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DUNGEONS &  
DRAGONS®  
MAGAZINE**

# DRAGON

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**NEW GLADIATOR ADVENTURE IN DUNGEON® MAGAZINE**

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## ON THE COVER

Marc Sasso pulls double duty, producing killer covers of dueling gladiators ready for battle in this month's *DRAGON* and *DUNGEON* magazines.

## GAME ROOM

**8 Wyrms' Turn**  
Paizo's gladiators get "orange-crushed."

**10 Scale Mail**  
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**18,90 Dork Tower**



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Bring the excitement and danger of the arena to your game with character concepts, new equipment, and special rules.

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**ORANGE CRUSH—**  
the miniature that  
invaded Paizo's  
Gladiator  
campaign.



## WIN A 5-SIDED DIE!

Developed by Gamescience, this oddly shaped 5-sided die and four other similar prototypes underwent rigorous scientific testing to determine which thickness was required to ensure that all sides of the die were rolled equally. Now that we know it works, we need to think of a good use for the weird little die, so send us your best ideas, and we'll send you your very own 5-sided die. Email your entries to [scalemail@paizopublishing.com](mailto:scalemail@paizopublishing.com), and be sure to include your full name and mailing address. Once submitted, all ideas become the property of Gamescience.

## DRAGON AND DUNGEON GO GLADIATOR

If you like the gladiator on this month's cover, you won't want to miss the cover of *DUNGEON MAGAZINE* #96. Placing these two covers side by side creates one very cool picture of two bad-ass gladiatorial combatants facing off in the arena. As if that wasn't enough, *DUNGEON* offers an exciting gladiator adventure that is compatible with the material presented in this month's "Campaign Components: Gladiators." Both magazines include a poster-sized version of the cover art, which piece together to form an even larger poster. Here at Paizo, we're pretty excited about this crossover, and we have plans to do more in the future, but we'd like to know what our readers think. Drop us an email and tell us what's on your mind.

# WYRM'S TURN FROM THE EDITOR

When I started planning the lunchtime gladiatorial game that I run here at Paizo, I was envisioning a grim arena, filled not only with wheedling handlers and corrupt officials but also with more serious evil, ranging from an arch-devil gladiator to inquisition-like organizations of supposedly good gladiators—the kind of dark backdrop that would let the nobility of the PCs really come to the fore. Like most plans made by DMs, however, these expectations did not survive contact with the players.

Starting with *DUNGEON* Editor Chris "Can I Play a Troll" Thomasson's predictable "can I play a troll?" I decided to let the players create nearly any character they wanted. I'd draw the line, I figured, when we strayed from gladiators to big-time wrestling. Two days later, Chris had changed his mind and now wanted to play a dwarf, which was fine by me. Tordek would make a fine gladiator, and if Chris could give a little more life to this classic character type, he'd have just the kind of character I expected the guys to bring to the table.

Then the campaign was "orange crushed."

Although I didn't know it while I was planning the campaign, Associate Editor Matt Sernett had for years been secretly treasuring a strangely painted miniature that he referred to as "Orange Crush." The miniature, a top-knotted male warrior with bright orange hair and an unfortunately skimpy outfit, was a character that Matt had apparently wanted to play for years but had never been allowed to by various DMs . . . or something like that. Anyway, Matt gets this gleeful look in his eye and says, "He's got a loincloth!" like it was a selling point.

Before I could get the words "Matt, don't ever say loincloth like that again" out of my mouth, Orange Crush had invaded the campaign, and the rest of the players raced to out-weird each other with their character concepts.

**Chris Thomasson:** Since Orange Crush refers to himself in the third person, Chris knew his dwarf couldn't copy that schtick, but apparently it was okay to jump on the color bandwagon because an otherwise innocuously power-gamed dwarf fighter/rogue became The Green Mamba. When he enters the arena, Green Mamba makes the "sign of the mamba," raising his hands just above his head, forking two fingers from each hand forward, and hissing. I'd like to point out that it's not every day that you see a grown man hiss.

**Kyle Hunter:** Kyle's character went from a half-orc cleric to "The Loser," a cleric devoted to the philosophy of defeat looking for ultimate enlightenment (read "defeat") in the arena. The Loser tears through the arena screaming, "Defeat me, defeat me!"

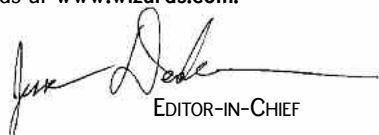
**Pierce Watters:** Emphurio the human cleric was the only character that didn't change from my expectations, but don't think that Pierce is laboring with the same vision of the arena that I started with, because I rolled up the character for him.

**Erik Mona:** Apparently Erik playtested the *Book of Vile Darkness* a little too thoroughly, because his character, Sparks Imperial (a euphoric imp from the *Fiend Folio*), is a willing servant of the forces of darkness, obsessed with unleashing his *necklace of fireballs* one bead at a time to build up his reputation in the arena.

**Matt Sernet:** Matt, of course, started this all with his orange crush miniature, and I blame him.

**Johnny Wilson:** I'd like to point out that the campaign's sixth player, Paizo President Johnny L. Wilson, Ph. D., (also my boss) made a great character. A really, really good character. Sublime even.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who's been surprised by a character concept. If you've ever surprised your DM with an unusual character concept, or if you've ever been surprised by your player's ideas of what makes a cool character, join us on the *DRAGON* message boards at [www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com).

  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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## MERCENARIES

### THE NAMELESS LEGION

by Mike Mearls

What do a vampire rogue, a harpy sorcerer, and a goblin fighter have in common? They are mercenaries for the Nameless Legion. Wiped of their memory and tattooed as a demonstration of their subservience, these once-savage mercenaries can be hired for protection, reconnaissance, or more sinister reasons. Learn how your PC can become a powerful and sought-after mercenary, take the feats, and use their unique weapons and magic items. Or, if you're a DM, drop the Legion into your campaign with ease.

## MONSTROUS MAGIC

by James Wyatt

Packed with over 30 new spells, this article will make your monstrous PC or NPC a lethal force to reckon with! Awaken an ooze, infect your enemies with a deadly disease using nothing more than your breath, regenerate lost limbs, force creatures to look upon your face and suffer from your gaze attack, deal extra damage to your foes by imbuing your weapon with poison, and much more!

## INTELLIGENT MOUNTS

by Rich Redman

Tired of riding mules, horses, and warponies? Ever wish you could ride a truly spectacular mount or even a member of your own adventuring party? Now's your chance! *DRAGON* presents exclusive rules for riding intelligent mounts. Learn how to flank and make attacks of opportunity while mounted, and take new feats to help you and your mount coordinate deadly attacks.

## PRESTIGE RACES

by Greg Dent and Brannon Hollingsworth

For the first time ever, your character can become a new race! With special training, your PC can learn how to evolve into a new race, slowly gaining new special abilities and traits. Evolve into an inferno creature and watch the ground blister with your every footstep, and blast your enemies with heat when they come within reach of your *flame aura*. Sacrifice your paladin to the cause of good and become a divine creature, gaining a bonus to Constitution and the ability to fly. This article tells you everything you need to know to evolve your character into a unique race, offering you interesting new roleplaying abilities.

Inside you'll also find new fiction, "Bestiary: Born Fair and Foul," "DM's Toolbox," "Bazaar of the Bizarre," and more advice, tools, and tactics to improve your game!

# READERS TALK BACK SCALE MAIL

## While I was Out

Sometime last year I let my subscription run out, mainly because my gaming group broke up and the magazine was no longer useful to me. Since then, I have realized how difficult it is to find your magazine. I started looking for it last June and finally found issue #299 in September. Then I decided to pick up issue #300. These two issues were of far better quality than what I had been getting when I had my subscription. The huge article on designing knighthoods was definitely a step in the right direction—a complete how-to article is far more useful than "this worked in the FORGOTTEN REALMS, maybe it will work for you." Issue #300 was one of the best issues to date. I found almost every article useful. While I personally do not use the *LIVING GREYHAWK Journal* articles, I can't fault you for including them since GREYHAWK is the official world and deserves some support. "Elminster's Guide to the Realms" was a complete waste of paper, but every other article in *DRAGON* #300 was very well written and will likely be useful to me in the future.

The new "For Your Campaign" and "For Your Character" sidebars that you've added to most articles are a welcome addition—I can't believe someone didn't think of this concept earlier. Congratulations on having the guts to publish the "mature" sealed section. I can just imagine some of the responses you must be getting about the content. Don't let any of it bother you; none of it was bad enough to traumatize anyone mature enough to play D&D. The same thing goes for the "How Far Should You Go" article. I had never even thought about the evil level for my campaign.

I have a few comments about things I have noticed while looking through old issues and comparing them to the new ones. First of all, what happened to "Forum?" I haven't seen it in your magazine for a long time, and the last few issues it was there, it was relegated

to a sidebar with only a couple of letters. Second, go back to the old format for your "Table of Contents," like the one in issue #278, where you reprinted the front cover on one page and then had a nice, color-coordinated "TOC" on the other page. Lastly, why is "Nodwick" only one page now? Does Aaron Williams have too heavy a workload to do two pages a month? Overall, I am very impressed with your magazine. Keep packing the issues like #300 and I might renew my subscription.

Melissa Acker  
Niagara Falls, ON, Canada

*"Forum" left the magazine for two reasons. It was a great column, but it simply got fewer and fewer responses as the discussions among the readers moved more and more to Internet message boards. With new tools for communicating with the readership and new ways for readers to talk to one another, it seemed like time for the column to go. In the end, we were swayed when we realized that instead of those pages of "Forum," we could devote more pages to feature articles. Also, "Forum" differed from "Scale Mail" only in that the editors never intruded in the issues that the readers were discussing, and we like to intrude.*

Jesse Decker  
Editor-in-Chief

## Predicting the Future

I've really been enjoying the "Campaign Components" articles in your magazine. Is there any chance we'll see an adventure in *DUNGEON* that ties in with future (and past) "Campaign Components?"

Kevin Chenevert  
New Orleans, LA

*Spooky, isn't it, how we can read your minds?*

*Actually, as much as we like to pretend that we have superhuman powers (you should see the brown cape*

# ZOGONIA



BY TONY MOSELEY www.zogonia.com

and monkey t-shirt that Matt wears to work), the truth is that the benefits of providing crossover material in the two magazines to support the "Campaign Components" articles seemed obvious. The articles were just crying out for a tie-in adventure.

The Paizo staff has been pretty pumped up lately about our lunchtime gladiatorial campaign (see "Wyrms' Turn"), and what better way to share that enthusiasm with our readers than by supplying them with the means to run their own gladiator campaign, complete with an adventure in DUNGEON and poster maps that could be used in conjunction with one another (DUNGEON's premium is also two-sided: One side is a poster-size version of the DRAGON cover, and the other side is a map of the bottom level of an arena). If you haven't checked out DUNGEON #96 yet, be sure to pick up a copy before it's gone from the shelves. By the way, does anyone know where I can get a miniature of an Amazonian gladiatrix with a whip and a spiked shield?

Stacie Magelssen  
Associate Editor

## Touche

"Campaign Components" has done it again! A very good job and an excellent article overall, but I have a few things I'd like to point out. The bibliography was appallingly short. Dale Donovan's "Touché!" from DRAGON #273 was far more helpful as far as references to films, fiction, and non-fiction. I'm glad I keep all my old copies of DRAGON or I would have cheated myself out of numerous films to use as reference (those interested in a good pirate flick should rent *Cutthroat Island*, and *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* is also a good reference film).

As for my second point, Mr. Stout gives reference to the article "Adding Injury to Insults" from DRAGON #294, but he neglects the prestige class from that issue and its predecessor (the night song enforcer and night song infiltrator), both of which I find superb. These prestige classes could easily fit a swashbuckler-style campaign. Another good prestige class for this type of campaign is the Justicar from issue #290, which is perfect for the role of bounty hunter.

That said, I have a few ideas of my own for campaign and character design

using the components in the article, and my overall grade for the article would be an A.

Michael Schell  
Philadelphia, PA

## Picture Perfect

When I read the cover of DRAGON #301, I saw the cover line about a character sheet included in the issue. All I could think was, "Not another character sheet." I scanned through the issue stopping at Todd Harris's beautiful artwork for the Bard's article, and I almost forgot about the character sheet. Then, I flipped to the last page and stopped, stunned. In over 22 years of gaming I never thought of using artwork blended into the actual character sheet. I love the idea. Artwork has always been integral to the game, and to have a character rendition right there on the sheet should be the norm. Please continue to print these character sheets in the future, and tell the artists [Glen Angus and Arnie Swekel] thanks and keep them coming!

Kevin J. Liss  
Address withheld

## One Sheet to Rule Them All

The whole concept of "Campaign Components" is wonderful, and looking for those sidebar icons presented in issue #301 will make it that much easier. I am always looking for ways to enhance my campaign, and this is the way to do it. It is a concept I hope remains a part of DRAGON for a long time to come.

The character sheet in issue #301 is a wonderful idea and an excellent way of making the character seem more elegant and prestigious. However, I do have one concern, and that is its total usefulness in the game. It is missing several components that are a must for adventurers. There is no room for class features, equipment, experience, money, magical items, and the character's appearance. Some of these things could be squeezed in the blank spaces that remain on the character sheet, but these are woefully small and not very practical. What I would recommend is making the character sheet two sided and instilling a gender-neutral picture that players can embellish to better represent their character. Otherwise, I found the character sheet impressive.

Shawn O'Leary  
Crestview, FL



### PANDEMONIUM IN THE VEINS

by Frank Brunner

Some fell force is slaying the gladiators of the Nyos Arena. The PCs must sign up as new gladiatorial combatants to find out who or what is behind these disturbing deaths. A D&D adventure for four 5th-level PCs but adaptable for levels 1-9. This adventure uses rules from *DRAGON* #303's "Campaign Components: Gladiators" article and can be used as support for a new gladiatorial campaign or be simply inserted into your existing game.

### BEYOND THE LIGHT OF REASON

by Caine Chandler

The village of Rutherton was long besieged by the denizens of the nearby mountains until a powerful cleric of Pelor gave them the Light of Reason, a holy artifact designed to protect the area from evil. When the flame of the Light is snuffed in a violent storm, and a massive threat lurks in the mountains nearby, the PCs must follow the trail of the now-dead cleric in the hope of rekindling the powerful Light of Reason. A D&D adventure for four 13th-level PCs but scalable for levels 9-15.

Plus, two more complete adventures, two new "Critical Threats," and a new *POLYHEDRON* d20 Mini-Game.

### Enter: Genetech

Modern military conspiracies abound as *POLYHEDRON* presents "Genetech," a complete d20 Modern campaign setting. In "Genetech," gene-manipulated special agents escape from the labs that created them and must eke out a living using their paramilitary skills and enhanced senses. All the while, their former masters hound their every step. You might have the strength of a bear and the keen eyes of an eagle, but do you have what it takes to escape the clutches of the government's most secretive branch?

Plus "PX Poker Night," the first DELTA GREEN d20 adventure ever published, d20 industry news, RPGA updates, and more!

*So far, the response to the "Campaign Components" articles has been overwhelming, and people have been pleased with how easy it is to incorporate the ideas into their own campaigns. We're busy thinking up cool topics and themes for future installments of "Campaign Components," but we'd like to know what the readers want to see. Send an email to [scalemail@paizopublishing.com](mailto:scalemail@paizopublishing.com) or drop by our message boards at [www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com) and let us know what topics would interest you most for a "Campaign Components" article.*

**Stacie Magelssen**

*A lot of people have written in to express their enthusiasm for the character sheets, and many of them have mentioned that they wish the sheet could contain more information. We do too, but the single-page character sheet that can contain all you want to know about your character and great art is the Holy Grail of roleplaying, and we're fresh out of crusading knights. It might help to think of the character sheets as character coversheets: The essential information about your character fits on the first page, but spell lists, equipment inventory, campaign notes, and other*

*sundries fit better on the back or on a separate sheet.*

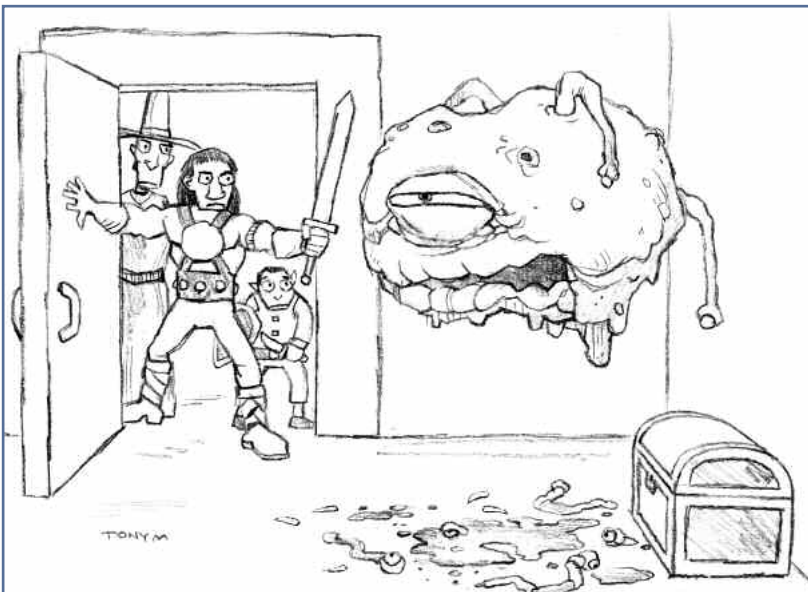
**Matthew Sernett**  
Associate Editor

### Much Ado About Nothing

I just wanted to write in and say thanks for taking a chance on the vile darkness section in issue #300. I feel that the letters of complaint you received came from people that did not fully read the material. I have a 7th-grade brother who is 15 years younger than me. He is encouraged by his teachers to read Stephen King books. The article in your magazine was no worse than what he is able to check out at his school library. I gave him my copy of the magazine after I read it. I watched him to see if he would be interested in the article. He stopped, tried to figure out what the hoopla was about, and moved on. Having read the material, I would not have said anything if he showed interest. I believe that kids brought up with good principles will make good decisions, and that an article, book, movie, or video game will not make a kid make bad decisions. Thanks for the great magazine, and keep the variety of content coming.

**Jason Schulte**  
Reedsburg, WI

### CAPTION CONTEST



What's so funny? Why, you are! So send your caption for this cartoon to **Caption/DRAGON Magazine**, 3245 146th PL SE Suite 110, Bellevue, WA 98007 by March 1st, and be sure to write "issue #303" somewhere on your entry. Your caption will undergo rigorous testing by the editors, and if it passes, it just might be printed in an upcoming issue. There's no need to cut up your magazine. If you want to include the drawing, send in a photocopy.

## My DRAGON

I suppose I need to write to you to so that you know what I like and don't like about your magazine. First, some background information. I got my first subscription to *DRAGON Magazine* back in the mid to late 1980s. I dropped my subscription when FORGOTTEN REALMS and 2nd Edition dominated the pages. When 3rd Edition came out, I resubscribed. I was pretty happy at first, but *DRAGON* rapidly sank back into the mire by filling up with FORGOTTEN REALMS material. When my subscription ran out this time, there was one thing that made me resubscribe: "Up On a Soapbox." I love this column, and without it, I wouldn't have a subscription today. I think 2nd Edition and FORGOTTEN REALMS are D&D's equivalent of "Spock's Brain," or maybe even that movie when Kirk met God and God needed a starship. Gygax, however, is D&D. I want you to know, I was horrified when you took over the magazine and his article wasn't in there. I made a good guess, however, that the transitory issue was rougher than the others, and that Gygax's article would be back.

This most recent issue, #301, seems like a huge improvement, although I can't figure out why or point to anything specific. Overall, it must just be subtle layout changes that work well together. Oh, and I like the cartoons.

Here's how I read *DRAGON Magazine*:

- Step 1: Carefully peel out the cardboard insert and put it with the others.
  - Step 2: Play with the glue that held the cardboard insert in.
  - Step 3: Remove all of the subscription cards.
  - Step 4: Find "Up On a Soapbox" and read it.
  - Step 5: Torment myself by starting at the front of the magazine and flipping pages to see what all is in it until I finally reach the cartoons.
  - Step 6: Read "Wyrm's Turn."
  - Step 7: Read any articles that interested me when I quickly flipped through the magazine in step 5.
  - Step 8: Give the magazine a two-week rotation in the bathroom for a more thorough reading.
  - Step 9: File the magazine with all the other past issues of *DRAGON*.
- There is one thing that I despise about the magazine: the colored pages.

I know it looks cool and gives the magazine a certain feel, but I'm a big proponent of black text on white pages. If I ruled the world, *DRAGON Magazine* would look a lot like an issue of *Scientific American*. The D&D 3rd-Edition rulebooks would look the same way too. As for the character sheet in the back of the latest issue: It was nice and certainly creative, but it wasn't practical. There is tons of information that needs to go onto a character sheet, and the sheet you supplied didn't have it. If you need something to go in the back of the magazine, I'd suggest a "guest column," where people can write in funny stories about their game, characters, and so on.

William D. Colburn  
Socorro, NM

*Here's how I read DRAGON Magazine: I grab it out of the box of first-bounds (the first few copies that come off of the printing press) and indulge in a mild panic attack as I flip through the magazine looking for production errors or gaffs made by the printer. Then I shift the blame for whatever errors I find to Matt Sernett.*

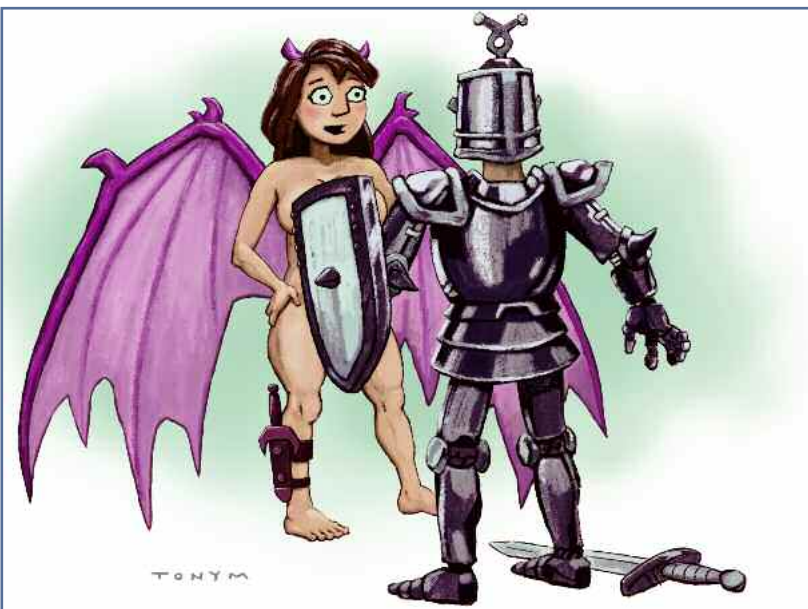
Jesse Decker

*Here's how I would rule the world:*

- Step 1: Establish a unified code of law, weighed heavily toward human rights.
- Step 2: Create economic incentives to invest in poorer nations in an attempt to increase the standard of living worldwide.
- Step 3: Make a standardized education available to all people for free.
- Step 4: Develop a means to appropriately fund medicine and higher education in an attempt to make them free.
- Step 5: Establish economic incentives to reduce population growth and environmental damage worldwide.
- Step 6: Dissolve national borders, establish a world language, and support the concept of a world culture in an effort to quash nationalism and ethnocentrism.
- Step 7: Quell the inevitable rebellions against my magnanimous rule in as peaceful a way as possible.
- Step 8: Fix D&D to suit my tastes.
- Step 9: Make Jesse my assistant and shift the blame for all my failures to him.

Matthew Sernett 

CAPTION CONTEST WINNER



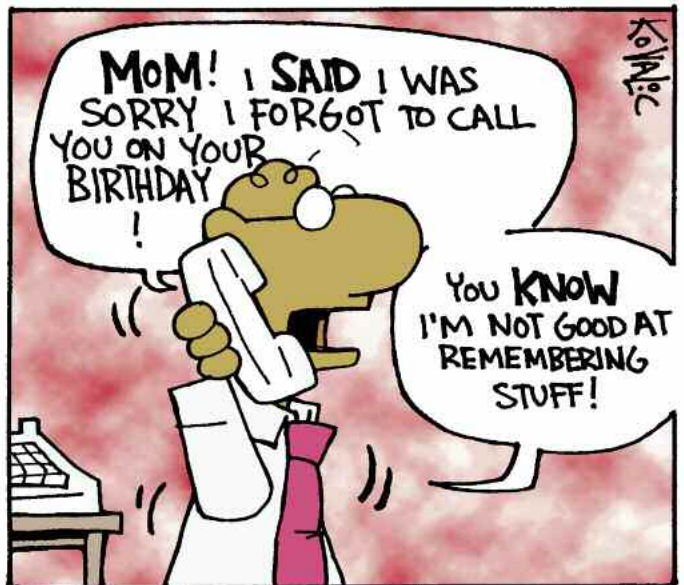
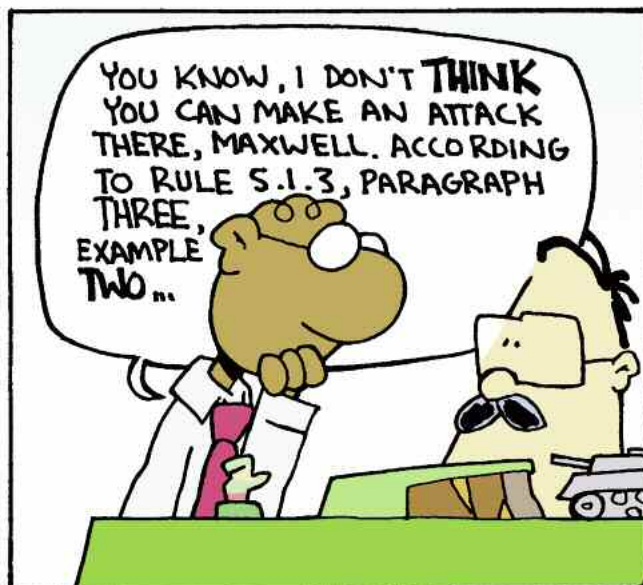
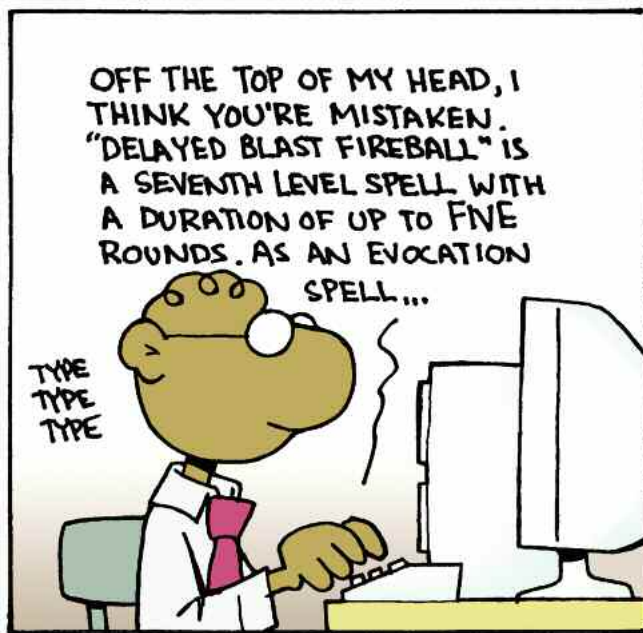
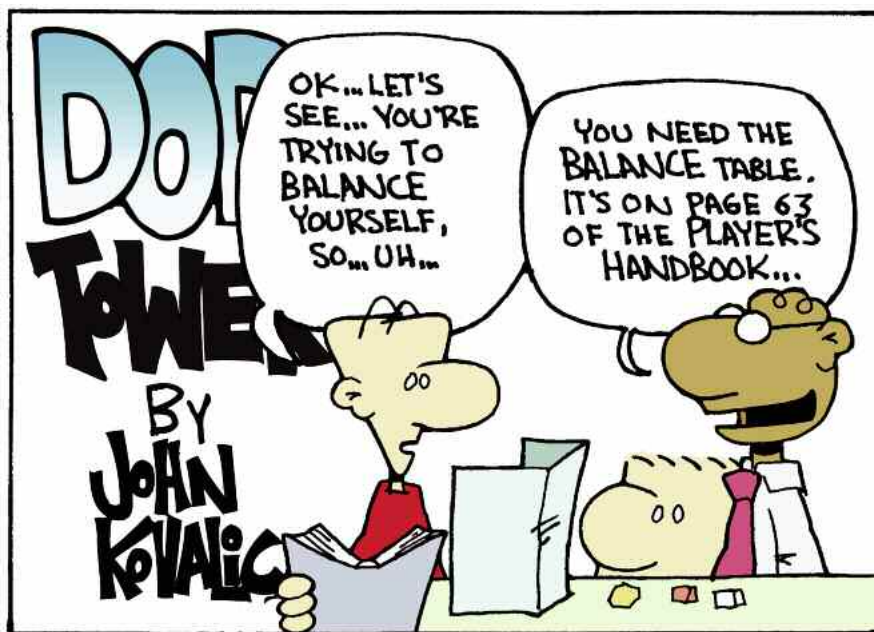
### WINNER

"Oh, Tomb of Horrors, that's up the road."  
Congratulations Brian McCoy!  
Cuyahoga Falls, OH

### RUNNER-UP

"And after college I tried the peace corps for a few years. . . . What about you? Did you ever do anything with that art degree?"  
Sherry Young • Abilene, TX

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# GLORY AND TRIUMPH

## Campaign Components: Gladiators

by Dean Poisso · illustrated by Marc Sasso · cartography by Arnie Swekel

**R**ife with treachery, cruelty, and death, the gladiatorial arena injects high-adrenaline adventure and conflict into your campaign. Far from merely housing a small group of melee fighters, the arena is home to many character types, both combatants and support personnel. It might even become the central location for a campaign; instead of going out to adventure, the adventure comes to the PCs.

Clerics tend to the needs of the gladiators and their horrific wounds. Rogues and bards size up potential matches, broker wages, and generate publicity, and they excel at arranging tournaments and managing wagers and side betting. Arcane spellcasters scry on future opponents and use spells to enhance their companions' abilities in battle. With their typically high Intelligence, they make superb advisors for navigating the intrigues of the professional fighting world. Of course, members of all classes can enter the arena and fight.

Whether player or DM, you can add as much gladiatorial combat to your campaign as you like. Whether one small arena in a frontier city serves as part of a single character's background or you build an entire campaign that features multiple combats and adventures centered around the gladiatorial arena, "Campaign Components: Gladiators" gives you the tools to shape gladiatorial combat to your character's or campaign's goals. Glorious battle and bitter wounds await the courageous. Ignominy and defeat await those unable to avoid the relentless pressures of the arena.

Politics and greed govern much of what occurs within the arena. Politicians use the games to raise money for personal projects and to gain prestige from sponsoring decadent displays or hosting benefits for the public or other nobles. The behind-the-scenes backbiting and double-dealing can actually precipitate wars between regions whose hometown stables rival one another in the arena. Politicians strike at one another through the gladiatorial stables they own or sponsor. With this richness of roleplaying opportunity, DMs and players alike need to make sure that the issues behind the scenes in the arena are every bit as exciting as the events within it.



### GLADIATORS OF HISTORY

One of the oldest myths about Roman gladiatorial games is that they were passed down to the Romans from the older Etruscan civilization. Roman sources commonly state that the Etruscans staged such contests as part of funeral rites for rich or important figures. Slaves would fight to the death to decide who would have the "honor" of accompanying their master into the afterlife. While this makes a good story, and the first gladiatorial games in Roman times were held as part of a funeral, there is no archeological or written evidence from Etruscan sources that substantiate that allegation. During the rise of the Roman Empire, it evolved to become the most infamous form of





public spectacle and entertainment. The fervor of the arena bled deeply into Roman society, an inexorable element of its politics and culture.

The first Roman gladiatorial games were held in 264 BC, when three pairs of gladiators fought as part of a funeral celebration arranged by sons of Junius Brutus Pera to commemorate their father's death. The event proved extremely popular and began a spiraling escalation as Rome's elite competed for the votes of the commoners with more and more lavish gladiatorial exhibitions. A century later, in 174 BC, Titus Flaminus offered seventy-four gladiator matches in three days of games to honor his father. Julius Caesar had intended to stage 320 matches in funeral games for his daughter, Julia, but his political opponents in the Senate passed legislation limiting the amount of money that could be spent on gladiatorial games. From the origins of the games, their power as a public spectacle, and thus a political tool, was well understood.

The earliest games were highly ritualized, cloaked in the guise of religious funerary rites. Despite the ritualization of the games, they were extremely popular with the Roman populace. It was tantamount to political suicide for a Senator not to hold games upon the death of a relative. In fact, it could be more literal than that. There are reports of citizens in some towns threatening violence when prominent families refused to stage games.

After the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of the emperors, the games were even more highly regulated. The funerary aspect was de-emphasized, although certain ritualistic holdovers remained as part of the spectacle of the games. With the democracy of the

republic removed, there was no legitimate reason for members of the aristocracy to vie for the popularity of the masses. As a hereditary monarch, the emperor and his heirs could not allow other prominent citizens to stage extravagant games or other diversions for the populace. To allow this was to invite others to undermine the emperor's popularity. While the games in Rome were too powerful a political tool to be controlled by anyone but the emperor, in the provinces, governors, rich patrons, and local nobility were freely permitted to sponsor games.

During the Imperial period gladiatorial exhibitions became more and more grand. The largest contest of gladiators on record was sponsored by the emperor Trajan as part of a victory celebration in 107 AD and featured combat between 5,000 pairs of gladiators during which 9,000 total combatants were killed. When the sheer numbers of deaths in the arena failed to entertain the crowds, the contests instead became bizarre. In 96 AD, the emperor Domitian presented

combats between women and dwarves. Julius Caesar was the first editor, or sponsor of games, to stage a naval engagement between full-sized warships on a man-made lake. The Emperor Claudius went one further and staged a battle between hundreds of ships representing the navies of Rhodes and Sicily. Reportedly some 19,000 condemned prisoners were recruited to man these ships. This particular naumachia, or staged sea battle, was the first and only time the salute of "Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutemus!" (Hail Caesar! We who are about to die salute you!) was ever used.

The emperor most often associated with gladiators is Commodus, the mad son of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Commodus was actually far crazier and far more outlandish than he was depicted in the recent film *Gladiator*. Commodus imagined himself as the reincarnation of Hercules, considered the patron deity of gladiators. In order to sate these megalomaniac fantasies, the palace staff filled the emperor's apartments with easily breakable furniture, fake marbles, and false boulders so Commodus could show off his imagined super strength. Commodus consorted with gladiators, showering his favorites with extravagant gifts, training with them, and practicing killing blows on live human targets. He was particularly obsessed with the arena and appeared in it 735 times. His opponents were ostriches, sick toothless bears, old blind lions, and gladiators armed with wooden and lead weapons or mortally wounded before the combat began. In exchange for these heroic displays Commodus paid himself as much as a million sesterces per appearance from the public coffers. Having murdered his sister Lucilla, dozens of Senators, hundreds of gladiators, and thousands of animals, Commodus turned on his own bodyguards, the Pretorian Guard, assembling a long death list of imagined crimes and plots against him. The Pretorians quickly put an end to that plan by having Commodus strangled in his baths.

Although Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, proscribed gladiatorial contests in 325 AD, they continued to be held until about 500, well into the period when Rome was a Christian state. Such was the popularity

of the games in spite of their connection to so many Christian martyrs.

### Historical Fighting Styles

There are a number of gladiatorial styles that have been passed down through

## HAIL CAESAR! WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE SALUTE YOU!

writings and archeological evidence. Some styles are quite baffling, while others only have scant data recorded about them. Fighting and armor styles for which no names have been found have not been included here.

**Bestiarius:** These warriors were trained to fight wild animals and armed with nets, spears, and bows. They were one of the few types of gladiators equipped to fight with ranged weapons, and they were occasionally allowed to fight in combination with trained hunting dogs.

**Myrmillo:** The myrmillo, or fish man, was named for the images of fish and dolphins that adorned his helmet, often in the form of a stylized crest. He was most commonly paired against the retarius: the fisherman versus the fish. The myrmillo carried a large round shield and short sword. Because he had to avoid entanglement in the net of the retarius, the myrmillo's legs were left unarmored for maximum agility.

**Retarius:** The retarius, or net thrower, was a particularly specialized gladiator. Armed with a weighted net and a trident, he only carried armor on his left arm and shoulder, including a high shoulder guard. The weighted net was attached to the retarius by a cord with which he could draw the net back for a second throw. More often the net was not thrown, but instead used to "whip" around an opponent's feet to trip him.

**Thracian:** The thracian gladiator is named for a style of fighting associated with a particular ethnic group. The thracian carried a small round shield called a parma and a curved short sword called a sica. A large crested helmet, often topped with the image of a mythological beast, was worn. Leg armor was worn on both legs, unlike the samnite and hoplomachus, covering the legs all the way up to the thighs.

**Samnite:** This was the prototype for the gladiator. Its mix of arms and armor

were based on those of the Samnites, one of Rome's earliest enemies. The samnite wore a large crested helmet with a visor, carried a large rectangular shield called a

scutum, and carried a sword. His sword arm was armored with leather or metal bands, as was the leg on his shield side. Sometimes the leg armor was replaced with a greave.

**Hoplomachus:** This gladiator was as heavily armed and armored as the samnite, using an almost identical mix of arms and armor. Archeologists are hard pressed to understand the exact distinctions between the samnite and the hoplomachus gladiators. Prior to the reign of the first emperor Augustus (31 BC to 14 AD), all heavily armed and armored gladiators were called samnites, and after his reign they were called hoplomachi. Perhaps the most important difference is that the leather and armored bands on the sword arm were replaced with chainmail. The name hoplomachus is derived from the Greek word hoplite, meaning armored warrior.

**Secutor:** The secutor, or chaser, was heavily armored, which might suggest that the name comes from an aggressive, attacking fighting style rather than actually chasing opponents around the arena. Secutors wore a rounded helmet meant to be less easily entangled by the net of the retarius, and carried large shields. They also wore a metal leg guard called an ocrea on their left sides, and their sword arms were well armored with leather and metal bands. For offense, they carried short swords or daggers.

**Andabatus:** The anadabatus was a mounted gladiator who

## GLADIATORS IN ANY GAME

Historical gladiatorial combat had roots in funeral rites but it played a different role in society. Although most of the article assumes that gladiatorial combat in your game follows this historical mold, the fantasy setting of D&D allows you to incorporate such fighting into your campaign in many different ways. Here are a few examples:

- **Dueling:** Gladiatorial combat could be an infrequent spectator sport based upon the concept of dueling for honor. Dueling in city streets and vigilante-killings of criminals might carry a death sentence for the chaos it can cause, so characters must take their grievances to the arena.
- **Legal Disputes:** Legal disputes between persons in a particular city in your campaign might be "settled in the ring," with public justices on hand to judge the winner and award a verdict based on combat performance. Instead of paying for lawyers, people hire professional fighters to "argue" the justice of their claim.
- **Worship Ceremonies:** Worship of a god of death, war, glory, honor, fortune, or slaughter could take the form of arena battles. The games might be "safe," with fighters in these ceremonies provided with healing and the promise of resurrection.
- **Public Execution:** Gladiator combat might be purely a form of public execution. Enemies of the state and criminals are put in the arena to die in vainglorious fashion at the hands of monsters and traps or be killed by symbols of the city's virtue.
- **Villain's Obsession:** A villain in the campaign might be obsessed with watching death and violence. This character might even be a hero to the people for capturing marauding monsters and ridding the region of other dire threats. Of course, these monsters just end up in the villain's hidden arena to combat worthy opponents the villain brings to them, maybe the PCs.
- **No More War:** With all the powerful magic at the disposal of high-level characters to go where they will, attack, die, and return to attack again, it's possible that conventional war doesn't happen. Large numbers of weak individuals are simply no match for *fireball*-casting, flying wizards with *improved invisibility*. Perhaps gladiatorial combat in such a world is a means of settling disputes between nations. To the victor goes the spoils.

wore a helmet with no eye-holes. An anadabatus was supposed to find opponents by sound and run them down with his steed or strike blindly with his weapons. This style was reported to be a comic diversion for the audience.

**Essedarius:** These gladiators fought from chariots, like the ancient Britons.

**Dimachaerius:** This style of gladiator carried two short swords and wore little armor.

**Laquerius:** The laquerius was equipped like a retarius, only these gladiators used rope lassos in place of nets.

**Velitus:** A Velitus wore no armor and was armed only with a spear.

### The Rules and

#### Customs of the Historical Arena

The games held in the Colosseum of Rome, properly called the Flavian Amphitheater, took place over several weeks around the summer and winter solstices. Games began in the morning and continued until the combat had to be illuminated by lamplight.

In the morning, battles between wild beasts were presented. Starving lions were set loose against buffalos; elephants tortured into a rage were unleashed against rhinoceroses. The bestiaries were presented next, fighting beasts imported from all over the empire and even from beyond its borders. Lunchtime was busied with less interesting fare: the execution of condemned prisoners. Some died by the sword, others were killed by wild beasts. These displays were usually performed with a minimum of drama, although in Nero's time condemned criminals could be forced to appear in plays where their actual death was called for by the script; a kind of "snuff theatre."

In the afternoon, combat between gladiators began. Gladiators were often appropriately paired; meaning evenly matched, but not identically armed. The idea was to ensure that there would be no competitive advantage but that styles were different enough to keep the fight interesting. It was this asymmetry the audience found intriguing, while also maintaining a sense of fairness that the spectators desired.

When a gladiator believed he was too wounded to continue, he could cast down his weapon, drop to one knee, and raise his index finger to signal

surrender. The editor of the games would then make the decision whether to spare the gladiator, often taking the mood of the crowd into account.

The defeated were expected to be valiant even in death. The proscribed way to die was for the losing gladiator to grasp the thigh of the victor who would then hold the loser's head or helmet and plunge a sword into the back of his neck for a clean, quick death. To make sure the loser wasn't pretending to be dead, an attendant dressed as Mercury, messenger of the gods, would touch him with a red-hot iron brand. Another attendant, dressed as Charon, the ferryman who ushered souls across the river Styx into the afterlife, would finish off still-living gladiators with a heavy iron hammer.

Particularly successful and popular gladiators were often released from slavery by the awarding of a *rutis*, a ceremonial wooden sword. Only the editor of the games could award a *rutis*, an expensive prospect since the gladiator school would have to be compensated. A freed gladiator could return to a stable as a teacher, continue his career in the arena as a freeman, or become a freelance bodyguard.

### Games and Matches

In most cases, gladiatorial games occur as portions of a larger tournament. The games within tournaments vary according to the size and scope of the tournament. Several common types of matches exist.

**Singles Matches:** These matches are straightforward, one-on-one matches between two warriors. They are often preludes to tiered tournaments, featuring relative unknowns seeking to better their records or standings. On the other hand, singles matches are the format of choice for the grand finales of large tournaments, where the most popular gladiators battle in grudge matches and championship bouts.

**Paired/Team Matches:** While historical games limited these matches to highly specialized fights between warriors trained to fight as a duo or group against other fighters or beasts, this format is easily the most satisfying for a D&D campaign.

**Beast Fights:** These matches pit gladiators against one or more beasts. Monsters are used against the greatest

beastmasters, and the spectacle is always a crowd favorite.

**Tiered Tournaments:** In historical times, these were the most glorious gladiatorial games. These tournaments are multi-gladiator events consisting of several tiers of elimination matches.

The final two gladiators compete for the greatest prizes and purses. Tiered tournaments are crowd favorites, the heart of the glory that is the Arena.

In D&D campaigns, tiered tournaments are best when they allow entire adventuring groups to compete against other groups of gladiators, single monsters of great individual power, or swarms of lesser opponents. These games might feature preliminary tests for unproven warriors who wish to be allowed to compete. Independent warriors competing in such events are uncommon. Most tiered tournaments are held in large arenas, and these establishments reserve their glory for proven gladiators who most likely belong to a stable.

Tiered tournaments are grueling, and access to healing magic and long-lasting enhancement spells are crucial to success in these longer events. They sometimes require a gladiator and gladiatorial teams to fight more than one match in a given day. Tiered tournaments usually last three to five days. The greatest of these tournaments, held annually, are far and away the most popular gladiatorial events in most campaigns. Promotional placards are posted around the city weeks ahead of time and criers take to the streets. Citizens talk about their favorite fighters and villains, most of whom are foreigners or gladiators who are known for dirty tactics. The amount of money that is exchanged during wagers is phenomenal. Thousands of gold pieces change hands, much of it ending up in the coffers of the stables themselves.

**Chariot Races:** These frenetic competitions run a close second to tiered tournaments in popularity. Their speed and danger excite crowds to a near frenzy. Winners are lauded for their courage as well as their skill.

Chariot racing is dangerous because the inevitable accidents are often lethal. Broken spokes or another charioteer's club or whip is enough to send a charioteer to his death, crushed under the hooves of another racer or ripped to shreds on the bladed wheels of

another chariot. Of course this only adds to the excitement—and the purse—at the end of the race.

**Exotic Games:** Unusual matches can be incredibly brutal (depending on the organizer's depravity) or truly imaginative (depending on her coffers).

## THE DEFEATED WERE EXPECTED TO BE VALIANT EVEN IN DEATH.

For more ideas about exotic matches, see the Spice section later in the article.

### Fighting Stables

The fighting stable is the heart of the gladiatorial campaign. The stables in most gladiatorial campaigns are comprised of the warriors who will fight alongside one another in the games. These warriors can be free adventurers seeking glory and wealth, or they might be slaves and prisoners forced to fight. Because the games are frequently deadly, it is uncommon for genuine camaraderie to develop, but when such ties develop, especially among fellow gladiators, they are made all the richer for their rarity and the backdrop of conflict within the arena. The slaves who live and do well in the arena are usually taken from the stable (which is refilled with more slaves) and trained for larger events. If luck is with them, they might rise through the ranks to become the personal bodyguards of a noble or wealthy merchant or even gain their freedom.

Life in a slave stable is cruel and dismal. Gladiators receive minimum care, because owners typically hope to make their money through the spectacle of the slave-gladiators' deaths. The primary costs for stable owners are lodging and training. Owners who treat their gladiators poorly for extended periods are rewarded with poor performance, if not outright rebellion. Gladiators who show promise are sent to gladiator schools to learn improved battle arts and increase their chances of winning a purse.

Some stables employ freemen. These fighters are highly skilled and well-paid warriors who literally hand their lives over to stable owners by contract for a set time or number of fights.

Although it is a departure from historical precedent, in most D&D campaigns fighting stables are as much

fraternities as they are teams. These stables are often known for individual members who specialize in specific types of matches. Stables of this sort often have names, and they develop

reputations based on the success of their members. These successful stables have their own entourages of trainers and healers as well as agents who arrange matches for the warriors.

Some stables become renowned for a particular type of gladiator, a specialized form of magic, or notable magic items. Successful stables run their own fighting schools overseen by successful retired members who pass on their knowledge to up-and-coming recruits. These schools produce some of the finest gladiators of the particular style the stable cultivates.

Strong stables vie with other stables to attract the best talent. The most successful run their own schools where warriors pay for training and up-and-coming gladiators petition for membership.



### FOR THE PLAYERS

Gladiatorial campaigns and adventures depend on the players in many ways, and the more you invest in establishing your character's arena persona, the more the gladiatorial arena comes alive. Even if your party is only passing through a city with an arena or tangentially associated with the gladiatorial matches, what your character thinks about the arena helps shape the party and the campaign. Most of the suggestions in this section assume that the

## FOR YOUR CHARACTER



If you want to play a gladiator but the rest of the party doesn't, there are plenty of interesting ways to carry the ideas presented in this article into other campaigns. (Even in campaigns totally devoid of arenas and gladiatorial fighting, the ideas here can apply to duelists or others who specialize in small combats that take place in front of even a handful of spectators.) Here are some ways you can use the ideas with a character that's not in a gladiatorial campaign.

- Perhaps your character took part in some peaceful sport that has the trappings of gladiatorial combat but not the deadly weapon use. Such sports might include wrestling, boxing or fist-fighting, martial arts, tournament jousting, and so on.
- Perhaps your character has a family member that took part in now defunct or illegal gladiatorial games.
- If gladiatorial combat exists in the campaign world but your characters do not participate in the games, you could follow a favorite gladiator avidly, talk often about developments among the gladiatorial stables, or even sponsor a team of gladiators.
- Taking exotic weapon proficiencies or choosing some of the gladiatorial armor styles described in this article might allow you to bring the flavor of the games to your character even if you never set foot in an arena.

gladiatorial arena plays a significant part in the campaign, but the ideas are just as valid even if your DM doesn't give the games a prominent role. Your character or her family could have a history of competing in the arena, or you could covet the glory that would come from competing and are frustrated that other events and adventures keep you away from the games.

## Character Options and Ideas

The following sections outline ideas for character classes, prestige classes, and concepts for characters of any class or race, including

monstrous characters. More than many other campaign structures, a gladiatorial arena provides tremendous room for variety in character race and background—all a creature needs is a desire (or mandate) to compete in the arena, and it can fit in the campaign. In the arena, the norms of class and race that pervade most D&D campaigns give way to the crowd's desire to see a grand spectacle and exotic matches. Skilled gladiators battling with sword or spell will always draw a crowd, but add dragons, mindflayers, and owlbears to the mix, and the people flock to the arena.

## Character Classes

While many gladiators are melee specialists from the fighter and warrior classes, characters of any class can be a valuable addition to a gladiatorial campaign.

**Fighters:** Fighters are the backbone of a gladiatorial campaign. They can specialize in any form of combat, mastering particular styles of matches or specific tournament formats. Just as importantly, they make superb trainers for non-fighters. They make decent factors (representatives of an arena) and solid stable owners because their knowledge of the arena enables them to pick quality fighters. Many top stable owners are former gladiators with levels in the fighter class.

**Barbarians:** Barbarians frequently come to the arena as captives. Their fury and rage, along with their battle prowess, make them natural stars in the arena. More often than not, barbarians seem to take the role of villains, but regardless of their roles, they are popular draws.

**Rangers:** Few rangers enter the arena willingly. Whether slave or not, rangers make excellent paired gladiators and usually come out well in single matches. Their natural abilities make them superb animal trainers, and those who are adept at handling mounts make excellent charioteers. The call for glory does not often resonate with a wilderness-bound ranger, but some city-based rangers embrace the games. Evil rangers that take humans and other humanoids as their racial enemies make fearsome foes, and some gain so much fame that good rangers come to the arena specifically to seek out and defeat such villains.

**Paladins:** Paladins seldom seek fame and glory, and the pursuits of the arena are typically beneath them. However, when they enter the arena, usually bent on defeating a particularly vicious or evil gladiator, they make formidable opponents. Their abilities are incredibly effective at maintaining their health and the health of their stablemates. In addition, their ability to smite evil finds no end of use in the arena and provides a powerful edge against opponents with more skill or experience. Some paladin-gladiators choose to have their trusted mounts take the lead in chariot teams. In these rare cases, they have distinct advantages and make fearsome competitors.

**Monks:** Monks can be found in the arena for any number of reasons. Some are slaves, while others seek to test their prowess. Few, however, seek money or fame. With their skill in unarmed combat, monks become pankrationists (see Roles of the Great Drama below) in arena stables. Their dynamic fighting skills allow them to excel in nearly any conceivable game. They make superb trainers, focusing stablemates' skills and discipline to new levels. As slaves, they do well in their harsh living conditions and like paladins can help maintain the health of their stablemates. Evil monks make notoriously dangerous (and therefore popular) villains.

**Rogues:** Rogues are incredibly useful and versatile in a gladiatorial campaign. Their skills make them valuable both inside and outside the arena. Within the arena, rogues make excellent partners in paired events, utilizing their sneak attacks to deadly advantage. Games such as the Labyrinth and the Gauntlet (See the Spice section later in the article) favor rogues who are adept at avoiding traps and blows and at striking from an ambush.

**Bards:** Bards and other characters who devote skill ranks to Sense Motive and Gather Information make equally useful factors outside of the arena. Skilled at sizing up foes and using propaganda against opponents, bards are important parts of any gladiatorial stable. Many bards function as agents for a stable or organizer, and they excel as negotiators for establishing purses and fees.

**Clerics:** Like rogues, clerics are useful both within the arena and without. Their most obvious function is that of stable healer and surgeon. Because it can allow popular gladiators to fight multiple matches in a single day and allow even dead gladiators a chance to continue competing, clerical magic is one of the most important assets a gladiatorial stable can cultivate. Clerics who worship war deities or gods dedicated to combat make fine additions to the arena. They use their skills and spells to enhance their performance as well as the performances of their teammates. Clerics also make solid negotiators and factors.

**Druids:** As champions of the natural world, druids seldom take to the arena unless they see a chance to fight alongside and protect animals used in the games. Once focused on the arena, druids make great healers and animal trainers. Even if druid characters opt not to participate in the arena, they might assist others who support their own causes in the city or in the wild. Druids might also help a noble who is sympathetic to the druid's work by acting as a healer for the noble's stable.

**Wizards and Sorcerers:** If they can stay away from more physically powerful opponents, arcane spellcasters have numerous advantages over most other gladiators. Games featuring spellcasting characters are extremely dangerous, because spells often deal large amounts of damage at once, making it more likely that a gladiator will die. Since many spells have flashy dramatic effects, duels featuring spellcasters are both expensive and popular. Arcane spellcasters also work behind the scenes as negotiators and spies, pairing with rogues to hunt down secrets and weaken opposing teams.

### Monstrous Gladiators

Many stables allow monsters as stable members. While there are clearly no historical precedents involving other intelligent species participating in gladiatorial games, allowing monsters or beasts to participate in gladiatorial campaigns opens up a tremendous number of character ideas that would otherwise be unavailable. Although the arena is harsh at times, it shelters its gladiators from many aspects of society, making it easier

to imagine peaceful interaction between creatures of vastly different alignments and outlooks. Of course, it's peaceful only because they save the violence for the lucrative arena floor.

Although nearly any creature can make a good addition to a gladiatorial match, intelligent creatures capable of reasonable movement rates make the best choices for player characters. For more guidelines on playing monstrous creatures, see *DRAGON Magazine* issue #293 or the upcoming *Savage Species* book.

### Roles of the Great Drama

The action in a gladiatorial campaign ultimately comes down to combat. Despite the importance of non-combat adventures and activities, characters with no interest in arena combat will find themselves left out of many of the campaign's most interesting scenes.

Characters in the arena can include nearly any type of gladiator. Most stables develop a cadre of leaders that forms the core of the team. This cadre usually consists of one specialist in each of the typical events found in large tournaments. Many different types of warriors can fill these positions.

**Pankrationists:** These skilled melee open-handed fighters specialize in hand-to-hand forms such as wrestling and boxing.

**Blademasters:** These deadly swordsmen specialize in sword work and sometimes in fighting with two weapons.

**Myrmidons:** These heavily armed warriors specialize in two-handed weapons, usually polearms or axes.



## FAME AND INFAMY

**DUNGEON #96** uses the concept of Infamy points in addition to Fame points. Infamy points are identical to Fame points and work in the same way. When a character is perceived as a villain by the arena audiences, his Fame points are considered Infamy points, but as soon as that character commits some valiant act that sways public opinion, the Infamy points are converted to Fame points. This system is mainly useful as a way for the DM and players to keep track of who the "good guys" are in the eyes of the audience, but if you adopt this system you might find other applications for the idea.

- Fame feats might rely on Fame or Infamy specifically. A character that switches sides might lose access to a feat.
- Fame feats might change depending on whether the character has Fame or Infamy points. A character that switches sides might lose access to one ability and gain access to another.
- The bonuses to social skill checks might be dependent on whether the character has Fame or Infamy points. Characters with Infamy points might get their bonuses to Intimidate and Gather Information checks. Characters with Fame points might get their bonuses to Bluff and Diplomacy.

**Charioteers:** Masters of the chariot race, these gladiators are specialists in charioteering as well as mounted combat and archery.

**Beastmasters:** These rare gladiators specialize in fighting against beasts and animals. Extreme versions of this type of gladiator devote themselves to battling a specific type of beast or monster.

**Factors:** These specialists are the eyes, ears, and sometimes voices of stable owners and arena owners. Factors of arena owners negotiate with organizers for purse rewards and promotional needs, and with stable owners for admission fees. If the event is expected to be extremely popular, entry costs for stables can be steep. If the stable is popular and the stable owner can

guarantee monies generated through wagers on his gladiators, fees can be waived, saving the stable owner thousands of gold pieces. Factors are also responsible for making sure the proper odds are set and balanced before matches. The main job of a factor is to generate money. They slap costs on anything feasibly possible. Rigging fights, while not uncommon, is a dangerous game that factors sometimes play.

**Agents:** Agents work for stable owners as scouts or sometimes on behalf of famous independent gladiators. Most agents are known to the powers that run the gladiatorial system. They act as able-minded brokers who arrange matches for maximum profit. Most agents work up through the ranks of a stable as scouts and trainers, so they know the business inside and out. Agents make a percentage of what the gladiator earns or get finders' fees for signing particularly good fighters to the stable. In darker cases, agents are nothing more than slavers who capture people to send to the arena.

**Healers:** An important part of any gladiatorial arena, healers maintain close personal relationships with gladiators. They are responsible for maintaining the health of the stable's gladiators and sometimes other members of the organization as well. A misjudgment in technique can be devastating to a gladiator's career, so young healers are carefully schooled by senior healers. Their primary skill is obviously Heal, with Profession (herbalist) and Alchemy also proving quite useful. Magical healing is usually the best alternative if available, but some tournaments forbid magical healing.

## Rules of Engagement

The following options, feats, and equipment help bring more gladiatorial flavor to your character or campaign.

### Skills

Some skills have alternative uses in the confines of the arena.

**Sense Motive:** By making a Sense Motive check (DC 10 + opponent's level), you may attempt to anticipate your opponent's first move before the match begins. This roll can be opposed by a Bluff check; if you succeed, you gain a +1 insight bonus to Initiative.

**Perform:** By making a successful Perform (drama) check (DC 10 + opponent's level), you may put on a brief display before the match to show off your skills. This check can be opposed by a Sense Motive check. If you succeed, your opponent suffers a -2 on her Initiative roll out of fear of your abilities. Gladiators who are immune to fear effects are immune to this use of the Perform skill.

### New Feats

Gladiators depend on impressive maneuvers and inventive tactics to maintain the crowd's attention. The following feats let gladiators customize their combat tactics. Gladiatorial combat often combines showmanship with effective combat techniques, and the fans respond to both innovation and the repeated use of signature moves. Some of the feats described below are a new type of feat called fame feats. These feats interact with the Fame point system described below. Even if you're not using the Fame point system or playing in a gladiatorial game, it's possible to use them if you adapt the honor point system from the "Campaign Components: Knights" article in issue #299 and substitute references in the feats to Fame points with references to honor points. This variant allows the feats to span many other genres such as knights or swashbucklers.

### Crowd Favorite [Fame]

Whenever you get into a match against a hated opponent, the crowd backs you.

**Prerequisites:** Fame points 15+, must have won at least one grudge match.

**Benefit:** Any time you are in a grudge match, you gain a +1 morale bonus to your attack and damage rolls.

### Dirty Fighting\* [General]

You know the brutal and effective tactics of the streets and back alleys.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +2 or higher.

**Benefit:** As a full attack action, you may make a single melee attack that deals an additional +1d4 points of damage.

\*From *Sword and Fist*.

### Double Team [General]

When fighting with at least one ally who also possesses this feat, you can

coordinate your attacks effectively and threaten your opponent's vital areas more easily.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +6 or higher, Combat Reflexes, Dual Strike.

**Benefit:** When you and an ally who also has the Double Team feat both threaten the same

throughout the arena.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +3 or higher, must have won at least two gladiatorial matches, must name your signature move.

**Benefit:** Once per day while fighting in the arena, you can perform your signature move with one normal melee attack. When attacking in this manner, you get a morale bonus to damage

## GLADIATORS DEPEND ON IMPRESSIVE MANEUVERS AND INVENTIVE TACTICS TO MAINTAIN THE CROWD'S ATTENTION.

opponent with a melee weapon, the target is treated as flanked regardless of position. Targets normally immune to flanking are immune to the special flanking conditions created by this feat.

### Dual Strike\* [General]

Your combat teamwork makes you a more dangerous foe.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +3 or higher, Combat Reflexes.

**Benefit:** When you and an ally who also has the Dual Strike feat are flanking an opponent, you both get a +4 bonus to your attack rolls. This replaces the standard flanking bonus.

\*From *Sword and Fist*.

### Improved Dirty Fighting [General]

You are an expert in the brutal and effective fighting tactics of the streets and back alleys.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +6 or higher, Dirty Fighting.

**Benefit:** As a full attack action, you may make a single melee attack that deals an additional +2d6 points of damage. The extra damage dice from this feat replaces (and does not stack with) the extra damage die from the Dirty Fighting feat.

### Signature Move [Fame]

You have developed a move that has become famous

equal to half of your Fame point total.

**Special:** You can take this feat multiple times. Each time you take it, you gain another daily use of the feat, but you must name the subsequent move.

### Staggering Blow [General]

You are capable of delivering devastating strikes in melee combat, and when you land a critical blow, opponents seldom recover in time to fend off your attacks.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Critical (unarmed or bludgeoning weapon), Power Attack, 3 or more ranks of Heal, Str 13+.

**Benefit:** Whenever you confirm a critical hit with a melee attack that deals bludgeoning or subdual damage, your opponent must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + half your level + your Strength modifier) or be stunned for one round.

**Special:** You must be using the weapon or natural attack with which you have the Improved Critical feat in order to gain the benefits of this feat.

### Fame Points and Grudges

The following rules outline a simple system for tracking the fame and notoriety of gladiators. Even if you don't participate in a gladiatorial game, you can make use of the system in any situation where several onlookers witness an encounter.

**Fame Points:** Fame points are a measure of a gladiator's popularity with arena audiences. Fame points are useful for gladiators because their popularity can influence people. Characters accumulate Fame points as described below. A character's total Fame points score can help the character in a number of ways:

- Add half a character's Fame points to any Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, or Intimidate check made when interacting with the staff of an arena or a fellow gladiator. Do not add this bonus to any checks that could result in more Fame points (such as Bluff checks made to feint in combat or a skill check made for Grudge Building). If the character has a negative Fame score, apply the full negative amount as a penalty to these skill checks.

- Add a character's full Fame points score to any Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, or Intimidate check made when interacting with a fan of gladiatorial combat. Do not add this bonus to any checks that could result in more Fame points. If the character has a negative Fame score, apply the full negative amount as a penalty to these skill checks.

- Important people who follow the games might refuse to talk to a character with few or negative Fame points.

- Some gladiatorial events might require competitors to have a certain number of Fame points. High-level characters can simply have less drawing power than more famous low-level gladiators.

Like with the honor points system presented in issue #299, the influence that a character's Fame points have is dependent on people hearing about the character. Fame points might be good only in one city, or gladiatorial games could be so popular that competitors are known throughout a nation and their Fame points help them wherever they go. Fame can also be a disadvantage; when interacting with the NPC who hates the needless violence and carnage of the arena, the character's Fame score could be applied as a penalty.

**Gaining Fame:** Every gladiator can gain Fame points by fighting in an arena before a crowd. A character can gain 1 Fame point by:

- Using his named finishing move to finish an opponent. The finishing move gets no bonus outside the normal D&D rules, but the player must describe and name it. A finishing move can be attempted once per match.
- Winning a match.
- Winning a match versus an opponent against whom the PC has successfully built up a grudge.
- Winning a match in 2 rounds or less.

- Winning a match without taking damage.
- Appearing in a match with spice (see the Spice on the Sands section, below).
- Entering the arena dramatically before a match. A dramatic entrance requires a successful Bluff, Perform (drama), Intimidate, or Diplomacy check (DC 15 + her current Fame point total). If a player describes how her character uses a class skill or ability to enhance her entrance, she earns a bonus on her check equal to half her character level.

• Using a catchphrase in any combination of three separate and successful Grudge Building (see Grudge Building, below) attempts or victorious matches. A catchphrase is a simple and often-used expression unique to each gladiator. A player must devise his own catchphrase.

• Doing massive amounts of damage with a single blow or spell to an opponent who still threatens you or your companions. In game terms, someone who successfully confirms a critical hit that deals more than 30 points of damage gets a Fame point. A character or monster who deals more than 30 points of damage without a critical hit doesn't get the Fame point, because the style and flash of a regular blow doesn't wow the fans as much, even if the damage dealt is incredibly high.

• Killing, knocking unconscious, or otherwise incapacitating more than two uninjured foes in a single round.

• Any action that makes the fans cheer and jump or throw ale steins in derision (your DM's judgment). An example of this might be using *telekinesis* to hoist one enemy into the air and then dropping her onto her companion to deal falling damage to both. Another example might be a villainous PC pouring acid down the back of a gladiator while that gladiator is distracted.

Fame point gain is cumulative, but a PC can gain a maximum of 2 Fame points per match, so if a PC wins a grudge match with spice against an opponent in 2 rounds or less, he gains a total of 2 Fame points (he would have gained 4).

**Losing Fame:** Arena crowds are fickle. Characters can lose Fame points more easily than they can gain them.

## MAGIC DUELS

Fantasy literature teems with examples of the mage duel, usually in situations where two arcane casters enter some sort of protected arena where their spells won't harm spectators. Although the bulk of this article assumes that spellcasters mingle with other characters in gladiatorial matches and that the average D&D party is a good representation of a gladiatorial team, some campaigns might benefit from game mechanics that represent the idea of a spell duel.

One way to represent such mage duels is to use standard D&D combat rules in an arena like The Veins, described in *DUNGEON Magazine* issue #96, that has a permanent antimagic effect in a ring around the arena floor, allowing powerful spells to function in the dueling area without harming those in the stands. In highly magical campaigns or locations, such an arena could be further enchanted to make all damage from spells (or damage from any source) subdual damage.

Another version of mage duel rules appears in *Magic of Faerûn*. If you have that supplement, feel free to use those rules for exclusive gladiatorial matches between spellcasters.

Loss of Fame points can happen in many ways, such as by:

• Missing a match (the fans consider this cowardly). Lose 1d4 Fame points.

• Missing a match versus an opponent against whom the character has built up a grudge. Lose 2d4 Fame points.

• Missing a match with spice. Lose 2 extra Fame points in addition to those for missing a match.

• Losing a match in 2 rounds or less. Lose 1d3 Fame points.

• Losing a match without harming the opposing gladiator. Lose 1d2 Fame points.

• Losing to a gladiator who has never won a match. Lose 1d2 Fame points.

• Asking for quarter if the PC still has more than 10 hp remaining. Lose 1d3 Fame points.

• Employing any sort of delaying tactic (hiding in a *rope trick*, running around invisible while waiting for a barbarian's rage to run out, and so on). Lose 1d3 Fame points.

• Time off. Sometimes a gladiator might not have any scheduled matches for some time. In this case the gladiator slowly passes out of the public eye as other gladiators gain favor. Such a character loses 1 Fame point per week (minimum 0) of time away from the games.

Again, Fame point loss is cumulative, so if a PC loses a grudge match with spice against an opponent in 2 rounds or less, he loses 4 Fame points (note that there is no limit to the number of Fame points a character can lose in a single match). Characters who drop to -10 Fame points or less are usually released by their stable, as they've become more a liability than a draw to the arena.

**Grudge Building:** Playing to the fans is essential in D&D gladiatorial combat. Bizarre creatures of myth, mighty magic, and incredible feats of strength and endurance are commonplace in a D&D gladiatorial arena, so the combatants must go to great lengths in other ways to gain the attention of the arena-goers. Much of this is accomplished through Grudge Building. Before each match, the opposing gladiators attempt to enter the ring dramatically and then perform for the crowd. Common actions in pre-match Grudge Building include casting figments and glamers to amaze the crowd and intimidate one's opponent, posing and flexing in the center of the arena, and of course, shouting at one's opponent and detailing exactly how he will be dismembered.

To attempt a Grudge Building check, a character must make a successful Bluff, Perform (drama), Intimidate, or Diplomacy check. Another type of Perform check can be substituted at the DM's

## GLADIATORIAL ARMOR

Armor	Cost	Armor		Max Dex.	Armor Check	Arcane Spells	—Speed—		Weight
		Bonus					30 ft.	20 ft.	
Retarius Armor	10 gp	+1	+6	-1	5%	30 ft.	20 ft.	5 lb.	
Samite Armor	10 gp	+1	+8	-1	10%	30 ft.	20 ft.	10 lb.	
Secutor Armor	40 gp	+3	+3	-2	20%	30 ft.	20 ft.	30 lb.	
Thracian Armor	15 gp	+2	+5	-2	10%	30 ft.	20 ft.	15 lb.	

option. If the subject of the attempted grudge is present at the time of the check, this is an opposed check (failure on the part of the character attempting to build the grudge indicates the audience doesn't buy the performance). If the subject isn't present, the DC of the check is 10 + the subject's level + 1 for every 5 Fame points the subject possesses. The character can choose which skill to use. The DM might reward players who roleplay Grudge Building especially well by awarding a bonus to their Grudge Building check of up to one-half their character level. If a character defeats any opponent against whom he has made a successful Grudge Building check, he gains a bonus Fame point.

### Tools of the Trade

Exotic weapons and fighting styles are a gladiator's stock in trade. Strategies and weapons with the potential to surprise other gladiators offer obvious advantages. Cultivating unique techniques is imperative to both victory and popularity.

Magical weapons, while not common in the arena, are highly sought after by gladiators and stable managers alike for the edge they give their wielders. Most gladiators use at least masterwork weapons. Ranged weapons are present in the arena, but occasionally arena managers impose special restrictions to keep them from dominating the combat. Although the crowd appreciates archery skill and the ability to bring down opponents from a distance, few tolerate a match that devolves into a string of archers firing at each other from across the arena.

### Exotic Weapons

The following exotic weapons make good additions to gladiatorial matches. Most gladiators perfect the use of one or

like standard nets, but their barbs are larger and sharpened, allowing them to inflict damage whenever a trapped creature attempts either a Strength check to break the net or an Escape Artist check to slip out of the net. Since the barbs and razors invariably damage the net once a creature begins struggling inside one, the escape and break DC decreases by 1 each time a trapped creature attempts to escape. Once the net is successfully thrown and captures a creature, it cannot be used again. All other effects are as a standard net. Exotic Weapon Proficiency (net) allows use of either the standard net or a razor net.

**Hydraflail:** Hydraflails are light, three-headed flails. The individual flail-heads are smaller than that of a light flail, but the multiple chains make the weapon even more effective at disarming foes. When wielding a hydraflail, you get a +4 bonus on your opposed attack roll when attempting to disarm an enemy (including the opposed attack roll to avoid being disarmed if you fail to disarm your enemy).

**Swordbreaker:** Swordbreakers have longsword-shaped blades with thick

### EXOTIC WEAPONS

Medium-Size	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Razor Net	50 gp	1d6	x2	10 ft.	15 lb.	Slashing
Hydraflail	40 gp	1d8	x3	—	10 lb.	Bludgeoning.
Swordbreaker	50 gp	1d8	19-20	—	4 lb.	Slashing

more exotic weapons because they keep the crowd's interest and make the gladiator more recognizable.

**Razor net:** These wicked weapons act

metal teeth created by notches cut into one edge.

The tempered steel is designed to catch blades, and when you use a



## UNIQUE ARENAS

Don't feel constrained by history when designing arenas. The stadium is a great way to make gladiator fights visible to all, but in a D&D game spectators might even pay to watch fights through scrying devices, eliminating the need for audience seating altogether. Here are a few ideas you can use to make your arena battles more exciting.

- A gladiatorial match might have added interest simply by having it take place in an arena with a strange shape. A skull-shaped arena could provide a great battleground to fight undead gladiators. A wizard's arena might have the shape of a star.
- Different races might have different standard arenas. Elves might have gladiators fight on treetop platforms and rope bridges. Dwarven gladiatorial matches might occur on a large artificial hill, with matches having a "king of the mountain" aspect.
- Unique environments can breathe new life into arena combat. Gladiatorial combat with creatures associated with cold could occur in an ice cave, with the audience following the fight from above and looking down through the cavern's transparent ceiling.

swordbreaker to sunder a foe's weapon, you inflict an additional +1d6 points of damage.

## Armor

Gladiators usually wear whatever armor suits them, but some gladiatorial matches disallow armor or require that participants wear provided armor. According to the games' organizers, these rules are designed to emphasize the importance of weapon skill, but the truth is that blood drives both the fight and the crowd, and effective armor works against the goals of those who run the games. In prestigious matches filled with spellcasters, dangerous monsters, and well-known gladiators, there are usually few or no restrictions on armor.

The Gladiatorial Armor sidebar lists statistics for several common types of gladiator armor; see the Historical Fighting Styles section for the armor descriptions. Note that the armor values presented in the sidebar do not include shields.



## FOR THE DM

A memorable gladiatorial campaign encompasses much more than duel after duel. Memorable campaigns call for memorable adversaries throughout the setting: conniving rival stable owners, greedy factors, and avaricious nobles seeking political favor through the intrigues of the arena.

In the face of these forces, DMs must make players understand that at either extreme—be it glorious riches or dismal slavery—the stakes are ultimately the same: life or death. With every win, gladiators increase the value of their own lives to those wagering gold on their victories. However distant it might seem to each hopeful combatant, death remains the grim drumbeat driving the spectacle.

To successfully DM a gladiatorial campaign, you must run your PCs through the gamut of spectacle within the arena. Variety is key.

## GLADIATORIAL EVENTS

Regardless of how frequently they occur in your campaign, events and tournaments are the lifeblood of the gladiator. Those who make their living from the arena depend on the smooth operation of such events to maintain their livelihood, and such an event can draw in characters from many different angles, whether as participants or as employees or foes of those running the events.

Bringing a gladiatorial event alive in the eyes of the players is no easy task. While the word gladiator is itself evocative of the splendor of ancient Rome, it is left to you to make the players understand how your world differs from the gladiatorial combats of history, how the monsters and merchants of the arena interact, and how much life changes for the city hosting such an event. To bring these events to life and make them seem realistic, you must consider who pays for such a concentration of wealth and the finances behind the event, you must know how to design an interesting tournament, and you must figure out how to run the event.

## Event Finance

The largest gladiatorial contests are organized by the prime powers of a given city. The larger the city, the

more elaborate the games and the more money to be made. Organizers usually employ a cadre of factors or agents to negotiate with gladiator stable owners for their participation.

Payment is dependent on the quality of the gladiators, which is greatly modified by their reputations and the size of the arena. Although it's okay to gloss over the details of the prizes for other gladiators, you should keep the prizes for gladiatorial combat in line with the average treasure values for the encounter level of the combat when the players enter the arena. See Chapter 7: Rewards in the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* for more information on average treasure amounts by encounter level.

Prices for gladiators of surpassing skill and reputation are steep. Crowd favorites and popular villains command rates of literally thousands of gold pieces as well as possible gratuities to the gladiators and their stable owners. These veterans often negotiate on their own behalf. In campaigns where gladiatorial games play a large role, gladiators might be part of an organization that handles negotiations for them or they might have an agent who does this.

Of course, all these payment schemes are exclusive of the actual tournament purse, which must surely be fabulous to attract gladiators of this quality.

The real expense of organizing a tournament comes in financing a venue. For low-quality tournaments, a deserted warehouse or back-alley courtyard will do. Innkeepers with a taste for blood sports sometimes keep back room fighting pits or even small arenas. These events are often illegal, since organizers overlook turning in the local government's share of

## PLAYTEST NOTES

Here at *DRAGON* HQ, we've been playing a gladiatorial campaign for a few months. The following observations stem from our lunchtime game.

**Spellcasters:** Spellcasters are quite powerful because they can concentrate all of their day's spells into one encounter. Because this makes for flashy fights and dramatic finishes, it's hardly a problem, but those concerned about non-spellcasters losing out might want to do something to limit the power of spellcasters in their gladiatorial games. In the *DUNGEON* adventure that serves as a companion piece to this article in *DUNGEON Magazine* #96, characters are prohibited from casting spells before they enter the arena, putting all characters on a more even footing.

**1/Day:** Much like spells, the power of abilities that can only be used a few times per day is magnified in an environment where characters know in advance how many matches they'll have in a given day. Although it's unlikely to cause problems in a campaign, players and DMs might want to be aware of this dynamic and adjust the number of uses per day or the power level of the opponents accordingly.

**Encounters:** Because gladiatorial matches are the focus of much preparation and tactical maneuvering, and offer relatively small risk of surprising the characters with a follow-up encounter, most parties can handle matches against groups of creatures with an Encounter Level much higher than the average party level. In most cases, parties can handle encounters with an EL of up to 3 higher than the party level. This heightened danger means that the DM can prepare tougher encounters when the party fights in the arena. In general, DMs should consider the party composition carefully before throwing a single high-CR monster at the party because a key ability, a high damage reduction, or a high spell resistance can occasionally prove too powerful for a lower-level party to overcome.

taxable proceeds. The cost for such facilities depends on the nature and size of the games.

At venues such as small amphitheatres or arenas, the costs are quite low. Large venues might be brokered for a

small fee—at least one gold piece per fifty seats—plus a portion of the draw. Most games are regular monthly or annual events, so most stable owners have no financial responsibility for the venue and pay only tournament entry fees. Entry fees are frequently waived for popular fighters and stables (see "Fame" in the For the Players section), since their draw often guarantees a small fortune for both the venue owners and event organizers.

For special events, venue prices rise steeply. Special events are risky ventures, since organizers must rent the venue in its entirety and pay the winners' purse as well as handle promotion fees. If popular fighters are brought in, organizers gain prestige even if spectator turnout is low and the tournament takes a loss. Many times this is actually planned, since political prestige is far more important to some organizers than mere coin.

## Designing Tournaments

Running a tiered tournament can easily take up an entire game session. You can simplify creating these events by following three simple principles.

First, make sure the tournament is of a size appropriate to the level of the PCs. Don't railroad characters into an event where they are clearly outclassed (unless, of course, they get themselves into it on their own). Tournaments are the perfect opportunity to weed out the unfit. For example, describe the pomp and circumstance of the opening ceremonies, and have the gladiators file into the arena to stand under the blazing sun. As the hours drone by, many begin dropping from the heat (follow the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide* rules for extreme heat). After setting up several such situations, the swarm of potential combatants drops to a manageable number and the players have some interesting fun.

Next, make sure that non-gladiators have things to do before, after, and between fights. Roleplay some major injuries with the healers, making sure to describe the venue. Is it filthy? Is it spotless? Is there a staff of apothecaries on hand? Get agents into the pits to scope out fighters and place discreet bets. Keep the tension taut between fights. Alternatively, involve all of the PCs in the arena battle.

Finally, make NPC gladiators colorful, memorable characters. Every gladiator should have a nickname based on his style of fighting or homeland. Give them personality! PC gladiators will face them in tournaments, and rivalries might develop that carry outside of the arena. This is part of the drama. Make sure the PCs never forget the others that share the arena floor with them, whether they end up as friends or foes.

The rule for creating solid singles and pairs tournaments is the same: create memorable NPCs. Never let your player characters face a generic NPC. Give them something to remember from each and every fight. You can also refer to "DM's Toolbox" in *DRAGON* issue #302 for tips on making memorable NPCs.

Only the largest coliseums can accommodate chariot races, so plot the layout carefully. Refer to *Sword and Fist* for rules on dealing with chariots in combat or see *DRAGON Magazine* issue #294 for more complete rules for vehicles. Pacing is key. The frenetic pace and the constant control of these deadly events should be both nerve-wracking and exhilarating for players. Make sure that races include dirty players as well as honorable ones.

## Running a Tournament

Tournaments are composed of a number of games that are decided upon by the tournament patron. Formats include single-combat, pairs, and teams as well as charioteering, beast hunts, tiered tournaments, and

## SLAVES AND GLADIATORIAL GAMES

While historically many gladiators were slaves or prisoners forced to fight, including such themes in your campaign takes care, an accurate assessment of your players, and an awareness that most campaigns that include slavery focus on the fight against it. Much of the fun to be had from roleplaying involves choosing your character's activities, adventures, and career, and of course, gladiators who are slaves can't make such choices for themselves.

In general, it's both easier and more entertaining for the players to play free gladiators, but the final choice lies with you and your players.

## FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

Like other campaign components, you can choose how much of the gladiatorial theme you'd like to add to your own campaign. Should you choose to include gladiators in your game, here are four options for different levels of gladiatorial combat.

**Background:** There are a few gladiatorial arenas in the campaign, but the characters rarely take part in the games. A character or two might have ties to the arena, but this is not necessary for the campaign. As the characters or specific adventures dictate, they might step into the arena for a time, but only as the means to finishing a larger adventure.

**Occasional Gladiators:** The characters rarely make it to the arena, but they know of their existence and have likely competed in at least a handful of matches. Some might entertain thoughts of becoming more serious participants in the gladiatorial games, but the party's focus remains on adventuring. Arenas in far-off cities might draw the PCs if the games are big enough, and some of the characters have contacts who frequently feed them updates about action in the arena.

**Frequent Gladiators:** While the characters likely see themselves as adventurers first and gladiators second, they compete in the games frequently, either on behalf of a wealthy patron or to further their own goals. Characters likely develop a reputation as gladiators, and such fights impact who and what they know as much as their other adventuring activities. Some parties might go so far as to plan their adventuring around the seasons in the arena.

**Never Leave the Arena:** The party is also a dedicated gladiatorial team, and adventures, combat, and roleplaying opportunities take place entirely (or almost entirely) within the arena. Gladiators might travel a circuit of linked venues, and the standings of the PCs' team becomes almost as important as the level of their characters. While not every session features a gladiatorial match, there are many such fights, and rivalries and the intrigues of the arena are the focus of the campaign.

In addition to choosing how much gladiatorial combat is in the campaign, you can also choose the venues, legality, and prestige of such combat.

**Tavern League:** Gladiatorial combat is little more than a semi-organized league of brawlers that fights in the basements of taverns, in hidden clearings outside of town, and in other out-of-the-way places. Such fighting might be extremely lucrative, but it is seldom legal. The back-room combats of the movie *Fight Club* are one example of this kind of fighting.

**Wandering Fairs:** Circuses and other large groups of entertainers bring the thrill of gladiatorial combat with them. This might range from relatively safe wrestling matches against large humanoids to full-scale combat against trained warriors and monsters intent to kill.

**Small Arenas:** Nobles and other wealthy individuals hold organized, normally non-lethal, bouts between their own champions and the champions of other wealthy patrons. Such matches usually occur inside the private residences of these patrons, often in private arenas with room for a few hundred spectators. Such combat is usually legal, and it is sometimes mirrored by illegal street versions of a similar nature. The organized bouts from the movie *Rob Roy* are one example of such fighting.

**Public Spectacle:** The grand spectacle of Roman times lives in the campaign. Gladiatorial matches take place in front of thousands, if not tens of thousands, and wealth and fame await those who survive the arena.



even entire reenactments of great battles or sieges. All these formats are appropriate in a standard campaign.

The smallest tournaments utilize up to ten participants between all of its individual games. These tournaments are typically amateurish and are usually illegally sponsored by non-nobles seeking to make money. The games are sometimes little more than back-alley pit fights. Most warriors of quality steer clear of these games, as they tend to attract fighters whose reputations have been tarnished by cheating or poor performance. Warriors of raw skill, however, might use these games to seek sponsorship or get noticed by a scout.

Medium-sized tournaments feature up to fifty participants. These tournaments help establish many of the better warriors, and numerous professionals participate in order to keep their skills sharp. These tournaments are almost always sponsored by nobles or wealthy merchants.

The largest tournaments might feature as many as a thousand warriors spread across its various games. These spectacles are usually held annually and afford great prestige and revenues. In standard campaigns, only individuals of great skill and powerful monsters are allowed to participate. Lesser fighters are accepted only if proven before the tournament and if someone of note sponsors them. In historical campaigns, however, there are no limits on who can enter the arena. These bloody affairs are often akin to massacres. The winner or winners might be granted their freedom or they might gain patronage from a wealthy merchant or noble.

## Beasts of War

Beast matches are always popular. Word of true monsters in the arena draws onlookers who ordinarily wouldn't come to the arena. Creatures destined for the arena are kept in pens under the arena floor or in chambers near the arena floor, where they are often released upon unsuspecting gladiators in battle.

Most meat-eating animals have been starved and are ravenous. The most common beasts in the arena are bears, lions, tigers, rhinoceros, elephants, and wolves (see *MONSTER MANUAL* Appendix I: Animals).

Monsters are extremely expensive to obtain due to the danger and skill it takes to acquire them. Rangers and barbarians often capture these monsters in the wild knowing they can earn superb profits for them. Popular monsters in the arena include ankhegs, dire animals, athachs, chuuls, dinosaurs, ettins, hill giants, girallons, gricks, minotaurs, ogres, otyughs, owlbeats, and monstrous insects (scorpions, stag beetles, praying mantises, centipedes, and spiders).

## Spice on the Sand

One of the most interesting aspects of gladiatorial tournaments and campaigns are matches with special conditions or rules. The spectators sometimes call this "putting spice on the sand." For more examples of spice, see the adventure "Pandemonium in the Veins" in *DUNGEON Magazine* issue #96.

**Labyrinth Match:** The normal arena floor is replaced with a labyrinth. Although the top of the maze is open, flying or climbing out of the maze is forbidden. For added spice, the labyrinth might hold traps and other dangers.

**Ocean Battle:** The arena floor is flooded, and the gladiators must fight from small, unstable boats. Those who wear armor or carry other heavy gear must contend with the dangers of drowning in addition to the other hazards of the arena.

**No Resurrection Match:** The gladiators agree beforehand that no one who falls in the arena will be *raised* or *resurrected*. Such matches are usually to the death, and they draw immense crowds. Gladiators and their stables earn double or even triple the reward for winning a no resurrection match.

**Zombie Hordes:** Those who fall in the arena are automatically raised as zombies (or any undead of an appropriate CR) under the control of arena officials, who use the undead to draw out the length of the match, even the stakes when possible, and entertain the crowd. After the match, the undead are destroyed, and the fallen can be *raised* or *resurrected* normally.

**Limited Equipment:** Gladiators agree ahead of time to limit the weapons, equipment, and enhancing magic that they bring into the ring.

**Gather the Rings:** Teams of gladiators race to collect seven rings tied to posts throughout the arena. The first team to bring four of the rings back to the 10 ft. by 10 ft. area in front of their entry point wins the match. The poles are 10 to 15 feet in height, and each ring can only be taken from the post with a successful DC 15 Strength check (the poles themselves are 3-inch-thick wooden beams, hardness 5, 30 hit points, and break DC 23). For added spice, monsters or guards can be assigned to protect specific rings. Arena rules usually prohibit any one creature from carrying more than one ring at a time.

## CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

Gladiatorial campaigns contain as much possibility and potential as any other campaign. A gladiatorial campaign might assume that most of the norms of a D&D campaign are present within the arena and that magic occurs in only a few aspects of the arena, most magical power being saved for gladiatorial matches. Gladiators run the gamut of character races and monsters, but most are humanoids or animals. Alternatively, the campaign can be as homogenous as the realistic version but include a broader variety of what might be considered the last vestiges of gladiatorial fighting today: professional boxing, wrestling, and other modern combat sports.

This campaign might give the characters more flexibility and allow them to enjoy the freedom of their fame within the campaign.

The campaign could be structured around normal adventuring, with occasional participation in an arena with the one-on-one matches of historical origin, or the PCs could be part of a gladiatorial team.

The following sample campaign outline should spur ideas of your own and illustrate some of the possible things that can happen in a gladiatorial campaign or adventure. Remember that like all "Campaign Components," you can add as much or as little of the gladiatorial theme as you like.

## Sample Campaign

The following outline describes a sample campaign where the norms of the D&D game (intelligent monsters, magic, and great individual power) pervade the gladiatorial arena.

**Levels 1-3:** Would-be gladiators are freemen seeking glory, starting in back-alley pitfights or taverns. After a time, young gladiators might be able to secure spots in singles matches and work their way up from there. Members of all classes participate in the arena, and many of the best gladiatorial teams are well-balanced groups from various classes.

Factors and agents can be lone rogues or members of thieves' guilds running illegal establishments. Gladiatorial matches are heavily regulated with stiff fines and even jail time for illegal operations.

**Levels 4-6:** Gladiators at this level have earned a small reputation at local tournaments. Many begin looking for agents to gain representation in a champion stable, and all diligently seek quality training at a reputable school. The best schools remain far beyond the price range of gladiators at this level unless they have a wealthy patron. Lesser schools can still provide good training or important connections. Training at important schools often allows gladiators to command higher prices.

Factors and agents search for new talent to cultivate. Factors want to work for good venues, while agents seek new clients and events for their fighters.

**Levels 7-10:** At this level, gladiators are well known in their region. If they do not have an agent or if they are already members of a reputable stable, they might be seen as potential top-flight gladiators who still need more training and practice. Successful gladiators at this stratum are highly

trained warriors and usually specialize in certain games, weapons, skills, and tactics. Buying and trading gladiators is common, with gladiators vying to get into the powerful stables that compete in the largest annual events. Gladiators need at least 20 Fame points just to use a well-known stable's facilities and pay for their training. Many exotic feats, fighting styles, and weapons are available from these highly skilled trainers.

Agents make large deals. They arrange their own tournaments, and some are beginning to form plans to create their own venues or stables. The stakes for wagering on their gladiators can run very high, often as much as a few thousand gold pieces. Purses are equally as large.

**Levels 11-15:** Gladiators in this stratum are established members of successful stables or up-and-coming members of one of the stellar stables that dominate the largest tournaments. Heated rivalries develop between gladiators of different stables. Deaths in the arena are commonplace, though usually frowned upon. Glory and fame follow gladiators everywhere. Offers from nobles to fight in decadent, private blood matches are frequent. These matches are often ritual duels for honor, using the gladiators as proxies. These fights are a fast way to gain powerful allies and enemies. By this point, gladiators are well known for their skill in specific games. They live more comfortable lives but train constantly in the hope of becoming a grand champion and attaining legendary status.

Agents are beginning to pull in large sums of money. Things start getting risky for agents when better stables start heavily recruiting quality gladiators, sometimes negating the gladiators' need for their agents. Agents must

take special care when playing one stable's rivalry against another's for publicity. More than one agent has been killed by gladiators who feel insulted by repeated negative publicity.

Factors for large venues have no such qualms about publicity. Anything that draws spectators and heats up wagers is fair game. Factors are responsible for a basic level of arena security, and they must be strict about making sure gladiatorial rivalries remain behind the scenes. Bad blood between stables has erupted into riotous carnage in the stands in the past, and it is not good for business.

**Levels 16–20:** Gladiators at this point in their careers are living legends. They command thousands of gold pieces to participate in tournaments and live pampered lifestyles. As part of a powerful stable, they receive all of the training resources they desire. As long as they continue to perform, they want for nothing.

Heated rivalries exist between stables and stablemates. These rivalries are hyped between tournaments, and gossip swirls around the competitors and every move they make. However, most stabled gladiators are kept out of the public eye in order to keep them focused. Celebrations by merchant lords and nobles occasionally bring them out with their stable owners as special guests. Powerful nobles seek to entice legendary warriors to enter their service as bodyguards or fight in private matches against exotic beasts. In the arena, all that remains is victory in the most prestigious tournaments, with monuments erected for the winners and fabulous sums of money awarded to the victors and stable owners. Rivalries eventually come to their natural conclusions through retirement or death.

Many factors are preparing to start establishments of their own. Most coliseums are government-owned. Due to the massive amounts of gold traded in the arena, however, a coliseum could quite possibly be owned by powerful, private individuals.

Private agents are on their way to establishing powerful stables of their own by this point. Rival stable owners plot to kill one another or to lure away the other's fighters. Some private agents have earned enough clout to protect themselves—a few shady matches with the stable's lesser fighters to benefit the local thieves' guild can go a long way in garnering behind-the-scenes protection. Stable agents spend countless hours scouting for new recruits of surpassing caliber. They might sabotage the efforts of other stables or even assassinate their rivals. Agents might likewise be associated with thieves' guilds that could own whole stables and even venues. Such underhanded tactics are a staple for agents at this level. **D**

## THE ARENA GROUNDS



1. The sands of the arena often cover a wood and tile ceiling supported by stone columns. Animals, various supplies, and even slaves can then be stored beneath the arena.



2. The stands usually consist of simple stone step seating. Some amphitheaters, including the Coliseum, had huge canopies spread between wooden spars that reached out over the stands. This provided shade for audience members, who often stayed for day-long celebrations. The patrons at this arena aren't so lucky.



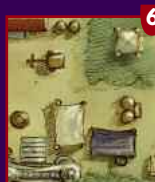
3. Slave gladiators trained in special schools called ludus. There they were armed only with blunt, wooden weapons to prevent them from revolting against their captors. The famed Spartacus led a successful slave revolt using knives stolen from the ludus kitchens.



4. Most gladiators were slaves; few chose to live such short and violent lives. The stables the slaves lived in often contained prisons where slaves who misbehaved could be locked away. Being locked in prison was no way to escape the arena; slaves who refused to work with their trainers could be tortured, executed, or sent into the arena unarmed and unarmored.



5. A D&D campaign might include stables for free gladiators. These stables would hold far more comforts than the slaves' stables, and their owners would treat the gladiators well—so long as they fulfilled their ends of their contracts.



6. In any place that people congregate, merchants can be found. Because the arena attracts people of every kind, nearly anything can be found for sale at the bazaars near the amphitheater.



7. The homes of Roman nobles often included a courtyard garden and fountain. The owner of an amphitheater or the editor of a games would certainly live in such a grand house.



8. The arena is a powerful political tool, and the buildings of the politicians might be conveniently located near the arena. After the games, politicians can often gather crowds to hear them speak on the steps of their offices.



9. Arenas are often associated with temples, especially in D&D where wounds can be healed and famous dead gladiators can be raised. Although likely the temple to a god of battle, any god's temple could make a great deal of money selling spells to the fighters of the arena.





# BLOOD AND GLADIA



As soon as Staflos entered the ring, the gamblers started yelling.

"Three to one on the newcomer!"

"Is that the only weapon he's got?"

"Five to one against the fresh meat!"

The young man had no idea who or what his opponent was going to be. All he could see were the bars of a metal portcullis across the circular arena. But something bulky moved in the shadows behind those bars, stamping and snorting in anticipation. The din of the crowd began to subside, and Staflos heard again his trainer's grim warning: "Remember, your desire to live must be greater than your opponent's. Otherwise your innards will be a spectacle for the mob."

Indeed, the mob thought Staflos was fodder—a bloody transition between main attractions. But the young man was more than he seemed. As his trainer knew, his skill with the dagger in his hand more than made up for his lack of physical presence and strength.

The portcullis across the arena rose, and out came an unarmed half-orc, growling and snarling. The sight bolstered the young man's confidence

for a moment, then the half-orc leapt toward him, jumping farther than any humanoid he'd ever seen before. The half-orc's loping movements were jerky and difficult to predict, and Staflos tried to dodge, but before he knew it, his opponent was upon him, tearing and biting. If Staflos was to have any chance against this creature, he had to act quickly.

The young man's dagger cut an unorthodox path through the air, faster than the eye could see, making a seamless incision across his opponent's underbelly. The half-orc staggered back, aware that he had received a mortal wound, but not quite understanding how. The spectators were likewise confused—they hadn't seen how it happened either. Staflos was just too fast.

A smile curled the young man's lips for the first time that day as the half-orc fell. Now he could start to play.

## GLADIATOR PRESTIGE CLASSES

Gladiators are more than just trained warriors—they are superbly trained warriors. Those who embrace the life of competitive combat fight with a focus that even soldiers rarely possess. After all, the stakes in a fighting

stadium are much more straightforward than they are on a battlefield. In the arena, surrender is not an option. The gladiator knows that only one will emerge from the fight alive, so he can spare no pity for his opponent. Nor can he allow any stray thoughts to distract him from his objective: to be the one left alive. His focus on victory is absolute.

A gladiatorial bout is usually decided by two factors: training and the will to live. Successful gladiators are those who can channel their survival instinct into killer instinct, empowering every blow they land.

The three gladiator prestige classes presented below fit nicely into any fantasy setting where people organize fighting for entertainment. Each excels in a particular form of combat exemplified by the skills and feats required and the special abilities defined in the class descriptions. These abilities are geared to please the crowds, as well as to help the character gain the upper hand in single or group combat.

Of course, there is no reason why members of these prestige classes can't also become adventurers in their own right. A gladiator's abilities make him an excellent candidate for adventuring,

# PRESTIGE

# FAME TOR

should he live long enough to escape or retire from the arena.

How you use these prestige classes is up to you and your DM. Fight well or die with honor.

## INVISIBLE BLADE

Who is this fool who dares to challenge you in the arena? You brandish a greatsword, and he whips out a dagger. You unsheathe your longsword, and he throws off his armor. You advance menacingly, and he only smiles at you—a big, maniacal grin. Is he mad? Does he have a death wish? No, he is an invisible blade, and you have made the classic mistake of underestimating his prowess. As you fight, he seems almost relaxed, stepping lightly to the side, dodging your blows easily. His eyes note your every move, as though taking mental notes about your style. Then, in the split second that you lower your guard, he exploits your error, plunging his weapon into your heart.

Invisible blades are deadly fighters who prefer to use daggers and related weapons in combat. Their training and techniques with these weapons make them just as lethal as any well-armed fighter. Invisible blades enjoy cultivating misconceptions about the level of

danger they present, and they relish any chance to demonstrate that the most unimposing weapons can be the most lethal. Thus, invisible blades are rarely impressed by how mighty their opponents appear.

An invisible blade specializes in fighting with the dagger, kukri, or punching dagger. He is not penalized for using other weapons with which he is proficient, but every class ability he possesses is tied into using one of these three weapons.

The typical invisible blade was once a rogue, who chose this path because his sneak attack ability dovetailed nicely with the abilities of this prestige class. Bards and monks are also good candidates, as are barbarians, fighters, and rangers who are willing to exchange their arsenals of weapons for a less cumbersome approach. Clerics and



by Kolja Liquette

illustrated by

Wayne Reynolds

& Derek Thompson

# CLASSES

# OCCULT SLAYERS BELIEVE THAT MORTALS ARE TOO IRRESPONSIBLE TO WIELD MAGIC.

druids seldom choose this class, perceiving its members as faithless, while paladins ironically view invisible blades as too self-absorbed. Sorcerers

## INVISIBLE BLADE REQUIREMENTS

To become an invisible blade, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

**Bluff:** 8 ranks.

**Sense Motive:** 6 ranks.

**Feats:** Point Blank Shot, Far Shot, Weapon Focus (dagger, kukri, or punching dagger).

**Special:** The candidate must defeat an opponent with a CR equal to his character level in single combat using one or more daggers, kukris, or punching daggers in any combination as his only weapons.

Magical aid in the form of bolstering spells and nonweapon magic items, even if provided by other characters, is permitted in such a combat.

## INVISIBLE BLADE CLASS SKILLS

The invisible blade's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

**Str:** Climb, Jump.

**Dex:** Balance, Escape Artist, Hide, Move Silently, Tumble.

**Con:—**

**Int:** Craft.

**Wis:** Listen, Profession, Sense Motive, Spot.

**Cha:** Bluff, Innuendo Perform.

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

and wizards rarely become invisible blades because they find the class's lack of offensive options and tight focus on weapon use galling.

NPC invisible blades are silently egotistical gladiators who regard their combat style as superior to all other martial philosophies. They place enormous emphasis on making a single decisive strike, thereby ending a bout in one combat round. Most invisible blades pick up their skills in a guild that loans out its members for the games. A few, however, learn from seasoned professionals who expect, a potential gladiator to practice fanatically with the dagger until he can pass the required rite-of-passage combat (see the Invisible Blade Requirements sidebar).

**Hir Die:** d6.

## Class Features

All the following are class features of the invisible blade prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** An invisible blade gains no new weapon, armor, or shield proficiencies.

**Dagger Sneak Attack (Ex):** The invisible blade gains the sneak attack ability (see the Rogue section in Chapter 3 of the *Player's Handbook*) at 1st level if he does not already have it, but the extra damage applies only to sneak attacks made with a dagger, kukri, or punching dagger. When making a sneak attack with one of these weapons, he gains +1d6 damage at 1st level, but this rises to +2d6 at 3rd level and to +3d6 at 5th level. If he already has the sneak attack ability

from a previous class, the applicable damage bonuses stack.

**Unfettered Defense (Ex):** Beginning at 1st level, an invisible blade benefits from an increased survival instinct during combat. Because of this sixth sense, he adds his Intelligence bonus (if any) to his AC in addition to any other modifiers he would normally receive. If the invisible blade is caught flat-footed or otherwise denied his Dexterity modifier to AC, he also loses this bonus. Unfettered defense functions only when the invisible blade is not wearing armor and is armed with one or more daggers, kukris, or punching daggers as his only weapons.

**Bleeding Wound (Ex):** At 2nd level, an invisible blade who makes a successful dagger sneak attack can choose to inflict a bleeding wound, sacrificing 1d6 of the extra damage from the dagger sneak attack. Such an attack deals normal damage on the first round. Thereafter, the wound caused by the invisible blade's dagger bleeds for 1 point of damage per round.

Multiple wounds from the weapon result in cumulative bleeding loss (two wounds for 2 points of damage per round, and so on). The bleeding can only be stopped by a successful Heal check (DC 15) or the application of any cure spell or other healing spell (*heal*, *healing circle*, and so on).

**Uncanny Feint (Ex):** At 3rd level, the invisible blade gains the ability to feint in combat (see the Bluff skill description in Chapter 4 of the *Player's Handbook*) as a move-equivalent action rather than a miscellaneous standard action. At 5th level, the character can feint in combat as a free action. An invisible blade can use uncanny feint only when armed with a dagger, kukri, or punching dagger and no other weapon.

**Feint Mastery (Ex):** At 4th level, an invisible blade armed with a dagger, kukri, or punching dagger becomes so sure of his ability to mislead opponents that he can take 10 on all Bluff checks when feinting in combat (see the Bluff skill description in Chapter 4 of the *Player's Handbook*), even if stress and distractions would normally prevent him from doing so.

## OCCULT SLAYER

Rare among gladiators, the occult slayer is driven to confront any arcane or divine spellcaster who steps into the

## INVISIBLE BLADE ADVANCEMENT

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Dagger sneak attack +1d6, unfettered defense
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+0	Bleeding wound
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Dagger sneak attack +2d6, uncanny feint (move-equivalent action)
4th	+4	+1	+4	+1	Feint mastery
5th	+5	+1	+4	+1	Dagger sneak attack +3d6, uncanny feint (free action)

fighting pits. Occult slayers believe that mortals are too irresponsible to wield magic, and that those who dare to do so must be slain. Spellcasters who become occult slayers are considered to have seen the error of their ways—although they may still cast spells, they rely primarily on their battle prowess and their ability to resist magical effects to defeat their enemies.

The occult slayer comes into her own through exhaustive training. Every regimen she performs is an exercise that refines her anger against spellcasters into martial skill. Each occult slayer forms a preternatural bond with her masterwork weapon of choice, which serves as the instrument of her vengeance.

This prestige class is ideal for individuals who have been victimized

by spellcasters and seek acceptable ways to oppose them. Most occult slayers begin their careers as fighters, although barbarians and rangers often take this path as well. Monks and rogues have also been known to embrace this calling, but bards and paladins find the occult slayer's preoccupation with spellcasters stifling. Clerics, druids, sorcerers, and wizards—the primary targets of occult slayers—tend not to adopt this prestige class, although such characters are not without precedent.

NPC occult slayers do not form organizations within gladiator societies because they have discovered that congregating in one place attracts spellcasters intent on making preemptive strikes against them. Instead, occult slayers discreetly meet from time to time to exchange information about spellcasting opponents they have targeted for matches. When an occult slayer steps into an arena, she is usually presented as a last-minute addition to the roster so as not to scare off her chosen target. Otherwise, the occult slayer operates alone, traveling between venues in search of matches that involve spellcasters. Because of the inherent discretion that occult slayers display, a candidate for this prestige class must be chosen and trained by another occult slayer who is willing to share her secrets.

**Hit Die:** d8.

### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the occult slayer prestige class.

#### Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

The occult slayer is proficient with all simple and martial weapons and all armor (heavy, medium, and light) and shields. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump,

### OCCULT SLAYER REQUIREMENTS

To qualify as an occult slayer, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +5.

**Knowledge (arcana):** 4 ranks

**Spellcraft:** 3 ranks.

**Feats:** Improved Initiative, Weapon

Focus (any).

**Special:** The candidate (or someone close to her) must have been brought to o hit points or below by a magical attack.

### OCCULT SLAYER CLASS SKILLS

The occult slayer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

**Str:** —

**Dex:** —

**Con:** —

**Int:** Craft, Knowledge (arcana),

Spellcraft.

**Wis:** Innuendo, Listen, Profession, Sense Motive.

**Cha:** Gather Information.

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 2 + Int modifier.

### OCCULT SLAYER ADVANCEMENT

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+2	Magical defense +2, weapon bond
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+3	Vicious strike, mind over magic 1/day
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+3	Auravision, magical defense +3
4th	+4	+4	+1	+4	Cloak of absence, mind over magic 2/day
5th	+5	+4	+1	+4	Blank thoughts, magical defense +4





Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble. Also, the occult slayer takes a -1 penalty on Swim checks for every 5 pounds of armor or equipment carried.

**Magical Defense (Ex):** The occult slayer's constant training in countering magic of all types manifests itself as a bonus on saving throws against spells or magical effects. This bonus is +2 at 1st level, but it increases to +3 at 3rd level and to +4 at 5th level.

**Mind Over Magic (Su):** Starting at 3rd level, an occult slayer can cause spells (and spell-like abilities) targeted against her to rebound onto the originators as a free action. This ability otherwise functions like the *spell turning* spell (caster level equals the character's occult slayer level + 5). The occult slayer can use this ability once per day at 2nd level and twice per day at 4th level.

**Weapon Bond (Su):** At 1st level, an occult slayer must choose a particular masterwork weapon as the focus of her power. Upon making her selection, she immediately forms a bond with the chosen weapon that imbues it with the force of her hatred for spellcasters. Thereafter, any hit she makes with that weapon against a spellcaster or a creature with spell-like abilities deals an extra +1d6 points of damage. If this particular weapon is lost or destroyed, the occult slayer loses the ability to deal the extra damage until she acquires and bonds with another masterwork weapon of the same type.

**Vicious Strike (Ex):** At 2nd level, an occult slayer who takes a ready action to disrupt a spellcaster deals double damage if the attack hits.

**Auravision (Su):** At 3rd level, the occult slayer can see magical auras at a range of up to 60 feet as a free action. This ability otherwise functions like the *detect magic* spell.

**Cloak of Absence (Su):** Upon reaching 4th level, an occult slayer becomes more difficult to locate through divinations such as *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *locate object*, and detection spells. This ability functions like a *nondetection* spell (caster level equals the character's occult slayer level), except that activating it is a free action and its effects apply to the slayer only. The occult slayer can use this ability once per day per class level.

**Blank Thoughts (Ex):** At 5th level, the occult slayer can induce a state of

mental absence, thereby becoming immune to mind-influencing effects (charms, compulsions, patterns, phantasms, and morale effects) for a number of rounds per day equal to her occult slayer level. This duration need not be used all at once; the character may activate this ability for as little as 1 round at a time. An occult slayer who is already under a mind-influencing effect when she activates this ability may attempt a second saving throw to resist the effect, but she is limited to this one additional attempt through this ability. Activating blank thoughts is a free action.

## REAPING MAULER

Truly wise gladiators are always wary of unarmed opponents, for such adversaries are almost always more than they seem. Such an opponent might even be a reaping mauler—the worst nightmare of a gladiator who depends on weapon skills to win. Anyone who dares to wield a weapon against a reaping mauler had better make use of it quickly, because the opportunity won't last long.

Reaping maulers are the back-breakers, the limb-twisters, and the neck-snappers among pit fighters. Grapplers of the highest order, they wear nothing heavier than light armor in combat to maximize their flexibility, and they use no weapons to achieve their gruesome victories, for they prefer the intimacy of a barehanded kill. Reaping maulers want to be close enough to taunt their opponents in whispers while crushing the life out of them, to smell their fear, and to watch the despair creep over their faces when they realize just how useless their weapons are during a grapple.

Fighters are most often attracted to the reaping mauler prestige class, but it is not uncommon for barbarians or rangers to embrace this path. Paladins and clerics have also been known to dabble in this prestige class, treating the combat style as both good, hearty sport and a means to render their opponents unconscious without killing them. Druids sometimes become reaping maulers to enhance their ability to tame animals by hand, and even rogues and monks occasionally adopt the class. Bards, sorcerers, and wizards usually lack the physical strength to be good candidates for the class, but they

respect reaping maulers for their obvious spell-disrupting abilities.

NPC reaping maulers are burly, rowdy individuals who carry themselves with an air of invulnerability. When it comes to the simple pleasures of life—drink and food—they believe the world exists for their convenience. In the reaping mauler's mind, there is no problem that can't be solved with brawn. If something can be taken by force, he feels that it must naturally belong to him, and rarely does anyone openly oppose this concept.

**Hit Die:** d10.

## Class Features

All the following are class features of the reaping mauler prestige class.

### REAPING MAULER REQUIREMENTS

To become a reaping mauler, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +5.

**Escape Artist:** 8 ranks.

**Tumble:** 5 ranks.

**Feats:** Clever Wrestling (see feat description below), Improved Unarmed Strike.

**Special:** The candidate must have defeated at least three opponents one size category larger than himself with his bare hands.

### REAPING MAULER CLASS SKILLS

The reaping mauler's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

**Str:** Climb, Jump, Swim.

**Dex:** Escape Artist, Tumble.

**Con:** —

**Int:** Craft.

**Wis:** Profession.

**Cha:** Intimidate.

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 2 + Int modifier.

# REAPING MAULERS ARE THE BACK-BREAKERS, THE LIMB-TWISTERS, AND THE NECK-SNAPPERS AMONG PIT FIGHTERS.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The reaping mauler is proficient with light armor but gains no new weapon or shield proficiencies. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble. Also, the reaping mauler takes a -1 penalty on Swim checks for every 5 pounds of armor or equipment carried.

**Improved Grapple (Ex):** Beginning at 1st level, whenever a reaping mauler makes a successful unarmed strike, he can immediately attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. In addition, he can deal normal damage rather than subdual damage while grappling without taking the usual penalty on his grapple checks.

**Mobility (Ex):** When wearing light armor or no armor, a 1st-level reaping mauler gains the benefits of the Mobility feat, even if he does not meet the prerequisites.

**Adept Wrestling (Ex):** Beginning at 2nd level, a reaping mauler who is wearing light armor or no armor gains a +1 bonus on all opposed grapple checks and opposed Dexterity or Strength checks he makes. This bonus increases to +2 at 4th level.

**Counter Grapple (Ex):** When held or pinned, a 3rd-level reaping mauler wearing light armor or no armor can attempt either a grapple check or an Escape Artist check opposed by his opponent's grapple check result to

free himself as normal. If he fails the check he has chosen, he can immediately attempt the other check as a free action.

**Sleeper Lock (Ex):** At 3rd level, a reaping mauler learns how to render an opponent unconscious with pressure. If the reaping mauler pins his opponent while grappling and maintains the pin for 1 full round, the opponent must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 10 + the reaping mauler's class level + the reaping mauler's Wisdom modifier) at the end of the round or fall unconscious for 1d3 rounds.

**Devastating Grapple (Ex):** If a 5th-level reaping mauler pins his opponent while grappling and maintains the pin for 3 full rounds, the opponent must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + the reaping mauler's class level + the reaping mauler's Wisdom modifier) at the end of the round or die.

### Clever Wrestling [General]

You have a better than normal chance to escape or wriggle free from a big creature's grapple or pin.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Unarmed Strike, Small or Medium-size.

**Benefit:** When your opponent is larger than Medium-size, you gain a circumstance bonus on your grapple check to escape a grapple or pin. The size of the bonus depends on your opponent's size, according to the following table.

Opponent Size	Bonus
Colossal	+8
Gargantuan	+6
Huge	+4
Large	+2 <sup>D</sup>

### REAPING MAULER ADVANCEMENT

Class Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	Improved grapple, Mobility
2nd	+2	+3	+3	+0	Adept wrestling +1
3rd	+3	+3	+3	+1	Counter grapple, sleeper lock
4th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Adept wrestling +2
5th	+5	+4	+4	+1	Devastating grapple



# SAYING THE RIGHT THINGS

## Optional Rules for Social Skills

by Eric Cagle • illustrated by Todd Harris

As a roleplaying system, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game can offer some fine moments of play that involve nothing more than interaction between PCs and NPCs. Not every problem can be solved through the use of sword or magic—sometimes a simple turn of phrase can be what’s required to keep the adventure moving.

The social interaction skills in the D&D game are Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive. Although it might seem like an oversimplification to reduce the total number of ways that people interact to a mere four skills, in truth they cover almost every roleplaying situation in which social interaction occurs.

This article examines how these skills can be used in an adventure, how they interact with each other, and how you can flesh out your character’s personality by using them. A few optional rules are also presented, but as usual, it’s up to the DM to decide whether to allow them in her game.

### BLUFF

*“No really, we’re here on behalf of the king himself! Something really hush-hush, if you know what I mean. So be a*

*sport and open up the gate for us, eh? There’s a lad. . . .”*

Sometimes a little white lie is all it takes to get what you want. Although the Bluff skill is primarily cultivated by rogues, bards, and other characters who depend on deception for their livelihoods, almost any character can benefit from the ability to obscure the truth a bit now and then. The downside to being a superb liar, of course, is that people might get wise to your ways and stop believing you altogether—usually just at the wrong time. This is doubly true in the pseudomedieval world of the D&D game, where written contracts are rare and a person’s word is binding. Thus, a character who garners a reputation as a liar could find it difficult to do business, make purchases, or gain assistance from others.

The Bluff skill represents the ability to lie, cajole, wheedle, or hide the truth in some way. A character who is bluffing uses a combination of deceptive body language, fast-talking, misdirection, and old-fashioned con games to convince others of something that isn’t true. Bluff also works on a physical level, allowing a nimble character to feint, duck, and

weave to confuse and confound an opponent in combat.

### When to Use Bluff

A player must state that his character is attempting to bluff an opponent. Whenever this occurs, the player must describe to the DM in detail what the lie is. The description of the Bluff skill in Chapter 2: Skills in the *Player’s Handbook* gives good examples against which the DM can compare the lie to decide what modifiers should apply to the attempt. As with the other skills discussed here, the DM is perfectly justified in making Bluff checks for the players and keeping the results hidden. This tactic keeps the players unsure of how well their gambits have worked.

There are a few times when a character can attempt to bluff an opponent in combat, but this skill is also useful in nearly any social circumstance. As mentioned before, the only real limitations are those that can cause fallout in social situations.

### Alternate Uses

One obvious alternative use of the Bluff skill is for intimidation.

### Bluff and Intimidate

**Synergy:** Sometimes a character wants to throw his weight around by acting like he's tougher than he really is. In such a

case, the Bluff skill can actually be used to intimidate someone. Using this optional rule, a character with at least 5 ranks of Bluff gains a +1 bonus to Intimidate checks for every additional 5 ranks of Bluff he has. This bonus is in addition to the character's regular synergy bonus.

**Intimidating through Bluff:** Alternately, characters may gain a bonus to Intimidate checks by making a successful Bluff check. For every 5 points by which the PC surpasses the opposed Sense Motive check, the PC gains a +1 bonus to her Intimidate check. This use of the Bluff skill may not be used with the Bluff and Intimidate Synergy use noted above.

### Roleplaying Opportunities

A character who focuses on the Bluff skill is a natural liar, but there are many different types of liars. Here are some examples of personality types that excel in the use of the Bluff skill.

**The Grifter:** To this character, words

reason, he uses the Bluff skill constantly, weaving outrageous deceptions, often without any particular reason. If caught in a lie, he simply adds more layers to the web until the truth is completely hidden, even from himself. Not exactly in touch with reality, the compulsive liar probably has few or no ranks in the Diplomacy skill.

### DIPLOMACY

*"We can settle this through steel and both die, or we can figure out some sort of compromise and live to see tomorrow. Which will it be?"*

### When to Use Diplomacy

Whether they know it or not, characters use the Diplomacy skill all the time. This skill represents typical social interaction, be it haggling for a new sword or trying to convince a city guard to let a group through the gate. For clarity's sake, the DM should require the players to state exactly what message they're trying to get across in such discussions. Diplomacy checks are required only if the situation could go either way or if the characters say or do something outside the social norm (a frequent occurrence with adventurers). Again,

**TABLE 1: HAGGLING**

#### Opposed Diplomacy Check Result

Missed by 10

#### Effect

**How dare you insult me!** The haggling attempt fails, and the NPC demands an additional 20% above the original asking price.

Missed by 5

**I don't think so.** The haggling attempt fails, and the NPC demands an additional 10% above the original asking price.

Made the DC

**I'll cut you a deal.** The NPC agrees to sell the item for the price asked by the character.

Succeed by 5

**Hey, I like you.** The NPC agrees to sell the item for 5% below the character's offer.

Succeed by 10

**Got it for a steal.** The NPC agrees to sell the item for 10% below the character's offer.

## Characters with ranks in Diplomacy prefer to settle disputes with words instead of steel . . .

have more power than steel. The grifter is the silver-tongued devil who can sell a mirror to a medusa. He does not bluff for the sake of deception—every lie is carefully crafted and has multiple backup lies in place to support it. The grifter bluffs to get ahead in life.

**The Swashbuckler:** Where the grifter bluffs using words, the swashbuckler lies with her body. She is fast and nimble on her feet, feinting and dodging with consummate ease. In addition to lots of ranks in the Bluff skill, the swashbuckler probably has some ranks in Tumble, Jump, Hide, or Pick Pocket.

### The Compulsive Liar:

To this character, lying comes as easily as breathing. For whatever

In a world filled with dangerous monsters, armed bandits, and powerful magic, being able to talk your way out of a situation can be extremely valuable. The Diplomacy skill represents an understanding of etiquette, social grace, tact, societal traditions, and the proper use of titles. It is also one of the broadest skills, encompassing negotiation, seductive wiles, debating talent, and empathy—all for the purpose of giving the right impression and getting what you want.

In the D&D game, the Diplomacy skill is used to change an NPC's attitude toward the speaker—usually for the better. All parties to a negotiation make opposed Diplomacy checks, with the winner gaining the upper hand in the debate.

the DM should feel free to make these checks and keep the results secret, so that the players are never sure whether they were successful or not.

### Alternate Uses

Here are some optional rules for using the Diplomacy skill in your game.

**Divine Diplomacy:** Clerics and other users of divine magic who have access to such spells as *lesser planar ally*, *planar ally*, and *greater planar ally* can use the Diplomacy skill to reduce the "asking price" for the cooperation of the extraplanar beings they summon. The divine magic user and the summoned being must make opposed Diplomacy checks. If successful, the divine magic user can renegotiate the payment demanded. For example, suppose a cleric uses *greater planar ally* to conjure a hound archon, who demands the character's +2 *holy mace* in exchange for its services. With a successful Diplomacy check, the character can convince the hound archon to accept a lesser magic item. Of course, the DM can still insist that the character give the being a good

reason to accept the reduced offer, such as pointing out their similar beliefs or goals, or mentioning that the item requested is vital to the success of a mission important to the being or to its superiors.

**Haggling:** Characters can use the Diplomacy skill to bargain for goods and services, including those of a magical nature. When discussing the sale of an item or service, the character can attempt to lower the asking price with a Diplomacy check opposed by the vendor's Diplomacy check result. The character attempting to haggle can ask for up to a 10% reduction in price with this technique. For each 5% reduction requested, however, the NPC gains a +5 circumstance bonus on his own Diplomacy checks during the bargaining process. Consult Table 1: Haggling to determine the outcome of the haggling attempt.

### Roleplaying Opportunities

Characters with ranks in Diplomacy tend to believe in logic, reason, discourse, and compromise as valid methods of problem solving. They prefer to settle disputes with words instead of steel, and they can become quite dismayed when dealing with illogical people. Here are some examples of personality types that make heavy use of the Diplomacy skill.

**The Negotiator:** This character relies on common sense, reason, and compromise to get things done. She tries to exhaust all other options before resorting to violence. The negotiator probably has several ranks in Sense Motive, but she may have no ranks at all in Bluff or Intimidate. In general, she prefers to rely on truth and reason to make her points rather than deception or threats.

**The Seducer:** The seducer uses the Diplomacy skill to enthrall members of the opposite sex. His speech is peppered with sexual suggestions and accentuated with suggestive body language. If the seducer is a rogue, he probably has ranks in Read Lips, Innuendo, and Pick Pockets (the better to steal from bedazzled targets).

**The Proxy:** The proxy is accustomed to speaking on behalf of someone else. She is always conscious of her client's wishes and is careful not to reveal any sensitive information. The proxy

typically has ranks in Sense Motive and, if a rogue, Read Lips and Innuendo as well.

### INTIMIDATE

*"It's a pity you won't tell me what I want to hear. Of course, I'm not a man of violence. I'd never dream of hurting anyone, but I'm afraid that my associate here has no such compunctions."*

When sensibility, reason, and diplomacy fail, adventurers can always fall back on threats and intimidation to get what they want. Intimidation is the brute-force approach to getting answers and convincing others to do what you want them to. Why waste time trying to reason with people when you can threaten them instead?

Nevertheless, the Intimidate skill is a two-edged sword. As with those who overuse the Bluff skill, characters who

it's difficult to enforce player behavior, when an NPC makes a successful Intimidate check against a PC, make sure that the player understands the situation and knows that you expect her to play along.

As with the other skills discussed in this article, it is often preferable for the DM to roll for a character attempting an Intimidate check, so that he can keep the result a secret.

### Alternate Uses

One of the easiest ways to intimidate people is to convince them that you are stronger and more likely to cause harm than they are. The barbarian with bulging muscles and an enormous axe can intimidate even the most hardened warrior if he looks tough enough. Listed here are the variant

## When a barbarian begins to scream and froth at the mouth, anyone is a little more likely to do what he says.

rely solely on Intimidate soon become known for being bullies, tyrants, or simply unreasonable people. NPCs who might otherwise be inclined to offer help tend to concentrate on making themselves scarce instead. Such a reputation suits some characters just fine, but it can make life difficult when success depends on gaining the willing cooperation of others.

### When to Use Intimidate

Many martially oriented characters, such as fighters, barbarians, and rogues, use this skill frequently. As a result, most NPCs come to expect such behavior from any stranger clad in armor and toting an enormous sword.

In fact, it's possible for a PC or NPC to intimidate someone without even intending to do so. Any character who displays exceptional fighting prowess, magical talent, or political clout might intimidate someone simply by showing off, or even by entering the room in a dramatic fashion. See Alternate Uses (below) for an optional rule for adjudicating such uses of Intimidate.

Remember that NPCs can use this skill against the PCs as well. Although

intimidation rules presented in *Masters of the Wild*.

**Raging Intimidation:** A raging barbarian gains a +4 bonus to both his Strength and his Constitution scores. This variant rule also grants him a +4 morale bonus on his Intimidate checks. After all, when a barbarian begins to scream and froth at the mouth, just about anyone is a little more likely to do what he says.

**Intimidation through Strength:** Sometimes it's appropriate to change the key ability of a particular skill (see Variant: Skills with Different Abilities in Chapter 3: Running the Game in the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*). While intimidation is usually a function of Charisma, this option allows a character to apply his Strength modifier rather than his Charisma modifier to Intimidate checks. This assumes, of course, that he accompanies such attempts with appropriate displays of might, such as breaking objects or showing off impressive muscles. With this variant, a barbarian who is raging is even

better at intimidation than he otherwise would be because of his increased Strength score.

#### Imposing Aura: As

characters advance in level, they exude an air of superiority and confidence that can cow lesser beings. To represent this, a character with 5 or more ranks in Intimidate makes an automatic Intimidate check (DC 20) as a free action when entering a new area. To make this check, add the character's Intimidate modifier plus his character level to the result of a 1d20 roll. Success means that every NPC whose character level is lower than the PC's

### Roleplaying Opportunities

Characters who excel at intimidation are imposing, frightening individuals who are aware of their own superiority and their ability to inflict pain. While use of the Intimidate skill is commonly associated with fighters and rogues, there's nothing stopping a player from developing a sorcerer or wizard who bullies everyone around her.

The following personality types typify characters who depend on intimidation to get their way.

**The Hothead:** The hothead has a serious temper that can easily get out of control. Such a character might otherwise be unassuming, rational, and

the hothead's. The bully uses the Intimidate skill because he enjoys it. He likes nothing better than to see someone trembling in front of him, obeying his commands without hesitation. Compromise and reason are often lost on the bully, who has few or no ranks in Diplomacy. He probably doesn't have ranks in Sense Motive either—the only emotion he cares about is fear.

### SENSE MOTIVE

*"As you listen to the watch captain give his report, you notice that something doesn't seem quite right. He fidgets and absently pats the pouch hanging from his belt. You're pretty sure that he's not telling the truth."*

In a world filled with danger, deceit, and duplicitous characters, a bit of suspicion about another person's motives can be the difference between life and death. The Sense Motive skill is used to determine when a person is attempting any sort of bluff. It can help a character detect outright lies, or even determine whether an NPC is holding back information of some kind. A character using the Sense Motive skill does not actually have to say anything; simply observing the subject is enough.

The character watches the target's body language and listens to his speech mannerisms and phrasing. Someone using Sense Motive makes note of how the target's eyes dart back and forth, how he holds his hands and body, and whether he does anything that appears suspicious. In essence, a character using this skill homes in on the subconscious thoughts of the target—most people demonstrate certain small movements and mannerisms when they have something to hide or are revealing only part of the truth.

This skill can be used in the thick of battle as well. A trained fighter, especially one who relies on speed and agility, is constantly watching his opponent. How his adversary carries her body, moves her feet, and subtly twists her wrist before a thrust can be a significant aid in overcoming feints and anticipating special maneuvers.

### When to Use Sense Motive

Players may freely make Sense Motive checks, but if DMs find that their players are making excessive use of the

**TABLE 2: SENSE MOTIVE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL**

Sense Motive Check Result	Effect
Missed by 10	<b>Total confusion.</b> The DM gives the player a completely false motivation for the target (desire instead of hatred, kindness instead of disdain, and so forth). Each additional Sense Motive check by that character against the same target incurs a -2 penalty for the remainder of the encounter.
Missed by 5	<b>Slight confusion.</b> The character fails the check and incurs a -1 penalty on Sense Motive checks against that target for the remainder of the encounter.
Made the DC	<b>Success.</b> The player learns the target's basic motivation and can tell whether that NPC is lying.
Succeed by 5	<b>Insight.</b> The character discovers whether the target is telling the truth. In addition, the PC gains a +1 circumstance bonus on Sense Motive checks against that target for the remainder of the encounter.
Succeed by 10	<b>Deep insight.</b> The character learns the target's basic motivation (anger, fear, greed, lust, or the like) and gains a +2 circumstance bonus on Sense Motive checks against that target for the remainder of the encounter.

defers to her. Such an NPC's attitude changes to friendly (see NPC attitudes in Chapter 5: Campaigns in the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*) for the purpose of giving information, offering help, and advocating the character's position. However, this attitude is superficial and applies only when the character directly interacts with the NPC. At other times, the NPC maintains an unfriendly attitude toward the character in question. Even the friendly attitude the NPC presents to the

character's face is subject to change if the PC harms, insults, or otherwise attacks the person she has intimidated.

even pleasant, up until the moment that he starts to lose his tenuous grip on his anger. When enraged, the character throws things, punches anything nearby, and generally makes an imposing spectacle of himself. The hothead is particularly intimidating if he is a fighter, a barbarian, or a spellcaster who relies on flashy, dangerous magic.

**The Stoic:** Where the hothead is explosive, the stoic is ice-cold and creepy. Her threats are descriptive and delivered with almost no emotion. The stoic says a great deal with almost no words—a stare, a nod, or a slight nervous twitch is all she needs to get her point across.

**The Bully:** The bully's personality combines elements of the stoic's and

skill, remember that it takes at least 1 full minute to gain information with Sense Motive. DMs might also make secret Sense Motive checks for their players when the situation warrants or when they think a particularly attentive PC would notice that something is amiss.

Of course, NPCs can also use this skill against the PCs. If the characters are acting suspicious, one or more of your NPCs can attempt Sense Motive checks to find out what the characters are really up to. Law enforcement officials in particular rely heavily on this skill—nothing keeps the players on their toes more than a town constable who doesn't trust the characters and keeps a keen eye on their actions.

### Alternate Uses

Table 2 (above) gives some optional results for Sense Motive checks. The information in the table defines exactly what sort of information the character discovers with a Sense Motive check against a single target NPC, but the use of this variant rule also increases the stakes for failure.

Another variant use of the Sense Motive skill allows the DM to impart information about important NPCs to the players via Sense Motive checks. For each 10 minutes spent observing the target, a character can attempt a Sense Motive check to learn the following information: political affiliation (if any), class (especially if the target is trying to pass himself off as a member of some other class), and character level. A Character can also use Sense Motive when he wants to appraise the skill of another character (usually an opponent). When using Sense Motive in this manner, use the following DCs:

Information	DC
Opposing character's political affiliation	15
Opposing character's class	20
Opposing character's level	20
Opposing character's ranks in a particular skill*	20
Opposing character's total attack and damage bonus with primary weapon	25

\*Note that you must be able to observe a character using the skill before you are able to determine the character's skill level.

A character can also use the Sense Motive skill to find out the general attitude of the people. The results of such a check are given on Table 3: Sense Motive for a Population, below.

This use of the skill provides only emotions, not specifics, upon a successful check. For example, a character could tell whether a city's populace is content, concerned, fearful, or oppressed. To find out the

**The Diplomat:** The business of diplomacy is a delicate one, requiring a character to be just as good at observing as she is at weaving lies or mouthing placating statements. The diplomat uses Sense Motive to learn the general attitude of the person she is dealing with. She tries to discover lies but has the discretion not to reveal them to

**TABLE 3: SENSE MOTIVE FOR A POPULATION**

Sense Motive Check Result	Effect
Missed by 10	<b>Total confusion.</b> The character fails to learn anything and incurs a -2 penalty on Sense Motive checks against that population for the next 24 hours.
Missed by 5	<b>Slight confusion.</b> The character fails to learn anything and incurs a -1 penalty on Sense Motive checks against that population for the next 24 hours.
Made the DC	<b>Success.</b> The character discovers the general mood of the populace.
Succeed by 5	<b>Insight.</b> The character discovers the general mood of the populace as well as the primary source of the attitude.
Succeed by 10	<b>Deep insight.</b> The character discovers the general mood of the populace, its source, and one other motivation. For example, perhaps the duke has been steadily increasing taxes, making everyone unhappy, because he is raising an army to attack the neighboring duchy.

cause of these emotions, the character must make one or more separate Gather Information checks.


### Roleplaying Opportunities

Almost every character attempts to use Sense Motive at some point, but what sorts of characters excel at it? Here are some ideas for personality types that make common use of the Sense Motive skill.

**The Observer:** The observer usually has several ranks in Sense Motive. Much like Sherlock Holmes, she notices everything that happens around her. This character probably also has ranks in Search, Spot, and Listen. Some observers also have the annoying habit of pointing out others' motivations.

**The Paranoid:** This character watches others like a hawk because he believes they intend him harm. The paranoid makes judicious use of the Sense Motive skill to watch for anything suspicious or dangerous. He is particularly keen on gaining information that relates to him specifically. The paranoid even uses Sense Motive on allies.

her target unless doing so will accelerate negotiations in some way. The diplomat watches for subtle clues of body language and listens for minute inflections in the target's voice. Then she uses that information to decide her next move.

**The Opportunist:** The opportunist uses the Sense Motive skill primarily in combat. He watches his opponent intently, looking for the slightest sign of weakness that he might exploit with a killing blow. The opportunist is more concerned with body language and fighting style than with the subtleties of language, so he might actually be quite dense when it comes to using this skill in social situations. 

# THE IRON PATH

## Martial Arts Styles for Fantasy Cultures



Like a fine weapon or armor handed down over years of history and tradition, so too the secrets of a martial art are passed down from master to student. Some martial arts are a family tradition. Others might be openly taught at military institutions. Still others might be secret, known only to a precious few who guard their fighting style as a heritage of their people.



by Dean Poisso • illustrated by Jeff Laubenstein

Although most commonly associated with Asian cultures, martial traditions have evolved in cultures across the globe. India, Indonesia, and Greece are home to martial traditions as old as any found in China, Korea, or Japan. Your D&D campaign should be no different. Martial arts are not confined solely to campaigns set in *Oriental Adventures*. Whether elves, halflings, or dwarves, each race guards its own secret martial traditions.

Come then and learn some of these secrets. You might decide that your characters have the will and the desire to walk the iron path of the warrior.

### USING MARTIAL ARTS STYLES

In *Oriental Adventures*, martial arts styles represent the training and knowledge of a special fighting form. This form is made up of a list of feats, but characters attain mastery of the martial art by gaining a few specific feats and ranks in particular skills. Once a character meets the prerequisites, she gains the benefit of the martial arts style. Most of the time, these benefits mildly improve the character, granting no more power than a feat would—often less. Below we present the mastery rules for several new martial arts styles.

#### ELVES: MASTERS OF BLADE AND BOW

Elven traditions and culture survived through savage wars, periods of great peace, and eras of ruling power. Renowned for their intelligence, grace, and peaceful ways, the elven nations have not survived without developing strong defenses.

Countless battles against invading orc hordes and humans offered rare glimpses of the refined martial arts of the elves. Elves have long memories, fueling their vigilance against the day that they must bring those skills to bear. Because of this history, the fearsome and ancient martial tradition stands on a solid foundation of centuries of confrontation.

Elven culture is subtle in its bearing. Their war arts are synonymous with the bow and longsword. The simplicity of these two weapons forms the basis of their greatest martial traditions. Most foes of the elves fear them for these two ubiquitous weapons alone. Few foes who have met the elven

masters of their martial arts traditions have lived to speak of the encounter.

#### Winterlight

At one with their bows, practitioners of the Winterlight tradition are said to be able to strike a falling leaf at more than 200 paces. The culmination of thousands of years of intermittent warfare against invaders, the Winterlight style cultivates speed, precision, and accuracy through heightened awareness. Every aspect of learning this art is governed by a master who instructs his student in all aspects of archery, including the delicate and painstaking crafting of the bow and arrows themselves.

Practitioners of Winterlight must swear to protect the elven nations and revere all life. The taking of life with their deadly and mysterious art is considered the most serious of responsibilities, carried out with grim determination when necessary. Members of the Order of the Winter Moon, as the cadre of Winterlight practitioners is known, believe that their weapons take life in order to maintain life. Their creed: One arrow, one life.

**Prerequisites:** Martial Weapon Proficiency (Longbow or Composite Longbow), Precise Shot, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (Longbow or Composite Longbow), Zen Archery\*, 6 or more ranks of Craft (bowmaking).

**Benefit:** You have expanded your awareness to such a degree that you may add your Wisdom modifier instead of your Dexterity modifier to any attack roll for any ranged attack up to the first range increment of the weapon.

\*From *Sword and Fist*, see the Feats From Other Sources sidebar.

#### Dance of Blades

Not to be confused with the legendary Bladesong sword style, the less well-known Dance of Blades is no less effective. With the true origins of this style lost to even elven scholars, some sages speculate that the Dance of Blades style came from the dark elves, brought back to the elven nations by a sympathetic good drow as a gift. Some among the elven nobility say the drow stole this style from the elven people. More

than one bloody conflict has erupted in an attempt to settle such arguments.

The Dance of Blades style emphasizes the use of the longsword with fluid yet deceptively aggressive attacks. The goal is to exhaust opponents, forcing them to reveal openings in their defense. Bladedancers spin with a whirling dance, their blades cutting through the air with tremendous speed and power. With graceful twists and turns, Bladedancers keep their blades in constant motion. Opponents find it difficult to draw a line of attack, giving Bladedancers a strong defense on all quarters.

**Prerequisites:** Dodge, Expertise, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Whirlwind Attack, 6 or more ranks each of Perform (dance must be a chosen performance type) and Tumble.

**Benefit:** When you make a 5-foot adjust after using the Whirlwind Attack feat, you may make an additional attack against an opponent now within reach that you did not attack with your whirlwind attack. This attack is at your highest attack bonus. This extra attack uses up one of your attacks of opportunity for the round.

#### Bladesong

The most famous martial tradition of the elven nations, the Bladesong is also one of its most cherished. Seen as an art as well as a means of cultural preservation, the Bladesong style descended from what was once purely a warrior tradition in the days when the elven people first picked up arms to defend themselves. Nothing in elven culture remains untouched by the need for beauty, and this inevitably includes their war arts. The



natural grace and internal resolve of the elves turned this technique into an art unto itself.

The original form of the Bladesong was created when elven warriors combined their love of dance and song with their beautiful fighting and preternatural grace. Their dancing attacks and the fluid motions of their slim longswords, coupled with their haunting warsongs, provided economy of motion and confused enemies in combat. As the style slowly evolved over millennia, mage-warrior practitioners learned to weave their somatic gestures along with exquisite control of their weapons. This brought an influx of spellcasters to the

Bladesong style, ushering in a new era within the tradition that exists to this day.

Traditionally, the Bladesong is practiced only by elves who have sworn to uphold the virtues of elven society. Few non-elves learn this style because most other races lack lifespans long enough to allow an apprentice to earn the absolute trust of a Bladesong master. Outside of the tradition, some elven families retain the knowledge and skills of the Bladesong style but do not affiliate themselves with the Bladesingers; however, they too are slow to share the secrets of the style.

**Prerequisites:** Combat Casting, Dodge, Mobility, Martial Weapon

Proficiency (longsword), 6 or more ranks of Concentration and Perform (dance and ballad must be chosen as performance types).

**Benefit:** When armed with a longsword, you gain a +4 competence bonus to Concentration checks made to cast defensively.

### DROW: THE DARK ARTS

The aggressive cultural attitudes of the drow, along with their natural agility and grace, make for formidable martial traditions. Legendary for using two weapons simultaneously, drow houses often maintain several unique two-weapon styles. These martial arts are passed from the house swordmaster to his underlings and successors—if not for the protection of the house, then for the glory of proving the prowess of dark elves.

Yet the variety of the drow warriors runs deep. Lolth calls upon her worshipers to learn as many martial techniques as possible in order to ensure the continued superiority of drow combat. Among her worshipers is an order of monks whose skills and insights have deepened the philosophy of drow martial superiority. Where once brutal bloodthirsty battle was considered the end unto itself, the monks believe that the carnage of war can be focused to levels heretofore unseen. Their regimen of rigid discipline and the inner cultivation of power and awareness is based on the tenet, "Focus all passions toward the goal of martial mastery." This produced a new breed of warriors and monks even more fearsome in their skill and ferocity than those who came before.

### Twin Swords

While there are varieties of this style particular to each drow city and house, Twin Swords represents the culmination of millennia of drow martial tradition. Aggressive, graceful, and ferocious, the style is a physical manifestation of drow culture.

While it might seem like the style is ubiquitous to the drow warrior caste, few ever truly master it. Emphasizing wits as much as strength, Twin



Swords fighters study for years to achieve mastery. The secrets of the technique are considered rare treasures for the use of the matrons against their houses' enemies. Longswords are the typical weapon used in this style, but it is not unheard of to see Twin Sword fighters who use axes, batons, knives, punching daggers, scimitars, or maces.

**Prerequisites:** Ambidexterity, Greater Two-Weapon Fighting\*, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Off-Hand Parry\*, Two-Weapon Fighting, 6 or more ranks of Intimidate.

**Benefit:** When fighting with two weapons and neither weapon is light, you suffer only a -3 penalty to attacks with either weapon rather than the usual -4.

\*From *Masters of the Wild*, see the Feats From Other Sources sidebar.

### Shadow Guard

With the birth of the first order of monks dedicated to Lolth, there arose a subtle yet powerful force among the drow: the Shadow Guard. The Shadow Guard is comprised entirely of male monks. Constant experimentation and brutal practice allowed them to learn the weakest points of humanoid anatomy. The Shadow Guard style harnesses drow cruelty, focusing it into a martial art. The open-handed combat is fast yet deceptive, with blows that appear to be little more than pushes or gentle slaps and taps that render foes blinded, paralyzed, or deeply wounded.

**Prerequisites:** Falling Star Strike\*, Freezing the Lifeblood\*, Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Pain Touch\*, Stunning Fist, 6 or more ranks of Concentration.

**Benefit:** The DC of all your Stunning Fist, Pain Touch, Falling Star Strike, and Freezing the Lifeblood attacks increases by +2.

\*From *Oriental Adventures*, see the Feats From Other Sources sidebar.

### DWARVES: FEROCIOUS TENACITY

Known to be a martially minded race, dwarves often defend their holdings through sheer tenacity and endurance rather than complicated fighting styles, but although few purely dwarven martial arts styles exist, many dwarves have added their own unique slant to arts learned from their neighbors.

Most dwarves learn to fight informally within their own clans. Young dwarves begin by brawling with one another at an early age. Later, their ferocity and skill develop in regular battles with goblinoids and other denizens of the subterranean realms that the dwarves share. Two kinds of leaders show themselves in these battles, fearsome fighters who lead by example and tactically

minded warriors whose command of the battlefield allows them to achieve results. The best fighters advance in the ranks of martial traditions, forming special units of battle-hardened veterans, while their more clear-minded counterparts become the generals and commanders of the dwarves' armies. While both types of warriors can become masters of dwarven martial arts, most dwarven masters come from their special units.

### Axefury

Believed to have first been codified and taught by the famous mountain-dwarf fighter known as Harl "Too Bold" of the Thunderfury clan, the secrets of the Axefury style are guarded as closely as the recipe for "Old Smoke," the clan's much-sought-after black whiskey. Few dispute the strength of either.

Practitioners of the Axefury style typically use an axe and shield, although some prefer to use the great axe, and a few dwarves have modified the style to utilize the warhammer and great hammer. Axefury focuses on ferocious attacks with minimal defense, especially when charging a foe. The dwarves' low center of gravity and deft skill in close quarters prove to be a deadly surprise to more than one foe.

**Prerequisites:** Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Sunder, Weapon Focus (any kind of axe or hammer).

**Benefit:** If you make a successful bull rush attack and you follow your target, you drive your foe back an additional 5 feet.

### Stonegrind Wrestling

Finding little use for their great axes and hammers in the cramped tunnels of kobold and goblin enemies, some dwarves adopted a brutal form of wrestling. Originally developed as a sport, Stonegrind Wrestling quickly evolved into a war art of tremendous value.

In the last two generations, some of the cavern-dwelling clans have adopted this Stonegrind sport as a means of close-quarter fighting. Clad in spiked armor, these wrestlers grapple their foes and literally grind them to death. The technique is bloody but effective. After one particularly fearsome mercenary captain wrestled an umber hulk to death with Stonegrind tactics, dwarven mercenary companies specializing in clearing orc and goblin dens took up Stonegrind Wrestling as their method of



### FOR YOUR CHARACTER

Training in a martial arts style shows a certain amount of devotion and discipline. If your character studies a martial art, you might want to explain and highlight this devotion when you roleplay your character, even if your DM doesn't require anything special from you.

- Your character might feel the need to train and meditate in private, perhaps at regular weekly or daily intervals. This might affect your adventuring routine and could provide interesting roleplaying situations.

- A chaotic character might need to "blow off steam" after meditating or training in a martial art. This could result in the character provoking a fight or otherwise acting more rashly than usual.

- Like a cleric who believes others should worship his god, your character might feel the need to spread the word about her martial art and indoctrinate others into the secrets of her sect.

- As a student of a fighting form, your character might have names for particular moves. For instance, each time you use the Power Attack feat, your character might yell "Kord's killing fist." "Playful Phoenix Fist Vs. Four Scholars Boxing" in *DRAGON* #289 presented a random name generator for martial arts moves that could be useful.





## FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

Some DMs might balk at including martial arts styles in their games. After all, the styles give players and NPCs a benefit for free. Yet if you examine martial arts styles, you should note a few mitigating factors.

Think of martial arts styles as new feat trees. These feat trees are more complicated and more stringent. They often have high skill requirements or feats that seem like less beneficial choices.

When a character takes the feats from a standard feat tree, such as by taking Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Expertise, and Whirlwind Attack, all the feats provide that character a benefit, and many can be used in conjunction. Martial arts styles often require disparate feats and skills that lead to no obvious end feat; thus, a small benefit might not be unreasonable.

If you'd like another balancing factor, there are many options:

- In your campaign, students of martial arts might need to periodically train with a particular master. This can present a challenge to PCs who must travel great distances, save the master from peril, or fight off rival students.
- A character in your campaign might need at least one level of monk to learn martial arts styles.
- Characters might need to take a special feat that allows them to learn martial arts. This feat might do nothing else but give them the ability to learn martial arts styles.
- The benefit of a martial art could be a feat that characters can take once they have met the prerequisites for the style.

choice. These companies trained all their warriors in the style, popularizing the technique. Tales now spread that some of Stonegrind Wrestling's greatest practitioners are teaching their skills in the great dwarven kingdoms to any who have the strength and tenacity to learn.

**Prerequisites:** Endurance, Great Fortitude, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack.

**Benefit:** You are considered one size category larger for the purposes of grapple checks.

## HUMANS: MASTERS OF WAR

No other race can claim the versatility and adaptive ability of the human race. Human martial traditions are second to none and continue to evolve with each passing generation. With both open-handed and weapon-based combat, humans have proven time and again to be leaders in the creation of new techniques and new possibilities in the arena of personal combat.

### Might of the Hand

Many warriors, especially those who fight professionally in the great gladiatorial arenas, practice the ancient Might of the Hand style. Its origins are lost in the fog of history, but its practitioners are legion.

Might of the Hand combines solid power with deftness of hand and eye. It stresses powerful punches and kicks as well as intense grappling maneuvers and joint manipulation to disarm foes. Might of the Hand was designed for use primarily when caught unarmed against an armed opponent. Spies and soldiers frequently train in the basics of this style, and gladiators often use it in the arena. Those who master this style undergo conditioning bordering on torture and usually eschew the use of weapons altogether.

**Prerequisites:** Deflect Arrows, Dodge, Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, 6 or more ranks of Tumble.

**Benefit:** When unarmed and fighting defensively, you may designate a number of extra creatures equal to your Wisdom bonus as targets of the Dodge feat.

## HALFLINGS: COORDINATED CHAOS

Most halflings who pursue the martial arts adapt a human martial art to suit their needs. Nevertheless, among a

small segment of the halfling population exists a little-known but long-standing fighting tradition that has evolved into an order of monks known as the Hin Fist. Their belief in perfection has led them to create a uniquely halfling martial art that grows with each year.

### Hin Fist

The Hin Fist order of monks is comprised mostly of halflings, with a few gnomes and a scattering of dwarf adherents. The Hin Fist style promotes self perfection and mastery of self through peaceful means. These monks protect not only one another but all others who seek the peaceful pursuit of excellence.

The Hin Fist style employs the body as well as weaponry to cause attackers to second-guess themselves, committing to actions the monk can exploit. Hin Fist monks attack with a level of ruthlessness that sometimes begs the question of their order's peaceful intentions. The true power of their art is revealed when several monks fight in concert. They weave and coordinate their attacks and defenses with incredible precision, confusing attackers and leaving them helpless before the onslaught. The Hin Fist style shines as a worthy addition to the annals of warrior arts.

**Prerequisites:** Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, 6 or more ranks each of Bluff, Jump, and Tumble.

**Benefit:** You gain a +1 circumstance bonus to your attacks against the target of your Dodge feat when you and an ally both threaten the target of your Dodge feat.

## GNOMES: LITTLE GIANTS

The gnome ability to ease around the cultural barriers of more militant races has enabled the gnomes to thrive, sharing their habitat with no loss of identity in a world of savage orc hordes, goblin tribes, human empires, dwarven kingdoms, and elven empires. Inevitably, conflict created a need for a defender more specialized than the common soldier, someone who could defend the race employing the virtues gnomes hold in the highest regard. Gifted in guile and subterfuge, the gnomes' martial arts rely on deflection and obfuscation. While not as aggressive as the techniques of other races, these tactics often achieve the same results.



## Tanglefoot

Known for their sense of humor, gnomes take an appropriately inhuman delight at besting enemies through skill and wit. The Tanglefoot style developed in the gnome High Summer celebration as a means of defeating a foe without killing him. To mark High Summer, large gnome communities send out an intrepid gnome to find an enemy—usually a kobold or goblin—and bring it back alive to the High Summer festival. In a celebration only the gnomes could appreciate, the event serves as a peace offering to the enemy. There is singing and dancing around the bound prisoner, whose belly is generously filled with warm food, wine, and ale—lots of wine and ale. The High Summer festival awards an annual prize, often a masterwork item or piece of art, to the gnome who brings back the most worthy adversary. Tanglefoot has become a formidable style of fighting, used mainly to pacify foes or to buy time until the practitioner can escape or summon reinforcements.

**Prerequisites:** Dodge, Combat Reflexes, Expertise, Improved Trip, Weapon Finesse, 6 or

more ranks each of Tumble and Use Rope, you must be of Small size.

**Benefit:** You are considered one size category larger when attempting to trip a foe. In addition, when you attack to cause subdual damage with a weapon that deals normal damage, you suffer a -1 penalty instead of the usual -4 penalty.

## GNOLLS: LAUGHING AND KILLING

Feared for their martial capability, some human organizations use gnolls as mercenaries, and unsavory governments employ them in their armies. Like the hyenas they resemble, gnolls have a natural pack mentality that allows them to be far more organized than their savagery would suggest. Combined with their natural physical capabilities, this makes them one of the tougher savage races.

The martial traditions of the gnolls come from their war leaders, large powerful gnolls known as flind. The most cunning of

the gnolls, flinds' understanding of their natural physical prowess is instinctive, and they have created their own weapons and styles of combat to capitalize on this.

## Yuur'grot

The most famous of the gnoll styles is known as Yuur'grot, which has no direct translation but means something close to "to defang." Yuur'grot was born from the gnolls' need to establish their domination without necessarily killing their rivals. This does not point to any peaceful intent. Instead, domination represents a way of showing pack precedence, and it serves the gnoll trade of choice: slavery. Yuur'grot emphasizes the use of a flail to disarm potential targets and eliminate them quickly without causing much damage, but the aggressiveness of this style cannot be understated.

**Prerequisites:** Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Martial Weapon Proficiency (heavy flail or light flail) or Exotic Weapon Proficiency (dire flail).

**Benefit:** When using a light flail, heavy flail, or dire flail to disarm an



### FEATS FROM OTHER SOURCES

#### FALLING STAR STRIKE [GENERAL]

You have mastered the art of striking a nerve that blinds a humanoid opponent.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, base attack bonus +4, Wis 17+.

**Benefit:** Against a humanoid opponent, you can make an unarmed attack that has a chance of blinding your target. If your attack is successful, your target must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + 1/2 your level + your Wisdom modifier) or be blinded for 1 round per level you possess. Using this feat uses up one of your stunning attacks for the day (either a monk stunning attack or a use of the Stunning Fist feat).

#### FREEZING THE LIFEBLOOD [GENERAL]

You paralyze a humanoid opponent with an unarmed attack.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, base attack bonus +5, Wis 17+.

**Benefit:** Against a humanoid opponent, you can make an unarmed attack that deals no damage but has a chance of paralyzing your target. If your attack is successful, your target must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10 + 1/2 your level + your Wisdom modifier) or be paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds. Using this feat uses up one of your stunning attacks for the day (either a monk stunning attack or a use of the Stunning Fist feat).

#### GREATER TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING [GENERAL]

You are a master at fighting with two weapons.

**Prerequisites:** Ambidexterity, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Fighting, base attack bonus +15, Dex 13+.

**Benefit:** You get a third attack with your off-hand weapon, albeit at a -10 penalty.

opponent, you gain a +4 bonus to your opposed attack roll instead of the usual +2 bonus.

### GOBLINS: SCREAMING HORDES

Given their slight stature, relatively straightforward tactics, and craven attitudes, most seasoned adventurers consider goblins little threat. They tend to rely on superior numbers to wear down opponents, a tactic doomed to result in the goblins' extinction unless they periodically go into hiding for several years to build their numbers. Some goblins recognize this fact, and their rabid attempts to discipline their fellows and teach them good martial tactics has resulted in a strange tradition of martial arts.

#### Talon Swarm

Led by a large and extremely cunning goblin named Grix, the Splitrot tribe displaced many of the top predators of its territory. Persistent rumors insist that they killed a young dragon and are challenging the authority of the orcs and gnolls of their region. Their success is largely due to Grix's insistence that his goblins use squad tactics and fight in a confusing yet coordinated fashion. Grix learned these tactics from the pet worgs he hunts with. Their skill at taking down more powerful foes became the basis of Grix's tactics.

Where once screaming hordes of goblins rushed to certain doom, groups of Grix's highly trained goblins employ harassment and confusion to wear down foes with minimal loss of life. This style of fighting is called burak pagk'tshi, or Talon Swarm. Already the success of Grix and his tribe has become legendary among the goblinoids. Many flock to his banner.

**Prerequisites:** Dodge, Mobility, Skill Focus (Bluff), Quick Draw, 6 or more ranks each of Bluff and Tumble.

**Benefit:** When you feint in combat, your feint affects the creature you target for the feint and the target of your Dodge feat. Each must succeed at a Sense Motive check or lose its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class against your next attack against it. Your attacks against either or both must be made on or before your next turn.

### LIZARDFOLK: COLD STEEL, COLD BLOOD

While lizardfolk are capable weapon

crafters, they often lack the materials to make metal weapons. Recognizing the value of human-crafted weaponry, lizardfolk scavenge or trade for what they need, and they are quick to pick up on new and innovative uses for weapons and tools. Because of their pragmatic view of life, lizardfolk eagerly pass down their weaponry and combat techniques to younger warriors. Mastery of the spear is universal among all lizardmen tribes. The spear and its derivatives are the primary weapons of the cold-blooded warriors. Whatever weapon is favored in a particular tribe always takes second place to the spear. The few true martial traditions maintained by lizardmen are spear-based. Their prowess with these weapons grants them a healthy respect and even outright fear from those who have faced them in combat.

#### Longfang

Leaders of the lizardfolk often employ a combat method that has been in refinement for generations. It is a savage technique that leaves bloody death in its wake. Its Draconic name translates loosely to "longfang-heart-pierce," but most refer to it simply as Longfang.

Longfang demands precise control and a technique of power-thrusting that allows practitioners to punch the spearhead through heavy armor and tough skin. Masters use the Longfang technique to make an incredibly powerful strike from a hidden position, leaving their prey dead or dying in a single, brutal assault. This prevents the hunter from becoming the hunted.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Critical (any hafted piercing weapon), Improved Initiative, Martial Weapon Proficiency (any hafted piercing weapon), Power Attack, Power Lunge\*, Weapon Focus (any hafted piercing weapon you are proficient with), 6 or more ranks each of Hide and Move Silently.

**Benefit:** You may attack foes adjacent to you with a hafted piercing weapon with reach. If you use Power Lunge on the first round of combat, you provoke no attack of opportunity.

\*From *Sword and Fist*, see the Feats From Other Sources sidebar.

### OGRES: POWER AND FURY

Ogres are stupid. These witless dolts are often duped into acting as muscle for well-organized gnoll tribes or as heavy foot soldiers for the orc hordes. Ogres



maintain few traditions outside of eating, but anything that provides amusement, like fighting, can keep their attention and interest long enough to establish patterns of behavior. Of course, even the dumbest ogre can recognize a fearsome fighter, and most ogres learn martial arts by watching giants. Thus, mimicry of fighters with good habits created the ogres' only known martial art.

### Skullcracks

Having picked up a few disparate techniques from a small family of rogue stone giants, the Skullcrack tribe of ogres now act with unprecedented ogre cunning. The Skullcrack tribe strikes fear into many local wild ogre tribes and human barbarian tribes.

The Skullcracks cobbled together a truly devastating method of combat. More than a few able adventurers met an early and permanent retirement inside the gullets of the Skullcracks after tangling with this technique. Using massive clubs made from the trunks of young trees (stout oak being a particular favorite), these ogres learned to utilize their whole bodies behind swings. Rather than resorting to the clumsy attacks normal for their race, which often put them in a poor line of defense from attackers, they bide their time to permit their overconfident foes to allow an opening.

**Prerequisites:** Cleave, Expertise, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Sunder.

**Benefit:** If you successfully use Improved Trip on a foe, your extra melee attack against the prone foe gains a +2 bonus to damage.

### ORCS: BLOODY WARLORDS

Savage and brutal, orcs are the ultimate survivors, capable of eking out a living in nearly any terrain. Orcs wage war against every race imaginable. Try as they might, their foes cannot seem to vanquish them. Because of their extremely high attrition rate in these battles, few orcs live long enough to develop true martial arts. The exceptions to that rule, however, are fearsome to behold. Perhaps one in ten orcs


learn techniques that are useful in personal combat. They are often able to pass on some of their knowledge to younger orcs, guaranteeing the continued growth of their savage war arts.

### Storm of Blood

Orc legend told that Gruumsh himself taught this style to R'racku "Showerguts," warlord of the Firehell orc tribe, in recognition of his ferocity and success in slaying the ogre chieftain Lugdush in single combat. This renowned battle with R'racku's newly created weapon, now known as the orc double axe, was the first event of an incredible two decades of constant warfare that eventually carved out the Ebon Peaks as the permanent abode of R'racku's tribe, subjugating or obliterating its other inhabitants.

The orc's Bloodstorm style demonstrates signs of cunning beyond what many might expect of the race. Some say the skill must have been taught to the orcs by a renegade human, but no one knows for sure. An orc using the Bloodstorm style attacks aggressively, making two or three special cuts designed to weaken or kill foes through blood loss. The technique is surprisingly effective and, like its practitioners, as savage as it is cruel.

**Prerequisites:** Ambidexterity, Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (orc double axe), Power Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, 6 or more ranks of Heal.

**Benefit:** When you take the full attack action using an orc double axe, you may designate one attack to be a wounding attack. On this attack you suffer a -4 penalty. If it damages the foe, the wound continues to bleed on the following rounds for up to 10 rounds. Blood loss is cumulative; a creature with two bleeding wounds suffers 2 points of damage a round. A creature continues to bleed for 10 rounds unless a Heal check (DC 10) is made to staunch the wound or until the creature is the subject of a healing spell (*cure light wounds*, *healing circle*, *heal*, and so on). 

### OFF-HAND PARRY [GENERAL]

You use your off-hand weapon to defend against melee attacks.

**Prerequisites:** Ambidexterity, Two-Weapon Fighting, base attack bonus +3, Dex 13+, proficiency with weapon.

**Benefit:** When fighting with two weapons and using the full attack option, you can on your action decide to attack normally or to sacrifice all your off-hand attacks for that round in exchange for a +2 dodge bonus to your AC. If you take this option, you also suffer penalties on your attacks as if you were fighting with two weapons. If you are using a buckler, its AC bonus stacks with the dodge bonus. You can only use blades or hafted weapons of a size category smaller than your own with this feat.

### PAIN TOUCH [GENERAL]

You can cause intense pain in an opponent with a successful stunning attack.

**Prerequisites:** Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, base attack bonus +2, Wis 19+.

**Benefit:** Victims of a successful stunning attack are subject to such debilitating pain that they are nauseated for 1 round following the round they are stunned. Creatures immune to stunning are immune to this attack as are creatures more than one size category larger than the feat user. Using this feat uses up one of your stunning attacks for the day (either a monk stunning attack or a use of the Stunning Fist feat).

### POWER LUNGE [GENERAL]

Your ferocious attack can catch an opponent unprepared.

**Prerequisites:** Power Attack, base attack bonus +3, Str 13+.

**Benefit:** A successful attack roll during a charge allows you to inflict double your normal Strength modifier in addition to the attack's damage. You provoke an attack of opportunity from the opponent you charged.

### ZEN ARCHERY [GENERAL]

Your intuition guides your hand when you use a ranged weapon.

**Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +3, Wis 13+.

**Benefit:** You can use your Wisdom modifier instead of your Dexterity modifier when making a ranged attack at a target within 30 feet.





# THE UNDER-GROVES

## THE NATURAL DANGERS OF THE UNDERDARK

by Tim Hitchcock · illustrated by Johnathan Wayshak

**F**ar beneath the earth's surface lie the wondrous but alien cavern complexes collectively known as the Underdark. Hidden within this vast expanse of inky darkness, fragile ecosystems struggle to survive under harsh and dangerous conditions. Most adventurers are familiar with the Underdark's fungus forests and its settlements of strange humanoids, but few have explored the other, far more rare, ecosystems that exist here, which are known to Underdark residents as the undergroves.

A wide variety of flora and fauna struggle for survival in the undergroves. Each creature has its own ecological niche to fill within its particular environment. Some are beneficial and others are deadly, but all are as mysterious as the Underdark itself.

The different types of undergroves, along with their physical features and hazards of note, are described below. Each kind of undergrove is a self-contained ecosystem largely

unconnected with the others or with the greater Underdark ecology.

### **BARNACLE FIELDS**

Barnacle fields are huge caverns in which the walls, floors, and ceilings appear to be covered with giant craters. From a distance, these depressions resemble nothing so much as pock-marks on the face of the rock. In fact, these "craters" are insectoid creatures known as deep barnacles.

**Deep Barnacles (CR 6):** These monstrously huge, cave-dwelling crustaceans look like 20-foot diameter rock-colored hills or craters about 10 feet high. Nearly immobile, these Huge creatures struggle to pull their great bulk more than a few feet in an hour. They survive in the Underdark because their size and shell allow them to endure the attacks of most creatures. Larger predators learn that the effort of clawing into a deep barnacle is poorly rewarded with awful-tasting meat and the danger of troglodyte fungus infection. Most intelligent creatures

learn to avoid the deep barnacles, but animals and unwary adventurers often become their prey.

Creatures unfamiliar with the deep barnacle can make a Spot or Listen check (DC 30) to note signs of life in the "rocky hill." A successful Heal or Search check (DC 25) indicates to a character that the deep barnacle is a living creature, but a failure by 5 or more results in the character's investigation leading her to the top of the hill. Examining the deep barnacle and succeeding at a Knowledge (nature) or Craft (stonemasonry) check (DC 20) reveals that the "stone" of the "hill" isn't stone at all. Note that dwarves receive a +2 bonus to these checks, and a dwarf that merely comes within 10 feet of a deep barnacle can make a Search check as though actively searching.

Most of the time, a deep barnacle's mouth remains open to catch dripping water, bat droppings, and any creature foolish enough to enter the cavernous opening. Deep barnacles have an ability

similar to tremorsense, and when a creature weighing more than 20 pounds walks within 400 feet of a deep barnacle, its mouth swiftly and silently shuts. When a creature that weighs more than 20 pounds walks onto the 10-foot square on the top of the deep barnacle, the mouth immediately opens. Any creature standing there must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 20) or

Although deep barnacles are living creatures, they should be treated in most ways as dungeon hazards like green slime. For the purposes of spells and attacks, a deep barnacle's statistics are presented below. Note that a deep barnacle does not move to avoid attacks, and it should be treated like a stationary object for the purposes of hitting it.

## CORPSE SLIME HAS AN UNLIFE ALL ITS OWN ...AND IT IS ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS HAZARDS OF THE UNDERGROVES.

fall into the deep barnacle's mouth. Success indicates that the mouth opening and the creature's reflexes move it off the deep barnacle's mouth. Once such a weight is within the mouth, it shuts, trapping the creature within. The mouth does not again open until the creature is digested or the deep barnacle discovers it cannot digest the object (such as if a boulder were swallowed). The creature trapped inside suffers 1d6 points of falling damage. On subsequent rounds, creatures inside suffer 3d6 points of acid damage each round. A deep barnacle can contain 1 Large creature, 2 Medium-size creatures, 4 Small creatures, or 8 Tiny creatures.

Individuals swallowed by the deep barnacle are considered grappled. A deep barnacle cannot grapple to cause damage or pin foes; it simply allows its acid to go to work. Swallowed creatures can try to wrestle their way free with a grapple check or shimmy out with an Escape Artist check opposed by the deep barnacle's grapple check (+25 bonus). Swallowed creatures can also use a light piercing or slashing weapon or a natural weapon to deal 30 points of damage to the deep barnacle to cut their way free. Once cut open from the inside, the hole seals itself; each swallowed creature must cut its own way out. A character outside the deep barnacle can try to pry open its mouth by opposing the deep barnacle's grapple check or attack it in the hopes of killing it and freeing a companion from the deep barnacle's corpse. Any creature swallowed by the deep barnacle or attacking it with a natural weapon risks contracting trog fungus (see below).

Juvenile deep barnacles are swifter and more aggressive, looking somewhat like rocky giant stag beetles and having the same statistics. Once they have eaten enough, they form a chitinous cocoon that eventually forms the body of a full-grown deep barnacle.

**Deep Barnacle:** CR 6 (hazard); Huge Vermin; HD 17d8+51; hp 127; Init +0; Spd —; AC 13 (-2 size, -5 Dex, +10 natural) touch 0, flat-footed 3; Atk —; Face/Reach: 20 ft. by 20 ft./—; SQ tremorsense, trog fungus, vermin; AL N; SV Fort +13, Ref +0, Will +5; Str 20, Dex —, Con 17, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 2.

**Trog Fungus:** Contact, Fortitude save (DC 14), incubation period 1d4 days; damage 1d3 temporary Dexterity, 1 temporary Constitution, and stench (see Disease in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*).

Trog fungus is a skin affliction spread by contact with deep barnacles. On a deep barnacle it has no smell, but other creatures affected by the disease emit a terrible stench. Any creature with an olfactory sense that comes within 15 feet of a creature infected by trog fungus must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 12). Success indicates that the creature is unaffected by the stench for one full day; failure means the creature becomes nauseated (see Condition Summary in Chapter 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*) for 2d4 rounds and must make a new save at the same DC each time the nausea wears off, until he either saves successfully or moves out of range. The infected creature is immune to the stench's nauseating effects.

## BLACKWATER GROVE

When water seeping into the ground comes into contact with a large deposit of soluble minerals, it slowly dissolves them, creating a cavern known as a blackwater grove. Most blackwater groves are located below surface waterways of some type, often lakes or seas.

The ceiling of a blackwater grove drips water at an extremely slow pace—just enough to keep everything moist, but not so much that it feels like one is caught in a drizzle. Hundreds of small stalactites dot the ceiling, each slowly dripping like a leaky faucet. The sound of the constant dripping makes listening and concentrating within the cavern difficult. Anyone attempting to cast a spell within a blackwater grove must make a Concentration check (DC 8) or lose the spell. Furthermore, a -2 circumstance penalty applies to all Listen checks made within the cavern.

There is nothing unusual about the water itself, except that it tastes brackish because of its high concentration of minerals. A character who tastes water from the stalactites and makes a successful Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) can identify it as either salt water or fresh water, depending on its source—a determination that might help the characters discover their location beneath the surface.

The floor of a blackwater grove is covered with a thin sludge that ranges from 6 inches to several feet in depth. The watery mud is usually stagnant, though occasionally the natural grooves in the cavern floor channel it into slow-moving streams that eventually join with underground rivers. Beneath the water is a layer of soft silt that can range from 1 to 3 feet in depth. Walking across the floor of a blackwater grove is difficult, and a character who attempts to move farther than her base speed in 1 round must succeed at a Balance check (DC 15) or fall prone. Creatures walking on the bottom should be wary of blackwater sinkholes (see below). Swimming through the mud is possible, but a swimmer suffers a -3 circumstance penalty to all Swim checks.

Floating on the surface of the sludge are patches of a dark-purple growth called blackwater algae. The term algae is a misnomer, because this growth is actually a kind of mold. Blackwater algae is edible and has a spicy taste

similar to that of hot peppers. If properly prepared, it can also be used to stave off the effects of exhaustion. A successful Alchemy check (DC 15) allows a character to make a chewable substance from the mold that grants a +1 circumstance bonus on saves and checks made to avoid fatigue for 24 hours. Worth about 5 silver pieces at most markets, few alchemists create the item, but travelers in the Underdark sometimes find it useful.

The water in blackwater groves is also home to the infamous blackwater leeches. These creatures are quite delectable when properly roasted. Of course, the leeches are equally eager to dine on the blood of characters.

**Blackwater Leeches (CR 1/2):** These fine parasites only live in fresh water blackwater groves and feed off of warm-blooded creatures that wander into the grove looking for water. Any warm-blooded creature that moves through the watery mud of such a grove attracts a cloud of these miniscule vermin. They slip through armor and other protections and attach to soft skin. Their bites are painless and hardly visible, and each leech takes only a miniscule amount of blood. Other leeches swarm near the creature sucking up small amounts of blood released into the water. All this activity causes no hit point damage, but a creature within such a swarm of leeches must succeed at a Fortitude saving throw (DC 12) each round it remains in the cloud of leeches or suffer 1 point of Constitution damage. Most attacks fail to significantly harm or deter the cloud of leeches, but an attack or spell targeting the pool that deals more than 10 points of electricity or acid damage kills all the leeches in the pool. In a few days, the leech population returns to full strength unless the sludge is removed from the bottom of the pool. Most pools have more than enough leeches to threaten any number of creatures that enter the pool, but the cloud of leeches can never deal more than 1 point of Constitution damage to a creature each round.

**Blackwater Sinkhole (CR 5):** Blackwater sinkholes represent another common hazard in a blackwater grove. A sinkhole is a 5-foot-wide, 10-foot-deep pit concealed by dark water and muck. A character walking across a

pool of blackwater risks becoming stuck in the thick mud at the bottom of the sinkhole. A character walking into the sinkhole's area must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 20) or fall in, plunging below the water. A character who falls into a sinkhole is considered entangled as though by the *entangle* spell at the bottom of the pool. The trapped character can attempt an Escape Artist or Strength check (DC 20) to free herself. Blackwater leeches (see above) also inhabit the sinkholes. If not rescued, the character might drown. A Search check (DC 17) reveals the sinkhole. Characters who wish to help a trapped companion must first find her in the black water; reaching for such a character has a 50% miss chance due to total concealment. If a character swims down to the trapped ally, he must make a Reflex saving throw each round he remains in the sinkhole or become entangled by the mud as well. Freeing a trapped companion from a sinkhole requires a successful Strength check (DC 20) and is a full-round action that provokes attacks of opportunity.

## BONE GARDENS

Bone gardens form beneath the graveyards of surface dwellers. A bone garden typically has a dirt-covered floor and an excess of bones strewn about. The earthen ceiling is usually very high, and it tapers gently into a dome shape. Instead of stalactites, the ceiling of a bone garden sports a profuse growth of a fungus called bloodroot.

Bloodroot is a hard, slender fungus that feeds on mineral-rich graveyard dirt. When freshly picked, bloodroot shoots are edible and high in protein. One-quarter pound of bloodroot makes a meal large enough to satisfy one Medium-size humanoid. After 24 hours, bloodroot rots and becomes inedible.

**Blind-Eye Puffball (CR 3):** Bone gardens are also home to a rare species of mushroom called the blind-eye puffball. These mushrooms are thimble-sized, and they grow only on bones and cartilage. When one of these fragile mushrooms is ruptured, it releases a cloudy, gaseous substance in a 10-foot radius. Any sighted creature in the area must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be blinded for 1d10+20 minutes. A successful

Search or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 25), reveals that if the puffballs are disturbed they will release a gas. A successful Disable Device check (DC 27) allows a character to "bleed out" the puffball's spores slowly, rendering them harmless. Bleeding out a puffball is a full-round action.

**Corpse Slime (CR 5):** Another hazard associated with bone gardens is corpse slime, a lumpy gray sludge that is commonly believed to form in humanoid corpses. The true origin of this material is unknown, but corpse slime does seem to be most prevalent near and underneath graveyards. The substance clings to almost any surface in small patches (no larger than 3 square feet) and is difficult to see (Spot DC 25). Like green slime, it drops from walls and ceilings when it detects movement (and possible food) below.

Corpse slime has an unlife all its own, and for this reason the slime is considered one of the most dangerous hazards of the undergroves. Because it drains life energy, it is sometimes called wight's blood. When a patch of corpse slime comes in contact with living flesh, the victim must make an immediate Fortitude save (DC 14) or gain one negative level. A new saving throw at the same DC and with identical consequences for failure is required each subsequent round that the slime remains in contact with its target. Another successful Fortitude save (DC 14) is required to remove each negative level after 24 hours.

Unlike green slime, corpse slime can easily be scraped off at any time. Intense heat, sunlight, or a spell that destroys light-sensitive undead permanently destroys corpse slime. Positive energy also harms it. A clerical turning attempt that successfully turns a 4-HD undead creature and deals 4 Hit Dice of turning damage destroys one patch of corpse slime.

## FLASHFIRE GROVES

The strange and rare phenomena known as flashfire groves were created when glaciers cutting across the surface of the world swallowed whole forests of sap-filled pine trees and forced them underground. Some of these trees were infested with scale bugs that had burrowed into the bark to feed on sap and hibernate for the winter. When those trees were pushed

beneath the ground by the glaciers, the comparative warmth of the Underdark signaled the scale bugs to come out of hibernation and devour the tree sap. As the trees began to decompose, they released toxic gases. Fleeing these deadly vapors, the scale bugs burrowed upward. As they made their way toward the surface, they deposited trails of a substance called lac. The buildup of this goo from the mass exodus of thousands of scale bugs created a thick, sticky "shellac" that eventually fossilized on cavern floors. The gases diffused upward through the burrow holes left by the scale bugs and were trapped by the buildup of fossilized shellac. As years passed, the gases softened the shellac, which swelled into viscous, balloonlike sacs.

These gas-filled sacs now bulge upward from the floors of caverns in the upper Underdark. In torchlight, they resemble translucent amber, streaked with oily scintillations of color. Although attached to the floors of their caverns, they almost seem to hover, as if they could break free from the ground and gracefully float away. Such collections of gas sacs are called flashfire groves.

Flashfire groves are usually found in small or medium caverns. A typical grove consists of ten to thirty gas sacs ranging from Diminutive to Large size. The sacs are erratically spaced; some are only inches apart, but most are several yards from one another.

Patches of yellow mold are occasionally found growing on gas sacs. If disturbed, these patches release clouds of poisonous spores (Fort DC 15; 1d6 Con/2d6 Con; see *Dungeon Ecology* in Chapter 4 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*).

**Gas Sac (CR 1 to 5):** These gas-filled lacquer sacs are highly flammable and explosive. Any open flame (such as a torch) placed within 5 feet of a gas sac causes it to rupture in a *fireball*-like explosion. The area and damage of the effect depend on the size of gas sac, as shown on the table below. An exploding gas sac automatically ignites all others within the area of the explosion or up to 5 feet from its outer perimeter, potentially creating a fiery inferno of cataclysmic proportions. A character caught in the area of an explosion can attempt a Reflex save to halve the damage.

#### GAS SAC EFFECTS TABLE

Circumference	Area	Fire Damage	CR
Diminutive	5 square feet	1d6	1/2
Tiny	10 square feet	2d6	1
Small	15 square feet	2d6	2
Medium-size	20 square feet	3d6	3
Large	25 square feet	3d6	4

Gas sacs can be disarmed by puncturing them and releasing the gas. Gas sacs have no hardness and 1 hit point each regardless of size. Released gas dissipates within 1 round per 5-foot-radius of the gas sac's normal explosion. At any time before the gas has dissipated, it can be ignited, having the normal effect. Also, the dissipating gas is poisonous, and any creature within the area of the sac's normal explosion range must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 23) each round or fall unconscious for 1 minute; there is no secondary damage. The gas sacs can also be disarmed and stoppered for later use or disposal; this requires a Disable Device check (DC 20), with failure indicating that the gas has been released to the air.

Would-be soothsayers in the Underdark occasionally establish themselves as oracles near flashfire groves and send their disciples to collect the smaller gas sacs, which they use as inhalants. They believe that inhaling small doses of the gas puts them into a state of mental openness that allows them to receive divine messages. The dreams such soothsayers have while unconscious are interpreted for omens.

#### LICHEN GARDENS

A lichen garden is a strange self-contained ecosystem resulting from a fungus that grows up to the surface. It typically grows in a large cave, suspended from the ceiling by strands of fungi.

As a lichen garden grows, it becomes thick and strong enough to bear weight. Larger gardens grow up to 5 feet thick and can support almost 1,000 pounds of direct pressure. The total area of a lichen garden is limited only by the size of the cavern in which it forms, with one exception—a garden needs at least 10 feet between the main bed and any other surface. Thus, the garden grows no closer than

10 feet from the walls, floor, or ceiling of any cavern.

A lichen garden collects moisture from the surface through its fungus strands and stores it in thin-walled "bubbles" called cluster-sacks, which dangle like fruit from the lower strands of the lichen bed. Cluster-sacks range in size from as small as a pea to as large as a grapefruit. Water trapped inside a cluster-sack is saturated with minerals and proteins that it has accumulated on its long trip from the surface. The lichen absorbs some of the water from its cluster-sacks during photosynthesis, then recycles it to excrete surplus minerals and proteins back into the cluster-sacks. As a result, the liquid in the sacks slowly transforms into thick, viscous, protein-filled nectar.

A fist-sized cluster sack provides enough food and water to sustain one Medium-size creature for an entire day. Foraging for sacks is a full-round action that requires a Wilderness Lore check (DC 15) for every 5 feet of lichen searched. A successful check indicates that the character has gathered 1d4 fist-sized cluster-sacks. If a sack breaks (see statistics below), it spills its entire contents and becomes useless. Because cluster-sacks are difficult to eat, the DM might opt to have a character attempting the task make a Dexterity check (DC 10) to succeed. Failure means the character used too much force to pierce the sack and spilled its contents. Lichen gardens produce cluster-sacks year round.

These hanging lichen gardens can be home to numerous creatures. Besides including most varieties of bats and vermin, cloaklers, darkmantles, and stirges are often found near lichen gardens. Some of these creatures feed on the gardens themselves, but others come to feed on what is attracted to the lichen.

**Lichen Garden:** Hardness 0; 1 hp/inch of thickness; AC 0; break DC 15. A lichen garden can be damaged by

physical attacks, but it takes only half damage from piercing and slashing weapons. Because of its high moisture content, it takes no extra damage from normal fire, but magical fire causes normal damage.

### SALT HIVES

Salt hives are mazelike catacombs formed entirely out of salt deposits. Most of the passages in a salt hive are no more than 5 feet in diameter. Sages are not entirely sure how these passages form, but the most widely accepted theory is that they are the products of erosion caused by the runoff of subterranean lakes.

The walls of a salt hive are brittle and have no hardness; striking a wall or ceiling for 10 or more points of damage causes it to crack and collapse. Although not quite as deadly as a cave-in of a stone cavern (see Cave-Ins and Collapses in Chapter 4 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*), a hive wall collapse can still trap, injure, or bury characters. A typical salt hive cave-in has a 10-foot burial area with a 5-foot slide zone at either end. A creature in a bury zone takes 2d6 points of damage (Reflex half DC 15) and is considered pinned, but he takes no further subdual damage on subsequent rounds that he remains pinned. A character in the slide zone takes 1d6 points of damage and is considered pinned. A successful Reflex save (DC 15) allows the character to avoid being pinned and take no damage from the slide. Pinned characters take 1d6 points of subdual damage per minute they remain pinned. A character buried in salt is also in danger of slow suffocation (see Suffocation in Chapter 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*). Pinned characters can escape by making a Strength or Escape Artist check (DC 25) or by being dug out by their fellows (see the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*).

A gray, prickly substance called cactus fungus grows on the corridor walls of salt hives in a flat, semicircular shape. A typical cactus fungus grows up to 8 inches in diameter and can store enough water to sustain one Medium-size creature for half a day. Cactus fungi grow sporadically in patches, each consisting of 1d20+10 individual fungi. Intelligent Underdark humanoids harvest these fungi to make

a sweet but potent liquor called salt hive stout.

Salt hives attract animals in need of salt, and their presence in turn attracts predators. Salt hives are also infested with minute scavengers called salt lice that carry disease.

**Salt Louse (CR 1/2):** Each creature in a salt hive has a cumulative 10% chance per round of acquiring an

infestation of salt lice. Even after leaving the hive, any creature in the company of an infested creature has the same chance per hour of acquiring an infestation. An infested character must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) each day that the infestation remains or contract filth fever (see Disease in Chapter 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*). An infestation of salt lice can be cured with a *cure disease* spell or a successful Heal check (DC 20).

### SCREAMING CAVES

Adventurers who think of the Underdark as a cold and silent place have obviously never experienced a screaming cave. Screaming caves form near large sources of geothermal heat. When the air beneath the caves is heated to extreme temperatures, it expands and forces its way out through fissures in the rock, making a horrible screaming sound as it escapes. The sounds of a screaming cave aren't constant; they come in spurts as pressure builds and releases. When multiple fissures release hot air simultaneously, the screams can echo through the surrounding caves like the discordant song of a demonic choir. In general, single screams occur every 1d4 minutes and "choral" screams occur every 1d4+10 minutes.

The hot air in a screaming cave keeps the temperature between 90 and 110 degrees. Characters wearing heavy clothing or armor take the normal penalties for very hot conditions (see Heat Danger in Chapter 3 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*). The hot temperature of the screaming caves also attracts a variety of creatures and


encourages fungus growth. Brown mold patches (see Dungeon Ecology in Chapter 4 of the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*) are especially common in these caves.

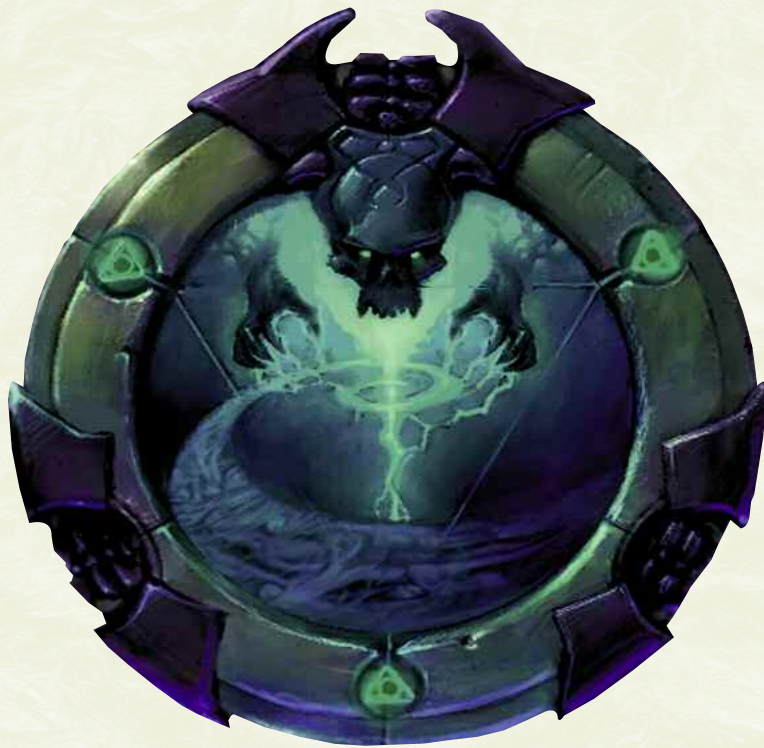
Water is readily available in these caverns. As the steam from the fissures and vents cools and condenses, it collects in indentations in the rocks, forming small pools. Druids sometimes

... The screams can echo through the surrounding caves like the discordant song of a demonic choir.

carve out these indentations so that they can hold more water. Larger caves sometimes even have hot springs that create pools big enough to be used as baths by Medium-size creatures. Although bathing in hot springs is very relaxing, the high sulfur content of the water often has a terrible odor like rotten eggs.

**Intensified Scream (CR 1/3):** A character can use the Craft (sculpture or stonemasonry) skill to carve faces into the rock, and a successful Perform or Knowledge (nature) check (DC 20) allows the carvings to intensify the sounds made by screaming vents. Many Underdark creatures fear such places for good reason. Creatures within 40 feet of an intensified screaming fissure must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or be deafened for 1d4 rounds. Deaf creatures are immune to this effect.

**Steam-Burst Hazard (CR 1):** Another hazard of screaming caves is the steam-burst, a blast of steam resembling a geyser. Steam-bursts also occur at random intervals, but with much lower frequency than the screams. Like a geyser, an individual steam-burst fires from a specific fissure in the floor in a 25-foot cone aimed straight up, but it fires superheated steam instead of water. Anyone caught in the area takes 1d6 points of damage from the heat (Reflex avoids DC 18). A Search check (DC 10) reveals the hole the steam issues from, and a Disable Device check (DC 10) allows a character to appropriately plug the hole. 



# ACADEMY Necromica

by Andy Collins · illustrated by Todd Harris

**A**cademy Necromica was founded nearly 150 years ago by the necromancer Xilian, who sought to establish a place where like-minded individuals could come together and share secrets of the dark arts. Over the next two decades, Master Xilian slowly built up the organization, offering membership to carefully handpicked individuals who respected (or worshiped) death and undeath. Soon her academy boasted a cadre of necromancers, evil priests, and professional killers.

Eventually, however, the academy was infiltrated by a paladin/rogue named Rion, who used his knowledge of the group's inner workings to organize an assault upon it by those who opposed its practices and philosophy. Most of the Necromicans (as the academy's

members often called themselves) were destroyed, and Xilian herself was at death's door when loyal minions spirited her away.

From the ashes of Academy Necromica's worst failure came its first great success. Unable to repair Master Xilian's horribly broken body, her fellow necromancers instead performed an unspeakable process upon her, transforming her into a lich. With her newfound lease on unlife, Xilian swore vengeance upon her enemies. As an undead creature, she understood well that patience was her best ally. Over the next century she quietly rebuilt Academy Necromica into a secret but powerful organization dedicated to death and evil. Now the time to strike back at her old enemies approaches, yet still she

hesitates, fearing the possibility of another setback.

## SIZE AND RESOURCES

Although currently only a minor organization in the metropolis of Septentrio, the academy is on the verge of becoming a more powerful player in the community (that is, a medium organization) because of its rapid growth in recent months. Thus, the academy's members can call upon more resources than a typical minor organization could—approximately 40,000 gp per week. The Necromicans' most common resources include scrolls, potions, poisons, and, of course, zombies.

## ALIGNMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The members of Academy Necromica

pride themselves on their strict dedication to evil and their disinterest in what they consider the petty politics of law and chaos. Thus, the organization is predominantly neutral evil in alignment. The alignments of individual members may vary, but the academy itself rarely strays into either lawful or chaotic methods.

Symbolic of this neutral evil ideal is Xilian, Master of the Academy (female human lich Nec 15). As the organization's founder and most powerful member, Xilian possesses a patience born of more than a century of unlife. She does not take unnecessary risks, although she understands the value of personal involvement in times of crisis. Xilian spends most of her time teaching the academy's many students and crafting long-range plans for the organization's future.

## MEMBERSHIP AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The membership of Academy Necromica numbers an even 120, not counting the various skeleton and zombie minions that roam the halls of the organization's home base. The academy leaders (Xilian and her underlings, see below) care little about the members' races, reasoning that such mortal accidents are ultimately meaningless. Just over 33% of the members are humans, and (perhaps surprisingly) 20% are elves. Another 18% are dwarves, 10% are half-elves, 7% are half-orcs, and the remainder of the membership is made up of a variety of races.

After Master Xilian, the most respected member of the academy is Uther Kyush (male elf Rog 5/Asn 5). Kyush oversees all targeted slayings, the gathering of illicit information, and the academy's various other criminal activities. Most Necromicans value Kyush's personal involvement in the day-to-day workings of the organization, for he seems much more in touch with the rank-and-file membership than Xilian. Kyush employs two squads of spies and cutthroats, each composed of three 1st-level rogues and a 2nd-level rogue who serves as leader. Kyush is rarely separated from his bodyguard and lover Ronica (female human Rog 2/Ftr 2).

As one might expect, the academy welcomes both the living and the dead, and it numbers a few undead among its members. The most powerful of these

(after Xilian herself) is Strichus (male human vampire Rog 5), who commands a pair of vampire spawn. Strichus is content to let Xilian control the organization, but he wouldn't mind turning a few more Necromicans to his way of "life."

The spiritual center of the academy is Brother Quarn (human male Clr 8 of Nerull), who performs all significant religious rituals for the organization. Quarn's rival for this role is Cyllise (female dwarf Clr 4 of Vecna), who counts Strichus and his vampire spawn among her allies. Dwarthin (male half-orc Rog 1/Clr 1) serves as Brother Quarn's eyes and ears in the academy. The organization's religious sector also includes a half-dozen acolytes (Clr 1), and its temple is protected by Yuri (male human Ftr 2).

Although Master Xilian takes an active role in teaching, the mundane functions of academia are the purview of Professor Hophla Dox (male half-elf Wiz 7) and his two teaching assistants, Fiula (female human Nec 3) and Langes (male dwarf Wiz 3). Together, these three handle the bulk of the teaching duties for the ninety-one 1st-level wizards who belong to the academy.

A frequent guest lecturer at Academy Necromica, Shae Liava (female elf Exp 5) also runs an apothecary shop that serves as a front for the organization. Her assistant, Mert (male human Exp 2), takes care of business in her absence, and her consort, the burly Xo (male human Ftr 1) keeps a constant and watchful eye both on Mert and the shop's wares.

## IN THE CAMPAIGN

Unless you run an evil-oriented campaign, Academy Necromica probably works best as an adversary organization for your PCs, but it's best not to pit lower-level characters directly against the academy. Either Master Xilian or Uther Kyush could certainly defeat a low-level party of adventurers singlehandedly, and neither would hesitate to eliminate a serious threat to the organization.

## Plot Hooks

The characters might come across rumors of a ring of grave robbers or body snatchers, which in turn could lead them to discover the academy's vile activities. Alternatively, the academy

might target one of the PCs as a likely candidate for vampirism or some other undead transformation, counting on the resulting alignment shift to make the character more sympathetic to the organization and its evil aims. Perhaps one or more characters are aligned with the forces that brought Xilian and her academy down the first time, and now Xilian is intent on revenge. Finally, if you have a nongood necromancer PC in your group, Professor Dox might attempt to recruit the character into the academy, but only after confirming her alignment.

## NEW FEATS

The members of Academy Necromica strive to perfect their talents in the animation of the dead and similar necromantic arts. To that end, they have devised a few special techniques. For more new and interesting Necromancy feats, see "Shades of Death" in *DRAGON* #298

## Taint Spell [Metamagic]

Your magic is so steeped in the powers of death that your other spells become partially infused with necromantic energy.

**Prerequisites:** Spell Focus (Necromancy), any other metamagic feat.

**Benefit:** Whenever you cast a spell with an energy descriptor that causes damage, half of the damage resulting from that spell is caused by negative energy and the other half of the damage is caused by the spell's normal energy descriptor. A tainted spell uses up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

## Poison Specialization [General]

Choose a type of poison, such as injury, contact, ingested, or inhaled. All such poisons that you craft are more deadly than normal.

**Prerequisites:** Craft (poisonmaking) 5+ ranks.

**Benefit:** Whenever you create a poison of the chosen type, the Fortitude DC to resist the poison's effects increases by +2. This adjustment applies to both the initial and secondary saving throws.

**Special:** You may select this feat more than once. Each time you select the feat, it applies to a different type of poison.

## ACADEMY NECROMICA

Academy Necromica (minor): AL NE; 40,000 gp resource limit; Membership 120; Integrated (human 45, elf 24, dwarf 22, half-elf 12, half-orc 8, other 9).

**Authority Figure:** Master Xilian, female human lich Wiz 15.

**Important Characters:** Uther Kyush, male elf Rog 5/Asn 5; Brother Quarn, human male Clr 8 (Nerull); Professor Hophla Dox, male half-elf Wiz 7; Strichus, male human vampire Rog 5; Shae Liava, female elf Exp 5; Ronica, female human Rog 2/Ftr 2; Cyllise, female dwarf Clr 4 (Vecna); Fiula, female human Nec 3; Langes, male dwarf Wiz 3; Yuri, male human Ftr 2; Mert, male human Exp 2; Dwarthin, male half-orc Rog 1/Clr 1; Xo, male human Ftr 1.

**Others:** Mixed; Clr 1 (6), Rog 1 (6), Rog 2 (2), Wiz 1 (91), vampire spawn (2).

## NEW EQUIPMENT

The Necromicans have also turned their talents toward crafting concoctions that provide either a combat edge for themselves and their allies or a horrible surprise for their enemies. Each of these alchemical substances must be spread over the body of the target creature (a

full-round action). If no waiting period is specified in the item's description, the substance's magical abilities activate immediately thereafter. A single bottle, flask, or jar of the substance is sufficient for a Medium-size creature, two Small creatures, or four Tiny creatures. A Large creature requires two bottles, a Huge creature four bottles, a Gargantuan creature eight bottles, and a Colossal creature sixteen bottles.

### Brittlebone

This unguent must be spread over a set of bones before it is animated as a skeleton. The ointment reduces the skeleton's natural armor bonus by 2 (to a minimum of 0), but when an affected skeleton is destroyed, its bones splinter and fly apart, sending shards in all directions. Any creature within the skeleton's normal reach when this occurs takes 1 point of piercing damage per Hit Die of the skeleton, rounded up (Reflex half DC 15).

**Market Price:** 30 gp.

**Alchemy DC:** 20.

### Embalming Fire

This bitter-smelling liquid must be poured over a corpse and allowed to soak for at least 1 minute before the corpse is animated as a zombie. If an

affected zombie takes even a single point of damage, it bursts into blue flame that lasts for 1 minute. This fire does no damage to the zombie, but each successful unarmed melee attack the creature makes while burning deals an additional 1d6 points of fire damage.

**Market Price:** 50 gp.

**Alchemy DC:** 20.

### Liquid Night

When spread upon a daylight-sensitive undead creature, this dark, sticky fluid provides temporary protection from the sun's deadly rays. An affected undead creature can ignore its usual vulnerability to sunlight for a full hour. If subjected to a spell or magical effect that would cause extra damage to an undead creature vulnerable to sunlight (such as *searing light* or *sunbeam*), a creature under the influence of liquid night is treated as though it did not have that vulnerability. However, exposure to such a spell or magical effect burns away the liquid night, immediately ending all protection against sunlight or magical effects that simulate it. Liquid night has the distinct odor of moonflower (one of its ingredients).

**Market Price:** 150 gp.

**Alchemy DC:** 25. 



# PRYING

# EYES

by Johnny L. Wilson • illustration by Wayne Reynolds

The silver edge of the axe wedged between the seams of the thick wooden door. Rusty bolts and hinges cried with a mournful sigh and splinters erupted from the sagging door as Calmet awakened to a frightening reality. At first, his sleepy mind had written off the repetitive blows of the axe as merely the sound of a woodsman felling trees. Then, Calmet awoke to a direct threat: Someone was assaulting his house. Somehow, Calmet found the presence of mind to scoot his sleeping mat over the trap door that led to his inner sanctum, the site where his order's fortune was stored.

"Pelor protect me," prayed Augustin Calmet. The prior plenipotentiary of the Soldiers of the Sun found himself newly baptized in perspiration as the pounding continued and he became awake enough to realize that all of his wards had failed. Once an orator who could inspire courage and faith throughout the army of Pelor in which he served, Calmet suddenly found himself paralyzed with fear as he realized the extent of his predicament. "Pelor, have mercy," he prayed as he began to comprehend that the threat at his door had either already routed or killed the squad of bodyguards assigned to his mission by the Master General.

"Great Pelor! Place your power upon me!" Calmet cried out as he watched his door crumble into useless fragments of kindling. Two large shapes were framed in the doorway, obscene shadows in the misty morning. "They must be after the gold," the priest muttered quietly to himself. He immediately began to beseech Pelor's protection over the holy treasury and put muscle to his prayer by reaching for his hammer.

The "Amen" that ended this brief and frantic prayer was echoed by a cynical, mocking "Amen" emanating from one of the figures in shadow. "You won't be needing that," the figure gestured toward


the hammer with one hand and held onto a necklace or medallion with the other. Calmet's hammer glowed with a sickening green glow and slid another arm's length away from the cleric.

Even as the hammer slid away from him, Calmet noticed the larger shadow moving toward him, axe in hand. Calmet was no frail prelate sent out to pastor a parish church. He was a trained fighting man, a cleric who trusted in Pelor's might to be reflected in his own. With a practiced ease, Calmet tumbled backward onto his sleeping mat and reached toward his hammer. He reached in vain as a wave of lethargy washed over him, weighting him down. It was all he could do to turn toward the shadowy figure who had just spoken. It was more than he could bear to realize that the assailant was holding a piece of iron in front of him and, in spite of Pelor's presumed blessing, he had surrendered to the intruder's spell.

The two shadows stood over Calmet. The wielder of the axe was a brawny half-orc warrior with the blue woad tattoos common to northerners who followed the old traditions. The warrior scowled as he considered Calmet, and the scowl added an extra touch of ferocity to the scarred face with its empty left eye socket. Were he not held by the other figure's spell, Calmet would have shuddered. As it was, he waited to see what these worshipers of Gruumsh could possibly want from a priest of Pelor.

The other figure wore clerical robes more fitting for a high churchman than a rogue. Yet, when the figure looked into Calmet's face, all became clear. "I presume you know who I am," stated the figure in robes that once belonged to an archprelate of Pelor. Indeed, Calmet had heard of a renegade priest of Pelor, a heretic and traitor named Guillaume Laud who had forsaken the path of righteousness for a quick route to power. As Calmet studied the bejeweled eye patch over the

FROM A STORY IDEA BY T. H. LAIN



intruder's left eye and the harsh frown lines around his assailant's cruel mouth, Calmet could readily believe that he was facing the heretic whose infamy had assumed legendary proportions throughout the region.

"And if you know who I am," the presumed heretic continued, "you know that I show no tolerance, not even a slender strand of what you sun-lovers call grace." The man Calmet believed to be Laud smiled, but the smile was more frightening than the half-orc's scowl. Being unable to move or speak, Calmet merely waited to hear the expected ultimatum from the intruder.

"I once served your impotent little god," the apostate lectured Calmet. "I

even be allowed to live? Where was Pelor's justice?"

The apostate dismissed his spell and Calmet was barely able to catch himself before he fell against the floor. "You see," continued the intruder, "I need gold. I need gold to finance my experiments. I need gold to pay my minions. I need gold to rework the sanctuary of my god. In short, I need gold, and my sources in the service of Pelor tell me that you have plenty. I serve a god of power and you serve a god who is hard of hearing. Tell me where your order's gold is hidden."

With a sinking feeling, Calmet quietly prayed for Pelor's intervention and wished that he could grasp his holy

intervene soon, there would be no new monastery for the Soldiers of the Sun. For a fleeting moment, he wondered if Pelor would ever intervene, if Pelor even cared.

"Oh, don't worry about the books, my dear Calmet," remonstrated Laud. "I don't need the books. I only need the gold . . . and, I need you."

"Me?" Calmet almost screamed. "What need has a foul apostate for *me*?"

"Power has a price," explained Laud as he drew a silver dagger from his belt. "I need more power, but I don't intend to be the one who pays the price. Gruumsh is a demanding sovereign, but at least his tariffs are clearly stated. The sacrifices are a little more straightforward than those ambiguous far-off rewards promised by Pelor. They are more transactions than mysterious rites, you see."

"Pelor protect me," breathed Calmet quietly as Laud held the silver blade beneath his left eye. Suddenly, it was very important that Pelor intervene.

Laud laughed contemptuously. "I heard that feeble prayer to your still more feeble god. Pelor won't protect you. I learned that a long time ago. Anyone who trusts Pelor might as well float his soul in the wind. No one knows the direction or the destination."

Calmet tried to protest, but the words caught in his throat and he couldn't interrupt the foul heretic. In desperation, he inwardly called on Pelor to save him and listened in horror as Laud continued.

"If Pelor is powerful, he is not provident. If Pelor is provident, he is not powerful," lectured the fallen cleric. "Am I not right? Have you not given your entire life in Pelor's service, trying to make a difference in the world? You have dedicated your entire life to Pelor, and where is your sun god, now? You, yourself, have need of Pelor's intervention, but his providence is nowhere to be found. I offer you the portal to power."

Calmet wanted to shout a slogan of faith. He wanted to dispute Laud's heretical assertions. He wanted to call fire from the sky to incinerate the heretic and purify his ears from the blasphemy that Laud had just spouted with such confidence. But Calmet didn't feel confident.

He mentally begged Pelor to intervene, insisting that he could no longer believe in a god who would let

## "PELOR PROTECT ME," BREATHED CALMET AS LAUD HELD THE SILVER BLADE BENEATH HIS LEFT EYE.

watched the poor starve with Pelor's blessing. I tried to stem the tide of plagues that decimated our population, vainly invoking the alleged power of a capricious god who claimed to love the lowest human. I taught your obscene little catechisms. Now, I have my own. If Pelor is powerful, he is not provident. If Pelor is provident, he is not powerful. Don't you agree?"

Calmet felt so betrayed that he couldn't answer at all. He still hoped for Pelor's intervention, but he was beginning to feel doubt, and every bone in his body was crying out that his faith was futile.

"Remember that little verse about the rays of Pelor shining upon the just and the unjust?" asked Laud. Calmet wondered when the torture of the heretic's mocking would end, but Laud continued, "Frankly, I wonder if the unjust don't catch more than their share of the golden glow of Pelor. I know they get their share of the gold, if not the glow. And that's where you come in. . . ."

Laud's unholy symbol dangled in front of Calmet's face. In horror, the priest of Pelor realized that the unseeing eye of Gruumsh was scratched and scarred from what had previously been a solar disk sacred to Pelor. How could Pelor have withheld his wrath from such heresy? How could this abomination

symbol for extra assurance.

Unfortunately, the solar disk and his bag of spell components were safely locked in the casket behind Laud. Involuntarily, Calmet looked at the small wooden casket with its pearl inlay and quickly looked away from it. Laud was not fooled. The archpriest glanced back at the little box and confronted Calmet once again.

"I'm afraid the chest I'm interested in is much larger than that," threatened the apostate. "I want the one that's so large and heavy I'll need the wagon to carry it away."

"It isn't here," asserted Calmet, hoping that Pelor would forgive the half-truth. The treasure wasn't in the house, but it was hidden in a cavern below the house.

"Then, we have a problem," retorted Laud. "I don't see how it could fail to be here. You arrived with a wagon. You've only spent a modicum on herbs, ground bone, desiccated body parts, and powders. You've spent slightly more on an intriguing array of tomes of both the magical, historical, and sacred variety. Tomes, I might add, of which I only see one in your house."

"I bought them for the order," protested Calmet. "We'll need them for the new monastery. They're currently in safekeeping!" Calmet felt his shoulders slump as he realized that if Pelor didn't

his servants face such horrors. Before Calmet could finish the thought, the silver dagger pierced his eye. Blood spurted like a geyser. Pain shot through his eye like a firebrand, only to be replaced with a merciful numbing as his body's defenses began to assume control.

"Only he who sees with one eye can truly see," intoned the blasphemous priest, holding the bloody orb in front of Calmet's remaining eye. "I offer this power to the god of power. Releasing the half-sight of ignorance, I open the portal of power for myself and, should he have the courage, for this poor misguided Peloran. Great Gruumsh, God of Pure Power, I honor thee."

Calmet collapsed into a welcome unconsciousness, whispering "Pelor! Pelor! Why did you fail me?"



Jozan dropped his guard and watched the barbarian thrust predictably toward the apparent opening. The barbarian, a new recruit named Eusebius, couldn't be blamed. This was the first time he had faced Jozan, and he had never experienced Jozan's favorite ruse of establishing a false pattern of dropping his shield arm prior to swinging low with his weapon arm. Then, at a later point in the match, when his opponent would inevitably commit irreversibly to the attack, Jozan would raise the shield and corkscrew back in the opposite direction to take his opponent on his weapon arm. Nearly all of Jozan's peers had succumbed to the tactic at one point or another, and Eusebius would soon be added to the roster of duped sparring partners.

Jozan raised his shield with lightning speed and parried Eusebius's blow. He smiled with satisfaction as he twisted to the barbarian's vulnerable side to deliver the decisive blow. Inexplicably, he dropped to his knees, grabbed his eye, and cried out in pain. Eusebius glanced helplessly over at the trainer as if to say that he hadn't actually struck Jozan. The trainer waved Eusebius off and ran toward the stricken cleric, kneeling beside him as he reached his pupil.

"What is it, Jozan?" asked Laurent, the order's Master-at-Arms.

"My eye!" cried Jozan, holding tightly to his left eye. "It feels like someone stabbed my eye."

"That can't be, my son," responded Laurent. "You are fighting with blunt weapons. No one stabbed anyone." The Master paused before continuing. "I saw you block Eusebius's stroke with my own eyes. It must have been the glare." Settling on this explanation, the Master plunged onward into lecture. "Surely, I've warned you to shield your eyes when Pelor's sun is high. On the battlefield or in the arena, glare can be the harbinger of defeat . . . or death."

"Master Laurent," whispered Jozan, "I assure you, this did not come from glare. I feel like someone stabbed my eye." Concluding his defense, the young cleric lowered his hand and Laurent could see Jozan's red, swollen left eye. Although no weapon had punctured his eye, Laurent's prize pupil had sustained a mysterious wound.

"Sorcery!" shouted the Master-at-Arms.

"I'm not certain, Master," responded Jozan. "I had a sense of my former tutor, and then it struck! Do you think Calmet is in danger?"

"I do not know, my son," answered the older man. "May Pelor protect the prior and lead him safely to our new house of prayer."

"Pelor's blessing be upon him," came Jozan's trained response. He stood shakily to his feet and feebly brandished his hammer in what he thought was a clear signal for Eusebius to resume the match. The barbarian

doubt that the Soldiers of the Sun would eventually triumph over the greedy larceny and blasphemous accusations of King Ingemar. He secretly enjoyed the fact that the order's treasure had been sent in two different directions prior to the arrest. He didn't know if the Master General had been warned directly by Pelor in vision or dream, or whether a more human messenger had warned the leader of Ingemar's foul intent. He simply knew that Pelor would not allow such calumny and larceny to go unpunished.

At the door of his cell, Jozan stumbled and fell forward. Although Pelor's radiance should have lit at least a portion of the cell, Jozan thrashed about in a darkness more akin to night than ordinary shadow. The cleric found himself unable to focus on his surroundings, yet despite this, he saw a clear image before him. Jozan swallowed impulsively as he absorbed the malevolence of the laughing image. It was a cruel face with a patch over the left eye, and a cruel mouth accentuated by harsh lines and spitting out vile blasphemies against Pelor.

After a moment, the darkness passed and the room was immersed in a mix of light and shadow. Jozan started to stand and became aware that his hand was resting in a puddle. At first, the cleric wrote off the puddle as perspiration wrought from the strange experience and vision. Then, looking downward, Jozan

## JOZAN REALIZED THAT HIS HAND WAS COVERED IN BLOOD—BLOOD THAT HAD DRIPPED FROM HIS OWN EYE.

hesitantly moved toward Jozan, but the Master-at-Arms waved him aside.

"We've seen enough for one day!" asserted Laurent as he excused the class, and Jozan heard the Master add under his breath, "And may it be the first of many before we have to face those churlish rats who serve His Bellicose Majesty, King Ingemar. Pelor grant us time to train or give us strength to die."

Jozan didn't enjoy hearing Master Laurent's fatalism. The days had been tense since the arrest of the Master General and all of his brothers at the order's home temple. Yet, Jozan had no

realized that his hand was covered with blood—blood that had dripped from his own eye.

With a sense of urgency to understand what was happening to him, Jozan rushed to a small sack that held his store of earthly possessions. Hurriedly, he rummaged through the bag until he found the mirrored plate he occasionally used to trim his beard. He adjusted the plate to examine his eye and discovered no open wound whatsoever, no logical explanation.

"Stigmata!" he cried. "I've been marked with a stigmata!"



Calmet felt the blood oozing down his cheek. Having lost his eye in Laud's obscene ritual, he now feared that his life would be the next sacrifice. Laud glowered at him.

"Where is the gold?" demanded the apostate archprelate. "Did you really expect me to believe your story of burying it piecemeal on your treks to gather roots and herbs?"

Calmet attempted to stare down the apostate priest with his surviving eye. As he felt the blood streaming down his face, he felt no need to protect Pelor's gold, but he had no desire to reward the archprelate for his foul methods, either. He bravely prepared to face down the heretic with his boldest bluff ever. "Then, I suppose you'll have to find it. Do you think I'm

## "A DREAM! DO DREAMS CAUSE EYES TO SWELL AND BLEED? DO DREAMS DRIVE MEN TO THEIR KNEES?"

a fool? I know I would die if you found the gold in my possession."

Laud grabbed Calmet by the neck and pulled his victim to a standing position. "Bravely spoken, Augustin Calmet. I would almost believe you if it were not for the trap door beneath your sleeping mat."

Calmet's emotions started to sag, but he quickly steeled himself to play out the bluff as long as he could. "That's only a root cellar," protested the helpless priest, suddenly as concerned that the ruse work to protect his life as well as protect the gold.

"We'll determine that," responded Laud with a menacing quality to his voice. Pulling Calmet away from the trap door, the archprelate held the ceremonial dagger at his prisoner's throat. Turning to his henchman, he ordered, "Search below. Look under every root and tuber."

Calmet willed himself to look confident. He would die if he failed to convince the archprelate that there was no treasure in the hiding place below. He heard the trap door creak and the three wooden stairs groan as the heavy body descended them. He heard the axeman's boots find purchase in the loose shale of the stone steps, a soft

crunching sound. He continued to will confidence to course through his body, even as his one good eye observed the heretic observing him. He would have smiled if he hadn't sensed that such an expression would seem too contrived and over-confident. Instead, he waited. And prayed. He prayed, and then he gritted his teeth in defiant anger against the god who had forsaken him.

A wooden basket was overturned in the cellar, the contents heavy enough to be potatoes or turnips. Then, another basket was overturned. Calmet could easily visualize what was happening by listening. Laud's henchman lost patience and hacked another basket apart with his axe. Calmet hated to think what his root cellar would look like when the henchman finished, but he felt glad that the axeman was using the blade on his

vegetables rather than his person.

The familiar crunch returned, along with the protests from the wooden steps. Calmet sensed the presence of the henchman, even before he smelled the man's leek-tainted breath. "There's nothing there," reported Laud's minion, "nothing but a bunch of vegetables."

Laud released Calmet and hissed a threat in the cleric's ear as he did so. "So, you spoke the truth. In that case, I give you until the full moon to bring that gold to me. Bring it to me or I'll show you that Pelor can't protect your other eye, either. One way or another, I intend to have that gold."

Calmet shuddered. Never before had he felt as helpless as he did at that moment. Watching the evil priest and his henchman depart, he finally broke down and wept, blood and tears commingling until the two riders were out of sight. Then, assured that the invaders had truly left, Calmet descended into the root cellar.



Jozan faced his confessor, Brother Gerot. Like a benevolent inquisitor, Gerot had carefully examined Jozan's recent experiences. A stigmata was not common in the ranks of the Soldiers of

the Sun and neither were the visions the young cleric claimed to have had.

"Let's cover this again," challenged Gerot. "You feel that your former tutor, Augustin Calmet, is in grave danger from this man with an eye patch?"

"The man with the eye patch blasphemed Pelor!" contended Jozan.

"Yes, yes, I understand," soothed the confessor. "We simply can't be sure that all of your anxieties aren't caused by a dream."

"A dream!" Jozan couldn't help but raise his voice. "A dream! Do dreams cause eyes to swell and bleed? Do dreams drive men to their knees in midday as though they were staggering home drunkenly past closing?"

"Perhaps," responded Gerot.

"Perhaps, your inner mind is dealing with the uncertainties of having our Master General and brothers arrested, our temple seized. Perhaps, your inner mind has inflicted these indignities upon you to help you resolve your doubts and fears. We cannot know."

"I know that Pelor would not bring these visions on me without a reason," retorted Jozan.

"You know?" the confessor remonstrated his charge. "You have not even learned to read and write the celestial language, but *you know*. You cannot even read our scripture or our institutes in the language in which they were given, yet *you know*. You who couldn't move beyond Calmet's most elementary examinations now know of dangers for which Calmet isn't prepared?"

"Why doesn't anyone believe me?" lamented Jozan. "Don't you understand? Pelor works in mysterious ways. I don't know why He is speaking to me. Maybe it's because I don't know very much, but, if you don't believe me, send word to the Master General. He might understand what Pelor is doing, even if none of us does."

"We cannot," Gerot responded softly. "You don't know what you're asking."

"I don't care. I demand to press my request before the Master General!"

The confessor shook his head sadly. "Jozan, Jozan," cautioned Gerot, "the only way the order can present this to the Master General is for you to prove the justness of your cause before we query him."

Jozan knelt before his confessor in



helplessness. “But how can I prove the justness of my cause when you won’t listen to me?”

Brother Gerot stood up and glided to the door as though performing an episcopal procession during a mass. “I warned you that you didn’t know what you were asking,” answered the confessor. “The only way to prove the justness of your cause is to win a trial by combat.”

“Then, that’s what I’ll do,” exclaimed Jozan. “Pelor will help me. I’m not that bad in the arena.”

“You really don’t understand,” explained Gerot. “You must win a trial by combat against Master Laurent.”



Calmet edged carefully down the steps, his depth perception off because of his missing eye. He felt both safe and foolish, holding his hammer in one hand and a torch in the other. Yet, somehow, he didn’t want to let the hammer out of his hand. Carefully, he stepped around the disarranged piles of turnips and potatoes to an empty basket against the far wall from the steps. Moving the basket aside with a sweep of his hammer, he smashed downward at a swiftly moving shadow and missed the rat’s tail by a hair, little understanding the price he was already paying for missing an eye.

Waving his torch to startle the rodents, he whirled and smashed his hammer against another rat, its blood and entrails mixing with the smashed remains of some turnips on the cellar floor. Reaching down, he grabbed the remains of the rat and turned to face the cellar wall, once again. Then, as though his depth perception had failed him once more, he stepped directly into the wall. Indeed, it would be more accurate to state that he stepped through the wall. Calmet smiled as the illusion dissipated. The axeman had been so intent on searching the baskets and turning the cellar upside-down that it never occurred to him that one of the cellar walls might be an illusory wall.

With contempt, Calmet remembered how Laud had treated him. He sneered to himself as he realized that Laud had been too sure of himself to even bother scanning for magic before he left the cottage. Calmet’s bluff had worked.

The priest moved on through the

cavern until he reached a natural opening. There, he paused long enough to toss the bloody pulp of the rat toward the ceiling. Folds of shadow dropped toward the freshly smashed corpse as a preternatural darkness descended on the cavern. Tentacles appeared to snare the rat’s remains and pull it upward toward the cavern’s ceiling. The rodent carcass disappeared into the darkness, and the darkness dissipated as the darkmantle pulled itself back into its hidden crevice.

With the darkmantle distracted, Calmet moved rapidly into the cavern in the direction of a blue glow. In spite of the numb and shock he was experiencing from the loss of his eye, Calmet smiled at the glyph’s continuing glow. Designed to cause fear in any enemies that traversed the cavern, the glyph was still performing its task of warding as Calmet had intended.

He moved confidently toward the eastern branch of the passage and nodded with satisfaction as his torch’s glow played over the fungi, dried leaves, and desiccated body parts he had painstakingly arranged on crudely hewn wooden shelving. He transferred his torch to the hand grasping the

## FOLDS OF SHADOW DROPPED TOWARD THE FRESHLY SMASHED CORPSE AS A PRE-TERNATURAL DARKNESS DESCENDED . . .

hammer and used his free hand to pull a dark gray scroll case from the midst of several light gray ones. Scroll case in hand, he quickly moved past the cavern’s only table, its mortar and pestle sitting amid a half-dozen pottery amphorae that Calmet had crafted.

Calmet passed into a smaller portion of the cavern and used his torch to light a candle placed in an incongruously fashioned sconce. The smaller cavern was illuminated by the candle and revealed a potter’s wheel. Calmet extinguished his torch, set the hammer aside, and grabbed two handfuls of the clay he kept in a covered basket near the wheel. He slammed the clay against the wheel, nearly breaking it as it absorbed his fierce frustration, and began to speak aloud.

“Pelor, my lord and sovereign, how could you let this happen?” Calmet punctuated the prayer by lifting the

clay and smashing it down on the wheel, once more. “For so many years, you were the potter and I was the willing clay.” He smacked the clay roughly with his fist and allowed drops of blood to ooze from his eye long enough to lubricate the clay. “You molded me and you made me what I am. Now, I’m a misshapen lump.” He smashed the clay again. “I am a broken jar, a jagged shard, and *you* let it happen to me! You molded me. You made me. And *you* broke me!”

Once again, Calmet began to cry. His tears mixed with his blood, and the sanguine mixture dripped onto the clay. Calmet massaged the blood and water into the clay and began to shape it into the form of a small, winged humanoid. With every motion of his hand, the angry priest shouted invective at his god until he shaped the figure into the horror he had envisioned. Grabbing the scroll case, he opened it and stood above his creation. Reading the scroll, he let his blood drop onto the tiny figure until the clay took on a reddish hue and the figure moved with a life of its own.


Then, Calmet spoke to the homunculus

like a father cooing over his newborn. “Though Pelor failed to protect me, you will protect my secrets. With every gold piece in these caverns, I will purchase scrolls and artifacts. I dedicate myself to power. If Gruumsh is that power, I serve Gruumsh. If Pelor’s power cannot protect me, I will find my own. I will wreak revenge against Laud. I will use Gruumsh’ own power against Laud. If it is to be Pelor or power, I serve power.”

The one-eyed cleric failed to see that his creation was unmoved by his speech. The homunculus merely awaited Calmet’s instructions, clay awaiting its potter. And Calmet awaited the opportunity for his revenge, the potter himself molded by circumstance and emotion.



Jozan saluted his teacher and swallowed with grave difficulty as he saw Master Laurent’s eyes glistening. Jozan might



have been the top of his class in martial training, but it was one thing to face his peers and another to face the weapon master himself. Jozan was relieved that he needn't fear death at the hands of the Master-at-Arms, but he did fear the consequences of failure. Whenever a Soldier of the Sun sought vindication through the ritual of combat, he faced excommunication from the order and the removal of his holy orders. Jozan knew his Master thought the trial by combat foolhardy and that Laurent expected Jozan to be expunged from the order at the end of their bout.

Yet, Jozan felt certain that Pelor had brought him to this point. His hammer felt lighter than it ever had, and he could see with clarity, as though time had slowed to accommodate his normally slow reflexes. He breathed a prayer for Pelor's protection and shook his head to clear his thoughts when he felt assaulted by the words he had heard in his vision. "If Pelor is powerful, he is not provident. If Pelor is provident, he is not powerful."

"Praise Pelor!" shouted Jozan as the trial began. Master Laurent responded with the same phrase and immediately advanced menacingly toward his pupil. The master stepped just inside Jozan's range and hesitated for a brief second as Jozan tested the range with a quick smash of his hammer. Laurent deflected Jozan's blow with his shield and feinted toward Jozan's shield with his mace. Yet, at the same moment Jozan deflected the blow, Laurent rushed forward and smashed into the side of Jozan's head with his shield.

Jozan was stunned, his head ringing from the shield bash against his helmet. Master Laurent had always said that shield bashes were only useful in facing multiple foes. Obviously, Jozan had plenty to learn about hand-to-hand fighting. Unfortunately, it was too late for advanced training techniques.

For his part, Master Laurent was taking no chances with his star pupil. He assumed that Jozan had learned his lessons well, and he was determined to keep his student off-guard until he could launch the finishing blow. His next blow fairly dented Jozan's shield, and he kept rushing the younger cleric and smashing blow after blow into his former pupil's defenses until he sensed Jozan weakening. Laurent only needed a brief moment when Jozan wobbled, stumbled, or hesitated and he knew he could drop

the young man to the ground.

Jozan sensed this, as well. He had always respected Laurent's prowess and now, he felt beaten down and desperate. Then, just when he thought there was no hope, he noticed that Laurent's shield arm was lower than normal. He just might score a blow on the shoulder. Jozan whipped his hammer toward the exposed shoulder and immediately realized that the blow would never land. Laurent had used the tactic to draw Jozan closer to him and had hooked his right boot behind Jozan's left leg. As Jozan swung the hammer, Laurent struck with mace and shield simultaneously and caused the less-experienced cleric to stumble backward.

Jozan caught himself and deflected yet another blow, wondering how he could possibly win. With every ounce of energy left in him, he launched a flurry of blows toward his master. In turn, Master Laurent circled backward as though he were giving way to Jozan's forceful series of blows. In reality, he was moving such that he would eventually force Jozan to face the sun or give up the attack. Somehow, Jozan sensed what would happen if he turned to his right. If Laurent kept circling until Jozan looked directly into the sun, Jozan would be blinded and find himself vulnerable to any combination of blows and thrusts from Laurent's mace.

Instead, Jozan judged Laurent's position from his Master's shadow, dipped his right shoulder as though he were going to turn to the right and, instead, spun swiftly to his left. Laurent's mace was raised to crush Jozan's weapon arm as he turned right, and Jozan placed a resounding blow across the more experienced man's shoulders. The Master weakly struck at Jozan's left side as he realized, too late, that Jozan was not fighting conventionally. He raised the mace to strike his student once more and realized that Jozan had slipped by him shield to shield. He was even more surprised to feel Jozan's armored shoulder smashing into his back and nearly knocking him off-balance.


Laurent did not fall, but it took him a few moments to find firm footing. By that time, Jozan had struck him several times across his left shoulder and head. Laurent was certain that Jozan hadn't learned these moves from him, and he was furious at the prospect of being humiliated by a relatively untrained

upstart. As a result, he did exactly what he had taught countless trainees not to do, he charged recklessly.

Laurent spun to his right and thrust his mace at Jozan in a ferocious backhand, only to discover that Jozan wasn't there and he himself was looking squarely at the sun. Momentarily blinded, he felt a bone-cracking smash on his weapon arm. Even through the armor, he could sense the broken bone. He vainly tried to toss the mace to his left hand, but the weakened arm refused to obey him and involuntarily dropped the mace to the ground. Agonizing fire tore through his lower arm as he carelessly reached for the weapon, but the pain of the broken arm was nothing to his next experience. From behind him came the words, "Master Laurent, do you yield?"

There was nothing else to do. Laurent realized that he was unarmed and his foe was right behind him. Although he was the most experienced warrior in the Soldiers of the Sun, an untried novice had bested him. He had disregarded his own lessons and been blinded by Pelor for his hubris. And then, Laurent understood. He dropped to one knee in front of Jozan and chose his words carefully. "I yield to you, Brother Jozan. Pelor has vindicated your cause, and I offer you my arms and my blessing in your quest."

Jozan breathed a quiet prayer of thanksgiving. He knelt beside his Master and called on Pelor to cure the veteran's wounds. A golden glow snaked around Laurent's broken arm and the pained grimaces began to leave his face as he felt the bones begin to reform. Laurent sighed with relief, and Jozan began to sing a psalm of praise to Pelor.

Yet, in the very midst of worship, uneasy images unfolded in Jozan's mind, images of Calmet, blood dripping from his empty eye socket onto a monstrous little creature. Jozan pledged to confront his former tutor and restore his order's glory. For the first time in his life, Jozan failed to question his motives. After all, hadn't Pelor himself blinded the Master? How else could Jozan have managed to win his trial? "Praise Pelor!" exclaimed Jozan. "Praise Pelor, indeed." 

[Jozan continues his quest in T.H. Lain's *The Bloody Eye*, scheduled for release in January, 2003.]

by Clifford Horowitz · illustrated by Mike Sass and Todd Granier

# THE LOST HORRORS OF NEVERWINTER

Just in case you're one of the few people who isn't familiar with *Neverwinter Nights*, the game is a massive, sprawling tale that starts in a plague-ridden Neverwinter and quickly embroils you in a stirring plot of intrigue and mystery, requiring you to defeat many enemies along the way.

The game uses 3rd Edition D&D rules . . . mostly. Character generation utilizes the optional point allocation method, which might be new territory for some, but after that, it's all the rules you've grown used to. Five-foot adjusts, attacks of opportunity, power attacks—they're all there. And nothing is as cool as walking your fighter into the midst of a swarm of enemies and watching the Cleave feat do its work.

Despite the numerous similarities to the D&D mechanics, *Neverwinter Nights* has broken with tradition in a few cases, introducing monstrous adversaries previously unseen in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. These monsters are presented here for the first time and are ready for you to throw at your players during your next D&D session.

## SKELETAL INTELLECT DEVOURER

Small Undead

Hit Dice: 6d12 (39 hp)

Initiative: +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 40 ft.

AC: 18 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +3 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 14

Attacks: 4 claws +6 melee

Damage: Claw 1d3+2 and stunning pain

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Attacks: Stunning pain

Special Qualities: Undead, skeletal, damage reduction 20/+3, electricity

resistance 15, fire immunity, *psionics*, *corpse thief*, turning vulnerability

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +6

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

Skills: Climb +11, Concentration +9, Jump +11, Listen +10, Spot +10

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Focus (claws), Improved Initiative

Climate/Terrain: Any

Organization: Solitary, pod (2-4)

Challenge Rating: 7

Treasure: 1/2 coins, standard goods, double items

Alignment: Often chaotic evil

Advancement: 7-8 HD (Medium-size); 9-12 HD (Large)

The skeletal intellect devourer is a hideous creature that resembles a moldering brain in a bony shell with scraps of flesh hanging from its form. Stripped of the weaknesses of flesh and wielding power from beyond the grave, the skeletal intellect devourer retains its impressive psionic abilities, making it even more dangerous and terrible than when it was when it was living.

Unlike other undead, the skeletal intellect devourer retains its speed and agility and gains strength and immunities far surpassing its living kin. However, it is a coward; it fears divine casters for the burning touch of their turning ability.

Because these creatures can only inhabit corpses, skeletal intellect devourers make their lairs near a ready supply of bodies (such as cemeteries or sewers), and large concentrations of corpses can bring these normally solitary creatures together.

## Combat

Skeletal intellect devourers have an immense fear of being turned. Thus, clerics are often a skeletal intellect devourer's first target in combat. If it is able to strike from surprise, the skeletal intellect devourer attempts to use *domination* to command all clerics and paladins to remove their holy symbols. When finally forced to engage in physical combat, it attacks a single target, inhabiting the body as soon as it is able. If the skeletal intellect devourer closes with divine casters and has not yet been able to *dominate* the caster, it uses its first action to sunder the caster's holy symbol and then uses *claws of the vampire* to keep its host body intact.

**Undead:** Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage (except by psionic combat), energy drain, or death from massive damage.

**Skeletal:** Because they no longer have vital, internal organs, skeletal intellect devourers take half damage from piercing and slashing weapons.

**Psionics (Sp):** At will—*claws of the vampire*, *compression*, *domination*, *invisibility*, *painful touch*, and *schism*. These abilities are as the powers manifested by a 16th-level psion.

If you do not use the psionics rules in your game, the skeletal intellect devourer's psionic abilities can be represented with the following spell-like abilities as cast by a 16th-level wizard: *reduce*, *dominate person*, *invisibility*, and *vampiric touch*. In addition, the skeletal intellect devourer causes 1d6 points of subdual damage with all physical attacks on top of normal damage.

# NIGHTS



**Attack/Defense Modes (Sp):** At will—*ego whip, id insinuation/empty mind, intellect fortress, thought shield.*

**Corpse Thief (Su):** When the skeletal intellect devourer encounters a corpse, it can devour whatever brain remains and enter the skull (compacting itself supernaturally to fit in the skull). Once in place, it can animate the body as if the corpse were a zombie or a skeleton. Treat the host body as a zombie or skeleton (depending on whether the corpse had flesh on it or not) of the appropriate size, with all appropriate statistics. Even if the body is a fresh kill, the skeletal intellect devourer cannot use any of the corpse's former abilities, skills, or feats. However, it may channel its psionic powers through the body it inhabits, allowing the body to grow claws, become invisible, and so on. Hit points regained with *claws of the vampire* may be absorbed by the skeletal intellect devourer, its host body, or split between the two as needed. Damage to the host body does not affect the devourer. While inside the host body, the skeletal intellect devourer has total cover but can perceive its environment normally.

**Stunning Pain (Su):** The touch of a skeletal intellect devourer's claws is incredibly painful, much more than the wounds they leave would suggest. Every time a skeletal intellect devourer damages an opponent with a claw attack, the victim must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 10) or be stunned for 1 round. This also applies to any physical attacks made by a corpse the skeletal intellect devourer is animating.

**Turning Vulnerability (Ex):** A skeletal intellect devourer is treated as a creature with 1 fewer HD for the

purposes of a turning attempt.

## BATTLE INTELLECT DEVOURER

### Small Aberration

**Hit Dice:** 8d8+24 (60 hp)

**Initiative:** +4 (Dex)

**Speed:** 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

**AC:** 21 (+1 Size, +4 Dex, +6 natural), touch 15, flat-footed 17

**Attacks:** 4 claws +9 melee

**Damage:** Claw 1d6+2 and poison

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** *Fear cone*, poison

**Special Qualities:** Damage reduction 20/+3, *protection from evil* vulnerability, resistances

**Saves:** Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 15, Dex 19, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10

**Skills:** Climb +15, Hide +11, Jump +7,

Listen +8, Move Silently +11, Spot +8

**Feats:** Alertness, Weapon Focus (claw)

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate and warm hills, mountains, and underground

**Organization:** Solitary or pod (2-4)

**Challenge Rating:** 6

**Treasure:** 1/2 coins, standard goods, standard items

**Alignment:** Often chaotic evil

**Advancement:** 9-12 HD (Large), 13-16 HD (Huge)

Bred as spies, couriers, and assassins, battle intellect devourers are stronger and harder than their better-known brethren, the intellect devourer. Their brain tissue has developed into a single, all-purpose sensory organ, and it is encased in a reinforced shell. This highly resilient body sits on four

sinewy legs, each tipped with a trio of stout, sharp claws. As the battle intellect devourer has evolved, it has lost most of its psionic abilities. This makes it no less dangerous in a fight, as its newly developed strengths can be just as deadly.

### Combat

Despite their incredible hardness, battle intellect devourers prefer to strike from surprise. They often cling to walls or hide in rock formations, waiting for the chance to spring on an isolated individual.

**Fear Cone (Sp):** The last remnants of the devourer's psionic abilities, the battle intellect devourer can project a 40-foot-long cone of fear up to 6 times per day. Creatures within the area must make a Will saving throw (DC 14) or be affected as though by the *fear* spell.



## FOR YOUR CHARACTER

Although the intellect devourer variants are probably too alien to really consider for an association with a PC, the other two creatures presented give opportunities to players as well as DMs.

**Spirit of the Woods:** This power of nature could have a close relationship with a nature-oriented PC as easily as it does with the animals of the wild. Perhaps your barbarian comes from a tribe that worships this spirit as its primary totem, and its touch is what lets the chosen warriors rage like fierce predators. A ranger with a true touch of the wild might have even been raised in the wilds with the guardianship of such a creature. Both druids and rangers could seek such guidance and wisdom. Putting a personality and name to the power behind your character's beliefs could go a long way to helping you establish and support your character's identity.

**Creator Race:** Although largely evil, there is nothing preventing you from playing a member of this race (with your DM's permission, of course). After all, everyone knows drow are evil (and if you don't, check out *DRAGON Magazine* #298), but there are famous exceptions. Ignorant of the world as it is now, your creator character's more worldly companions (the other PCs) will be essential allies. Depending on the particulars of the campaign, you might face prejudice from people who largely think you're a lizardfolk, or you might face the much more dangerous prejudice of people who know what you really are. Creators have an ECL of +11.

**Resistances:** The battle intellect devourer has acid, cold, electricity, and fire resistance 20.

**Poison (Ex):** Claw, Fortitude save (DC 17); initial damage 1d4 temporary

Dexterity, secondary damage 2d4 temporary Dexterity.

**Protection From Evil Vulnerability (Ex):** A battle intellect devourer is treated as a summoned creature for the purposes of a *protection from evil* spell.

## CREATOR RACE

**Medium-Size Monstrous Humanoid**

**Hit Dice:** 8d8+8 (44 hp)

**Initiative:** +2 (+2 Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft.

**AC:** 18 (+2 Dex, +2 natural, +4 *mage armor*), touch 12, flat-footed 16

**Attacks:** Scimitar +8/+3 melee; or ray +11 ranged touch

**Damage:** Scimitar 1d8; ray (by type)

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Nexus rays, spells

**Special Qualities:** Mage armor, magic nexus, nexus empower

**Saves:** Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +7

**Abilities:** Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 17

**Skills:** Concentration +10, Hide +11, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (the planes) +12, Spellcraft +12

**Feats:** Combat Casting, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration, Still Spell, Weapon Focus (rays)

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate and warm mountains and underground

**Organization:** Solitary, party (4-6), camp (10-20), settlement (100+)

**Challenge Rating:** 9

**Treasure:** Standard

**Alignment:** Usually neutral evil

**Advancement:** By character class

The creator race hails from an ancient time, long before the rise of humans and the arrival of elves. The race craved supremacy and control of the world, and

so they waged war against the only enemy who matched them in power and numbers—the great wyrms. In time, the death tolls on both sides grew to extraordinary numbers. In desperation, the creators devised a plan:

They would put themselves into a trance and sleep for centuries, and meanwhile, time would destroy what they could not. Now the centuries have passed, and curious adventurers have discovered their crypts, brought light to their long-closed eyes, and loosed them again on the world. It is a world not only where the dragons have survived but also where dominance has passed to strange, monkey-like beings. The creators still desire to have ultimate control over the world, and so they have once again begun preparations for war.

Creators are a reptilian race, and they closely resemble lizardfolk. They stand roughly 6-7 feet tall, have the same head ridge as lizardfolk, and possess a tail. However, a creator's snake-like scales are finer and softer than a lizardfolk's scales. Creators claim that this difference marks them as a more highly evolved species, but it also means they lack the strong natural protection of their barbaric descendants.

Creators excel in the arcane arts and are natural spellcasters. Even with years of study, few can hope to match the might of an accomplished creator sorcerer. Some even whisper that it was the creator race that created the art of arcane magic in the first place, and that sorcerers have the blood of creators not dragons in their veins, although this is a matter of pure conjecture.

Creators speak Abyssal, Celestial, Draconic, and Infernal.

## Combat

Creators prefer to strike from cover, giving them protection from missile fire, preventing foes from charging them, and buying them more time to attack with spells. Their first targets are often rival spellcasters, although they are intelligent enough to alter their tactics as the situation requires.

**Mage Armor (Su):** Even when not protected by the magical nexus, magical energy clings tightly to creators. Members of this race are treated as if constantly under the effects of the *mage armor* spell cast by an 8th-level sorcerer. If dispelled, a creator may renew the effect as a standard action.

**Magic Nexus (Su):** Creators seem to be made for magic. It literally flows about them when they call to it. As a standard

action, creators can summon a swirling mass of magical tendrils about themselves. These weaving strands of magical energy are composed of fire, ice, and the essence of death, and the nexus they form grants the creator the effects of a *fire shield* (both *chill* and *warm*) and *negative energy protection* as per the spells cast by an 8th-level sorcerer. A creator can use this ability at will.

**Nexus Rays (Su):** As a standard action, a creator can draw upon the nexus of energy swirling about him and fling a ray of energy from his pointed finger. Once a creator flings a ray, he must succeed at a ranged touch attack. Whether the ray successfully strikes or not, the creator can't fling another ray for 1d4 rounds. A creator may choose one of the following three rays to project:

**Cold Ray:** A ray of freezing air and ice projects from the creator's pointing finger. If it hits, the ray deals 3d6 points of cold damage.

**Death Ray:** A black ray moans through the air toward the target. If it hits, the ray deals 1d8 points of Strength damage unless the creature struck makes a Fortitude saving throw (DC 17).

**Fire Ray:** A ray of scorching air and fire projects from the creator's pointing finger. If it hits, the ray deals 3d6 points of fire damage.

**Nexus Empower (Su):** As a move-equivalent action, a creator may tap into one of the strands of magic that winds around him and weave it into a spell or nexus ray he casts in that round. The creator must have his magic nexus swirling about him at the time of use. This ability can be used to empower (as the Empower Spell feat) any Necromancy spell or any spell with the fire or cold subtype, or to cause a nexus ray to deal maximum damage. This does not cause a nexus-empowered spell to take a full-round action to cast nor does it require a higher-level spell slot. Spells so empowered cannot be additionally empowered by the Empower Spell feat. When a creator uses this ability, he loses his mage armor and magic nexus and must renew them (by taking the usual standard action to activate the ability) to gain their benefits.

**Spells:** All creators cast spells as 8th-level sorcerers.

### Creator Society

Creators live in a magocracy, and magic holds sway over all aspects of their lives. They place as much

emphasis on intellectual achievement as most human societies place on the physical. Their pastimes are mostly devoid of physical activity and instead focus on puzzle and strategy games, often with arcane themes. The most learned are the most revered, and the dim-witted warrior is intellectually abused throughout his life.

Because of this focus on intellect, creators prefer to have others do their menial chores; such tasks are not worthy of minds such as theirs. Slavery is a common practice, and most creators assume it is only a matter of time before all life bows to them in servitude and worship.

The majority of the race still slumbers in its mystically induced hibernation, but they are slowly returning to the world. Upon awakening, a community of creators typically seeks to dominate all intelligent life around them (within reason, their arrogance does have limits) in order to build their slave network. These slaves serve as hunters, laborers, and warriors.

Although most of the race remains underground, their natural habitat is in the mountains. As the creators' communities grow in power, they begin moving to higher



### FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

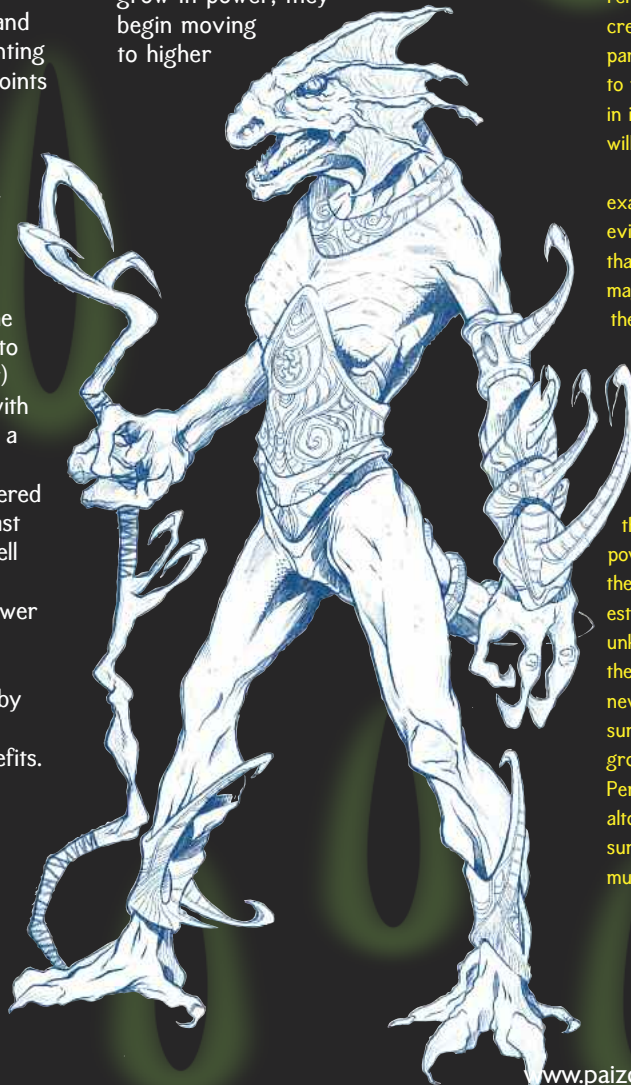
There are many ways to introduce new monsters to your campaign. Here are a few ideas:

- The two new variants of intellect devourers could be introduced to your campaign, new or old, in nearly any way, but what if these monsters really were new? They could be newly created specimens, and an adventure could be set around the task of discovering how they were created and who is making them.

- The spirit of the woods could be the source of much legend and superstition, and the spirit presents a way to make a haunted wood without resorting to evil sorcery or walking dead. The spirit might simply be more protective of the native environment than what most would consider normal. Perhaps the spirit is so overzealous that it seeks to remove the threat of nearby sentient creatures. PCs might be able to parlay with it in order to bring peace to the region, but the spirit, believing in its own superiority, might not be willing to listen to reason.

- There can't be a more classic example of an ancient and forgotten evil rising to terrify the world anew than the creator race. Their powerful magic and advanced intellect make them ideal hidden powers in a campaign of cults and intrigue, but these creatures work perfectly fine in a more traditional fantasy game as well.

That they first awake in underground tombs might make them a new and unpredictable power in the Underdark, disrupting the balance between the more established Underdark races in unknown ways. Do the drow ally with the duergar and illithid to fight this new menace, or do they flee to the surface world to garner above ground the territory they lost below? Perhaps they hope to avoid the battle altogether by tricking powerful surface dwellers into facing their mutual enemies.





ground and braving the outside world in an attempt to reclaim their ancient homelands.

### Creator Characters

The creator's favored class is sorcerer. When a creator takes levels as a sorcerer, he gains spellcasting ability at a level equal to his sorcerer level +8. The creators have no gods, believing themselves the only thing worthy of worship. Creator clerics are oddities and outcasts, worshipping other races' deities.

### SPIRIT OF THE WOODS

The spirit of the woods is a force of nature with sentience and great power, but no form. Despite its name, these spirits are not limited to woodlands. There are spirits of the deep, spirits of the plains, spirits of the mountains, and so on. Often patrons and friends of rangers and druids, these spirits embody the will of the land and all creatures in it.

These mutable creatures typically drift in the Ethereal Plane, hovering just beside the lands that spawned them. Although this prevents the spirits from manifesting most of their power, they can still be dangerous foes if provoked, for the creatures of the wilderness love

these benevolent protectors and savagely attack all who anger them. Traveling through an area overseen by a hostile spirit of the woods means continual harassment from local creatures. This hostility is not limited to normal animals. A forest spirit might turn owlbears and dryads against enemies in addition to bears and wolves, while rodents might continually infest enemies' food supplies, and snakes spook their mounts.

On rare occasions, a spirit of the woods needs to manifest in the Material Plane. In order to do this, it must possess an indigenous creature. The fusion of such power greatly enhances the host body. Although the spirit will try to preserve the life of the creature it inhabits, killing the host only forces the spirit to return to the Ethereal Plane; it is not harmed in any way.

### Creating a Spirit of the Woods

The spirit of the woods is a template that can be applied to any animal (referred to hereafter as the "base creature"). The creature's type changes to "magical beast." It uses all of the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

**Hit Dice:** Change to d10.

**AC:** The base creature's natural armor increases by +6.

**Special Attacks:** The spirit of the woods retains all special attacks of the base creature and gains those listed below.

**Possess Animal (Su):** When on the Ethereal Plane, the spirit of the woods can attempt to possess an animal it detects on the Material Plane (or any plane coexistent with the Ethereal Plane). The spirit of the woods may use this ability 3 times per day. The chosen animal must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or the spirit of the woods possesses it. If the spirit of the woods succeeds, its essence leaves the Ethereal Plane and enters the animal. The animal gains the spirit of the woods template and is completely controlled by the spirit of the woods. The spirit of the woods can leave the animal as a standard action, whereupon it immediately appears in the same relative place on the Ethereal Plane in an animal form of its choice (often the most powerful animal form in the area it frequents). If the animal is killed, the spirit of the woods is forced into the

Ethereal Plane and takes form in the same fashion as if it willfully left.

Damage dealt and spell, supernatural, or spell-like effects that affect the spirit's possessed animal form do not affect its ethereal form, although they might affect its ability to return to the Ethereal Plane (such as if it is rendered unconscious or *charmed*). A spirit of the woods can be forced to the Ethereal Plane by entering an *antimagic field*, and it can be expelled to the Ethereal Plane by a *banishment* or *dismissal* spell (in both cases there is no chance it will be sent to another plane and it appears in the same relative place on the Ethereal Plane).

**Special Qualities:** The spirit of the woods retains all special qualities of the base creature and gains those listed below.

**Animal Language (Ex):** A spirit of the woods can speak with animals at will. In addition, it can speak Druidic and Sylvan.

**Ethereal Form:** On the Ethereal Plane, the spirit of the woods does not need to possess an animal, but it may assume any animal shape it wishes. Switching forms is a full-round action, and it may switch its ethereal form up to 3 times a day. If it was forced out of the Material Plane or voluntarily left, taking form on the Ethereal counts as a use of its ability to take a new ethereal form. When a spirit of the woods switches ethereal forms, damage dealt and spell, super-natural, or spell-like effects that affect the spirit's previous ethereal form do not affect its new ethereal form. Ethereal forms are created by picking any animal form as a base creature and applying the changes detailed in this template. If the ethereal form of the spirit of the woods is slain, it is destroyed.

**Spells:** A spirit of the woods casts spells as a 7th-level druid for purposes of determining spell potency, availability, and number of spells per day. This spellcasting ability is available to it in whatever form it takes, and it never requires material components. When switching from one form to another, whether an ethereal form or a possessed animal form, it does not regain spells it cast; spells cast in one form are no longer available to the spirit of the woods in another form.

**Saves:** Same as base creature

**Abilities:** Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +6, Dex +6,

Con +6. Int, Wis, and Cha all become 20, as the spirit's mind supplants the base creature's.

**Skills:** A spirit of the woods has a +10 racial bonus to Wilderness Lore, Knowledge (nature), and Concentration. Otherwise, same as base creature.

**Feats:** Same as base creature

**Climate/Terrain:** Same as base creature

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** Same as base creature +3. Note that if the spirit of the woods flees to change form, that could be considered a situation where the party overcame the encounter.

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** Same as base creature

### Sample Spirit of the Woods

This example uses a dire elk (see *Masters of the Wild*) as the base creature.

#### Dire Elk Spirit of the Woods

##### Huge Magical Beast

**Hit Dice:** 12d10+96 (174 hp)

**Initiative:** +0

**Speed:** 50 ft.

**AC:** 18 (-2 size, +3 Dex, +7 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 15

**Attacks:** Slam +17 melee and 2 hooves +12 melee; or gore +17 melee

**Damage:** Slam 2d6+10, hoof 2d4+5; gore 2d8+15

**Face/Reach:** 10 ft. by 20 ft./10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Possess animal, trample 2d8+15

**Special Qualities:** Animal language, ethereal form, scent, spells

**Saves:** Fort +16, Ref +11, Will +9

**Abilities:** Str 30, Dex 17, Con 26, Int 20, Wis 20, Cha 20

**Skills:** Concentration +15\*, Hide -1\*, Knowledge (nature) +15\*, Listen +11, Spot +11, Wilderness Lore +15\*

**Feats:** —

**Climate/Terrain:** Temperate and cold forests, hills, and mountains

**Organization:** Solitary

**Challenge Rating:** 10

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 13-16 HD (Huge); 17-36 HD (Gargantuan)

### Combat

Having possessed the body of a dire elk, the spirit of the woods has gained a

powerful form it can use to protect the woods it inhabits. The forest the spirit lives in is famed for its large and healthy elk herds, but hunters fear the great leader of the herd and rarely go there.

**Animal Language (Ex):** A spirit of the woods knows the language of all animals. In addition, it can speak Druidic and Sylvan.


**Ethereal Form:** On the Ethereal Plane, the spirit of the woods does not need to possess an animal, but it may assume any animal shape it wishes. Switching forms is a full-round action, and it may switch its ethereal form up to 3 times a day. If it was forced out of the Material Plane or voluntarily left, taking form on the Ethereal counts as a use of its ability to take a new ethereal form. When a spirit of the woods switches ethereal forms, damage dealt and spell, supernatural, or spell-like effects that affect the spirit's previous ethereal form do not affect its new ethereal form. Ethereal forms are created by picking any animal form as a base creature and applying the changes detailed in the spirit of the woods template. If the ethereal form of the spirit of the woods is slain, it is destroyed.

**Possess Animal (Su):** When on the Ethereal Plane, the spirit of the woods can attempt to possess an animal it detects on the Material Plane (or any plane coexistent with the Ethereal Plane). The spirit of the woods may use this ability 3 times per day. The chosen animal must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or the spirit of the woods possesses it. If the spirit of the woods succeeds, its essence leaves the Ethereal Plane and enters the animal. The animal gains the spirit of the woods template and is completely controlled by the spirit of the woods. The spirit of the woods can leave the animal as a standard action, whereupon it immediately appears in the same relative place on the Ethereal Plane in an animal form of its choice (often the most powerful animal form in the area it frequents). If the animal is

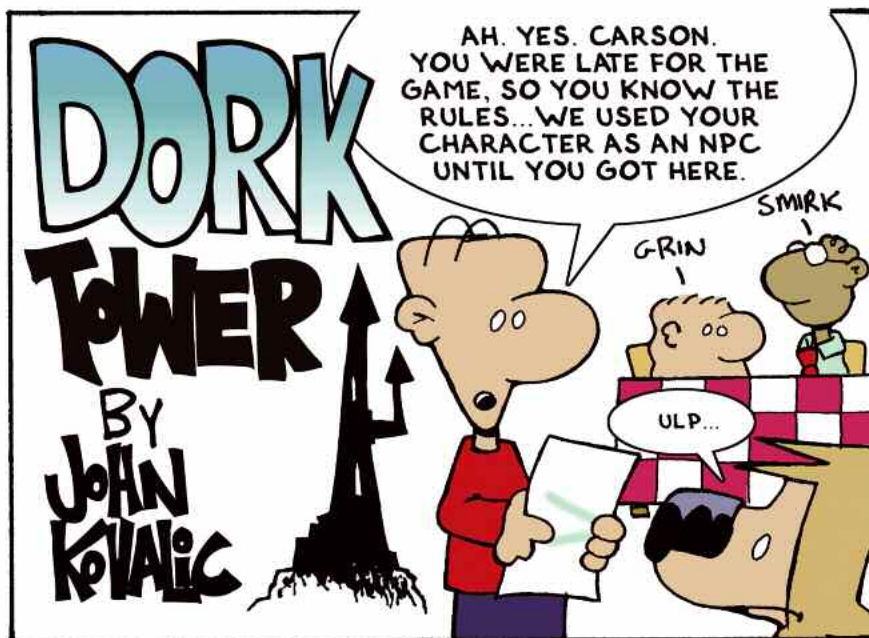
killed, the spirit of the woods is forced into the Ethereal Plane and takes form in the same fashion as if it willfully left. Damage dealt and spell, supernatural, or spell-like effects that affect the spirit's possessed animal form do not affect its ethereal form, although they might affect its ability to return to the Ethereal Plane (such as if it is rendered unconscious or *charmed*). A spirit of the woods can be forced to the Ethereal Plane by entering an *antimagic field*, and it can be expelled to the Ethereal Plane by a *banishment* or *dismissal* spell (in both cases there is no chance it will be sent to another plane and it appears in the same relative place on the Ethereal Plane).

**Spells:** A spirit of the woods casts spells as a 7th-level druid for determining spell potency, availability, and number of spells per day. This spellcasting ability is available to it in whatever form it takes, and it never requires material components. When switching from one form to another, whether an ethereal form or a possessed animal form, it does not regain spells it cast; spells cast in one form are no longer available to the spirit of the woods in another form.

**Trample (Ex):** A dire elk spirit of the woods can trample Medium-size or smaller creatures for automatic gore damage. Opponents who do not make attacks against the spirit can attempt a Reflex save (DC 26) to halve the damage.

**Skills\*:** A dire elk spirit of the woods receives a +4 racial bonus on hide checks and a +10 competence bonus to Concentration, Knowledge (nature), and Wilderness Lore. 



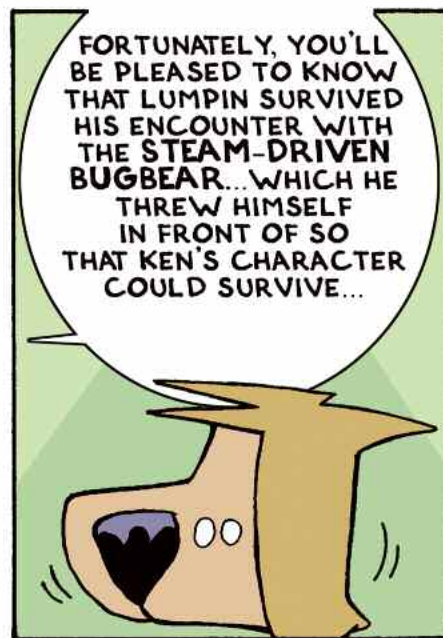


AH. YES. CARSON. YOU WERE LATE FOR THE GAME, SO YOU KNOW THE RULES... WE USED YOUR CHARACTER AS AN NPC UNTIL YOU GOT HERE.

GRIN

SMIRK

ULP...



FORTUNATELY, YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO KNOW THAT LUMPIN SURVIVED HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE STEAM-DRIVEN BUGBEAR... WHICH HE THREW HIMSELF IN FRONT OF SO THAT KEN'S CHARACTER COULD SURVIVE...



THE SAME COULDN'T BE SAID, SADLY, OF HIS RUN IN WITH THE ROOM OF DEMONIC TRAPS HE HEROICALLY VOLUNTEERED TO SCOUT OUT FOR THE REST OF THE PARTY'S COLLECTIVE SAFETY.



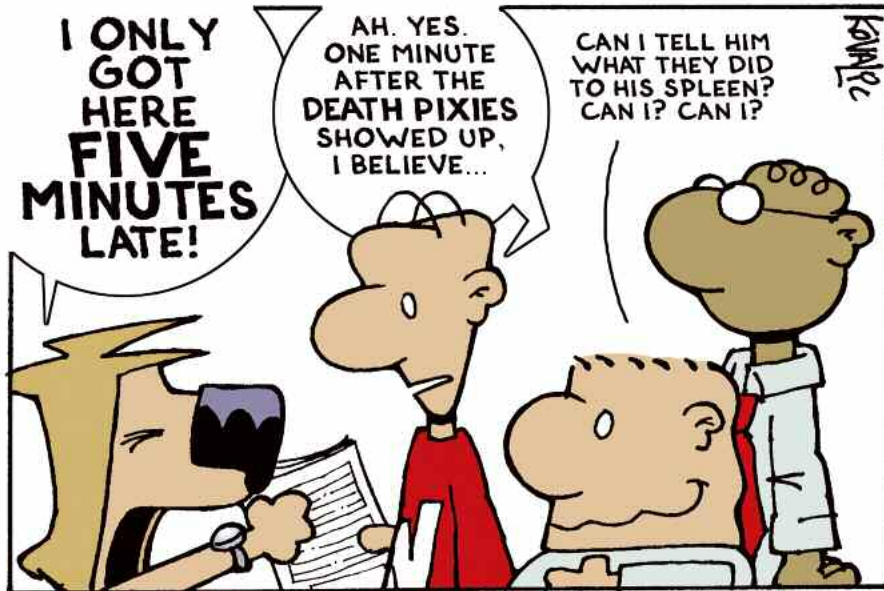
HOWEVER, A COUPLE OF HEALING SPELLS, SOME STAPLES, AND DUCT TAPE LATER, AND HE WAS ALL SET TO FACE OFF AGAINST THE TURBONIUM DRAGON, ALLOWING EVERYONE ELSE TO ESCAPE UNHARMED!



SO OF COURSE, HE WAS DOWN TO ONE HIT POINT AFTER THAT. WHICH WAS UNFORTUNATE, BUT, LIKE I SAID, WE ALL KNOW THE RULES FOR GETTING TO A GAMING SESSION LATE.



≡PING≡



I ONLY GOT HERE FIVE MINUTES LATE!

AH. YES. ONE MINUTE AFTER THE DEATH PIXIES SHOWED UP, I BELIEVE...

CAN I TELL HIM WHAT THEY DID TO HIS SPLEEN? CAN I? CAN I?

KOVALIC

# Building Better Plot Hooks

by Johnn Four

The term “plot hook” is bandied about frequently in roleplaying game literature, but just what is a plot hook, and how can it help your game? Quite simply, a plot hook is an exceptionally useful DM tool that you can use to guide players into your adventures. Once you become skilled at building and using plot hooks, your job will become much easier, and you'll get considerably more enjoyment out of each game session—as will your players.

## What Is A Plot Hook?

In a roleplaying game, a plot hook is any story-related device—typically an NPC, item, clue, or event—that offers the player characters a starting point for adventuring. Think of it as a piece of irresistible bait that you can dangle before the characters' eyes to get them off their backs and start them running headlong into your latest adventure.

## Benefits of a Plot Hook

Plot hooks make game sessions a little more controllable and much more enjoyable without sacrificing the sense of character freedom that is so important to players. Here are some specific benefits of plot hooks used liberally and well.

**1. Better, Faster Session Planning.** The ultimate benefit of building effective plot hooks is that it makes your job as DM a lot easier. If you create plot hooks that are too irresistible to pass up, you greatly increase the chance that your plans will remain intact during game sessions. Planning becomes easier since

you can spend less time allowing for contingencies and more time focusing on the main adventure.

**2. Player Freedom.** A good plot hook always leaves the players with a choice: Take the bait or leave it. Your job is to make the hook so fascinating that the characters willingly follow it. This tactic leaves the players in control of their characters' destinies, but it also stacks the deck in your favor by drumming up interest in the path you have in mind.

**3. Character Direction.** Nothing is more frustrating than watching the energy slowly ooze away from the game table while the players wonder what to do next. A good plot hook acts like a signal beacon by revealing what opportunities lie ahead and how to pursue them. Ideally, players should have several unexplored hooks available at any time so that they feel continually excited about the choices and possibilities in your campaign.

**4. Better Stories.** Plot hooks provide instant feedback for the DM about what kind of gaming experiences the players want. If they bypass a particular hook, it generally means either that the hook wasn't compelling enough or that the kind of adventure it promised wasn't to the group's liking. Either way, you have some excellent information that can help you serve up what the players want on an ongoing basis.

**5. Strong Beginnings.** Great endings stem from strong beginnings. Good plot hooks focus player attention, maintain character interest, and add to game intensity. This is exactly the type of environment that creates memorable adventures and fantastic game sessions.

## Anatomy of a Plot Hook

Although there is an art to creating compelling plot hooks, it is a skill that can be mastered with practice and experimentation. A great plot hook has three aspects, each of which you should try to make as compelling as possible. First, the hook must immediately capture the players' interest. Second, it must provide motivation by letting the characters know what's in it for them. Finally, it must generate action by making it clear what their next step should be. Let's consider each of these aspects in further detail.

## Capture Attention

If the PCs don't notice your plot hook, it obviously won't provide any benefits to your game. To grab the players' attention and hold it, the hook must be both obvious and versatile so that you

## 10 TIMES TO USE PLOT HOOKS

1. To start a campaign
2. To begin an adventure
3. To draw the PCs into the next encounter
4. To help a lost group get back on track
5. To focus players at the start of a session
6. To re-energize bored players
7. To reintegrate an isolated or ostracized character
8. To introduce a new element of your world
9. To begin a new side-plot
10. To introduce a new character or player

can place it anywhere. Subtle hooks or those that require fixed locations are too easily missed.

For example, a hook that requires the PCs to turn down a specific street and notice that two NPCs seem overly distraught over their broken cart is doomed—the PCs might never go there, and the clue is too easy to miss. Instead, be ready to place that encounter anywhere, and put giant bite marks and blood stains all over the cart. If the PCs still seem ready to ignore the situation, have one of the NPCs moan, “All our treasure is gone, thanks to that horrible monster!” Such a statement is bound to capture character interest.

Not every plot hook has to be this obvious, but it's best to start big and bold. Later on, you can experiment with subtlety as you get a feel for your players' observation skills and interest levels.

### Provide Motivation

This aspect of the plot hook must tell the PCs what's in it for them. The better the reward, the more likely the PCs are to take the bait. If there's doubt about a hook's potential payoff, the PCs might hesitate and even talk themselves into following a different path.

If your plot hooks aren't motivating your players to take the bait, try one of the techniques below. A hook that involves any of these options is usually a winner.

1. **Clearly communicate the reward.** Do the PCs stand to earn a hoard of gold and magic? If so, let them know this up front. You still have the whole adventure in which to plant twists, but the important thing now is to move them on to your prepared route.

2. **Make it personal.** If the hook personally involves one or more of the characters, the group is likely to notice and follow up on it. A personal hook often involves solving a PC's problem or advancing a player's agenda. See the 10 Ways to Make it Personal and 10 Possible PC Agendas sidebars for some ideas.

3. **Make it a mystery.** Often an intriguing mystery or odd circumstance can capture a group's attention better than anything else. A mystery hook need

not be complex, but it should be presented directly and without much buildup, or the players might lose interest. For example, you could have the PCs stumble over cart tracks that lead straight up to a blank wall, or they could encounter a magic bird that somehow knows their names.

4. **Keep a PC wish list.** You can find out what new items the PCs want by interviewing players directly, asking them to write up a description of an item their character wants, or simply by eavesdropping on character conversations over time. Either way, you'll never be without a plot hook if you incorporate something a PC wants.

5. **Cater to the three classic motivations.** Greed, ego, and sympathy are tried-and-true motivators for player characters. Any plot hook that appeals to one, two, or all of these is likely to be successful.

- **Greed:** Characters are always after experience points and treasure, although how and why you award these is always up to you.

- **Ego:** Most characters can be reached through their egos. It might be power they crave, or it might be the respect of some NPC.

- **Sympathy:** Being heroic, saving others, and helping the weak are all classic motivators, particularly for good-aligned characters.

### Generate Action

Now that your plot hook has captured the characters' attention and motivated them to follow up on it, the hook must provide them with a clear path to follow, or your plans could still go awry. Here are a few suggested ways to design a plot hook so that it can provide direction.

- Give the characters a map or some written instructions. Be sure that the wording of such documents has an air of mystery about it, such as, “The meeting takes place at midnight in the old church. . . .”

- Use DM description to let the PCs know what their options are. For example, “It looks like the seal on the scroll you've found was poorly pressed.

### 10 POSSIBLE PC AGENDAS

1. A threat
2. Blackmail
3. A personal challenge
4. Praise and adulation
5. An insult
6. Public scrutiny
7. An event involving family or friends
8. A class-related incident
9. A race-related incident
10. A personal loss

### 10 PC PROBLEMS THAT NEED SOLVING

1. Special healing (such as *cure disease* or *raise dead*)
2. Information from an expert
3. Revenge
4. A present for a fellow PC's upcoming birthday
5. Special equipment
6. A new skill or training
7. Family business
8. A job or income
9. Acquiring magic items
10. Feat or prestige class training

You could probably open and reseal it without detection.”

- Require a skill check against a low DC. This tactic is a perfect way for you to dispense information, hints, or suggestions about what the group should do next.

- Make the problem time-sensitive. Introduce a sense of urgency by saying something like, “The old man who has been staring strangely at your group from across the street finally decides to cross toward you—but he obviously doesn't see the oncoming rider approaching at a gallop!”

### Six Plot Hook Tips

Here are a few tips to help you build more effective plot hooks.

1. **Give the players options.** While scripting your hook, you might not notice that you're blatantly forcing the players in a certain direction, but you can bet they'll notice, and they certainly won't like it. Therefore, it's a good idea to review your plot hook when you're

finished creating it to ensure that it's entertaining but not overly restrictive.

**2. Have backup hooks ready.** If a plot hook falls flat, the players just don't get it, or the PCs simply choose not to pursue it, have additional hooks on standby for your adventure. It's important that plot hooks remain optional courses of action and that players retain their freedom of choice, so expect that a few of your hooks will be bypassed.

**3. Repeat hooks.** Feel free to reuse plot hooks, but be careful not to overuse this technique, and be sure to spread your repeated hooks apart over time. Also feel free to add twists and unexpected results to your hooks to keep players on their toes.

**4. Use time-release hooks.** A great technique is to present a hook that isn't ready to be explored yet. Make it temporarily unavailable or have it lead to a dead end, and then open it up as a lead-in for a future story. This technique will amaze your players and give your games a sense of depth and complexity. Here are a few good examples of time-release hooks:

- A magic item whose command word is yet to be discovered
- A key for a lock yet to be found
- A name attached to an NPC the party has not yet met

**5. Experiment with passive hooks.** Active hooks happen *to* the PCs, affecting them directly. Passive hooks, on the other hand, happen *around* the PCs, in background events. Such plot hooks give the players even greater feelings of control, choice, and freedom.

For example, suppose the PCs are in a tavern. A dying messenger thrusts a map into one character's hand, a crazy old man walks up to another PC and starts droning out a prophecy, and the bartender bares his vampiric fangs and attacks the rest of the group! These plot hooks are all active.

Now consider the same situation with passive plot hooks. While in the tavern, the characters spot a group of men quietly and intensely discussing a parchment spread on their table. An old man rocks back and forth in the corner


mumbling under his breath, and the bartender is eyeing everyone suspiciously. Suddenly, two drunken patrons start a brawl. The parchment gets rolled up and is left jutting out of a backpack on the floor, the old man gets knocked down by accident and appears to be helpless, and a flailing patron slams into a wall and reveals a secret door. This time, the PCs get to choose what interests them and interfere in the activities as they wish.

**6. Recycle campaign elements.** Rather than constantly inventing new people, places, and things to act as plot hooks, feel free to reuse elements that already exist in your game. This technique lends greater realism to your games and makes your job a bit easier. Try recycling one of the following elements into a plot hook:

- NPCs the characters already know
- Events that take place every year
- Items owned that reveal secret

compartments or new properties

## A Better Campaign

Using plot hooks doesn't mean you'll never have to have a contingency plan, but it does mean you have a good chance of directing your players down a path you've prepared. It also means your players can retain their sense of freedom and choice while getting direction for the adventure. 

## 10 TYPES OF PLOT HOOKS

1. Person in need
2. An event, celebration, or disaster
3. A magic item found
4. Gossip and rumors
5. A random encounter or combat
6. A gift or inheritance
7. A prophecy, dream, or omen
8. A summons, message, or job
9. A discovery
10. A case of mistaken identity, an old enemy, or a public challenge

## TOP 10 CLICHÉD PLOT HOOKS

10. "You see a wanted poster on the wall. It promises a reward for the death or capture of . . ."
9. "When you wake up, your (magic item, mount, money, loved one, or fellow PC whose player missed the session) is gone! Some unfamiliar tracks lead . . ."
8. "You finally find a citizen of the town who is willing to talk to you. After some coaxing, he tells you why all the villagers are afraid and pleads with you, 'Help us! Save us from our dark lord!'"
7. "You wake up in a different place than you went to sleep in! You've been captured by . . ."
6. "That's the (isle, castle, or dungeon) of Death! No one has ever gone there and lived to tell the tale!"
5. "Inside the chest you find a scrap of map. It looks like a treasure map!"
4. "The dying man rasps out these mysterious words . . ."
3. "The only weapon that can harm the (insert scary name here) is the (insert weapon) of (insert name of hero or villain). You must retrieve it from the lair of . . ."
2. "If you rescue the kidnapped princess, the king will reward you with . . ."
1. "A cloaked figure approaches your table in the tavern and . . ."

# Table Tune Up

by Glen Veltum

One of your most difficult challenges as a DM is to populate an entire campaign world with believable, memorable, and unique characters. Coming up with convincing histories, credible motivations, and dynamic personalities for all those NPCs is a huge and daunting task in itself, but the hardest part is actually roleplaying all those different characters at the gaming table. After all, a player has only one character to bring to life, but the DM must portray dozens of villagers, town guards, villainous henchmen, and evil masterminds over the course of the campaign. Jumping into all those different characters on a moment's notice and without missing a beat is a challenge worthy of any Oscar-winning actor. With a little forethought, however, this task can become, if not easy, at least manageable. One excellent way to master the art of character portrayal is to use "marks"—physical actions and verbal descriptors that give auditory, manual, and visual clues about a character.

## The Value of Marks

Let's dispel a common myth about NPCs: Knowing everything about your NPCs does not help you portray them more believably. There is much to be said for developing the histories and statistics of your campaign's major NPCs, but all the background information in the world won't tell you how to play that character when

it's game time. To play an NPC effectively, you need some useful marks that can help you get into character and stay there.

Professional actors often say that donning the costume of a particular character—be it a suit of armor or a tuxedo—helps them get into the part. While you probably don't want to change clothes every time you begin roleplaying a new NPC, the basis for this acting technique can still be valuable in assuming a new role. Instead of wearing costumes, you can use your marks to help you take on various personas.

There are three simple kinds of marks that you can attach to an NPC: auditory, manual, and visual. Taken together, these cues tell you at a glance how to depict that character.

## Auditory Marks

Your voice is by far the most powerful character-building tool you have at your disposal. A roleplaying game is, in many ways, like the classic radio plays of the 1930s and 1940s: It takes place in a world built entirely in the imagination, and the human voice is the visitor's only window into a fantastic universe of adventure. In such a world, the sound of a character's voice is the whole of his identity, so every voice must be unique.

Although speaking in accents might seem to be a useful technique for differentiating voices, you should avoid using them in most cases. In a

roleplaying game, accents either come off sounding silly or are easily recognizable as voice patterns from the real world. Either way, their use can strain your credibility as a roleplayer.

Fortunately, there are numerous other ways to distinguish a character's voice. The most obvious of these are tone, diction, cadence, and word choice.

**Tone:** The tone of a character's voice is primarily its overall sound—husky, purring, squeaky, whispery, or nearly any other auditory quality you imagine. Tone also encompasses the inflection, or pattern of emphasis, of an NPC's speech. Does the character drone on in a numbing monotone? Does his voice have the melodious rise and fall of a trained orator? Or does he rage with the explosive force of a priest of Saint Cuthbert?

**Diction:** Varying your diction can go a long way toward creating an NPC's voice. Does the character speak with the clear and precise pronunciation of a noble or the slurred drawl of a habitual drunk? Should you speak with the crisp directness of a paladin or the painfully humble murmurs of an unschooled fisherman?

**Cadence:** One often-overlooked aspect of voice acting is the cadence of a character's speech. Listen to a comic do an impression of a famous person, and you'll notice that matching the pacing of the individual's speech is key to making an impression recognizable, not duplicating the precise voice. For the purpose of a

## SAMPLE MARKS

A comprehensive list of possible NPC traits is beyond the scope of this article; in fact, it would probably fill this entire magazine. But the following examples might help to get you started.

### Auditory Marks

The character speaks in/with:

- Harsh whispers
- Syrupy cooing
- Clipped fragments
- A suggestive purr
- Tight-lipped growls
- Deep commands
- Mocking sarcasm
- Forceful imperatives
- Serene, soothing tones
- A stutter
- A slight lisp

The character's speech is peppered with:

- Distracted ramblings
- Self-aggrandizing boasts
- Insincere flattery
- References to obscure historical events
- Battlefield terms ("The guild outflanked us," or "This tomb's about as quiet as a sleeping army")
- Forced, self-conscious laughter
- Wheezing coughs
- Criticism of those around him
- Constant references to her goddess
- Exotic oaths ("Curse me for a thrice-blinded chimera!")
- Loud guffaws

roleplaying game, an NPC who draws out her words or pauses in the middle of sentences becomes both more memorable to the players and easier for you to portray.

**Word Choice:** Consider marking some NPCs by their common expressions or word choices. A veteran sailor, for example, might make constant references to the sea, speaking of storms on the horizon or sailing into unknown depths. A forest-born elf, on the other hand, would be more likely to draw comparisons with his woodland home. Perhaps the dwarf watchman often swears by Clangeddin's bristling beard, or the town's gnome tailor

always uses made-up words like "enpuzzled" and "uncommonal."

### Manual Marks

What do you do with your hands while you roleplay? Do you fiddle with your dice or doodle on your notes? How you use your hands can help you get into the swing of playing a particular NPC and give the players a visual cue about which character is talking. Whether you simply fold your hands in front of you or pantomime lighting and smoking a pipe, you can send the players a clear message with your hands.

This technique is easy to overdo, but if applied subtly and consistently, it can lead to some glorious gaming moments. Perhaps all you have to do is stroke your chin a certain way to make your players blurt out, "Elminster! Are we glad to see you!"

### Visual Marks

Like the narrator of a 1940's radio play, you must verbally supply the players with the visual cues that distinguish individual characters. Each NPC needs at least one noticeable trait that you mention almost every time you describe her. For a commoner, such a trait might be as mundane as a potbelly or crooked teeth, whereas for a powerful wizard, it could be anything from a wyvern-skin cloak to a swarm of circling *ioun stones*. Whichever trait you choose, latch onto it as that character's calling card, including it in your description as you stand up from the gaming table to portray her.

### Choosing Marks

Assigning marks to an NPC should never be a random process. In general, the marks should support the overall image you want the character to project. Here's where those carefully constructed histories and motivations you've built come in—they make it easy to select traits that bring out the character's depth. This is especially true with published adventures in which you must play characters devised by someone else. In such a case, read the details about

the NPC in the module, then assign three marks to make that character your own.

The distinctiveness of your marks should also relate to the importance of the character. Save your deepest voice and your most pathetic whine for recurring NPCs whom the players will come to know and love (or hate). Don't waste your most memorable visual marks on minor NPCs, and by all means don't attach a trite descriptor such as "penetrating eyes" to a figure like Khelben Arunsun or Drizzt Do'Urden.

Avoiding clichés and repetition can be difficult—after all, there are only so many things you can do with your hands while you play a character—but remember that you are combining three kinds of marks to portray the character, not relying on just one. A little imagination can populate a world with characters for whom you have developed countless combinations of roleplaying cues.

## MARKING NPCs FOR PLAY

The key to using this system is to keep

### MANUAL MARKS

#### The character:

- Folds his arms heavily across his chest
- Smoothes her robe, picking away lint
- Pets his familiar as he speaks
- Rubs her fingertips together
- Keeps one hand on his quarterstaff, gesturing with it often
- Runs her fingers through her hair
- Uses his throwing knives to clean his nails
- Pounds her fist on the table to emphasize her point
- Picks his nose (best used for goblin and ogres)
- Pulls on her bottom lip when thinking
- Always points at the person he is talking to
- Drums his fingers on the table when thinking
- Twists her hair with her fingers when nervous
- Cracks his knuckles when speaking
- Bounces her leg when seated



the marks for each NPC simple, vivid, and accessible. Before running a session, prepare a “cheat sheet” that lists all the NPCs in the adventure and the need-to-know information for each—name, title, and your three marks for playing that character. This isn’t the place to make a note of how the mayor lost two sons to the frost giants last winter; just list the quick-and-dirty essentials. Keep this sheet in front of you, especially during the early part of the adventure when the PCs are in town. Each time the characters address a certain NPC, glance down at your cheat sheet and you’ll be able to bring that character back to life instantly.

For example, suppose that halfway through the gaming session, the players suddenly decide to head back to the town gate and ask the night watchman a few more questions. You check your notes to remind yourself of his marks and find the following:

**Suraan: Commander of the Night Watch (War2)**

Auditory—quiet and guarded voice  
Manual—thumbs inside sword belt  
Visual—copper nose ring

You stand up from the table and tuck your thumbs into your belt. Then you say, “Suraan comes down the stone steps from the top of the city wall, his copper nose ring and stern expression making him look uncomfortably like an angry bull.” You lean toward the players, lowering your voice to a quite drone. “I’ve got better things to do than answer more of your fool questions. What do you want?”

By just using your marks, you’ve brought color and life to an NPC, ensured that you’ll be able to drop into his role at a moment’s notice, and made him memorable to your players.

### The Mark of Success

If you need help to get started with the NPC marking system, the Sample Marks sidebar can provide you with some ideas, but you’ll find that once you start devising your own NPC marks, unique and intriguing ones will

### VISUAL MARKS

#### The character:

- Has a distinctive scar or tattoo
- Has bits of food clinging to his face
- Wears a helmet fashioned to resemble an animal or demon
- Wears oversized robes and a wide-brimmed hat
- Has hands that are always stained with ink, alchemical powders, and so forth
- Always wears shirts that feature a plunging neckline
- Has a limp or stooping shoulders
- Has kohled eyes and painted lips
- Always carries a book or bundle of scrolls
- Has numerous gold teeth
- Sweats profusely
- Has a pipe shaped like a beholder
- Wears hair in elaborate braids
- Walks with a gnarled, wooden cane
- Has a thick gray beard
- Wears a necklace made of the teeth of a particular monster
- Has extremely long fingernails that curve under at the ends
- Wears a thick fur cape
- Has a gaping eye socket or wears an eye patch
- Is unusually tall and towers over others
- Carries a jug of wine at all times
- has a wooden leg or is missing some finger digits.

start coming to you every day. It pays to keep a small notebook with you, so that you can jot down ideas as you get them and draw upon your list as needed.

With a system like this to help you, roleplaying a dozen characters in a single session doesn’t have to be an intimidating chore. In fact, it can actually become your favorite part of the adventure—after all, each of the players is stuck with only one character, but you’ve got a whole world of them to play. 🗨

# the Play's the thing Negotiating with Your DM

by Robin Laws

**YOUR DM:** So, you had some comments on how the game went the other night?

**YOU:** Yes, I've written a little critique pinpointing your various inadequacies as a DM. I didn't print it out because it's seventy pages long and my printer is low on toner, so I'll just email it to you. I hope you'll read it carefully, because I drank six espressos and stayed up all night writing it in a blaze of furious inspiration.

**YOUR DM:** Hmm. Oh, by the way, did I mention that I'll be visiting the tiny island of Tierra del Fuego for the next three or four years?

In recent installments (issue #296 and #298), we talked about the importance of resolving communications problems within a game group, even though this can be difficult and touchy at times. We identified the dilemmas you're most likely to encounter and offered suggestions on how best to discuss them with DMs and other players. This month we'll look at the most common DMing styles and discuss how an understanding of your DM's style can help you in your negotiations. Finally, we'll wrap up by reviewing basic negotiating tactics.

## TYPING YOUR DM

Whether the problem you want to discuss with your DM is common or unique, big or small, it helps to think about the basic assumptions she brings to the gaming table. It is important to remember that there is no single, ideal way to DM. If you think of yourself as the great arbiter of gaming correctness, curing your DM's bad

habits, you're going to have a tough time winning her over. Her tastes in gaming are just as valid as yours. Your challenge is to work together with her to find more of a balance between the two.

The better you understand your DM's gaming style and tastes, the easier it will be to talk to her and offer suggestions for compromise. Just as most players fall into one or more common categories (storytellers, method actors, power gamers, and so on), DMs can also be grouped according to their gaming tastes. No one fits completely into one category; most of us straddle the boundaries to one degree or another. Typing your DM is an exercise to get you thinking about what she wants from a gaming session. You need to know this in order to effectively negotiate with her.

The most common types of DMing styles are listed below.

## Author

The author wants to unfold a storyline, often an epic one, which he has more or less worked out in advance. His setting, NPCs, and encounters are all designed to further this predetermined narrative. When his style works, you feel like you're in the middle of a brilliantly constructed fantasy trilogy. When it fails, the PCs feel like secondary characters being whisked from one big event to another, with player decisions having only minimal impact on the grand outcome.

When negotiating with this type of DM, you'll want to encourage him to open up his storyline so that the party enjoys greater freedom of action and

can make choices that matter. Your lack of freedom might manifest itself in the form of invulnerable NPCs, obstacles that are nearly impossible to overcome, or instances in which the group gets coerced into taking actions it's uninterested in. Your suggestions for change should show the DM how he can still create a big, coherent narrative without turning the party into mere bit players.

## Battle Master

The battle master likes running fights. At her best, her games are packed with exciting action and challenging tactical choices. At her worst, the scenes between fights are flat and rushed, offering little chance for character interaction, problem solving, or setting exploration.

When negotiating with the battle master, suggest that the fights might mean more if the players care about the outcome. Use specific examples to show how recent battle sequences could have been enhanced with the elements of play you prefer. Suggest ways in which she can challenge the players' Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma-based skills as well as their combat prowess.

## Director

The director, like the author, likes to spin tales, but he tends to make up stories on the fly in response to choices the characters make. This DM relies on his players to create PCs with interesting goals. This works well for players skilled at that sort of thing, but if you don't feel creative enough to contribute the plot hooks he needs,

you could find yourself sitting in the corner as the storyteller and method actor players get all the attention.

Adept at thinking on his feet, the director can usually help you workshop your PC so that he'll get into the sort of trouble you most enjoy, whether it's monster bashing, problem solving, or general XP accumulation. This won't happen, though, until you take your DM aside and let him know what you want.

### Monty Haul

The "Monty Haul" DM (the term plays on the name of former game show host Monty Hall) is often mocked for her main preoccupation, the dispensing of undeserved piles of treasure and magic items to her players. When she plays the game instead of running it, she's a power gamer concerned almost exclusively with the addition of cool new abilities, spells, and magic items to her character sheet. She thinks games should be games, but she wants everyone to come out a winner. This type of DM understands that people game to be entertained, and she can't think of anything more entertaining than picking up a cart full of relics every session.

Generosity is this DM's reason for playing, so accept the fact that her game is a high-level power-fest. She also wants you to use all the great things she's doled out, so whatever your tastes, suggest the kinds of encounters in which you can use your goodies while still satisfying your own preferences. For example, if you want more intrigue, tell her you'd like a *diadem of mind control* and some opportunities to use it. If a little more skirmish-level detail in the fights would satisfy you, mention your desire for a magic item that affects terrain conditions in combat.

### Off-the-Racker

The off-the-racker, often a person new to DMing or someone who lacks confidence, runs things by the book. He relies exclusively on published adventures and careful rules interpretations to tell him what to do

next. If you want to kick butt, overcome tactical problems, or increase your PC's power, you'll find plenty to enjoy in the off-the-racker's game. On the other hand, if you prefer a game that focuses on character or storyline, you might need to help this DM along a little, as he sometimes get stuck when you want to do something the published scenario fails to anticipate.

This DM might be afraid that he's not experienced or talented enough to do the kinds of things you want; if so, you need to increase his confidence. Praise him when he improvises and, if you're an experienced DM, assure him that everyone feels apprehensive at first, but that more complicated elements are easier to incorporate than they look.

On the other hand, the off-the-racker might simply relate better to the printed page than to verbal requests. In this case, you should look for published adventures that provide the elements you're looking for, and give them to your DM as examples.

### World Maker

The world maker's main area of interest is the exceptionally detailed setting she's created. She wants you to interact with the aspects of that world, from bizarre fauna to strange social customs, that most intrigue her. She knows how her setting works and expects the same out of you if your PCs are to prosper. If your explorations result in anticlimactic stories or a shortage of fight sequences, so be it. Her setting is a sort of grand experiment, and she finds any results of your interaction with it interesting.

When negotiating with this type of DM, ask her to show you relevant aspects of her world. For example, if you want grand-scale battles, ask her about warfare and martial subcultures. For a dose of intrigue, send your PC to check out the political situation. If cool magic items are all you need, quiz the DM about relics relating to the lengthy historical background she's painstakingly created.

## NEGOTIATING BASICS—GIVE AND TAKE

Most problems stem from a clash in expectations. We often think of a campaign we aren't enjoying as a bad game, when it might simply fail to cater to our tastes. So let's say that you know what you want out of the game—more fighting, less fighting, more freedom, more obvious plots, and so on. You've studied your DM's style and figured out what kind of game she enjoys. You've even come up with specific suggestions to find a middle ground between your different preferences. So what's next?

This is where real-world negotiating techniques come into play. Many of us are much more persuasive in character than we are in real life. Playing an imaginary person, we can analyze the motivations of the cruel baron or the reckless bandit king. We can use these motivations to persuade him to take action favorable to the PCs, convincing him that it would further his goals, too. Out of character, however, we're rarely so adroit at making our case.

Usually this is because we become emotionally involved, and we end up simultaneously pursuing two contradictory goals. We want our negotiating partner to do something (or stop doing it), but we also want to be proven right. This emotional impulse is universal, perfectly understandable, and disastrous. It turns discussions into debates, debates into arguments, and arguments into impasses.

You win a negotiation by getting a result you can live with, not by defeating the other person or making him admit that his way of doing things is inferior.

### Be Friendly

Many people claim that they like receiving constructive criticism, but this isn't the exact truth. Typically, people do not enjoy being challenged or having someone point out their weaknesses. What most people do like, however, are the improvements that result after they swallow their pride and incorporate useful criticism into their work.

DMs devote considerable effort into running the game—it's time-consuming and difficult. With all of the work they put into organizing and planning game sessions, it's not unusual for them to feel unappreciated at times. This can lead to a DM feeling especially sensitive to criticism, even if approached constructively. Thus, it is important to be tactful and non-confrontational when bringing up a problem to your DM. Keep in mind that DMs must also exercise a certain degree of authority and dominance to keep order in the gaming room. Even the most laid-back DM might unconsciously regard your criticisms as an encroachment of her territory. Keep this in mind, and couch all of your criticisms in the most polite way possible. No one ever lost a negotiation because they were too courteous.

## Be Deferential

When we are threatened, we often look for reasons to take offense. Instead of addressing the issue head-on, we focus on the way the other person makes his presentation. This gives us the emotional satisfaction of rejecting the other person's complaint, while at the same time allowing us to feel justifiably indignant about it.

Be aware of this basic fact of human nature when making your argument. Make it clear to the DM that you are not trying to offend him and that you respect his opinion.

Use plenty of qualifiers, and never state your case in absolute terms. A statement like "Your game needs more action," is too direct and confrontational. It suggests that your DM is doing a poor job of running the game, and it fails to recognize that almost all choices in gaming are matters of taste. Now consider the above sentence in a more subjective manner: "I'd really enjoy it if there was a little more action in the game." Although both examples address the same concern—your unhappiness with the lack of action in the game—the second version leaves open the option for discussion, and it isn't a statement of your DM's failure. That makes it both easier to take and harder to argue with.

## Avoid Abstract Argument

Many people are used to winning arguments by obscuring the actual, practical matter at hand. Instead, they look at the issue in abstract, theoretical terms. Since any abstract question can easily be couched in absurdly extreme terms, this tactic usually leads to a hardening of positions and delays resolution of the problem.

Avoid this tactic. Don't argue from a general principle of how games should be played. Keep discussion focused on your personal preference.

If the other party tries to take the discussion to an abstract level, politely but insistently return to the specific dilemma at hand, and offer specific actions that can be taken to fix it.

## Be Aware of Past Baggage

If you've ever argued, debated, disputed, or otherwise negotiated with your DM in the past, you must assume that the flavor of those past altercations will seep into the current one. She'll be extra wary of anything you did before that she found annoying or insulting. If you repeat these mistakes, you might suddenly find that she is taking your suggestions in the wrong manner and has closed down completely to hearing your point of view. When a negotiation turns into a rehash of past grievances, it's very hard to rescue.

Equally important is the need to purge yourself of the desire for a rematch of a past debate. Do you really want to accomplish your goal, or are you simply looking to win a dispute you lost the last time?

If you have a secondary goal, it's to negotiate so pleasantly, so skillfully, that you improve the atmosphere for the next time a problem needs to be confronted.

Don't try to change the other person. Not only is it irrelevant to the task at hand, it's almost always impossible.

## Listen

Although it's okay to enter a negotiation with a good guess about the nature of the other person's goals and desires, you should never let your assumption stand in the way of new information.

No one is a better expert on what your DM wants from her game than she is. Listen carefully to what she says, and always remain open to the possibility that you've completely misunderstood her plans and intentions. Good listeners negotiate better than good talkers.


## Modify Your Suggestions Accordingly

If your DM tells you something you hadn't considered before, stop and consider it now. Find a way to change your suggestions to incorporate your new understanding. Don't be afraid to think out loud. It's always good to admit that you've learned something new and need time to rethink things. It signals to the other person that you're flexible. As an added bonus, it often makes the other party more willing to compromise and listen to your concerns, too. Accommodating gestures inspire the same in return.

## Enlist the Other Party's Help

If you just present demands, expect to meet resistance. If, on the other hand, you attempt to enlist the other party in finding a solution, you're showing a willingness to engage in give-and-take to find a solution everyone can be happy with.

Remember, you and your DM both share the same overall goal: to make the game as fun as possible. Treat your negotiation as an exercise in cooperative problem solving, and you'll get much further than if you turn it into a battle of wills.

**YOU:** Ah, well, maybe I went a little overboard on that critique thing. Forget it. There's just this one little problem, really, and I was hoping you could help me solve it. . . . 

# Sage Advice

## Questions and Answers

by Skip Williams

Email your questions to the Sage at [tsrsage@aol.com](mailto:tsrsage@aol.com).

**T**his month, the Sage considers a grab bag of questions about the D&D game, from dragonhide armor to the *true strike* spell.

The *Monster Manual* has rules for how much masterwork armor you can create from the hide of a dragon based on its size, but it doesn't mention anything about the AC such armor would have. Does the wearer get the dragon's natural AC or some percentage of it, or is it an additional armor bonus like that from adamantite because dragon scales are harder than steel? How do those bonuses differ for all the different types of armor you can create? Exactly how many suits of armor can you make from one dragon's hide? What if I just want to make shields out of the hide? How much does dragonhide armor cost?

Armor made from a dragon's hide is no different from any other kind of armor. To determine the AC bonus such armor provides, first decide what size and kind of armor you want to make. (The dragon's size limits your

choices here, as noted in the *Monster Manual*.) The kind of armor you choose determines all its statistics. For example, if you slay a Large dragon, you can use the hide to make one suit of masterwork hide armor for a Medium-size creature. According to Tables 7–5 and 7–9 in the *Player's Handbook*, masterwork hide armor costs 165 gp (15 gp base for hide armor plus 150 gp for masterwork). The resulting armor gives its wearer a +3 armor bonus, and it has a maximum Dexterity bonus of +4 and an armor check penalty of –2 (base –3 for hide armor, reduced by one for being masterwork). The armor's arcane spell failure chance, weight, and speed are the same as those for other suits of masterwork hide armor.

The table below sums up the kinds of armor you can choose to make from a dragon's hide.

As a general rule, for every single suit of armor and shield you'd normally be allowed to make, you can make two suits for each size category smaller than the maximum, plus one shield of the appropriate size per suit. For example, from the hide of a Colossal dragon you could make one suit of full plate armor for a Medium-

size creature, or two suits for Small creatures, or four suits for Tiny creatures, or eight suits for Diminutive creatures, or sixteen suits for Fine creatures. Note, however, that there are some special rules regarding armor for Tiny and smaller creatures (see the box on page 105 of the *Player's Handbook*).

A dragon carcass actually has a lot more hide on it than the table above might indicate, but the armor-making process involves considerable wastage. If you just want to make shields, assume that you can make two shields for every suit of armor you could normally make.

**What bonuses get multiplied when a character confirms a critical hit? Suppose a 10th-level barbarian with a Strength score of 18 confirms a critical hit while raging and using a +3 greataxe and a maximum Power Attack. How much damage does the barbarian deal? Can you even use the Power Attack feat while raging? What if the character is a paladin using the smite evil ability, a fighter with Weapon Specialization, or a rogue using a sneak attack?**

It's easiest to think of a confirmed

DRAGON SIZE	ARMOR KIND AND MAXIMUM SIZE				
	HIDE	BANDED	HALF-PLATE	BREASTPLATE	FULL PLATE
Tiny	Diminutive	Fine	—	—	—
Small	Tiny	Diminutive	Fine	—	—
Medium-size	Small	Tiny	Diminutive	Fine	Fine
Large	Medium-size	Small	Tiny	Diminutive	Diminutive
Huge	Large	Medium-size	Small	Tiny	Tiny
Gargantuan	Huge	Large	Medium-size	Small	Small
Colossal	Gargantuan	Huge	Large	Medium-size	Medium-size

critical hit as a number of hits equal to the weapon's critical damage multiplier. The example character is using a greataxe, which has a critical multiplier of  $\times 3$ , so the damage for a confirmed critical is just like the damage for hitting the foe three times. The only damage that's not multiplied in this way is damage expressed in extra dice, such as for a rogue's sneak attack (see page 123 in the *Player's Handbook*).

The example character has a base attack bonus of  $+10$ , so the damage bonus for a "maximum power attack" is  $+10$ . The character's Strength score increases to 22 while he rages, giving him a  $+6$  damage bonus for Strength, which increases to  $+9$  because a greataxe is a two-handed weapon. The greataxe's  $+3$  enhancement bonus also applies to damage, so the character's total damage from one hit with the greataxe is  $1d12+22$  ( $10+9+3$ ). A confirmed critical hit makes the damage  $3d12+66$ , just as if you had rolled  $1d12+22$  three times.

As noted earlier, any damage expressed in extra points of damage is multiplied with a confirmed critical hit, so the extra damage from the smite evil ability or the Weapon Specialization feat is also multiplied. Damage expressed as extra dice does not increase, so a rogue doesn't roll any extra sneak attack damage dice for a confirmed critical hit. However, some magic weapons that deal extra dice of damage do deal some extra damage on a confirmed critical hit, as noted in their descriptions. This ability is a special feature of these weapons.

You do not multiply damage that has already been multiplied. If the example character were striking a foe for double damage already, you would apply the extra ("doubled") damage only once to the critical damage. For example, suppose the sample barbarian above is an azer, who deals fire damage along with his greataxe attack. The character's total damage from one hit with the greataxe is  $1d12+23$  ( $10+9+3+1$  fire). A confirmed critical hit would make the damage  $3d12+69$ , just as if you had rolled  $1d12+23$  three times. If the azer attacks a creature with the

cold subtype, the fire damage is doubled, so the base damage for the attack is  $1d12+24$  ( $10+9+3+2$  fire). The doubled damage is not applied to a confirmed critical hit; instead the total damage becomes  $3d12+70$  ( $1d12+23$  three times, plus one extra point for the "doubled" fire damage).

Sharp readers might notice that two-handed weapons by their nature deal "multiplied" damage (Strength bonus  $\times 1.5$ ), but this is not a true damage multiplier in the sense that the term is used in the D&D game. Thus, the extra damage from a two-handed weapon is multiplied for a confirmed critical hit.

**Does the penalty for not having a martial weapon proficiency stack with the penalty for not having an exotic weapon proficiency? For example, what happens if a sorcerer uses a bastard sword in one hand and does not have either the martial weapon proficiency or the exotic weapon proficiency for a bastard sword? Is her penalty a straight  $-4$  for not having the exotic weapon proficiency, or does she suffer a  $-4$  for not having the martial weapon proficiency in addition to the  $-4$  for not having the exotic weapon proficiency because a bastard sword requires special training to use with one hand?**

No. You don't get two penalties for nonproficiency. You're either proficient with a weapon or you're not.

If you're Medium-size, you have to be proficient with a bastard sword to use it in one hand; if you're not proficient, you don't have the option to use the sword one-handed. Assuming that the sorcerer in your example is Medium-size, she would have to use the sword in two hands and would suffer the  $-4$  nonproficiency penalty when doing so.

**I am confused about the Speak Language skill. I always thought that it just enabled a member of an illiterate character class to learn languages. Then I noticed that the loremaster has it as a class skill. What is this skill used for? Do you use 2 skill points to become literate, or do you use the skill points to learn**

languages at a rate of 2 skill points/language? Let's say that I am an elf wizard/loremaster and want to spend points on this skill. Am I limited to the number of languages I learn because of my race, or is the limitation only for my Intelligence modifier? Does my level affect how many languages I can learn? What if my Intelligence score changes?

The Speak Language skill lets you learn to speak a new language. If you're literate, you can also read and write any language you can speak. Any languages you can speak courtesy of this skill are in addition to the languages you are able to speak because of your race, class, and Intelligence score. For example, an elf character who begins play with an Intelligence score of 18 speaks six languages: Common, Elven, and four additional languages chosen from the list on page 16 of the *Player's Handbook*. (The character's choice of class could expand the selection a little more, as noted on page 12 of the *Player's Handbook*). If the character buys the Speak Language skill, he learns to speak other languages in addition to these. Most characters must spend 2 skill points to learn a new language, but loremasters have Speak Language as a class skill and can learn new languages for one skill point each.

You do not buy ranks in Speak Language, so there is no maximum rank to worry about. You can learn to speak as many languages as you like, provided you have the skill points to spend on them.

It's your beginning Intelligence score that determines how many languages you can speak without the skill. You do not learn new languages if you have an Intelligence increase, nor do you lose languages if your Intelligence decreases.

As for the use of the skill by barbarians, all characters except barbarians are automatically literate when they begin play. A barbarian can become literate by spending 2 skill points, but this is not the same as choosing a new language.

**Can a spellcaster on the Ethereal Plane affect anybody on the Material Plane with a *magic missile* spell?**

No. A *magic missile* spell is a force effect. While force effects created on the Material Plane do affect things on the Ethereal Plane, the reverse is not true. One exception to this rule is a manifested ghost, which exists on the Ethereal and Material Planes simultaneously and so can be affected by attacks from either plane.

If I'm a paladin 5/templar 4, I have two different smiting abilities, right? Now suppose I have a weapon with the mighty smiting property (from the *Oriental Adventures* book). Will the weapon give me two extra smites per day?

No. A paladin/templar has only one smite ability, which is usable twice a day or more. Your example character can smite evil twice per day (see the templar description in *Defenders of the Faith*). A weapon of mighty smiting gives the character one extra smite per day.

Alternatively, a character such as a paladin/cleric with the Destruction domain could have two or more different smite abilities. Such a character would have the smite evil ability once per day as a paladin and the smite (anything) ability once per day as a cleric. In this case, only the character's paladin level would be used to determine the damage bonus for the smite evil ability and only her cleric level would be used to determine the damage bonus for the smite ability she receives as a granted power for her domain.

Any power or effect that increases the number of smites such a character would be allowed applies to only one of her smite abilities. For example, if the paladin/cleric became a templar, she could combine the templar's smite ability with either her paladin smite evil ability or her cleric smite ability. (Once this choice is made, the character cannot change it.) If the same character then picked up a weapon of mighty smiting, she would gain one extra smite ability per day—either an extra paladin smite evil or an extra cleric smite—but she could freely choose which one gained the extra use each day.

My character has just become a 5th-level sacred fist and has an overall character level of 14. The sacred fist prestige class gives him the uncanny dodge ability (can't be flanked). Does that mean it would take an 18th-level rogue to flank and sneak attack him or just a 9th-level rogue, since he has only 5 levels in the class that grants the ability? Suppose the attacking rogue is a multiclass character who gets sneak attack from her new class as well as her old one. Do you add the class levels from both classes to determine whether the sneak attack is more powerful than the uncanny dodge?

Add up all the attacker's class levels in classes that grant sneak attack. Then add up all the defender's class levels in classes that grant uncanny dodge. Finally, compare the two normally.

Assuming that the example character has only one class that grants uncanny dodge, it would take a 9th-level rogue (or a character with a total of 9 class levels in classes that grant sneak attack) to flank him.

I am a bit confused as to what the term "corporeal source" means when one is trying to affect an incorporeal creature. Does it refer to the creature making the attack, or to the weapon or spell used? The description of incorporeality in the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide* seems to imply that only force spells strike true and that any other spell cast by a corporeal creature has a 50% miss chance. Is that so? Would a turn undead attempt (a supernatural ability) made by a corporeal creature suffer a miss chance? If "corporeal source" refers to the weapon or spell used, which spells are corporeal and which are not?

The term "corporeal source" refers to both the creature making an attack and the item or effect used in that attack. Physical attacks (melee and ranged) from corporeal creatures are from a corporeal source and are subject to the incorporeal miss chance. Physical attacks from incorporeal creatures are not from a corporeal source and therefore are not subject to the miss chance.

Most spell effects are corporeal, no matter what kind of creature creates them. A *fireball*, for example, is subject to the incorporeal miss chance even if an incorporeal creature casts it.

Some attacks break that rule. Force effects from any source are not subject to the incorporeal miss chance, and neither are attacks with ghost touch weapons. Undead turning attempts are not subject to the incorporeal miss chance, but other uses of positive energy (such as cure wounds spells) are, as is holy water.

How does the *true strike* spell work against invisible opponents? Do you have to know where they are in order to shoot? Please explain how you would handle a character trying to use *true strike* against an invisible foe. I know the spell is supposed to negate any miss chance the attacker has, but what exactly does that mean?

When you use a *true strike* spell against an opponent you cannot see, the procedure is exactly the same as it would be if you attacked without the benefit of the spell. You must choose a space to attack. If you choose the correct space (the one your opponent occupies) the *true strike* spell negates the 50% miss chance you would normally have for attacking an unseen foe, you roll normally to hit, and you get the spell's +20 insight bonus on the attack roll. If you attack the wrong space, you nearly hit the space you're aiming at, but if there's nothing there, you hit nothing.

The *true strike* spell negates any miss chance you might have for the target's concealment, but not any other miss chance. For example, *true strike* would negate the miss chance from the *displacement* spell or the miss chance for attacking in fog or an *obscuring mist* spell because both of those effects conceal the target. *True strike* does not negate the miss chance from the *blink* spell or the miss chance when attacking an incorporeal creature (see previous question) because those miss chances don't have anything to do with concealment. ♣



