initiative as level 4; Speed defense as level 2 due to size
  - **Combat:** When a sapient tree attacks, it often does so with surprise because it looks like a normal tree at first. If a character about to be attacked fails an Intellect defense roll, they do not perceive the attack in time, and the tree's attack is eased.
  - If a tree strikes in combat with one of its branch-arms, it can choose to grab the foe (rather than inflict damage) and toss them an immediate distance away, inflicting 2 points of ambient damage if they hit the ground or another solid object. If they are tossed at another creature, that second creature must make a successful Speed defense roll or also take this damage.
  - Sometimes, a sapient tree that bears fruit will hurl its fruit up to short range, inflicting 4 points of damage.
- Interaction: Sapient trees are generally unfriendly and indignant toward animal life. They are fearful and assume that any creature not native to their forest is a threat. They are likely to attack first rather than speak, although they can speak eloquently, if sometimes slowly.

**Use:** These trees populate magic forests. They can be used to surprise characters with an attack from an unexpected direction.

### CREATURES AND NPCs

# SATYR

These muscular humanoids sport long curved horns and furry, hooved legs. They are self-centered, greedy, and sybaritic creatures, dedicated to food, drink, and other pleasures. They rob and steal from others as it pleases them, often relying on tricks and lies, or alluring music they play on pipes.

Motive: Play tricks, gather treasure, fulfill desires

Environment: Woodlands, hills, and plains

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Tasks related to persuasion and deception as level 7; resists mental attacks as level 7

**Combat:** Satyrs usually carry spears that they can use in melee and against foes within short range. They can also create magical effects by playing their pipes as an action, which can either bolster allies or harm enemies:

Dance of the Leaping Stag: Foes within short range who fail an Intellect defense task lose their next turn to dancing and leaping. Attacks made against affected targets are eased.

Feral Overture: An ally within short range is infused with magic, and one attack it makes on its next turn is eased; if it hits, it inflicts +3 damage.

*Tune of the Clouded Mind:* A foe within short range who fails an Intellect defense task spends its next turn attacking one of its allies.

Interaction: Satyrs are inveterate mercenaries. They gladly work for strong drink and other treasures, and they ally with almost any creature capable of meeting their price. A satyr is always willing to start negotiations, but is prone to lying and exaggeration. Offering excessive libation, food, and other rewards is the only way to ensure that a satyr remains honest, and then for only a short period.

**Use:** Strange piping music in the forest lures away young people from a nearby community. Community elders say a charismatic cult leader has set up in the woods and clouds the minds of all who come near.

Loot: A satyr is likely to carry one or two cyphers. **GM intrusion:** A mental effect makes the character view the satyr as a good friend for up to one minute unless they succeed at an Intellect defense task.



## SHADOW

# 1 (3)

Shadows are semi-intelligent patches of darkness roughly in the shape of a humanoid creature's silhouette. They creep along walls, floors, and ceilings, blending in with actual shadows, peeling themselves free only when they're ready to clutch at a victim with their cold claws.

Motive: Hunger for life energy Environment: Anywhere that shadows can occur Health: 3 Damage Inflicted: 2 points Armor: 1 Movement: Short

Modifications: Stealth as level 3

**Combat:** Shadows attack with their claws, which feel like a cold breeze and drain 2 points of Might from their target with each hit. They can barely interact with physical objects, and even something as simple as moving a pebble an immediate distance or knocking over a candle takes intense concentration.

A group of five shadows can act as a swarm, focusing on one target to make one attack as a single level 3 creature, inflicting 4 points of damage.

In an area of complete darkness with no illumination at all, shadows are effectively powerless—they cannot attack and all their actions are hindered. If suddenly deprived of light, they slink about menacingly for a few minutes but lose interest if it seems like their prey won't be bringing back the light. Shadows are flat rather than insubstantial, but attacks that harm phased, ghostly, or similar creatures are fully effective against them. They can easily pass through narrow spaces such as the gap under a door or between the bars of a cell, but cannot move through solid objects. Interaction: Shadows never speak, but they can

make rustling noises like a gently moving curtain. If controlled or prevented from attacking, they can communicate with simple pantomimes and seem to understand some pieces of language. **Use:** The flickering shadows from a campfire bend strangely and begin to creep toward a nearby character. A person appears to have two shadows just before they feel icy coldness slide along their flesh.

GM intrusion: The shadow attaches itself to a character and begins to take over as their shadow, automatically inflicting damage every round until the character uses an action to tear it off of them.

# SOUL EATER

## 5 (15)

A soul eater is the animate head of a powerful wizard who shuffled off this mortal coil to become an undead creature without ethics, feelings, or a sense of morality.

Also called dread skulls, these creatures maintain their existence by occasionally absorbing the spirit or mind of living victims. An absorbed "soul" is burned away, which is why dread skulls are wreathed in flame; it's the by-product of the creature's previous meal. **Motive:** Hungers for souls

Environment: Usually at the center of tombs

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long when flying

**Modifications:** Resists mental attacks and deception as level 7; Speed defense as level 7 due to size and quickness; knowledge of arcane methodologies and rituals as level 8

**Combat:** A soul eater has a library of magic abilities it can draw upon, including long-range attacks of fire or cold against all targets within immediate range of each other, the ability to read the mind of a victim within short range on a failed Intellect defense roll, and the ability to cloak itself in the illusion of a normal human for up to an hour at a time.

In addition, a dread skull can draw out a victim's consciousness and absorb it in a blaze of supernatural fire. To do so, the creature must bite a target, which inflicts 5 points of damage; the target must then succeed on an Intellect defense roll or take an additional 5 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). If a dread skull drains a character's Intellect Pool to o through repeated bites, the character's soul is sucked into the skull, and the body falls limp. Once absorbed into the skull, a victim's essence is trapped and slowly consumed over the next twenty-four hours. During this period, the skull regenerates 1 point of health per round.

- If a dread skull isn't destroyed within twenty-four hours of eating a soul, the victim's essence is fully consumed. If the soul eater is defeated and its skull is shattered before then, all unconsumed souls are returned to their bodies.
- **Interaction:** Dread skulls are slightly insane but hellishly smart, which means that sometimes they will negotiate to get what they want.
- **Use:** Soul eaters remember a little bit of the knowledge of every creature's essence they consume. The PCs need to learn the command word of an artifact they've found, but the only one who knew it was consumed by a dread skull.

**Loot:** Sometimes dread skulls keep treasures as trophies of past victories, consisting of 1d6 cyphers and maybe an artifact.

If a dread skull consumes multiple spirits during the same time frame, it regenerates multiple points of health per round.

**GM intrusion:** The character who uses a cypher against the dread skull must make an Intellect defense roll. On a failed roll, the cypher begins to burn with flame, dealing the character 5 points of damage and destroying the cypher in the process.

## SPHINX

# 7 (21)

A sphinx is a magical creature with a large lionlike body, feathered wings, and a head that is like that of a human or some kind of animal (typically a hawk or ram). Wise and fierce, sphinxes have a connection to the divine and are often found guarding temples or persons of great interest to the gods (although whether they serve good or evil depends on the individual sphinx). No matter what their head looks like, a sphinx can devour creatures as easily and quickly as a lion.

Motive: Defense, riddles

Environment: Deserts, plains, and mountains

Health: 25

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: Intellect defense and magical lore as level 8

Combat: A sphinx attacks with its lion claws, making two swipes as its action.

A sphinx also has the following magical abilities:

- *Curse:* Curse a creature within long range, hindering all their physical actions by two steps until some other magic lifts the curse.
- *Heal*: Restore 10 health to an NPC, or allow a PC to use their next action to make a recovery roll that does not count toward their normal allotment. Can be used three times per day.
- *Riddle:* A creature within long range must make an Intellect defense roll to answer a difficult riddle; failure means the creature stands confused for one minute even if they are attacked.
- Spellbreaker: End an ongoing magical effect within short range, such as a curse or protective spell. If there are multiple effects, the sphinx chooses which one to end. It can target an immediate area instead of a specific effect (such as an area where it suspects an invisible enemy is hiding).
- *Teleport:* Instantaneously move a very long distance. Can be used once per day.
- Interaction: Sphinxes are very intelligent and speak several languages (including at least one ancient or obscure language). If their demands are met (such as by answering a riddle or performing a service), they can be quite talkative, if arrogant.

Use: A sphinx guards the main road into the city, killing anyone who fails to answer its riddle. A sphinx approaches, offering secret lore if the characters can direct it to a suitable mate or an abandoned temple it can restore and guard.
 Loot: A sphinx usually has one or two cyphers and perhaps a small artifact it can wear and use.

GM intrusion: The sphinx leaps onto its opponent, attacking with all four claws as its action.

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# TROLL

A troll is a hideous humanoid standing at least 10 feet (3 m) tall that hunts more by smell than by sight. They are dangerous but not particularly intelligent. Always ravenous, trolls eat anything, and rarely take the time to cook a meal. Usually, they distend their mouths and throats and swallow subdued prey whole.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Nearly anywhere, hunting alone or in pairs

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long

**Modifications:** Speed defense as level 5 due to size; Might defense as level 7; sees through deception as level 4

**Combat:** The troll attacks with its claws. If it hits, it grabs a foe tightly, then squeezes and bites until the victim is dead or it releases that victim to attack another creature. Each round that a held creature does not escape, they take 10 points of damage.

Trolls regain 3 points of health per round. If a troll suffers a particularly egregious wound (10 or more points of damage in one round), rather than regain

health in that round (and instead of taking any other action), the troll divides into two level 4 trolls that are 3 feet (1 m) tall. Spawned trolls that survive the battle and have access to food grow into full-power trolls within a few weeks.

Interaction: Trolls speak their own simple language, but a few know a little bit of a local human language. Most prefer to attack and eat other creatures, but might be bargained with after a successful show of force.

**Use:** Trolls may be chance encounters in the wilderness for unlucky travelers. Sometimes

> captured trolls are used by slavers, armies, and powerful wizards as guards and warriors.

**Spawned troll:** *level 4,* Might defense as *level 5; health 15;* Armor 1; *claws inflict 5 points of damage; grabbed victim suffers 5 points of damage each round held by troll* 

**GM intrusion:** The struck troll divides into two separate trolls that immediately attack the character in the same action.

#### GODFORSAKEN

The individual grubs could be an immature form of some as-yet unnamed (or unrecognized) creature.

A worm that walks sometimes refers to itself as a "collective."

**GM** intrusion: A character struck by the worm that walks notices that they weren't able to shake off all the grubs that spilled out. If they fail a Speed defense roll, a grub dives into their flesh and travels through their body, its route visible beneath their skin. The character is distracted (all tasks hindered) until the grub dies one minute later or is otherwise extracted.

# WORM THAT WALKS

This sodden, leather-wrapped humanoid smells of the sea. It moves effortlessly through the air, levitating above the ground while its damp wrappings writhe and squirm as if infested with thousands of worms—because they are.

7 [21]

Each worm that walks is a mass of psionic grubs squirming through a slush of salty ooze. Individually the grubs are harmless vermin, but together they're a sentient entity, a single psionic mind formed of thousands of tiny, maggot-like pupae.

The tightly wound leather straps covering a worm that walks are just as important for hiding its true nature as for adhesion. Despite being fully encased, the worm that walks senses its environment with a hard-to-fool sixth sense.

Motive: Domination of other creatures, hunger

Environment: Almost anywhere

Health: 30 Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Immediate; short when flying

**Modifications:** Perception as level 8; Speed defense as level 5 due to slow nature **Combat:** A worm that walks can strike a single target in immediate range with a leather-wrapped "fist" as its action. When it hits and deals damage, several grubs spill out and attach to the victim (getting under most armor unless it's hermetically sealed

> or behind a force field), who must make a Might defense roll to shake them loose. On a failure, the grubs begin to feed, and the target takes 5 points of damage (ignores Armor).

If a victim is killed while in immediate range of a worm that walks, the worms automatically engulf the body through a wide opening in their wrappings. The grubs go into a feeding frenzy, reducing the remains to nothing within minutes. During the frenzy, the worm that walks regenerates 2 points of health per round. A victim's equipment is retained for later study.

> A worm that walks can also emit a psychic burst that can target up to three creatures in short range as its action. On a failed Intellect defense roll, a victim suffers 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and is unable to take actions on their subsequent turn. If the victim is attacked while so stunned, their defenses are hindered by two steps.

Interaction: A worm that walks can communicate telepathically with characters within short range. It negotiates only with those strong enough to harm it; otherwise, it tries to eat whoever it runs across. Even if the worm that walks makes a deal, it eventually reneges if it senses any advantage for doing so.

Use: A worm that walks has been active in a small rural community for weeks, apparently in preparation for something it calls "the Great Hatching." If that refers to the hatching of more psychic grubs, it could spell trouble for a much larger region.
Loot: A worm that walks might have one or two cyphers, though during combat it will use any devices that could help it in the fight.

2 [6]

# WRAITH

When a spirit of a dead creature fails to find its way to the afterworld, escapes the same, or is summoned forth by a necromancer, it may become a wraith: a bodiless spirit of rage and loss. A wraith appears as a shadowy or misty figure that can resemble the humanoid figure it once was, though wraiths tend to swarm together, making it difficult to distinguish them from each other.

Wraiths are often mindless, consumed by their condition. But on occasion, a wraith not too far gone still remembers its life and may respond to questions or seek to locate its loved ones or enemies. A wraith may even attempt to finish a task it started in life. But in time, even the strongest-willed spirit's mind erodes without physical substance to renew it, and it becomes an almost mindless monster of destruction.

Motive: Destruction

**Environment:** Almost anywhere, singly or in groups of six to ten **Health:** 6

Damage Inflicted: 3 points Armor: 1

Movement: Short while flying

Modifications: Stealth as level 5

- **Combat:** A wraith attacks with its touch, which rots flesh and drains life.
- A wraith can become fully insubstantial. After it does so, the creature can't change state again until its next turn. While insubstantial, it can't affect or be affected by anything (except for weapons and attacks that specifically affect undead or phased creatures), and it can pass through solid matter without hindrance, but even simple magical wards can keep it at bay. While partly insubstantial (its normal state), a wraith can affect and be affected by others normally.
- A group of five wraiths can act as a swarm, focusing on one target to make one attack roll as a single level 4 creature dealing 5 points of damage.
- Interaction: Most wraiths moan and scream in rage. The rare few that retain reason can speak in a sepulchral voice, and they may even negotiate. Any alliance with a wraith is usually short-lived, since the creature eventually forgets itself and descends fully into rage and the desire to spread destruction.
- **Use:** The PCs are attacked while attending a burial, or they happen to pass close to or camp near a graveyard. Another swarm of wraiths appears in a location where an earlier group was destroyed (indicating a necromancer is summoning them).

**GM intrusion:** The wraith screams out, summoning 1d6 more wraiths from the afterworld.

LADON

## WYVERN

#### Sometimes mad wizards attempt (with limited success) to mix wyverns with dragons to produce smarter flying mounts or awaken a latent potential for breathing fire.

GM intrusions: As part of its attack, the wyvern grabs hold of the character and flies a short distance away. The character can escape with a Might or Speed defense roll (which probably means they fall to the ground and land prone).

The wyvern uses a wing or its tail to slam a character so they are thrown a short distance away and land prone. Wyverns are aggressive lesser cousins of dragons. Their bodies are about the size of a heavy horse but their wingspan makes them seem much larger. Lacking a dragon's fiery breath or other magical abilities, wyverns rely on their strong flight and deadly stinger to catch and kill their prey, typically humanoids or large animals. Wyverns have four limbs—two legs used for clumsy walking and two arm-wings used for flight and balance. **Motive:** Hungers for flesh

**Environment:** Mountains, hills, and plains where large prey is plentiful **Health:** 35

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: Perception as level 7; Speed defense as level 5 due to size

**Combat:** Wyverns prefer to attack from the air, moving up to a short distance and making three attacks (bite, venomous stinger, claws) as their action. If a wyvern has to fight on the ground, it can attack only with its bite and stinger on its turn.

The stinger injects poison, dealing an additional 5 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor)

if the opponent fails a Might defense roll. Because the wyvern hunts primarily out of hunger, it usually focuses its attacks on one creature, weakening the prey so the wyvern can carry it away and eat in peace.

6 [18]

Interaction: Wyverns lack the intelligence of true dragons. They are relatively smart animals (on par with large reptiles such as crocodiles) but can be distracted by easy prey. Allowing one to catch a pig, pony, or riding horse can give characters enough time to get safely away. Use: Hungry wyverns are known to swoop in and carry off livestock and travelers near a particular road or field. A gang of crafty bandits has managed to train a couple of wyverns as mounts and use them as flying cavalry for their troops on the ground. Loot: Wyverns do not collect treasure, but their nest might have a few cyphers from previous victims. If carefully extracted, an intact venom gland from a dead wyvern can be used to poison one weapon (if sold, it is the equivalent of an expensive item).

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# NPCs

## BARD

3 (9)

A bard uses the power of words and music to create magic that inspires and influences others. A typical bard plays a musical instrument and weaves song-spells that rival the magic of wizards and priests, but some use their voices, creating fascinating tales and dramatic speeches.

**Motive:** Entertainment, interaction, and novel experiences **Health:** 10

Damage Inflicted: 3 points Movement: Short

Modifications: Music, oration, persuasion, stealth, and Speed defense as level 4

**Combat:** Bards prefer weapons that rely on speed and agility, like daggers, rapiers, and small bows. Every other round, a bard can create a blast

of pure sound that inflicts 3 points of damage (ignores Armor) to one target within short range.

- A bard knows several spells, such as adding +1 to recovery rolls of nearby creatures, making an indifferent creature friendly (or a hostile one indifferent) for a few minutes, deafening one opponent for hours, easing a physical task by two steps, turning invisible for a minute, or negating sound for a minute.
- **Interaction:** Bards are personable and easy to talk to, but they have a sharp wit and a sharper tongue when it comes to critics and tyrants. A bard would rather escape from a dangerous situation than fight to the death.
- **Use:** A bard ally often has useful information about the current situation, drawn from songs and folk tales. In a pinch, they can make do as a scout or spy, especially in an urban setting. An unfriendly bard mocks the characters and turns the will of a crowd against them.

**Loot:** In addition to a musical instrument and a nice outfit for performing, bards usually have currency equivalent to a moderately priced item and one or two cyphers. **GM intrusion:** The bard creates a burst of discordant sound, stunning the character for one round and deafening them for a minute.



GM intrusion: A berserker makes a second attack as part of their action, either on the character or on another foe within immediate range.



Black bear: level 3, attacks as level 4

Hawk: level 2; flies a long distance each round

Viper: level 2; bite inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor)

Wolf: level 3, perception as level 4

Faerie, page 109 Sapient tree, page 124 Satyr, page 125

GM intrusion: The druid casts a spell (such as healing or a bolt of lightning) and makes a weapon attack in the same action.

### BERSERKER

A berserker is a fierce warrior who can fly into a rage, greatly increasing their strength and hardiness. Many of them choose an animal such as a bear, wolf, or boar as their spiritual kin, wearing the skin of that animal and fighting like wild beasts. **Motive:** Glory in battle

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1 (or 3 when berserk)

Movement: Short

Modifications: Climbing, jumping, running, and Speed defense as level 4

**Combat:** Berserkers prefer large, heavy weapons such as axes, hammers, and greatswords, but they may use bows if they can't easily get close to their foes.

- A berserker can enter a state of rage as part of their action. When raging, they gain +1 to Armor (including against fire), their melee attacks inflict an additional 2 points of damage, and their attacks, Might defense, and actions relying on strength (such as climbing and jumping) are eased by two steps. However, their Speed defense is hindered. A raging berserker fights only with melee weapons and won't retreat from battle.
- **Interaction:** Berserkers are the elites of some warrior cultures and enjoy physical competitions such as wrestling, throwing heavy items, and feasting. They dislike weak and cowardly folk, and do not tolerate insults to their strength or honor.
- **Use:** A group of warriors is led by a mighty berserker looking for a challenging fight. A group of berserkers enters town and picks fights with the local toughs.
- **Loot:** In addition to their weapons and light armor, a berserker has one or two moderately priced items. The leader of a group might have a cypher that enhances strength or toughness.

### DRUID



3 (9)

A druid is a servant of a nature deity or the entirety of nature itself. Some have specific interests such as animals, plants, or storms, with greater powers relating to that devotion. Druids are leaders and advisors in some cultures, society-hating hermits in others. **Motive:** Protecting nature

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Nature lore, perception, and stealth as level 5

- **Combat:** Druids use simple weapons crafted out of natural materials, such as spears, slings, and bows, as well as ritual tools such as daggers and sickles.
- A druid knows several spells, such as a short-range attack that uses electricity or fire, healing a touched creature for 4 health, calming and befriending animals, traveling quickly, controlling the weather within long range, transforming into an animal or plant, and manipulating the natural elements.

A druid often has a loyal animal companion, such as a black bear, hawk, viper, or wolf. Interaction: Druids are cautious when dealing with city folk, and they act quickly to stop the reckless use of fire or exploitation of the wilds. They are generally on good terms with

local animals and magical creatures of nature (faeries, sapient trees, satyrs, and so on). **Use:** A hermit druid comes to the aid of injured or lost characters in the wildlands. A druid

has been attacking loggers and hunters who stray too far from civilization. Loot: In addition to weapons, light armor, and some moderately priced ritual items, a druid might have a couple of cyphers or perhaps an artifact.

### **CREATURES AND NPCs**

## DWARF

4 [12]

A typical dwarf found outside of their homeland is an explorer, warrior, and tradesperson of some skill. Dwarves travel to find work as mercenaries, sell the goods they create, or find unusual materials to use in their crafting.

Motive: Defense, loyalty, honor

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

#### Armor: 2

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Crafting (metal or stone), Intellect defense, and Might defense as level 5 **Combat:** Dwarves traditionally use weapons like axes, hammers, and crossbows. They're used to working together to defend their halls; three or more dwarves attacking the

same target act as a level 6 creature that inflicts 8 points of damage.

Dwarf leaders are usually officers or priests.

**Interaction:** Dwarves are proud and hardworking, but they tend to be stubborn, gruff, and unforgiving of offenses to them or their clan. It takes time to gain their trust, but they respect a fair deal, a hard bargain, a sharp axe, and a sturdy hammer.

**Use:** A stoic old dwarf is looking to go on one more quest before retiring. A clan of dwarves seeks a trade agreement with a human city leader—or redress for an old insult.

**Loot:** In addition to their weapons and light or medium armor, a dwarf probably has several moderately priced items (such as tools or exploration gear) and perhaps a cypher or two.

## ELF

An elf has a very long lifespan and tends to learn and abandon many skills and interests, including combat and magic. Elves are likely to wander in pursuit of something new and interesting, such as finding the tallest tree in the forest, the most beautiful sunset, or the perfect love song.

Motive: Curiosity

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

**Modifications:** Perception, Speed defense, and any two noncombat skills as level 5 **Combat:** Elves usually fight with short or medium blades and delicate but deadly bows. Because of their subtle skill and fast reactions, their first attack in any combat inflicts an additional 2 points of damage.

- A typical elf might know a few minor spells, such as heating or chilling food, creating a bit of moonlight, and cleaning or repairing clothing.
- **Interaction:** Elves appreciate beauty, grace, and skill, and they don't respond well to crudeness or bluster, especially from people decades or centuries younger than themselves. They are subtle in their insults but do have a sense of humor.
- **Use:** A group of young elves arrives in a city, wanting to see firsthand how the short-lived humans do things. An elf is said to have lived in the forest for a thousand years, listening to the secrets whispered by the trees.
- Loot: In addition to their weapons and light armor, an elf carries a few moderately priced (but extremely well-made) curios and mementos, and usually a cypher.



**Dwarf officer:** level 5; health 16; damage inflicted 7 points

**Dwarf priest:** *level 5; health 16; can heal one creature for 10 points or all within immediate range for 5 points* 

**GM intrusion:** The dwarf retaliates for a wound with an attack of their own that inflicts the same damage that was done to them.

[12]

**GM intrusion:** The elf uses a combat maneuver they learned long ago, easing their attack by three steps and inflicting +1 point of damage.

## HALFLING

3 (9)

A halfling is fond of the comforts of home, but adventures and exploration are the fodder of great stories told over tea or dinner, or in a fireside chat. Quick, resourceful, and easy to get along with, halflings fit right in with brave big folk as scouts, burglars, and loyal companions.

Motive: Defense, comfort

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Armor: 0 or 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Intellect defense, pleasant social interactions, and stealth as level 4

**Combat:** Halflings are remarkably skilled with knives, clubs, slings, and small bows. They prefer not to fight larger creatures head on; instead they stay at range, plan ambushes to quickly overwhelm opponents, or team up with a larger ally so they can attack a foe's back and legs.



A master thief or assassin

halfling uses the stats

for an assassin.

GM intrusion: The halfling ducks between or around the character's legs, immediately making a melee attack and hindering the character's next attack against them by two steps.



GM intrusion: The paladin channels holy power into an attack, inflicting +2 points of damage and healing themselves for 4 points of health at the same time. **Interaction:** Halflings enjoy the company of larger folks as long as they aren't mocked for their size. They're brave and determined when they need to be, though some might complain about wanting to go home.

**Use:** A young halfling wants to have some adventures before settling down. The local thieves' guild is said to employ halflings as lookouts and cutpurses, sometimes disguised as human children.

**Loot:** In addition to their weapons (and perhaps some light armor) and food, a halfling might have an interesting cypher or two. Most carry several useful moderately priced items, or an expensive item such as an heirloom snuff box or a nice bag of tools.

### PALADIN

4 [12]

Paladins are heroes who swear a holy oath to vanquish evil. Their power and righteousness are a gift and a heavy burden, and most of them expect to die in battle against an evil foe. **Motive:** Protecting the innocent, destroying evil

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 2 or 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Attacks and Might defense as level 5

**Combat:** Paladins like flashy weapons and shiny armor, which help them show their devotion to the ideals of goodness and draw the attention of evil foes. Many choose a two-handed weapon, but some prefer using a shield in their off hand (defense-oriented paladins like these inflict only 4 points of damage with their attacks but gain an asset on Speed defense).

Blessed by the powers of good, paladins can draw on innate holy magic for several purposes, such as detecting the presence of supernatural evil (demons, evil dragons, undead, and so on), restoring 4 health to themselves or a touched creature, smiting an evil foe to inflict an additional 4 points of damage, or breaking free of mind control.

**Interaction:** Paladins have big personalities and strongly believe in their purpose and goals. They have no tolerance for evil acts and are unwilling to look the other way when their allies want to bend the rules or take advantage of a "grey area." However, they are not fools and won't throw away their lives for nothing.

**Use:** A paladin lays claim to a foe the characters are seeking or have captured. An old paladin is looking for one last villain to smite.

**Loot:** In addition to their weapons and armor, paladins might have one or two cyphers. More experienced ones might be lucky enough to have an artifact (usually a weapon or armor).

### **CREATURES AND NPCs**

# THIEF

A thief takes things that don't belong to them-preferably with their victim remaining unaware of the crime until the thief is safely away. Burglars and pickpockets are the most common sort, but ambitious thieves are known to plan elaborate heists to steal priceless items from prominent targets.

Motive: Greed, curiosity, risk Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Balancing, climbing, perception, pickpocketing, and stealth as level 5 Combat: Thieves prefer small concealable weapons-knives, batons, and so on-so they can quickly make themselves look like an innocent bystander. Their goal is to escape, not kill, so they often rely on tricks like caltrops, spilled oil, and smoke pellets to distract or delay foes and give themselves an opportunity to get away. They aren't above using poison, typically a sleep poison that knocks out a foe for ten minutes on a failed Might defense task.

Interaction: Thieves run a broad range of personalities-nervous, arrogant, quietly confident, sarcastic, and more. They like to know the risks and rewards of what they'll be doing, and they don't like surprises.

Use: A cocky thief steals an item from a character and returns it to prove their skills are up to the task. A gang of pickpockets targets a character's jewelry or cyphers.

Loot: Thieves usually carry light tools, a few small weapons, miscellaneous equipment for creating a distraction, and a cypher they plan to use or sell.

**GM** intrusion: The

thief somehow evades an attack from the character and follows up with a packet of itching powder in the character's face, blinding them until they use an action to clear their eyes.

4 [12]

### CHAPTER 11

# FANTASY CYPHERS

agic items are a staple of fantasy stories and games. Whether the hero is drinking a potion that heals a wound, reading a spell from a scroll to gain protection from a monster, or using a mysterious powder to vex an enemy, these one-use items have a very different role than more permanent items like armor, weapons, and boots. In the Cypher System, these magic items are, of course, cyphers.



Normal and Fantastic Effects, page 380

The Cypher System Rulebook assumes that subtle cyphers are the default, but in a fantasy game the assumption is usually the opposite—cyphers are physical objects (manifest cyphers) with magical powers, which the heroes find as treasure, gifts, or rewards for their adventures and exploits. This immediately creates a different gameplay dynamic than a game that uses only subtle cyphers. First, it means that the PCs can exchange cyphers with each other, allowing them better optimizations of their abilities and counteracting their weaknesses. Second, it means their cyphers can be stolen from them, forcing them to adapt to a situation without their extra magical tricks. Third, it probably means that fantastic cyphers become the norm because magic easily allows for fantastic effects. Fourth, the manifest cyphers are an easy and visible way to reward or entice the PCs (a treasure chest full of gems and potions is an obvious draw, whereas subtle cyphers don't have quite the same visual appeal).

#### MIXING SUBTLE AND MANIFEST CYPHERS

There's no reason why a fantasy campaign can't use manifest cyphers and subtle cyphers. In this setup, manifest cyphers are the tangible objects found in treasure hoards, and subtle cyphers represent good fortune, the blessings of the gods, and other coincidences that benefit the characters. This also creates an opportunity for having two different "tiers" of cyphers—perhaps fantastic effects come only from manifest cyphers, and normal effects are mainly due to subtle cyphers, creating an interesting situation where the PCs can be heroic and perform amazing feats, and magic items are what let really strange things happen. In a low-magic game, the GM might even decide that each character can carry only one manifest cypher at a time, and all of their other cyphers must be subtle cyphers.

#### <u>Cypher forms</u>

What form a manifest cypher takes such as a potion or scroll—doesn't affect its abilities at all. A potion that eases the user's next task by three steps is functionally identical to a magical scroll that does the same thing. The only difference is the look and feel (campaign flavor) in the story. Here are some examples of forms cyphers can take in a fantasy setting. **Potion.** Generally a liquid that the user must drink. This form includes other terms for the container bottle (flask, vial, phial, philter), as well as different consistencies of the liquid itself (oil, salve, ointment). In a broader sense, this category could just as easily be a magical food instead of a beverage, such as an enchanted apple, a seed from an underworld pomegranate, or cursed candy.

**Scroll.** Magical writing on a flexible surface, which must be read (usually out loud) to activate its power. This form includes paper, parchment (writing material made from untanned animal skins), vellum (fine-quality parchment), papyrus, leather, and large leaves. A particularly large scroll might have several cyphers' worth of magic written upon it; in this case, using one cypher doesn't affect the others on the scroll, but all unused cyphers on the scroll count individually toward a character's cypher limit.

**Runeplate.** Magical writing carved into a flat surface rather than painted or drawn onto it. The objects are usually metal, clay, or wood and can include non-flat carvings such as bones, teeth, or sticks.

**Tattoo.** Similar to scrolls, except the magical writing is on the user's flesh rather than a separate object. This category includes painted symbols, branding, and scarification in addition to actual tattoos. The writing might persist after the magic is used, or it might fade away. A tattoo cypher found as treasure might be a vial of magical ink and a needle or brush, or a tattoo on a slain creature that can be transferred to someone else by concentration and touch.

**Charm.** A small device, sometimes attached to a necklace or bracelet. Multiple charm cyphers might be attached to the same object (and still count as multiple cyphers) and could be removed and reattached as needed, or given to another character. The shape of the charm sometimes represents the magic within it—a flying charm might look like a feather, a protective charm might look like a shield, and so on.

**Powder.** Fine particles, typically scattered over an area, sprinkled on a creature, or carefully poured in a line or circle. The powder might be held in a bottle, small sealed tube, pouch, or folded envelope. This category includes dust, sand, and other similar materials.

**Crystal.** A physical object storing magical power within it rather than having magical writing scribed upon it (like a runeplate). The magic might incorporate some aspect of the crystal's shape (such as a knife) or its transparency (such as a lens). This category includes other hard materials such as stones, bricks, and glass.

**Book with words of power.** Similar to a scroll, except the book has other pages, which might describe magical or mundane subjects. Some of the pages might be additional cyphers, usable individually like those on a large scroll.

The GM can use these different cypher forms as hooks for game rules. Perhaps crystals are the only cyphers with fire magic because the flame glyph tends to ignite other enchanting materials. Some scrolls and books might be usable only by characters who have magical training (perhaps limited to Adepts and other characters who choose magical training as one of their type abilities). PCs who studied under a famous alchemist might get more out of the Augment Cypher ability when using potions, but not when using other cyphers. (The GM should let players know about these changes and options ahead of time so they don't accidentally choose something that hurts their character concept.)

Players can use cypher forms as hooks for roleplaying. A barbarian PC might refuse to use magical scrolls as an objection to "wizard magic" or because the character



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Setting Paradigms, page 13 is illiterate. A PC who learns how to craft cyphers might style themselves as a scribe and only make beautiful calligraphic scrolls, or as an alchemist and only make flavorful potions. A PC from a prestigious wizard academy might consider books and scrolls from a less-exclusive institution to be inferior. A practitioner of earth magic might prefer magical crystals to water-based potions. (Players should present these ideas to the GM to make sure they don't contradict campaign lore.)

To randomly determine a manifest cypher's form, roll on the following table.

dıoo	Cypher Form
01–02	Bone runeplate
03–04	Book page
05–07	Bottle of powder
08–09	Brand
10–12	Brick
13–15	Carved bone
16–18	Carved stick
19–20	Carved tooth
21–23	Chalky potion
24–26	Charm
27–29	Chunky potion
30-33	Clay runeplate
34-37	Crystal
38–39	Elaborate scar
40-42	Envelope of powder
43-44	Fuming potion
45-47	Glass
48–50	Leaf
51-54	Leather scroll
55-57	Metal runeplate
58–60	Oily potion
61–62	Paper scroll
63–66	Papyrus scroll
67–71	Parchment scroll
72–74	Pouch of powder
75–76	Skin drawing
77–80	Stone
81–82	Tattoo
83–85	Thick potion
86–88	Tube of powder
89–92	Vellum scroll
93–96	Watery potion
07 00	Wood rupoplata

97–00 Wood runeplate

### CYPHERS AND SETTING PARADIGMS

The Setting Paradigms section of this book talks about defining important aspects of the campaign setting, such as whether magic is divided into divine and arcane, or if practitioners of fire magic oppose practitioners of water magic. These choices may affect cyphers as well—a prayer of healing on a scroll may work only for a member of the faith that created it, a healing potion made by elves might be only half as effective on humans, dwarves may get a bonus on using metal or stone items, and so on.

If the GM decides these paradigms apply to cyphers, they should give the list of available cyphers a once-over just to flag any potential consequences. In general, it's easier during play if few of these changes pop up in the middle of a session, and the GM may decide to hand-wave whether a specific cypher works differently than expected.

#### FANTASY CYPHER NAMES

The cyphers in the Cypher System Rulebook aren't written or named with a particular setting in mind, which means that some of their names don't quite fit for some genres. For example, a traditional medieval fantasy setting probably wouldn't have a cypher called a chemical factory, and probably wouldn't even call it a cypher at all. This is easily fixed by renaming that item to a "flask of arcane tears," a "potion of magical sorrows," or (in a more whimsical setting) an "alchemical onion." In the same way that the physical form of the cypher doesn't matter, the name of the cypher doesn't matter, and the GM should feel free to rename all cyphers to suit the genre, mood, and lore of the campaign (perhaps by photocopying the random cypher table pages from the rulebook and writing in campaign-appropriate names).

Chemical factory, page 385

### FANTASY CYPHERS

#### CHARACTER ABILITIES AS CYPHERS

Some cyphers work similarly to character abilities. For example, the walking corpse cypher is similar to the Necromancy ability. The GM can adapt other abilities as cyphers, but should consider two constraints when doing so. First, limit them to low-tier abilities to prevent the cyphers from overshadowing character abilities. Second, avoid abilities that the PCs already know so players don't regret choosing an ability that they thought was uncommon and interesting. If part of the campaign story requires duplicating an existing PC ability as a cypher, the GM should make sure the character ability is more versatile or more powerful, or otherwise has an advantage compared to the cypher. The protagonists of the story should be the PCs, not their equipment.

### EXAMPLE FANTASY CYPHERS

All of the cyphers in this chapter are manifest and fantastic cyphers.

#### FANTASY CYPHERS TABLE

01–05	Acid resistance
06–11	Animal control
12–18	Beast shape
19–27	Cold resistance
28–34	Demon ward
35-39	Dragon ward
40-44	Electricity resistance
45–48	Elemental conjuration
49-57	Fire resistance
58–61	Giant size
62–65	Instant boat
66–68	Instant tower
69–72	Lycanthrope ward
73–76	Penultimate key
77–82	Poison resistance
83–86	Restorative aura
87–89	Thought listening
90-93	Tiny size
94–98	Undead ward
99–00	Walking corpse

### lacid resistance

Level: 1d6 + 3

Effect: The user gains Armor against acid damage equal to the cypher's level for one hour.

### lanimal, control,

Level: 1d6 + 2

**Effect:** To activate the cypher, the user must succeed on an Intellect attack against a beast whose level does not exceed the cypher's level. If successful, the beast immediately becomes calm. The beast awaits the user's commands and carries out all orders to the best of its ability. The target remains so enslaved for a number of hours equal to the cypher's level minus the target's level. (If the result is o, the target is enslaved for only one minute.) The beast could attack or defend, a dog could follow a scent or retrieve an object, a badger could dig a hole, and so on.

The cypher doesn't give the user any special ability to understand the target or perceive through its senses. For example, the user can command an eagle to fly above a group of enemies, but the eagle can't describe what it sees and the user can't look through its eyes.

### 🚳 🥑 BEAST SHAPE

Level: 1d6

Effect: The user transforms into a specific kind of animal, such as a bear, hawk, horse, or wolf (the kind of animal is determined by the cypher's creator). The user gains the animal's type of movement (swimming for a fish, flying for a bird, and so on) and two assets on tasks to pretend to be that animal. The user also gains an asset on one skill appropriate to their animal form (or two skills for cypher level 5 and higher). See the Animal Form Minor Abilities table.

The magic shrinks or enlarges the user to a size more suitable for their animal



"Beast" in this sense refers to creatures of animal-level intelligence and may include unintelligent magical creatures like basilisks, pegasi, and so on.

Depending on the cypher, the user might still be able to speak in a humanoid language, talk in a "language" of animal noises that other transformed people can understand perfectly, speak with animals of the same kind, or none of the above.

Animal Form Minor Abilities table, page 30

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form, but generally can't make them more than about 50 percent smaller or larger, so the user might become an unusually large bird or a small bear. This doesn't affect the animal's abilities. The user can still use all of their abilities that don't rely specifically on their normal form. For example, an Adept in wolf form can't wield a dagger because wolves don't have hands, but could still use a healing power or mind blast ability.

After about an hour, the user returns to their normal form.

## The second secon

Level: 1d6 + 3

**Effect:** The user gains Armor against cold damage equal to the cypher's level for one hour.

### lemon ward

#### Level: 1d6

**Effect:** For one hour, the user gains Armor equal to the cypher's level against damage from demons, devils, and similar malevolent creatures.

## 🕥 🥑 DRAGON WARD

Level: 1d6

**Effect:** For one hour, the user gains Armor equal to the cypher's level against damage from dragons, wyverns, and similar magical reptilian creatures.

### I C ELECTRICITY RESISTANCE

#### Level: 1d6 + 3

**Effect:** The user gains Armor against electricity damage equal to the cypher's level for one hour.

## The second secon

#### Level: 1d6

- **Effect:** Summons an elemental creature (air, earth, fire, or water) that can understand the verbal commands of the user. Once the elemental is summoned, commanding it is not an action. It can make attacks or perform actions as ordered to the best of its abilities, but it cannot speak.
- The elemental never goes farther than long range away from the user. The elemental is not particularly intelligent or capable of initiating action. It responds if attacked, but otherwise does only as commanded.
- The elemental remains for one hour per cypher level or until its physical form is destroyed, after which it vanishes back to its native realm.

### 🚳 🥑 FIRE RESISTANCE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Effect: The user gains Armor against fire damage equal to the cypher's level for one hour.

In a typical fantasy campaign, a demon is a supernatural being from another dimension or plane of existence.

Earth elemental.

Fire elemental,

Water elemental,

page 107

Air elemental, page 105

page 327

page 326
## FANTASY CYPHERS



#### Level: 1d6

- **Effect:** The user grows to about one and a half times their normal size. While at this larger size, they add 4 points to their Might Pool and +2 to their Might Edge, but their Speed defense rolls are hindered.
- They return to their normal size after a minute. When the effect ends, their Might Edge returns to normal, they lose the penalty to Speed defense, and they subtract 4 points from their Might Pool (if this brings the Pool to 0, they subtract the overflow first from their Speed Pool and then, if necessary, from their Intellect Pool).
- If the user is an NPC, the cypher increases their health by 4, eases their Might-based tasks, and hinders their Speed defense. When the effect ends, they lose 4 health and all of the other advantages and penalties from the cypher.

## 🚳 🥑 INSTANT BOAT

Level: 1d6 + 2

**Effect:** Creates or transforms into a small sailboat that can carry up to eight people. The user or other characters must row, steer, and sail the boat as normal. At cypher level 5 and higher, the boat grants an asset on all tasks relating to its movement, and at cypher level 7 and higher, the boat can move a short distance each round under its own power. The boat lasts for a day, after which it vanishes.

## linstant tower

Level: 1d6 + 3

- Effect: Creates a simple, squat stone tower with a door, three arrow slits, and a ceiling hatch leading to the roof. The tower is 10 feet (3 m) square and 12 feet (4 m) tall. If the cypher level is 7 or higher, the tower also has a second story (with four arrow slits), increasing its total height to 20 feet (6 m). If there isn't sufficient room for the tower to reach its full size, it fills the available space, but its appearance and growth does not apply any force or pressure against the confining surfaces.
- The tower is permanent and immobile once created.

## 🔊 🕜 Lycanthrope ward

Level: 1d6

**Effect:** For one hour, the user gains Armor equal to the cypher's level against damage from werewolves and other lycanthropes.

## PENULTIMATE KEY

Level: 1d6 + 2

**Effect:** Locks or unlocks any one door, portal, chest, or other lockable item of the cypher's level or lower. The targeted item must have a keyhole for the cypher to work.

## la Composition de la compositi

Level: 1d6 + 3

Effect: The user gains Armor against poison damage equal to the cypher's level for one hour.

Lycanthrope: Formally, a human who can transform into a wolf. Informally, a human who can transform into an animal, such as a bear, rat, tiger, or wolf.

Legends speak of the Ultimate Key, which can open any lock, even those sealed by a god.

## I C RESTORATIVE AURA

## Level: 1d6

Effect: Creates an immediate area filled with aromatic smoke, reassuring sounds, gentle light, or other pleasing sensations that last for one hour. Creatures who rest within the area gain +2 on their recovery rolls (or +4 for cypher level 5 and higher). NPCs instead recover 2 health if they spend at least ten minutes within the area (or 4 health for cypher level 5 and higher). For a creature to gain this benefit, its entire rest must occur while the cypher is active.

## 🕲 🥑 THOUGHT LISTENING

#### Level: 1d6 + 1

**Effect:** The user can read the surface thoughts of a creature within short range that they can see, even if the target doesn't want them to. Once the user has established contact, they can read the target's thoughts for up to one minute per cypher level.



#### Level: 1d6

- **Effect:** The user shrinks to about one-tenth their normal size. While at this smaller size, they add 4 points to their Speed Pool and +2 to their Speed Edge, but all of their Might actions are hindered by two steps.
- They return to their normal size after a minute. When the effect ends, their Speed Edge returns to normal, they lose the penalty to Might actions, and they subtract 4 points from their Speed Pool (if this brings the Pool to 0, they subtract the overflow first from their Intellect Pool and then, if necessary, from their Might Pool).
- If the user is an NPC, the cypher eases their Speed-based tasks and hinders their Might-based tasks. When the effect ends, they lose all of the advantages and penalties from the cypher.

## 🚳 🕑 UNDEAD WARD

Level: 1d6

**Effect:** For one hour, the user gains Armor equal to the cypher's level against damage from skeletons, zombies, ghosts, vampires, and other undead creatures.

## 🚳 🧭 WALKING CORPSE

Level: 1d6

Effect: Animates a corpse as a level 1 (or level 2 for cypher level 5 and higher) undead skeleton or zombie, depending on the condition of the body. The corpse can be no larger than a typical human. The animated corpse has none of the intelligence, memories, or special abilities that it had in life. The creature follows the user's verbal commands for one hour, after which it becomes an inert corpse. Unless the creature is killed by damage, the user can reanimate it again when its time expires, but any damage it had when it became inert applies to its newly reanimated state.

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

## **CHAPTER 12**

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

f cyphers are the expendable magic that is ever-present in fantasy, artifacts are the more durable magic items that can be used over and over again—swords, armor, tomes of weird magic, cloaks of invisibility, and so on. Unlike cyphers, there is no limit to how many artifacts a character can bear; an entire campaign might stem from an ongoing quest to collect all of the legendary items carried by a famous hero.

In many fantasy settings, artifacts are powerful items from an earlier age, created and gifted to mortals by the gods or mythic wizards, or from inheriting the power of a previous legendary bearer.

## **ARTIFACT RULES**

Artifacts are more powerful than common equipment or cyphers.

Each artifact has a level and a rate of power depletion. When an artifact is used or activated, the player rolls the designated die (1d6, 1d10, 1d20, or 1d100). If the die shows the depletion number(s), the item works, but that is its last use. A depletion entry of "—" means that the artifact never depletes, and an entry of "automatic" means that it can be used only once.

Depowered artifacts can sometimes be recharged using the repair rules, depending on the item's nature. Other special abilities can also repower an expended item, but probably for only one use. Powerful magical creatures might be able to recharge artifacts, at least temporarily. Under these circumstances, creating new artifacts is beyond the capabilities of player characters, and the only way for PCs to acquire them is by discovering them as treasure or receiving them as a reward for services rendered. The campaign world might have only a few artifacts (such as twelve legendary swords, or seven items made from the body of a slain demigod), or they might be common enough that every town has a retired adventurer who has at least one famous artifact to their name.

## EXAMPLE FANTASY ARTIFACTS

The rest of this chapter is examples of artifacts suitable for a fantasy game. The artifacts are divided into two tables—one for minor items (artifacts that don't have particularly flashy or world-affecting abilities) and one for major items (artifacts that do). A GM running a campaign where magic is subtle, weak, or otherwise limited can use the minor items table, and a GM of a campaign where some magic can do powerful or even impossible things can roll on either table.





In a game where artifacts are common, the GM might want to limit each PC to a number of artifacts equal to their cypher limit. This discourages hoarding and prevents the "Christmas tree" effect where PCs rely more on their items than their own abilities.

In the Dragaera novels by Stephen Brust, beings called the Serioli created large numbers of soul-eating weapons in order to make warfare so terrible that nobody would ever start a war. It didn't work.

Equipment, page 34 Cyphers, page 138



INOR	FANTASY ARTIFACTS TABLE	MAJOR	FANTASY ARTIFACTS TABLE
01–02	Adamantine rope	01–03	Angelic ward*
03–06	Alchemist bag	04	Book of all spells
07–09	Armored cloth	05	Cloak of Balakar
10–15	Belt of strength	06–07	Crown of eyes
16–18	Bounding boots	08	Death's scythe
19–21	Cat's eye spectacles	09–10	Demonflesh
2–24	Cloak of elfkind	11	Demonic rune blade
25-26	Cloak of finery	12–15	Dragontongue weapon
7–28	Coil of endless rope	16–18	Dragontooth soldiers
9-33	Crown of the mind	19–20	Explorer's gloves
34	Crystal ball	21–23	Falcon cloak
35-37	Deflecting shield	24–25	Flying carpet
38-40	Elfblade	26–27	Ghostly armor
<u>1–43</u>	Enchanted armor	28–30	Guardian idol
4-49	Exploding arrow	31–33	Hand of glory
jo-55	Gloves of agility	34–36	Horn of thunder
6–58	Gruelmaker	37-39	Instant ladder
9–60	Helm of water breathing	40-43	Lightning hammer
1–66	Mastercraft armor	44-47	Necromantic wand
7–72	Mastercraft weapon	48–50	Ring of dragon's flight*
73-75	Mindshield helmet	51-53	Ring of fall flourishing
6–77	Pack of storage	54–56	Ring of invisibility
8–79	Poisoner's touch	57	Ring of wishes
80-85	Protection amulet	58–60	Smooth-stepping boots
36–87	Shield of two skies	61–62	Soul-stealing knife
38–92	Skill ring	63–65	Spellbook of elemental summoning
93	Soulflaying weapon*	66	Spellbook of the amber mage*
94–96	Sovereign key	67–69	Staff of black iron
97–98	Tunneling gauntlets	70-74	Staff of healing
99	Vorpal sword	75-77	Staff of the prophet
00	Whisperer in the ether	78–79	Storm shack
		80-83	Trap runestone

84–88 89–93

94-97 Witch's broom

Artifacts table

Wand of spider's webbing

98–00 Roll twice on the Minor Fantasy

\* Artifact found in the Fantasy Artifacts section of the Cypher System Rulebook

Other common forms for flight-granting artifacts are cloaks, boots, and belts.

Other magic wands could shoot blasts of ice, shadow, lightning, acid, or other damage-inflicting substances.

> Fantasy Artifacts, page 257

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

## ADAMANTINE ROPE

#### Level: 1d6 + 4

**Form:** A 50-foot (15 m) length of black rope **Effect:** This length of rope has the

flexibility of ordinary rope but a hardness greater than steel. It is impervious to damage (including attempts to cut it) from anything less than the artifact's level. **Depletion:** —

## ALCHEMIST BAG

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Embroidered velvet bag

**Effect:** This bag can contain up to one cypher per artifact level, as long as each is no larger than a typical potion bottle or scroll case. These cyphers do not

count against a character's cypher limit. **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check each time a cypher is added to the bag)

#### ARMORED CLOTH

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Suit of typical clothing (robe, dress, jerkin and breeches, and so on)

Effect: This clothing is soft and flexible, as expected, except when it is struck or crushed with force, at which point it hardens, providing +1 to Armor. It then immediately returns to its normal state (which is in no way encumbering).

This clothing cannot be worn with armor of any kind.

Depletion: ---

## **BELT OF STRENGTH**

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Thick leather belt with a metal buckle and rivets

- **Effect:** The belt enhances the strength and endurance of the wearer. This increases the wearer's maximum Might Pool by 5 (or by 7 if the artifact is level 6 or higher).
- If the wearer removes the belt, any excess Might points above their normal maximum Might Pool are lost; if they wear the belt again, the points do not automatically return (they must be restored with recovery rolls, healing magic, or similar effects). **Depletion:** —

**BOOK OF ALL SPELLS** 

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Weighty tome filled with pages of spell runes

- Effect: This mysterious spellbook is said to contain knowledge of hundreds of spells—perhaps even all spells. Each set of facing pages includes the magical runes for one spell and a description of the spell and how to use it.
- When a character first opens the book, the GM randomly determines what type of spell is shown by rolling on the following table, then rolling on the indicated table in the *Cypher System Rulebook*:

#### d6 Cypher Type

- 1–2 Roll on the Manifest Cypher table
- 3–5 Roll on the Fantastic Cypher table
- 6 Roll on the Subtle Cypher table
- The bearer can cast the spell on the page as if it were a cypher with a level equal to the book's level. This doesn't remove the spell from the page (it can be cast again and again), but it does require a depletion roll.
- As part of another action, the bearer can turn the page to find a new spell, but only forward, never backward. It is said that turning to the last page makes the book vanish and appear somewhere else in the world.
- The artifact always remembers the last page it was turned to. Opening the book always presents that page. Attempting to copy, remove, or destroy a page only makes the book turn to a later page on its own.
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d100 (Check each time the book is used or the bearer turns a page. The chance of depletion increases by 1 each time it is used [1 in 1d100, 2 in 1d100, 3 in 1d100, and so on]. Instead of depleting, the book might turn to a later page, or disappear and reappear somewhere else in the world.)

Manifest Cypher table, page 382

Fantastic Cypher table, page 382

Subtle Cypher table, page 383

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#### **BOUNDING BOOTS**

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Sturdy but flexible boots

- **Effect:** The boots assist the wearer's every step to make jumping and running easier. The boots are an asset for
  - jumping and running (easing one of these skills by two steps if the artifact is level 6 or higher).

Depletion: —

## CAT'S EYE SPECTACLES

#### Level: 1d6

- Form: Pair of dark crystalline spectacles in a dull wooden frame
- **Effect:** Outside, the wearer can see at night as if it were daylight. Inside, the wearer can see in pitch darkness up to short range (or to long range if the artifact is level 5 or higher).

Depletion: ---

## CLOAK OF BALAKAR

Level: 1d6 + 3

- Form: Blue cloak with elaborate designs suggesting blowing wind
- Effect: The wearer can calm winds of the artifact's level or lower in a radius of 1 mile (1.5 km). Up to once a day, the wearer can create a destructive windstorm up to that size, lasting one minute; this storm's level is equal to half the artifact's level.
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d6 (on depletion, cloak disappears and reappears somewhere else in the world)

## CLOAK OF ELFKIND

#### Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: Thin greyish-green cloak with a cowl and clasp
- Effect: When activated (by drawing the hood over the wearer's head), the cloak takes on the colors and textures of everything around the wearer for ten minutes (or one hour if the artifact is level 8 or higher). This eases hiding and sneaking tasks by two steps. While the cloak is activated, the wearer can also see in the dark. Depletion: 1 in 1d100

### CLOAK OF FINERY

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Multilayered cloak of glittering material
- **Effect:** This cloak is woven of beautiful fibers and set with dazzling gems. It automatically fits itself to its wearer in the most flattering way. When activated, it enhances the wearer's appearance, voice, tone, and even their grammar, granting an asset to all interaction tasks for the next minute.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

### **COIL OF ENDLESS ROPE**

Level: 1d6

Form: Coil of rope

- **Effect:** The coil of rope can be let out at a rate of 50 feet (15 m) per round; however, no end to the rope can be found no matter how long the user uncoils it. The rope retains its incredible length until recoiled or until it becomes depleted. If cut, any length beyond the coil's initial 50 feet crumbles into powder after a round or two.
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check each use that extends it beyond 50 feet)

### CROWN OF EYES

Level: 1d6

- Form: Metallic circlet set with several crystal spheres
- Effect: It takes one round to activate the crown. When activated, the crystal spheres separate from the crown and fly around the wearer at immediate range for an hour. The wearer can see anything the crystal spheres can see. This allows the wearer to peek around corners without being exposed to danger. This gives the wearer an asset in initiative and all perception tasks. Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

#### CROWN OF THE MIND

Level: 1d6

- Form: Crown, circlet, headband, diadem, or amulet
- **Effect:** The crown augments the mind and thoughts of the wearer. This increases the wearer's maximum Intellect Pool by 5 (or by 7 if the artifact is level 6 or higher).
- If the wearer removes the crown, any excess Intellect points above their normal maximum Intellect Pool are lost; if they wear the crown again, the points do not automatically return (they must be restored with recovery rolls, healing magic, or similar effects).
- Depletion: ---

#### CRYSTAL BALL

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

- **Form:** Melon-sized crystalline or glass orb, with or without a support stand
- Effect: This allows the user to scry (view) remote locations and creatures. The user must make a difficulty 2 Intellect task to activate the crystal ball, then use an action trying to make it show a person or location they know. The user must succeed at an Intellect task against the level of the target; otherwise, the crystal shows only indistinct or misleading images. The task roll is modified by how familiar the target is to the user, how available they are to be viewed, and how far away they are.

#### Familiarity

Only have name or description	Hindered
Target has been visited	Eased
Target is well known to the user	Eased

#### Availability

Target is willing	Eased
Target is unwilling	Hindered

#### Distance

More than 1 mile	Hindered
More than 10 miles	Hindered
More than 100 miles	Hindered

- These modifiers are cumulative, so trying to view a level 4 target who the user knows only by name (+1 step), is unwilling (+1 step), and is 20 miles away (+2 steps) is a difficulty 8 task.
- The crystal shows the creature or area for one minute before the image becomes muddled and the artifact must be activated again.
- In addition to the normal options for using Effort, the user can choose to apply a level of Effort to open two-way communication with the viewed area. All creatures in the area can sense the user's presence and hear their voice, and the creatures can speak to and be heard by the user.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

#### DEATH'S SCYTHE

**Level:** 1d6 + 4

Form: Double-handed scythe Effect: This scythe functions as a heavy weapon. In addition, it instantly kills level 1 or level 2 creatures it hits. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, the user can choose to use a level of Effort to affect a higher-level target; each level of Effort applied increases the level of creature that can be instantly killed by the scythe. Thus, to instantly kill a level 5 target (three levels above the normal limit), the wielder must apply three levels of Effort.

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check per killing effect; upon depletion, a manifestation of Death appears to reclaim its blade) An unwilling creature's defenses against magic and Intellect attacks should hinder scrying attempts just as they would against a directly harmful mental spell.

Death manifestation: level 7

## DEFLECTING SHIELD

#### Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Ornate metal or wooden shield Effect: When a small physical projectile such as an arrow, a sling stone, or a thrown knife comes within 4 inches (10 cm) of the wearer, the shield moves to intercept or deflect it, even if the wearer is not aware of the attack. The wearer's Speed defense against the attack is eased (or eased by two steps if the artifact is level 6 or higher). If the projectile still hits the

wearer, the shield gives +1 to Armor against the attack.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

#### DEMONFLESH

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Ball of black leather with vein-like red streaks
- **Effect:** When activated, the ball liquefies and coats the body of the user for one hour, appearing to be a form-fitting leather suit veined with pathways of dully glowing blood.
- As an action, the wearer can become invisible. While invisible, they are specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. This effect ends if they do something to reveal their presence or position—attacking, casting a spell, using an ability, moving a large object,

and so on. If this occurs, they can regain the remaining invisibility effect by taking an action to focus on hiding their position.

The wearer can inflict 3 points of damage with a touch by releasing a dark crackle of demonic power. This attack ignores most Armor, but Armor made to ward against evil or demonic attacks should work against it. **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

### **DEMONIC RUNE BLADE**

Level: 1d6 + 4

**Form:** Sword inscribed with demonic runes **Effect:** This longsword functions as a

- medium weapon, but it is actually a powerful demon transformed into the shape of a sword. The demon cannot speak directly to the wielder, but it can make its desires known by emitting bass rumbles and dirgelike melodies, and by pulling in the direction of its desire.
- The sword eases all attacks made with it by one step, and it inflicts 4 additional points of damage (for a total of 8 points).
- If the wielder kills a creature with the sword, the sword eats the creature's spirit and transfers some of its energy to the wielder, adding 5 points to their Might Pool and increasing their Might Edge by 1. This lasts for an hour and allows the wielder to exceed their normal Might Pool and Might Edge stats.
- If the wielder misses with an attack, the blade sometimes hits an ally of the wielder instead (this *always* happens on an attack roll of 1).
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d10 (check each time a killed creature's life force is absorbed; if depleted, the sword's magical abilities can be recharged if it kills an "innocent" creature)

## DRAGONTONGUE WEAPON

Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: Weapon that roars with red flame when activated, trailing a stream of black smoke
- Effect: This weapon functions as a normal weapon of its type. If the wielder uses it to attack a foe, upon a successful hit, the wielder decides whether to activate the flame. Upon activation, the weapon lashes the target with fire, inflicting additional points of damage equal to the artifact level. The effect lasts for one minute after each activation. Depletion: 1 in 1d100

To randomly determine what kind of dragontongue weapon is found, see Chapter 4: Medieval Fantasy Equipment, page 34.

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

## DRAGONTOOTH SOLDIERS

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Burlap bag containing a handful of large reptilian teeth

Effect: If a tooth is drawn from the bag and cast upon the earth, a dragontooth warrior appears, ready to fight for the user for up to ten minutes before going their own way. The user can draw several teeth at once from the bag, but each tooth drawn requires a separate depletion roll.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10

## ELFBLADE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Medium sword

- Effect: This sword can be used as a normal medium sword that deals 2 additional points of damage (for a total of 6 points).
- The short sword can cut through any material of its level or lower with ease, owing to its exceptional sharpness. The blade sheds a blue light as bright as a candle to warn when goblins, orcs, trolls, or similar creatures are within 300 feet (90 m).

Depletion: —

### **ENCHANTED ARMOR**

Level: 1d6 + 3

- Form: Full suit of light, medium, or heavy armor
- Effect: This armor is carefully crafted and reinforced with magic to be stronger and more protective than typical armor. It is armor according to its type (light, medium, or heavy), but it grants an additional +1 Armor (or +2 if the artifact is level 7 or higher) beyond what it would normally provide. For example, chainmail is medium armor (2 Armor), so enchanted chainmail provides a total of 3 Armor (for artifact level 6 or lower) or 4 Armor (for artifact level 7 or higher).
- The additional Armor provided by the magic also applies to damage that often isn't reduced by typical armor,

such as heat or cold damage (but not Intellect damage). Depletion: —

## **EXPLODING ARROW**

Level: 1d6

- Form: Arrow with runes carved on the shaft and head
- Effect: The arrow explodes when it strikes something, inflicting its level in damage to all within immediate range. Roll d100 to determine the type of damage.

01–20	Acid
21–40	Electricity
41–60	Cold
61–90	Fire
91–00	Necromantic (harms only flesh)

**Depletion:** Automatic

## **EXPLORER'S GLOVES**

Level: 1d6

- **Form:** Thick but flexible-fingered leather gloves
- Effect: The wearer can cling to or climb any surface for up to one hour. Even level 10 climbing tasks become routine while the gloves are activated, but taking any other action while climbing requires a new activation. Depletion: 1 in 1d20

## FALCON CLOAK

Level: 1d6

Form: Cloak made of feathers

Effect: For ten hours, the wearer becomes a falcon whose level is equal to the artifact level. The falcon can fly a long distance each round, or up to 60 miles (97 km) per hour when traveling overland.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

Dragontooth warrior: level equal to the artifact level, Speed defense as artifact level + 1 due to shield; Armor 1; spear attack (melee or short range) inflicts damage and impedes movement of victim to immediate range for one round

One advantage of an exploding arrow over a detonation cypher is that the arrow doesn't count toward your cypher limit.

An exploding arrow can instead be a crossbow bolt, sling stone, or other thrown weapon or projectile.

To randomly determine what kind of enchanted armor is found, see Chapter 4: Medieval Fantasy Equipment, page 34.

Most magic items that turn a character into a different creature make it difficult to use any of the character's special abilities (other than skills) in that form.

## FLYING CARPET

#### Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Silken rug with repeating designs bordered with a pattern that suggests scudding clouds
- **Effect:** The carpet flies a long distance each round, carrying up to five passengers. It flies for up to ten hours per activation. When traveling overland, the artifact can achieve a flying speed of 60 miles (97 km) per hour.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

### **GHOSTLY ARMOR**

#### Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Full suit of light, medium, or heavy armor

- Effect: This armor is carefully crafted and reinforced with magic to be stronger and more protective than typical armor. It is armor according to its type (light, medium, or heavy), but it grants an additional +1 Armor beyond what it would normally provide. For example, chainmail is medium armor (2 Armor), so ghostly chainmail provides 3 Armor.
- When activated, the armor randomly makes the wearer ghostly and immaterial for ten minutes (or for one hour if the artifact is level 9 or higher), which hinders attacks on the wearer by two steps without hindering any of the character's abilities. Special multidimensional weapons or attacks (such as abilities meant to harm ghosts) ignore this defense.
- Depletion: 1 in 1d10 (for the ghostly defense ability, but after depletion, the suit still functions as normal armor and provides its full Armor value)

## **GLOVES OF AGILITY**

Level: 1d6

Form: Supple leather or cloth gloves

- **Effect:** The gloves enhance the dexterity and reflexes of the wearer. This increases the wearer's maximum Speed Pool by 5 (or by 7 if the artifact is level 6 or higher).
- If the wearer removes the gloves, any excess Speed points above their normal maximum Speed Pool are lost; if they wear the gloves again, the points do not automatically return (they must be restored with recovery rolls, healing magic, or similar effects).

Depletion: —

## GRUELMAKER

Level: 1d6

- Form: Clay bowl stamped with symbols of fish and birds
- Effect: The bowl fills itself to the brim with a bland-tasting tan porridge that provides enough nutrition for one person for one day (or two people if the artifact is level 5 or higher). Depletion: 1 in 1d10

#### **GUARDIAN IDOL**

Level: 1d6 + 3

- **Form:** Demonic idol on top of a thin metal leg that is 1 foot (30 cm) tall
- **Effect:** It takes two rounds to balance this artifact on its metal leg, and then it requires an action to activate. When activated, the idol stares at the activating character and nearby creatures for five rounds, memorizing their faces and shapes. After that, if anything the idol doesn't recognize (and is larger than a mouse) comes within long range, it spits a small ball of fire at the target. The fire inflicts damage equal to the artifact level. The idol can attack up to ten times per round, but it never attacks the same target more than once per round. It remains on watch for twenty-four hours or until it has made one hundred attacks, whichever comes first. **Depletion:** Automatic

To randomly determine what kind of ghostly armor is found, see Chapter 4: Medieval Fantasy Equipment, page 34.

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

#### HAND OF GLORY

Level: 1d6 + 3 Form: Dried humanoid hand with candle-tip fingers

- **Effect:** A hand of glory has several potential uses, including the following. In all cases, the candles making up the hand must be lit and burning to produce an effect.
- Insensibility: A target within short range is held motionless and unable to take actions as long as the lit hand remains within range (or until the target is attacked or otherwise snapped out of the trance).
- *Invisibility:* User is invisible for up to one minute while holding the hand. While invisible, the user is specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks.
- Thief's Passage: A locked or barred door or a container whose level is less than or equal to the hand's level becomes unlocked when touched by the hand. **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20

## HELM OF WATER BREATHING

Level: 1d6

- Form: Green metal helm with a scaly or fishy motif
- **Effect:** The wearer's head is enveloped in a tight bubble of air that constantly renews itself, allowing them to breathe underwater indefinitely, speak normally, and so on.

Depletion: 1-2 in 1d100 (check each day)

#### HORN OF THUNDER

Level: 1d6 + 4

- Form: Large signal horn banded with metal and carved with runes
- Effect: This massive instrument can barely be held or carried by a single person. When activated, it emits a 50-foot (15 m) wide cone of pure sonic force out to long range. Any creature in that area is knocked prone and stunned for one round, losing its action. Unfixed items the size of a human or smaller are toppled and/or moved at least 5 feet (1.5 m). Larger objects might also be toppled. Depletion: 1 in 1d10

## INSTANT LADDER

Level: 1d6

Form: Small lightweight metal rod with gem buttons

Effect: When activated, the rod extends and produces rungs so that it can be used as a ladder up to 28 feet (9 m) long. The ladder can be transformed back into its rod form from either end.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## LIGHTNING HAMMER

Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: Massive silver hammer that crackles with electricity
- **Effect:** This hammer functions as a normal heavy weapon. However, if the wielder uses an action to activate it, the weapon radiates electricity for one round. If used to attack on the next round, the hammer inflicts an additional 10 points of electricity damage. The user can choose to strike the ground instead, sending shockwaves of electricity outward that deal 5 points of damage to everyone within short range.
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d6 (still usable as a normal heavy weapon after depletion)



A creature unfamiliar with the buttons on an instant ladder needs to spend several rounds figuring out the proper sequence to expand or collapse it. Depending on the game world, mastercraft armor

and weapons might be

crafted with exceptional quality, or both.

To randomly determine

what kind of mastercraft armor or weapon is

found, see Chapter 4:

Equipment, page 34.

Medieval Fantasy

magical, mundanely

## MASTERCRAFT ARMOR

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Armor of exceptional quality Effect: This armor grants its wearer an asset for Speed defense rolls. Depletion: —

MASTERCRAFT WEAPON

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Weapon of exceptional quality Effect: This weapon grants its wielder an asset for attack rolls made with it. Depletion: —

## MINDSHIELD HELMET

**Level:** 1d6 + 2

Form: Lightweight cloth, leather, or metal helmet

Effect: The wearer gains 3 Armor that protects against Intellect damage only. Further, attempts to affect the wearer's mind are hindered (or hindered by two steps if the artifact is level 7 or higher). Depletion: —

#### NECROMANTIC WAND

#### **Level:** 1d6 + 4

Form: Bone wand carved with runes

- **Effect:** This wand emits a faint short-range beam of sickly violet light that affects only organic creatures and materials. Living targets hit by the beam move one step down the damage track. Nonliving organic targets are likely destroyed.
- This device is a rapid-fire weapon and thus can be used with the Spray or Arc Spray abilities that some characters have, but each "round of ammo" used or each additional target selected requires an additional depletion roll. Depletion: 1 in 1d10

#### PACK OF STORAGE

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Leather backpack or haversack with multiple pockets
- Effect: This pack's mouth can be loosened to open as wide as 6 feet (2 m) in diameter. It is larger on the inside than on the outside, and can carry up to 500 pounds (226 kg) or 10 cubic feet (.3 cubic m). The pack weighs about one-tenth as much as it is holding.
- **Depletion:** 1 in 1d100 (check each time something is added to the pack; on depletion, all objects are expelled from the pack)

### **POISONER'S TOUCH**

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Very thin transparent glove with faint markings
- Effect: When the wearer activates the glove (which might require speaking a command word or tracing a specific pattern on its surface), it secretes a small amount of poison. The next creature the wearer touches with the glove takes Speed damage equal to the artifact level (ignores Armor) and must make a new Might defense roll each round or suffer the damage again until either they succeed at the defense roll or five rounds pass, whichever comes first.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10

## **PROTECTION AMULET**

#### Level: 1d6

Form: Stylized amulet worn on a chain

**Effect:** The amulet reduces one type of damage by an amount equal to the artifact level. Roll a d20 to determine the kind of damage the amulet protects against

protects	agamsi.
1–4	Acid
5–8	Cold
9–12	Electricity
13–16	Fire
17–20	Poison

**Depletion:** 1 in 1d6 (check each time the amulet reduces damage)



## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

Wishes, page 71

## RING OF FALL FLOURISHING

Level: 1d6

Form: Gold band inscribed with feather wreath

**Effect:** The wearer of the ring can fall any distance safely, landing easily and upright.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## RING OF INVISIBILITY

Level: 1d6

Form: Gold band inscribed with characters that are revealed only if ring is heated

Effect: The wearer of the ring becomes invisible for one minute. While invisible, the wearer is specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. The effect ends if they attack or spend points from a Pool for any reason. Depletion: 1 in 1d20

**RING OF WISHES** 

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Plain gold band

Effect: The user makes a wish, and it is granted, within limits. The level of the effect granted is no greater than the level of the artifact, as determined by the GM, who can modify the effect accordingly. (The larger the wish, the more likely the GM will limit its effect.) Depletion: 1–3 in 1d6

## SHIELD OF TWO SKIES

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small hexagonal amulet Effect: Upon activation, the amulet creates a faint glow around the wearer that provides +2 to Armor against heat and cold (or +3 for artifact level 6 and higher). The effect lasts for ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## SKILL RING

Level: 1d6

Form: Ring carved with sigils appropriate to its granted skill

Effect: This ring grants its wearer knowledge of a specific skill, such as climbing, jumping, history, or persuasion. This grants the wearer training in that skill (or in two skills if the artifact is level 5 or higher). Depletion: —

#### SMOOTH-STEPPING BOOTS

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Pair of boots

- Effect: When the boots are activated, for
  - the next hour the wearer can move across rough or difficult terrain at normal speed, walk up walls, and even walk across liquids. In areas of low or no gravity, the wearer can walk along hard surfaces (even vertically or upside down) as if under normal gravity.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## soul-stealing knife

Level: 1d6

- Form: Night-black blade in which distant stars are sometimes visible
- Effect: This knife functions as a normal light weapon. However, if the wielder wishes, on a successful attack, it inflicts additional damage (ignores Armor) equal to the artifact's level. If damage from the dagger reduces a target to o health, the target's soul is drawn into the blade. The soul remains trapped there for up to three days, after which time it is consumed. (Alternatively, the wielder can release the soul to whatever its fate would otherwise be.)

As a separate activation, the wielder can ask three questions of a creature whose soul is trapped in the blade and not yet consumed. After answering the third question, the soul is consumed. **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check each

activation)

Earth elemental.

Fire elemental,

Thorn elemental,

Water elemental,

page 106

page 107

Air elemental, page 105

page 327

page 326

## SOVEREIGN KEY

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Slender golden key

**Effect:** When touched to a lock or the surface of a sealed object (such as a chest, envelope, or urn), the key briefly glows and attempts to open the target. Sealed objects fall open like peeled fruits if their level is equal to or less than the artifact level, and locks open easily if their level is equal to or less than the artifact level.

Depletion: 1 in 1d10

## SPELLBOOK OF ELEMENTAL SUMMONING

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Weighty tome filled with pages of spell runes
- Effect: When the user incants from the spellbook and succeeds at a level 3 Intellect task, they can summon an elemental of one specific kind described in the book (earth, fire, thorn, or some other type). The elemental appears and does the summoner's bidding for up to one hour, unless it somehow breaks the geas created by the book.

Depletion: 1-3 in 1d20



## STAFF OF BLACK IRON

Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: Staff of black iron set with an eye-shaped crystal headpiece
- **Effect:** The wielder can use an action to gain one of the following effects.
- *Influence:* The wielder makes a mental attack on a creature within immediate range by providing a suggestion. An affected target follows any suggestion during its next turn that doesn't cause direct harm to itself or its allies.
- *Lightning:* The wielder discharges a bolt of lightning that attacks all targets along a straight line out to long range, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level.
- Shield: For one hour, the wielder gains the protective effect of using a normal shield (an asset on their Speed defense rolls). This effect is invisible and doesn't require them to hold a shield; merely touching the staff is sufficient.
- The staff can have more than one effect ongoing at a time (such as using the shield ability and blasting someone with lightning), but each requires a separate activation and depletion roll.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

## STAFF OF HEALING

Level: 1d6 + 4

- Form: Wooden staff capped with a golden icon
- **Effect:** The staff emits a short-range beam of silvery light that affects only living creatures. A living creature hit by the beam moves up one step on the damage track.
- A target that is not down on the damage track can immediately make a free recovery roll (or, for NPCs, regain a number of points of health equal to three times their level). **Depletion:** 1 in 1d10

## FANTASY ARTIFACTS

#### STAFF OF THE PROPHET

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Short wooden staff

Effect: The staff has three abilities, each of which requires an action to activate.

- Sea Passage. Creates a dry route through a body of water. The route is approximately 20 feet (6 m) wide, up to 1,000 feet (300 m) deep, and as long as the body of water is wide. The path remains open for up to four hours, or the wielder can collapse it as an action.
- Snake Form. Staff transforms into a venomous snake whose level is equal to the artifact level. The snake has a bite attack that inflicts 6 points of damage, plus 3 additional points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) for three rounds on a failed Might defense roll. The snake obeys the wielder's verbal commands, but it can't do anything a regular snake couldn't do.

Water From Stone. Produces approximately 10 gallons (38 liters) of pure water within immediate range, as if from a natural spring in the ground. Depletion: 1 in 1d20

#### STORM SHACK

**Level:** 1d6 + 3

Form: Miniature model of a simple wooden shack

Effect: Activating the artifact transforms it over the next few rounds into a simple wooden shack that is 10 feet by 10 feet (3 m by 3 m) with a thin door. Everything inside the area of the full-size shack is protected from most forms of inclement weather for one hour (or ten hours for artifact level 6 and higher). Leaving or entering the shack before the duration is up makes it harmlessly collapse upon itself unless the character succeeds on a Speed roll against the artifact's level. If collapsed early or the duration runs out, the shack collapses into sticks, dust, and the miniature model, which can be taken and reused. Depletion: 1 in 1d100

#### TRAP RUNESTONE

Level: 1d6

Form: Pouch with chalk, sealing wax, and an engraved runestone

- Effect: A simple cypher (such as a potion or scroll) can be modified with this set of implements to turn it into a trap. First, the cypher is attached to a surface with the sealing wax, then the user must make a difficulty 4 Intellect task to draw the runestone symbols around the edge of the cypher with the chalk and place the runestone in the correct position. When the trap is triggered, the cypher is activated, so people often use straightforward cyphers such as an explosive spell scroll, a poisonous potion, and so on.
- The trigger can react to a specified movement within 3 feet (1 m)—a door opening, a creature or object moving past the runestone, and so on. The higher the level of the artifact, the more sophisticated the trigger. For example, a level 4 artifact's trigger might be based on a creature's size or weight, a level 5 artifact can trigger based on a specific type of creature, and a level 6 artifact can trigger based on recognizing an individual creature. **Depletion:** Automatic

## TUNNELING GAUNTLETS

Level: 1d6 + 1

- Form: Oversized pair of metallic gauntlets with broad nails
- Effect: When activated, for one hour the gauntlets let the wearer burrow up to an immediate distance each round. They can burrow through most soils and even some stone, but only through material whose level is lower than the artifact level. Burrowing leaves behind a tunnel with a diameter of 5 feet (1.5 m) that remains stable for several hours. After that, the tunnel is subject to collapse.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

Minor effect, page 211

Major effect, page 212

## **VORPAL SWORD**

Level: 1d6 + 3

- Form: Long sword that sometimes whispers and snickers aloud
- Effect: The vorpal sword cuts through any material of a level lower than its own. It is a medium weapon that ignores Armor of a level lower than its own. On a natural attack roll of 19 or 20, the suggested minor or major effect is decapitation if the artifact is higher level than the foe (use this only if the foe has a head; otherwise, choose a different effect).
- **Depletion:** 1–2 in 1d100 (check each decapitation and specific attempt to cut through solid material)

#### WAND OF SPIDER'S WEBBING

#### Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: White oak wand

Effect: This wand produces a long-range stream of grey spider's webbing that entangles a target and holds it stuck to nearby surfaces. Entangled victims can't move or take actions that require movement. Targets whose level is higher than the wand's level can usually break free within one or two rounds. The entangling web is highly flammable, and if ignited it burns away over the course of one round, but the intense heat inflicts damage equal to the artifact level on whatever was caught within it.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

## WHISPERER IN THE ETHER

#### Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Small crystal

Effect: The bearer of this crystal can telepathically communicate with an immortal being whose location is unknown (probably another dimension or a godly or infernal realm). The user can converse with the intelligence on an ongoing basis, but in general, the whisperer can share a useful bit of information, insight, or advice about once every day. Sometimes, this translates into an asset on one of the user's actions. For example, the intelligence can suggest the right phrase to make friends with a shopkeeper to get a good deal, the right tools to use while trying to break open a door, or the right place to put a shield to deflect an incoming attack. Sometimes the information is more broad, such as the right road to take to reach the next town or why a group of monsters is attacking the caravan the bearer is guarding.

The whisperer's willingness and ability to converse varies considerably. Sometimes it is quite chatty and offers advice. Other times, it must be convinced, cajoled, or tricked into giving information. And sometimes, it is entirely absent for reasons it will not explain. The whisperer's knowledge base is broad but not omniscient. It cannot see the future, but it can often predict outcomes based on logic. **Depletion:** 1 in 1d20 (check each day)

#### WITCH'S BROOM

Level: 1d6 + 2

- Form: A 6-foot (2 m) long wooden broom Effect: As a vehicle, the broom can be ridden a long distance each round. On
- extended trips, it can move up to 100 miles (160 km) per hour.
- The bearer can call upon the broom to grant them a powerful hallucinogenic state that lasts for four hours, during which time all tasks are hindered. After the hallucinations end, the bearer's Intellect tasks are eased for the next ten minutes.

Depletion: 1 in 1d20

# PART 2 GODFORSAKEN SETTING

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## CHAPTER 13

## BONTHERRE: THE BLESSED LAND

he Godforsaken setting is about brave souls venturing out of the safety and comfort of their homes into places as removed from all they hold dear as could be imagined. The players take on the roles of these explorers. They're brave, but they don't do what they do to save the world. Their world is in no danger. They do it for the reason the proverbial mountain climber climbs the mountain: because it's there.

The wealth and fame are nice too, though. At the heart of the setting lies Bontherre, a place most people simply call the Blessed Land. A pantheon of gods called the Sacrante watch over Bontherre and its people very closely. Bontherre could almost be considered a paradise, as the power of divinity nurtures, protects, and provides. But there are lands beyond where the power of the gods cannot reach. These places are the Godforsaken Lands, dangerous and strange, and only the bravest and most capable souls from Bontherre dare venture there. However, those regions hold wealth and magic not found in the Blessed Land, and those who do go and come back are both admired and idolized.

## <u>A GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND</u>

Green hills covered in grazing cows and sheep. Fields of golden grain blowing in the breeze. Lush forests and strong trees and plentiful wildlife. Towns and cities of clean streets and welcoming structures. This is Bontherre. And in Bontherre's case, appearances are not deceiving. It truly is peaceful and pleasant, thanks to the gods called the Sacrante.

The power of the gods is present in all aspects of life. It is, in many ways, a divine utopia. While life is not free from toil—farmers still till fields and tend flocks, merchants still transport and sell goods, workers still build and repair, and so on—it is virtually free from poverty, disease, and war.

The people of Bontherre all speak Bontheche.

## THE SACRANTE

Five gods comprise the Sacrante. They are sometimes referred to as a family, though if that is literally true, no one knows. Although divine, each god has a physical body and appears human, but their inexplicable majesty cannot be mistaken. Almost always accompanied by a retinue of carefully selected mortal attendants, they sometimes dwell together in the city of Coerve and sometimes apart in individual palaces scattered across the land.

This means that the mortal inhabitants of Coerve can see the gods walking among them. Or, at least, they can see a god and their retinue moving as a procession through the streets from a distance. Still, that kind of proximity creates a bond between a worshipper and the subject of their worship. The Sacrante are not distant, removed entities whose attentiveness (and maybe even existence) can be at times in doubt.

Bontherre: Bon-THAYR Bontheche: Bon-THAY-shay Sacrante: Sac-RON-tay

**Pronunciations** 

Coerve: Cor-VAY Flevame: Flev-AM-ay



The people of Coerve—and truly, of all Bontherre—can see that their gods truly exist and maintain awareness of all that transpires.

And this care and attention is rewarded with adoration and utterly faithful worship. Temples are always crowded with worshippers, singing praises and giving thanks. The people of Bontherre have not allowed complacency, ingratitude, or entitlement to take hold. They do not take the Sacrante for granted.

## **BIELOSH, THE PROTECTOR**

The archetypal barrel-chested father figure, Bielosh guards Bontherre and its people from threat. He prevents war and calamity, warding them off with divine sword and shield. Legend has it that in the earliest of days, predatory creatures preyed unduly upon the weak, making the wilderness unsafe for humans, but Bielosh slew hordes of hideous monsters and horrific dragons until none remained. Combat, feats of strength, and worked metal all fall within Bielosh's domain.

## ANIANA, THE PROVIDER

Aniana is mother to the world. She feeds the hungry, watches over the sick and the weak, and aids those in need. Farmers love her for each bountiful harvest. Doctors and healers call upon her power when treating the injured and ill. She protects the world from both plague and famine. Plants, food, medicine, and comforts of all kind belong to Aniana.

## VANEMERRE, THE GUIDE

Vanemerre, reportedly, is all-knowing, at least in regard to all things Bontherre. She knows where everything and everyone is, and she sees what the future will bring. All paths through time and space are known to her. She masters knowledge, roads, books, and maps.

## **EVIRAIMON, THE SPARK**

Eviraimon appears to be an eternal child, although he is experienced and wise. And obviously, very old. He gives the spark of life and the blessing of movement. Every Predatory animals such as bears, wolves, birds of prey, and the like still exist in Bontherre, but they are essentially no threat to humans unless the humans do something extremely unwise—much like in the real world.

### GODFORSAKEN

Maefe Regre: level 7; administration, persuasion, and public speaking as level 9

Pronunciations Bielosh: Bee-AY-lohsh

Aniana: An-ee-AN-ah

Vanemerre: Van-uh-ME-ayr

Eviraimon: Ev-EE-ray-ee-mon

> Riamanne: Ree-ah-MAYN

living thing owes this god their existence, and he watches over birds as they fly, rivers as they run, and children as they play. He also holds fire and lightning within his purview.

#### **RIAMANNE, THE CREATOR**

Riamanne created and continues to create everything that exists. Living beings may thank Eviraimon for their life, but they have Riamanne to thank for their physical body. This god created every rock, every blade of grass, every storm, and every creature in the land. Builders and craftspeople adore Riamanne, and they are seen as the overseer of order, wisdom, and skill.

## LOCATIONS WITHIN The blessed land

Bontherre is a land mainly of rolling green hills. Snowcapped mountains run along the northern border, and another range bars the east. The rocky, warm southern coastline provides access to a glistening sea and its distant islands.

For the most part, the weather is temperate and essentially always (supernaturally) mild. Farmers sow crops of wheat, corn, and

beans. Orchards of apple and pear trees grow in the east, and everywhere herders keep flocks of sheep and cattle.

## COERVE

The central city of Bontherre is Coerve, a metropolis of more than one million people. Citizens enjoy plentiful food, warmth, indoor plumbing, lit streets, and more conveniences, all provided by the power of the Sacrante. The gods themselves dwell in Coerve, at least some of the time. The Sacrante Palace, sometimes just called the Golden Palace, lies at the center of the city, and it is—by far—the largest structure in Coerve.

Clever mechanisms of divine inspiration enable devices that carry people and goods to even the tops of the tallest structures, making Coerve a city of tall, glistening towers.

The city leader is the regent, Maefe Regre, a mortal directly appointed by the gods. She has a reputation for fairness and compassion. Under her direct command assemble the Bronze Ranks, the guardians and peacekeepers of the city. Crimes are dealt with swiftly, but justly.

#### LORIAN

Home of the Sacrante School, the Blessed Land's greatest university, Lorian is a city of fifty thousand residents, and most of them are scholars. It is a city of columned streets, libraries, and grand monuments to past historical figures.

#### NIRAĻĻE

Niralle, also known as the Sparkling City, is famous for its buildings and towers of stained glass designed to glisten in both sunlight and moonlight. Through power granted by the Sacrante, craftspeople create magical glass and lights of all kinds. Merchants in the city sell glowing glass objects that never dim, glittering and flickering like a torch, for only 50 gp. Travelers to Korak-Mar might find such lights very useful indeed.

#### SETVESOUS

Setvesous is a town located atop a plateau with sheer sides. The only way into or out of the city is by using trained flying creatures called skywhales, which bear gondolas both above and below their bodies. Skywhales look just like their oceanic counterparts, but they swim through the air. Unlike whales in the sea, skywhales are blind; to navigate, they create invisible pathways of sound by singing whalesongs that guide them from place to place.

Ten thousand people call this high city home, and the skywhale traffic above always bustles. High above the city, in

Skywhale: level 5, Speed defense as level 4, Might defense as level 6; health 50; Armor 1

Korak-Mar, page 196

the middle of the air, lies the gate to the Firmament. It can most easily be reached by skywhale, although other flying magic might work if one knows where to go.

## THE SULIDDE MOUNTAINS

These snowcapped peaks mark the northern boundary of Bontherre. Panthers, bears, elk, moose, foxes, and hares all thrive in these mountains, along with many other animals. It is probably the most dangerous region in the Blessed Land, but the gods watch over and protect their people even there. The Sacrante maintain a hidden citadel within the mountains, but no mortal knows where it lies.

The grandest of the mountains, Mount Launde, holds the portal to Korak-Mar deep within its lava-filled heart. It was discovered by miners exploring the mountain's vast subterranean caverns.

## INFLUENCE OF THE GODS (AND RELIGION) ON SOCIETY

The priesthood of the Sacrante run hospitals, schools, libraries, and various other institutions for the public good. This means that most people can read and write, are familiar with typical healthcare and hygiene assumptions, and know basic math, history, and logic. That puts the people of Bontherre a step or two ahead of the folk of, say, Medieval Europe in the real world. The priests also wield power channeled from the gods directly, healing the sick, protecting the endangered, and repairing the broken. Even those not in the priesthood have access to powerful magical items created by the gods that allow the performance of all manner of miracles.

Perhaps far more importantly, the gods prevent any sort of catastrophe from coming to their land. No dangerous storms, no swarms of crop-devouring insects, no plagues, and no incursions by foreign invaders. Life in the Blessed Land is safe, peaceful, and comfortable. Life expectancy for most people is well into their eighties or nineties. The people of Bontherre barely understand the concepts for things like food shortages, cancer, or natural disasters, let alone apostasy or insurrection.

Those latter two ideas are probably worth a bit more consideration. In a world where the gods are right there, visible in their grandeur, performing miracles every day—or empowering their priesthood to do likewise-disbelief isn't just rare, it's idiocy. Very rarely, a person will renounce the gods and refuse to give them worship, but most people want to show their gratitude and fidelity to the beings that make their lives so good. People who don't want the Sacrante in their lives probably head to one of the Godforsaken Lands—Flevame, most likely—and those who remain in Bontherre are generally treated by society with condescending patience, as though they are quite mad.

Similarly, almost no one opposes or even questions the government or the rulers of the land, because they are literally gods. Their wisdom and understanding far exceed that of mortals, and their ability to act on their insight and knowledge is overwhelming.

The only people who find dissatisfaction with the abundant happiness and contentment of Bontherre are those who long for adventure and excitement. These adventurers are rare, and there is no place in the Blessed Land where they can find what they seek. They often wield skills and abilities beyond those of their fellow citizens, but have no cause to use them.

Such individuals head into the Godforsaken Lands—places that exist apart from the gods and outside their purview. The Sacrante cannot go or see there. The priesthood is powerless in such places. Even the magical items created by The Firmament, page 186

**Pronunciations** 

Lorian: Lo-ree-AN Niralle: Nee-RALL Setvesous: Set-VES-ows Sulidde: Soo-LEED Launde: LAWN-day

Flevame, page 174

The priesthood of the Sacrante and the people of Bontherre don't object to sorcerers and others who wish to practice personal magic. They do, however, consider it mostly a waste of time. In the Blessed Land, personal magic pales in comparison to magic wielded by the priests, or to the creations of the gods (let alone the gods themselves). In the Godforsaken Lands, it's the only magic that works, but most people in Bontherre don't care about that.

"The gods cannot save us here!" ~a frequent rallying cry of adventurers from Bontherre in the Godforsaken Lands. It's meant to be encouraging and empowering, rather than a cry for help. It is their way of saying, "We succeed or fail on our own! We make our own destiny!"

the gods are little more than useless junk when taken to the Godforsaken Lands.

So adventurers learn to fend for themselves. They learn to fight, to survive, and to cope with harsh, godless realities. Some even learn personal magic that allows them to perform their own (minor) miracles without the power of the gods to back them up. Those who return with trophies, treasures, or grand stories are hailed as daredevil celebrities (but not really "heroes"). Fans follow their exploits and choose their favorites. Some people even make wagers on the success or failure of expeditions into the Godforsaken Lands.

## THE DOORS TO THE GODFORSAKEN LANDS

There are holes in the world. These holes lead to other places. Despite what the tut-tutting priests might say, these other places are not hells, although the gods hold no sway there, and dangers are frequent and terrifying at times. They are other worlds, severed from Bontherre but just as real, and populated by beings just as real as well.

Currently, the people of the Blessed Land know of three doorways to other lands. One is extremely accessible (and not really a door, but an entire bank of a river), and two are exceedingly inaccessible. There is no reason to believe that there aren't more such doorways which would mean more Godforsaken Lands, each with their own strange atmospheres and unique magic.

The doors are different, of course. The one to Flevame is a river bank, and merely crossing the river means crossing into the next world. But there is little feeling of transition, and you can see from one side of the river, standing in one world, and look to the other side, which lies in another. Conversely, the door to the Firmament is invisible, and the transition through it is abrupt and takes a few seconds, during which time the traveler appears encased in whitish-blue light. The door to Korak-Mar is visible but opaque, and the transition takes almost a full minute, during which time the traveler floats in utter darkness.

Regardless of which door is used, travel always completes. In other words, you cannot step halfway through a door. Once any part of a creature or object is put through the door, the entire creature or object is transported to the other side. If that's not possible (an object tied to a tree with a rope, for example), the doorway does not function, and nothing passes through it.

## THE RIVER OF SOULS AND AUDELLU BRIDGE

A traveler who wants to go to Flevame can cross the River of Souls anywhere, but the most common way is to use the Audellu Bridge. The river stretches 90 feet (27 m) across on average, but at Audellu Bridge it is half again that wide. The impressive stone bridge is well guarded, and a small keep houses the guards on the Bontherre side.

The road from the bridge leads to Vothe, the City of the Disaffected.

The gods do not speak of the doorways. Perhaps like the lands beyond, they are outside of the gods' sight and influence.

## BONTHERRE: THE BLESSED LAND

## THE TUNNEL IN THE SKY

To travel to the realm called the Firmament, one must use a skywhale craft or some other means of flight, because the passage is more than 300 feet (90 m) in the air, almost directly above the town of Setvesous.

The other side of the gate offers solid ground, and in fact the safety of Castle Turion.

### THE DOORWAY BENEATH THE MOUNTAIN

Deep within the twisting caverns at the heart of Mount Launde, greatest of the Sulidde Mountains, lies a glowing doorway seemingly made of dripping magma. Despite the apparent danger, passage through this gate is safe, and brings one to the dark and dangerous Godforsaken Land of Korak-Mar.

## **RUNNING GAMES IN BONTHERRE**

Bontherre is safe. It is also dull, at least if you're an adventurer. Even in the wilderness, the gods' influence keeps people relatively protected. That's not to say that no one ever runs afoul of a bear or gets caught in an avalanche, but it's very rare, and rescue or healing is never far away, thanks to the priesthood and those armed with divine artifacts.

This chapter doesn't provide a lot of detail about Bontherre because it assumes that the characters won't have many (or really, any) adventures there. Instead, Bontherre is the safe, settled land that the PCs can return to in order to rest, recuperate, sell their treasures, and tell their tales.

Beyond what is presented here, make whatever medieval fantasy assumptions you need to make. People ride horses. They keep flocks of sheep. Blacksmiths work iron. Typical houses are wood or stone with thatched roofs. People hunt game with bows or snares.

Magic from the Godforsaken Lands, unless described otherwise, holds its own power. It works even if taken from its world of origin. Conversely, magic from Bontherre does not function in the Godforsaken Lands. Since the Godforsaken Lands will be the setting for most if not all of your adventures, don't worry if the PCs wield all sorts of magic blessed by their gods. It won't help them where it matters (to them). They'll have to rely on their own skills, abilities, wits, and magic. Castle Turion, page 186

Korak-Mar, page 196



## CHAPTER 14

## CHARACTERS IN GODFORSAKEN

layers take on the roles of adventurers who have the wherewithal and the skills to travel into the Godforsaken Lands. Such individuals are a rare breed.

Most people in the Blessed Land have no interest in leaving Bontherre, ever. In fact, adventurers need to get dispensation from the priesthood to go into the Godforsaken Lands. (Plenty "forget" this rule, and in truth the priests don't really care, as long as adventurers seem capable and remain few in number.)

Adventurers in this sense are not conquerors. They don't seek to colonize or subjugate the Godforsaken Lands. Instead, they typically try to get in, accomplish a task, and get out, back to the safety and comforts of Bontherre.

The Godforsaken Lands are inhospitable, particularly to the folk of Bontherre, as well as dangerous and difficult. However, each of the discovered lands offers materials of great use and great value in the Blessed Land, and they cannot be found anywhere else.

## **ADVENTURERS**

Adventurers traveling into the Godforsaken Lands take on four basic roles, each mapping to one of the four basic character types. Those roles are Sorcerer, Warder, Scout, and Emissary, and they are typically descriptive of individual talents and training. A Sorcerer probably has a very different background than a Scout, for example.

## SORCERERS

Sorcerers command what can be referred to as "independent magic." That is to say, they do not draw upon the power of the Sacrante to cast spells or wield supernatural talents.

Players who wish to create Sorcerers use the Adept type.

It would be wrong to imagine Sorcerers as traditional fantasy wizards, as they are rarely frail, bookish, or wizened. Far more often, they are hardy, capable individuals physically as well as mentally. Some players will want to add the skills and knowledge flavor or even the combat flavor to their character to reflect this.

Sorcery in Bontherre has always been considered an odd pursuit. Why bother learning how to use magic by manipulating the small amount of power within yourself when it's so much easier to draw upon the power of the gods? Sorcery has far greater limits and requires far more skill and practice than what the Sacrante priests do. Few have the talent and the wherewithal to truly master the craft, particularly since the rewards are not really obvious until one goes to the Godforsaken Lands, where a priest would have no power, but the Sorcerer's spells still work.

Sorcerers typically learn their spells and knowledge from a mentor one on one, for there are no real schools for sorcery, and the priesthood would quietly discourage attempts to create one in Bontherre.

Some Sorcerers focus on one type of magic, becoming combat Sorcerers or







healers or something else, but most prefer to master a wide variety of spells for the wide variety of situations that present themselves in the Godforsaken Lands.

#### WARDERS

Stout, stalwart, and armed to the teeth, Warders focus on the dangers of the Godforsaken Lands.

A player wishing to play a Warder uses the Warrior character type with the skills and knowledge flavor. Alternatively, some Warders might have the magic flavor instead, but they would be very out-of-the-ordinary individuals, using magic to power their skill at arms.

Far from being simple brutes or thugs, Warders have to know how to survive in harsh environments and operate in suboptimal conditions. While Bontherre has soldiers and guards, the only individuals from those ranks who become Warders are likely those dissatisfied with the boredom that comes from guarding a kingdom that is watched over directly by a pantheon of divine beings who essentially eliminate all threats.

Warders typically seek the excitement of the Godforsaken Lands, and perhaps more importantly the challenges found in those regions. There's little way to truly test one's mettle in Bontherre, so people who want to see what they're made of head out on an expedition into the Godforsaken Lands as quickly as they can. Many, of course, are never heard from again, but those who come back bring tales of wonders and glory.

Warders often gain their initial training in a formal setting, like the military or law enforcement, but most follow up by training with an experienced Warder who can warn them about the conditions in the Godforsaken Lands and the dangers there. Such a mentor can also tell them where in the Blessed Land to get the best gear and weapons (most weapons in Bontherre that aren't used for hunting are little more than decorative).



## SCOUTS

Explorer, page 27



Scouts are self-sufficient, hardy, and crafty individuals who use stealth, lore, and keen senses to blaze a trail in the wilds of the Godforsaken Lands. Players interested in playing a Scout should use the Explorer type. Flavoring the character with stealth would certainly be a typical choice, but it is not required.

Scouts often come from the ranks of the outcasts and introverts in the Blessed Land who just never seemed to fit in. For them, the safety and gentleness of Bontherre grated a bit, rather than comforted. They probably could never get truly comfortable in the clean cities and the fairly rigid structure of society. Longing to be free spirits and to embrace their autonomy to make their own path, they headed to the Godforsaken Lands. Even before journeying to those dangerous other worlds, a Scout probably

> spent a great amount of time in the

wilderness of Bontherre, developing the skills that would later serve them so well. Most Scouts, then, are self-taught.

A few Scouts come from different origins in which they learned to use their stealth to get ahead through criminal actions. Making a long-term living this way in Bontherre is difficult, as most criminals are soon apprehended. Far easier, then, to take what skills a thief or burglar might pick up in their early life and head to lands where the authorities and law are not quite so absolute (not to mention backed up by the gods themselves). A few such people have even earned pardons in the Blessed Land by accomplishing great deeds in the Godforsaken Lands that benefitted Bontherre in some fashion.

#### **EMISSARIES**

The fact that intelligent species dwell in the Godforsaken Lands means that someone needs to be able to speak and interact on behalf of the folk of Bontherre. Emissaries negotiate with the people of the Godforsaken Lands, conduct trade, and learn about their societies and cultures. Some of them wield such command over interaction and influence that their abilities take on a magic all their own.

> Players wishing to be an Emissary should use the Speaker character type. As with Sorcerers, they may wish to flavor their type with skills and knowledge or even combat so as to portray their preparedness for the rigors they face.

Emissaries often possess a scholarly outlook. Many take copious notes on what they encounter in the Godforsaken Lands, usually focusing on the intelligent species and cultures. Their drive to brave the dangers of the lands can come from their curiosity and need to discover and learn.

Bontherre has no official diplomatic corps because the Sacrante recognize no other lands on a formal level. However, the priest-run schools promote the study of skills that are important to emissaries, and some priests intentionally encourage students to accompany expeditions into the Godforsaken Lands and bring back detailed accounts of what they find. They also hope that a well-trained Emissary will represent Bontherre effectively, and perhaps even establish formal relations with the species they find there. These priests, however, operate quietly, as official doctrine does not encourage such endeavors.

## STARTING OFF

Very likely, the GM will start the first session in Bontherre, where the PCs will meet, plan, and equip for an expedition into one of the Godforsaken Lands. They might have a specific mission that will take them through a particular doorway, or they might be left to choose where to explore on their own.

## PLAYER TIPS

Players who are new to the setting can use the following tips to help their characters get off on the right foot.

**Research.** Each of the Godforsaken Lands has its own dangers and challenges. Try to figure out all you can about a place before you go there. Ask other adventurers, or read a book. **Prepare for a variety of scenarios.** Bring rope. Bring cold-weather gear. Bring something that can be sealed airtight. And so on.

**Bring extra supplies.** You might find a source for food, ammunition, and other consumables you need, but then again, you might not.

**Consider establishing a base camp.** You might find civilized areas where you can rent a room for the night, but it's unlikely. A base camp allows you to have a store of supplies that you can return to as needed, and have shelter when you need it, without carrying everything with you all the time and finding new secure locations each night.

## ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

ltem	Price
Acid-resistant tarp	15 gp
Bellerite (1 pound)	100 gp
Bellerite case	2,000 gp
Camouflaged tarp	2 gp
Firmament elixir	75 gp
Insect repellent	15 gp
Korak-Mar curative	75 gp
Liquid mirror (1 ounce)	100 gp
Liquid mirror artisan tools	500 gp
Liquid mirror cooler	50 gp
Rotting smear	10 gp
Spirit goggles	500 gp
Spirit thread	1,000 gp
Strong seasonings	2 gp
Sunblock cream	6 gp
Thread tools	1,000 gp

Acid-resistant tarp: The burning rains on Korak-Mar can be hard on tents, gear, and, of course, flesh. Something covered completely by this tarp will be fine for a while, but after more than twenty hours of rain, even the tarp begins to disintegrate. Starting characters in this setting are always human and have no species-based descriptor. Later, perhaps, a player might take on the role of a moord or forlorren from one of the other lands, but this should happen only after the PCs have interacted with that species extensively, and their alien nature has worn off a bit.

Moord, page 197 Forlorren, page 187

Additional equipment for the Godforsaken setting, page 169 **Bellerite:** This blue-black metal is found only in Korak-Mar. It cannot be damaged or manipulated by magic of any kind, but neither can it be enchanted. Usually found with many impurities such that the ore must be refined before it can be used.

**Bellerite case:** This metal box is 18 inches long, 12 inches wide, and 6 inches deep (46 cm by 30 cm by 15 cm). It has a bellerite lock. Neither box nor lock can be affected by magic.

**Camouflaged tarp:** When PCs leave their base camp behind for short trips, they'll want to hide their supplies.

**Firmament elixir:** This flask of red liquid can ease or prevent suffering from the illness that seems to come from breathing Firmament air. Anyone who drinks it has the most recent damage they suffered from the affliction cured, and they will not be subject to further damage for one week. This minor magical elixir is produced in the Blessed Land, but its power is independent of the Sacrante. It does not count as a cypher.

**Insect repellent (Firmament):** Certain biting insects in the Firmament carry disease, but this balm keeps them away from one's skin. This is a week's supply.

**Insect repellent (Korak-Mar):** There are a variety of biting, stinging insects in Korak-Mar that can give adventurers painful welts and irritating bumps. This foul-smelling liquid drives them away. This is a week's supply.

Korak-Mar curative: The land of Korak-Mar itself seems hostile to Bontherre life, but this curative can help. Anyone who drinks it has the most recent damage they suffered from the affliction cured, and they will not be subject to further damage for one week. This minor magical elixir is produced in the Blessed Land, but its power is independent of the Sacrante. It does not count as a cypher.

**Liquid mirror:** A metal found only in the Firmament, and only in liquid form unless

exposed to very, very low temperatures. It is used to make fantastical works of art, but it cannot be transported in liquid form back to Bontherre—only in solid form.

Liquid mirror artisan tools: This case of various magically treated tools allows someone to shape and manipulate liquid mirror. This does not count against a character's cypher limit.

**Liquid mirror cooler:** This magical cylinder can be filled with liquid mirror and keep it cool for up to twenty-four hours for transport. It can be used only once, and it counts against a character's cypher limit.

**Rotting smear:** If this stinking salve is added to a disguise kit, it is possible to fool even the undead into believing that the disguised character is one of them.

**Spirit goggles:** These magically enhanced goggles allow an adventurer looking for spirit threads in Flevame to see them. The goggles also ease any task to find a spirit of any kind.

**Spirit thread:** Invisible, intangible thread that can be worked into magic items to make them more powerful. Can be manipulated only by thread tools.

**Strong seasonings:** Even when one finds something edible in the Godforsaken Lands, the taste is usually quite unpleasant. Large doses of herbs from home help. This is enough for a week or more.

**Sunblock cream:** While sunburn certainly happens in the Blessed Land, adventurers have found that exposure to the Firmament's brighter sun, not to mention its second sun, causes sunburn almost twice as fast. Smearing this thick cream on the skin provides protection. This is a week's supply.

**Thread tools:** This is a large pack of strange, magically treated tools that allow someone to "harvest" spirit threads in Flevame once they are located. The pack does not count against a character's cypher limit.

Something designed to cope with a difficulty in one Godforsaken Land, such as the various insect repellents or cures, will not help with the difficulties in another land.

## Bellerite lock: level 6

Short trips to the Firmament and Korak-Mar without the proper elixir or curative are possible, if potentially unpleasant. Starting adventurers might not be able to afford the cures before they leave the Blessed Land.

## CHAPTER 15

## THE GODFORSAKEN LANDS

ost, or more likely all, of the adventures in this setting will take place not in Bontherre, but in the Godforsaken Lands beyond it. These realms can be reached only by magic, but the mystical pathways to them are at least somewhat accessible (particularly to the land of Flevame).

The general populace of Bontherre considers the Godforsaken Lands to be literally hellish places, cursed by evil magic and teeming with demons and dark spirits. Adventurers (and others who are more learned than the typical person) know that in fact the Godforsaken Lands are far more nuanced. Yes, it is true that the power and even the vision of the gods do not extend there, and it is true that predators in those lands would not hesitate to hunt and kill explorers, but that does not make these places accursed hells. The Sacrante provide for the people of the Blessed Land and ensure their freedom from things such as predators and disease, so it is easy to understand why the folk of Bontherre would find anywhere else to be terrifying.

Adventurers, of course, just find such things invigorating and challenging. They do not want to dwell forever within the safe bosom of the gods. They want to make their own way, test their own mettle, and prove their own worth. Moreover, there are treasures and materials found in each of the Godforsaken Lands that are worth a great deal to people in Bontherre. Each of the Godforsaken Lands is different—in some ways, very different from the others. However, all have the following in common:

- No magic from the Sacrante functions in the Godforsaken Lands.
- Further, no magic originating in Bontherre extends into the Godforsaken Lands, meaning no divine sight or divination used from the Blessed Land can see into them, no magical travel from the Blessed Land is possible, and no communication with Bontherre is possible except by physical delivery of messages. This is true even of magic independent of the gods.
- New kinds of magic, completely different types of plants and animals, and even different sorts of weather are found there.
- The sun and the night sky are both different—different from those of Bontherre, and different from those of the other Godforsaken Lands.
- Predators are common.
- Nonhuman intelligent species dwell within each land.
- Disease and debilitating conditions are common.
- Much is still unknown.

Although the people of Bontherre do not have the context to grasp this concept, each of the Godforsaken Lands is actually on a different planet. This explains the difference in the sun, the moon(s), the stars, and of course the environments and other conditions. The gods of Bontherre are truly gods and wield powerful magic, but they don't have the ability to extend their divine might into other solar systems—or perhaps other galaxies. However, this doesn't mean that Godforsaken is a science fiction setting. Travel to and from the Godforsaken Lands is done via magic, and each world presented is a magical one. After all, the characters in a traditional fantasy world like Middle-earth or Narnia contend with things like gravity, air, and weather, and that does not make those places any less fantastical. The same is true here. The only difference is that the Godforsaken setting involves four (or perhaps more) worlds with different gravity, air, weather, and so on.



#### Godforsaken Lands GM intrusions:

Scorpion in the PC's boot in the morning

Sudden sinkhole beneath their feet

Vent in the ground with noxious fumes

Unexpected heat or cold

Some kind of insects or worms crawl into armor or helmet

Supplies filled with bugs

Strange, debilitating rash that lasts for a day or two

## RUNNING ADVENTURES IN The Godforsaken Lands

One of the main themes of a Godforsaken campaign is the dichotomy between the safety and comfort of Bontherre and the dangers and difficulties (and rewards) of the Godforsaken Lands. It is the clash of civilization versus wilderness. Of course, just like in the real world, one person's "wilderness" might be someone else's "civilization." It's not the intention here to promote colonialist attitudes. The PCs aren't going to conquer, proselytize, or civilize anyone. It's more about surviving in (literally) alien environments.

Godforsaken campaigns are also, however, about the triumph of capable individuals over hardship. People who remain in the Blessed Land are well cared for by the Sacrante, but that means most of their problems are solved for them. They don't experience a lot of adversity, but neither do they face challenges. Some people thrive when challenged and want to fend for themselves. Getting out of Bontherre is very likely the best thing that could happen to them.

Remember, they're *God*forsaken lands, not people-forsaken lands. The people of Bontherre mistakenly think of them as evil, hellish places, but they're just different environments, outside the sphere of the gods. Yes, it's difficult for people from Bontherre to survive and flourish there, but "difficult" is what true adventurers want.

## NEVER MAKE IT EASY

Life in the Godforsaken Lands should be challenging for natives of Bontherre. To portray this, always make things difficult and frequently unpleasant.

If there's a location the PCs want to reach, put it at the top of a sheer, crumbling cliff or the bottom of a dark ravine. If there's a person they need to speak with, that person lives in the middle of a village gripped with plague. If there are supplies the PCs need, they're on the other side of an area filled with prowling predators.

This doesn't mean that adventures in these places should be a frustrating slog. You can use the challenges as flavor. You don't have to slow things down with extra die rolls or meaningless encounters to portray how difficult it is to pass through the Wilderness of Krym in Flevame, for example. Just give a few sentences of visceral description about how every step is a mud-caked effort, with all manner of foul things squirming around the PCs' boots, and with biting, buzzing insects plaguing their every moment, even getting in their mouths and noses as they breathe.

The Godforsaken Lands, then, have ample opportunities for GM intrusions. Again, not to be irritating to the players or to slow down gameplay, but to add exciting moments of danger to what might be, in a more hospitable land, a simple bit of travel or a relatively easy task.

## DON'T FORGET THE Specific Dangers

Each Godforsaken Land has a peculiar danger. Flevame has the weakening. The Firmament has thin air that makes it hard to breathe, as well as the affliction called red hammer. Korak-Mar has debilitating energies, as well as acid rain, biting insects, and more. (Korak-Mar, in particular, is a nasty place to visit, even by the standards of the other Godforsaken Lands.) It's easy to forget to make the PCs attempt tasks to resist these ongoing effects, but they play an important role in cementing the inhospitable and alien natures of these places.

Even the bravest or hardiest of adventurers should be relieved to get back home to Bontherre. Of course, the call to excitement and adventure might drive them to organize their next expedition soon after they catch their breath.

## use their unique materials

Each of the Godforsaken Lands has a substance that is unique and valuable. Flevame has spirit threads, the Firmament has liquid mirror, and Korak-Mar has bellerite. All of these materials are rare, but they should feature in at least some, if not many, of the adventures or locations in these lands. While not every locale in Korak-Mar will involve a bellerite vein, for example, a map to a bellerite mine would be precious treasure.

These unique substances should be valuable enough to be the impetus for an expedition, but rare enough that finding the material and getting it back to Bontherre should be difficult. And the inhabitants of the Godforsaken Lands value the materials themselves, and thus may be competitors for the resources.

Weakening, page 174 Red hammer, page 186 Korak-Mar, page 196



## CHAPTER 16

## FLEVAME: ACROSS THE RIVER OF SOULS

levame was the first of the Godforsaken Lands to be explored by folk from Bontherre. No one in the Blessed Land can remember a time when Flevame was unknown. As long as people have visited the River of Souls, they have known of Flevame.

The River of Souls marks the northwest boundary of Bontherre, because to cross it is to pass into the realm of Flevame. This, however, is more than just a simple river crossing. Flevame is a very different land from Bontherre and obeys very different rules. However, the ease of entry into this Godforsaken Land fools many people into taking the trip casually. Such travelers typically turn back rather quickly.

Long ago in Bontherre, Flevame was believed to be the land of the dead. This is not the case. It is, however, a land of many spiritual entities, as well as ghosts (and undead). Spirits inhabit and represent natural features, like the forests, the rivers, the mountains, and so on. These are called shoum.

The idea that Flevame is the land of the dead is ironic to some, who believe instead that the people of Bontherre originated in Flevame, long ago migrating across the river and discovering the Sacrante. Upon finding a far more hospitable place to live, they set down roots in the "blessed land" and never returned.

## DIFFERENCES IN FLEVAME

Adventurers crossing the river into Flevame will experience a number of notable changes, aside from those true of every Godforsaken Land.

The sun appears slightly smaller in Flevame, and its light is slightly more pale. The night sky bears no moon. Because of the nature of the broad, visible "doorway" to this land, however, it's sometimes possible to stand near the River of Souls and see two suns, one on each side, or to see Bontherre's moon from the banks of the Flevame side of the river.

Flevame air seems colder. Some explorers even say it "tastes" different, although not everyone seems to notice this, and the difference is slight.

Perhaps most significantly, adventurers from Bontherre experience what they call the "weakening" in Flevame. They grow tired more quickly, they cannot carry the heavy burdens they are accustomed to, and they generally feel slightly unwell. Bontherre PCs find that any Might-related task costs 1 additional Might point.

Adventurers typically come to Flevame for spirit threads. These are strands of invisible, ethereal matter that, if cut and woven, can be incorporated into an existing magical artifact (or cypher) to increase its level by 2. Obviously, spirit

"Flevame" is a Bontherrian name. No native of Flevame calls it that, but their names for it vary from culture to culture.

Although it feels like Flevame weakens visitors, the truth is that its gravity is somewhat greater. Unlike with the difficulties in the Firmament and Korak-Mar, there is no easy elixir or curative for this issue other than a cypher or other effect that restores Might normally.

## FLEVAME: ACROSS THE RIVER OF SOULS



threads are difficult to find and even more difficult to obtain and work with, but adventurers have developed thread tools and methods to do so.

Unlike the other Godforsaken Lands, Flevame and Bontherre have a fair amount of "bleed." Animals and plants from one world long ago began coming into the other, passing over or across the river as easily as explorers do. This is far more true of Bontherrian influence on Flevame than the other way around—so much so that the Flevame banks of the River of Souls look fairly similar to their Bontherre counterpart.

Appearances can be deceiving, however. Bontherrian plants are smaller and sturdier in Flevame, and Bontherrian animals that spend a great deal of time (or all their time) in Flevame are likewise stouter, lower to the ground, and generally stronger.

Watchtowers run along the southern and eastern banks of the river to ensure that no inhabitants of Flevame cross the river into Bontherre.

## VOTHE, CITY OF THE DISAFFECTED

Ask anyone in Vothe and they'll tell you the tale: once, there were two sorcerers, twin siblings, and each built a tower in which to live and practice their art. These two towers stood many miles apart, but as time passed, the link between the siblings created a link between the towers, and over the course of many years, the towers drew closer and closer together. Eventually, they stood next to each other and remain so today. When the sorcerers died, other people moved into the towers and built onto the structures so that they grew and grew. Many more years passed, and the towers developed Thread tools: see Additional Equipment, page 169

If it's true that the people of Bontherre originated in Flevame, that migration across the river must have happened a very, very long time ago. For one thing, it would mean that the migrants to Bontherre eventually grew ill-accustomed to the force that creates the "weakening" in Flevame. (Some have theorized that there is no weakening in Flevame, but rather a "strengthening" in Bontherre. Perhaps, but the end result is the same.) Further, no records of this migration can be found in the Blessed Land. Rather, there are many stories from the distant past involving the first Bontherre explorations into Flevame. Most of these involve ghosts and the living dead hordes of the necromancer Crumellia Encomium.



None of the disaffected in Vothe have acclimatized entirely to the weakening. Some who have lived there the longest, however, have grown resistant to it (as they believe it's some detrimental effect, not realizing that it's stronger gravity). into a sort of vertical city, hundreds of feet tall. However, the distinct nature of the towers remains, so the city exists in two halves, still resembling two very tall towers, but each made of hundreds of different buildings, extensions, and additions. Three bridges at different levels connect the two massive, hodgepodge conglomerate structures.

The two halves of the city are named for the sorcerers, so one is called Nenne and the other Nanne. Nenne is mostly a number of markets (typically on balconies extending out of the rim of the structure), eateries, and other businesses. Nanne is primarily the residential section. About five thousand people live in the odd city.

The reason for Vothe's strange but steady growth lies with the fact that some people in Bontherre don't *want* to live in a world that's nurtured, protected, and overseen by a group of immortal beings. They want to live free and under their own rules, even if it means living in greater hardship. Flevame is the easiest place to reach if one wants to escape the bosom of the gods, and Vothe grew as more and more of the disaffected arrived over the years, looking for a new place to call home.

#### PCs IN VOTHE

Travelers from Bontherre can find information, supplies, and lodging in Vothe. The city isn't welcoming, per se, but the people there won't ask a lot of questions or automatically challenge outsiders.

Vothe is a center for the spirit thread trade, although trade in such a rare and expensive commodity is quiet. Still, some of the most skilled thread hunters use Vothe as their home base, and a few magical artisans and craftspeople live there to make use of the threads.

Many criminals from Bontherre come to Vothe to hide from the authorities. This makes it a dangerous city with a large number of cutthroats and murderers. Worse, they are *paranoid* cutthroats and murderers, wary that anyone coming from the Blessed Land might be there to apprehend them.

Everyone in Vothe speaks Bontheche, so the PCs shouldn't have great difficulty with communication.

## ADVENTURES IN VOTHE

The Graveyard Suitor: Thanks to the actions of the necromancer Crumellia Encomium, the dead from Vothe's graveyard routinely rise, despite the best efforts of local mages and others to prevent it. Recently, a deceased man named Corve rose from his grave, but rather than join Crumellia's hordes, he lingered, eventually slipping into the shadows of Vothe. Skulking there, he began breaking into the home of a woman, Zabyn. Corve was obsessed with Zabyn in life, and that obsession has continued into death. Corve doesn't seek to harm her, but his entreaties of love seem menacing and ghastly now that he's dead. Zabyn needs the help of someone who can either destroy her undead harasser or convince (or force) him to leave her alone.

The Needy Merchant: A merchant named Endre Vavion would like to set up a regular trading route between Vothe and Bontherre. The authorities in Bontherre don't condone open trade with the Godforsaken Lands, so it would need to be done stealthily, at least at first. To accomplish this, Endre and whomever he hires to help would need to establish the easiest route, make an accurate map, and rid the area around the route of bandits, dangerous beasts, and other challenges.

**The Wanted Criminal:** The authorities in Bontherre have placed a bounty of 1,000 gp on the head of Fabrinne Coloste, a

## HARVESTING AND WORKING WITH SPIRIT THREADS

A harvested spirit thread is worth 500 gp. They can be found anywhere in Flevame, seemingly stretching from one random point to another. Normally invisible, if they can be found, they appear to be ghostly threads about the width of a human hair, usually 12 to 15 feet (3.5 to 4.5 m) long.

Special thread tools allow the thread to be cut, wound, and stored. They also enable a crafter of magic to weave the thread into a magical artifact or cypher, which increases the level by 2 without otherwise making the item more time-intensive, expensive, or difficult to fashion.

Characters equipped with spirit goggles or other means to see invisible objects can potentially find the threads anywhere in Flevame, but they are rare (to say the least), and one must venture far from Vothe to find any uncut, unharvested threads.

murderer from the city of Niralle who apparently is highly skilled in making and using poisons. She's hiding out in Vothe, trying to raise enough money to hire a sorcerer to magically change her appearance.

## <u>Crumellia encomium</u>

One of the reasons that people likely believed Flevame to be the realm of the dead is that some of the first beings explorers encountered were the undead creatures that serve Crumellia Encomium, an undying necromancer of great power. Long ago, she ruled over the entirety of the lands immediately across the River of Souls. Years of incursions of strong and skilled intruders from Bontherre have Thread tools, page 170

Spirit goggles, page 170

Niralle, page 162

## GODFORSAKEN

For Crumellia, use the demigod stats on page 321 of the Cypher System Rulebook, with the following changes: Raises the dead (transformed into undead) with a touch.

• Causes all the dead within 10 miles to rise over the course of a week.

• Communicates telepathically with any undead creature within 100 miles.

 Transforms an undead creature with a touch into a higher-level type of undead over the course of a week.

 Possesses the Orb of Death's Denial, which returns its owner to life (or unlife) one week after being slain. This artifact is level 10 and has a depletion of 1–3 on 1d6.

 Has dozens of magical manifest cyphers at her disposal to grant to loyal servants, and probably carries five or six herself. driven back her hordes of ancient dead. The necromancer *hates* adventurers from the Blessed Land.

Although it's possible that she uses her own powers over life and death to endure for as long as she has, it's very likely that Crumellia Encomium is not human, or in fact even mortal. In fact, a few people might claim—perhaps whispered in a tavern in Vothe after too many drinks—that she is related to the Sacrante somehow. Perhaps she is some form of progeny, distant relation, or failed creation. Certainly she is mighty, but it's also certain that she is no true god, at least not in the sense of the gods of the Blessed Land.

Still, for an evil, tyrannical wizard, Crumellia is uncharacteristically content. She loves raising the dead and experimenting with necromantic spells and potions. She does not desire more power or more land, and she has all the subjects she could ever want (and if she doesn't, she can just make more). She would be no real threat except for one thing.

The necromancer *hates* adventurers from the Blessed Land.

What Crumellia seeks more than anything is a way to slay all the so-called adventurers that come to Flevame, and to keep more from ever crossing the River of Souls. She tolerates the people of Vothe as long as they keep to their strange, towering city, except in that they aid and abet the adventurers that come and destroy her creations, loot her castles, and drive back her hordes. If her spies reveal that a certain merchant or barkeep lends too much assistance to adventurers in Vothe, she sends in her assassins. And her assassins are vampires.

She would rather strike at her enemies directly. However, she has learned that should she attempt straightforward battle with her assembled hordes, she will see success for a time, but eventually such actions only draw more powerful adventurers to her land. So to achieve her ends, she puts her devious mind to work. She turns some of the castles in the wilderness into deathtraps. She plans ambushes by the dead hidden half-buried in the wilds (because if there is anything her troops have in abundance, it is patience). She lures adventurers with valuable treasures that also carry curses or plagues. Crumellia has the time to play a very slow game. Neither she nor her servants are prisoners of time.
## FLEVAME: ACROSS THE RIVER OF SOULS

#### THE WILDERNESS OF KRYM

A blasted heath, occasionally punctuated by copses of shriveled, grey trees, the Wilderness of Krym is exceedingly dry and perpetually withered. Also known as the Funereal Fields, it is a vast moor forever in the process of dying. Other than the occasional carrion birds or biting insects, no living creature resides in this wilderness.

The undead dwell in dark castles of cold stone here and there in Krym. Usually, a vampire rules from each castle, commanding a variety of undead soldiers and servants. Each vampire, in turn, answers to the necromancer.

As one proceeds northward, the heath becomes a bog. Poisonous serpents, bloodthirsty leeches, and scuttling creatures dwell within this stinking swamp, but again, it is mostly lifeless. The bog is filled with the remains of ancient dead, ensuring that Crumellia never goes without raw materials for her dread sorcery. Paths of stone and bone wend through the bog, allowing those who know the routes to pass quickly through the region and easily travel to and from the castles within. Newcomers are likely to slowly slog through the morass.

Rising out of the bog like a monolith, Crumellia's palace is a snarl of grey angles and jutting iron extremities. Its many towers spew forth smoke both dark and green, the by-products of her foul magical practices. The necromancer almost never leaves her sanctum, instead spending her nights brewing more undead servitors for her hordes, consorting with her inner circle of vampires, and listening to the whispered gossip of her ghostly spies.

#### THE UNDEAD HORDES

Crumellia's living dead servants can be encountered almost anywhere in the Wilderness of Krym. These wandering bands—usually skeletons or ghoulsattack any living creatures they come upon. Sometimes, however, those in Crumellia's realm might be seen by a ghost that won't attack immediately but instead will report its findings to a vampire or perhaps even the necromancer herself.

As one approaches Crumellia's palace, the numbers of the undead grow and their presence becomes ubiquitous.

**Skeletons:** Skeletal creatures, given a semblance of life by Crumellia's dark magic, comprise the vast majority of the undead hordes. They serve as both guards and infantry. Some wield weapons—usually bows or swords—while others strike with bony hands and claws. In truth, these beings are more automaton than anything else, following orders but not truly intelligent.

Many of these skeletons appear to have been human once, but plenty of them were clearly animals, nonhuman humanoids, or beasts that are difficult to recognize. Those that fall into this latter category appear to be random collections of bones assembled into the forms of no creatures that ever lived. Multiarmed bears with three toothy skulls, serpents with the skulls of lions, and horses with human spinal columns for legs. Some seem more like works of macabre art than efficient servants. Still, no matter what form they take, they are composed of the remains of creatures that once lived, which means Crumellia can coax servitude from them. (Her magic can make bones, skulls, and dead flesh move and act however she wishes.)

**Ghouls:** Shock troops and elite soldiers, Crumellia's ghouls are undead humans seething with her dark sorcery. They get their name from their love of devouring their slain foes, but they don't actually need to eat to sustain themselves. Much



Crumellia can even force her skeletal servitors to scream when in battle, despite the fact that they have no vocal cords.

Ghouls in Flevame are different from those in the Cypher System Rulebook. For Flevame ghoul stats, use the abomination stats on page 315 of the Cypher System Rulebook.

smarter than skeletons, ghouls hunt in packs when their mistress looses them from the pits in which they dwell, savagely attacking almost anything that lives (unless given orders to do otherwise). These creatures bear no resemblance to the people they were in life, physically or mentally.

Ghost, page 331

**Ghosts:** Crumellia's spies are the ephemeral spirits of the dead. Torn free from the memories and personalities of the people they were in life, these sinister spirits eagerly serve the necromancer and delight in learning information valuable enough to whisper in her ear.

Grave behemoth: level 7, Speed defense as level 6 due to size; health 40; Armor 2; living creatures within close range must succeed at a Might defense roll or move down one step on the damage track

Vampire, page 362

**Grave behemoths:** Perhaps some of the most terrifying and powerful of Crumellia's servants, the grave behemoths are towering giants 12 or 13 feet (3.5 to 4 m) tall with thick, muscular bodies on which the head has been replaced by a gravestone. In addition to being juggernauts of destruction, they literally drain the life from the living beings around them in a vile process called "the lure of the grave." Grave behemoths stink of decay and fresh dirt.

Vampires: Vampires serve Crumellia as commanders of her hordes. Their ability to fool the living into thinking they too are alive also makes them excellent assassins. Unlike the other members of the necromancer's hordes, vampires are entirely autonomous. Some have even turned against their creator, or fled into the wilds to make their own way rather than serve. Perhaps because of this, Crumellia rewards her most powerful and loyal vampires with potent magical artifacts—usually swords.

#### **VAMPIRE SWORD (ARTIFACT)**

Level: 1d6 + 4 Form: Black and red bladed greatsword

Effect: Vampire swords function as normal greatswords (heavy weapons) until they have been successfully used to draw blood. From that point onward, for the rest of the combat, they moan and hiss hungrily, with ravenous mouths all along the blade. A blooded vampire sword inflicts +3 damage and heals a vampire wielder for 1 point of health each round (other wielders are not healed).

Depletion: —

## THE COMERELK AND THE SHALISS

Shaggy humanoids with long limbs and almost beak-like snouts, shaliss are unsophisticated but quite intelligent. Their prodigious hair can be varying shades of brown, black, or even whitish-blue. These arboreal folk fashion crude tools and shelters, but only to meet their modest needs. They have little interest in progress.

The shaliss dwell within what they call the Comerelk, which translates more or less to "the quiet wood." The Comerelk couldn't be more different than the Wilderness of Krym. This lush rainforest teems with life, both flora and fauna. Shaliss are herbivorous, but have learned to protect themselves from the many creatures in the wood that are not.

While the shaliss excel at brachiating through the trees, non-natives passing through the Comerelk very likely must do it on the ground, and at half normal speed due to the thick growth of vines, underbrush, and other plants, not to mention the tiny streams and pools hidden by that vegetation throughout.

## FLEVAME: ACROSS THE RIVER OF SOULS

Shaliss speak their own language, which involves a great many gestures as well as sounds. A few have learned to speak halting Bontheche so they can interact with visitors. They take it as a sign of respect and goodwill if visitors speak a little of the shaliss tongue (even if it is done through magic).

A shaliss takes great offense if their land is referred to as "Godforsaken." They worship Shava, the Sun, and Imass, the Moon. These gods are very different than those of the Sacrante. They are not present and do not overtly interfere. Adventurers from the Blessed Land might find it hard to believe that they are real, because belief and faith have no real foundation in their own worship. It doesn't take faith to know that the Sacrante are real and take an interest in the activities of their worshippers.

#### OTHER DENIZENS OF THE WOOD

The Comerelk teems with life. Birds nest in the trees, and small mammals scurry along the ground as well as the branches. Although nothing in the woods exactly resembles the animals of the Blessed Land, some come close enough to still use terms like "squirrels," "frogs," "raccoons," or even "wolves" to describe them.

The woods also harbor inhabitants such as the following.

Hass: The predatory hass resemble 10-foot (3 m) pythons with two heads. The bite of a hass has a strange effect on victims: they rapidly increase in body mass. This increase is random and almost certainly detrimental, and it could manifest as bulbous, egg-like growths of fat tissue all over their body, a massive swelling of their torso, or an extraneous and useless limb. This extra mass makes the victim clumsier and slower (6 points of Speed damage). It also makes them into a more substantial meal for the hass. Hederar: Goblin-like humanoids, hederar are small of size and selfish of spirit. These hideous creatures fashion clothing from furs and skins, weapons of sharpened wood or stone, and various crude tools. They eat flesh and greedily lust after shiny treasures of any kind. They live in small, wandering bands and sometimes capture and force other creatures, like wolves or hyenas, to serve them. Hederar have their own crude language, but a few can speak and understand a handful of words of Bontheche or the shaliss tongue.

The peculiar thing about hederar is that each has a single innate magical ability. While most are innocuous, like producing a small flame or having a supernatural sense of balance, some hederar can conjure violent storms or teleport hundreds of miles. And there seems to be no way to tell how powerful a hederar is just by looking.

Some useful abilities of individual hederar include:

- Leaping a short distance
- Inflicting 5 points of electrical damage by touch
- Freezing liquid within short range
- Deflecting attacks (hindering attacks made on them by three steps)
- X-ray vision
- Ability to take two actions each round
- Negating sound within short range
- Levitation
- Mind control
- Immunity to fire
- Telepathy

Less dramatic (and less overtly useful) abilities include:

- · Conjuring a small amount of water
- Levitating small objects
- Producing a small light like a candle flame
- Having slightly better than normal hearing

Hederar: level 2; Armor 1; one random magical ability

The Comerelk does not generate more spirit threads than anywhere else in the land, but it very likely has a greater occurrence of as-yet-undiscovered threads than Krym and certainly anywhere near Vothe.

Hass: level 6; health 25; Armor 1; bite inflicts 6 Speed damage and causes swollen growths

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#### GODFORSAKEN

Voroon: level 5; Armor 1

Lavrenos: level 4; Armor 6; inflicts 5 damage with horns

Rastikar: level 3, Speed defense as level 5; song entrances all within short range that fail an Intellect defense roll, and victims can take no action unless attacked or vigorously shaken

Some of the creatures in the Southern Wastes were created or summoned by magic long ago. The GM should feel free to populate the ruins with whatever creatures seem fitting.

Spider collective (massive form): level 7; attack carries a venom that inflicts 7 points of Speed damage; can disassemble into thousands of normal spiders or return to the massive form as a single action, as needed Lavrenos: Quadrupeds with literal ironthehides, lavrenos are testy herbivores withaplong, defensive horns and tails bristlinganwith spikes.doshshRastikar: Rastikar are magical birds withnoenchanting songs. The song of a rastikarcomakes those who hear it fall into a calmen

makes those who hear it fall into a calm, almost blissful stupor. Not surprisingly, predators like to wait near (but not too near) where a rastikar is singing, so that when the bird is done or flies off, they can easily reach the stupefied animals or people. Just as surely, this means that most animals and even other birds flee immediately at the sight of a rastikar.

Repairing torn clothing or armor

• Producing a distinctive foul odor

vibrate

· Causing an object in short range to

The Spider Collective: The spiders of the forest possess a singular mind. Not truly spiders at all, each is an extension of a single creature that happens to look like (and weave webs like) a spider. This distinction is relatively meaningless to most people, except if a character is able to communicate (through magic, probably) with a spider in the Comerelk, it—or perhaps they—proves to be quite intelligent. The spiders act in perfect concert, directed by the single mind as easily as a creature moves its own limbs. Thus, the spiders can form bridges across streams for others to cross, weave webs with beautiful patterns and artwork, and more. If the Collective wishes, it can take a few thousand (or more) spiders and have them form a huge spider-shaped mass that can act as a single enormous spider.

**Voroon:** These are forest spirits given physical form by inhabiting piles of fallen leaves, pine needles, sticks, bark, and other decaying vegetation. "Voroon" is the name they use for themselves when they attempt to speak. Forming anything approaching vocal cords out of old leaves and sticks is difficult, so the voroon don't try often. They are related to the shoum, but the two types of spirits do not coexist well. The voroon can be more contemptuous of material creatures that enter their domain.

#### THE SOUTHERN WASTES

South of the forest lies a land filled with crumbling ruins and abandoned cities. The people who built and inhabited these structures are long gone, but many of their ghosts remain. Whomever these people were, they wielded magic with skill. Many of the structures are quite magical in nature, some involving extradimensional spaces, magical wards (still functioning), and portals to other locales.

These haunted ruins hold treasures both magical and mundane, left behind by the former residents. Adventurers willing and able to deal with ghosts, lingering magical defenses, and monstrous creatures that have taken up residence in the Southern Wastes can find great rewards.

#### PCs IN THE COMERELK

Characters seeking adventure in the Comerelk have come to the right place. Explorers in these woods will almost certainly have to come to terms with the shaliss, and they'll find that well-treated and well-compensated younger shaliss make for excellent guides and even scouts, porters, or bodyguards.

It seems quite likely that the ranks of Crumellia's unliving hordes are comprised of the long-dead folk of the Southern Wastes.



Moving through the verdant woodlands is not easy, but most humans cannot keep to the branches and canopy the way the shaliss can. Explorers should be wary of the dangers that lurk on the forest floor, often hidden by the thick vegetation.

#### ADVENTURES IN THE COMERELK

**Treasure Berries:** A black berry called the cultrivori grows almost year-round in the woods on vines that wrap around the bases of trees. Very rarely, a cultrivori, as it ripens, instead transforms into a dark red crystal. The good news is that the shaliss consider these crystals sacred, and they'll gladly trade one for food, supplies, or information (if brought back to human lands, it would be worth 100 gp). The bad news is that the cultrivori are also prized by the serpentine hass. It is difficult to find a crystal cultrivori without a hass guardian.

The Kidnapped Traveler: An explorer named Trusis, operating out of Vothe, disappeared in the Comerelk. Soon after, a crude message written on an animal skin was delivered to the town by a hederar with the ability to teleport. It read: "Find big split rok neer 2 burn out trees and pul with yello fish. Bring big guld. Get Trusis bak. No guld is dead Trusis. Come quik. No feed Trusis." Trusis's husband seeks his return, but needs the help of people able to make the trek to the Comerelk, find the vague location (probably with the help of the shaliss), and deal with the hederar kidnappers one way or another. This is an ambitious plot for the hederar, but this band's leader is smarter than average.

**Divine Divination:** On the southern end of the forest, a strange ruined temple sits atop a hill where no trees or plants grow. This stone structure bears an enormous carving of the face of an unknown ancient Magical creatures like rastikar or voroon are drawn to spirit threads instinctually and often make their lairs near them. Of course, no beings in Flevame have a greater affinity with the threads than the shoum.



god. Those who have approached it say that the face will speak to those who bring it offerings, and will even foretell the future. Rumors say that there are magical artifacts of great power within the ruin or in the burial catacombs beneath it.

#### THE SHOUM

The ancient, immortal spirits known as shoum might be the original native inhabitants of Flevame. Each individual is intrinsically linked to a natural element of the land, whether it be a tree, a stone, a body of water, or something similar. As ethereal creatures tied to physical aspects of the world, shoum possess a dual nature. Although spirits, they can manipulate their associated matter to affect the physical world. Thus, a stone shoum spirit can move or throw rocks, while a river shoum spirit can control the flow of water.

Tree shoum are the most common of their kind, and appear to be small humanoid creatures of bark and leaves.

Stone shoum are very large but are usually invisible unless they cause a stone to form a humanlike face to interact with others. They can also take the form of a giant humanoid made of moving stone.

River shoum appear as shimmering, lithe humanoids made of water with ever-flowing hair. They are never far from a stream or river.

Wind shoum are the most intelligent and most powerful of the spirits. Although shoum society is not set up this way, if there were shoum nobility, it would be the wind shoum. They are nearly invisible humanoids that either stand perfectly still or move with incredible speed.

All shoum speak Bontheche as well as many other languages.

Shoum can see and manipulate spirit threads easily. They understand the

threads' power and their (seemingly) random appearance. Shoum lore allows them to use the threads in ways that mortals never have, and perhaps never will. They greatly resent, however, when non-shoum cut or harvest threads, and they get enraged at the thought of cut threads being taken from their land (such as into Bontherre).

#### THE EPHEMERAL CITY

A city floats in the clouds, its substance as ethereal as the shoum that dwell there. When visitors approach, if the shoum wish it, the city lowers to the ground to give the newcomers access, should they provide the spirits with a good reason to let them in. This often involves a series of riddles or similar challenges. Those who somehow enter without permission cannot touch anything and eventually fall to the solid ground below.

The city's twisting towers and silvery domes are beautiful, and as many as ten thousand shoum dwell within its walls. King Yysh III, a wind shoum spirit, rules the city and maintains a vast court of similar shoum within his palace. Although the wind shoum preside over the Ephemeral City, all shoum are welcome there.

In the workshops and markets, some of the rarest and oddest magical objects can be found. Likewise, the rare visitor might learn some of the most interesting lore, magical spells, and secrets among its libraries and sages.

#### A RÌDDLE TO ENTER THE EPHEMERAL CÌTY

Always I hunger, but never thirst. Your arrows won't slay me, but your breath is my curse.

Answer: A candle flame

Tree shoum spirit: level 4; can animate a tree within short range so it attacks as a level 3 creature

King Yysh III: level 8, resisting flattery as level 6; can travel up to 1 mile (1.5 km) as an action; controls wind within very long range such that it can knock over any unsecured person or object the size of a human or smaller

Stone shoum spirit: level 5; can take the physical form of a stony giant with Armor 5; can move or hurl rocks up to 20 pounds (9 kg) as if through telekinesis

River shoum spirit: level 5; can control the flow and movement of water (including making it defy gravity) within very long range; can instantly turn water to ice or steam

Wind shoum spirit: level 6; can travel up to 1 mile (1.5 km) as an action; controls wind within long range such that it can knock over any unsecured person or object the size of a human or smaller

## FLEVAME: ACROSS THE RIVER OF SOULS

As one might expect, the city is filled with trees, running rivers, and mounds of natural stone that integrate seamlessly with the structures and streets.

#### PCs AMONG THE SHOUM

The shoum look upon humans and other physical, mortal creatures with suspicion and fear. If such a creature can be trusted, it is their burden to prove it. The shoum hate the necromancer and her undead hordes. Striking a meaningful blow against her would be an excellent way to get in their good graces.

Ghosts are an exception to their hatred. Unlike physical undead, ghosts of dead mortals often gain a sympathetic ear among the shoum. They do not consider such spirits equals, but rather wretches to be pitied and granted succor.

A terrible way to make a positive impression on the shoum would be to discuss harvesting spirit threads or even brandish the tools for doing so.

Because the shoum are ancient and immortal, they know lore and secrets that no one else possesses. Visitors who gain their favor can learn from them. After a month among the shoum, a PC can spend 2 XP and gain any low-tier ability as a magical skill they can henceforth use. The shoum typically require some kind of payment in exchange, often in the form of a magical cypher or artifact (of at least level 5) or a task performed at their behest.

#### ADVENTURES AMONG THE SHOUM

**Trapped in the Shadows:** A shoum wind spirit has somehow become trapped in the shadows in the Wilderness of Krym, in a place no shoum rescue parties have successfully reached. King Yysh III seeks physical mortal allies who will brave the undead hordes to find the trapped shoum and figure out a means to free them. **Thread Secrets:** Within the Ephemeral City lies the Library of Whispers, where, it's said, one can find books and scrolls detailing some of the shoum secrets having to do with spirit threads. Even one such tome would be worth 5,000 gp or more to sorcerers or priests in Bontherre. Getting there and getting out with such a treasure is far more difficult than one might think, however, as the shoum not only guard it closely but have also rigged deadly magical traps and alarms using spirit threads.





## CHAPTER 17

# THE FIRMAMENT: A TUNNEL IN THE SKY

"The Firmament" is a Bontherrian name. No native of the land calls it that. The forlorren just call it "the land" or "the homeland."

#### Firmament elixir, page 170

Red hammer: level 5 disease. Every day, an infected individual must succeed at a Might defense roll or their Speed Edge decreases by 1. A negative Speed Edge in this case is the amount of Speed that must be used to perform Speed-based actions even if no Effort is used. Simply picking up a small object and carrying it across the room has a Speed cost of 2 if your Speed Edge is -2. Three successful days of resisting the effects allows the victim to shake off the illness.

Skywhale, page 162

f it weren't for powerful divinatory magic, provided of course by the gods, the gate to the Firmament would never have been discovered. To travel to the Firmament, one must use a skywhale craft, because the passage is more than 300 feet (90 m) in the air, almost directly above the town of Setvesous.

The Firmament appears to be a wide expanse of rocky hills with frequent cold streams cutting across the landscape, bringing life in the form of broad-leafed trees and swaying tall grasses as well as blue-green lichen. With long days marked by two suns and night skies with multiple moons, this realm knows little true darkness. But as one adventurer's maxim states, "Don't equate light with safety."

Many days see a brief rain shower, and mornings typically carry a particularly heavy dewfall from the night before.

## DIFFERENCES IN THE FIRMAMENT

Adventurers entering the Firmament will experience a number of notable changes aside from those true of every Godforsaken Land.

Two suns shine in the sky. One is similar to the sun they are used to—perhaps a bit brighter—but the other is very small and red. Every hundred years or so, the red sun grows slowly larger until it is the same size as its companion, bathing the land in a reddish hue. After a year or so, it shrinks again to its small size. Days are much longer and nights shorter—about twenty hours of daylight and six hours of darkness, and even in the night, the red sun lingers longer into the evening and rises earlier in the morning.

Likewise, the Firmament has six moons, although all are smaller than Bontherre's nighttime guardian. They are never all visible at the same time.

The air in the Firmament is dry and thin. People from Bontherre find it difficult to catch their breath after exertion, and over time they begin to grow ill from the air itself. Every day, upon waking, an adventurer who fails a Might defense roll (difficulty 5) suffers 1 point of damage to either Might or Speed (determine randomly). Clever adventurers have discovered a cure for this sickness.

Some of the biting, flying insects that swarm the hills of the Firmament carry a terrible disease that adventurers call the red hammer. It turns the flesh red and slowly eats at one's nerves, eventually making even the simplest physical activities difficult or impossible.

## CASTLE TURION

Passing into the Firmament, very likely on a skywhale or similar flying craft, adventurers emerge in the vast courtyard of a castle built from brown and white stone. Although a

## THE FIRMAMENT: A TUNNEL IN THE SKY

#### LIQUID MIRROR

Throughout the Firmament, in deep, rocky crevasses or silent subterranean grottos, one can find a substance called liquid mirror. As its name suggests, this liquid is highly reflective. It has the properties of liquid metal except that it is cool to the touch. In fact, it can be rendered into a solid only in extreme cold. The material is quite rare and usually found in small quantities, such as a pool of 1 to 3 ounces.

Artisans prize liquid mirror, for with magically enhanced tools they can shape it into flowing, moving sculptures or add it to an existing work of art in another medium to give it movement and a unique, glistening, ever-changing nature. Even an ounce of the material is worth 100 gold pieces to them.

However, liquid mirror cannot be brought through the doorway back into Bontherre in liquid form—it boils away in the transition. Adventurers have designed liquid mirror coolers to transport it.

skywhale can fly in the Firmament, they are exceedingly reluctant to do so, eager to return as quickly as possible to Bontherre. It's likely that other means of magical flight in the Blessed Land won't function in the Firmament, as they're probably powered by the Sacrante. Devices and craft of this nature rest inert on the ground in the courtyard, but as soon as they pass back (or in some cases are carried or pushed) through the portal, they fly once again as they appear in the skies above Bontherre. The castle was built a decade earlier by a legendary adventurer named Turion. With the help of a trio of sorcerers, he created this place so that those following in his footsteps would have a safe refuge from which to explore the Firmament.

Turion is an old man now and has chosen to live out his days in the Firmament. He tries to greet all those who pass through the portal, accompanied by a small but capable retinue of paid servants and guards. He asks for news of Bontherre and inquires about the adventurers' plans in the Firmament. Turion can tell travelers the basics of the land, and he recommends that if they go to Ettatomain, they should drop his name with Valla Chataberer. He says that doing so will assure their excellent treatment in that holding (this is not the case, but he believes it to be).

Turion doesn't attempt to exact a toll on those passing into his castle, but if adventurers want anything (a safe place to stay the night, a meal, equipment, and so on) he will expect something in return. This might be money, or it might be a favor.

Turion has a magical flying craft that looks like an enormous falcon made of wood. It functions only in Bontherre, but if he (or his servants) need to return there, he has the means. Mostly, though, he and his people attempt to get what they need from the forlorren.

## THE HILLS OF THE FORLORREN

With brilliant golden skin and billowing, silvery hair, the forlorren are a people one does not mistake for any another. Though Turion: level 7, attacks with a sword as level 8; health 50; Armor 2; wears a magical breastplate that gives him 5 points of Armor against fire and cold, and imbues his attacks with +2 damage from either fire or cold (his choice)

Turion christened this land "the Firmament" after ancient legends about a realm in the sky. He believed that those legends referred to this place, but whether that's true or not is debatable. They might just be legends.

Liquid mirror cooler, page 170

**Typical forlorren:** *level 3, Intellect defense and all manner of crafting as level 4* 

With the help of a trio of sorcerers, the legendary Turion created this place so that those following in his footsteps would have a safe refuge from which to explore the Firmament.



It's not the intention of this text to imply that the forlorren use science and engineering that seems like magic to others. Rather, just the opposite. What they refer to as engineering is actually magic. They simply think of magic in a very scientific fashion. Talk of spells, rituals, and the like sounds like nonsense to them.

Few forlorren holdings have proper names. The residents just call it "home" or "the holding." Ettatomain is the exception. they stand only about 5 feet (1.5 m) tall, most of these humanoid folk are muscular and broad-shouldered. When a forlorren moves, their limbs and joints make a cracking sound like crinkling paper.

The forlorren watch over their domain from towers that float well above the ground, held aloft by magic that they call "engineering" (though they don't explain what they mean).

Forlorren dwell in small holdings that exist both above and below the surface, built into the sides of their hills. These communities often prominently incorporate a river, pond, waterfall or other water feature.

The people command powerful magic, but they don't consider it supernatural. They believe that with the right training and practice, anyone can do it (they are mistaken) and that it's just harnessing the natural laws of their world (perhaps true, but probably not as literally as they believe). This means that their magical powers are so innate and subtle that they don't even realize they are using such abilities. They don't use spells or similar kinds of magical praxis. The way they understand it, when they create a flying machine or a floating tower, it works because they fashioned it in a particular way, not because it's imbued with magic. A flying machine made some other way or in some other shape would never get off the ground.

The forlorren worship no gods, but they deeply respect and revere both sky and earth, and think of them as sacred. Their art depicts this, but they do not personify or anthropomorphize the concepts. And they certainly have no temples or priests. Instead, most forlorren are engineers, builders, crafters, artisans, miners, soldiers, farmers, or herders. They are a practical folk, although they appreciate the aesthetics of both sight and sound.

The forlorren have their own languages, but a few speak a little Bontheche. They

#### FORLORREN PCs

Some players may wish to play a forlorren character. This shouldn't happen until after the players have finished at least one adventure in the Firmament and encountered the forlorren more than once. Thus, the forlorren character is probably a recent addition to the group, recruited in the Firmament. As with most nonhuman species, the forlorren aspect should be portrayed through a descriptor.

#### FORLORREN DESCRIPTOR

You are a forlorren. Standing around 5 feet (1.5 m) tall, your skin glistens like gold and your long hair is silver. You're likely muscular and broad-shouldered. When you move, your limbs and joints make a cracking sound like crinkling paper. Other beings you encounter might find you a curiosity, but their ways are as strange to you as you are to them.

You gain the following characteristics.

Sturdy: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You are trained in all crafting tasks and in Intellect defense.

**Engineering:** With a cost of 100 gp per level in tools and materials, given a full day, you can craft a cypher with any effect you are aware of, up to level 3.

**Inability:** You have difficulty relating to magic as it is thought of by other peoples (spells and such). Tasks to understand or use such magic are hindered.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The other PCs rescued you from danger, and you feel beholden to them.

2. The other PCs offered to teach you about the other lands that exist beyond your own.

- 3. The other PCs seemed hopeless and doomed in your land without your help.
- 4. You are an outcast from your holding and had to leave anyway.

value gold and silver just like humans do and gladly accept coins from Bontherre. They have their own coins as well. They prize liquid mirror for its decorative qualities, and it is frequently found in their art and jewelry.

#### ETTATOMAIN

Those passing into the Firmament from Bontherre are very likely to first encounter the forlorren in a holding called Ettatomain, which is larger than most. The forlorren there are at least somewhat accustomed to humans.

On approach, it might appear a small town nestled in the hills, built on both sides of a river with a tiered waterfall. Two floating towers watch over Ettatomain, each equipped with soldiers armed with so-called ironbows. Similar to crossbows in appearance, these feats of "engineering" can sight distant targets and accurately launch powerful arrows at them.

Like all forlorren holdings, however, fully half of the town lies underground, within and beneath the hills. Almost every structure extends down into the earth as much as (or more than) it exists above the surface. These are not mere cellars or basements, but functioning parts of the town, connected by broad subterranean passages just as they are connected by streets above. Forlorren "engineering" enables lighting, heating, circulation, and elevators to make these underground areas not just habitable, but pleasant. Ironbows are heavy weapons with a range of 1,000 feet (300 m), but it requires a full action to load them, and another to trigger.

Forlorren soldier: level 3, Intellect defense and all manner of crafting as level 4; Armor 2; armed with a sword and a heavy ironbow with very long range

Valla Chataberer: level 6, organization and leadership as level 7

Azure bird: level 1, Speed defense as level 4, perception as level 3; supernatural ability to sense danger that no one else senses

Esecran: level 8, Speed defense as level 7; health 65; can attack every foe in close range with a different limb Valla Chataberer serves as the leader of Ettatomain and its two thousand or so citizens. She is a serious-minded, older female with a severe temper. She wields a long, scepter-like walking stick as a symbol of her office, decorated with delicate liquid mirror embellishments (it's worth at least 500 gp). Valla does not speak Bontheche, but her assistant, Kiater, does and can serve as a translator. About a third of the people of Ettatomain have picked up a little of the language of Bontherre visitors.

#### OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE HILLS

The forlorren realm is filled with buzzing insects, birds, and grazing flocks of various animals—bovine, sheep, and goats, some wild and some domesticated. Adventurers from Bontherre might think these beasts look a little different from what they're used to back home, but a goat here is close enough to a goat in Bontherre to use the same term. **Azure birds:** As their name suggests, azure birds are difficult to spot, for they are the same color as the clear sky. Their feathers are valued for their almost mirrorlike reflectiveness, but the real prize is one captured alive, for they screech in times of otherwise unseen danger anything from the presence of a disease to thieves breaking into the house.

**Esecran:** Multilimbed monstrosities as big as elephants, these terrifying creatures eat anything and everything. When they're not eating, they spend their time just destroying things. The forlorren believe esecran to be demons from some other world (neither the Firmament nor Bontherre). If they discover an esecran, they attempt to raise a band of capable warriors to destroy it or at least drive it well away from any holdings as quickly as possible.



Jotunn: Ten to 12 feet (3 to 3.5 m) tall, these giant humanoids usually keep to themselves but may dwell in small bands of six to ten. They sometimes tend to enormous red cattle. The forlorren give them a wide berth when possible, and surprisingly, most of the time the giants do not bother their holdings.

**Lorria:** These six-legged deer navigate the rockiest, most uneven terrain in the hills with ease.

**Vork:** Also called vork-wolves, these large canines have two heads, each with powerful jaws. They can attack a single foe twice or two foes at the same time.

**Yammers:** A silly name disguises the danger posed by these hornet-like insects. As long as a person's arm, yammers have grasping mandibles and massive stingers, so that they first bite and latch on, and then sting a victim repeatedly. Yammers produce a keening drone when agitated.

### PCs in the hills of the forlorren

Player characters in the Firmament will very likely come to Ettatomain first. This allows them to meet the forlorren, the primary inhabitants of the land. Just as with humans and other species, some forlorren will turn out to be allies, and others enemies.

Beyond Ettatomain, most forlorren holdings are isolated and self-sufficient. What goes on in one is nothing but rumor or distant news in another, if they know about it at all. Each holding the PCs visit should be distinct. Some are fearful of outsiders, while others are welcoming. One holding has a law against alcohol, while another is built entirely around a brewery. A third doesn't even know the stuff exists.

#### ADVENTURES IN THE HILLS OF THE FORLORREN

**The Missing Hunters:** Some forlorren lorria hunters have gone missing, and the people of their holding offer a reward for their return. The hunters fell afoul of a basilisk and have been turned to stone. Should the PCs learn this and return with the information, they're asked to bring the petrified victims back home because the forlorren can brew a remedy for that. The forlorren will throw in some of the remedy for the PCs along with the reward.

**The Club of Gore:** A secret society among the forlorren appreciates dark entertainments of bloody fights and gruesome displays of violence. They pit forlorren against yammers and vorks, forlorren against forlorren, and more. Forlorren are disappearing (kidnapped by the society) and those who remain are getting worried. If anyone finds and confronts the club, its leaders attempt to bribe, coerce, or otherwise entice their way out of trouble before resorting to violence to defend themselves.

**Tunnel Mongers:** A pack of tunneling morlocks has broken into the subterranean portion of a forlorren holding. The forlorren have built barricades to hold them at bay but need help to drive them off. Once the morlocks are slain or routed, their own tunnels reveal a series of caves and chambers that hold interesting secrets, including a source of liquid mirror.

## <u>THE WILDS OF THE WEST</u>

Beyond the Hills of the Forlorren lies a wilderness untamed and unexplored. The climate is temperate, although powerful electrical storms are not uncommon. Jotunn: use fire jotunn stats, page 115. There are no frost jotunn in the Firmament. A few jotunn have two heads with two distinct personalities, using perception as level 7.

Jotunn's giant cattle: level 6, Speed defense as level 4; health 25

Basilisk, page 99

Lorria: level 3, climbing as level 6, Speed defense as level 4

**Vork:** *level 4, perception and stealth as level 5; make two attacks as a single action, each inflicting 4 damage* 

Yammer: level 3, Speed defense as level 4; victims struck by mandibles (3 damage) are then attacked by the stinger (5 damage) each round until they break free or are dead

Morlock, page 121

Allafreda: level 7, magical creature crafting as level 9, Intellect defense as level 8; change shape to anything up to half or twice her size (can give herself up to 40 health and 3 Armor as well as natural weapons to attack with, like teeth and claws)

Niamos: level 6, magical creature crafting as level 9, Might and Speed defense as level 8; health 30; Armor 2; targets struck in melee must make a Might defense roll or contract a wasting disease that immediately moves them one step down the damage track

> Dasce: level 3, swimming and fishing as level 5; speak only in sign language

Predatory amphibians: level 5, swimming as level 7, perception as level 3; health 20; Armor 2; foes bitten are dragged underwater and may drown

Mirrormen, page 194

Dreamlike apparition: level 6; immune to physical damage; cannot affect the physical world, but communicates telepathically and lashes out with 6 points of Intellect damage if hostile

> Typical crafted creature: level 3; Armor 1; some can fly; some have +1 level in stealth, perception, attacks, or defense

#### AUTARCH'S LAKE

A wide body of fresh water fashioned by a massive volcanic crater, with an island at the center, Autarch's Lake is both deep and cold. Small villages of fisherfolk lie on the shores, populated by forlorren, as well as odd, silent avian humanoids some call dasce. Fish fill the lake, and large predatory amphibians dwell in the depths, surfacing only every few days.

#### THE DREAMING MOUNTAINS

At the farthest reaches of the wilds lay seemingly impenetrable mountains. Some natives of the region believe the peaks to be sleeping gods. True or not, they are inhabited by all manner of creatures, but the most notable are dreamlike apparitions that seem more ghost than beast.

And woe to those mortals who sleep amid the mountains, for within them slumber brings lucid dreams of distant worlds and alien beings in cyclopean cities. The longer one experiences such a dream, the harder it is to awaken. Some dreamers eventually disappear altogether, presumably dwelling henceforth in regions beyond even the Godforsaken Lands.

The Dreaming Mountains are a good source of liquid mirror.

#### THE ROSE

Hidden within a narrow valley, a strange structure rises from the ground. It gains its name from its shape and color. Made of red glass (or something that looks very much like it), it has the appearance of a rosebud on its side, about a third of it buried in the ground. Upon close inspection, one finds that the glass is opaque and hides a large interior, the entrance of which is near the base. The central core of the building is the very heart of the rosebud.

This structure, the Rose, is the demesne of Allafreda and Niamos, an enigmatic duo of great magical power. It also serves as a temple to their patron, Emmeranal, an equally mysterious deity whom they claim dwells within the clouds above this land.

Allafreda often appears human, but she is not. She can change her shape as she wishes, but she has no connection to the mirrormen. Niamos retains a single form, that of a tall man with a bestial face and a golden horn. They sometimes act as though they are a romantic couple, but other times refer to each other as sibling. Perhaps both are true.

Allafreda's demeanor changes as easily as her shape. She adores you one moment and is bored of you the next. Niamos's temper is as short as his patience, and it's not out of the ordinary for him to be pushed to sudden, violent outbursts.

Within the Rose, the two spend much of their time building unique new creatures using alchemy and magic. These crafted creatures come in all shapes and sizes, and have a rudimentary intellect. Many are then dressed in uniforms to serve as butlers, cooks, maids, or guards. Some simply roam the Rose and its environs freely. The well-appointed interior of the structure is filled with abstract liquid mirror sculptures, both intricate and delicate.

The forlorren know of Allafreda and Niamos, but stay away. They tell tales of the duo's strange creations and dangerous demeanors.

And woe to those mortals who sleep amid the mountains, for within them slumber brings lucid dreams of distant worlds and alien beings in cyclopean cities.

## OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE WILDS OF THE WEST

Although many creatures are native to this region, some of the more prominent include the following.

**Devilworms:** Six-foot-long millipedes with bright red carapaces, devilworms emit poisonous vapors all around them when they wish through spiracles all along their body. Their bite is also venomous.

**Krao:** These reptilian humanoids use special scents to control 8-foot (2.5 m) long ant-like insects as mounts and guardians. Krao dwell in tunnel-ridden mounds of hardened earth created for them by 1-foot (30 cm) long insect builders they also master. Krao hunt and gather their own food, and guard the land around their home mound with a vicious territoriality. They prefer to eat mammals of any kind, and they conduct bloody rituals to appease their apparently alwayshungry ancestral ghosts.

## ADVENTURES IN THE WILDS OF THE WEST

**Krao Passage:** The PCs seek to travel farther west, but the only route they know of through the Dreaming Mountains holds a krao mound. While it might be possible to simply sneak through their territory, smart adventurers might find a way to appease the creatures and perhaps even turn them into allies. Those who fail, however, will likely end up a sacrifice to the ancestors, or a quick meal.

**Temple in the Deeps:** Within the waters of Autarch's Lake, legends say, one can find an ancient submerged temple built by unknown hands. This temple, according to the same legends, contains an inner sanctum where the dead can be restored to life. But first it must be found, and the depths of the cold, dark lake must be survived.

Wandering Merchant: A male human roams the wilderness in a brightly painted wagon, pulled by a pair of blue horses. He sells a variety of magical potions, charms, and other things. This mysterious, unknown man speaks the language of seemingly every being in the Firmament, **Devilworm:** *level 4, climbing as level 7; Armor 4; bite carries venom that inflicts 4 Speed damage; spiracles emit gas affecting all close targets, robbing them of their next action* 

**Krao:** level 3, riding and handling insects as level 5, perception as level 4; Armor 2; usually wield spears or axes

**Krao mount:** *level 4, climbing as level 5; Armor 2* 

Krao builder: level 1, climbing as level 3; Armor 1



and while he is welcome everywhere, no one seems to fully trust him. Where does he get his wares, and why is he so interested in selling them? And is it true that he knows secret paths through the wilds that no one else knows?

#### THE MIRRORMEN

"Mirrormen" is a misnomer in every way. First of all, these creatures have no gender. Second, they do not reflect appearances—they steal them. Still, this is the name given to them by the forlorren, and it's understandable why. They infiltrate communities one individual at a time, murder a carefully chosen victim, and take on their appearance in an act of perfect duplication. They even steal their memories. This theft leaves nothing but a pile of dust behind.

Mirrorman: level 5, disguise as level 10, stealth and deception as level 7; Armor 1; if attacking with surprise, they inflict 10 damage with their initial strike; steal the appearance and memories of a slain victim

Mirror curse: level 7

The mirrormen are likely the greatest threat the forlorren face. The insidious creatures seek to take over entire holdings. Should this happen, the village or town gradually falls into decay and disarray, for the mirrormen have little drive or initiative. Inherently lazy, they don't repair or replace damaged things and certainly don't craft or build anything. Once all the food and other supplies of a completely replicated holding have been exhausted, the mirrormen abandon it.

Mirrormen must kill to steal the appearance and memories of a victim. While in the form of one person, a mirrorman can kill another and take their appearance. In fact, if they murder someone, they automatically steal the victim's appearance and memories—it is not something they can prevent. They are reluctant to do this (because it denies another of their kind an identity to assume), but they will resort to this tactic to avoid discovery.

In their natural form, mirrormen look like pale pink worms the size of a large dog, each bearing a mostly featureless face. They always immediately recognize one of their kind no matter what their appearance. They can be found anywhere in the Firmament.

#### PCs AND THE MIRRORMEN

Adventurers from Bontherre might come to a forlorren holding and find that some or all of the people there have been replaced by mirrormen. Of course, this is not obvious, particularly to outsiders. If the community has not been entirely replaced, it will likely be experiencing dissent and conflict, as people are either angry at the sudden laziness and lethargy of their fellow citizens or paranoid or suspicious that a mirrorman infiltration is happening. The mirrormen are smart enough to deflect some of this by making accusations themselves, directed at legitimate forlorren. (Communities in chaos are also easier for new mirrormen to infiltrate because people tend to isolate and thus are more easily murdered and replaced.)

A mirrorman will not hesitate to try to murder and replace a human adventurer. Should this terrible event occur, once back in Bontherre, the mirrorman may try to call its brethren to this new land to conquer. (This endeavor is doomed to fail, thanks to the Sacrante, but that doesn't mean it's not a problem for a while.)

#### THE MIRROR CURSE

Strangely, it's possible for a non-mirrorman in the Firmament to suddenly take on the primary trait of one of those beings. In other words, sometimes a person who kills another takes on the victim's appearance and memories.

This mirror curse potentially befalls anyone who "unmasks" a disguised mirrorman for what they truly are. The effect happens gradually, over the course of a few days, after the cursed subject

## THE FIRMAMENT: A TUNNEL IN THE SKY

first slays another being. They gain the victim's memories slowly, bit by bit. Their appearance changes gradually, but steadily.

In the case of this curse, however, the murderer takes on the victim's nature as well. A heroic knight who slays an immoral bandit slowly becomes a liar, a cheat, and a cutthroat thief. A sorcerer who slays a ravenous beast becomes savage and voracious—perhaps even to their fellows.

#### LIQUID MIRROR

The mirrormen literally worship liquid mirror. To them, every bit of it is part of a vast deity, a sacred object or being they are not worthy to touch—but neither is anyone else. Damaging liquid mirror is the greatest sin imaginable, and creating art with it is considered damaging it.

## THE FUNGAL DANCERS

When creatures die in the Firmament, their corpses are sometimes infested with fungal spores that produce fruiting bodies over a few days. By the time much of the flesh has rotted (or been eaten) off, these fungal growths connect the bones and remaining flesh like muscular tissue, animating the corpse. The fungus possesses a rudimentary intelligence and uses its new body to carry out the will of its god, Uruthuscamosh the Debased. Dwelling deep beneath the surface, Uruthuscamosh continually spreads its spores and seeps further and further into the heart of the world, befouling it.

The fungal dancers get their name because one of the primary actions they take is to gather in the dark of night and perform obscene ritual dances. Sometimes, in advance of one of these loathsome rites, they capture a creature to sacrifice and immediately infest. The sacrifice is usually something the size of a deer, a wolf, or a person. Horrific alone but soul-chilling in groups, the fact that a roving pack might include one fungus inhabiting the corpse of a forlorren, another an elk, and a third a dog somehow makes it even worse. Fungal dancers' abilities in combat are clumsy and their reflexes are slow, but they produce spores that cloud the mind and perception of living creatures they strike.

The forlorren cremate their dead to avoid fungal infestation, but that doesn't help against already-mobile corpses that come at dusk to steal individuals for their horrific rituals. Forlorren guards are always particularly vigilant at sunset due to these ghastly raids.

Mirrormen and fungal dancers do not have regions of their own. They can be found anywhere in the Firmament.

Fungal dancer: level 4, stealth as level 5, Might and Intellect defense as level 6, Speed defense as level 3; regenerate 1 health per round unless burned; victim struck in combat suffers +3 Intellect damage and loses their next action unless they succeed at a Might defense roll

## CHAPTER 18

## KORAK-MAR: THROUGH THE DOORWAY BENEATH THE MOUNTAIN

Korak-Mar is tidally locked, as it closely orbits its white dwarf star. Radiation from this star causes some of the sickness that visitors experience.

Korak-Mar curative, page 170

Acid-resistant tarp, page 169 orak-Mar is not a Bontherre name, but the name given to the land by the moord, the dominant inhabitants of the realm. This is a dimly lit place of cold winds and bare, black rock. The air here burns the inside of one's nose and throat. The rain is worse. The entire land seems to vibrate with sickness, and although none of the native creatures seem affected, the flesh of a visitor grows raw, their eyes ache, and even their bones seem to weaken.

Korak-Mar is cold, and visitors will feel the need to wear winter clothing. A wise adventurer brings something resistant to the acidic rains that fall all too frequently, and probably an even greater amount of food and water. Much of this land's offerings are poisonous to those from the Blessed Land.

Winds may howl across bare wastes of dark stone, but there is life here. What's more, the people of Korak-Mar, the moord, are a wise and ancient folk. But their nature is one that's hard for a human to fully understand. It's possible to forge bonds and agreements with them, but they are no strangers to treachery.

## DIFFERENCES IN KORAK-MAR

Adventurers exploring Korak-Mar will encounter a number of notable changes aside from those true of every Godforsaken Land. The pale white sun gives off far less light than the sun of Bontherre. Even stranger, it does not move across the sky. Korak-Mar has no night, just a sickly dim twilight lasting an eternity.

After spending what a Bontherre resident would consider two days (about forty-eight hours) in Korak-Mar, characters must make a Might defense roll (difficulty 4) each morning. Those who fail suffer 1 point of Might damage and 1 point of Speed damage, and subtract 1 from their recovery rolls. Fortunately, adventurers have found a curative that acts as a remedy for this.

The acid rains in Korak-Mar burn the flesh of non-natives and eat away at soft materials brought from other lands, such as cloth and leather. Anyone caught unprotected in a rainstorm suffers 1 point of damage. Over the course of a week or perhaps two, an unprotected item of cloth or leather will become pitted and useless. Shelter helps, as do acid-resistant tarps.

The black flies and red lancers of Korak-Mar don't necessarily carry disease, but their constant biting is painful. Non-native victims subtract 1 from their recovery rolls (minimum result 1) other than the one-round recovery roll. Insect repellent formulated for these creatures negates this effect.

Insect repellent, page 170



## BLACK VEGETATION And bare earth

The landscape of Korak-Mar can be summed up with one word: black. The plants of the land are black rather than green, and much of the rock is black and volcanic. Korak-Mar is very geologically unstable, with volcanos erupting and vents blasting boiling water and rock. It is dark and bleak to visitors from Bontherre, and would still be so even if the sun were brighter.

The inhabitants of Korak-Mar have long since adapted to the dim light and the dark colors. A predator here can distinguish prey that has a sable hide standing in a patch of tall black grass in front of a jagged ebony boulder in the shadows, and probably see which way the creature's dark eyes are looking.

Adventurers from the Blessed Land will have to learn quickly that despite this being a twilight land of shadow, hiding here is as hard as it is back home perhaps harder.

## THE MOORD

Korak-Mar, despite its bleakness, hosts a variety of creatures. Chief among them is the dominant species, who call themselves the moord. Moord could be mistaken for hairless humans with vinous flesh. Their eyes are all white, with no pupil. Most stand 6 to 7 feet (around 2 m) tall, and a typical moord would be considered muscular compared to a human.

They dress regally, perhaps even flamboyantly. Their structures are similarly complex and highly decorative, with a particular style that a human might call "curvy, but with occasional sharp points."

Moord communicate intuitively. That is to say, if they want to be understood by someone, they instinctively know how to do so. To adventurers, it may seem that moord are all fluent in Bontheche, but this is not the case. They just make the right sounds to make themselves understood. The moord do have a unique language, but it is used only for writing.

Korak-Mar has no moons. The "moons" are actually asteroids or other bits of stellar debris that are in orbit around the sun, but which frequently pass close enough to the planet to be thought of as tiny moons. To people from Bontherre, they might seem more like bright, moving stars, unless they pass in front of the sun (which some do, but not all), at which point it's clear that they are dark objects.

The moord are both savage and serene, contradictions on two legs. Their temperament depends on the elaborate movements of Korak-Mar's multitudinous tiny moons. The complex series of celestial objects wields a mystical effect on the species. It's impossible for a non-moord to predict these effects, but the moord can look at the moons and tell when they will bring upon a change. Moord are mostly serene—about ten times more often than they are savage.

Thus, 90 to 95 percent of the time, the moord live calm lives of subdued contemplation and careful, considered action. They sleep fairly often and meditate at other times. They do not eat, mate, or hunt. They do, however, craft objects, produce art, write books (moord libraries are both numerous and extensive), and engage in other creative or constructive activities.

The other 5 to 10 percent of the time, moord engage in revels of reckless

abandon, hunt wild game with ferocity and bloodlust, eat voraciously, and engage in vigorous sex. They call these periods "feasts," but the name does not adequately convey the chaos.

It would be wrong—foolish, even—to think that a calm moord is automatically kind or benevolent. It would also be wrong to think that a moord during a feast must be immoral or amoral. The changes do not alter the overall ethics of the individual, only the chosen actions and responses to stimuli. For example, a moord that doesn't condone murder won't turn into a murderer during a feast, and a moord woodworker won't destroy his work. In other words, a feasting moord becomes more fierce, uninhibited, and barbaric, but they don't go insane.

Overall, if one must generalize, humans from Bontherre find the moord to be cold and distant—sometimes calculating and brooding—most of the time, and violent and ruthless during a feast. Neither state



can be safely trusted. Those in the know caution travelers to Korak-Mar to be wary of the moord in any case. But there are exceptions, of course. Some visitors have found trustworthy and even benevolent individuals.

The moord fear that an influx of explorers and adventurers from Bontherre will lead to an invasion. This isn't going to happen, but the moord—particularly the moord in charge—are suspicious at best, and paranoid at worst.

Moord craftspeople are skilled workers with stone and metal. They make items a human might find strangely shaped, and their aesthetic is one of smooth surfaces with little adornment. The rare metal known as bellerite is often incorporated into important or valuable items just to display wealth. Occasionally, it's used to produce a complete item, like a storage case or perhaps a door (if one is very wealthy) that is entirely immune to magical effects.

And the moord are no strangers to magic. Moord sorcerers summon strange beings from . . . who knows where? These entities perform services for the sorcerer and then return whence they came. Moord also use spells that would be generally recognizable to human sorcerers, although often with a strange visual element involving a deep display of colors like red, black, and silver.

#### TUNNELS THROUGH NOTHING

Some moord possess the strange ability to tunnel through space, creating invisible passages that allow them to travel through places without being seen, heard, or touched. The moord term for such people is "beyarak," which simply translates to "tunnelers."

Beyarak take about an hour to create roughly 500 feet (150 m) of a tunnel. While using a tunnel may look like a form of teleportation, it is no faster than moving through conventional space. However, it does allow one to move undetected and untouchable.

#### **BORUUD AND GOB'S MARKET**

Boruud is the walled capital city of the moord, and thus—in their estimation the capital city of Korak-Mar. There are many city-states and regions of moord, each maintaining as much independence from Boruud as possible, but ultimately all bending a knee to its size, wealth, and power.

Boruud boasts a population of more than three hundred thousand. Its streets present a winding mazework of narrow paths and many thousands of small structures packed together, and in some cases atop one another in a sort of "roof level" of the city. Despite being higher, these upper structures represent the lower-income individuals and families.

Black volcanic rock composes the 30-foot (9 m) tall walls that surround the city. Angular, almost blade-like towers punctuate the length of the walls, making Boruud seem more like a vast, imposing fortress than a city.

The moord in Boruud don't have a military. Every adult moord is assumed to be able to take up arms at the direction of their rulers, should the need arise. King Gramal rules Boruud from a subterranean palace below the city.

Adventurers from Bontherre very quickly come to know Gob's Market, probably the most welcoming place they'll find in Korak-Mar. This is a small but active marketplace that lies just inside the walls of the city. It caters to outsiders to Korak-Mar (most, but not all, of whom come from the Blessed Land).

Gob's Market offers food edible to humans, the so-called Korak-Mar curative, and various useful items and equipment, all for prices somewhere between half again and double what the characters are used Bellerite, page 170

Almost any creature's stats and appearance can be used for a moord summoning, but in every case they should seem alien and otherworldly.

The difficulties and harshness of Korak-Mar are often neither difficult nor harsh to the moord. To them, it's just home, and their people have long since adapted to the environment.

**King Gramal:** *level 5, persuasion and intimidation as level 6* 

Korak-Mar holds hidden gateways to other worlds, just like the doorway to Bontherre. All those that are known are watched and guarded.

Master Kann: level 10; Armor 10 (his so-called darkening cloak); all attacks against him in dim light (which is basically everywhere, all the time, in this land) are hindered by three steps and all attacks made by him are eased by three steps; can attack up to four foes in melee as a single action; can move from any shadow in the land to any other shadow, instantly (not an action)

#### Darkening way

disciples: level 6; Armor 3 (lesser darkening cloaks); all attacks against them in dim light (which is basically everywhere, all the time, in this land) are hindered by two steps and all attacks made by them are eased by two steps; can attack two foes in melee as a single action; can move from any shadow in the land to any other shadow, instantly, as an action

Queen Seppar: level 9, perception as level 10; touch drains 4 points from all Pools (ignores Armor) and adds those points to her own health; has many magical artifacts and cyphers

> Queen's soldiers: level 4; Armor 3

to paying in Bontherre. Near the market are hostels and other services catering to humans—again, at inflated prices.

There is also a clandestine aspect to the market, where sorcerers and others are willing to trade in cyphers and spells. However, selling magic or other information deemed "proprietary" by the moord rulers is illegal, so it must be done slyly.

#### FEDEN-BEL

The fortress of Feden-Bel is home to a variety of moord ruled by Master Kann. Kann is a master of the darkening way, a martial arts style that he teaches to an elite few disciples.

Master Kann is tall and thin, with four fingers on his right hand. He is aloof and harsh, but fair. He believes in swift justice and is not quick to trust those he does not know.

To those not interested in martial arts, Feden-Bel is a sanctuary for visitors looking for succor from the hostile city-states of the moord. Kann maintains that his fortress and the surrounding lands are truly independent, and says that he can back up this claim by sending a few darkening way assassins into the bedchamber of any ruler while they sleep. Clearly, enough people believe him, for no one challenges him.

Feden-Bel is also infamous for its production of poisons as well as cyphers and artifacts dealing with darkness. These all bear the emblem of Feden-Bel, a silver hand with only four fingers. Because of this, it's safe to assume that many of the inhabitants of the large fortress are craftspeople and sorcerers.

#### MORRAN

Morran is a large city significant perhaps only in that it does not prohibit non-moord or prevent any kind of trade with them. Morran's rulers, a council of elders, seek to learn more about outsiders This cloak is an example of an artifact produced in Feden-Bel.

#### CLOAK OF FEDEN-BEL

Level: 1d6 + 3 Form: Hooded cloak in a dark color marked with a small silver emblem of Feden-Bel

Effect: This item functions only in areas of dim light or many shadows. When activated (by drawing the hood over the wearer's head), the wearer disappears and reappears in another shadow within 1 mile (1.5 km). Depletion: 1 in 1d10

to their land, interested in perhaps forming an alliance to gain enough wealth and power to challenge Boruud.

#### RAGELITH

Queen Seppar rules the city-state of Ragelith, located within the caldera of an extinct volcano. The only entrance to the city is through a series of well-guarded underground passageways.

Within the caldera, the weather is surprisingly mild, and the ground is fertile. Visitors from the Blessed Land would find it quite pleasant, at least in comparison to the outside world. However, humans are not welcome, and the queen's soldiers are known for their ruthlessness. The queen is, to put it mildly, a cruel tyrant whose life has been extended over and over again by magic. Her people put up with her strict rule because the city itself is quite safe, prosperous, and healthy.

#### THE FUNEREAL SEA

Dark, choppy waters make the salty Funereal Sea dangerous to travel upon. Ice floes drift down from the north (which stretches as miles of drift ice before becoming a solid ice sheet that no one has ever crossed), causing hazards to ships that often cannot see them until too late.

Massive whales of dark blue or black flesh seem to rule the sea, although the waters teem with a variety and abundance of life like nowhere else in Korak-Mar. The moord that live along the coast consider the whales to be intelligent and almost godlike. They call them "the nobles of the sea."

The moord that live near the sea are typically fisherfolk, dwelling in small villages and towns in sheltered coves. They do not hunt the whales, but they do go after violet-colored seals for food as well as their skins.

#### THE CRUMBLING SPIRES

Moord legends say that a range of nigh-impossible mountains, stretching up to the dark heavens like red sword blades, once dominated their horizon. If true, all that remains of these tall spires is a vast region of tumbled red boulders and jagged cliffs. Storms are frequent in this area, with electrical strikes blasting away at the crimson stones as if to punish them for some past crime.

A peculiar black vine covered in thorns, called deathsgrip by some, grows thick in this land. It seems to do its part by slowly crushing the red stones within its embrace over months and years. Somehow, it has no roots, taking what it needs from the air and the caustic rains. Local moord have learned ways to cook and even make wine from deathsgrip, but it is unpalatable to most humans.

Small moord villages can be found throughout this rocky expanse, populated by those tending flocks of particularly hardy mountain goats. Elsewhere, individuals of power desiring solitude dwell in hidden fortresses and lonely towers amid the hills of red stones.

#### OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE LANDS OF THE MOORD

**Aarak:** These beetle-like insects range from the size of a large dog to that of a small horse. Aarak are dangerous predators that sometimes hunt in small packs, eating anything organic they come upon. Strangely, some moord have domesticated these creatures to use not only as guards but also as pack animals or to pull carts (usually in teams of two or four).

**Cold slime:** Always seeking warmth, this patch of animate, semi-intelligent slime attacks any living creature it finds. Ironically, its weakness is fire, which is too much of a good thing. Most cold slimes are 6 feet (2 m) or more in diameter.

**Kakavya:** Short, brutish, and pale white, these humanoids typically wear hooded cloaks of black or brown covering armor made of hides and furs. Small bands of them haunt lonely valleys and other places ripe for an ambush. The moord consider them to be a nuisance at best, and bandits and thieves at worst.

**Shadows:** Creatures of living darkness, these spirits haunt the entire land of Korak-Mar.

**Wyverns:** Screeching so shrilly that they can be heard over the winds upon which they ride, wyverns hunt throughout moord land. They are often referred to as dragonraptors by the inhabitants of Korak-Mar. **Aarak:** level 2; Armor 2; five or more can attack as one level 4 creature, inflicting 5 damage

**Cold slime:** *level 4, Speed defense as level 2, stealth as level 6; immune to physical damage other than fire* 

Kakavya: level 3, stealth as level 5; Armor 1; +1 damage when attacking from stealth

Although the rainwater in Korak-Mar is dangerous to drink, canny adventurers can find small pools and streams that come from natural springs and supply fresh water for drinking.

Shadows, page 126

Wyverns, page 132

Storms are frequent in this area, with electrical strikes blasting away at the crimson stones as if to punish them for some past crime.

#### PCs AMONG THE MOORD

Even by the standards of the Godforsaken Lands, Korak-Mar is harsh and difficult. Likewise, the moord present a strange challenge. Adventurers from the Blessed Land will find it hard to be trusted, and likewise probably will find it hard to trust the moord. Most places have laws either forbidding or restricting non-moord trade or access to goods and information. PCs who manage to ingratiate themselves with the moord will find these restrictions lifted for them, as an exception. But this likely requires a show of trustworthiness and capability, and only applies to the local moord, not to everyone in the land.

PC sorcerers may find new spells and applications of magic that they had never heard of, as well as intriguing and unique cyphers and artifacts. Getting one's hands on these things might be another matter.

#### **MOORD PCs**

Some players may wish to play a moord character. This shouldn't happen until after the players have finished at least one adventure in Korak-Mar and encountered the moord more than once. Thus, the moord character is probably a recent addition to the group, recruited in Korak-Mar. As with most nonhuman species, the moord aspect should be portrayed through a descriptor.

#### **MOORD DESCRIPTOR**

You are a moord. Standing at least 6 feet (2 m) tall, your skin is the color of red wine, and you have no hair. You're likely muscular and fit, at least compared to the average human. Other beings you encounter might find you a curiosity, but their ways are as strange to you as you are to them.

You gain the following characteristics.

**Resilient and Clever:** +2 to your Might Pool and Intellect Pool.

**Used to Harsh Conditions:** Your Might defense tasks are eased, and you have 3 points of Armor against cold.

**Calm:** If you are in Korak-Mar and the moons dictate it (about 90 to 95 percent of the time), you gain a +1 bonus to your Intellect Edge.

**Feast:** If you are in Korak-Mar and the moons dictate it (about 5 to 10 percent of the time), you become violent, voracious, and destructive. You are still mostly in control of yourself, but at any point, the GM may use intrusions (with no XP reward) to suggest appropriate actions. You can still spend XP to refuse such intrusions.

**Distrust:** You have difficulty trusting others and getting them to trust you. All interaction actions are hindered.

**Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:** From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The other PCs rescued you from danger, and you feel beholden to them.

- 2. The other PCs offered to teach you about the magic of their land.
- 3. The other PCs seemed on their way to some great treasure or reward.
- 4. You are an outlaw with no home among your kind.

In lands other than Korak-Mar, moord gain neither the Calm advantage nor the Feast requirement.

## KORAK-MAR: THROUGH THE DOORWAY BENEATH THE MOUNTAIN

#### ADVENTURES IN THE LANDS OF THE MOORD

The Stolen Crown: The kakavya have trained a wyvern and use it to help them make raids against the moord (and anyone else). The moord ignored this until recently, when the wyvern literally snatched the crown from the head of King Gramal of Boruud. The king has offered a reward of 5,000 gp to anyone who returns his crown—even non-moord.

The Bellerite Mine: An abandoned mine is now occupied by dangerous beasts, but also by a secretive group of moord convinced that there are untapped veins of bellerite somewhere in the mine. They've trapped certain portions to prevent anyone from claim-jumping. A rival mining group is willing to pay handsomely for adventurers who will brave the mine and find the ore (if it exists) before the other moord do. Bonus pay if the adventurers also clear the mine of dangers.

Helping a Fellow Traveler: A human adventurer named Nevenne seeks to learn from Master Kann in Feden-Bel, and is willing to pay others from Bontherre to help find and reach the fortress—and, more importantly, convince Kann to allow them access. Doing so will likely involve a test given by the moord master, such as bringing him two living cold slimes.

## THE FOREST OF ROTTING CASTLES

Deeper into Korak-Mar, past the lands of the moord, lie the remains of an ancient civilization and perhaps an even more ancient feature of the world. Long ago, impossibly tall trees grew to the sky. Although no one alive ever saw one of these trees, they must have been a thousand feet or more in height and hundreds of feet across. All that remains are the stumps of 87 of these colossal trees, each of which had been made into a fortress by some intelligent folk that burrowed, burned, and cut into them. This region is often referred to as the 87 Dead Keeps, but sometimes it's called the Forest of Rotting Castles.

The crafters of the Rotting Castles may not be around anymore, but the fortresses are almost all occupied today. From petty, independent warlords to strange creatures of all types, the castles house a variety of inhabitants, but still hold many ancient secrets and treasures from the days of their creation.

Although it is called the "Forest" of Rotting Castles, nothing could be further from the truth. The keeps lie instead on what is now an empty expanse with little but black scrub vegetation and upturned rocks from the geological instability of the region. Most of the Dead Keeps are far enough from each other that the other castles are little more than specks on the horizon, if that. Some, however, are close together, the two nearest being only a mile apart.

The open black plain the castles occupy presents its own difficulties, showcasing just how dangerous Korak-Mar can be. Storms of lightning and acidic rain roll across the steppes. Sometimes, the rain falls as sleet or hail due to the temperatures.

The black scrub brush of the region hides an insidious hazard: explosive sulfuric gas vents just beneath the ground. Despite the cold temperatures, Korak-Mar has an active—perhaps overactive—geothermal system beneath the surface, and when pockets of gas come into contact with magma or are caught under high pressure from moving subsurface plates, the results are explosions. Sometimes, these occur entirely below the ground or in the far distance, so that adventurers merely The two Dead Keeps only a mile apart are known as the Sisters, and, as long as anyone can remember, the inhabitants of one have hated those of the other. The field between the keeps has been the site of many bloody battles.

**Storm:** level 3; each minute, non-natives without shelter must make a Might defense roll or suffer 1 point of damage

#### **Exploding gas vent:** level 4. Endangers a small to a large area, inflicting 3 points of heat damage and 3 points of crushing damage. Two different Speed defense rolls to avoid. Can be used as a GM intrusion, although if it is a planned encounter, add a GM intrusion at the end in which a Speed defense roll is required to avoid falling into the hole created. Those who fall in take another 2 points of damage and are trapped until they pull themselves out.

Manticore, page 118

**Trawb:** level 3, Speed defense and stealth as level 5

Typical trawb trap (weighted net): victim must succeed at a difficulty 4 Might or Speed task to get free and can take no other action

Trawb sorcerer: level 4, Speed defense and stealth as level 6; can become invisible in dim light as an action; can cause nearby objects to bind a foe (like the trap, above)

> Aevae: level 1, can combine with another similar-sized specimen to form a level 3 aevae

Aevae: level 3, Speed defense as level 1; health 15; can combine with another similar-sized specimen to form a level 5 aevae

> Aevae: level 5, Speed defense as level 2; health 35

Vintaak: level 6; health 20; Armor 4

Charnel bat: level 4; Armor 1; can use an action to emit a light that allows other charnel bats to extract bones; bone extraction attack succeeds if victim fails a Speed defense roll (4 points of damage) and a Might defense roll. A victim with a bone extracted moves down one step on the damage track (only magical healing will restore this) and, if it is a limb bone, loses use of the limb. Losing the skull or spine results in death.

See the adventure "Within the Monstrous" (page 217) for more inhabitants of this region of Korak-Mar. hear a distant rumbling boom, and perhaps feel a strong vibration under their feet. Other times, the ground literally explodes nearby, sending steam, poisonous gas, superheated liquids, liquid rock, or solid stones (both small and surprisingly big) into the air. Often, an explosion involves two, three, or more of these discharges. As if that weren't bad enough, they sometimes continue as a spurting fountain of boiling liquid, steam, and poisonous gas, or they cause the surrounding ground that didn't explode upward to collapse down into the empty space just created.

## INHABITANTS OF THE ROTTING CASTLES AND THEIR ENVIRONS

Each of the Dead Keeps is different from the rest. Spectres of ancient inhabitants claim some, and others still have wards and traps left from long ago, but most serve as the homes of modern residents (though some remain uninhabited). These residents might include moord, but the following are a small sampling of other creatures explorers might encounter.

Aevae: Appearing to be undulating masses of green and white gelatinous goo, aevae range in size from 2 to 10 feet (60 cm to 3 m) across. The smallest are little more than nuisances, but the largest are quite deadly. And strangely, the small ones can combine to make a larger one. Aevae can harden their fluid forms temporarily to create strangling tendrils that they use to kill and consume prey, adding the biomass to their own.

**Charnel bats:** With a wingspan of 5 feet (1.5 m), these large flying mammals would already be frightening bat-like monstrosities. But what makes them truly terrifying is that when they hunt in packs—which they almost always

do—one bat can flutter in place or stand perched on a high object (even upside down) and emit a strange pale red light from its wings. This energy fills the area, and anyone bathed in the light who is attacked by another bat can literally have one of their bones ripped from their body. Essentially, within this red glow, a charnel bat claw or bite passes through flesh and muscle as though it did not exist, grasping a bone and pulling it free. The bat then flies away with its prize to suck out the marrow. Charnel bats are a dark charcoal color with streaks of blood red.

**Manticores:** Insane leftovers from the days when the Rotting Castles weren't rotting, these ravenous beasts attack for the sheer love of violence and destruction.

**Trawbs:** Gangly but only about 3 to 4 feet (about 1 m) tall, trawbs are greenish-grey-skinned humanoids with bulbous eyes and tufts of dark red hair. They prefer to keep to the shadows and have a predilection for long knives. They get what they want by stealing and killing, and have never willingly participated in a fair fight. They like traps, particularly those that bind a foe so a trawb can carve them up at their leisure. A few trawbs learn a little magic as well and become sorcerers, casting spells that aid in stealth or disabling victims.

Vintaak: Metal and stone and yet alive, vintaak are strange creatures. The fact that they often dwell within ancient fortresses of wood makes them all the stranger. Vintaak resemble stylized statues of humanlike figures, with intricate patterns etched into every surface, adorned with jewels and precious metals in aesthetically pleasing ways. However, they are not statues, and they insist that they were not crafted or created, but born naturally from the earth. Vintaak feed on flesh, even



though they are not flesh themselves. They have their own language, their own societal structure (to an extent), and their own superstitions, beliefs, and code of ethics. But theirs is a rudimentary intellect, and everything about them other than their appearance is crude. They believe strongly in personal honor, and that might makes right.

#### **MOORD BLACKGUARDS**

When a moord commits very serious crimes, they are typically exiled into the wilderness. Most such individuals die alone. The most powerful or capable, however, find allies amid the Rotting Castles (or possess such skill and strength that they don't need them). Collectively, people refer to them as blackguards, although more often than not, these exiles don't congregate. Instead, one blackguard will master a group of vintaak or trawbs, or partner with a beast like a manticore or a wyvern. To survive, a moord blackguard likely needs a potent mystical weapon or other magical resource. Some practice their own kind of sorcery, with spells and powers involving blood, strength, and various types of body modification.

It's not uncommon to encounter a moord blackguard that has taken up residence in one of the Rotting Castles. These castles are likely well defended with traps and guards of various kinds.

## PCs AND THE ROTTING CASTLES

These abandoned "structures" draw adventurers because they hold ancient secrets and treasures. Exploring a Dead Keep is a dangerous undertaking. Adventurers should be prepared for defenders, traps, and navigating the mazelike interiors.

The region in which the Forest of Rotting Castles lies teems with dangerous life—an overabundance of predators, Typical moord blackguard: level 7, attacks and defense as level 8 (probably due to magic); health 30; Armor 4; very likely has an extra ability such as bat-like wings to fly, pyrokinesis at long range, or an eye that can detach and operate independently as a spy

often preying upon each other. Creatures need to be hardy and strong to survive the environment. This means that should adventurers enter one of the castles and clear out the inhabitants, new creatures will soon come along to replace the fallen.

TAWICK

## ADVENTURES IN THE ROTTING CASTLES

The Lord of War: A moord sorcerer known only as the Ungraved summons terrible otherworldly beasts of every size and description, stocking the Dead Keep she has claimed as her own. She plans to launch her army of conjured creatures into the lands of the moord in a full-on invasion. Rumors say that the Ungraved's command of magic is so great that she conjured herself back from death. Many moord worry about her growing might, and seek spies willing to learn what they can about her, her creatures, and her plans. Even better if they can put a stop to those plans.

**Ransom:** A moord blackguard named Allal has kidnapped the son of a wealthy moord woman. He dwells in one of the Rotting Castles. Allal demands a ransom, and the mother wants someone to deliver it for her and bring back her son. Of course, what she really wants is Allal's head on a pike and for the ransom money to be returned to her. She'll pay the adventurers either way, but more eagerly for the latter outcome.

The Blood Bath: Legends speak of a magical pool of ancient blood in one of the Rotting Castles. Anyone who can find this pool and bathe in it is granted great unholy power. This might not be enticing for the PCs (but who knows?), but it very likely could be to their greatest rival or adversary, so they must reach it before their nemesis, perhaps to destroy it.

# PART 3 ADVENTURES

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## CHAPTER 19

## SECRET OF THE SOULSMITH

his adventure begins in the land of Flevame and then takes a surprising turn leading to the Firmament. It involves a mysterious being called the Soulsmith, who might be somehow related to the necromancer Crumellia Encomium.

"Secret of the Soulsmith" could be an adventure for starting characters, with a fairly basic initial impetus to get them on their first trip out of the Blessed Land. However, it could be inserted more organically into an ongoing game with the PCs already in Flevame for reasons of their own (such as simple exploration).

## SYNOPSIS

The PCs travel to Flevame to find a being called the Soulsmith, hoping to gain access to some of the treasures he has crafted. Reaching him requires dealing with the undead in the region, particularly those under the command of a vampire watching the Soulsmith for his master, Crumellia Encomium. After the PCs navigate the strange mazelike structure the Soulsmith calls home, he agrees to give them what they want if they run an errand for him to the Firmament.

Once in the Firmament, the PCs must find a woman named Ianthe and gather what she owes to the Soulsmith. However, a mirrorman has infiltrated her nomadic band with its own plans for the situation. Worse, the vampire's ensorcelled servants strike at an opportune moment (for them, not the PCs). After returning to Flevame, the characters must get past the ghostly spirits trying to intercept them before they reach the Soulsmith. If they make it to him successfully, they gain the treasures they seek.

## BACKGROUND

Within Flevame, south of the Wilderness of Krym, lies the small but significant domain of the Soulsmith. In the past, he has referred to Crumellia as a sibling, a cousin, and a foe, so their relationship (if any) is unclear.

This apparently immortal being typically keeps to himself, dwelling in a strange sort of floating structure. He literally creates new souls, which he then infuses into creatures and sometimes even objects he crafts. His arts have allowed him to create a trio of powerful "weapons" that can be of great use against the undead.

Word of these three objects has reached Bontherre, and the thought of such treasures is very enticing to human adventurers . . .

## SETUP

The PCs gather in Bontherre and prepare for an expedition into Flevame. One or more of them has heard rumors of the Soulsmith and the powerful treasures he creates. While they don't have a precise idea of where to find him, they know that

## SECRET OF THE SOULSMITH

Vothe is a decent place to get information about that land.

#### ALTERNATE SETUP

The PCs travel to Flevame for purposes of their own: exploration, adventure, or some other goal. Once there, they encounter a patrol of the living dead servants of Crumellia Encomium. These horrors carry a message from a vampire named Kalypsan to another named Vandrare, regarding a secret bane of the undead in the hands of a being called the Soulsmith. Such a secret would be invaluable in the fight against the undead hordes in Flevame.

The undead patrol consists of:

- Four skeletons, three with spears and one with a banner showing a red bat on a field of black (this is the banner of Kalypsan, one of the necromancer's vampire generals)
- Three ghouls, one carrying a leather tube that holds the message and an adhesion cypher in the form of a scroll

The message in the scroll tube is written on a piece of preserved human flesh. The text of the message is:

#### Vandrare,

The Soulsmith has apparently created a weapon that will be a bane to the mistress's hordes. See if you can learn the nature of this weapon, and I will do the same. Together, we can present this news to Crumellia Encomium. She will be pleased with our initiative and intelligence, I am certain.

Kalypsan

#### FLEVAME

The characters pass into Flevame however they choose, with no difficulties. Vothe is a relatively short distance away from the River of Souls.

#### **GETTING INFORMATION IN VOTHE**

Within Vothe, PCs asking around about the Soulsmith can find a middle-aged woman, short of stature but large in personality, named Oega. She can give them directions to the home of the Soulsmith, with the requisite warnings that journeying there will take them through the Wilderness of Krym, haunted by the living dead. All that Oega asks in return is that they bring her three skulls taken from the undead the PCs will undoubtedly encounter. She dabbles in brewing potions and she needs the ground skulls for her work. She trusts the characters, but if they don't fulfill their bargain, she's not out too much (though delinquent PCs will get an earful if they encounter her again later).

#### VANDRARE

From Vothe, the PCs head into the Wilderness of Krym and (unknowingly) enter the domain of Vandrare. He is a vampire who presides over the region that the PCs must cross to reach the Soulsmith.

As they pass through the wilderness, they should have at least one, if not two, encounters with roaming dead. An appropriate encounter would be as described above, with four skeletons and two ghouls. Another option is a dozen skeletons armed with pikes as if marching to war. Remember that not all of the necromancer's animate skeletons are human. Vothe, page 175

**Oega:** level 3, knowledge of all kinds as level 4

Wilderness of Krym, page 179



Adhesion cypher, page 384

Ghouls in Flevame are different from those in the Cypher System Rulebook. For Flevame ghoul stats, use the abomination stats on page 315 of the Cypher System Rulebook.

In the wilderness, the GM could have the PCs spot a much larger undead force or perhaps a grave behemoth (or both!) in the distance, but there should be plenty of opportunities to hide or avoid them if the characters take wise precautions. See page 180 for more about grave behemoths.

Beginning PCs probably should not confront Vandrare directly, if they want to live. But they are free to do as they wish.

Vandrare: Use the stats for a vampire on page 362 of the Cypher System Rulebook. He also has a Vampire Sword, page 180.

#### FUGITIVES

Narr: level 3; health 6 (normally 15)

> Nieva: level 2, stealth as level 3

GM intrusion: A group of four ghouls that has been hunting the fugitives catches up with them while they speak with the PCs.

Ghost, page 331

When the PCs see a pile of gigantic bones—the remains of creatures they cannot even venture to identify—they also spot two figures creeping among them. The figures probably look like undead, as they're little more than skin and bones draped in rags. But they're alive.

Narr is tall. He would be large and imposing if he wasn't starving. His sister Nieva is gaunt in her ragged dress. Neither is armed, although Narr carries a heavy stick like a club. These two hide from the undead. They were taken prisoner by Vandrare's forces weeks earlier, but they managed to escape and now they're on their way back to Vothe, their home.

They're both fearful and in shock from the horrors they've witnessed. A well-spoken PC might earn their trust, particularly if they're offered food and first aid. If so, Narr can give them basic information about Vandrare, the lord of this stretch of the Funereal Fields, and tips on how to hide from the undead here. (If the PCs get this information, their actions to hide from undead are eased for the rest of this adventure.) The only thing Narr and Nieva know about the Soulsmith is that the vampire is focused on him and probably has spies watching his home.

The siblings can be convinced to accompany the PCs, or they can go off on their own. Obviously, aid in the form of food, weapons, and so forth would be greatly appreciated, but they have no way to repay such kindness.

## THE SOULSMITH'S FLOATING MAZE

Vandrare's two ghost spies watch the Soulsmith's home fairly closely from the outside. To get past them without being seen, the PCs would need to pass with great stealth (difficulty 4). If the characters are seen, the ghosts don't attack, but one flits quickly off to its master to report while the other remains to observe the intruders. It follows them if they leave.

From the outside, the floating maze looks like dozens of stone towers magically hovering 20 to 60 feet (6 to 18 m) in the air, each ranging from 40 to 60 feet (12 to 18 m) tall. Each tower is connected to one to four other towers via enclosed stone passageways, each about 10 feet (3 m) across on the outside. Windows are

## SECRET OF THE SOULSMITH



rare, and the stonework appears old and ornate.

#### THE ENTRANCE

One tower rests on the ground and bears a heavy wooden door with a lock (level 4). No amount of knocking garners any result. If the PCs want in, they'll have to let themselves in somehow.

The interior of the entry tower leads off to three other towers via passages of different lengths, each requiring a short set of stairs to reach them. The entry tower is open and empty except for strange floating spheres of different colors that disappear if touched (these are merely ornamental).

#### THE MAZE

The interior of the floating maze is large and confusing. Adventurers might attempt to create a map, but there's something uncanny about the place mapping or other means to orient themselves eventually fail. Occasionally, they find a window, but looking out only confirms that they're not where they thought they were in the vast structure.

Most of the towers have multiple levels, and the connections to other towers are often not on the same level. Sometimes doors leading into one area or another will be locked.

The PCs won't find the Soulsmith until they reach the Vault of Souls. Before that, as the characters wander, they may come upon any of the following rooms, areas, or objects of interest:

**Storeroom (level 3 lock):** This room contains a variety of foodstuffs, supplies, tools, and other useful but mundane gear.

**Storeroom (level 5 lock):** This room contains five random cyphers.

**Library:** A huge collection of informative and valuable books (each worth 1 to 10 gp) on a variety of topics. Don't forget about the differences in Flevame, in particular the weakening. See page 174.

Mass of metal: level 3

Federis: level 4; can take no physical actions

Statue: level 2; can take no physical actions

Spirit threads, page 170 Thread tools, page 170

Soul injector: level 4 artifact; can put a soul stored in a vial (found in the Vault of Souls) into a construct or object. Depletion 1 in 1d10.

Soulsmith: Use the demigod stats on page 321 of the Cypher System Rulebook, with the following changes:

> • Can turn spirit threads into living souls through a laborious process

 Can teleport himself and/or up to ten others up to 1 mile (1.5 km)

- Cannot be harmed by anything with a soul (any living creature)
- Can cause any being with a soul to be unable to act

**Geoffrey:** level 5, Speed defense as level 4; Armor 2

**Corporal Nix:** level 4, Speed defense and stealth as level 6; Armor 1 **Gameroom:** The floor of this entire chamber is a game board covered in hexagons 3 feet (1 m) across. Carved stone and wood pieces of different shapes, each about 4 feet (1.2 m) tall, rest in some of the hexes. Although this room seems like a strangely standard magic trap (in certain circles), it is nothing more than it appears.

**Junk:** Debris and trash fill this room, although a careful search (difficulty 3) turns up a jeweled ring worth 100 gp and a key to the laboratory.

Laboratory (level 5 lock): Filled with a variety of strange magical implements, this lab is where the Soulsmith creates souls, using spirit threads. As such, there is a spirit thread stored here currently, as well as thread tools. The room also has a magical device called a soul injector that can infuse a crafted soul into a creature or object. (There are no souls here—they are all in the Vault of Souls.)

#### INHABITANTS

As the adventurers explore, they might encounter some of the Soulsmith's creations. He has crafted souls and infused them into things. Some are mostly inanimate objects, while others are constructs that can move. Some of his creations include the following.

#### Soul-imbued construct (taxidermized

**bear):** The bear, Geoffrey, moves stiffly but is very strong and extremely grumpy. It yells at intruders and tells them to get out, offering no help. It won't attack unless attacked first.

#### Soul-imbued construct (wooden toy

**soldier):** Corporal Nix stands only 12 inches (30 cm) high, but he is sneaky and fierce. He tries to set up a trap or ambush for any intruders he comes upon and will fight to defend his home. **Soul-imbued construct (mass of metal):** This construct is made of dozens of metal rods and utensils, all held together by a powerful central magnet. The mass of metal will in no way interact with intruders.

#### Soul-imbued object (candelabra):

Although he has no mobility, Federis is well mannered and well spoken. If the PCs treat him kindly and they have not obviously stolen anything, he can tell them that the Soulsmith is in the Vault of Souls and give them a general idea of how to get there.

**Soul-imbued object (singing statue):** This statue is always singing, but if anyone pays her a compliment, she'll sing helpful directions through the maze.

#### THE VAULT OF SOULS

Eventually, the characters reach a large tower where the Soulsmith is at work. The door hangs open. The Soulsmith keeps his manufactured souls in glass vials suspended in the air in this otherwise empty chamber. Any of the vials fit into the injector found in the laboratory.

No matter what the PCs have done in the maze, the Soulsmith appears neither surprised nor cross at their intrusion. He stands nearly 8 feet (2 m) tall, with a lanky, almost awkward build. His grey hair and goatee and his balding head make him appear old, but in truth he is immortal and ageless. A red and yellow robe drapes over his angular frame.

"You're in my home, seeking aid, wealth, information—it doesn't matter. I have no reason to help you, or even to allow your transgressions to go unpunished."

If the PCs attack him, without even a gesture he teleports them all back outside the maze. Persuading him to listen, help, or give them the rumored items seems

## SECRET OF THE SOULSMITH

difficult, but in truth, it's all a ruse. He wanted them to come because he has a task for them. And what's more, he wants the weapons to be available for use against the necromancer's hordes, for she recently offended him.

Eventually, the Soulsmith "hesitantly" agrees to give the PCs the items they seek if they agree to help him first. He cannot leave Flevame but needs something in another land. Specifically, he needs the characters to travel to the Firmament. A woman there named lanthe has a soul that she borrowed from him, and he wants it back. He says that she knows someone will be coming for it and, if asked, assures the PCs that it is not her soul, but one he created and placed in a vial such as those hovering in the room. The Soulsmith doesn't know where she is, only that she travels with a nomadic camp and is friendly with the native forlorren there.

Once the deal is struck, he promises to give the PCs what they want when they return with the soul vial and then teleports them out of the maze.

## INTO THE FIRMAMENT

The trip out of Flevame should be mostly uneventful. If desired, there can be a group GM intrusion with more undead, but it should be random happenstance. Vandrare doesn't send anyone to intercept the PCs. He wants to know where the visitors to the Soulsmith go next.

If the PCs stop in Vothe on their way back, and if they helped the fugitives and sent them on their way, Narr and Nieva are there, having arrived in the city shortly before. The siblings offer a place to stay in their home and a meal to any PCs who gave them aid. Anytime the PCs return to Vothe, they have a place to stay, Narr assures them.

#### CASTLE TURION

The PCs need to find their own way through Bontherre and into the Firmament, passing into Castle Turion. The lord of the castle meets them and asks for news from the Blessed Land.

Turion knows lanthe and how to find her, if asked. He can give directions to the general location of her camp in the Hills of the Forlorren. But he gives this information only in exchange for something particularly useful, like a manifest cypher. Castle Turion, page 186

GM intrusion: A pack of three vork-wolves attacks the PCs while they travel through the hills. See page 191.

Ettatomain, page 189

Don't forget about the differences in the Firmament, in particular the thin air and the disease known as red hammer. See page 186.

Camp nomads: level 3 or use forlorren stats (page 187)

lanthe: level 5; magical lore, knowledge of creatures and plants, and healing as level 7; all interactions as level 6

Berrak and Jedd: level 4, Might and Speed defense as level 5 due to shields; health 20; Armor 2

Darra: level 4, stealth as level 6, Speed defense as level 5; Armor 1; inflicts +3 damage if attacking with surprise; magic amulet (a level 4 artifact) allows her to teleport a short distance as an action (depletion of 1 in 1d20)

Itume: level 4, Intellect defense and magical lore as level 5; Armor 1 (a magical ward); can hurl bolts of fire up to very long range that inflict 4 points of damage; can cause up to three targets within short range to lose their next action due to a mental stun effect



Rejuvenator, page 395

#### FINDING IANTHE

If Turion didn't tell them where to go, the PCs need to find lanthe via different means. This might include using some power of their own, but another option is to travel to Ettatomain and inquire there. The Soulsmith mentioned the forlorren, so the characters should have a general idea of where to start looking and asking. Fortunately for them, Ianthe is fairly well known among the forlorren as a human "wise woman" who professes to know much about magic and similar things. While the forlorren scoff at magic, they recognize that lanthe has great skill as a healer and plenty of knowledge about many more tangible things. She's always been a good ally.

#### IANTHE'S CAMP

A day's travel through the Forlorren Hills eventually brings the PCs to a small nomadic camp with five wagons arranged in a circle. The wagons are pulled by beasts called beppin that look like very shaggy cattle with three horns.

The nomads are a mixture of humans and forlorren. They wander the hills from holding to holding, trading crafts and services for supplies. They're initially very suspicious of strangers.

lanthe is a large woman with long grey hair bundled behind her head. If she learns that the PCs were sent by the Soulsmith, she looks sad, but welcomes them and offers them a meal beside the camp's large fire.

#### **AGENTS OF VANDRARE**

Agents of Vandrare pursue the PCs. Assuming they were observed leaving the Soulsmith's home, that's all the vampire needed to know to realize that he wanted to learn who they are and what they are up to, and probably stop them to win favor from the necromancer.

But Vandrare couldn't send undead all the way to the Blessed Land. The power of the Sacrante would likely prevent them from getting very far, even if disguised. So he brought forth four prisoners that he had already taken—other adventurers from Bontherre—and ensorcelled them to be his mental slaves. The agents are:

- Berrak and Jedd (Warriors): Berrak is rotund and Jedd a bit short, but both are capable warriors wearing chainmail armor. Berrak uses a crossbow and a sword. Jedd has a bow and an axe. Both wield large shields in melee combat. Jedd carries a pouch with the group's joint funds, 344 gp.
- Darra (Scout): Darra is cold and calculating. Her bald head is covered in intricate tattoos. She has a long curved blade (a medium weapon) and wears a leather coat over dark clothing. Her magical amulet allows her to disappear and reappear behind someone to make a surprise attack.
- Itume (Sorcerer): Itume is a large man with a boisterous voice. Burn scars cover his face and the left side of his neck, and his left arm has been replaced by a fully functional magical prosthetic made of wood. He has a variety of spells and carries two scroll cyphers (enduring shield and inferno wall) as well as a level 5 rejuvenator (Intellect) potion.

These agents will follow the PCs discreetly all the way into the Firmament and wait for an opportune time to attack. Their goal is to quickly overwhelm their quarry, so they might try to sneak up on the PCs while some or all sleep. They want information for their master and will kill the PCs only if necessary. Unless the magical compulsion (level 6) is lifted, they fight (unwillingly) to the death.

She concedes that she did borrow a soul crafted by the Soulsmith. She was hoping to use magic to copy its essence and use its power to save her dying son. The effort failed. She will produce the vial from one of the wagons to give to the PCs.

#### **SURPRISE!**

Unfortunately, a mirrorman has infiltrated the camp, having stolen the appearance of Narij, who tends the beppin. Mirror Narij leaps out and snatches the vial before the PCs can take it. He yells that he'll destroy it if lanthe doesn't give him the liquid mirror he knows she possesses. (Normally, a mirrorman infiltrates a community to begin the process of eliminating and replacing everyone. However, this one worked its way into the camp to try to get the liquid mirror that it sensed there.)



Ianthe and the other members of the camp never suspected Narij and don't understand why he's acting this way. She does have a bottle of liquid mirror in one of the wagons, but is reluctant to part with it. The PCs can attempt to defuse the situation, but "Narij" won't listen to reason. Eventually, Ianthe realizes that Narij is not her campmate at all. She tells everyone the shocking news of his true nature, and the PCs still need to get the vial away from him somehow. If they fail, Ianthe ends up giving the mirrorman what he wants, and he tosses the vial on the ground and runs away.

If the vial is destroyed at any point during this encounter, lanthe can only express regret, and she offers to write a letter of apology for the PCs to give to the Soulsmith. With nothing but the letter, it will take some real convincing (and perhaps another task) for the PCs to get the promised reward from him.

## RETURNING TO THE SOULSMITH

The PCs can leave the Firmament and return to Flevame on their own schedule. Trips through the Godforsaken Lands are always difficult, but insert new encounters only as feels right for the story and the pacing of the adventure.

Before the adventurers reach the Soulsmith's home, however, Vandrare orders his two ghost spies to attack them directly. The vampire stays back, afraid to make his own presence known to the Soulsmith.

## THE SOULSMITH'S REWARD

If the PCs manage to get back into the Soulsmith's maze, they're greeted by a crafted soul-imbued construct in the form of a woman made of iron named Beatrix. She leads them directly to her creator.

With the soul vial in hand, the PCs can exchange it for their payment: the magical

Mirrorman, page 194

Liquid mirror, page 187



Beatrix: level 5; Armor 4



items the Soulsmith has crafted. Each is a level 5 artifact that does not deplete. These three objects are:

The Ivory Shield: This steel shield has an intricate inlay of ivory in abstract, pleasing patterns. In addition to using it as a normal shield, the wielder can ease any one defense roll made by them or an ally within immediate range against an undead foe. Only one defense roll can be eased in a given round, but doing this is not an action.

The Spirit Boots: Shiny and tall leather boots, these objects resize to fit whomever puts them on. Ghosts and other spirits of level 5 and below cannot see or hear the wearer. If one of these spirits somehow learns of the wearer's presence, actions the wearer takes to defend against them are eased by two steps. Stealth actions against such opponents automatically succeed. **The Golden Spear:** This long spear has a golden head that is stronger than steel. All attacks made against undead with this medium weapon are eased and inflict 4 additional points of damage.

## WRAPPING UP

If the PCs obtained the artifacts, they can go on their way and do as they please. The Soulsmith doesn't overtly encourage them to attack the necromancer's horde, but clearly that's what the items are for. The characters may wish to return to Bontherre first. There should be time to celebrate and brag about their accomplishments.

Three level 5 artifacts are worth 15 XP to divide among the PCs. In addition, each PC should earn 2 XP for accomplishing all the tasks required of them. Consider an additional 1 XP reward if they saved Narr and Nieva.

## WITHIN THE MONSTROUS

## CHAPTER 20

## WITHIN THE MONSTROUS

his adventure takes place in the land of Korak-Mar, beyond the realm of the moord and in one of the so-called Rotting Castles.

"Within the Monstrous" is almost certainly not appropriate for beginning player characters. Those of tier 3 or perhaps tier 4 would be better suited, and even the most powerful PCs might find a challenge here.

## **SYNOPSIS**

The characters are recruited by the daughter of an infamous adventurer thought to be lost (probably dead) in Korak-Mar. What she doesn't tell them is that she hates her mother and is in league with a moord named Alon to find and eventually murder her.

The PCs travel to Korak-Mar and into the Forest of Rotting Castles looking for the so-called Traveler Queen, who lives within one of the ancient structures there. After proving themselves in a trial by combat, they likely learn that they've been brought unwittingly into a conflict based on old grudges. They'll have to decide who to side with, or to side with no one at all.

## BACKGROUND

Almost two years ago, the infamous adventurer Devonne Coure disappeared in Korak-Mar. Tales of her infamous exploits in the Godforsaken Lands were well known in Bontherre, but as the months passed, people thought of her and referenced her name less and less. Most now believe her to be dead.

This is not the case. Instead, she has taken one of the Rotting Castles as her own, setting herself up there as the Traveler Queen. Which would be fine, except that she left Bontherre without her daughter. Contrarre Coure believes that her mother is alive, and she's willing to pay well to find her. At least, that's what she tells people. In truth, she's in league with a moord knight named Alon who seeks Devonne to avenge the death of his brother and recover some of what she stole from his family before she took over her castle.

#### SETUP

The PCs are contacted by Contrarre Coure while in Bontherre. She is a sturdy woman with a narrow face and a wild typhoon of hair. After introductions and some praise for the PCs, she explains: "Most people believe that my mother, the great adventurer Devonne Coure, is dead. It's true that she disappeared in the Godforsaken Lands and has not returned in almost two years, but I refuse to believe that she might be dead. She was too great a warrior—too clever and too skilled—to meet her end in such a way. No, I won't believe it until I have proof."

Contrarre then explains that in the land of Korak-Mar, there is a moord named

Contrarre Coure: level 7, Intellect defense as level 8; Armor 10 against any magical attack; has many spells and magical items that allow her to negate attacks preemptively, launch icy bolts that inflict 7 damage up to very long range, emit waves of cold that inflict 4 Speed damage (ignores Armor) to all within short range, and more. She can also heal up to 8 points of health for herself or another as an action. Carries at least three useful cyphers.

Alon who might have a lead on where her mother might be found. She has communicated with him and convinced him to help through various bribes. She wants the PCs to find Devonne. If her mother is dead, Contrarre wants proof, as well as any details about her final fate they can provide. The return of her mother's remains would be even better.

Contrarre's necklace: level 6 artifact; gives the wearer 3 points of Armor against any attack from a magical source, including those that normally ignore Armor; depletion of 1 in 1d20 If Devonne is alive, Contrarre wants the PCs to convey the message that her daughter loves her and never lost faith in her, and would like her to return to Bontherre. If they can't get her to come back with them, hopefully the PCs can at least bring back the good news that she lives.

Contrarre readies a payment of 500 gold pieces for the adventurers, with a promise of five times that much (or more) if they return with valuable information. This initial payment, she hopes, will cover expenses to get to Korak-Mar and back. If the PCs have never been there before, she can supply them with a map and written instructions to reach the gate that she procured. Under no circumstances will she accompany them, as she is terrified of the Godforsaken Lands.

#### THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LIES

Contrarre is a powerful sorcerer and despises her mother. She is in league with Alon, who is paying her for information about Devonne's whereabouts.

While she was still an adventurer, Devonne killed Alon's brother Norval, and stole a great deal of family funds and treasure from him. Alon wants revenge. He suspects that the mysterious figure known as the Traveler Queen in the Forest of Rotting Castles is actually Devonne, but he can't confirm that on his own. If it is Devonne, she would recognize him. So he wants someone else to investigate, and Contrarre sends the PCs to do his scouting for him. Once Devonne's location is confirmed, he and Contrarre will move in to get their revenge.

## WITHIN THE MONSTROUS

## ARRIVAL IN KORAK-MAR

With their advance payment, the PCs should have no problem equipping themselves and finding the doorway to Korak-Mar if they've never been there before.

#### meeting with alon

The prearranged meeting spot with Alon is in the city of Boruud, near a food vendor in Gob's Market. Alon is well dressed and has a sword at his side, but otherwise is a nondescript moord male. (As a knight, Alon normally wears armor and some kind of crest or badge that shows his station, but he doesn't want the PCs to know who he is.)

Alon says that he has spoken with Contrarre and is sympathetic to her need for closure. He notes that he himself lost his brother out in the wilds beyond the city (which is true—Devonne killed him). He says that he has heard that Contrarre's famous mother was taken captive by a mysterious figure in the Forest of Rotting Castles called the Traveler Queen. "Find the queen and you might find Devonne Coure."

He suggests that if the PCs find her, perhaps they should simply speak with her and see what they can learn through conversation. Or speak with others in the castle first to learn more about the queen. He doesn't know which of the castles the Traveler Queen inhabits (which is also true).

Alon wishes them the best and hopes for their success. He would be very interested to learn what they discover, he says, but communicating their findings to Contrarre is more important. He will in no circumstances go with them, claiming that he fears leaving the safety of the city, as he is just a scholar. (These are both lies. He's an accomplished swordsman and doesn't even live in the city, but in a castle a few miles away.)

## THE FOREST OF ROTTING CASTLES

The trip across Korak-Mar is very likely challenging and hazardous.

#### ON THE WAY

Before the PCs reach the Forest of Rotting Castles, they might have any of the following encounters. (Some of these might be GM intrusions, as circumstances dictate.)

**Insects:** A swarm of ten aarak suddenly attack the PCs from all directions.

**Travelers:** A band of five moord travelers, suspicious of non-moord, react poorly to any attempts at interaction.

**Living Shadows:** Four shadows stalk the PCs for a while, then attack while the characters rest or are separated.

**Hazardous Terrain:** The PCs make their way down a crumbling cliff. Anyone who fails a difficulty 4 climbing action will slide and fall, suffering 3 points of damage.

#### IN THE FOREST

The so-called forest is nothing of the sort, but rather an open expanse with almost mesa-like black tree trunks. As the PCs explore, they might have any of the following encounters. (Some of these might be GM intrusions, as circumstances dictate.)

**Dragonraptors:** The PCs spot two huge winged creatures high in the sky. A hunting pair of wyverns is circling above and sizing them up for a meal. Eventually, unless they successfully hide or do something dramatic to scare them off, the wyverns swoop to attack.

**The Cold, Cold Ground:** The ground beneath the PCs shakes and rumbles, suddenly exploding as if a bomb was detonated. This Don't forget about the differences in Korak-Mar, in particular the Might and Speed damage and acidic rain. See page 196.

Forest of Rotting Castles, page 203

Alon: level 8; attacks, Speed defense, and Might defense as level 9; health 45; Armor 4 (if wearing his armor); inflicts 10 damage with his sword on one foe or 6 damage on up to three separate foes as an action; carries at least three useful cyphers

Alon's sword: level 5 artifact; medium weapon with a depletion of —; attacks with it are eased and it adds +2 to damage

Gob's Market, page 199 Aarak, page 201

Moord travelers: level 4; health 20; Armor 2

Shadows, page 126

Wyvern, page 132

**GM intrusion:** A level 3 pickpocket tries to steal from the character while in the market.

Explosive gas vent, page 203

Vintaak, page 204

Human and moord guards: level 3; Armor 2

Kethera: level 4; Might defense, Speed defense (due to shield), and strength-related tasks (including physical attacks) as level 5; health 16; Armor 2; two hammer attacks inflict 5 damage each and stun a foe who fails a Might defense roll, causing them to lose their next action, or one attack at very long range (a thrown hammer) inflicts 4 damage

It's possible that the PCs could learn the true identity of the queen without confronting her by interrogating servants or guards, by talking to Anais earlier, or perhaps through some magical means. If so, they might choose to return to Contrarre at that point. If they do, she'll thank them and pay them. Afterward, the PCs don't have to remain involved if they don't want to be.

> Anais: level 4, stealth and deception as level 5; Armor 1

#### Bellerite, page 170

The Traveler Queen: level 9; health 50; Armor 5. While within her castle, she can attack every foe she can see within long range, controlling the structure to create limbs to grasp, spikes or pits beneath their feet, and so on, inflicting 9 points of damage; as an action, she can regain 10 points of health. While not within her castle, she makes one attack per action with a greatsword that inflicts 12 points of damage, and she cannot heal herself.

is an explosive gas vent. Careful PCs might sense the explosion beforehand—allow players who state that they're being cautious to attempt a difficulty 4 Intellect task to sense trouble in time.

Kethera Hunting Party: The PCs come upon a group of five individuals of a species unknown to them. These kethera are four-armed centaur-like beings who wear armor of bone and wood. They are bullies and won't hesitate to look at the PCs as food, but if the PCs try to talk their way out, the kethera can be persuaded to listen. If the PCs start to form a good rapport with the kethera, they can be a source of information about the so-called Traveler Queen. They know where her castle is, but they won't go there because they fear her and her creature, the Nrugan.

Anais the Servant: A moord named Anais, somewhat slighter and more weasel-faced than most of his kind, makes his way across the region alone. He's distracted because he is talking to himself, but what he says is nonsense (moord communicate empathically, and he's only trying to talk to himself). Anais serves the Traveler Queen and is headed to her castle. He's a bit odd, perhaps even deranged, and quite cowardly. It's difficult to get him to betray her (due to his fear of her), but he might be the best way to find her castle. He also knows that her real name is Devonne Coure, but getting that out of him is even more difficult than getting him to show the PCs the way.

## CASTLE OF THE TRAVELER QUEEN

The castle looks no different than the other Dead Keeps, except that it's clearly inhabited. Small, meager gardens are tended near the entrances, although the produce is not edible by humans. There are three entrances spaced around the base near ground level, reached by a short flight of stairs. Each is blocked by four human or moord guards or by one vintaak. A well-spoken group of impressive visitors might be granted an audience. Some other cover story might also get the PCs inside. Fighting their way in is an option as well, but they can expect to have many more encounters with larger and larger groups of guards until the queen herself investigates the disturbance.

The interior of the castle is a labyrinth of tunnels and chambers carved out of the ancient wood, now hardened like stone. Oil lamps provide the only illumination, so it's always dim and dank. Throughout the castle, there are many more guards and servants, most fully loyal to their queen. Those who aren't loyal are terrified of her, so the net result is basically the same.

#### THE THRONE ROOM

If the PCs are brought before the queen, or if they somehow lie or sneak or fight their way in, they likely encounter her in her throne room at the heart of the keep.

The massive round chamber, inlaid with bellerite, has a ceiling 50 feet (15 m) high. At the far end is her throne, but in the center of the room is a dark circular pit 30 feet (9 m) across. This pit drops down to the mostly dark, unexplored reaches beneath the castle, 80 feet (24 m) below. The subterranean realm holds many ancient wonders and magical treasures and secrets. One such wonder transformed Devonne Coure into the Traveler Queen.

#### THE QUEEN

Though once she was human, the magic deep below the castle transformed the explorer Devonne Coure body and mind so that she would remain there and protect it. The Traveler Queen stands



15 feet (5 m) tall, appearing to be a normal-sized, regal woman with what must be extremely long legs hidden by a long gown made of dark, hardened wood. Her flesh, likewise, appears to be wooden. It's as if she is somehow fused metaphysically with the tree that makes up the keep. Despite her wooden appearance, she can move freely and easily.

She doesn't trust visitors and doesn't want to hear what the PCs have to say unless they earn her trust. Unfortunately, that involves a trial by combat. She states that if the characters can defeat her creature, the Nrugan, in combat, she will listen to them. Attempting to talk to her before facing the Nrugan only angers her.

Human handlers bring the Nrugan into the chamber as the queen watches from her throne. Any other guards or servants present flee when it enters.

#### THE NRUGAN

The Nrugan stands almost 15 feet (5 m) tall. Ostensibly humanoid, its entire upper torso is composed of muscular arms, and its head is nothing but an ephemeral, tooth-filled maw hidden within the vortex of moving and flexing limbs. This creature was created by sorcerers in Alon's family, and it is the primary possession that the queen stole from him.

The queen's not worried that the Nrugan is in any danger. The PCs may be able to defeat it, but they almost certainly can't slay or destroy it.

The Nrugan attacks the PCs silently, but with enthusiasm. It has absolutely no fear. The queen will not get involved in the fight, although if anyone attacks her well, they get what they deserve.

If the PCs don't win the fight, they're probably dead. However, if they ask for mercy, they'll be imprisoned, with all their belongings confiscated. Victorious PCs can speak with the queen. This is probably when some truths are revealed. The Nrugan: level 8, attacks as level 10, Speed defense as level 6; health 45; can attack all foes within immediate range, inflicting 10 damage to each; regenerates 1 health per round. If slain (even if disintegrated), returns to life within a few hours. Only anointing the slain beast with water from a specific mystical spring hidden deep in the Korak-Mar wastelands prevents this resurrection.

**GM intrusion:** Big deep pit in the middle of the throne room where the fight takes place. You don't really need this suggestion, do you? You know what to do. If the PCs are very lucky or very powerful, it's conceivable that they can confront the queen with force—when they meet her or during the trial by combat—and defeat her. If so, her servants flee, but the Nrugan eventually seeks revenge. Contrarre and Alon will realize that they got way more for their money than they asked for and count it as a huge success!

GM intrusion: The queen, Contrarre, and Alon are all powerful enough that if there's some ability they need to be a more formidable foe, they have it. The Traveler Queen is happy to admit that she was once Devonne Coure, and that now she is "one with this fortress." She intends to raise an army of loyal followers and eventually take over some of the other castles. Again, she has no reason not to proclaim these goals.

Any mention of her daughter Contrarre makes her angry and once again suspicious. She knows that her daughter hates her. Mention of Alon is worse, for she knows that he is looking for her, and interference from him before she has assembled her armies could be problematic. If the PCs say they were sent by either of these two, the queen tells them they've been duped and have put her in danger. She commands them to go back and slay both Alon and Contrarre, promising (sincerely) to reward the characters for doing so.

"And I'll send the Nrugan with you," she adds. "I'm certain it would delight in helping to slay its former moord master." She won't take no for an answer.

#### THE BIG DECISION

The PCs now find themselves in the middle of a conflict that has nothing to do with them. They probably have three choices.

**Side With the Queen:** The PCs could do as the Traveler Queen commands and mount an assault against Alon in his fortress-like ancestral home near Boruud. If they do, Contrarre is there as well, as she and Alon make plans to confront her mother if and when the PCs find her. The moord has many guards and servants, although the Nrugan is a powerful ally. It could, for example, take on *all* the guards while the PCs confront Alon and Contrarre.

The queen has magic and money at her disposal. As a reward, she might grant an artifact to each victorious character who returns to her. If they'd rather, she could give a character jewels worth 3,000 gp instead.

Side With Alon and Contrarre: The PCs could somehow ditch the Nrugan on the way back to Boruud, and return to Alon and/or Contrarre as originally agreed. Contrarre rewards them with their promised payment. Most likely, she drops the deception that she's doing it for any sort of good or loving reason. In fact, seeing as the PCs are so capable, she'll offer further, greater payment if they help her and Alon get to the Traveler Queen's castle and destroy her.

**Just Leave:** They'll have to lose the Nrugan somehow, but then they could just be on their way. Of course, they get no reward from either party, and they likely gain a little enmity from both.

#### WRAPPING UP

If the PCs ultimately aid the Traveler Queen, she will remain an ally, albeit an unnerving one. If they aid Alon and Contrarre, the two reward the PCs but won't think of them as anything other than mercenaries for hire. If they aid neither, none of those concerned will react well should they encounter the PCs again.

In any event, the PCs should earn 4 XP for the whole endeavor, whichever way they go.

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