JOHNSON

50 MONSTER MAXIMIZERS

by Brian Corvello

Many AD&D® game monsters come from popular mythology, folklore, and fairy tales. The game statistics for these creatures, however, only scratch the surface of the original mythology. A zombie can be much more than a mindless undead soldier according to Caribbean folklore.

Here are fifty bits of forgotten lore, each with an optional rule for the AD&D version of the monster.

illustrated by Pete Venters

1 **The haunting wail of a BANSHEE is an omen of death. If a family with a sick member hears the eerie sound, they can be sure the person will not survive. If the banshee is fought and defeated, however, the sick individual recovers completely.**

A terminally diseased character dying in his or her home town has a 5% chance per level of attracting a banshee. The spirit wails a harmless but chilling cry every night until the character dies. If the banshee is slain during this time, the sick person is affected by a *cure disease* spell cast at 12th level.

2 The stupid CATOBLEPAS is a spirit of gluttony. Not only does it eat any creature it slays with its deadly gaze, but also it eats its own forelegs and tail if food is scarce. This is of little consequence to the monster, as the limbs soon grow back.

A catoblepas cannot regenerate in combat, but it can regrow a lost limb or tail in 2d6 days.

3 The race of CENTAURS is divided into two main families. One branch, the Descendants of Ixion, combine the speed and strength of a horse with the greed and arrogance of humans. These centaurs have gone bad and indulge in endless debauchery. They give allegiance only to the Greek god of wine, Dionysus.

Descendants of Ixion are chaotic neutral and have Low to Average Intelligence. They can become priests of Dionysus, up to 5th level.

4 The other family of CENTAURS is known as the Descendants of Chronus. These noble centaurs are far more wise, intelligent, and benign than their cousins, and they pursue a sober life filled with study. Many have educated a number of heroes.

Descendants of Chronos are chaotic good and have Intelligence scores ranging from 11 to 15. They can become priests or druids of any good deity, up to 8th level.

5 An effective antidote for the petrifying touch of the COCKATRICE is the rue leaf. Rubbing rue leaves on the stone body of one of the monster's victims restores the victim to flesh and heals any wounds inflicted by the creature.

A restored victim must survive a System Shock roll. Also, the leaves heal only the damage caused by the cockatrice. Eating the leaves has the same effect.

6 The COCKATRICE's deadliest enemy is the rooster. The monster never goes near a place inhabited by these birds, as the sound of the rooster's crow causes it to fall dead. The rooster knows this by instinct and always starts crowing when it sees the monster.

The cockatrice is allowed a saving throw vs. death magic; otherwise, the sound of the rooster kills it.

7 Another mortal enemy of the COCKATRICE is the weasel. Weasels are immune to the monster's petrifying touch and attack the beast without mercy. The cockatrice fights back with its sharp beak, but weasels are instinctively aware of the healing power of rue, which they usually know where to find. The weasel usually wins a fight with the cockatrice.

This hatred and immunity extends to giant weasels. Both normal and giant varieties never check morale when confronted with a cockatrice.

8 Some DWARVES have the ability to see the future. However, these dwarves tend to be recluses and rarely, if ever, use their ability for the good of other races.

At most, 2% of dwarf NPCs have this ability; PC dwarves never do. Such dwarves are true neutral, inhabit remote locations, and can see three days into the future for every level they have obtained. Most are 9th level or higher.

9 NEREIDS are exceedingly vain and accept no comparisons to their beauty. When the queen Cassiopeia bragged that her daughter Andromeda was more beautiful than the nereids, they petitioned Poseidon to punish the queen. The sea god demanded that Andromeda be sacrificed to a sea monster called Cetus. Fortunately, Cetus was slain the hero Perseus.

Only evil nereids are likely to retaliate this way. It might be possible for PCs to manipulate a nereid with flattery, but nereids are allowed a Wisdom check to realize they are being flattered. (Treat a nereid's Wisdom score as equal to her Intelligence).

10 When an ELEPHANT knows it is about to die of old age, it travels to one of several hidden groves known as Elephant Graveyards. Once it arrives, it finds a spot amid hundreds of skeletons, takes one last look at life, and dies. Many have tried to follow an old elephant to one of these spots, hoping to claim a fortune in ivory tusks, but elephants are crafty, and most would sooner die in combat than lead a human to the bones of its ancestors.

Should a PC try to follow such a dying elephant, the animal attacks without checking morale if it detects the PC. Should a PC actually make it to a Graveyard, it will indeed yield ivory—at least 10,000 gp worth—but the places are always well trapped and guarded. Several bone golems patrolling the graveyard would not be unusual.

11 **One HALF-ELF of widely recognized fame is Robin Goodfellow. Robin was the son of a mortal woman and an avatar of Oberon. Robin soon developed a knack for shapeshifting magic and became a wizard of great skill. He is a notorious lover, and traces of his elven blood can be found in many communities. He is also an incurable prankster who loves to play jokes. One of his favorite tricks is to impersonate a rich man's favorite riding horse, wait to be mounted, and dump him in a stream.**

Robin Goodfellow is a 17th-level chaotic good transmuter. He has been given a gift of immortality by his father—though he can be killed, he does not age. He can often be found in sylvan settings, but only when he desires it.

12 Some GRIFFONS delight in punishing the greedy. They often lure treasure hunters to their nests and tear them to pieces. If one can defeat such a griffon, the treasure is rich indeed.

These horde-watching griffons could have a treasure type of up to F.

13 The reason GRIFFONS delight in eating horses is that they see them as competitors in riding and chariot drawing. Horses are too weak to stand up for themselves, but an intelligent equine—like a unicorn or pegasus—will seldom miss an opportunity to hinder or embarrass a griffon.

14 HAGS can be identified by the lair they keep. An annis lair is always a cave with a large pile of bones at the entrance, on which the hag often sits. The bones of anyone foolish enough to come near are soon added to the pile. However, if a sizeable group gathers to hunt her down, the creature usually abandons the lair. Close inspection of the bones shows that she often has to content herself with a diet of sheep and deer when humans aren't available.

At the DM's option, this pile may also be where the monster stores treasure.

15 **The gluttonous HARPIES often act as agents of the gods. When a mortal offends a deity, the god might send these beasts to attack at a time when a meal is served. The harpies proceed to devour the offender's meal, repeating the attack every day until they are slain or the offender starves to death.**

A priest who offends a deity whose area of influence includes nature, charity, or the harvest has a 5% to 50% chance of receiving this punishment, the probability depending on the severity of the offense.

16 HARPIES that dwell on coast lines are notoriously sore losers. If a ship does not succumb to their hypnotic singing, they might commit suicide by tossing themselves into the sea.

There is a 5% cumulative chance per defeat that a group of harpies does this. PCs might gain XP awards for it, depending on how clever they were in avoiding the *charm*.

17 **Some HYDRAE are so venomous that they poison the air around them. Even the hero Heracles nearly succumbed to the poisonous stench of the Lernaean hydra he fought. It would be folly to think that a lesser person could stand up to one.**

One in every ten hydrae has a poisonous aura. Every round spent within 20 feet of these hydrae causes 1d6 points damage unless a saving throw vs. poison succeeds. Any water touched by them becomes poison; those who drink it must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die instantly.

18 HYDRAE never sleep; they have a constant activity cycle. This makes *charmed* hydrae excellent guardians for the treasures of kings or even gods. Two treasures known to have been guarded by hydrae are the Golden Fleece and the Golden Apple Tree, planted by Zeus at the End of the World. (This means hydrae are unaffected by magical and poisonous affects that cause sleep.)

19 In a fairy community, LEPRECHAUNS often serve as cobblers, making shoes for brownies, pixies, and other fairies. If one hears a faint tapping in sylvan woods, it might be one of these creatures pounding nails into a tiny shoe. When actually seen, the leprechaun has only one shoe in his possession; he hides the other in case he must escape when a mortal sees him.

At the DM's option, leprechauns might be able to construct magical shoes and boots, such as *boots of elvenkind*. The fairies can be persuaded to do this by payment of gold equal to the magical item's worth.

20 LEPRECHAUNS carry magical snuff-boxes that serve as effective weapons. If caught by a human or demihuman assailant, a leprechaun throws the snuff into the attacker's face; by the time the attacker recovers from sneezing, the leprechaun has vanished.

Those hit by a leprechaun's snuff box, which requires a normal attack roll, must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or collapse into a fit of helpless sneezing for 2 rounds.

21 The LION is the natural enemy of the unicorn. When the two creatures meet, they compete for dominance of the land. Lions always attack unicorns, who return the favor. Unfortunately, the two evenly matched creatures often wind up killing each other.

A lion never checks morale when dealing with a unicorn. It attacks on sight and does not give up until one of them is dead or the unicorn somehow escapes.

22 One LION of note was fought by the demigod Heracles at Namea. The son of a monster called Typheus, the Namean lion had skin tougher than steel. Heracles killed the beast by strangling it, but it might have fathered offspring. The lion's skin was used as invulnerable armor for the demigod, aiding him in all further endeavors.

Descendants of the Namean lion have 7 HD and AC –4. Their skin can be made into *leather armor* +2.

23 In tropical rain forests, the MANTICORE often poisons its spines with the juice of the *upas* tree, a plant notorious for its venomous sap. Death is immediate for prey struck by these spines, and the victims are devoured at the monster's leisure. The manticore itself is immune to upas poison.

Anyone struck by upas poison must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die instantly. On the plus side, the tree's poison can be used by anyone, though it becomes inert after 1d6 days.

This manticore cleans its teeth on the bones of slain victims.

24 When a MANTICORE feeds, it uses its mighty teeth to crunch up every portion of the corpse. Bones, clothing, and even armor are devoured by the greedy monster. The complete disappearance of a person in the wilderness might be an indication of a manitcore's presence.

Manticores leave nothing left of their victims to raise or resurrect.

25 **The original MEDUSA (as well as her sisters, Stheno and Euryale) had fanlike wings that allowed her to fly like the wind. When Perseus killed Medusa, he would surely have fallen prey to her sisters had not the first pegasus sprung from her neck; Perseus mounted the steed and escaped. It is not known whether Stheno or Euryale produced offspring, but if they did, some of their descendants might be winged.**

Winged medusae fly at a speed of 24, Maneuverability Class D. Greater medusae never have these appendages.

26 A serpentine lock of a MEDUSA's hair is considered an infallible protection against those who seek to control one's mind. Most would argue, however, that obtaining this protection is far more dangerous than fighting an enchanter.

Anyone carrying medusa hair gains a +4 bonus to saving throws vs. Enchantment/Charm magic.

27 MERFOLK can predict the weather of the sea accurately. A sailor who befriends these folk can ask them for help. Merfolk aid sailors in this manner as long as their skills aren't squandered on greedy ventures.

Merfolk can predict the weather with 80% accuracy, but only weather over the sea.

28 MERMAIDS can throw powerful curses at sailors who offend them. Possible offenses include spying on them, lusting after their beauty, refusing their aid, or especially—trying to cheat them in any way. A fisherman who cheats a mermaid might never catch another fish, and a ship commander who harms one certainly loses his next battle.

A mermaid's curse is powerful. One can be removed only by performing an act of atonement to the merfolk. DMs should be fiendish in devising punishments for those who cheat the mermaids.

29 MINOTAURS are also used occasionally as divine retribution. When a ruler offends a deity badly, he might find that one of his cows gives birth to a minotaur. Since this beast eats only human flesh, the despot must sacrifice humans to the beast until it is killed. (Slaying the minotaur would only invoke more punishments from the gods.)

Only an evil power would saddle someone with this punishment, and even then the crime would have to be a great one.

30 **One famous SPIRIT NAGA was known as the Lambton Worm. This creature possessed an amazing regenerative power that allowed it to put itself back together even after being hacked to pieces. A warrior defeated this monster by wearing razor-studded armor and fighting it in a river (before they could rebond, the pieces were washed away), but the Worm was surely not the only member of this branch of the family.**

A "Lambton" spirit naga can regenerate at the rate of 4 hp per round, and severed parts can reattach themselves by slithering together. Damage from fire and acid cannot be regenerated.

31 Many believe that the beauteous NYMPHS are immortal spirits, but this is not so. Nymphs are long lived, however: Their typical life span is ten thousand human generations. Though they can be a wealth of information, nymphs have been known to trouble mortals with mischief when they have too much time on their hands.

Often (50% of the time), a bored nymph will trouble PCs with druid spells or other forest inhabitants. While causing trouble like this, they never show themselves.

32 NYMPHS have been known to succumb to dangerous levels of alcohol consumption, especially when celebrating with satyrs. A band of drunk nymphs are a dangerous mob, tearing apart any unlucky creature who runs into them.

Drunken nymphs are considered temporarily chaotic neutral. If provoked, they attack with their hands, inflicting 1d4 points of damage and using sheer numbers to overbear lone opponents. Victims must still make a successful saving throw vs. spell to avoid blindness or death upon seeing them, but with a +2 bonus.

The Ecology of the Aboleth

The type best known is also the least dangerous

by Brandon Grist

The following information on aboleth is based on testimony given to a group of adventurers by the dark-elf sage Alzor, just hours before his mysterious disappearance. Alzor was known to be fair and honest, and his information about the Underdark and its denizens had always been reliable.

The aboleth are perhaps the least well-known and the most misunderstood of all the races which inhabit the Underdark. The reason for this is very simple — the aboleth want it that way. The bulk of their population dwells in seclusion in the great, sunless seas found deep beneath the surface of the earth. Only the weakest aboleth are encountered near the surface, and it is from these creatures that the vast majority of surface-dwellers have drawn what little knowledge they have of this race. Because of the unfortunate misconceptions which arise from this practice, it is necessary to explain the true nature of the aboleth.

In general, all aboleth are cruel, emotionless, and logical. All are extremely intelligent — some even more so than the most ancient of elven mages. They are believed to live for thousands of years, but exact information is difficult to gain for obvious reasons.[1] Over their many years of existence, the aboleth have developed a society which far exceeds that of man in its efficiency. In this society, each aboleth has a specific duty which it performs with the utmost skill. There are four major roles in the aboleth society. In increasing order of importance, these roles are: slave-gathering, slave maintenance, scientific research and experimentation, and ruling.

The role of slave-gathering is delegated to the common aboleth with which most surface-dwellers are familiar.[2] Such an aboleth resembles a large, blue-green fish which lacks all fins but the caudal. It has a head with three large, slitlike eyes and four long tentacles. Its mouth is like a great sucker and can be found on the underside of the head section. On each of its sides can be found four tubelike orifices which excrete a vile slime. This common aboleth is about 20′ long from tail to head, and has 10′-long tentacles. It is clumsy on land and is usually encountered in underground lakes. Despite its good combat abilities, this creature prefers to attack with a mental ability which allows it to *enslave* those with weak minds. It also possesses illusion-casting abilities used to hide itself while hunting for slaves. In general, it is wise not to get close to one of these creatures, for not only is the slime they excrete hazardous to all air-breathing creatures, but their very skin can cause serious tissue damage if touched to exposed flesh. It is important to note that these slave-gathering monsters are also the *weakest* of their kind.

Slaves gathered by the common aboleth are routinely brought back to certain floating cities in these underground seas in which the more powerful aboleth dwell.[3] This collection process, along with further maintenance of slaves, is the responsibility of the greater aboleth. These creatures resemble their lesser brothers in every way, but are considerably larger. They average 30′ in length and weigh several tons. They are also more intelligent than the common aboleth. They have most of the same powers possessed by the common aboleth, but their *enslavement* ability is more developed. Generally speaking, anyone *enslaved* by one of these creatures never sees the upper world again. There may be as many as a dozen of these creatures in a single aboleth city, each maintaining a separate group of slaves.

The purpose of slaves in the aboleth society is quite different from what would normally be expected. Though slaves may have been used originally to aid in the construction of aboleth cities, these cities generally lack any kind of significant slave population. Instead, most slaves dwell on the shores of the lakes on which the cities float. There, the slaves serve both as guards and as playthings for the cruel aboleth, who pit slaves against one another in strange spectacles of combat. The exact purpose of this practice is not clear, though it may be a way of eliminating the weak in the breeding of a race of subterranean slaves.

In order to fully understand the next major class in aboleth society, that of the noble, it is first necessary to establish the point that the aboleth have chosen the path of science over that of magic. Consequently, they have no wizards or conjurers as do other races. Noble aboleth, the scientists of the race, are fantastically intelligent and ever seek to increase their powers through bizarre means.[4] In general, they are similar in appearance to the common aboleth. Unlike common aboleth, noble aboleth have an enlarged head section, and they have two slender arms, each ending in three highly dextrous fingers, instead of their two uppermost tentacles. These latter appendages are used for more delicate work.[5] These scientist-types possess most of the other abilities common to aboleth, as well as a few mental powers which are useful in their research. Though the full extent of the aboleth's scientific knowledge can only be guessed at, it is certain that it is, at the very least, comparable to the magical knowledge possessed by the dwellers of the upper world. Each city usually holds about half a dozen of these noble aboleth.

The last major role in aboleth society is that of command, which is the responsibility of the greatest class of aboleth. Physically, ruler aboleth resemble common aboleth, but each is about 40′ long and more intelligent than even the nobles. Each city has but one ruler, and it is his job to maintain order. To better accomplish this, the ruler has some sort of mental link with all of his subjects.[6] As their knowledge increases, so does the ruler's. Rulers possess all other aboleth abilities and should be regarded as dangerous in the extreme.

An aboleth feeds mainly on microscopic organisms which abound in its natural habitat, but it can also consume larger prey if necessary.[7] Aboleth can survive in both air and water, but prefer water for obvious reasons. Every aboleth has both male and female reproductive organs, though mating is rare and is restricted between aboleth of the same class.[8]

Because of their nonmagical nature, aboleth have a measure of resistance to spells similar to the spell-resistance of dwarves. This resistance grows greater as the aboleth's size and power increase.[9] All aboleth have psionic powers commensurate with their level of intelligence, and the most intelligent have powers which rival those of the illithids who, like all of the other subterranean races, have a healthy fear of the aboleth.

In closing, it is worthy to note that rumors exist of a grand aboleth, a creature so immense that it dwarfs even the rulers. If so, then perhaps it is better that surface and subterranean dwellers alike leave the aboleth to do as they please.

Notes

1. Common aboleth have a life span of about 2,000 years. Greater and noble aboleth live to be about 3,000 years old. Rulers can live as long as five millennia, while the grand aboleth may well be immortal.

2. The common aboleth is simply the monster as outlined in the *Monster Manual II*, with slight modifications as noted herein. The illusion-casting power mentioned in this paragraph is equal to the ability to cast *phantasmal force* (with auditory effects as well as visual ones) at will, once per round.

3. When a common aboleth enslaves a total of seven creatures (regardless of their hit dice), a greater and noble aboleth arrive using *probability travel* and take the slaves back to their city. Each greater aboleth has as many as five common aboleth gathering slaves for it. It takes from 2-8 turns for the greater and noble aboleth to arrive, though they are alerted immediately by *telepathy* when the quota is met.

4. Nobles use their ability of *probability travel*, as well as many strange drugs and devices, to travel to alternate Prime Material planes. There they amass as much knowledge as possible while *enslaving* any who oppose them. Occasionally, several nobles and a dozen or so common aboleth mount a raid into a particularly promising world, but this is rare.

5. These appendages are also capable of using technological items. The aboleth nobles have developed several potent offensive weapons and do not hesitate to use them if they feel the need exists. Note that they do not care for magic, and will not use items such as wands, rods, staves, etc. Magical treasures are locked in vaults as curios or are destroyed.

6. This *telepathy* has a range of 100 miles and allows complete communication with all subject aboleth in that range. Note that all other types of aboleth can and do communicate by telepathic means, though this has a range of no more than 20 miles and must be used consciously. They can also communicate with other intelligent creatures by these means, with a range of 100 yards, but seldom do so.

7. The aboleth does not have an effective biting attack because of the position of its mouth. If, for some reason, its opponent is immobilized, the aboleth may elect to consume its victim. If it chooses to do so, it receives but one biting attack per round. Damage varies with the type of aboleth; common ones do 3-18 hp damage per bite and swallow whole on a roll of 20, greater and noble aboleth do 4-24 hp damage and swallow whole on a roll of 19 or 20, and ruler aboleth do 5-30 hp damage and swallow whole on a role of 18, 19 or 20. The grand aboleth never attacks in this way. Those swallowed take one quarter of their maximum normal hit points in damage each round until they die.

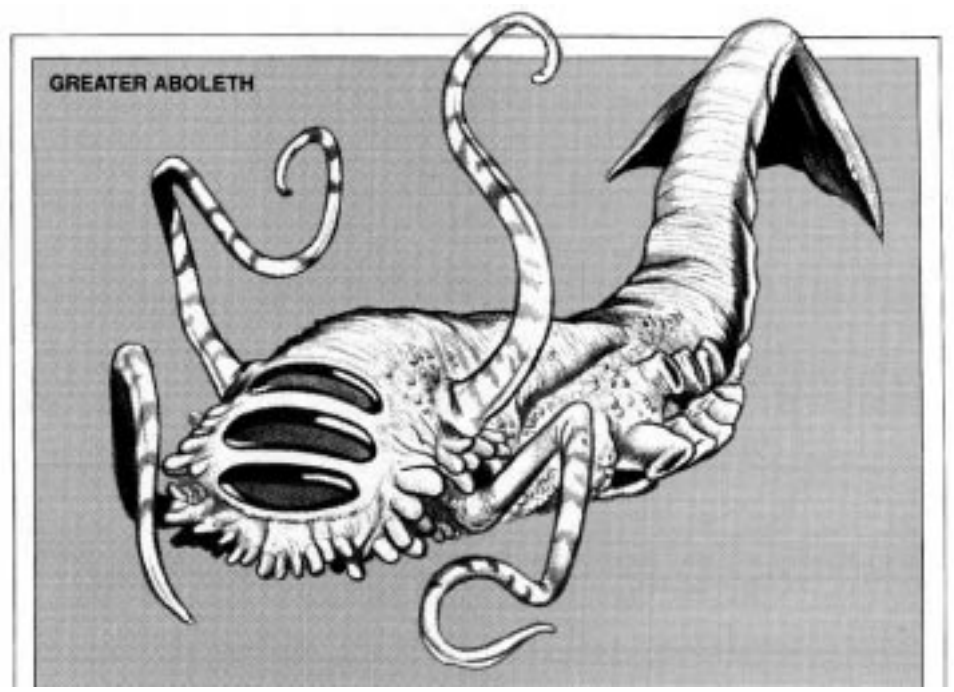
8. Most aboleth mate about once every 500 years. Each participant has one egg which it deposits in a safe place about a week after fertilization. This egg is surrounded by a thick cocoon of slime that protects and nourishes the egg. The egg begins about the size of a human head, but over the course of five years it grows to be about 6′ long. At this point, the aboleth hatches and begins a quick, one-year mutation into a miniature version of its parent. It takes about 10 more years before the aboleth reaches its adult stage, and during this time it is carefully guarded by other aboleth or, occasionally, by slaves. Ruler aboleth mate only once in their lives, and the growth process takes a total of about one hundred years, though it is the same in its various stages. Some noble aboleth have performed occasional cloning experiments, but one has yet to meet with any great success.

9. Because of their nonmagical nature, all aboleth gain a bonus to save versus spells equal to their hit dice divided by four, rounded up. This applies to all aboleth, including common ones (which get a bonus of +2). Also note that rulers and the grand aboleth are immune to some illusions due to their high intelligence.

GREATER ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1-3 (7-12 in city)*
ARMOR CLASS: *3*
MOVE: *3"//21"*
HIT DICE: *12-14*
% IN LAIR: *90%*
TREASURE TYPE: *A (x2) (with /R, S, T, U in city)*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4 tentacles*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *4-10 (x4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Exceptional*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *280*
Attack/Defense Modes: *B, C, D, E/F, G, I, J*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *12 HD: VIII/4,400 + 16 per hit point; 13-14 HD: IX/6,100 + 18 per hit point*

Greater aboleth are simply larger, more intelligent versions of the common aboleth. They are normally only encountered in an aboleth city, although they are occasionally found in some other underground locale pursuing some strange, dark purpose. Their purpose in the aboleth society is to control the slave population, which they do with unrelenting cruelty. They possess *enslavement* powers superior to those of common aboleth, having a range of 60′ and usable a number of times per day equal to the aboleth's hit dice. The save vs. spells is at -4, and only a *limited wish*, *wish*, or *alter reality* spell can counter it (though *enslavement* ends if the aboleth is killed as well). If more than two miles ever separate slave and master, the slave is entitled to another saving throw (still at -4). A hit from the tentacle of a greater aboleth has the same effect as that of the common aboleth, though its size



and strength result in 4-10 rather than 1-6 hp damage per hit. Greater aboleth produce slime just as the common aboleth, but in a 2′ radius. Greater aboleth possess the psionic disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *ESP*, *levitation*, and *dimension door*, all at a level of mastery equal to their hit dice.

The illusion-casting power of a greater aboleth is its ability to cast *improved phantasmal force* once per round, with auditory and visual effects, at will.

NOBLE ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1-2 (3-8 in city)*
ARMOR CLASS: *3*
MOVE: *3"//15"*
HIT DICE: *16-28*
% IN LAIR: *95%*
TREASURE TYPE: *E, F, X (with R, S, T, V in city)*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4 tentacles*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *2-16 (x2)/2-5 (x2)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *310*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *16 HD: IX/8,100 + 20/hp; 17-18 HD: X/10,100 + 25 per hit point*

The noble aboleth is an extremely powerful version of the common aboleth which has mutated in several ways so as to accomplish its duties. It is almost never encountered outside an aboleth city, where its role is that of the scientist. It does research, conducts experiments, and travels to alternate worlds to gather information. There are two major differences in appearance between the noble and common aboleth. First, the noble aboleth's head is slightly larger than that of a common or greater aboleth. This makes its movement through water a bit more difficult. Second, two of the noble's tentacles are smaller and end in three fingers, which allow it to do very complicated and delicate work. These tentacles can still be used in combat, but they also can be used to manipulate items or devices (though they never use melee weapons). A hit from any of these tentacles has the same effect as a hit from a common aboleth. Nobles have *enslavement* abilities equal to those of common aboleth and secrete slime in a 3′ radius. They possess the ability to cast *spectral force* spells at will, once per round. Noble aboleth have very powerful psionic abilities and can use the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *ESP*, *body control*, and *probability travel*. All of these disciplines are performed at a level of mastery equal to the aboleth's hit dice.

The exact nature of the various technological weaponry and devices created by noble aboleth is left to the DM to design. Helpful guidelines may be found in DRAGON® issue #114 ("Hi-tech Hijinks," page 84). Most such devices should parallel or duplicate magical devices in effect.

RULER ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *1*
MOVE: *3"//21"*
HIT DICE: *20-22*
% IN LAIR: *100%*
TREASURE TYPE: *H, R, S, T, V*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *5-20 (x 4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Supra-genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *340*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *20 HD: X/15,700 + 30 per hit point; 21-22 HD: X/19,200 + 35 per hit point*

These huge, bloated monstrosities are the largest and most intelligent of all aboleth (aside from the grand aboleth). Each rules an aboleth city and is never encountered anywhere else, except when it must mate (and must therefore travel to another city using psionic means). Its telepathic link with its subjects allows it to be constantly aware of everything going on in its realm. Rulers are, in most other respects, similar to common and greater aboleth. They possess *enslavement* abilities equal to those of greater aboleth and can generate *veil* spells at will. Rulers can generate slime in a 5′ radius, and the mere sight of one causes *fear* in all beings of less than 5th level or five hit dice. They have extremely potent psionics and may use the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *clairvoyance*, *ESP*, *astral projection*, *body control*, and *dimension door* at a level of mastery equal to their hit dice.

GRAND ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *0*
MOVE: *3"//24"*
HIT DICE: *40 (182 hp)*
% IN LAIR: *100%*
TREASURE TYPE: *H (x2), R, S, T (x2), V*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *5-30 (x4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Godlike*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *370*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *X/32,000*

The grand aboleth is quite simply the largest aboleth in existence on a particular world. It is not only incredibly huge (about

RULER ABOLETH

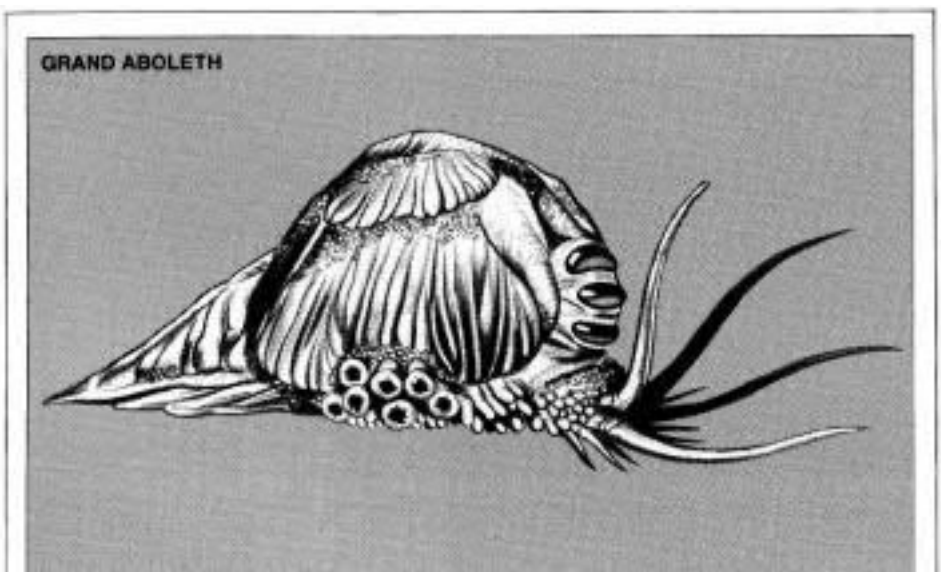
70′ long with ten 30′-long tentacles), but also vastly intelligent. It has a telepathic link with every ruler aboleth on its world (within a range of 10,000 miles), effectively giving it complete knowledge of all that goes on within its empire. It can attack physically with great effect and exudes slime in a 20′ radius. Its psionic powers are unmatched by any other aboleth, and it has the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *detection of good or evil*, *detection of magic*, *ESP*, *levitation*, *mind over body*, *astral projection*, *body control*, *energy control*, and *probability travel*, all performed at the 25th level of mastery. The grand aboleth also has *enslavement* powers equal to those of a greater aboleth and can create very effective illusions (save at -4). This monster dwells in a vast chamber in the midst of the largest aboleth city, which floats on the lowest portion of the worlds underground seas.

The illusion powers of the grand aboleth are equivalent to the spell capability of an 18th-level illusionist. The choice of the monster's spells are left to the DM to decide. The grand aboleth may also generate *veil* spells at will, one per round.

Final note

This article is intended to make the aboleth not only more complete, but more powerful. It is important to bear in mind at all times that the aboleth are extremely intelligent and have managed to maintain their control of the lowest depths of the Underdark for many thousands of years. No party of bold adventurers should ever be able to topple this mighty empire with ease. The grand aboleth is included only as the icing on the cake; actually meeting it would be nearly impossible, and it would require heroic effort to overcome.

Illustrations by Jim Holloway



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The Ecology of the Actaeon

Don't cross antlers with one in his forest

by Aidan Doyle

Artwork by David O. Miller

There were six of them. Too many for me to handle alone. I paused as they drew nearer. They were heavily armed. I slipped back into the foliage. There was no doubt about it: they were heading toward the Tree of Saldis. I considered my options. I could summon the help of some more of my woodland friends, but the battle would be costly, and if possible should be avoided. I had sent Grubble, a bear, to greet the party, hoping that the priest among them would try to communicate with it. However, the black-robed mage in the group had merely laughed and disintegrated Grubble.

I could not allow them to reach the tree. The Tree of Saldis had been planted over five hundred years ago, when the great elven ruler Saldis dedicated it to the woodland folk of Achelos Woods. Since then several adventuring parties had tried to hack down the tree, for its wood was valuable. Its wood was ideally suited for the manufacture of potent magical staves. Then I recalled some of my mentor's tales, tales about a hero who had saved Saldis from an ambush and then led Saldis to plant the tree. This hero of the woodland folk was a creature named Seridus—an actaeon.

I knew actaeons were solitary creatures (except for their animal companions), but Seridus had not been heard of in many years. I had heard that actaeons live for 800 years, as long-lived as the elves. Hoping that Seridus was still alive, I set out for the old growth where Seridus was rumored to live, a section of the forest I do not tend.

I approached the ancient grove slowly. I could sense an aura of peace and tranquility as I entered the grove and gazed at my surroundings. In the shade of a particularly tall tree was a patch of mushrooms and fungi. I later discovered that Seridus was a vegetarian and this the food he cultivated for himself. He told me that his metabolism was slow compared to humans and that he needed little food to sustain himself.

Continuing my scouting, I saw that a crystal clear stream ran through the grove, springing from a cluster of stones and forming a small waterfall over a rocky shelf. I felt a mystic presence issuing from the waterfall, not unlike the presence I felt while meditating. Obviously, this was the place of Seridus' power and served as a temple to the power that had appointed him. Indeed, we were both appointed as caretakers of the forest, by the same power.[1]

I speak of Seridus as though he were male, for this is how he refers to himself. In fact, actaeons are asexual and cannot reproduce; they are the result of a transformation rather than a birth. A druid leads an elk to a place of tranquility and natural beauty, where the animal is bathed in the power and radiance of nature and becomes a fully grown, intelligent actaeon. When an actaeon dies (either violently or of old age) another elk is summoned to replace him.

"Seridus," I called, hesitantly.

I heard a rustling sound and turned. A fearsome, towering creature had stepped out from the woods, at least nine feet tall. It was roughly humanoid but was covered in a thick, brown fur. What startled me most were the great antlers set atop the creature's head. I took an involuntary step backward.

I paused and saw that although the creature clutched a long bone spear in its hand, its face was reassuring. The gleam of wisdom twinkled behind the dark eyes.

The creature opened its mouth and spoke in a deep, measured voice. "Welcome, Dathrin Silverthrush."[2]

I managed a bow. "Greetings, Seridus. You know of me, then?"

Seridus moved gracefully into the grove and with a thrust planted the spear in the ground. "I know everyone and everything within this forest. The animals speak highly of Dathrin, their druid."

I colored slightly at the compliment. "Thank you, Seridus. I guess you know why I have come here, then."

"You seek help to stop the band of marauders."

I nodded. "Unless something is done,

they will reach the Tree of Saldis. There are too many of them for me to tight alone. From the way they bear themselves and the equipment they carry, they are experienced adventurers. If I called on the help of my woodland friends, many of them would die driving away this scourge. The marauders have already killed Grubble."

Seridus paused for a moment, then seized his spear, wrenching it out of the ground. He thrust it into the sky and let out a booming roar. "Let all know that Seridus, actaeon of Achelos Woods, acts to defend his forest. Let those who seek to harm the forest flee, or face my wrath."

I watched as the burly warrior and the priest made their way down to the stream. The warrior stood guard as the priest knelt and filled waterskins.

Seridus emerged from the bushes and stood, spear poised. Behind him, a grizzly bear named Burgin shuffled slowly forward. I had only recently met Burgin, but he was Grubble's cousin and wanted to avenge Grubble's death. Seridus pointed the spear at the adventurers. "Who are you to attempt to violate Achelos Woods?" he demanded."

The warrior stood momentarily surprised, then brought his sword to guard position. The priest dropped the waterskins and stood up.

Seridus glared at them. "Answer me, or face my wrath."

The priest sneered and began an incantation. The warrior bellowed a battle cry. He moved forward, ready to slash at Seridus. Seridus moved just as swiftly, hurling the spear. It struck the warrior in the shoulder and sent him crashing backward, his armor rent and a gaping wound in his shoulder.

The priest finished his spell and six wolves appeared before him. Laughing, he pointed at Seridus. "Tear it to pieces."

The wolves bounded forward, but stopped when they neared Seridus. They paused, then sat on their haunches and whined. I later learned from Seridus that an actaeon's position of respect and power is so great in the woods that no normal forest animal will attack or harm him in any way. So long as an actaeon's allies are in his presence, forest animals will spare them as well. Magically summoned, controlled, or charmed animals compelled to attack an actaeon are confused and unsure what to do. However, an actaeon does not have the power to turn animals against their controller, and the animals will still obey other commands from their controller.

The priest hissed with anger. "Kill it," he commanded. Beside him, the warrior grunted with pain as he ripped the spear from his shoulder.

Seridus reached down to pet one of the wolves. He reached into a quiver slung over his back and pulled out two spears, hefting one of them in each hand.

The priest began casting another spell, and the warrior staggered to his feet. I murmured a phrase and silence descended on the area, drowning out the priest's spell. The priest hefted his mace, and he and the warrior moved forward to attack Seridus. The actaeon hurled both spears. The first struck the warrior on the side of the head, knocking him to the ground, dazed. The next struck the priest in the chest, rupturing his armor and knocking him to the ground.

Seridus produced two more spears from his quiver and moved forward purposefully, just as the fighter staggered to his feet and swung his sword, striking Seridus in the chest. Seridus roared in pain and stabbed at the warrior with his spear. The priest had scrambled to his feet, but before he could take action, Burgin was upon him, grasping him in a bear hug.

The warrior was faring poorly against Seridus, and a blow from a spear left him clutching a deep wound in his chest. Seridus moved closer and jabbed with his spear. The warrior raised his sword and tried to fend off the blow, but Seridus butted him with his antlers, momentarily stunning the warrior. He then slew the warrior with a thrust of his spear.

The priest had battered Burgin with his

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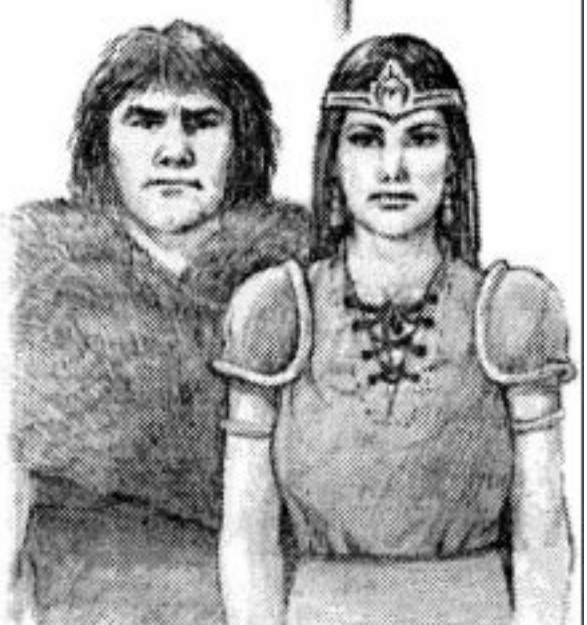

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mace and managed to free himself from the bear's deadly embrace. He staggered from the clearing, intent on escape. However, Seridus was quicker. Like a wolf bringing down a deer, he caught up to the priest and drove his spear deep into his back. The priest staggered and collapsed on the ground. Seridus paused, then raised the spear above his victim and drove it deep into the priest's exposed throat. I turned away, sickened by the blood. At the priest's death, the wolves faded away.

I was glad that I was not the one facing Seridus, for I have learned that actaeons are ruthless opponents. The concept of mercy is foreign to them—they fight until the threat to their forest is vanquished. If an opponent surrenders, an actaeon will quickly weigh the situation. If the actaeon has any doubts about the creature's sincere desire to leave the forest or to repair the damage he has caused, then the actaeon will slay the creature.

Moving swiftly, Seridus slung the body of the warrior over his shoulders. Burgin, who was badly wounded, shuffled forward and dragged away the dead priest. Even wounded and burdened with the weight of the warrior, Seridus still moved gracefully through the woods and left little evidence of his movements behind him."

I remained in hiding and watched from shelter as the other four adventurers arrived. The two thieves in the party knelt and examined the bloodstains on the forest floor. The silver-bearded fighter surveyed the woods, uneasily. The mage glanced at the blood, and then, noticing the unnatural silence of the area, moved away. He cast a spell, dispelling the silence.

One of the thieves, a thin, wiry man stood up. "Something dragged one of them into the woods. I don't know what happened to the other. Judging by the amount of blood, I'd say they wouldn't be worth bothering about."

The mage nodded. "Can you tell what did this?"

The thief shrugged his shoulders. "Judging by the tracks, I'd say it was a bear."

Seridus sprang out of the woods, spears grasped in his hands. "Who are you to attempt to violate Achelos Woods?" he again demanded.

The adventurers reacted swiftly, the mage beginning a spell, the fighter and one of the thieves surging forward with blades ready. The other thief balanced a throwing knife in his hand and aimed at Seridus.

Seridus roared, pouring a cloud of green mist from his mouth. The mist enveloped the adventurers, and I could hear startled cries of surprise from within the cloud. In a few moments the mist cleared, and four squirrels stood on the forest floor instead of the adventurers. Seridus had told me that he could breathe this magical mist only once a day, and so saved it for use against larger groups, breathing on individuals if they were extremely powerful.

The squirrels were sniffing the ground in bewilderment, wondering how they had come to this place.[5] Seridus moved forward and stared intently at the squirrels. He picked up one and placed it on his shoulder. He turned to the remaining three. "Begone from this place, my little friends." Obediently, the squirrels departed.

I emerged from the woods and moved toward Seridus. "Why did you take that squirrel?" I pointed to the squirrel on Seridus' shoulder.

"For this one, the transformation is only temporary. In a day, he will revert to his normal form. I do not want him to remain in the forest. I will take him from the woods and leave him in a distant place."[6]

"And the others?" I asked. "'Are their transformations permanent?"

Seridus nodded, then fixed his gaze on me. "Thank you for your help, Dathrin. We will meet again in the future, I am sure." With that, Seridus turned and vanished into the forest.

Footnotes

The game statistics and description of the actaeon are found in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *Rules Cyclopedia* on page 156. They are also found in the older D&D Masters Set *Master DM's Book* on page 24.

1. Depending upon a DM's campaign, this can be a specific Immortal, a mother goddess (for example, Demeter from Greek mythology), an elven Immortal, or even the "spirit of the forest."

2. Actaeons can speak Common, Elf and Dryad fluently. In addition, they have the permanent ability to *speak with animal* (as the second level cleric spell). This applies to all normal forest creatures.

3. Depending on the nature of their opponents, actaeons often use their surprise to question their opponents' motives and to demand that they leave the woods.

4. If the optional general skills are used, then a character with the tracking skill has his proficiency halved (rounding down) when searching for an actaeon's tracks. For example, a character with a 14 intelligence must roll 7 or under to spot the tracks. If found, the tracks will probably cause confusion, because they resemble the tracks of an elk with two hooves instead of four.

5. The *polymorph* effect of the breath weapon is identical (except for duration if the saving throw is passed) to the fourth-level mage spell, *polymorph other*. The *polymorphed* creature loses its memory of its former life and acts and thinks like the creature it resembles.

6. An actaeon can sense which transformations are permanent.

A guide to actaeons

At the most basic level, actaeons can be used as exotic druids. They can be used to curb the destruction of a forest by rampaging PCs.

Actaeons have a lot of role-playing potential if used in other ways. They can contact the PCs for help. An actaeon may face a particularly fierce foe and may need some assistance, or an actaeon may require something that is not normally found in a forest.

Actaeons can be used as long-term NPCs, especially in woodland campaigns. If any characters establish themselves as lords of a forest dominion, then an actaeon can be one of the NPCs who inhabits the land. The character could have an interesting time dealing with disputes between the characters' peasant families (some of whom are professional hunters and trappers) and an actaeon who forbids this loss of animal life.

Historical background

This information is included for readers who are interested in the origin of the creature, the actaeon. A human named Actaeon appears in Greek mythology. When out hunting, he was unfortunate enough to stumble upon Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, while she was bathing. For this, she turned him into a stag and his own hounds killed him.

A creature similar to the actaeon can be found in Celtic mythology. Herne the Hunter, a protector of woodland creatures, is an actaeon or woodland god. The BBC television series, "Robin of Sherwood," featured Herne the Hunter and is a guide to how an actaeon can be played. In the show, Herne takes a background role and lets Robin Hood be his agent in protecting Sherwood Forest. Ω

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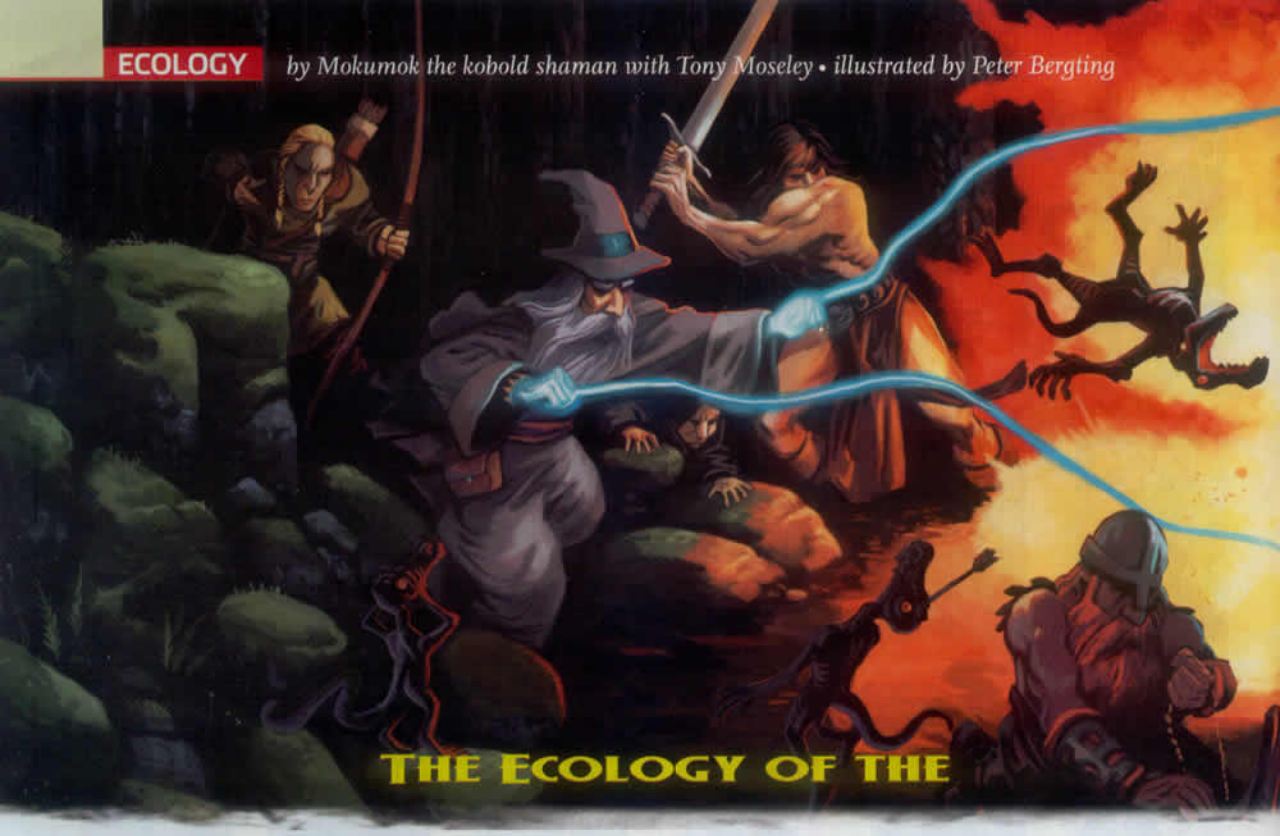
by Mokumok the kobold shaman with Tony Moseley • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE Adventurer

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

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

HISTORY OF THE CRYPT OF CYSTUS

Our tribe has inhabited the Crypt of Cystus since time immemorial. Similarly, adventurers have been raiding this dungeon since time immemorial minus two days. Luckily, until recently, the raids were restricted to one per year.

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

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

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

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

CHAIR OF PROPPING

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ADVENTURER

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

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

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

I have divided adventurers into three distinct types, based on their approach to fun. I call these groupings Gamist, Narrativist, and Simulationist. Every adventurer fits cleanly into one of these three categories, without overlap.

GAMIST

Gamist adventurers are the most deadly type of adventurer, as their every thought centers upon destruction and competition. If a gamist fails to kill more creatures in a battle than his companions, he will rip off his own head in humiliation and hurl it against a wall. Gamists are masters of the sword and bow, but are no less formidable when wielding improvised weapons, such as chains, table legs, or bags full of kittens. Unlike other adventurer types, gamists never speak.

NARRATIVIST

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

ADVANCED ADVENTURER

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

MORGAN IRONWOLF **CR 20**

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

N Medium humanoid

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

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Undercommon

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

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

SR 19

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

Immune mind-affecting effects

Fort +29, **Ref** +26, **Will** +20

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee +5 *dancing, keen, speed, vorpal, wounding longsword* +23/+23/+18/+13 (1d8+9/17–20); or
Axe of the Dwarvish Lords +24/+19/+14 (1d10+10/19–20/×3; throwing range 10 ft.); or
flurry of blows +17/+17/+12/+7 (1d8+4)

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +21

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

SIMULATIONIST

Simulationist adventurers are prepared for anything and never carry less than 200 pounds of gear (not counting armor and weapons). A typical simulationist carries a 10-foot aluminum pole, a comb, a mirror, wolfsbane, garlic, a pound of salt, 400 feet of knotted rope, a bedroll, flannel pajamas, a 15-foot pole, a 7 1/2-foot pole, a favorite pillow, two carrier pigeons, breath mints, a padlock, a first aid kit, a second aid kit, a laminated card naming several people to contact in the event of an emergency, a dog whistle, a canister of lamp oil, a pornographic drawing of an elf maiden, and so forth. Simulationists, being more curious than gamists or narrativists, can sometimes be lured into traps, ambushes, and small obvious cages. For reasons unknown, all simulationists have difficulty speaking in a normal fashion. Instead of saying "I see a chest," for example, they might say, "Verily, a chest!" or "Arrr, there be a chest, says I."

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ADVENTURER

Although it pains me to admit it, we kobolds have more in common with adventurers than we do with our cryptmates. Have you noticed that ropers, darkmantles, and oozes don't even have laundry? Adventurers, on the other hand, have two eyes, a nose, and lack tentacles—just like all of us (not counting Jimp, of course; sorry about that potion, Jimp). I'm not saying that adventurers are in any way preferable to our crypt-mates, not at all. But at least I can imagine how to go about torturing one.

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

Attack Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, favored enemy +2 (humanoid [kobold])[1], Great Cleave, Improved Grapple, Improved Unarmed Strike, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack

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

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

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 2nd):
1st—*disguise self*[D], *doom* (DC 15), *sanctuary* (DC 15)
0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, light*

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

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 5th):
2nd (4/day)—*blur, glitterdust* (DC 16), *scorching ray, web* (DC 16)
1st (7/day)—*charm person* (DC 15), *enlarge person, feather fall, grease, magic missile, shield, true strike*
0 (6/day)—*dancing lights, ghost sound, mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost, touch of fatigue* (DC 14)

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

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

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

Skills Balance +8, Bluff +11, Climb +11 (+13 using rope), Craft (alchemy) +11, Diplomacy +25, Disguise +11 (+13 to act in character), Decipher Script +11, Escape Artist +11 (+13 using rope), Gather Information +8, Handle Animal +11, Hide +16, Intimidate +8, Jump +13, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +11, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +11, Knowledge (geography) +11, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (local) +11, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Knowledge (the planes) +11, Listen +21, Move Silently +14, Perform (dance) +11, Profession (sailor) +7, Ride +8, Search +11 (+13 involving secret doors), Sense Motive +11, Sleight of Hand +9, Spellcraft +13, Spot +21, Survival +11 (+2 aboveground, underground, on other planes, to avoid getting lost, to avoid hazards, or to follow tracks [permutations stack]), Swim +11, Tumble +20, Use Magic Device +11 (+14 using scrolls or to decipher spells on scrolls), Use Rope +11 (+13 involving bindings)

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

Unnamed XXIII, hawk familiar[3]**:** 8 hp; *Monster Manual* 273

[1] Why!? [2] Uggh... you figure it out. [3] Hidden among equipment with the corpses of familiars one through twenty-two.

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

WEAPONS OF THE ADVENTURER

When not plundering dungeons, adventurers live in taverns on the surface, where they spend their time creating new, deadlier weapons to use in plundering dungeons. Over the years, the swords and arrows of adventurers have become so powerful that kobold warriors have started wearing armor to impress women rather than for any measurable protection. Concerned, our master armorer hammered together a special oaken shield thick enough to deflect at least one blow from their latest super-weapons. Unfortunately, at 23 inches thick, it proved too heavy to lift.

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

TACTICS OF THE ADVENTURER

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

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

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

SOME POSITIVE STUFF

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

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

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

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

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

If you are wondering why I've mentioned benefits derived from our enemy, I don't know. I might have a fever. Or maybe I'm looking for the silver lining in a dark, imposing cloud that hates us and wants to blast us with sonically-substituted, empowered *lightning bolts*.

NEW KOBOLD FEATS

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

Bad Decision

You made a bad decision.

Prerequisite: Kobold.

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

Dying Shriek

You refuse to die quietly.

Prerequisite: Kobold.

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

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

Elf

Better to die as an elf than as a kobold.

Prerequisite: Kobold.

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

Volunteer

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

Prerequisite: Kobold.

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

FINAL THOUGHTS

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

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

The Ecology of the Amphisbaena

by Johnathan M. Richards

Artwork by Scott Rosema

A case when two heads are definitely *worse* than one

My Lady Jessica,
Enclosed you will find several sheets of parchment, detailing the strange two-headed snake occasionally found in these parts. My patrol came across the parchments in an old tin box hidden in a cave up in the Crumbling Mountains. I know of your passions for both history and biology, and thought it might be of interest to you.
Very Respectfully,
Captain Gharn Armstrong

To Whomever Should Find This,

My name is Sigard of Escillon, a sage of some small note. I am being held as a slave to a band of kobolds. I was captured several weeks ago, while I was wandering in search of the fabled two-headed snake, the mis-named amphisbaena.[1]

I was wearing my magical *ring of serpent control,* as was my usual habit when doing field research, when I was taken by surprise by a band of kobolds. They overpowered me, a not too difficult task, for I fear my younger days are far behind me. For a while, I feared they would kill me, but I was fortunate. While I could make no sense of their strange language, I still remembered a smidgen of the goblin tongue, enough to communicate with my captors.

There was a heated argument among the larger of the kobolds, but in the end, I was allowed to live, after convincing the kobold "king" that I could write. It seems the band has no written language, and I am now the official scribe of the Band of the Twisted Horn. The "king," whose name sounds like the "Yipyip" of a small dog, and whom I call simply "King," is having me chronicle the adventures of his life for posterity. As none of them can read, I am instead devoting my time to this record of my captivity, and to the study of the amphisbaena, as I originally intended when I set off in these mountains.

In a way, my situation here is ironic indeed. I had hoped to find an amphisbaena, and use my ring to keep it from attacking me as I studied its behavior. Now, I am living with one of the creatures, much closer than I had ever expected. It seems only fitting that I should use the opportunity to document all I can about this marvelous being.

I should start by saying that this kobold band of mine makes their lair in a cave network deep in the side of a mountain. The kobolds seem to see just fine in the dark, but I am allowed to keep a light in one of the back caverns to allow me to

write of King's exploits. However, I am no pampered slave; I am forced to do my share and more of the menial work.

Last week, I and three kobolds were assigned the task of bringing water to the cave in rusty old buckets. As we neared the cave entrance, there was a flurry of movement, and the lead kobold was struck by something large. Though my eyes were still adjusting to the light from the entrance, I recognized the form as that of a giant snake. Furthermore, although only one head was visible at the time, it was recognizable as that of an amphisbaena, by the small horns above each eye.[2]

Instantly I froze, and called out for the others to do so. The snake had bitten the lead kobold,[3] and it was clear that the poison was taking effect immediately. The poor creature dropped to the cave floor and started convulsing. Meanwhile, the two other kobolds and I began to back away slowly from the giant snake. Out of force of habit, I attempted to control the snake with my ring, but had forgotten that it had been taken from me when I was first captured. Once we were out of range of the amphisbaena, I sent the kobolds to fetch King.

I was left alone with the creature I had come to study. In the dim light, I watched as it approached its meal.[4] The kobold had stopped twitching by then, and as the closest head opened its jaws to swallow its prey, the snake swung its body around so its other head could watch me. Even in the darkness of the cave, there was no doubt in my mind that the amphisbaena knew exactly where I was.[5]

The creature's jaws distended and surrounded the kobold, and slowly, the little humanoid was swallowed whole, head-first. The process took about two minutes, and afterward, I could still see the bulge in the amphisbaena's body where the kobold was being digested. By that time, I could hear the pounding of little footsteps behind me. The amphisbaena raised its head and flicked its tongue in the air, trying to gather information about the new threat.[6]

King and four of the bigger kobolds approached, armed with their spears, and seemed ready to destroy the threat to their lair. It took some doing, but, in my broken goblin, I managed to convey the idea that the amphisbaena was worth more to the tribe alive than it was dead. I think it was the concept, once I explained the power of the ring, that King could bend the creature to his will that sold him on the idea.

It took some practice, but King was finally able to exert his will on the snake. We started with simple things, like making the snake move from one side of the chamber to the other. The amphisbaena did so by sidewinding, which seemed strange to me, until I took into account its unusual anatomy.[7] Had it been up to him, I'm sure King would have played with his new "toy" all day, but I convinced him to let the creature digest, by warning him that the ring's power was limited, and would wear off with too much use at any one time.

My knowledge of snakes has served me well in my captivity. No longer am I a mere scribe of the Twisted Horn; now I am closer to a military advisor to King. The little kobold leader sees the amphisbaena as his master weapon, and has used it in numerous attacks against the band's enemies (chiefly goblins, it seems). I view my captivity as a chance to study the amphisbaena, and have perhaps learned more about the creature through my close proximity than any other before me. As for the battles between the kobolds and goblins, I care little whether they all kill each other, so long as my own safety and that of the serpent is assured.

I am constantly amazed by this creature. When last I left off this journal, the snake had finished eating its kobold meal, and was digesting. It digested the little kobold in little less than a week, breaking down all parts of its body except the small horns. During the entire time, the serpent barely moved. Indeed, a great deal of that time might have been spent in sleep, but as snakes have no eyelids, it is of course difficult to say.[8]

The first time King took the amphisbaena on a raid, we attacked a band of goblins that laired in a cave farther down the mountain. I accompanied the kobold war band, as always, but stayed near King, away from the front lines. King had his troops position themselves on a ledge above the goblin's cave entrance, with the amphisbaena behind the kobolds as a backup. We were stationed by the serpent, where we could see all of the mountainside battlefield.

The goblins were summoned out of their hideout by a war-challenge from King; apparently these races have a long-standing hatred toward each other. Within moments, a small horde of goblins appeared, ready for battle. Instantly, King's band leapt upon them, and the small humanoids joined in violent battle.

There were losses on both sides, but the kobolds had the high ground, and seemed to be overtaking the goblin forces, even though the goblins had started with slightly greater numbers. Finally, King pointed to a goblin figure in the rear, apparently the tribal leader (it seems that these goblins were led from the rear, as were the kobolds—neither race seems particularly noted for their bravery). Summoning the power of the ring, he commanded the amphisbaena to attack.

This was the first time I saw the amphisbaena's unusual surprise attack—the serpent grasped one of its necks with its opposite mouth, forming a hoop of its body.[9] Then, with a push of its body, it rolled down the side of the mountain, like some great serpentine wheel.

Amazingly, as the creature rolled down the side of the mountain, it seemed aware of its surroundings. Twice on its journey it managed to swing around obstacles—goblin and kobold combatants in each case. At the last moment, the goblin leader saw the snake speeding toward him, but by then it was too late, for the amphisbaena was upon him, uncoiling at the last instant in order to strike at its prey with its venomous fangs. The goblin chief was dead before he even knew what hit him.

The death of their leader had an adverse effect on the remaining goblins—those able to do so dropped their weapons and took off at top speed in all directions. King mobilized his troops and explored their new conquest, a cave network as filthy and foul-smelling as our own. There were squalls and yips of delight as they came upon the goblins' pitiful treasure, which primarily consisted of copper coins and hunks of rotting meat of unknown origin.

I have just learned of another strange ability of this strange two-headed snake. It is now close to winter, and our band has been preparing for the coming season. After some discussion, it was decided to remain in the old cave system instead of moving into the goblins', as our own was more easily defensible, and had easier

access to a water supply. However, the contents of the goblins' larder was transported to our own cave system, and while it smells half-rancid already, I prefer it to the bodies of the goblins themselves, which the kobolds are using as a source of meat. The snake surprised me by eating one of the dead goblins. Apparently, the amphisbaena is not averse to eating carrion.

But back to the new ability I have discovered. Our band was attacked by a lone ogre mage, seeking a dwelling for the winter. Apparently he thought he could simply walk in and take over the band, but King's dominance over the amphisbaena has given him rather a big head. Instead of complying to the ogre mage's demands, he had the Twisted Horn attack en masse.

I could tell that the ogre mage was surprised at this turn of events, but he quickly switched to battle mode and attacked his diminutive foes. He cast a darkness spell, which turned the dim area of the cave opening into pitch blackness, and I could make out the occasional squeal of pain as the kobolds met up with the ogre mage's blade in the darkness.

While this was occurring, King summoned forth the amphisbaena, and ordered it to attack. It went sidewinding down the cave tunnel, and sight of it apparently boosted the kobolds' morale, for they cried out a battle roar and rushed into the darkness behind the snake.

Presumably, the ogre mage saw this mass attack, and decided to cast one of its more powerful spells, hoping to take out a large chunk of its foes at once. From somewhere in the globe of darkness a cone *of cold* burst forth, freezing the little kobolds where they stood. There was almost immediately a cry of surprise and pain, then complete and total silence. When the *darkness* spell wore off, the results of the battle were plain to see. In the center of the cavern lay the ogre mage, dead, with a look of surprise on his face. Surrounding him were several dead kobolds, their frozen bodies covered in frost, as was a strip of cavern floor leading from the spell-caster's body. And there, on the ogre mage's chest, curled the amphisbaena, unhurt, even though one head and three feet of body also were covered in frost. Apparently, somehow, the creature's scales make it immune to cold. How this can be I am at a loss to explain.[10]

Another surprise. It is now spring time; the cold mountain winter passed pretty quietly after the ogre mage attack. The amphisbaena spent most of the winter in a hibernation-like state. King worried that it was sick, since it didn't move or eat, but I assured him that its state was perfectly natural, and that snakes can often go for over a year between meals.

Once it warmed up, though, the snake revived, and was fed a goat the kobolds had caught among the rocks. I must say the kobolds treat the amphisbaena better than a pet; to them it is a cross between a war animal and a demigod. Several of them have taken to wearing crude representations of a two-headed snake on their shields, and there is talk of changing the name of the band to that of the Band of the Serpent. King seems unsure; on the one hand, his is the twisted horn after which the band is presently named, and he does have an ego big enough to want to remain in the spotlight, yet he realizes that the snake is becoming universally seen as a symbol of power, and his mastery over the snake makes him seem all the more powerful.

Soon after the spring temperatures started to remain constant, the amphisbaena gave birth. This was somewhat of a shock, as the snake has not been in contact with others of its species in over half a year, when we first encountered it.[11]

King is concerned, and rightly so. It is unlikely he will be able to control all of them with the ring, and there are bound to be problems with so many venomous creatures living with us in our cave complex. On my advice he has decided to gather them together in a metal box and carry them close to the site of one of his enemies, where they will be released. I have assured them that the creatures cannot be raised as "pets," or commanded by another without use of a control device like my ring. King definitely wants to be the only one with such a powerful ally. He and his strongest kobold advisors are busy now making plans on which of their enemies is to receive the "surprise."

It is many months later now. King has gotten even more power hungry than before. I overheard him talking to one of his kobold advisors about my limited usefulness. He has long ago given up on his dreams of having me chronicle his life, as my continued attempts to teach him, or any of his band, to read have all met with failure. Thus, a written history of his life will be useless once I am no longer around to read it to them. King also realizes that the life span of a kobold is greater than that of a human, and that while he is in his prime, I am an old man, with few years left. While I was able to provide him with knowledge about the care of the amphisbaena, I was still a valuable asset to the band, but now I fear there is nothing left for me to tell King that he doesn't already know. He has become quite adept at commanding the amphisbaena, and has already expanded the tribe by absorbing several other kobold bands into his own. I plan to make a break for it as soon as the next opportunity presents itself. I will leave this record behind me, hidden in a small box in a crevice of my cave room. If I survive, I will not need the notes on the amphisbaena, for I have it all in my head, where it cannot be taken from me. If I am caught, I am sure I will be killed, and then at least there is a chance this record will survive me.

Sigard of Escillon

My Dear Captain,

My deepest thanks for the parchments detailing the amphisbaena. I have searched the library records, and have found several works on serpents by Sigard of Escilion, written well over one hundred years ago, but none of them on this particular subject. I am afraid we must conclude that Sigard did not escape from the kobold band.

In any case, I have made the parchments available to the scribes at the library, and they in turn send their heartfelt thanks for the information made available on the ecology of the amphisbaena.

With Fond Affection,
Lady Jessica Heartcross

Notes

The amphisbaena can be found in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ book on page 320, under the "Snake" heading.

1. Actually, the true members of the family amphisbaenidae, while snakelike in appearance, are legless lizards. They are often called "worm lizards" because the rings of ridges around their bodies give them a segmented appearance, like a worm. Amphisbaenidae are non-poisonous, living on insects and worms, and pose no threat to man.

The two-headed snake known as the amphisbaena, on the other hand, appears to be a member of the Viperidae family of snakes, a pit viper.

2. The amphisbaena's horns are too small to be effective in combat. Instead, they are used when the snake molts. As the creature grows in size, it periodically sheds the outer layer of its skin. Normal snakes rub their snouts against a rough surface, until the old skin is ripped open, then proceed to work the skin backward over their head and along their body, leaving behind an inside-out husk. Amphisbaena go through the same process, but since they have a head at each end of their body, the dead skin bunches up in the middle of their body. This is where the horns come in: the creature uses them to cut the dead skin open, and free itself from its husk.

3. Actually, the amphisbaena doesn't bite

so much as stab. Like other vipers, the amphisbaena has two fangs on its upper jaw. These fangs can assume two positions: when the mouth is closed, the fangs fold back along the palate, but when the mouth is open, the fangs are extended forward until they point at the snake's prey. When the creature strikes out at its victim, it punctures its skin and injects it with a toxic venom (the victim must save vs. poison or die immediately). The amphisbaena will then wait until its victim dies of the venom before attempting to eat it.

4. Since the amphisbaena has two heads, it has an advantage over other snakes in being able to feed and keep guard for threats at the same time. Most other snakes will only feed when they are alone.

5. The amphisbaena is a form of pit viper; thus it has the characteristic "pits" in the sides of its heads (one between each eye and nostril). These pits are extremely sensitive to variations of heat, and can discern temperature changes as small as 0.2 degrees Celsius. By comparing the heat images received by the two pits, the amphisbaena can target the exact location of its prey, even in complete darkness.

6. Snakes are deaf, but can pick up vibrations from the ground. Their deafness makes them immune to most sound-based attacks, such as those made by the androsphinx and dragonne. While their eyesight tends to be weak (their eyes are fixed in position, and cannot move, so they are unable to make out details very well), they have a keen sense of smell. Their tongues pick up particles of scent in the air, and transfer them to an organ in their mouths that in turn transmits information about the scents to the brain.

7. Most snakes are made up of three body parts: the head, body, and tail. The amphisbaena essentially has two heads and two bodies, which meet at a common vent, or cloaca (the reproductive and excretory opening), and no tail. While normal snakes can slither forward on their ventral (belly) scales, the amphisbaena cannot, as its scales are going in two different directions, meeting in the middle. The creature therefore uses a sidewinding technique as its primary form of movement; basically, it raises one head and throws it forward, then follows with the rest of its body, and continues the process.

Each half of the amphisbaena's body seems to have a complete set of internal organs: two sets of lungs, two hearts, two stomachs, and so on. While snakes usually go into a state of torpor after feeding, and are therefore vulnerable, the amphisbaena avoids such vulnerability by only feeding one stomach at a time. While the nourishment provided by the food affects both "halves" of the creature, only the "half" that ate is sluggish while it digests; the other head is alert and ready for danger.

8. Snakes do have transparent scales that cover their eyes, protecting them. When the snake molts, and the outer layer of skin begins to separate, the eye scales get milky in color, and the snake's already weak sense of vision becomes almost nonexistent. Unfortunately for the amphisbaena, the entire body molts at the same time, so it cannot use one head to stay alert at all times during molting as it does during digestion.

9. The amphisbaena is able to keep its fangs retracted during this procedure. The powerful jaws of the snake are strong enough to keep a firm grasp on its neck without danger of inflicting damage on itself with its fangs. In any case, the amphisbaena is immune to its own poison.

When the amphisbaena uses its rolling ability to attack its prey, the victim of the attack suffers a -2 modifier to his surprise roll. This penalty is negated if the victim is aware of the amphisbaena's strange ability.

10. The amphisbaena, while definitely an extraordinary specimen, is nonetheless a snake, and therefore cold-blooded. As such, it is unable to generate its own body heat, and is instead reliant on external heat sources to keep warm enough to function. Snakes often will bask in the sun or bury themselves in sand for this reason, and the amphisbaena is no exception.

Oddly enough, the scales of the amphisbaena have developed a magical resistance to all forms of cold-based attacks. While this prevents the snake from taking damage, the cold attack does prevent the snake from gathering heat. In the situation described, the amphisbaena took a direct hit from the *cone of cold*, yet took no damage. However, the attack did cause frost to cover part of the serpent's body, and until this frost melts, the snake will be unable to store heat naturally. This has no effect on the snake in combat, but will possibly affect it in the long run, forcing it to bask longer later on to restore heat.

Wizards often use amphisbaena scales as ingredients in the manufacture of spells and items providing protection from cold-based attacks.

11. Many female snakes can store sperm cells from previous matings. This is quite an advantage, as snakes mate infrequently; this allows the female to "time" its pregnancy during its winter hibernation. The snake is therefore not inconvenienced by its pregnant state, for it spends the whole time immobile any way, and the young are born in the spring time, when they have the most time to feed during the year in order to "stock up" for the winter season.

Some snakes lay eggs, and others give birth to live young. The amphisbaena gives birth to from seven to twelve living young. The newborn snakes immediately go their own ways, to live their own lives. There is no concept of "family" among amphisbaena, and young that hang around too long are liable to become food for the mother.

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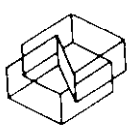

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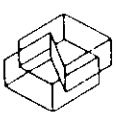

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The Ecology of the Anhkheg

Hunting down the farmers' bane

"We're ruined, your wizardship!" shouted a farmer, his voice echoing from the smoke-stained rafters. "Our lands are infested, and it's not even safe to go near the fields, let alone grow crops on them!" The angry, frightened crowd echoed his sentiments as a roar of shouting broke out across the meeting hall. It was a sea of chaos.

I closed my eyes and prayed for internal peace. *Why me?* I thought. Baron van Kirwak IV owned these lands; *he* should be here, taking command and solving this problem. I was a mere sage tied to a petty nobleman in the baron's service — hardly the wizard everyone took me for. Now I regretted putting "experience with exotic animals" down on my resume. All I had actually done at the academy was change the papers in the cages of the alchemical laboratory animals.

My eyes opened and patience fled. "I will have order!" I shouted as I stood up at the desk that had been set up for me at the front of the village hall. "Silence here! Let's have but one speaker at a time!"

I wished that I had a spell or two to cast, just to impress the crowd, but I had none, of course. Nonetheless, my voice seemed to do the job well enough.

"Alright, your wizardship!" screeched a withered, old man as he stepped forward. "There's something in our fields, and if we don't have a harvest to show the baron, he's going to kick us off our lands. Then where will we go?" The crowd murmured its concern over the question.

"I was sent here by the baron to find out what sort of beast has been plaguing you," I told him. "Then, perhaps, we can deal with the beast. Now, this thing —"

"It's a big thing! Looks like some sort of giant insect, it does," interrupted an old woman from the side of the room. "We saw it spring up out of the ground and fall upon one of our dogs, out for a run. Bit the poor thing in two!"

"Yes, but what did it look like? The monster, I mean."

"It was brown on top and pink on its underbelly," said a farmer leaning on a crutch. "I saw it the night we tried to kill it. We looked for its tunnels, like a giant mole's, near the edge of one of the fields. There were about fifteen of us, and we weren't thinking about being too quiet, as everybody with sense knows bugs don't hear, Suddenly, the ground shook a little bit, and right ahead of us, the earth opened up! The monster had us! It looked bigger than a horse, easy, and it caught us off guard. The only thing I could think about was running, and I ain't ashamed to say it, either! I dove to the side, towards the woods, and I heard the thing make a horrible hissing sound. Then something wet hit my leg, and it felt like fire! I crawled away. I could see some of the others were still on their feet, and were throwing pitchforks and the like at it. Bounced off, every one of them. Then the monster killed two of our dogs and scared the rest of 'em across the country, and the

rest of us took off for home."

I looked at the man's leg wound. From what little I could see of the wound, I judged it to be a burn. A light dawned upon me. "This monster," I asked suddenly. "Did it look like a praying mantis?"

"Nope," said the farmer. "Looked like a horn-headed devil!"

"Did not!" cried another farmer. "It was like a praying mantis, only a hundred times bigger!"

"You were too far away to see it!" shouted the injured farmer. The hall was instantly filled with heated abuse.

In the turmoil, I picked up enough conversation to confirm what I had first suspected. I got to my feet and waved my arms. "Silence! SILENCE, IN THE BARONS NAME! I have the answer! I know what monster has been bothering you!"

You could have heard a needle drop. I lowered my arms. "What you have in your fields is a beast called an anhkheg." I remembered when such a monster had been captured and brought in for study at the academy. It was big, ugly, and powerful, but stupid; we had eyed it nervously as it slammed itself against the sides of its force-walled cage. My hands grew clammy at the memory.

"They look like and are related to the praying mantis," I continued, "but they are of monstrous size and dig tunnels through the soil. They use the substances found in the earth as their food. But, when one of them is greatly disturbed, it can vomit an acid from its stomach that can dissolve rock." I looked at the farmer with the bandaged leg. "You are already aware of this weapon, of course. Though they feed upon soil, anhkhegs would prefer to get live meat — your cattle, your dogs, or your children and yourselves."

That got a rise out of them. I continued when the cries of alarm died down. "You were wrong in thinking that the anhkheg could not sense your coming. Anhkhegs sense all vibrations in the earth around them. They can detect a footfall from a field away. The lot of you going to track it down would have been easy for it to detect.

"As for killing it — an anhkheg has a tough shell, and it takes enormous force to break through it. It's as thick as plate armor. If you can kill one, you could even make a strong shield from the chitin. You'd have to treat it in chemicals and preservatives, of course. The point is that an anhkheg was built to take what it wants, from whomever it wants.

"But," — I raised a finger as I spoke — "it does have a few weaknesses. All insects hate smoke, and anhkhegs are no exception. If you had a large cage trap; you could put it near one of the openings of the monster's tunnels. After blocking the other exits, you could start huge, smoky fires in several of the exits themselves. To avoid the smoke, the monster would move down the tunnel leading right into your trap. Once captured, you could put the anhkheg to sleep by pouring a volatile liquid, such as turpentine, onto or near the beast." The anhkheg we had studied at the academy was captured in much the same way.

The farmers looked glum at that, however. "We don't have any turpentine, your wizardship," one called. "We could build the trap, but what would we do if it broke free? What if we missed a tunnel exit, and the monster came back for us?"

"We can't even wound the ankee-thing," another farmer shouted. "You said yourself that we couldn't break its skin!"

"And what if it spit at us again?" shouted the farmer with the wounded leg. "It could kill the lot of us!"

"I ain't a-gonna look for no ankee's tunnels!" shouted someone else. "Why doncha just burn the thing with your magic, your wizardship?"

It took half a minute to still the crowd again. "The baron believes that you can deal with this crisis on your own," I lied, not saying that the baron was too busy counting his loot from his recent adventuring, and cared little for concerns at home. "I was ordered to save my powers, and I must obey. But, there are other options which you might try." I was remembering more and more of that particular lecture in the academy, so long ago, when the anhkheg was brought in. "They depend upon what condition the beast is in. To take up these options, however, you must be willing to part with some of your cattle or goats, to feed the monster for a few days or weeks. This is —"

The immediate uproar revealed the town's opinion. "And what good would that do?" shouted the man with the wounded leg.

"It would keep the creature where it is, so that it doesn't roam the area! With the anhkheg satisfied for a short time, you can bring about its destruction — which you surely must, if the anhkheg is a *female."* The crowd began to fall quiet. "You see, there's but one anhkheg out there, now. Would you care to deal with a dozen?"

Silence fell like a rock. "You mean it might breed?" asked the brawny youth, his face pale.

"If you have a female, indeed it might," I told him. "In the late fall of each year, each anhkheg seeks out a partner and mates. Soon after, the female kills the male and starts preparing a nest, usually a widened dead-end of a tunnel. But the female's attacks on creatures passing nearby become more intense, because she isn't gathering food just for herself. The food is for her *brood."* The audience shivered. I had them, now, and I enjoyed it.

"When the female lays her grey, melon-sized eggs in the body of the male, she burrows into the side of the nesting lair to secure a place for the winter. The eggs hatch shortly after they're laid, and the young mature rapidly. The newborn anhkhegs feed upon the male for the duration of the snows; in the spring, the young feed on the rotting food that has been stored over the winter by the mother. The mother cares nothing for her young once they've passed that first season, and as soon as she can, the mother chases them from the nest.

"In short, if that is a female, you *must* keep the mother from roaming and wreaking even greater havoc on the countryside!"

The crowd was silent and white-faced. They waited for me to continue.

"You cannot take chances with the monster now. There are two alternatives open. The first one is to stay away from the field where it is, but occasionally send herd animals out onto the pasture, to keep the monster fed so that it doesn't wander. Then, about a month after the first snowfall, when the ground is frozen deep, you locate one of its tunnels. The anhkheg will be hibernating until spring, so you can go down into the tunnels and dispatch the beast and any eggs at your leisure. In hibernation, an anhkheg is helpless and hard to awaken, even if attacked. It will be hard to chop through the anhkheg's shell or carve off its legs and head, though picks and shovels might chop into it well enough. Long knives would be slow, but —"

"What about lumber saws?" asked the youth suddenly. He was uncommonly quick.

"Yes! Any lumber saws you have will do the job," I said, recalling some bit of lore from a ranger who visited the academy. "You'll have to work fast, and saw at it with all your might. When the anhkheg is bereft of most of its important body parts, cover it with any flammable liquid, like oil or alcohol, and light it up. Get away from it, as the heat of the fire will awaken the anhkheg if it's not totally cut into little pieces. But, provided you soaked the beast in fluid, the fire should finish off what you started."

"Why can't we just cut it up and not worry about the fire?" asked the farmer with the leg bandage.

I glanced knowingly in his direction. "There usually isn't enough room in the hibernation chamber to get all the way around the anhkheg. Never leave a monster's fate to chance."

"Mister wizard!" started the old woman who had spoken up earlier; "The winters around here aren't really cold at all, and the ground only freezes down to about a hands span. Is that gonna be enough to put that thing out there to sleep, huh?"

Oh, the best-laid plans of mice and men . . . I questioned the old woman about the weather, then sighed. "From what you say, I fear that it would be hard to predict when or if the anhkheg would hibernate. I have heard that some do not if the snows are light." Everyone's face fell at that. Arguments broke out across the room as the farmers tried to decide what to do next,

"Listen to me!" I shouted above the rising buzz. "You have one final option!"

Immediately, to my relief, the noise began to subside. This was indeed their last option — aside from hiring adventurers to destroy the anhkheg, which would cost every last copper piece these wretched people had.

"Before it settles in for a coming winter, whether it is male or female, and whether it hibernates or not, an anhkheg must shed its old skin, in order to grow larger for the next season. This period is when it's most vulnerable. As soon as it has shed its old shell, the anhkheg secretes a smell distasteful to predatory monsters and other anhkhegs. It does this so that its natural enemies stay away from it while its shell is soft." I could see questions forming on several lips, and I wanted to answer them before the onlookers could interrupt.

"Having fed itself upon live meat for a time, the anhkheg must rest, lose its old shell, and strictly avoid any activity which could deform or damage the impressionable new armor. For nearly a full week after it sheds, the shell has the toughness of a freshly tanned side of pigskin. In an underground environment, the shell dries much more slowly than it would in the air. Furthermore, the animal is sluggish as its body struggles to rebuild itself. Most of its energy is used up in the process of hardening its shell, making it slow to react. It cannot use its acidic spit, as its stomach contents are being digested to give it its needed energy.

"You must set up a watch on the field to keep track of the beast's activities, and regularly give it some sort of animal to keep it happy. When it doesn't show for a couple days, even after animals are released on the field, see if you can detect the smell it gives off to keep others like it away."

One old woman cocked her head, eyeing me thoughtfully. "Sire, a question. This smell it makes — you can smell it through the soil itself?"

I nodded. "Yes. It is quite strong."

She squinted her eyes. "And what does it smell like?"

I remembered the odor from school and wrinkled my nose. "It's very pungent, rather like rotting fruit."

The old woman broke into a toothless grin. "I was down by the field this morning, and I smelled rotting fruit real strong, but I didn't know where it was coming from. And we ain't seen that ankee for three or four days now!"

You could feel the atmosphere change as she spoke. "That may be the sign," I said. "If so, you're in luck. All you need is the courage to enter its tunnels and slay the vermin. It is in your hands!"

My voice was drowned out by a large cheer, then by loud, excited planning and talking. Within minutes, the hall was empty as the heartened crowd evaporated to go anhkheg-hunting — save for myself.

I reflected that I had accomplished my mission, but at a price the baron would not be pleased to pay. If they conquered the anhkheg, his subjects would see less use for a baron who refused to deal with monsters personally. If this kept up . . . I thought of the brawny youth with the quick mind and outspoken manner. Would I someday serve him, instead?

I collected my things. It was then that I noticed one other person in the hall with me- a girl about eight years old.

"Aren't you going to kill the anhkheg, too?" I asked her jokingly.

"Nope!" she said, her disgust obvious, "I hate bugs!"

Notes

1. In basic appearance, the anhkheg resembles a large praying mantis. This giant insect has a hard chitinous shell which covers the top portion of its body for AC 2, and a soft underside with AC 4. The hardened shell of the anhkheg appears in a variety of colors, ranging from yellow to brown to gray; the soft underside appears in various shades between red and pink. Like the praying mantis, the anhkheg has two sets of two legs each, and one set of forelegs which it uses for digging and in combat. The anhkheg also uses its forelegs to hold small prey while attacking with its mandibles.

As the anhkheg grows each year, it sheds its hard shell for another, larger shell. It is at this time of year — usually in the fall — that the anhkheg is most vulnerable. The anhkheg sheds the shell in a day or two; thereafter, it takes 1-2 weeks for the new shell to reach the hardened consistency of the former. During the first week, the anhkheg's armor class is diminished to 5 for the topside and 7 for the underside. One week after this, the shell has hardened to its normal consistency.

During this molting period, the anhkheg is very sluggish as its body struggles to cope with and adapt to the rebuilding of its exoskeleton. During this two-week period, the anhkheg's movement is half its normal rate (6" above ground). Likewise, the damage doled out by its mandibles is roughly half the normal figure (1-10 as opposed to 3-18). The anhkheg cannot use its acidic spit at this time as well. In the process of revitalizing its exoskeleton, the anhkheg refrains from digging, as this may cause damage to or otherwise deform its impressionable armor. As a result, no figure is given for underground movement during this period. To protect itself from predators or other anhkhegs (who may attempt to evict the shedding creature from its lair, or feed upon it in its weakened state), the anhkheg secretes an odor which is repulsive to these possible predators. This odor (which is the result of the anhkheg's shell-hardening enzyme) smells vaguely like rotting fruit to humans. Because of this aroma, most other creatures (except for some mammals and the most desperate predatory insects) avoid the anhkheg during this period.

The size of the anhkheg varies with age and health, and is directly related to the number of hit dice the individual creature possesses. For instance, a 3-HD anhkheg is roughly 10′ in length, whereas a 4-HD specimen is roughly 12′. This length increases in 2′ increments with each additional hit die, with an 8-HD anhkheg being approximately 20′ in length. Generally speaking, an anhkheg is half as tall as it is long; thus, a 16′ long creature is 8′ in height. As an additional note, the anhkheg's hit dice are almost directly proportionate to the creature's age. For the first six months following birth, the anhkheg has 1 HD; in the second six months, the creature has 2 HD. For every year of age following, the anhkheg gains another hit die until it reaches 8 HD, at which point the creature no longer grows. Anhkhegs usually do not live any longer than 10 to 12 years; these giant insects grow quickly and, as a result, live a relatively short time.

In climates where winters are particularly severe, the anhkheg hibernates through the cold season. Within a month after the first snowfall, the anhkheg enters its lair to hibernate. During this time, the anhkheg does not need to eat or burrow; instead, it lives off the supply of protein and nutrition it has built up in its system over the fall (part of the reason that the anhkheg is most active in its predation in the autumn). In this stage of existence, the creature can remain under-

ground without detection for the entire cold season, returning to the surface once more when the first signs of spring present themselves. In climates where winter is not a serious factor, the anhkheg remains active throughout the year.

2. In addition to activity in preparation for hibernation, autumn is also the mating season for the anhkheg. In the late fall of each year, the male anhkheg seeks out a female partner. This search is facilitated by the female's secretion of an odor which attracts the male anhkheg, drugging the insect with its aroma. In its dazed and sluggish state, the male fertilizes the eggs —and is immediately slain by the female. Dragging the male into a widened, dead-end tunnel, the female cracks the male's underside with its sharp ovipositor and plants the eggs in its body.

The female anhkheg lays 2-12 eggs in one laying, 75% of which are fertile and will hatch successfully. These eggs, which are gray in color and about 2′ across, hatch within one month — usually before the female adult begins hibernation. During the winter months, the newborn anhkheg (known as "nymphs") feed off the corpse of the male and grow as described earlier. Within the first three to four months of life, the newborn anhkhegs take on the appearance and abilities of the adult. Within the first year, young anhkheg are able to bite for 1-4 hp damage, with an additional 1-4 hp damage per turn from digestive enzymes. They can also spit, and their digestive acid does 2-16 hp, damage, with adult ranges- In addition, the adolescent anhkheg's AC is 4 overall and 6 for the underside for the first year; thereafter, AC is as stated in the *Monster Manual.*

3. Although the anhkheg is generally an unintelligent creature, it does have some physical advantages and a few instinctive bits of cunning that aid it in its predation. As stated in the *Monster Manual,* the anhkheg burrows through the earth, preferring soil rich in minerals and organic material. For the most part, this diet of mineral and vegetation provides the bulk of the anhkheg's nutrition. Still, the insect supplements its diet with regular helpings of fresh meat (usually livestock, though sometimes humans and other accessible beings). Although the anhkheg's mandibles are not capable of tearing meat, the anhkheg is able to break down its meals with the aid of a strong digestive fluid -a fluid which it also uses in combat.

A favorite tactic employed by the anhkheg involves burrowing 5-10′ under the earth's surface and lying in wait until it detects a potential victim passing overhead. Usually, the anhkheg burrows close enough to the surface to allow its antennae to poke up through the softened soil. The anhkheg's antennae are extremely sensitive to vibration, a sense that fully replaces hearing (the anhkheg is otherwise deaf). So sensitive is this sense that the anhkheg is capable of detecting the approach of a man-sized creature from as far away as 300′; it can detect smaller-than-man-sized creatures from as far as 100′, and creatures larger than man-sized from as far away as 500′.

As an added advantage, the anhkheg has superior eyesight due to its compound eye structure — though such vision is quite nearsighted. The hundreds of small, black lenses in its eyes allow the creature to see with great clarity in gloom or at night with 6″ ultravision (this sense is lost when underground, however). Above ground, in full daylight, the anhkheg's eyesight allows it a visual range of only 12″.

In burrowing, the anhkheg utilizes its mandibles for digging, breaking down larger minerals with its digestive enzymes and moving the earth with its forelegs. The anhkheg eats as it digs, disposing of the minerals by digesting them. For the most part, an anhkheg burrows continually; the creature seldom stays in one place, unless hibernating, nesting, or waiting for prey. At all other times, the anhkheg digs through an entire area at a variety of depths and angles before moving on to another place. As a result, it is not uncommon for an anhkheg to take up temporary residence in a farmer's field or in a forest bed until it has cleaned the area of most of its nutrient-enriched soil. An anhkheg seldom burrows below a depth of 40′; below this level, it starts to meet with hard-packed soil that is both difficult to move through and distasteful to the creature; furthermore, below this point, the water table of the land makes movement difficult, if not impossible.

4. Because of the anhkheg's nomadic nature, the creature's lair usually consists of no more than a series of labyrinthine tunnels — some of which may have collapsed, others of which are still in use. For the most part, the anhkheg does not lair in any one particular habitat, except when nesting or going into hibernation. In these cases, the anhkheg usually converts a dead-end tunnel into a small lair by widening the corridor to accommodate its purpose. Nesting lairs are fairly large constructs, being 10-12′ in height, 20-25′ wide, and 60-80′ in length (room must be allotted for the male anhkheg's body in addition to the female and her young). A hibernation lair is usually much smaller, being roughly the same size as the anhkheg itself (this allows the anhkheg insulation against the cold by providing the earth as a buffer).

Anhkheg tunnels resemble a maze in their random design; although these corridors wind in relatively straight paths, they change depth, intersect with other tunnels, and often end abruptly. There are usually only one or two entrances into the tunnels, though others sometimes appear when the anhkheg bursts up from beneath the surface to surprise its prey. The tunnels are generally only as wide and tall as the anhkheg itself, about 3-6′ wide and 4-10′ high. Because of the terrain in which they are built, these tunnels are often very unstable and are prone to collapse. Consequently, characters investigating these passages should be cautious; one wrong turn, and they could wind up with an early burial.

Treasure in the anhkheg lair is usually incidental, being left behind by the anhkheg's victims and generally ignored by the insect which, because of its animal intelligence, has no desire or use for treasure. As a result, there is no such thing as an anhkheg's "hoard." Monies and magic left behind by victims usually remain with the victim's remains — that is, those items which have managed to survive the effect of the anhkheg's digestive enzymes. All belongings on a victim's body must save vs. acid in order to survive the anhkheg's acidic secretion; those that do not are simply devoured along with the victim. Any surviving accoutrements or treasures are discarded by the anhkheg; these will often be found at various points in the anhkheg tunnels. Items found are usually at the point at which the victim was consumed.

5. Because of its unique composition, the anhkheg's body provides a number of "natural treasures." For example, the hard, chitinous shell of the creature makes extremely good armor. If cured and preserved properly (otherwise, the shell withers and dissolves with time), the shell maintains an AC of 2 or 4, depending on which area of its body is used. This armor is equal to scale mail in weight and encumbrance, though it offers protection equal to that of plate mail.

The anhkheg's eyes (and the fluid therein) are useful to alchemists and magic-users in the creation of sight-related magic potions and items. Likewise, the anhkheg's digestive acid can be salvaged and utilized as a regular acid. This chemical maintains its properties for up to six months after the anhkheg's death, delivering 1-4 hp damage and limited as listed in the rules regarding acid in the *DMG,* pages 64-65 and 80-81. This chemical can only be carried in a glass container and is highly susceptible to breakage as a result.

There is a secondary enzyme sac located in the creature's head, very similar to a small, acid-resistant bladder. Recovering this fluid from the anhkheg requires very adept hands, as it is very easy to break this sac accidentally. Failure to successfully remove the sac without breakage results in damage to the handler.

Aside from this, the anhkheg's mandibles make reasonably good axe-heads, and its legs (if cured and preserved) may be used as maces and other concussive weaponry. By removing out the meat inside and replacing it with some substance to provide weight (sand, metal, etc.), these appendages can be formed into weapons delivering the same damage as their counterparts.

Gaming notes by Robin Jenkins. Ω

by David Howery

The Ecology of the Carnivorous Ape

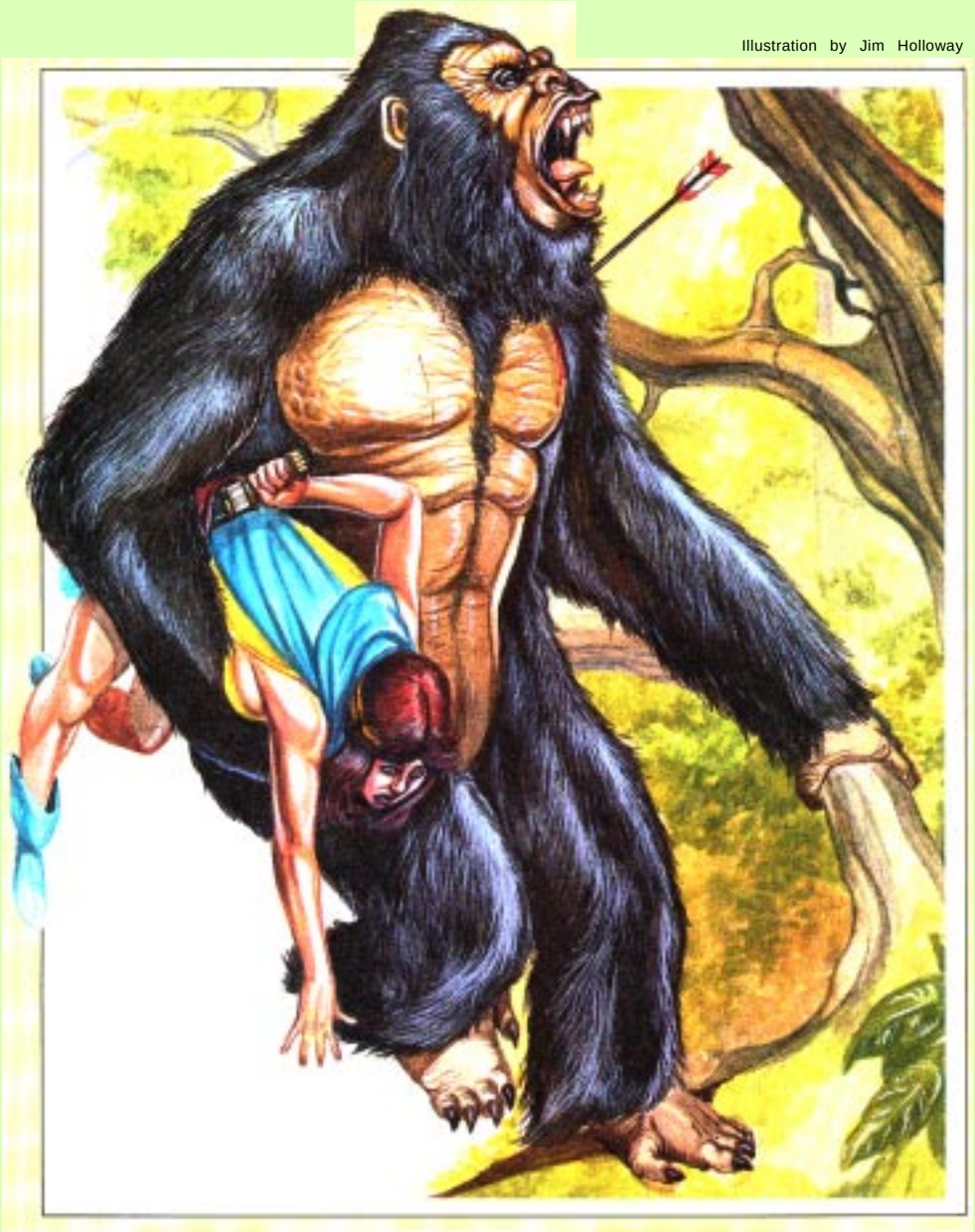

Illustration by Jim Holloway

The lords of the savage jungle

Excerpt from "Beasts of the Far Southlands," by the sage Fabius:

There are many types of apes in the tropical lands, but the carnivorous ape is the most notorious and legendary. Many fables are told of this primate's ferocity and lust for human flesh. The truth is less fantastic, of course; the carnivorous ape lives in remote areas and has rarely been studied. At one time, it was thought that apes were all vegetarian and that the carnivorous ape was an anomaly. Now it is known that all apes will eat meat to varying degrees, just as bears do. The carnivorous ape is simply a carnivorous member of an otherwise omnivorous family.

It was my good fortune to have made friendship with a clan of Watanga tribesmen. These so-called savages live on the fringes of the southern Hepmonaland jungle, and my temporary residence there gave me an excellent opportunity to study a family group of carnivorous apes that roamed the nearby wilderness. The results of these two years of research are given here.

Description

As is well known, carnivorous apes have a superficial resemblance to gorillas. They are tall, broad, heavily built, and covered with long, black hair. Albino carnivorous apes are occasionally seen. Male apes stand up to 7′ tall and weigh up to 625 lbs. Females are somewhat smaller, averaging 6′ and 500 lbs.[1]

It is the physiology of the jaws that shows the greatest distinction between carnivorous apes and gorillas. The mouth of the carnivorous ape is a bit longer and drawn out than in gorillas, almost becoming a muzzle. The teeth are long and sharp, with pointed incisors and canines designed to cut and tear flesh. The ape is a gluttonous eater, tearing off and swallowing chunks of flesh with every bite.

This ape has very keen senses, as befits a carnivore. The senses of sight and smell

are comparable to those of the great cats. The ape's hearing is also keen, making it hard to approach a group of these beasts undetected.

The arms and legs of the carnivorous ape are longer though nearly identical to those of the gorilla. Surprisingly, this ape has bony nails which curve into the form of claws; this is unusual in a primate.

Like all apes, the carnivorous ape is incredibly strong. An adult male is capable of dragging a buffalo carcass for miles into the jungle. One ape was seen rolling an elephant's carcass over in an attempt to get it closer to a group of protective trees. Carnivorous apes can thus easily carry off a man, if they choose to do so.

Life and habits

Female carnivorous apes give birth to single young (rarely two) once every five or six years. The young are fully dependent on their mothers for three years. During this time, they cling to the hair on their mothers' backs, only rarely moving away from them. At the age of four to seven years, the young gradually learn to move around in trees and hunt, gaining full independence at age eight. Full maturity comes at the tenth year.

As far as is known, carnivorous apes may live up to 40 years of age. The elderly are easy to pick out; as the apes get past 30 years of age, their hair gradually turns gray at the tips. The oldest individuals have a dark silvery coat, and with practice an observer may note distinctive facial and bodily characteristics of individual apes.

The life habits of the carnivorous apes are an odd mixture of those of the leopard, lion, gorilla, and bear. This is a result of their size, diet, and intelligence. Like other apes, the carnivorous ape lives in small family groups, usually numbering around eight adults but sometimes reaching numbers as high as 20. Within these groups, there is about a two-to-one ratio of females to males. The leader of the group is the largest male. The leader is often challenged by young males in nonlethal wrestling matches; defeated challengers are driven off and usually (but not always) join another family group. Defeated leaders leave the group and live a solitary existence for the rest of their lives, becoming a particular danger to humans dwelling nearby.

Within the family groups, the males are dominant. They get the choice parts of killed game and the best sleeping areas. When a kill is brought in, the males eat their fill first, followed by the females; the young are last to feed. In times of scarcity, many of the young starve to death.

Carnivorous apes do not establish actual lairs, but family groups do have large territories over which they widely roam. The size of the territory is about one to three square miles per adult in the group. The male apes mark their territorial boundaries by scarring tree trunks with their nails, and also by releasing a musky scent from glands in their cheeks (carnivorous apes releasing this scent appear to be hissing with open mouths at trees or objects they are marking).

Since carnivorous apes are not vegetarians, they do not live in the depths of the jungle where little game is found. These apes roam areas where the jungle is broken by hills or by the edge of the savannah, where much more game is found than deep in the rain forest.[2]

The diet of the carnivorous ape is varied. The apes will take almost any kind of meat they can get. Rodents make up nearly one-third of their diet. Another third is made of things like carrion, snakes, tortoises, eggs, lizards, fish, and the larvae of giant insects. Thus, two-thirds of the carnivorous ape's diet comes from individual foraging. The apes depend greatly on such foraging because of their size, which makes it necessary to have a large intake of high-protein food.

The remainder of these apes' diet comes from killed game. In this respect, the carnivorous apes are like lions; they drag the kill back to the group so all may eat. The apes may hunt either in groups or singly. Whenever a herd of large game such as buffalo or wildebeest wanders close to the apes' territory, all adult apes join the hunt, except for nursing mothers. More often, the only game available consists of antelope and warthogs. One group of apes was seen attacking a giraffe, although the intended prey viciously kicked several of the hunters and was able to run away.

Carnivorous apes do not wander very far from their protective trees, due to their fear of lions. Although one ape is a match for one lion, the apes generally act to protect the weaker members of their family groups. Leopards do not seem to be a major competitor, even though the leopards and apes are both tree climbers. Where they coexist, the leopards usually take the smaller, faster prey that the apes can't catch. However, it should be noted that carnivorous apes are capable of short bursts of speed and can easily outdistance a running man.[3]

When hunting alone, the apes depend on stealth. They often hide in trees overlooking trails or water, then leap out at creatures passing by.[4] At other times, the apes hide in grass or bushes, dashing out at their prey in hopes of catching it by surprise. Whatever method is used, the prey is doomed once the ape's great strength and sharp teeth come into play. Rending and breaking limbs is an often-seen tactic when a carnivorous ape means to incapacitate a foe.

Carnivorous apes and men

The carnivorous ape has a reputation for man-eating. While this is true to some extent, by no means do they all eat men. The apes can be compared to tigers in that individuals will occasionally turn into man-eaters, while the majority do not. Most of the man-eaters are solitary apes who were injured in some way, so as not to be able to catch other prey; such apes are usually defeated leaders cast out of their tribe.

Occasionally, however, an entire family group will turn into man-eaters. These groups are greatly feared by the native tribes. The apes' cunning allows them to make devastating raids on villages and caravans. Palisade walls are no protection against climbing apes. One group of 18 carnivorous apes attacked a slaver camp at night, silently climbing the walls. Once inside the camp, the apes tore apart huts and smashed tents flat. Out of 32 slavers, 28 were killed, along with 50 manacled slaves. The other six slavers saved themselves only by fleeing headlong into the jungle, somehow escaping undetected.

Although carnivorous apes may hunt men, men may also hunt the apes. Unscrupulous natives search out small family groups, spear the adults, and capture the young. The young are sold to similarly unscrupulous traders. This is how carnivorous apes end up in places far from their native jungle, such as hobgoblin lairs and hill-giant clans. Carnivorous apes appear to be more adaptable than their gorilla cousins, and they may even thrive in foreign, temperate areas where old forests are found.

Even stranger are the natives who worship carnivorous apes. One tribe believes that killing a carnivorous ape brings great luck and courage to the slayer; thus, one of their rites of manhood is to kill a carnivorous ape. Another tribe is known to regard the apes as sacred. This latter tribe keeps carnivorous apes as pets and feeds captives to them; such apes wander the tribal village freely and are said to be well behaved and friendly — to the villagers only, of course.

In summary, it should be seen that carnivorous apes are merely another jungle predator, instead of the bloodthirsty man-eaters of legend. However, their size and intelligence make them creatures to be wary of. Wandering through their territories is a perilous undertaking, for a single male ape is the equal of a half-dozen men-at-arms.

Notes

1. Treat female carnivorous apes as gorillas for hit dice and attacks, but allow them the same keen senses as the males.

2. Carnivorous apes can move through trees (brachiation) at a rate of 10". They can also run an 18" sprint, but only for one round. This sprint is used when the ape leaps out of an ambush; if attacking in the same round as it sprints, the ape's attacks are at +2 to hit for that round, but its armor class drops from AC 6 to AC 7.

3. When hiding in ambush (in grass or up in trees), the carnivorous ape has a 50% chance of surprising its prey.

4. When the ape hides in a tree and leaps down on its prey, the prey (if hit) takes 2-8 hp damage from the impact. Ω

THE ECOLOGY OF THE ASPIS

Statement of Explanation

Query: What do you give a six-foot-tall bug monster that wants to trade?

Statement of fact: Anything it wants.

by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Brad McDevitt

KARL THE WOODCUTTER WAS USED TO SOLITUDE. Every day, he left his small cottage in the woods with some bread and cheese wrapped in a clean cloth for his lunch and his trusty ax upon his shoulder to go fell trees. He was used to the sounds of the forest: the chirping of the birds, the chatter of the squirrels, his own grunts as he swung his ax with a rhythmic efficiency. He was used to the smells of woodcutting: the clean scent of the freshly-cut pine, the heavy, woodsy smell of growing things, even the presence of his own sweat as he toiled at his work. He was used to the forest's inhabitants: the chipmunks who watched him with a wary eye, the dragonflies that buzzed through the air in a frantic dance of shining colors, even the occasional deer seen in the distance.

He was therefore surprised when a trio of giant insects approached him one day.

These were like no insects he had ever seen before. For one thing, they walked upright on their hind legs. Their stocky bodies were covered in a hard, chitinous armor like beetles, only theirs was grayish-white, like no beetle he'd ever heard of.[1] They reminded him of weevils, with their elongated probosci and the two short, stubby antennae poking up halfway down their narrow faces—only weevils as big as he was, nearly six feet tall.

With a grunt, Karl pulled the ax from the tree he had been chopping—his younger days, alas, were behind him—and waved it in what he hoped was a menacing fashion at the insect intruders. "Keep away," he warned.

"Kee paway," agreed one of the bugs.

"I mean it," Karl said, drawing his weapon back by his shoulder, ready to swing if they came closer.

"I meenit," replied the bug sagely, to which one of his companions added, "Kee paway."

They advanced upon the woodcutter, and Karl swung his ax. Had the lead bug been a tree, the ax would have sunk into the trunk with a satisfying thunk! However, the bug merely grabbed the ax handle in its two left hands[2] and deftly

1. The chitinous armor covering an aspis drone's body provides excellent protection from harm. Not only does it give the creature a natural AC of 3 but also it makes the aspis immune to cold and electricity and halves any fire-based damage taken.

2. Aspis drones have manipulatory claws at the

pulled it from Karl's grasp. Karl, unarmed, was unable to prevent the two other bugs from rushing him. He tried fighting them off, but their eight arms against his two were too much. He was lifted from his feet and carried, arms pinned, between the two upright insects while the third examined his ax and the tree he had been chopping. "I meenit," the bug said knowingly. Then, by some signal that Karl was unable to fathom,[3] the one bug motioned the others to depart, and off they went, taking the old woodcutter with them.

The trip was brief and uneventful. In less time than it would have taken Karl to eat his lunch, the bugs arrived at their destination and dropped him down a hole in the forest floor. Karl slid down an angled shaft that led into a large chamber. It was dark there, lit only by the feeble rays of sunlight filtering down from the entry shaft above.[4] Before the woodcutter could get his bearings, two more bugs came at him from out of the darkness and held him in place while his three escorts climbed down the shaft. "Confound it, let me go!" he exploded, struggling with his captors.

The bug with Karl's ax approached, staring into his face with multifaceted eyes. "Con foundit. Let meego." When that got no response from the old man, he tried "I meenit. Kee paway." Karl only stared at the bug, a look of confusion on his weathered face. The bug stared back at him for a short while, then, again at some signal that Karl missed, his two captors dragged him away to a chamber deeper in the nest.

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The drone approached the cow's chamber, ready to give his report. As usual, it was pitch black in the chamber, but that didn't bother him. He could smell the cow's presence, picking her unique scent out of all the others. If that wasn't enough, he could feel the thick liquid that covered the walls and floor of the cow's chamber oozing between his feet.[5] "Statement of fact: We have captured a human, as ordered," he reported to the cow in the scent-language of the aspis.[6]

"Feeling of strong satisfaction: Good. Query: Has it been taken to the learning chamber?"

"Statement of affirmation: Yes."

"Command: Learn his strange manner of communication. Clarification: I wish three drones to learn; instruct the two that went with you to learn as well."

"Statement of undying obeisance: It will be done."

"Feeling of satisfaction: Good. Command: You may go."

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The next few weeks were trying for the three drones. There were difficulties with the human from the start. He didn't like being in the dark, so one of the drones opened the trap door in the tunnel overhead to let in sunlight. He immediately tried escaping up the shaft and had to be dragged back down. He was finicky, refusing to eat tree bark and the specially harvested mold from the granaries.[7] Even after conveying to the drones the concept that he ate animal flesh, he balked when they offered him meat from a dead drone. Nor did he want to dig for earthworms or beetles in the soil of the nest. In the end, he seemed satisfied with fruit and nuts brought from the trees in the forest.

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ends of each of their six limbs. Each can be used as a hand, although generally only the front four limbs are used as "arms," and then only when the drone is walking upright. This allows the drone to use two-handed weapons (usually short swords or hand axes) and two shields when standing erect.

The shields are both held on the same side, with the weapons held in the arms on the other side. (Like humans, aspis drones can be right-handed or left-handed.) Aspis do not hold a shield and a weapon on the same side of the body, as the shield interferes with the weapon's movement. Optionally, they may eschew shields and employ two crossbows, firing one and reloading the other each round.

If an aspis drone must fight without weapons, it strikes with two of its claws per round, inflicting 1–4 points of damage with each successful hit.

3. Aspis communicate among themselves via a language of scents, which they produce from glands in their bodies and detect with their extremely sensitive olfactory sense. Humans are unable to pick up even the slightest traces of these chemical scents and so are generally unaware of aspis "speech." Fortunately, about 5% of the aspis drones in a given nest are able to speak a basic form of a spoken language—generally the common tongue of a given area.

4. Aspis nests are underground, not far below the surface. Typically, they consist of a primary entrance leading to a central chamber. From this chamber radiate several low passageways. One leads to the egg chambers and grub hatcheries. (There are usually 1–3 of the former and 1–6 of the latter, depending on the size of the nest.) Another leads to the granaries (2–4 per nest), where foodstuffs are stored. The third leads to the chamber of the "cow"—the aspis equivalent of a queen in an ant colony. There are side passages along each of the tunnels, leading to chemical preparation rooms and small storage areas where the nest keeps its shields, weapons, and any treasure—although many aspis nests do not realize the value of gems and coins and treat them as debris.

Normally, none of these underground chambers is lit, except for what little light filters down into the central chamber. This doesn't bother the aspis drones, who are able to maneuver in the dark using their excellent hearing and olfactory senses. (Aspis drones receive the equivalent of the Blind-Fighting nonweapon proficiency.) However, most aspis nests have several "escape routes"—vertical tunnels leading to the surface, whose camouflaged "trap doors" can be opened to let light into the chamber directly below. The chambers directly beneath these escape tunnels are generally left empty, so that the rooms may be put to various uses as the need arises. If otherwise empty, these rooms contain at least one aspis drone on guard duty to prevent enemies from infiltrating the nest.

5. Just as each ant colony has a single queen, each aspis nest has but one cow. The cow is the only female in the entire nest, as all drones and larvae are male. Physically, the cow is similar to the aspis' larval stage, looking like a giant, 15' long maggot. Cows are pasty white, the result of living an entirely underground existence.

The cow, while less intelligent than the drones, is nevertheless in complete charge of all aspects of aspis life. The cow gives a basic command, and the smarter drones figure out how best to fulfill it. As the cow is responsible for laying the eggs that keep the nest functioning, a drone always fights to the death to ensure his cow's safety.

Although cows never leave their chambers (and are therefore almost never encountered by other races), they are quite able to defend themselves. Lacking eyes, they can track prey through their sense of smell and attack with their enormous jaws, inflicting 3d6 points of damage. In addition, they exude a thick, white, corrosive liquid from their skin. This liquid coats their bloated bodies and the walls and floor of their chamber, and eats through metal or wood in a single round. If it comes into contact with living flesh, it inflicts 1d8 points of damage per round until washed off. All aspis are immune to the corrosive properties of this substance—in fact, if the nest is invaded, drones often coat their claws in the substance before attacking enemies, enabling them to inflict an extra 1d8 points of damage on the first successful attack.

In the event of the cow's death, the drones cut open her body and remove a chemical substance from her brain. This is then fed to one of the larvae; the substance causes a change of sex in the grub and stimulates rapid growth. Within a month, the grub achieves normal size for a cow and assumes the cow's place in the nest.

6. The aspis scent-language provides a great amount of information in a short period. Certain specific scents are used as "words," while others are modifiers, denoting the type of information being conveyed, the verb tense, and so on. Thus, a sentence like "The enemy is attacking!" would be conveyed by the "scent-words" for "enemy" and "attack," along with an overall modifying scent denoting present tense and another denoting urgency.

When an aspis learns a spoken language, it tries putting its words together in a similar fashion. Thus, a speaking aspis with a large enough vocabulary usually begins each sentence with the sentence type or the feeling behind the information about to be transmitted verbally, followed by the words of the sentence itself. For instance: "Query: What are you doing?" or "Statement of personal belief: You probably shouldn't be doing that" or "Overall feeling of contentment: That was a good meal."

7. Aspis are the epitome of the omnivorous creature, deriving nourishment from nearly any organic substance. Their digestive systems are very efficient, and they are not as squeamish about their meals as humans are (well, most humans, anyway). An aspis doesn't always bother killing its food before eating it—small insects, spiders, and worms are eaten alive. Even slain aspis drones are "recycled" by becoming food for the nest—if not the drones, then the larvae that swim in the grub hatcheries. The cow has her food brought to her in her chamber; she is not fussy about what she eats, so long as there is a lot of it.

Shortly after the sun went down, though, the human closed his eyes and lost consciousness. When the drones went to check on him, he started screaming and thrashing about. They backed off, afraid to hurt him, and he huddled in a ball and soon lost consciousness again. After a quick huddle, the drones decided to leave him alone for a while and see what would happen. He stirred and mumbled, tossed and turned, but eventually settled into one position and began making strange, rhythmic noises in his throat. Fortunately, when the sun came up and light filtered into the room, the human regained consciousness. The drones regarded it as a strange human trait, and they carried on with their lessons.[8]

The language learning started slowly, but gradually the drones built up a small vocabulary and learned to string words together. At first, they merely repeated everything that the human said, a trait that irritated the old woodcutter. Once he learned that they weren't going to harm him, though, that all they wanted from him was to learn to speak his language, things progressed more smoothly. In fact, Karl seemed to warm to the role of language teacher, as if realizing that the faster he finished the lessons over with, the sooner he'd be a free man. Indeed, he found himself growing oddly attached to the insect trio, for he sensed that they earnestly wished to expand their knowledge by learning to speak. He could respect that.

As for the drones, they were apt pupils. How could they not be? Their leader had told them to learn, so learn they did, devoting all of their attention to the task at hand.

After learning all of the words for parts of the body (both Karl's and the drones'), and the words for the objects in the learning chamber ("rock," "dirt," "shaft," "tunnel," "trap door," "bug," "human," "man," "Karl"—these last three causing some confusion for the drones, who didn't understand the concept of personal names and therefore used the three terms interchangeably[9]), the drones began bringing objects into the room and having Karl identify them. "That's an ax," he would say, and the drones would nod their heads sagely and repeat "Ax. Yes. That's an ax," or "That's an ax. I mean it."

After that began an intense series of pantomimes, wherein the old woodcutter tried to express certain concepts: "big," "small," "old," "young," "eat," "drink," "sleep," "hunt," and so on. The insects seemed intrigued by the game, often copying the gestures and maneuvers as well as the spoken words.

Finally, the drones led their human guest/captive/teacher on a tour of the nest. In the granaries, they learned the terms "mushroom," "mold," and "disgusting crap" but didn't fully understand the difference between them. Moving on to the egg chambers, they learned "egg," "baby," and "hatch," with Karl performing a pantomime to get the last two words across. As the drones repeated the words, a pair of giant ants entered the egg chamber. Feeling the eggs with their nimble antennae, the ants turned a few over and selected one of the biggest. Working together, they began dragging the egg down a narrow corridor to one of the grub hatcheries.[10]

Following the ants and their precious cargo into the hatchery, the drones inadvertently learned the words "vomit," "sick," and "stench," after quizzing Karl on his reactions to the room.[11] They quickly decided to move the tour to another chamber.

Still, all in all, progress was made, and finally the drones decided they had learned as much as they could under the conditions of the nest. One of the drones reported to the cow in her chambers.

"Statement of fact: Three drones have been taught to speak as much of the human language as is possible here in the nest."

"Feeling of contentment: Good. Command: Bring the human to me."

"Statement of undying obeisance: it will be done." The drone left, reappearing soon thereafter with Karl. They stood immediately outside the cow's chamber to prevent the acidic secretions from harming the human. Karl squinted in at the creature and said, "Cripes! She's as fat as a cow!"

"Statement of intention: I will question the human," said the cow in scent-language. "Command: You will translate."

To ensure a steady supply of food for the nest, mold growths are cultivated in several granaries in the nest. The granaries never lead to escape routes, so that they can remain in the darkness that promotes the growth of the mold.

8. Aspis do not sleep. They do rest, however, spending several hours at a time in a motionless state, conserving energy and purging fatigue poisons that build up in the body. Like all insects, aspis drones have no eyelids (larvae and cows don't even have eyes), so they remain aware of events in their fields of vision even while resting—although an aspis drone is more likely to detect someone approaching with his sense of smell or hearing than with his vision, which is somewhat poorer than that of a human. The multifaceted aspis eye was designed for detecting movement, so a Thief attempting to avoid detection by an aspis drone by using the Hide in Shadows ability and remaining motionless does so with a +10% bonus—provided he is out of "smelling range" of the aspis.

9. Aspis drones have no concept of individuality—a drone is a drone is a drone. They lack personal names and even distinct personalities. As far as the nest is concerned, a drone's life is immaterial, as any single drone is easily replaced by another.

Not all drones are identical, however. Within the nest, there are various functions that must be performed. While each drone must be able to perform any of the tasks required, some "specialize" in certain areas: defense of the nest, trap-building, speaking aloud to humans and humanoid creatures, scouting, tending to the mold cultures in the granaries or the grubs in the hatcheries, food gathering, and even breeding with the cow. A drone that has specialized in a particular task adopts a specific scent to identify its area of expertise; thus, "breeder" or "gatherer of food" serves as the closest equivalent a drone has to a name. Not all drones have such pseudo-names, however, and those names used aren't likely to be unique—a nest might have three "breeders" and seven "gatherers of food," for instance, any of which are interchangeable.

10. Many aspis nests include 1–10 giant ants (larger nests may have as many as 10–100). These insects are the spoils of war, stolen as eggs from a giant ant nest after a raid by aspis drones. Allowed to hatch in the aspis nest, the ants bond to the aspis cow, mistakenly believing her to be their own queen. Giant ants can understand simple scent-words of the aspis "language," enough to obey direct commands given by the cow. They do not enter her chamber, however, being vulnerable to the cow's acidic secretions. Giant ants are most often used as food gatherers, egg tenders, and warriors when the nest is attacked. Only workers and soldiers are found in an aspis nest, never a queen, requiring the aspis nest to steal giant ant eggs on a regular basis to resupply their stock of ant slaves.

11. Aspis larvae resemble giant maggots, white or pale pink. They are blind and deaf, lacking both eyes and ears at this stage of development. However, they already have a highly developed sense of smell and use this to find edible food in the waters of the hatcheries. Each aspis nest has up to six grub hatcheries, each one housing up to ten larvae. The hatcheries are shaped like a shallow swimming pool surrounded by a narrow ledge. Hatcheries double as garbage pits, in which the drones pitch food scraps and other waste products. The stench of these hatcheries is so bad that nonaspis (other than giant ant slaves) must make a successful saving throw vs. poison upon entering or become violently ill until removed from the odor. (Incidentally, the aspis ability to tolerate such stenches also makes them immune to *stinking cloud* and similar spells.)

Larvae have enormous appetites and eat almost constantly, growing in size over the course of three to

"Statement of comprehension: Understood."

"Query: Where did he get the weapon?"

The drone turned to Karl and said, 'Where did you get the ax?'"

"I bought it in the village."

"'Bought?' What is 'bought?'"

"I purchased it. With money. You know, coins?" The drone stared at the human in incomprehension. "I ... traded small bits of metal for it."

"What is 'village?'"

"Village, uh ... man-nest."

The drone switched back to scent-language. "Statement of partial confusion: He acquired it from his nest, by trading something of value in return."

"Query: Are there more of these weapons in his nest?"

"The cow speaks, 'Are more axes in the village?'"

"Yes."

"Statement of affirmation: Yes."

"Query: What will they accept as trade for the weapons? Explanation: Metal axes will allow the drones to better protect the nest."

After a moment's thought, the drone said, "The cow speaks, 'What things humans trade?' Bugs want axes bought for bug-nest."

"Beats me. You'd have to ask the blacksmith."

After a bit of further explanation, the drone passed, "Statement of possible understanding: The human is unsure and suggests we ask the question of the maker of weapons at his nest."

"Command: Go to the human nest and find out. Query: Would the human be of assistance in speaking to the others of his nest?"

"Statement of strong affirmation: Yes, my cow. Our grasp of the noise-language is not complete."

"Command: Then take him. The other two drones will remain here. If you are slain, I do not want to have to start all over. Now go."

"Statement of undying obeisance: It will be done, my cow." The drone turned to Karl. "We go to your village now."

"Praise be to the gods!" he said.

The bugs approached Karl, staring into his face with multifaceted eyes. "Con foundit. Let meego."

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Karl blinked at the sunlight, the first direct sunlight he had seen in over three weeks. Scrambling up behind him came the drone, rising to stand upright once he cleared the entrance of the aspis nest. "Lead bug to your village," he said.

"First, we stop at my cottage," Karl said. "I want a bath and a decent meal before I take you anywhere else." The drone had been given no time constraints by his cow, so he shrugged mentally and followed the woodcutter to his small dwelling in the woods.

"A 'cottage' is a small man-nest," he declared upon seeing it. "I understand. What is a 'bath'?"

"Wash with water. Remove dirt from body. Forget it."

The drone chalked it up as another odd human custom, like praying to unseen gods,[12] snoring, and the removal of liquid wastes from the body.[13] While

four months until they reach 6 feet in length. At that time, triggered by instinct, a larva crawls onto the hatchery ledge and begins to metamorphosize. Over the next few days, it grows into an adult drone, which bursts out of the maggotlike outer larval shell. The drone then kicks the remains of this husk into the pool and leaves the hatchery to serve the nest in his adult form. The larval husk is devoured by other aspis larvae still in the pool.

12. The aspis subscribe to no religion. They are practical-minded, finding it difficult to believe in something that cannot be seen, heard, or smelled. Cows and larvae care only about eating, and as for the drones, the cow is all the deity they need.

13. Waste material takes the form of small, white flakes that are shed from the aspis' abdomen. Their efficient digestive systems process all liquid intake (most of which is a by-product of the food they eat—

Karl went around to the rain barrel at the side of the cottage, the drone examined the interior of the man-nest.

There was little to see. A cot and blanket, a small table and chair, a wooden dresser—all items unfamiliar to the drone, who couldn't imagine what strange purposes they might serve. Mounted on the wall over the cot was a sword and a shield; these, at least, the drone recognized, for his nest had several such items, taken from slain enemies like the orcs and goblins who occasionally attacked drones gathering food in the forest. The cow, ever concerned about the well-being of the nest, desired many more such items.[14]

As the drone waited for Karl to finish his "bath," he studied the weapon and nibbled idly on the woodcutter's blanket.

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"Now, let me do the talking," suggested Karl, as they approached the village.

The village of Barker's Grove was a small one, claiming little more than a single inn, two taverns, a blacksmith's shop and a cluster of tiny houses. The blacksmith's was closed; expecting this, Karl advanced upon the nearest tavern. It was late afternoon, and the streets were clear, so the first to notice the arrival of the aspis was a donkey tied to the hitching post. It brayed in fear at the creature's unfamiliar scent; the drone got a good whiff of the donkey and altered his own odor to mimic that of the beast. Convinced the danger had passed, the donkey snorted once and was silent.

"Thought I'd find you here, Aegon," said the woodcutter poking his head in the door. "C'mon out here a minute. There's someone I want you to meet."

Aegon finished his ale in a single swig, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and climbed off his stool. He winked at his wife Daphnia, the tired-looking waitress who served drinks at the tavern. She ignored him and carried on with her business. *Whatever happened to us?* thought Aegon. *We used to be so close.*

The blacksmith stepped out into the open air, a ready retort on his lips. Instead, he took one look at the gray-white insect standing behind Karl, and his jaw dropped open.

"Aegon, I'd like you to meet … well shoot, I guess he doesn't really have a name."

"I am a bug," supplied the drone helpfully.

Aegon just stared.

"You are a Karl," added the drone.

"No, I'm Karl," said Karl. "He's Aegon."

"Ay-gon. Aegon. Aegon is a human. Karl is a human."

"Right."

"I am a bug."

"Look, I thought we agreed I'd do the talking," said Karl.

"What's all this about?" asked the blacksmith, voice shaky with shock.

"The bug here wants to buy some axes. Wants to know what you'd trade for them."

"Axes are … axes are a gold apiece. You know that."

"No, he doesn't want to buy. He wants to trade."

"Trade what?"

"Good question." Karl turned to the drone. "What would you be willing to give to Aegon in exchange for axes for your nest?"

The drone thought it over. "Food. We have many mushrooms and disgusting crap to spare."

"What the hell?" asked the blacksmith.

"Uh, forget it," replied Karl. To the drone, he asked "What else?"

"Goo."

"Goo?"

"White cow-goo."

Aegon looked questioningly at Karl. "They've got this white stuff that eats through flesh, wood, metal, you name it," the woodcutter explained.

"What would I do with that?" Aegon asked.

Karl frowned. "Hmm. What else?" he asked the drone.

"Slaves. We have many giant ants; we could trade some for your axes."

"And what would I want with a giant ant?"

"They are useful. They will care for your eggs, and help them hatch into fat babies. They are also good food."

"Uh, it doesn't quite work like that with humans," said Karl.

"No deal," said Aegon.

"We can make chemicals," suggested the drone.

"What kind of chemicals?" asked the blacksmith. "You mean, like potions?"

"'Potions?' What is 'potions'?"

"Magic," Karl explained. "You drink the potion and something magical happens. You know, like you can fly, or turn invisible, like that."

"Bugs do not know 'magic.' But we can make many chemicals.[15] We can make rats come or run away. We can make Karl vomit. We can make a creature smell like another creature. We can cause an attraction between two creatures. We can make—"

"Wait, hold it there a minute," said Aegon. "Cause an attraction between two creatures? You mean, like a love potion?"

The drone looked to Karl, hoping for an explanation. Karl ignored the aspis and spoke directly to the blacksmith. "You betcha," he said. "The bugs back at this guy's nest could whip up a potion that'd have the women falling at your feet."

Aegon rubbed his jaw. "Even Daphnia? You think it'd work on her?"

Karl grinned. "Looking to put the spark back in your marriage, eh, Aegon? Well, this love potion'll do the trick just fine—you'll be like newlyweds again. So whaddaya say? How many axes would that be worth to you?"

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an aspis very rarely needs to drink water).

14. Aspis technology is rather primitive. They are capable of making simple wicker or wooden shields and often carve spears and javelins from straight shafts of wood, but metalworking is unknown to them, and they scavenge or trade for their metal weapons.

15. Although the concept of magic is unknown to the aspis, they are adept at mixing natural concoctions that can simulate nearly any odor, even those not normally distinguished by humans at a conscious level. These "nonmagical potions" have a wide variety of effects. Some attract or repel certain types of animals; a favorite form of aspis vengeance against a town that has taken action against an aspis nest is to splash its walls with a sticky, yellow liquid that not only attracts giant rats and similar creatures but also drives them into a wild frenzy, causing them to attack everyone they encounter.

To create a compound that affects a specific type of creature, the drones must first have some type of contact with that creature. They couldn't create a formula of scent to keep wolverines at bay, for instance, unless they had been within "sniffing distance" of a

"Ten."

"Not enough."

"Twenty."

"You're not being serious. Perhaps the bug and I need to take our business elsewhere. I'm sure there are smiths in the city that can spot a value when they see it; maybe we'd be better off doing our business there. Good day, Aegon."

"'City? What is 'city?'"

"Big man-nest. Bigger than a village."

"Wait!" called Aegon. "How many axes do you want?"

Karl called a quick conference with the drone. He had estimated about a dozen drones at the nest; the aspis confirmed fifteen. So, fifteen drones, each carrying two axes, plus some extras for the newer drones as the larvae hatched ... "Forty axes. No more and no less."

Aegon thought deep and hard. That was a lot of work; he didn't have forty axes back in his shop and he knew it. He looked back at the inn, and thought of his wife working within. To be like newlyweds again ... " Deal," he said.

♈ ♈ ♈

The drone reported back to the cow in the scent-language of their race. "Statement of unqualified success: I have arranged to receive forty axes from the humans at the man-nest."

"Query: What do they want in return?"

"Statement of bewilderment: A small quantity of what they term 'love potion.'"

"Query: Can we produce what they want?"

"Statement of affirmation: Yes, my cow. I have analyzed the human pheromones involved and can reproduce them in an appropriate elixir."

"Command: Assist one of the chemist-drones in such a preparation."

"Statement of undying obeisance: It will be done."

"Statement of satisfaction: Excellent. Command: After the compound has been made, exchange it for the weapons."

"Helpful input: I will require assistance to carry such a large load, my cow."

"Acknowledgment: You may take other drones to aid you."

"Statement of gratitude: Thank you, my cow."

"Command: After we have the weapons, you will leave the nest."

"Statement of bewilderment." The drone sent out scents of confusion and distress but could make no coherent scent-words to form a sentence. Had he offended the cow? Was he being exiled?

"Command: Calm yourself. Explanation: I have decided that access to the man-nests will benefit the nest. You will therefore go out into the world and explore. There might be other items available that will also be helpful. You will find them and return with them to the nest."

The drone found his scent-voice again. "Query: How long will I be gone?"

"Uncertainty: As long as it takes to find items of value. Clarification and return to certitude: In the meantime, we will begin trade with the man-nest on a regular basis. They may provide us with other metal items already known to us. We want shields, for instance. Annoyance: Enough explanations—go about your duties."

"Statement of undying obeisance: It will be done." As he left the cow's chamber, he could still smell the lingering words of their last conversation.[16] Would that prove to be the last time he spoke to his cow? It was possible—who knew what kinds of dangers awaited him, alone in a world he barely knew? Still, the cow was the cow, and he could not defy her orders. He made his way to the chemical preparation chamber and prepared himself mentally for the task ahead.

♈ ♈ ♈

The drone stood at the blacksmith's shop at Barker's Grove, watching as the Karl named Aegon counted out axes and placed them into the waiting hands of the three other drones that had accompanied him. Satisfied that all forty were accounted for, he passed over a vial of the chemical he had helped produce. "Put some of this in food. Give food to partner."

Aegon rubbed his hands together in eagerness and accepted the flask. "It's been a pleasure doing business with you," he said, and sped off to the tavern.

The drone turned to his companions. "Command: Return to the nest and give the weapons to the cow."

"Query: Won't you be accompanying us?"

"Statement of negation: I have other orders."

"Acceptance: The cow must always be obeyed."

"Statement of agreement: The cow must be obeyed. Statement of sorrow: I will miss the nest."

The others turned and followed the dirt road leading out of Barker's Grove. As the drone watched his nest-brothers depart, he couldn't help but add, in the noise-language of the humans, "I mean it."

"C'mon, cheer up," said Karl. "It won't be so bad. You'll be back to your nest in no time, with a mess of stories to tell your little bug buddies. And in the meantime, there's a whole world out there for us to see and explore."

"You will accompany me?"

"You bet I will. I may not be the stalwart warrior I once was, but I can still swing a mean ax if I have to. And let me tell you, there's plenty for me to show you! Wait until you see the city—the big man-nest. The bakeries! The arenas! The marketplace! We can take a ride on a boat—you'd like that."

"And you will help me to learn the noise-language even better?" asked the drone.

"Sure I will," agreed Karl.

"Good. Then, what is 'business'? What is 'buddies'? What is 'stalwart'? What is 'bakery'? What is 'arena'? What is 'marketplace'? What is 'boat'?"

Karl sighed and shook his head as the they started down the road toward the city.

The following appendix provides rules on creating aspis Player Characters!

wolverine to capture its particular essence.

16. The scents that compose aspis "speech" remain in the air for a minute or two before dissipation. Thus, it is possible for a drone to enter a chamber and smell a recent conversation between others of its kind.

by Mark Feil

The Ecology of the Aurumvorax

Count your fingers after you pet it

I was enjoying an evening drink in the Red Lion, one of my favorite taverns in Goodway during the time I was indentured to Duke Radford, and was getting ready to let fly with the story of how I once wooed six maids at the same time when, much to the pretended relief of my companions, I noticed a dwarf at my elbow. His sword was drawn but lowered. I tried to ignore him, but he would have none of that; he was determined to interrupt me.

"Are you Faulkenson the mage?" he growled, as he thrust his face close to mine. He looked like he had just crawled from the gutter. His breath certainly smelled like it.

"Yes, I am," I said, as I moved my chair back a foot for fresh air. "And who are you and what do you want?"

"I have authorization to take you immediately to Duke Kaor. Come with me."

"Duke Kaor? What does he want?" I was bewildered. Kaor the Toad was a rival of my master; his territory lay adjacent to Goodway. How did he know of me? Maybe I *had,* on occasion, let fly with a tall tale about my adventures, but it was usually only to the group of close friends now at the table. I likewise doubted the Duke wanted me to perform a service; he employed much more powerful spellcasters than myself.

The dwarf looked at me blackly. "He only wishes to talk to you and has promised me gold should I find you. His reasons are his own. Get up." Apparently, the little guy was having a bad day.

I looked at him straight on — easy enough while sitting down. "I'm really sorry, but I can't go with you. You see, I was just about to enlighten these—" I looked around the table and dismissed the word gentlemen "—these companions of mine with the story of the time I met half a dozen rich, beautiful, young maidens and what became-"

My beloved companions had obviously had too much to drink and were in a particularly mischievous mood that evening, as they carried me to the dwarf's horse and tied me over its back. It must have been the drink. They usually couldn't get enough of me.

A few bumpy hours later, I stood before Duke Kaor. The dwarf had been paid off, and the Duke evidently thought me valuable enough to entrust me with four of his largest guards. We were now in the Duke's library. Around me were volumes on shelves that covered all walls except for that behind the Duke's chair of state. Golden statuettes and unusual devices of magic lay on the shelves and floor, almost hidden in the semidarkness. Moonlight filtered through the large panes of glass behind Kaor; it was now late indeed. Despite the candles on some of the shelves, Kaor's bloated face was silhouetted and obscured.

"What do you know about the aurumvorax?" he asked without preamble.

"What do you mean, sir?" I was more nervous than I had anticipated. The line of questioning caught me off guard, and I was recalling some unpleasant stories about The Toad as well.

"Don't play games with me, Fautkenson," he ordered. "I know that one aurumvorax was apparently quite fond of you while you were training at the Academy. From what I have heard about aurumvoraxes, I didn't think they were fond of anything. What do you know?"

I hadn't thought that word of Goldie had gotten beyond the few friends I had sworn to secrecy a few years ago. I decided to lay out the basic facts and hope he would be satisfied with them while I tried to figure out what he was after.

"Well," I recited, "the aurumvorax is a small, shaggy, eight-legged animal usually found around lightly forested hills, though it may be encountered near the timberline of some mountains. Its golden fur is usually long and well cleaned. As you may know, sir, it weighs over 500 pounds in adulthood and fears nothing; the little monster can be extremely vicious and will attack anything that looks edible or threatening." *Much the way you do,* I thought.

Kaor looked unimpressed. "Tell me," he said slowly, "about your pet."

"Ah. My pet. Well, we had one at the Academy that had been captured while it was just about to come full term. It gave birth to six hairless kittens that we separated from the mother. After two weeks, their eyes opened and one took a liking to me. Her fur came out in a golden brown." I was getting nostalgic. "I remember she couldn't seem to get enough to eat, but she and the others took sick. Everything we tried to feed them came back up again."

"Go on," said the Duke. He sounded bored — but his stare was making me more nervous.

"Well, one day I was wearing a gold bracelet that a girlfriend had given me. I picked the kitten up to stroke her, and her nose went straight to the bracelet. She started to chew on it. I thought it harmless enough until I noticed that Goldie was actually chewing the chain to pieces with her little teeth and swallowing the fragments. Before I could get it away from her, she had eaten the whole thing."

Kaor looked less bored now, but continued to stare.

"Goldie perked up immediately afterward and had her health back within a few days. The roots of her hair began to take on a metallic-gold glint. That's when I named her Goldie. I reported this to my mentor, and he suggested that we isolate one kitten on an all-meat diet, give mine meat supplemented with gold, and give the rest of the litter other precious metals with their meals. The kitten with a plain diet died a week later, as did the others, although the one fed platinum lived about three weeks. Goldie grew rapidly, putting on weight until she was too heavy to carry after a month. She retained all the gold

she ate. She gnawed the bars of her cage and any other metal that she could find. Copper pots were a favorite; her teeth and claws absorbed the metal from those.

"By the time she was two months old, I had read everything I could find about aurumvoraxes. I was the local authority on them at the Academy." I puffed out my chest a little. The Duke seemed to be eating it up. Maybe he wouldn't do anything rash to me. "I talked to every ranger and druid who claimed to have seen aurumvoraxes, and pieced together that they are solitary creatures, each defending a territory about 10 miles square. Every eight or nine years, they seek a mate, spend a week together, then return to their respective territories. Sometime between three and four months later, the female gives birth to about half a dozen kittens. She weans them after about five or six years, when they're halfway grown, and forces them to stake out their own territories."

The Duke raised a pudgy hand. "How long did it take yours to reach that point? Was it that long?"

"No," I told him. "Goldie was nearly grown, that's about a yard long and a foot high at the back, in less than a year." I could tell he was ready to ask the obvious question and I beat him to it. "I believe it was because we fed her a diet rich in gold. Any aurumvoraxes in the wild must pick up the gold they need to survive by eating jewelry from unlucky travelers or by actually digging up gold ore itself. The aurumvorax is a burrowing animal with eight sets of claws; no digging task is impossible for it."

The Duke rubbed his chins. "But can there actually be that much gold out there — I mean, in the hills where gold has never been found, but where an aurumvorax is known to live?"

I spread my palms, my confidence back. "Well, where there's an aurumvorax, there *must* be gold. It cannot be otherwise. But the gold will eventually be exhausted, and little will be found in the creature's lair. Dwarves and gnomes are not fond of these beasts, as you might well imagine."

The Duke seemed to consider this for a moment. "What happened to your animal? My sources tell me it was very loyal to you, and eventually you were the only one who could feed it."

My throat went dry for a moment. I dropped my gaze, then words came easily again. "Yes, sir," I said. "She would even let me stroke her, though I had to wear gauntlets in case she was in a playful mood. She could bite my hand off without meaning to do it. But she was gentle. . ." I hesitated. "I'm afraid she died from poisoning, my lord. She got into a laboratory and chewed on some metal flasks. There was nothing we could do."

"Ah." The Duke sighed, his eyes focusing on the floor in deep thought. "Oh, well."

"If I may, sir," I said after a pause, "why do you have an interest in aurumvoraxes?" Couldn't hurt to ask — I hoped.

Illustration by Jim Holloway

Duke Kaor looked up. The candlelight showed he had a faint, fat grin. "As you may or may not be aware, in two months time I am going to the royal court in celebration of 30 years of service to His Majesty. I have been personally invited, and His Highness intends to reward me for my loyalty and devotion. I thought it would be fitting to arrive wearing an aurumvorax cape. For the ego, you know."

I was horrified but didn't show it. Granted that the aurumvorax wasn't an animal you would usually call lovable, but . . . "Where does your lordship mean to find an aurumvorax?" I asked.

He stared at me, then shrugged. "I have been made aware of the existence of one of these creatures near my northern borders. I will personally lead an expedition to dispatch the beast in two weeks, and we will have the cape by the time I leave for the royal audience. Thank you for your time, Faulkenson. My men will show you the way out. Ah — one detail. I'm sure you can appreciate the contents of this room; thus, you may take any item you can spot in the candlelight as your reward." He rose from the chair, and his huge stomach jiggled as he walked toward a side door — probably to the larder. A burly guard reached for my arm.

"Your pardon, gracious sir," I asked hastily, "but how do you intend to kill your aurumvorax?"

He turned and smiled in the dim light. "With poisoned arrows. Why, Faulkenson, you gave me the idea yourself."

I made a half-bow. "Sir, may I recommend leaving out gold with a coating of poison, then attacking the beast with clubs after it has finished its meal? An aurumvorax's fur is woven so that it resists the penetration of sharp objects, but blunt weapons easily crush its internal organs — and poisons, as I have learned to my sorrow, work swiftly on them."

Kaor the Toad looked astonished, then simply roared and shook with laughter. "Yes! My young man, that's an excellent idea! Superb! A plan worthy of a true mage." He looked around the dim room. "You may take two of whatever you wish." He left through the door, still chuckling.

"Thank you, good sir," I said as the door closed. I had spotted my payment the instant I had walked into the room. Moving behind the Duke's chair, I grasped the pair of objects that rested on the windowsill and placed them awkwardly beneath my cloak. A few minutes later, the guards showed me to a horse the Duke had set aside so I could return to Goodway. I kept up my look of awe and gratitude until I was safely away.

Then I spat to the side as I rode and smiled. "Good hunting, indeed," I whispered, and turned the horse northward.

Years ago, one of my instructors at the Academy had taken a dislike to Goldie and had tried to poison her. He was convinced that poison was the only way to kill her and escape detection; after all, who would

suspect a wizard of not using magic? He was caught, but the poisoning didn't stop; my mentor ordered it continued when he noticed that Goldie was immune to all forms of poison. Nothing slowed her down. Apparently the same internal chemistry that allowed her to use gold also made her immune to any normal toxin.

The Duke would also be in for a surprise when he went to kill that aurumvorax with a club at close quarters. Aurumvoraxes are so dense from the gold they eat that blunt weapons are of little use against them. Using the arrows, with or without poison, would have been a far better idea. A clubbing would only enrage the little beast — and the Duke would have to beg the mercy of the gods to save himself from the monster's fury. The Nine Hells have nothing like them. An old ranger told of an aurumvorax that had chased a manticore and several wyverns from the hills it had adopted as its home. Another told me of an adolescent green dragon that tried to deprive an aurumvorax of a cave and lost its life.

Was I justified in lying to the Duke, leading him to his death? Aye, the Duke was not the most wicked of men, but his greed was legendary, and you were wise to count your fingers after you dealt with him. When the mood took him, he could be generous, as he had been tonight. He could also have had me slain. He might still.

As the horse's hooves thundered toward the northern reaches of Kaor's territory, I pulled my two rewards closer beneath my cloak. I would be leaving the area with Duke Radford on the morrow, and wouldn't be back for two months, when my Duke would himself be honored by His Highness for his own service. By then—

The two massive candlesticks beneath my cloak were made from 15 pounds of pure, solid gold each. I laughed. Goldie was going to love them.

Other notes

The aurumvorax sometimes lives near the bottom of a shallow ravine, but usually chooses to dig a burrow or den in the side of a lightly wooded hill. It has eight legs, and is covered with golden fur about 3" long. Measuring 3' long and about 1½' high, the animal has copper-colored teeth and claws, the latter up to 3" long. Its whiskers and parts of its mane are bronze in color, and its eyes are pools of silver with golden pupils. The aurumvorax's flesh is extremely dense due to the intake and retention of gold, which accounts for its partial immunity to attacks by blunt weapons and its incredible weight. Other metals are absorbed into its system as well, but in lesser amounts.

A unique biochemistry grants the aurumvorax a high tolerance to heat and a total immunity to all poisons and gases. They are undamaged by small, normal fires, and magical fires cause only half damage. Likewise, they are surprisingly fast, strong, and tough, being able to drag their own weight in prey. The jaw muscles of the aurumvorax, being especially strong, are used to clamp on to a victim, and only death will loosen the grip.

An aurumvorax typically defends its territory from all other comers, tolerating most other animals but wary of large predators and humans. Almost any animal, however, may be considered prey if it wanders within range. The lair itself often extends deep into solid rock, which can support the beast's incredible weight. Rock rich in gold ore is nearly always used as a lair, though other locations may be chosen so long as gold deposits, either natural or from a civilized area, are available.

Mating occurs roughly every eight years, resulting in a litter of 5-8 kittens, most of which die young because of the rarity of gold. Adults are sometimes forced to eat one or more of their young if gold-based nourishment is not available. Usually, only one or two kittens survive to adulthood. During the first year of life for the kittens, the mother will be bad tempered, attacking anything within sight that might represent a threat to her young. If a PC obtains a kitten before its eyes open, he may attempt to befriend it, the probability of which increases with the amount of food and gold given to the kitten. Without gold in the first three weeks of life, the kitten dies. Kittens can detect any form of gold instinctively and seek it out in addition to red meat. If raised as a pet and supplied with ample amounts of gold, food, and attention, kittens grow rapidly. Typically, an aurumvorax reaches full size in about seven years in the wild, but the time may be only a year in captivity with ideal conditions. Kittens raised in captivity grow into strong, fiercely loyal pets if conditions are ideal.

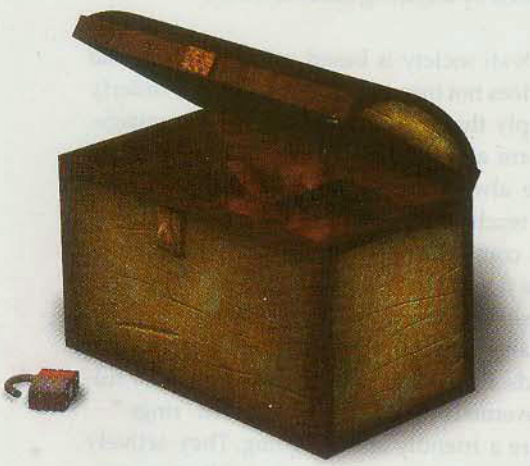
If killed and eaten, the flesh of the aurumvorax produces severe metal poisoning. The eater must save vs. poison 1d4 turns after the meat is eaten; a successful save means severe nausea and cramps strike the victim (as per a *symbol of pain),* lasting 2-8 hours. Failure to save indicates the victim goes into a coma and dies 10-60 rounds later. Only another aurumvorax may feast on one of its kind. If, on the other hand, the whole animal is roasted and the remains heated until everything burns off, 151-250 lbs. of gold and traces of other metals remain, depending on the size of the aurumvorax. In addition, if the pelt is carefully removed and tanned to preserve not only the hide but the gold-colored, metallic hair (the whole process typically costing 4,000-5,000 gp for the special procedure and materials), a durable but heavy garment may be made that has a value in excess of 15,000 gp. Ω

OP1 Tales of the Outer Planes
An AD&D® Module Anthology

The Ecology of the Bag of Devouring

Hiders Keepers

With an appetite unmatched by any other creature, these tricky beasts can decimate your treasure hoard.



by Kevin N. Haw

illustrated by Corey Macourek

How did I become the Keeper? It wasn't my idea at all.

A ghost suggested it.

My story began forty years ago in Colthar, a large port on the Regal Sea. Like any wealthy city, Colthar was infested with thieves. So many that some were forced to specialize to survive. I was one of those specialists.

I stole from wizards.

It was dangerous, but work was plentiful and paid well—retrieving knick-knacks from one sorcerer on behalf of another. It was during one such mission that my old career came to an end.

A moonless night found me deep within a certain baron's castle, rummaging through the magician's workshop. Although my pockets were heavy with small items for myself, I hadn't found the scroll I'd been hired to retrieve. I was just about to give up when I discovered something interesting at the bottom of an old battered chest.

It was a threadbare bundle of fabric, smelling of cedar. I opened it and saw it was a bag, one with more room inside than outside. A bag of holding! It was empty, which seemed odd for something so useful, but I didn't quibble. I knew a fence who would pay well for it.

The sound of a key in the door interrupted my thoughts. Unless I acted swiftly, I was caught! There were no windows and only the one door, so running was out of the question. Worse, the room was tiny, without even a closet to conceal me. There was only one place to hide.

I opened the bag and leaped in until just my head and arms were sticking out. It's weird, I tell you, to reach down to where your legs should be but find nothing! Shutting the chest from the inside, I heard the door creak open and a man shriek for the guards. I sealed the bag's opening, disappearing from view.

As long as no one opened the chest and looked inside the bag, I was safe. When a search of the keep found nothing, the guards would assume their burglar had escaped. They'd drop their guard, and I could sneak out the next morning disguised as a workman.

I simply had to wait.

It was a tight squeeze, so I had to crouch to fit.[1] It was pitch black, but the walls felt like leather and gave slightly when I poked with my finger. The air smelled old and dusty, like an abandoned attic. After a while I began counting my breaths.

At a thousand no one had come after me. The air was stuffy, and I wanted some ventilation. I reached up and couldn't find the opening! I searched everywhere, running my hands over every bit of the interior, trying not to

1. Per the *Dungeon Master® Guide*, a *bag of devouring* can hold 30 cubic feet. This capacity requires a cylindrical area 32 inches in diameter and 5 feet deep.

panic. Perhaps the guards knew where I was hiding and had tied the bag shut to suffocate me!

I was desperate, not thinking straight, when I decided to cut myself out. Stupidest thing you can do of course, cutting into something "extradimensional," as the wizards say. No room for my short sword, so I drew my dagger and began to slice into the roof of my little prison.[2] I figured things couldn't get any worse.

Of course, I was wrong. The walls started to ... well, ripple, for want of a better word. I pulled back to stab harder when a hole opened up beneath my feet and the stench hit.

It reeked of rotting garbage and mildew, but over everything was a burning, metallic tang as though someone had tossed all the chemicals in an alchemist's shop onto a carrion heap! It was awful, but it was nothing compared to the agony when the chamber began flooding with acid.[3]

I dropped my dagger and scrambled upward, clawing my way clear. My burned feet were safe for a moment, but the acid was rising.

How I remembered it is a mystery, but one of the items in my pocket from the wizard's den was a ring of acid resistance.[4] I slipped it on, and it grew warm and hummed faintly. My feet were in agony, and my boots burned to tatters, but when the acid finally engulfed me I felt only a tingling sensation, not the hideous pain I had expected.

Even if the stuff didn't burn, it could drown me. I probed with my foot and found that the drainhole had opened into a tunnel, and it was wide enough for me to slip through. My only option was pretty obvious.

Filling my lungs with all the stale air they could hold, I dove down the tunnel feet first. The going wasn't easy, though! The fluid was thick, closer to stew than water. Lots of spongy, half-rotten pieces of ... things I'd rather not talk about.

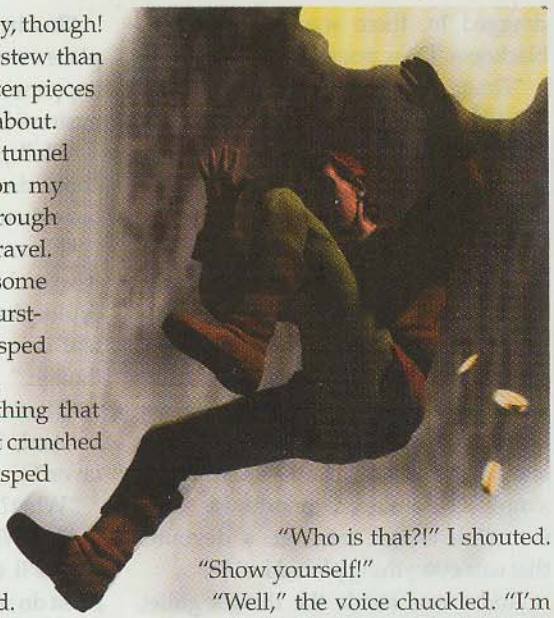
After maybe five yards, the tunnel curved sideways.[5] I swam on my back, my spine scrapping through something that felt like gravel. When the tunnel opened into some kind of pool, my lungs were bursting. I broke the surface and gasped some putrid but breathable air.

I swam blindly into something that felt like an island of garbage. It crunched as I crawled out of the acid, gasped for breath, and flopped onto my back. I stared into the darkness overhead, stunned by how fast it had all happened. The whole thing, from the first whiff of acid to my lying on that island, had taken maybe twenty heartbeats.[6]

Inside my pouch was a tinderbox and small candle, which yielded a dim flame when lit. I peered into the shadows and found myself in a round cavern, maybe thirty paces wide. My little island was indeed a mound of rotting garbage, shattered bones, and pieces of driftwood. It was five paces wide and in the center of the acid pool. The ceiling was maybe three times my height, so I could stand up if I didn't mind sinking shin deep into the filth.

There were no other entries or exits, no marks on the strangely ridged walls and ceiling, no sign that any living being had ever been there. The cavern was desolate and empty except for the acid pool and the little island. It was absolutely the last place you'd expect to be greeted by a cheerful, grandfatherly voice.

"Why, hullo there!" called the voice from behind. I whirled, sword drawn for whatever I faced. No one was in sight.



"Who is that?!" I shouted. "Show yourself!"

"Well," the voice chuckled. "I'm afraid that's not possible, old boy."

By this time I was spinning like mad, desperately seeking the voice's source. After a moment, I realized that it came from everywhere at once and also from nowhere in particular. I'd seen enough strangeness while thieving from mages to know what that meant.

"Ah," I asked, weapon still drawn. "You are a ghost, right?"

"Well, I believe so," answered the voice. Then, in a musing tone, "Technically, I might be an apparition or a spectre. Never could keep them straight. What do they call the harmless ones?"

"Er, a poltergeist?"

"Don't think so. They can't talk. Probably can't think, either. Just bang on windowsills and knock over bottles."

"You've got a point there."

A long, almost embarrassing silence followed.

I finally said, "You don't act like a ghost."

"I suppose not. But, it's not like I received any instruction. After I was

2. The interior of a *bag of devouring* is AC 7 and can withstand 15+1d6 points of damage before ripping. If ripped, the *bag* is destroyed, forming a 10-foot-wide vortex to the Astral plane, just as if a *portable hole* were placed within a *bag of holding*. Anyone inside the *bag of devouring* receives no saving throw against the vortex, while those outside can make a Dexterity check to jump clear. Except for destroying the *bag* and sealing one of its "mouths," the devourer is unharmed.

If the damage inflicted does not rip the *bag*, then the character trapped within is subject to immediate acid attack (below).

3. A devourer launches an acid attack if any damage is inflicted from inside the *bag*. Every round, the acid causes 1 point of damage for every Hit Die of the devourer, although a successful saving throw vs. poison reduces the damage by half. See below for determining a devourer's Hit Dice.

4. A *ring of acid resistance* protects from all forms of normal acid, up to 30 points of damage per round. The wearer gains a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. additional damage. The *ring* works continuously when worn and radiates faint magic. The *ring* has a resale value of 5,000 gp and is worth 2,500 XP.

5. This is the "throat" of the creature, linking mouth and stomach. It is AC 7 and withstands 15+2d6 hit points before ripping. Anyone being swallowed attacks at a –5 penalty and cannot resist being pulled further into the beast. (See below.) If ripped, a vortex forms just as with a ripped *bag* and no one in the throat or *bag* receives a saving throw. The devourer suffers no ill effects except the loss of the *bag*.

6. A trip from a *bag of devouring* to a devourer's stomach takes 4 rounds if the object (or victim) isn't resisting. Characters actively making their way to the stomach ("going with the flow") take 3 rounds if their movement is below 6 and 2 rounds if it's 6 or more. A character can resist being pulled closer to the stomach every round as they would resist being swallowed in the first place (75% base chance of failure minus 5% per Strength bonus). Resistance isn't recommended because every round spent reaching the stomach subjects the victim to an acid attack.

dragged in, there was just pain and blackness. Then, poof, I'm a ghost."

"Dragged in? Into what?"

"Why, into the beast, of course. Through a bag of devouring."

When he said that, my heart went cold. I felt my limbs weaken, and the sword slipped from my hands.

It all made sense, then. Why something as useful as a bag of holding would be left in the wizard's chest, empty and neglected. Why it had closed up, sealing me in. The terrifying, bizarre journey through the acid. It all fit with the stories about bags of devouring—that they are simply camouflaged mouths for some extradimensional monster, a devourer that eats everything placed inside.

And I was inside the thing's gullet, waiting to be digested.

"Are you all right?" the ghost asked, concern in its voice. "Surely, this isn't a surprise to you."

"You have no idea how surprised," I laughed, trying to keep my rising hysteria out of my voice. "I thought it was a bag of holding."

"Oh, my! Since you were protected from the acid, I thought you were an explorer. A scholar or biologist like myself, perhaps. I'd hoped that you had come here to complete my work."

"Huh?"

"My name is Philby, Josiah Rufus Philby of the Naturalist Guild of Elfmist City. I am, or rather was, the foremost expert on the bag of devouring."

"If you were such an expert, how did you ... well..."

"Get eaten? A laboratory accident. My own fault, really. I'd just had a horrible argument with my guildmaster, you see. He had the nerve to call my research worthless, said there was no practical application for it! I was upset and distracted, and I forgot to take the proper safety precautions before resuming work with one of my bags of devouring."

"And it pulled you in?"

"In a heartbeat. I've been haunting this place ever since then. I hear that's what happens when you die with unfinished business left."

"Philby, since you know so much about devourers, can you help me get out of here?"

"Hmmm ... an interesting challenge. It would be difficult..." he faded off. I could picture him rubbing his nonexistent chin in thought. "I'll give it a try, though."

"That's great! Let's get—"

"And, in return, you must do me a favor."

"What?" I sputtered. "You're a ghost, Philby! What can I possibly do for you?"

"We'll settle that later. For now, you must do some exploring."

I paused to put some herbal salve from my kit on my feet, then shredded my cloak to make wrappings to replace my boots. I checked to see the ring was still working and waded into the muck, my pitiful candle held high.[7]

Philby directed me toward the walls, and I discovered that they were indeed living flesh. The color varied from a dull pink to a light gray. There were twenty little alcoves in the wall, scattered around the chamber's perimeter. Philby informed me that each alcove had a flap beneath the acid to control access to the stomach. Each of those in turn led to a tunnel and thence to another bag of devouring. No wonder the stomach was so big—the creature had twenty mouths![8]

"Philby, do you think I can cut through a flap?"

"Not likely. There's three feet of muscle protecting that exit.[9] Unless you have a blade more impressive than that little pig sticker, it'd take days. Try to find another flap weakened by disease or birth defect."

I checked every alcove, but none proved any weaker than the first. Philby decided we needed another approach.

"You said you were, how shall I put it, 'involved with the underworld' back home?"

"Yes, I'm a burglar," I replied, defensively. "In Colthar, it's considered an honorable trade—"

"I'm sure it is," Philby interrupted. "Can you climb that wall?"

"Why?"

"Well, you see, devourers start out as an embryo with a single, nonmagical mouth. Only later do they grow bags of devouring on other planes."

"And how will that get me home?"

"The nonmagical mouth grows shut, but it forms a weak spot. I've examined it on this specimen, and it's thinner than the mouth flaps, but it's in a very precarious place."[10]

"Where?"

"In the ceiling, directly above you."

So, it was back into that muck to study the walls. They were covered with a thick, clear film,[11] so at first I thought they were unclimbable. But when I looked closely I saw the wall's texture was similar to the ridges on the roof of my mouth, but much bigger. The entire surface was a network of handholds.

Even with that, it was a hard climb.[12] It would have been easier with climbing spikes, but I had none. I was halfway up the wall panting for breath when I reached for a long horizontal wrinkle to use as a handhold. Suddenly, it opened to reveal an eight inch wide eye staring right at me! The pupil was slitted like a cat's, but the whole surface was milky, like an animal with horrible cataracts. It scared me down to my toenails! I lost my grip and fell backward into the pool.

I came to the surface sputtering. In the candlelight from the island, I saw the eyelid close, apparently content that I was causing no more trouble.

"Philby! What was that!"

"Just an eye, nothing to worry about. There's one above each alcove."

"You mean it's watching me?!"

7. A devourer's stomach acid is approximately 5 feet deep. A character can wade or swim through this fluid at 50% normal movement rate.

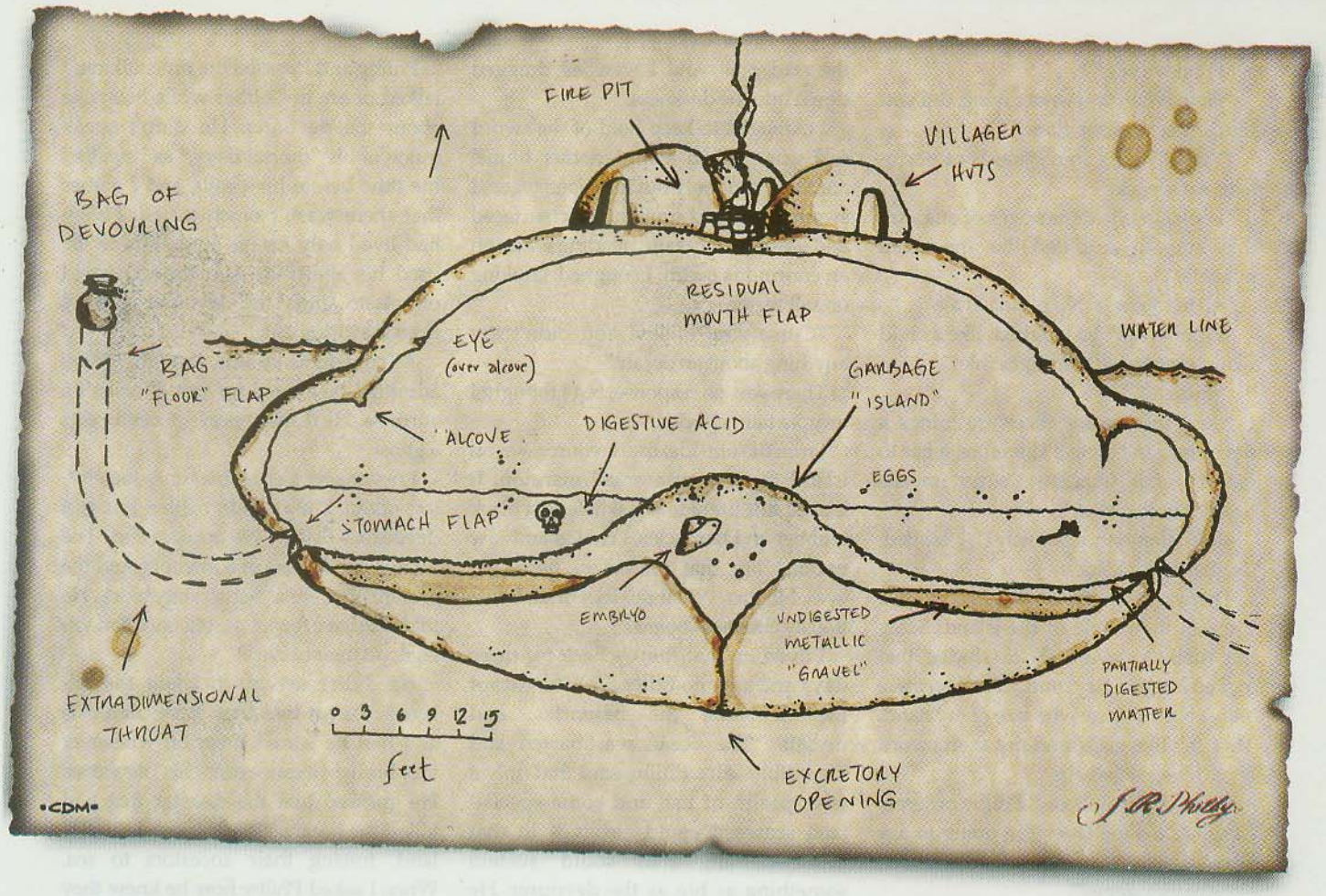
8. A devourer has 3d20 bags of devouring serving as mouths. Each mouth corresponds to five years of age and 1 Hit Die.

9. A character attacking one of these flaps must inflict one-third the creature's total hit points to get through. (Note that devourers are immune to all poisons and acids.) Like the inside of a *bag of devouring*, a devourer's stomach is AC 7. Upon causing more than 10 points of damage, however, the attacker and anyone else in the stomach are subject to expulsion from the stomach. (See below.)

10. This residual mouth flap is treated as any mouth flap, except that it takes only one-quarter of the creature's hit points to penetrate. If a melee weapon is used, the DM might require extra Climbing proficiency checks to reach it.

11. This film is similar to the lining of an animal's stomach, protecting flesh from digestive acid. It has strong acid resistant properties and can be used as an ingredient in acid resistant magical items.

12. Such a climb imposes a –30% penalty on a Climbing check. Driving spikes into the wall or using other climbing equipment has a 50% chance of causing expulsion from the stomach. (See below.)



"Well, yes. All its senses face inward, toward its next meal. Hardly smarter than a dog, in fact. This one isn't sentient, you see."[13]

"*This* one?"

"Of course. Some devourers react oddly to strong, continued doses of magical energy. They begin—"

"Forget it," I interrupted. "I don't want to know."

"You probably don't. Why don't you rest, and I'll try to think of another way out."

I sighed heavily, shaking my head.

When I'd fallen, I'd scraped my elbow on the bottom of the pool. I cleaned the wound and noticed something glinting. Pulling it out, I found a tiny nugget of copper, heavily pitted but very shiny.

I felt something stirring deep inside my heart, a basic element of my nature that had been sorely neglected for hours: my greed.

"Philby," I asked, my mouth going dry in anticipation. "What's at the bottom of the acid pool?"

"Oh, that stuff. Bits of slowly digested material. You see, when people lose something in a bag of devouring, some substances take longer than others to digest. Flesh, leather, and parchment dissolve almost immediately. Wood and bone last a little longer. Metals and gems take months to break down.[14] Even magical items eventually succumb. And since people often mistake bags of devouring for bags of holding—"

"Any treasure they toss in winds up at the bottom of the pool," I completed. "And there would always be a steady supply, too! I mean, nobody keeps a bag of devouring once they know what it is. They either trick an enemy into taking it or throw it away for someone else to find. There'd never be a shortage of fools tossing stuff into a devourer's gullet!"

"Well, yes. That's part of its survival strategy," Philby replied. "And just why are you so excited?"

I ignored him and instead dove under the surface. I surfaced with a handful of gold nuggets! Some time later five pounds of gold and silver flakes rested in my knapsack. My pouch held a handful of diamonds and rubies the size of rice grains.[15] My candle was sputtering, though, so I decided to continue looking for an escape.

"Are you finished?" asked the ghost, his voice dripping sarcasm.

13. At the DM's discretion, any devourer with ten or more mouths might have mutated by magical energy to have an Intelligence score of 4. Such a devourer watches characters through its eyes and communicates via telepathy. Because the devourer rarely interacts with other creatures (except to eat them) and knows nothing of the world outside, its personality resembles that of a petulant child ("You not screaming in pain like other food. I make you scream now."). While one might be convinced via mind control magic or trickery to help, the end result will more likely be acid attacks or expulsion from the stomach.

14. Obviously, goods swallowed by a *bag of devouring* are not spit out into extradimensional space. Instead, they must make saving throws against acid upon initial contact and once per day thereafter until they dissolve. Ceramics and glass, however, automatically make their saving throws.

15. The stomach of a devourer with ten or more mouths holds treasure equivalent to treasure type A except that no platinum or art objects are found intact, and gems are never more valuable than 50 gp. For every extra fifteen mouths, roll again for treasure. (So a DM would roll twice for a twenty-five mouth devourer and three times for a forty mouth monster).

"For now, yes."

"Fine. When you were diving, did you find any ceramic or glass?"

"Yeah. There's some shards of porcelain in my pack."

"Look closely at the edges of one. Are they smooth or pitted like the metal nuggets?"

"That's strange. No pitting at all."

"Wonderful!" he laughed, like a child with a new toy. "It's indigestible!"

"And...?"

"And that means there are things a devourer can't digest. Therefore, it has to get rid of it somehow, which means there's another exit!"

"Isn't there another way?" I replied, disgust in my voice.

There wasn't. Philby told me to dig through the rubble in the island. Soon, the rubbish gave way to sludge that looked like red clay mud.[16] Further, there were ebony spheres the size of my hand. They felt like glass, and my short sword couldn't scratch them.[17]

"Take some of those," Philby ordered. "They're for the favor I'm going to ask later."

"Are they gems?"

"No. Much more valuable."

He didn't have to tell me twice. I shoved several in my knapsack and kept digging. Finally, I reached some of the creature's flesh.

"Philby, you're sure about this?"

"Yes. Go ahead."

Following Philby's directions, I took a deep breath and slammed my short sword into the devourer with both hands! The reaction was as he'd expected, and the beast rippled in pain.[18] If my earlier cut had caused a tremor, this was the grandfather of all earthquakes! A hole opened, and the island, the acid pool, and I were all dragged down into the darkness.

I managed to keep hold of the sword as I was pushed along another tunnel and then suddenly out into open water. I swam up toward sunlight, then surfaced and gasped for breath, treading water on an enormous ocean. I coughed, choking on salt water.

"Curse you, Philby! You didn't say anything about an ocean!"

There was no response, but I thought I heard a faint chuckle.

From the outside, the devourer was an island the size of a small mansion. It looked like the side of a whale, just black blubber and barnacles. I circled and saw nothing but that mound of flesh. No eyes. No fins. When my legs tired, I cautiously climbed aboard.

I lived on that thing's back for three days and saw no other creature except the devourer, the barnacles, and myself.[19] The ocean was barren and incredibly salty. Philby said that only a few species of fish and some specialized seaweed could survive in that brine—nothing that could sustain something as big as the devourer. He felt that was why the beasts originally began getting food from other dimensions. Somehow, the sea had died, and the devourers were forced to look elsewhere for nourishment. They're like sea anemones, casting their tentacles as wide as possible for food. Instead of tentacles, though, their bags of devouring capture prey on dozens of other planes.

I, however, was not that fortunate. I tried fishing but never got a bite. Instead, I survived on blubber sliced from the beast's back. The stuff tasted horrible, but I appreciated the irony of my diet.

Philby and I passed the time talking. I talked of life in Colthar while he spoke about the devourer. He didn't speak much of his "mortal days," as he called the time before his death, and I gather that there wasn't much to tell. Philby had lived only for his studies. Now he used his ability to pass through solid objects to study the devourer literally from the inside out.

As content as he was, though, Philby admitted he longed for rest. It wasn't a surprise. He'd spent nearly a century as a ghost.

I never saw a coastline, only the endless ocean. Philby hadn't either but said devourers drifted by on occasion. The infants are the size of a rowboat, and the ancient ones are as big as a city block. He told me that a few of the big ones had villages on their backs.[20]

He didn't say much about the villagers, except that they were cannibals and that he scared them off whenever they brought a canoe near "his" devourer. He guessed that the disaster that had killed the oceans also destroyed the dry land, forcing their ancestors to sea. When I asked Philby how he knew they were cannibals, he refused to answer. I didn't press the issue but decided that anyone who could scare a ghost was best avoided.[21]

On the fourth morning, in the distance, Philby spotted my way home.

"Where is it?" I asked, straining my eyes on the horizon.

"Toward your left. Do you think you can make it?"

"Colthar is a port city. I learned to swim before I could walk. It's far, but I'll make it."

"You remember what I told you to do? I'm counting on you."

16. This nutrient solution can be synthesized by a sage skilled in alchemy, requiring a successful "specific task" if a sample of the solution is provided or an "exacting task" if only an egg is provided for study (although the egg will not be damaged by this). A full 200 gallons of the nutrient solution is required to hatch and grow an egg into an infant devourer at a cost of 5 gp per gallon.

17. At any given time, a devourer is gestating as many eggs in its stomach as it has mouths. Every egg immersed in the nutrient "mud" from a devourer for three months has a 10% chance of hatching into a larva. These larvae must be kept in the solution for six more months, during which time they ingest all unhatched eggs using the "residual" mouth mentioned earlier. At the end of this time, the larvae's first *bag of devouring* becomes functional and the devourer can feed itself. It is expelled from the parent, and the residual mouth seals itself.

18. An attack on the interior of the stomach makes the devourer convulse in pain. All characters are forced through the rest of the digestive track and subjected to 5 rounds of acid attacks. Afterward, they are free of the creature and find themselves on the devourers' home plane.

19. There is a 99% chance that an encountered devourer lives on its home plane and a 1% chance of its being "cultivated," as in the Keeper's tale.

20. If a devourer has thirty or more *bags of devouring*, the DM should roll percentile dice. On a roll of 1–40, the beast has a humanoid village on its back. Structures made of bone and driftwood provide some shelter from the sun, but not much. A village will have 4d10 humans (1–2 on a 1d6 roll), orcs (3 on the roll), goblins (4), or elves (5–6). All fight as 2nd-level fighters, although each tribe has a chief who fights at 5th level. Such skills are required for a cannibal to survive to adulthood.

On a percentile roll of 41–70, the DM should set up a "special" encounter instead of a village. Good examples would be a few low-level undead, a lone troll or ogre, or a mated pair of griffins. The DM should explain how the creatures survive (undead don't need food, the ogre can swim from the shore, while the griffins raid passing villages, and so on).

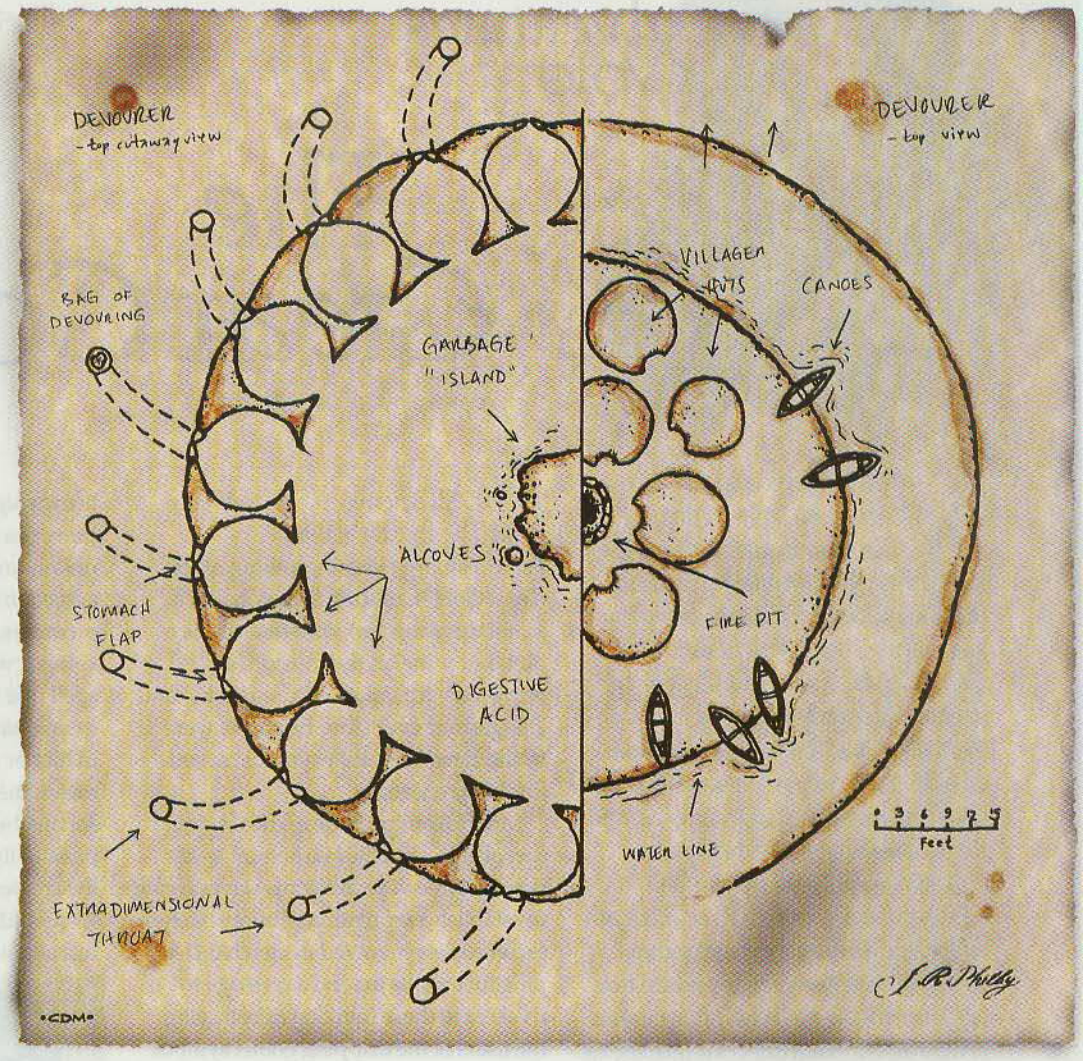
Percentile rolls of 71–00 indicate nothing living on the devourer's back.

21. The villagers are indeed cannibals, having no other sources of food except devourer flesh, seaweed, and (rarely) one of the few fish that live in the briny sea. They immediately attack any other creatures they see, eager to improve their diet. They are armed with spears and clubs, and (when possible) fight to subdue their foes for feasting rather than killing them immediately. If a captive is taken alive, the cannibals usually take several days to finish him off, as they lack any way to store leftovers.

There was a hint of worry in Philby's voice. As a ghost, he was bound to the devourer and couldn't go farther than a stone's throw from the beast.

I stripped down to my breeches, said my farewell, and dove into the sea with my sword and pack lashed to my back. Took an entire morning to get there. Swim and rest. Swim and rest. At least it was easy to float in that brine. After about four miles I reached my destination, sunburned and exhausted.

It was a baby devourer, no larger than a hay wagon. Its skin was thinner than that of the older beast, and I hacked my way in.[22] It covered me with ichor, but I was wearing the ring and finally reached its stomach. Fatally wounded, the creature started to sink.[23] It only had two throats, unlike the twenty of my previous host. I picked one and sawed through the thin muscle flap. I crawled through, followed by a flood of seawater, emerging from a bag of devouring into the bedroom of a very surprised merchant in the glassblowers' quarter ...[24]



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"Sir?"

The old man started, realizing that he'd trailed off as he told his tale, lost in forty years of memories.

"What?"

"Regrets, sir," repeated the apprentice. "I asked whether you have any regrets."

"About becoming an honest man?" laughed the Keeper. "Not a one. If I hadn't botched that burglary and gotten myself swallowed, I'd never have become the Keeper. I wouldn't have met my beloved Melissa, had children, grandchildren.

"No, lad, I'm glad I came to this plane, even knowing that I'd never find my way home, and I'm glad I met Philby. Why, he made me rich! I think he was right, that my work here proved his studies had a practical use, proved that miserable guildmaster wrong. I only hope that was his 'unfinished business' and that his spirit found peace."

The Keeper sighed, staring out at the bustle of activity below. His bookkeeper sat at a table in the midday sun, counting out a pile of coins and entering the sums in a ledger. Workmen hauled a wheelbarrow of silver ingots down the pier, the planks creaking under the weight. Apprentices in protective suits climbed through the hatch grafted into the side of an adult devourer, moored to the pier like a derelict ship. And watching over everything were his guards, protecting not only the treasure but also his three beloved devourers.

"But, most of all," said the Keeper of the Devourers, imparting a final thought on his apprentice, "I'm glad I listened to Philby so long ago and brought those devourer eggs back with me when I escaped that creature."

Kevin Haw lives in Southern California with his wife. They have two bags of devouring—a terrier and a pointer.

22. The exterior of a devourer is AC 5. The creature has no exterior attacks, but anyone hacking their way into the beast (by causing enough damage to kill it) is subject to acid attacks.

23. The extradimensional links between a devourer and its *bags of devouring* last 1d10 rounds after the creature's death. After this time, the *bags* fail and dissolve into dust.

24. Realistically, the odds that a particular *bag of devouring* is connect to a given plane are miniscule. However, a merciful DM might decide that a *bag* connects to the PCs' home plane.

Ecology of the Barghest

Looks like a goblin.

Kills like a fiend.

By Nicolas Logue
Art by John Carimando

A grey shadow darts from tree to tree, and low snarls echo softly through the snow-laden forest. No tracks mar the white shroud of freshly fallen snow, but fiery eyes burn in the misty woods: Barghests. Vicious fiends in the guise of worgs, their appearance spells doom to onlookers.

These wolfish monsters run through glades leaving no trail for the ranger to track. By taking the form of simple goblins, these sinister shapechangers mask their darker nature and prey on the unwary. They appear by magic, terrorize their foes, and then gorge themselves on flesh ripe with the taste of fear. Once both flesh and souls are devoured, the barghests vanish into the night.

With every victim they devour, their infernal power grows.

Myths and Origins

In a time before men immortalized their deeds with written word, when the shape of the planes were less well defined, the first barghests came into existence. Great goblin kings of old served abominations of Gehenna with more than just their swords and strength; they also mixed their blood with worg packlords, creating the potent bond between the two species.

These mixed-blood outsiders were the first barghests, great overmasters of the goblin and worg races who cut a swath of carnage and terror across the planes. Their hunger could not be slaked, and entire races were erased from existence, devoured in their entirety by great packs of demon-dogs and leaving behind nothing but stones.

Many of Gehenna's native species were culled, and the barghests' gluttony brought them victory after victory. Planar travelers returned with tales of vast realms, emptied of all inhabitants, whose entire civilizations fed the barghest overlords of old. The carnage the barghests wrought was well known among demons, angels, and the great races of the multiverse, and the sight of a barghest became synonymous with desolation and death. Even to this day, they remain a horrific portent of doom to all unfortunate enough to meet one.

Their ravenous appetite was their undoing. With nothing left to eat, the great barghest packs turned on one another. The barghests devoured enemies, allies and kin alike in a brutal civil war, a time called the Bitter Feast.

Many packs fled the planes, and others were forced to make alliances with other powerful entities and organizations to survive. These barghests made dark compacts, binding themselves to other powers to avoid enslavement at the hands of devil princes and demon lords. Some even swore service to powerful mortal warlocks and wizards among House Stross, or to the undead

princes of Morgau.

During this hungry war of attrition, their goblin and worg minions fled their masters' sides, most ending up in the Prime Material Plane. Many goblin clans still worship their "dark ancestors." Most goblin tribes and worg packs pay homage to patron spirits in the form of their ancient kings – the first barghests, including Tordaccan the Vile and Mistrokesh, the Ravening King.

For this reason, few goblinoids and worgs can resist the call of a barghest, and often bow down in servitude to these fiends when they appear. Fewer in number now, most of the remaining unbound barghests hide from their many enemies. Rather than lording it over the planes, they appear only rarely to herald death and feast on souls.

Physiology

Barghests are shapechangers able to assume two forms: that of a larger specimen of goblin, or a wolf with a feral humanoid visage. These two guises allow a barghest to infiltrate groups of either wolves or goblins, catching the party off guard and unprepared to face so formidable a foe. A few telling differences can save a group of heroes' lives. In goblinoid form, barghests have a stronger build than mundane goblins, and a distinct shade of skin. Young barghests in humanoid form have the greenish skin of their goblin relations, but as they age, their skin darkens to a deep blue.

In wolf form, barghests resemble wolves physically. However, they are much more aggressive, and they retain vaguely humanoid faces. In either form, the creature's eyes glow with a hellish red fire, especially when they are excited at the prospect of a kill.

A greater barghest is easy to distinguish from its brethren. In humanoid form the greater barghests are much larger than any goblin, standing around eight feet tall. They often weigh over 500 pounds, and run to fat.

While young, barghests stay in their hybrid, goblin form most of the time. Whelps in this form appear no different from a common goblin; wolvish features appear only after the age of 10, when young goblins go on their first raids.

A fiendish patron or pack leader often leaves a young barghest with a community of goblins to foster the child. A barghest typically does this by stealth. To make room, the fiend devours a young goblin and leaves its own pup to be raised by the goblin family; goblin mothers are either enchanted or intimidated into accepting the child as their own. T

The whelp grows normally until around age 10 or 11, when it develops into a hideous monstrosity with the body of a wolf, a goblin-like face and long cruel-taloned hands growing from its forelimbs. At this time the whelp discovers its infernal abilities, and rarely hesitates to devour its foster guardians. The young barghest's hunger also grows unnatural at this age; it can eat without pause for hours or even days.

Barghests are eating machines. Their fiendish anatomy is suited to their ravenous appetites, and it allows them to devour foes in their entirety. To do so, the jaws of a barghest open wider than any wolf's, to reveal a gaping maw is filled with row after row of razored teeth. These triangular fangs are perfect for flensing muscle and crunching bones. With its unhinged jaw, a barghest can consume a humanoid victim in a matter of seconds (typically, 1 full round action is all that is required).

A barghest absorbs the essence of its devoured foe, fueling itself with the souls of their victims. Particularly potent barghests absorb their prey's souls into their own, trapping their spirit for all eternity, unless the barghest who consumed them is slain. The sight of a barghest feeding is disturbing, both in its speed and its intensity. Even seasoned veterans have been known to flee in terror at the grisly sight, and the bone-gnashing cacophony, of a barghest devouring human prey.

If forced to flee from barghests or even goblins, wise adventurers do not leave any wounded or fallen comrades behind. They will be devoured, making it difficult to return them to life. In the case of a barghest this happens quickly, but goblins following barghest custom often consume foes as well, as a tradition with roots in barghest feasting.

In either case, a comrade's body is completely consumed. *Raise dead* spells

Knowledge of the Barghest

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the Planes) can learn more about the barghest. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

DC	Result
10	Barghests are evil wolfish creatures whose appearance is said to bring death or ill luck.
15	Barghests are shapechangers who can assume either goblin or wolf form. They live on a distant plane of war.
20	Barghests have powerful spell-like abilities, and the greater barghests are much more powerful than lesser barghests. Both are difficult to harm without magical weapons. The PC can also identify a barghest in natural wolf-goblin form, though not in goblin form.
25	Barghests grow in power by consuming the bodies of their foes; lesser barghests may become greater barghests this way. Barghests can *pass without trace*, and are often sent to the Material Plane in hunting packs to hunt victims and gain power. These victims must be weaker (less HD) than the barghest.
30	The PC is familiar with all the specific spell-like abilities of barghests and greater barghests and can distinguish a barghest from a goblin or wolf even at maximum Spot range.

will not restore them and their fellow adventurers are forced to *resurrect* them. When faced with a barghest with the Soul Feed feat, even this is impossible.

Psychology and Society

Barghest society is hierarchal and organized into packs. This stratification stemmed the feeding frenzy that culled so many of them during the Bitter Feast. Pack lords oversee every barghest pack; these are greater barghests of extreme power who require utter subservience from they lead. Pack lords rule through fear and are watchful of their charges. They make examples of agitators by devouring them in full view of the others.

A barghest's only means of advancement is to kill and consume its superior. These cruel monsters have no sense of family, loyalty, or compassion. Barghests do not hesitate to devour their own young if they feel the children are a threat to their power.

The greatest rite of passage for young barghests is the transformation to greater barghest. Elders place several whelps into loose hunting parties and send them to the Material Plane to engage in the Great Hunt. One or more of the pups will consume enough victims to make the transition to greater barghest. The strongest or most cunning barghest proves itself and dominates the group. Its commanding position becomes permanent when it becomes a greater barghest. It then forces the rest of the barghests to do its hunting and bring suitable victims for it to consume.

Lazy by nature, barghests retain minions to serve their needs. They make good use of their *charm monster* ability to secure human, goblin, or even ogre servants who can find meals for them or investigate an area's power structure without attracting undue attention.

Barghests on the Material Plane are known to subjugate entire tribes or even nations of goblins to serve them, claiming to be deities or powerful heroes of legend in order to gain their loyalty. If this fails, the barghest simply devours the tribal elders and assumes control. Whether through force or guile, once the barghest has control of a tribe it uses its goblin pawns as fodder, forcing them to track down and waylay individuals powerful enough for the fiend to feed off. Barghests are often responsible for unexplained disappearances. When adventurers investigate a rash of bizarre kidnappings and goblinoids are involved, they should be wary of possible barghest activity.

Barghests hiding among goblins or worgs sacrifice many of their minions simply to lure a party of adventurers into a false sense of security. Once the heroes are certain they are facing a pathetic rabble of goblins and worgs, the fiends pounce. The barghests often use *invisibility* to observe the fray, and when the party is sufficiently weakened by their minions' onslaught, the slavering fiends close in for the kill.

Barghest Feats

Soul Feed [**Monster**]
By devouring a foe, you absorb their very soul into your being, feeding off their spirit as well as their flesh.
Prerequisites: Greater Barghest, gained at least 3 HD through feeding.
Benefit: When you feed on an opponent, their soul is trapped in your own spirit, and the victim cannot be *resurrected* unless you are first slain. If the victim's hit dice are equal to or greater than your own, you immediately gain a *death knell* spell-like ability. These benefits are in addition to the normal results of the Feed ability.

Portent of Doom [**Monster**]
The sight of you speeds onlookers towards their doom.
Prerequisites: Greater Barghest or 10 ranks in Intimidate.
Benefit: Anyone who beholds you must immediately make a Will save (DC equal to 10 plus ½ your hit dice plus Charisma modifier). If they succeed, they are immune to this power for 1 day. If they fail, they immediately feel death's claws tearing their soul from their body, becoming shaken for 1 round. In addition, the next time they make a saving throw vs. a death effect, they must roll twice and take the lower of the two results.

Harbinger of Death [**Monster**]
The blood of your ancestors flows strong in you. Where you lead death follows, and you terrorize foes.
Prerequisites: Greater Barghest, Portent of Doom, 20 Cha, must have advanced 5 HD by feeding.
Benefit: You add the following spell-like abilities to your list:
At will—*deathwatch, doom*.
1/day—*death ward, nightmare, slay living*.

Howl of the Worg King [**Monster**]
Your fearsome howl inspires fear in foes and calls worgs to your defense.
Prerequisite: Barghest.
Benefit: While in wolf-like form, as a standard action, you may raise your head high and howl fiercely into the night. Any foe within 60 feet must immediately make a Will save (DC equals 10 plus half your Hit Dice plus your Charisma modifier) or become shaken for 1d4 rounds.

All worgs within 1 mile hear this call and must make the same Will save or travel to your side by the fastest possible route to defend you against your enemies. Worg allies who hear the howl gain +2 to attack, damage, and saving throws until the encounter ends.

History of the Barghest

The myth of the barghest originated in England, most notably in Yorkshire, though legends of black dogs of death, and spectral hounds exist in several cultures the world over. The word's origin may be derivative of north England's pronunciation of the word ghost as *guest*, naming this ghostly black dog as a *burg-guest* (town ghost). It may also sprout from the German *berg-geist* (mountain ghost) or *Bar-geist* (bear ghost) in allusion to its alleged appearance as a bear.

Britain is rife with these death dealing fiendish goblin-dogs, and the barghest of York is joined by the Demon of Tedworth, the Black Dog of Winchester, the Lancashire Striker, and the Padfoot of Wakefield. In each case this large, usually black, wolf or dog with huge fangs and claws is a reputed omen of death and ill luck.

In Jersey folklore, the Black Dog of Death is a phantom whose appearance presages storms. Smugglers may have spread the story to discourage people from leaving their homes at night and witnessing illegal transport of contraband.

The barghest makes an appearance in several works of literature, most notably in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous Sherlock Homes story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the supposed phantom dog of which is no doubt is inspired by barghest tales. The "Grim" of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, is a nod at England's classic ominous ghost-dog tale. Sirius Black transforms into a black dog and is named for one; his nickname just happens to be Padfoot (of Wakefield perhaps?).

Greater Barghest: Vralgor Szarn

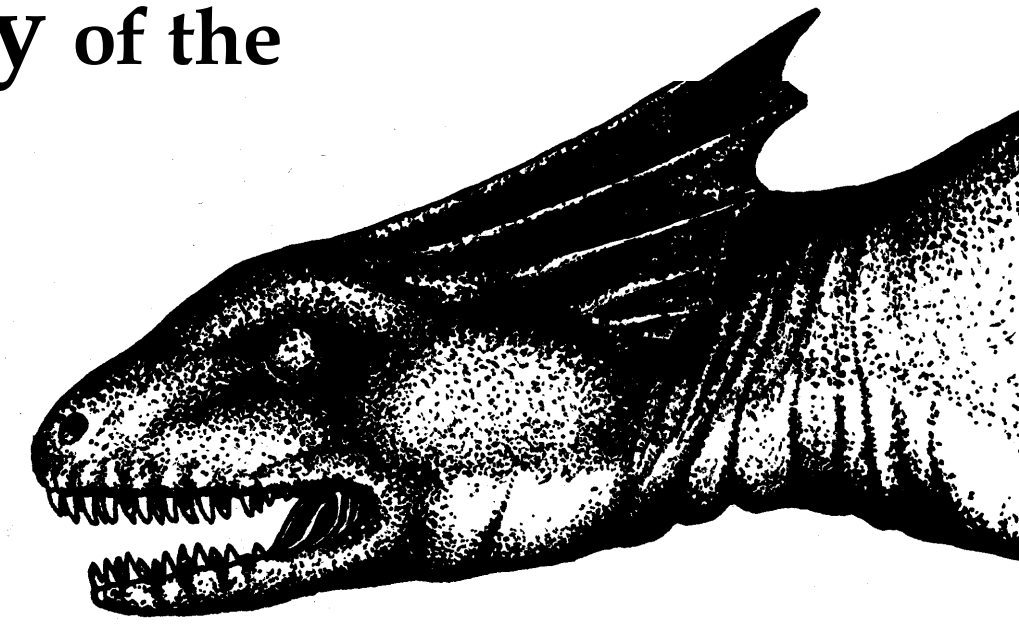
Vralgor rose to power by ambushing and consuming a powerful priest and his paladin guards during a Great Hunt. Vralgor moved the hunting party into the sewers below the Free City of Zobeck. Now Vralgor and his lessers feed on the city folk at their leisure.

The greater barghest curtails any threat to his position as pack leader by devouring lesser barghests. Vralgor has *charmed* the guildsmaster of a small rogue's guild, and he uses the rogues as his private spy network. With plenty of victims delivered to his waiting maw, Vralgor grown too huge to leave the sewer tunnels without using his *dimension door* ability. His *ring of x-ray vision* helps him keep tabs on the streets above.

VRALGOR SZARN CR 10

Male advanced greater barghest rogue 2
CE Medium humanoid (shapechanger)
Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent, Listen +27, Spot +27
Languages Abyssal, Common, Giant, Goblin, Infernal, Worg
AC 23, touch 9, flat-footed 21
hp 205 (17 HD); **DR** 5/magic, evasion
Fort +16, **Ref** +14, **Will** +16
Spd 40 ft.
Melee +27 large adamantine greatsword (3d6+20/19-20) and +23 bite (2d6+4), or +25 bite (2d6+9) and 2 claws +23 (1d8+4)
Base Atk +16; **Grp** +29
Atk Options feed, Harbinger of Death, Improved Sunder, Portent of Doom (DC 26), Power Attack, sneak attack +1d6, Soul Feed
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17):
At will—*blink, deathwatch, doom* (DC 19), *invisibility sphere, levitate, misdirection* (DC 20), *rage* (DC 21)
1/day—*charm monster* (DC 22), *crushing despair* (DC 22), *death ward, dimension door, mass bull's strength, mass enlarge, nightmare* (DC 23), *slay living* (DC 23)
Abilities Str 29, Dex 14, Con 24, Int 22, Wis 24, Cha 26
SQ alternate form, trapfinding
Feats Harbinger of Death, Improved Sunder, Multiattack, Portent of Doom, Power Attack, Soul Feed
Skills Bluff +28, Climb +19, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +22, Disguise +18 (+20 acting), Hide +18, Intimidate +30, Jump +23, Listen +27, Move Silently +22, Sense Motive +27, Spot +27, Survival +20, Swim +19, Tumble +19
Possessions *+2 large adamantine greatsword, +3 amulet of mighty fists, +4 bracers of armor, minor cloak of displacement, ring of x-ray vision,* a human skull studded with sapphires (1,200 gp), map of Zobeck tunnels and town above, sack with 235 gp.

The ecology of the basilisk



by Ed Greenwood

From an untitled tome in the library of Sulphon of Waterdeep, signed "Rhaphodel, Sage of Sages": *(AD&D™ game notations and other comments added by the author appear in italic inside parentheses.)*

Know, O sage, that a creature often asked about is the dreaded basilisk, whose gaze turns one to stone. It behooves a sage to wax wise and eloquent about this beast, for therein lies the seeds of much respect for yourself and your learning.

The basilisk is a large, reptilian brute that is both slow and stupid. It is feared for its infamous gaze, which can at will turn creatures (including both fish and fowl) who meet it to stone. So much any half-wit can tell you, but mark well the words that follow, for here is set down all that is known of the truth about the gaze of the basilisk.

Precisely how the creature's gaze works is a mystery; most learned observers agree that the creature's eyes emit a radiation that if absorbed by the eyes of other creatures — or even itself, if its gaze is reflected back upon it — causes an inexplicable chemical change in the bloodstream, altering living flesh to stone. *(Stoned creatures are immediately paralyzed, unable to speak, see, or feel. They will become unconscious from lack of air at the end of 1 round, but until then are capable of mental — i.e., psionic and some magical — activity Any spell or device supplying air, or removing the need for it, such as a necklace of adaptation, will allow continued mental activity, with a cumulative (intelligence score +1% per turn) chance of insanity due to helplessness and total isolation.)*

Clothing, accoutrements, and the like carried or worn by victims are not affected, despite some wild tales to the contrary. Beings who through natural ability or the use of magic are in *gaseous form* are also apparently immune to the effects of the basilisk's gaze. *(The use of invulnerability potions allows a saving throw vs. petrification at +2. Any rings or cloaks of protection being worn add their bonus to the saving throw.)*

A basilisk has two translucent eyelids, somewhat like the membranes covering the eyes of a frog, that can at will cover each of its eyes: an upper eyelid, which drops from above, and when thus closed overlaps an inner, lower eyelid, which rises from below the eye. With the upper and lower eyelids covering the eyes, a basilisk can see up to 15 man-lengths away *(9" in AD&D scale)* in normal light, much as men do. Each eye's lids operate independently of each other, and are controlled by the creature; it need not blink at all, if no irritants get into its eyes.

When the upper eyelid (only) is drawn back, a basilisk's eye sees up to 18 man-lengths away *(11" in scale)* on the prime material plane, with the benefits of both ultravision and infravision. Or, by concentration, it can scan the astral plane, seeing up to 12 man-lengths distant *(7" in scale),* or the ethereal plane, seeing up to 18 man-lengths away. A basilisk cannot see on more than one plane at once, but unless they are actually fighting or hunting in one particular plane, basilisks tend to flick their gazes from plane to plane every minute *(every round),* and thus remain aware of their surroundings in all three planes.

When its inner, lower eyelid is also drawn back — and both eyelids can be raised *and* lowered again in less than five seconds — a basilisk's gaze petrifies all who meet the stare of one of its eyes on the prime material plane, slays all who meet its stare on the astral plane, and turns ethereal creatures who meet its gaze into inanimate, insensible "ethereal stone ." Note that a basilisk's eyes are on opposite sides of its head, and thus it commands a very wide field of vision *(a 260-degree arc),* and can conceivably stone creatures to either side of it — two, in total in the same minute.

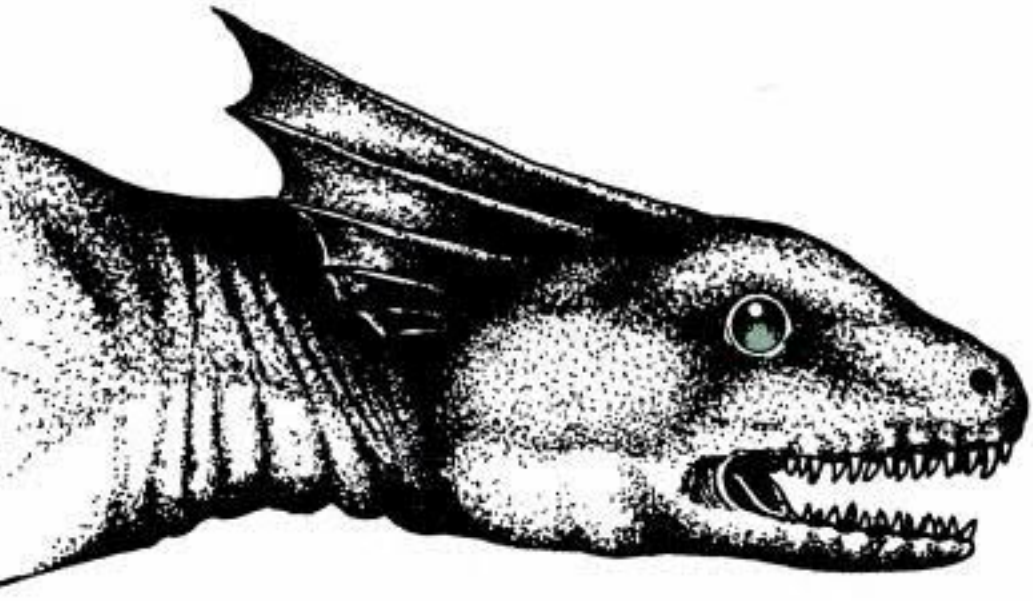
Fortunately for those who encounter it, the basilisk is not particularly energetic or cunning, and it simply will not comprehend the properties of a mirror or other reflective device if such is maneuvered into position, and will readily "stone" itself if such precautions are successfully applied.

Petrified creatures cannot be eaten by basilisks, and they will therefore strike with their petrifying gaze only at creatures who by size or aggressive behavior seem threatening to them. Petrified victims are subject to all of the effects that stone normally suffers. *(These effects include chipping, frost damage and other weathering, attacks from a horn of blasting, etc., and these may well destroy the unfortunate individual. Contrary to some fireside yarns, stoned people who are chipped or shattered do not bleed. Petrification does not otherwise slay creatures, who are held in a sort of suspended animation, or "stone sleep." Protective devices retained by a petrified victim —a cube of frost resistance, for example — will continue to function.)*

Basilisks eat all types of small creatures (including both fowl and fish), carrion, and some berries. They cannot eat or physically attack creatures not on the prime material plane, and apparently only use their gaze attacks in a defensive manner with respect to creatures thereon. It should be noted here that some sages dispute this point. Further research, dangerous though it is, will be necessary to remove all doubt as to the powers of the basilisk on the astral and ethereal planes, and possible prey it may seek from those planes.

Basilisks instinctively avoid looking directly at other basilisks, and they never deliberately use their stoning gaze on one another. They can recognize fellow basilisks by both sight and smell, and although their sense of smell is not noticeably keen with respect to hunting down other creatures, it is sufficiently acute to distinguish between individual basilisks; i.e., mate and young are readily discerned from strangers.

Any basilisks encountered will be solitary hunters, a mated but hunting pair, a nesting pair, or a pair with grown but immature young still sharing a lair. Such young often accompany their parents for up to three seasons, until they are ready to mate, whereupon they leave their parents and each other to seek out their own mates. Basilisks mate for life, and by instinct breed every four summers — usually in water,



which helps to support their slow, heavy bodies. One or two days after mating, the female lays a cluster of greenish-white eggs (from *1-8),* each about the size of a man's fist. Basilisk eggs have soft, warm, stretchy surfaces, and they withstand crowding or even gentle handling and tumbling without harm; they cannot break the way a duck's or hen's eggs will shatter in similar circumstances. A basilisk parent often picks up an egg in its mouth to carry it, drops it in a new location or to defend itself, or rolls eggs about with its snout — all without doing the eggs any damage. After laying its eggs, a basilisk mother covers them in cool sand or half-buries them in cool, wet mud. The eggs are almost always (95% chance) fertile, and if they survive the nesting period of four to six weeks *(31-50 days),* they will hatch into miniature basilisks, 4 to 9 inches long, who have full gaze powers at birth. During the nesting period, the parents do not eat, all the while growing more and more irritable and fanatical in the defense of their nest and its surroundings. Hatchlings grow quite rapidly, reaching man-size in length (from nose to base of tail) in 4 to 6 months after they are born. During this growth period, their parents hunt intensively with them and for them.

Like other reptilian creatures, basilisks are cold-blooded. They derive much of their energy from the heat of the sun, and spend much time sunning themselves on rocks or heights to gather this heat. (They will also often creep up to campfires at night for the same reason.) But unlike most reptiles, basilisks can tolerate a fairly wide range of temperature, and can also store heat efficiently in their coiled digestive organs; thus, they remain active on warm or mild nights, even in early spring or late autumn. (Basilisks who live deep underground always have ready access to volcanic heat — and if these subterranean creatures are kept from this heat source for any longer than a day, they will grow sluggish and ultimately perish within another three days.) Like their smaller kin among the lizard population, basilisks can regrow lost limbs and tails within 1 to 4 months, provided they have an above-average supply of food during this time.

Because of its fearsome petrifying power (which, it should be noted, is permanent; affected creatures are not freed by its "wearing off"), the basilisk has long been a source of fascination and magical power to men. Mages and alchemists have found two parts of a basilisk eye particularly useful: the internal pupil, lens, and fluid of its eye which are used as ingredients in potions, spell inks, and the making of items (such as *eyes of petrification)* concerned with petrifying creatures; and the inner membrane or eyelid of the creature, used likewise in magic concerned with protection against petrification. Other parts of the basilisk are sometimes tried for such purposes, but with little or dubious success. An intact eye might bring as much as 1,000 gp from an alchemist; parts of it, such as the eyelid or fluid, up to 400 gp each. Prices vary with demand, of course, as with all rarities, and have been known to reach ten times these amounts.

Various individuals have attempted to use basilisks as guardians, usually chained in a particular location, and fed by hooded attendants, or led about by them with a collar and several chains. This tactic can be effective, but eventually fails more often than not simply because of the nature of the beast and its powers. Basilisks are stupid, lazy, and often asleep. If they feel secure — they are not intelligent enough to remain constantly vigilant if no obvious threat is afoot — then they will not look about and repeatedly scan all three planes, and at such times they may be slain or hooded from the rear without great danger to the intruder or interloper they are supposed to be guarding against.

And even if a basilisk guard is successful in its stoning attack, the victim is impossible to interrogate (or rescue, if the wrong person is petrified by accident), and difficult to move out of the way — except by the use of expensive spells and magic items. If more than one basilisk guard is used in the same general area, they inevitably stone each other when tricked by cunning intruders, and starving or beating the beasts does not improve their drowsy indolence or lack of alertness. They are simply too stupid to be trained where to go or not go, or to distinguish between acceptable victims and persons who are not to be petrified. Despite all this, intact basilisk eggs usually bring up to 500 gp each, and a miniature young one is worth as much as 700 gp. Mature, less tractable specimens usually carry a price of 450 to 500 gp.

The effective petrifying range of a basilisk's gaze seems to be a function of how keen the eyesight of its victim is; although this tends to be only up to about 5 man-lengths distant *(3 " in scale),* cases have been reported of wizards employing *wizard eye* spells being stoned by basilisk guardians, and persons employing *crystal balls, eyes of the eagle* and similar devices being petrified at great distances.

At present *(the time of Rhaphodel's writing is unknown),* little else is known of the nature of a basilisk's gaze. The foremost authority on the subject is widely believed to be the sage Krammoch. of Baldur's Gate.

by Eric Cagle
illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE BEHIR

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

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

HISTORY OF BEHIRS

Behirs exhibit numerous traits that suggest an unnatural genesis. The most common theory posits that some enormous, magically altered snake or lizard—possibly even a manifestation of the gods Merrshaulk or Apep—bred with a powerful blue dragon in a time long past. The offspring of this bizarre union lacked the intellect of their draconic parent but exhibited the lightning breath weapon, thick hide, and spiny crests. Over time, these aberrant dragon spawn managed to propagate their own species and broke from draconic society to take up lairs in the wilderness. Most dragons, especially blue dragons, completely deny such theories, seeing behirs as nothing more than abominations that should be destroyed whenever possible. However, a few dragons (typically metallics) confirm hints of truth in this possible genesis, although none admit the full story—if indeed any truly know.

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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE BEHIR

While superficially resembling dragons, behirs are more akin to gigantic snakes than true wyrms. A full-grown behir reaches at least 40 feet in length and weighs approximately 4,000 pounds. Their extremely tough and scaly hides bristle with armored ridges and vary in color from electric blue to nearly purple with bands of brown . The underbellies of male behirs exhibit a lighter hue, typically a pale blue, while female underbellies near shades of white highlighted with streaks of azure. All behirs sprout numerous large horns that curve backwards from their heads and continue down their serpentine necks. Largely ornamental, these horns act as an indicator of the beast's age (growing for a behir's entire life) and are frequently used in preening hard-to-reach scales.

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

KNOWLEDGE OF BEHIRS

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

Knowledge (arcana)

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

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

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

A portion of the energy behirs generate from their food goes to fueling a number of strange, almost glassy organs that run below the thickly armored plates of their necks. Far different from the draconis fundamentum organ that produces the breath weapons of true dragons, these coarse formations are arrayed in a state of constant friction, shifting and colliding against one another as a behir moves. This constant friction gathers within several chambers inside the behir, waiting to escape in a bolt when the creature opens a specialized chamber within its mouth. Sometimes this energy escapes in ribbons that ripple over a behir's tongue or crackle over its spines, especially when the creature becomes agitated or otherwise excited. These formations require almost exactly 1 minute to generate enough friction to create a blast of electricity deadly enough for a behir to use as a weapon.

Not far from these charged structures rests a behir's brain. Large and complex enough to facilitate a behir's sentience and capacity for speech, this organ is in no way as complex or advanced as a dragon's brain. Also, perhaps due to the electrified organs nearby, behirs are prone to violent mood swings, far-flung leaps of reasoning, and spasmodic muscle actions.

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE BEHIR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEHIR AMBUSHES

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

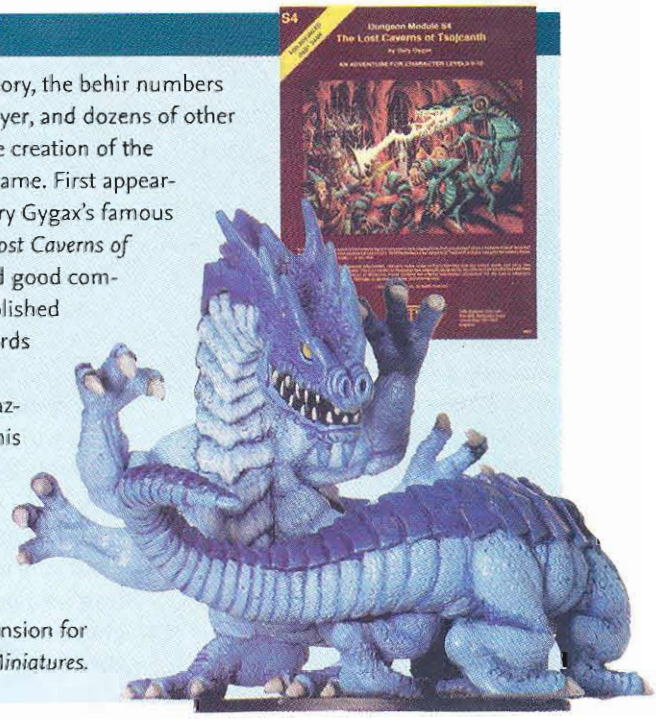
Tunnel Attack: Although not skilled tunnelers, behirs are particularly adept at navigating and detecting threats underground. Either making use of the natural crevices of the terrains they favor or intimidating servants into creating tunnels, behirs often lie in wait within such depressions. When prey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

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

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

BEHIR AND NOW

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

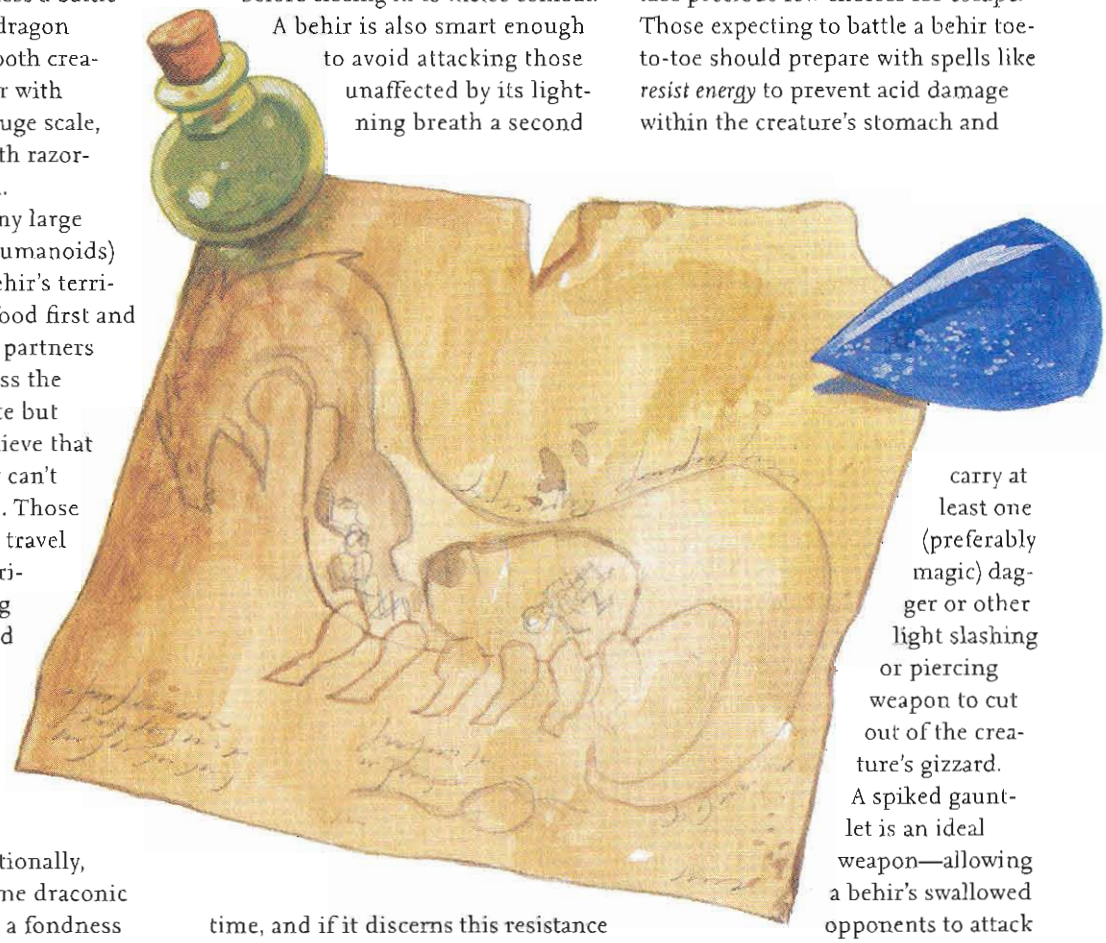


Behir mothers raise their young for two years, first providing hatchlings with regurgitated meat before teaching them to hunt small animals. Male behirs take little interest in their young, except for occasionally providing them with food and doing them the service of not ingesting them.

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

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

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



VS. BEHIRS

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

Beware the Breath: Like a dragon, a behir possesses a breath weapon—a line of lightning that deals terrible damage. Behirs can only use this ability once every 10 rounds, meaning that they purposefully maneuver themselves to line up foes for maximum effect. A behir frequently identifies the most dangerous-looking enemy and unleashes its breath weapon on him first in hopes of killing him off before closing in to melee combat. A behir is also smart enough to avoid attacking those unaffected by its lightning breath a second time, and if it discerns this resistance early it attempts to destroy such opponents with physical attacks first.

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

As this series of attacks proves so common when facing behirs, adventures should seek to avoid melee combat with such creatures at all costs. If such a battle proves unavoidable, spells like *bull's strength*, *freedom of movement*, and *grease* should see generous use.

Getting Out of the Gullet: Those who do fail at grappling with a behir are likely to be swallowed, where they face precious few choices for escape. Those expecting to battle a behir toe-to-toe should prepare with spells like *resist energy* to prevent acid damage within the creature's stomach and carry at least one (preferably magic) dagger or other light slashing or piercing weapon to cut out of the creature's gizzard. A spiked gauntlet is an ideal weapon—allowing a behir's swallowed opponents to attack without having to draw a weapon first.

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

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

The Ecology of the Behir

An excerpt from the tome **Creatures of the Wilderlands,** *by the sage and explorer Radamust:*

One of the most malevolent creatures I have ever encountered is the behir. Having nearly fallen victim to its depredations on two separate occasions, I have endeavored to learn more about this wild and curious beast, which is occasionally mistaken for a wingless dragon by the uneducated.

A behir is unmistakable to the learned, once you have seen it. It is a twelve-legged serpent, with each foot bearing three toes that end in razor-sharp talons. These talons are hooked like a raptor's but are designed for slashing, not grasping, prey. The body is covered in bandlike scales from light to dark blue in color with grayish tints along the edges. The underside is also light blue and composed of a vertical row of banded scales. The upper scales are very hard and tough and, if treated correctly, can be made into serviceable armor.[1] The head is long, and the narrow mouth is filled with many sharp teeth. Two backward-curving horns project from the rear of the skull, each black in color and 3-4′ in length.

Upon beginning my investigation, I discovered there was more than one species, each with its own special abilities and wildly divergent habitats. However, thankfully, these two other species are much rarer than the common (or lightning) behir, and are rarely encountered by anyone who is not an explorer or a savage, for they inhabit the fringes of the world: humid jungles, deserts, and volcanic plains. Because of their rarity, I was unable to discover much beyond their habitats and have named them accordingly: desert behir and jungle behir. Numerous tales have been told of them, each giving various descriptions of these beasts. Most are too fanciful to believe. I will assume their natures are much like that of the common behir until more is known. [2]

The common behir is a violent, destructive creature that frequents mountainous and hilly terrain as well as open plains and temperate forests. It never remains in one area very long, even if prey is plentiful, and thus never accumulates much in the way of spoils. Its den is usually a cave or well-hidden thicket where it rests while it is not hunting. It never brings prey back to its lair, preferring for the lair to remain unnoticed by scavengers and thus unlikely to draw attention to the behir there.[3]

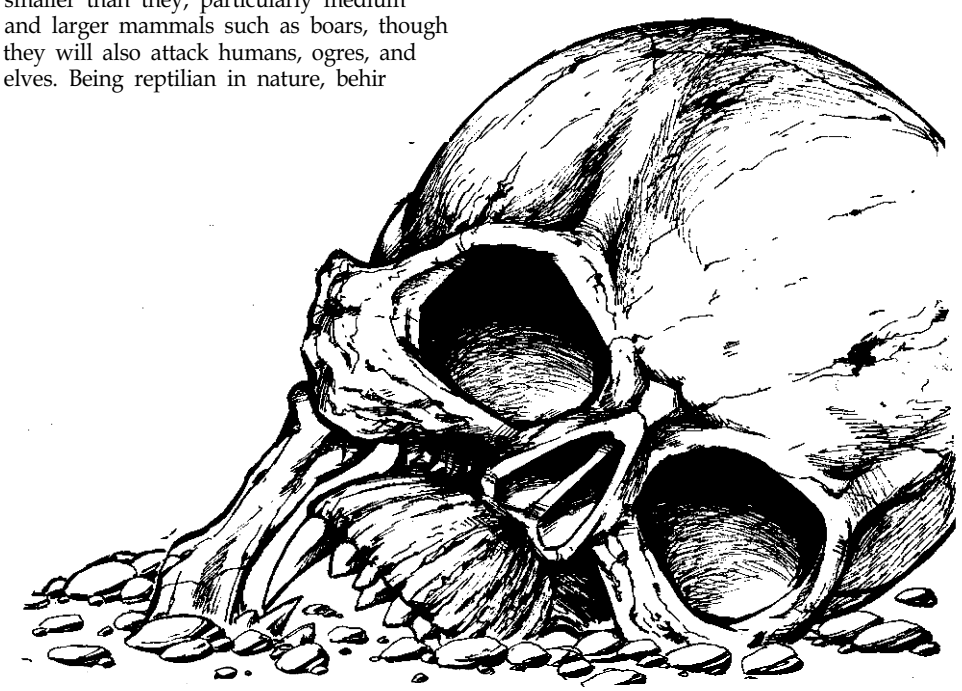
Behir are active during the day, though not exclusively, and they sleep during the moonlit hours. They prey on all creatures smaller than they, particularly medium and larger mammals such as boars, though they will also attack humans, ogres, and elves. Being reptilian in nature, behir several days recovering from their gluttony. Common behir hibernate during the winter and spend much of their time fattening up before its onset.[4]

Though massive and bulky creatures, behir are surprisingly quick and nimble, capable of overtaking human prey though not horses. They also climb remarkably well and dan move straight up the face of a mountainous cliff. When full grown, behir often measure as much as 40′ in length, though being reptilian they never stop growing. Enormous shed scales have been found that indicate some ancient specimens might be 60′ long.

Although only dimly intelligent when compared to humans, behir have a terrible natural cunning and are quite adept at acquiring prey by simple means. They prefer to attack from ambush, and openly confront only small groups of creatures. A pair occasionally works in concert to obtain prey, one flushing prey into the waiting claws and jaws of the other, but this working together seems to be unintentional, as behir are unsociable as a rule and will fight over a large kill.

A behir can attack in numerous ways, most commonly by biting and, by rearing up on the hindmost eight legs, clawing with the four foremost legs. The behir can also wrap its upper body around a large victim to crush it, a tactic that also allows it to make two to six talon attacks on the victim (depending on the latter's size) until the victim dies or manages to break free. Having witnessed a mercifully brief battle between an ogre and a behir, I can attest that even ogres find this a daunting task and are unlikely to win such a struggle. Less commonly, a behir will ram an opponent with its forehead or trample it underfoot. Both of these attacks can be fatal to smaller creatures, although they are fairly easy to avoid.[5]

On account of their size, behir can swal-



SCHWARTZ

low man-size or smaller creatures whole. The chance of this occurring is not very large, but once swallowed, there is almost no chance of its prey escaping alive. The digestive juices are strong enough to corrode and dissolve metal in a few days, flesh in a considerably shorter time. Needless to say, I have seen no one survive being swallowed. However, the acid is not strong enough to dissolve gems or glass and these sometimes will be found inside the stomach of a behir, the only treasure they will possess.[6]

Before I could continue my study of the beast, I needed a dead one for dissection. Rather than risk life and limb in this pursuit, I employed cunning that I thought even a behir would be proud of. Knowing from my studies that behir are not averse to adding carrion to their diet, I poisoned the body of a dead ox and left it for a behir to find. However, the ploy was a failure, for no matter what poison I used, the behir walked away unscathed. Apparently the strength of its digestive juices somehow destroyed the poison before it could take effect. Poisoned missiles also had no effect, and I was at a loss to explain why until I found that the behir has a thick layer of fat under its scales, like a pig. This explains why poison from arrows never gets to its bloodstream.

The most dangerous aspect of a behir, however, is its ability to generate a bolt of lightning, perhaps in the same manner as a blue dragon. This bolt is roughly seven yards long and is directed from its mouth. Upon studying the remains of the behir I finally managed to obtain, I have discovered a few clues to how this might be done, but nothing conclusive. A large organ with an unusually high concentration of metals lies adjacent to the stomach. This organ is connected by a system of nerve structures to another, smaller organ in the back of the mouth. Again, the smaller organ has a high concentration of metals. I hypothesize that an electrical current is produced in the larger gland by some as yet unknown method, then stored in the smaller gland until discharged. The behir seems to have complete control over this ability and is able to fire this bolt as often as five or six times per hour.

Perhaps to supply these organs, behir ingest fairly large quantities of metal, preferring copper and silver over all others. Few items of metallic nature are found after a behir has slain a victim. Occasionally, a behir can be distracted by great amounts of copper or silver coins, allowing passage or not attacking, but only if the behir is well fed beforehand. The high metal content in the behir's bodily systems seems to have an added advantage in that they are themselves unaffected by electrical discharges in any form. Exactly how the behir uses the metal it eats or how it is involved in the generation of and resistance to the lightning is unknown, but I plan to continue my research into this interesting phenomena.

At this point I would also like to hypothesize on the natures of the other species of behir. Although unable to examine one close at hand, I have heard stories that lead me to suspect each species has its own ranged magical attack, probably working on the same general principles as those of the common behir. From this and other aspects of its nature, I believe that behir are magical in nature and are the result of some ancient magical experiment of wizards or godlings—as so many beasts we know seem to be. Perhaps time and further research will tell.

Behir grow steadily and are able to mate by their tenth year, the point at which they can be considered adults, Behir can live as long as 50-60 years in the wild, but few actually reach that age as most are killed by predators before then. Mating takes place in early spring, with the pair choosing a secluded cave in which to live during this time. The female lays 1-4 eggs, blue-green in color and about 2′ in length. The eggs are leathery like a snake's, and they and are buried under a light layer of sand or dirt. During the time it takes the eggs to hatch—three to four weeks, normally—the female remains on guard at the nest. The male forages for both.[7]

But parental attitudes do not last long, as the young are quickly driven from the lair after hatching and must fend for themselves. Few survive to adulthood, as any number of other monsters and foes—not the least of them being adventurers—will slay the young at any opportunity. It is possible to train behir if captured while only months old. Such behir can be taught to understand simple commands and even to speak a few words of Common, but they are capricious and wicked by nature, respecting only power, and this loyalty usually lasts from one meal to the next or until a more powerful master comes along. Thus, ownership of a behir can be a double-edged sword. A behir that is much larger than its owner is certain to strike out and become unmanageable.[8]

The behir, surprisingly for its size, actually does not upset its environment beyond its tendency to lay waste to civilized dwellings in search of two-legged prey. Granted, it is hated by all intelligent beings, which it in turn hates, but it eats relatively little. However, being so well armored, so large, and so well equipped with weapons as it is, one cannot imagine what possible good it serves except to torment humanity. Certainly nature would not miss this beast, and it may be that extinction at the hands of warriors and wizards will someday be the fate of this species. Would that it were gone tomorrow!

Footnotes

1. A trained armorer or smith can construct armor from a behir's hide. Such armor takes two to four weeks and 2,000 gp to construct. Equivalent to chain mail in encumbrance, such armor provides protection equal to banded mail. Up to three man-size armors can be constructed from a single slain behir. Some armorers or smiths pay 500-1,000 gp for a behir's hide in good condition.

2. The other species of behir are detailed later. Both the desert behir and jungle behir are like the common behir in most respects, particularly in their destructive habits, general life cycles, etc.

3. There is a 5% chance of encountering a behir in its lair. If an encounter is indicated, there is a 75% chance that the behir is sleeping. Any undue noise, as well as any attacks, will bring the behir instantly awake.

4. Because of their reptilian nature, behir become extremely sluggish when temperatures fall below the freezing point, especially if the weather is cloudy. Thus, cold-producing spells, such as *cone of cold* and ice storm, reduce a behir's movement by half for 2-8 rounds. If the low temperatures can somehow be maintained, the behir will go nearly dormant, seeking only to defend itself from attack and escape the cold by whatever means possible.

5. It seems unlikely that a behir will constrict prey that is only of human size. If confronted with a human-size opponent, it will bite (2-8 hp damage) and rear back

to get four claw attacks (each doing 1-6 hp damage). If it meets an ogre, hill giant, bull, or similar large animal, it will bite (2-8 hp damage) and simultaneously wrap its body around the victim (doing 2-5 hp damage from crushing and abrasion). On the following round, the behir gives a slight roll to its body to bring its "interior" talons to bear on the entrapped prey, and it can bite (2-8 hp damage) and attempt six separate strikes with those talons (each strike doing 1-6 hp if it hits), though no damage from constriction will be done, as the body will have pulled back far enough to allow the talon attacks. If fighting a dragon, a behir could even wrap itself around the dragon an attempt to bring all of its claws to bear, biting and constricting as well, and perhaps using its electrical attack, too. The lightning strike is primarily used against spell-casting adventurers, dragons, and other dangerous foes.

A behir may also choose to butt an opponent (1-10 hp damage) or trample an opponent (4-16 hp damage). Both attacks are at -2 to hit against man-size or small creatures, but if successful such attacks stun victims for 1-4 rounds, not allowing them to attack, defend, or escape.

6. It should be noted that the strength of the acid is necessary to dissolve the metal items the behir eats. For this reason, no items of metallic origin are found in a behir's stomach. Only gems and glass objects are safe from the corroding effect of the acid. It takes a full day for the digestive acids to dissipate enough for safe removal of any gems or objects that might be in the stomach. If the behir is cut open before then, anyone who touches the stomach liquids will take 1-4 hp damage and, if a hand was used, be unable to grasp anything for 2-8 rounds from pain.

7. A behir grows according to the statistics in the Behir Growth Table. Rapid growth takes place during the first five years of a behir's life before it slows considerably. Young behir must fend for themselves while still quite young and, as noted by Radamust, few survive to adulthood. Those that do are extremely cunning and dangerous for beasts with simple minds.

For the three to four weeks it takes for the eggs to hatch, the female is always found in the lair, and the male is never far away. Although the male brings prey back to the lair for the female, they meticulously clean the area of remains to avoid drawing the attention of any predators. Both male and female fight ferociously to protect the eggs, gaining a +2 bonus to hit and damage when doing so.

8. Behir can be trained if caught within a year of their hatching. For this reason, young behir and behir eggs can be sold on the open market for 500-750 gp. Such training takes about two months for a skilled animal trainer, after which the behir can understand and speak Common as well as a five-year-old child. However, its natural tendency toward treachery can never be removed; there is a 50% chance the behir will abandon its current master for a new one if approached properly. (This chance should be adjusted either up or down by the DM depending on the circumstances.) By its tenth year, a behir will attempt to free itself and will become unmanageable in all respects. Ω

Behir, variant

	Desert	Jungle
CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Dry, deserts	Wet, rain forests
FREQUENCY	Very rare	Very rare
ORGANIZATION	Solitary	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Day	Day
DIET	Carnivore	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE	Low	Low
TREASURE	Incidental	Incidental
ALIGNMENT	Neutral evil	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING	1-2	1-2
ARMOR CLASS	3	4
MOVEMENT	15	15
HIT DICE	10	14
THAC0	11	7
NO. OF ATTACKS	See below	See below
DAMAGE/ATTACK	See below	See below
SPECIAL ATTACKS	See below	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES	Immune to poison and heat	Immune to poison and acid
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Standard	Standard
SIZE	L (35' long)	L (45' long)
MORALE	Champion (15)	Champion (15)
XP VALUE	8,000	12,000

Desert Behir: These creatures are found in deserts as well as volcanic plains. Their platelike upper scales range in color from yellow to orange, while the belly scales are fiery red. When attacking, the desert behir has available all the physical attacks of a normal behir. The desert behir's breath weapon, however, is a jet of flame, 20' long, that does 30 hp damage unless a successful saving throw vs. breath weapon is made, success indicating half damage is sustained. This jet can be used once every 12 rounds.

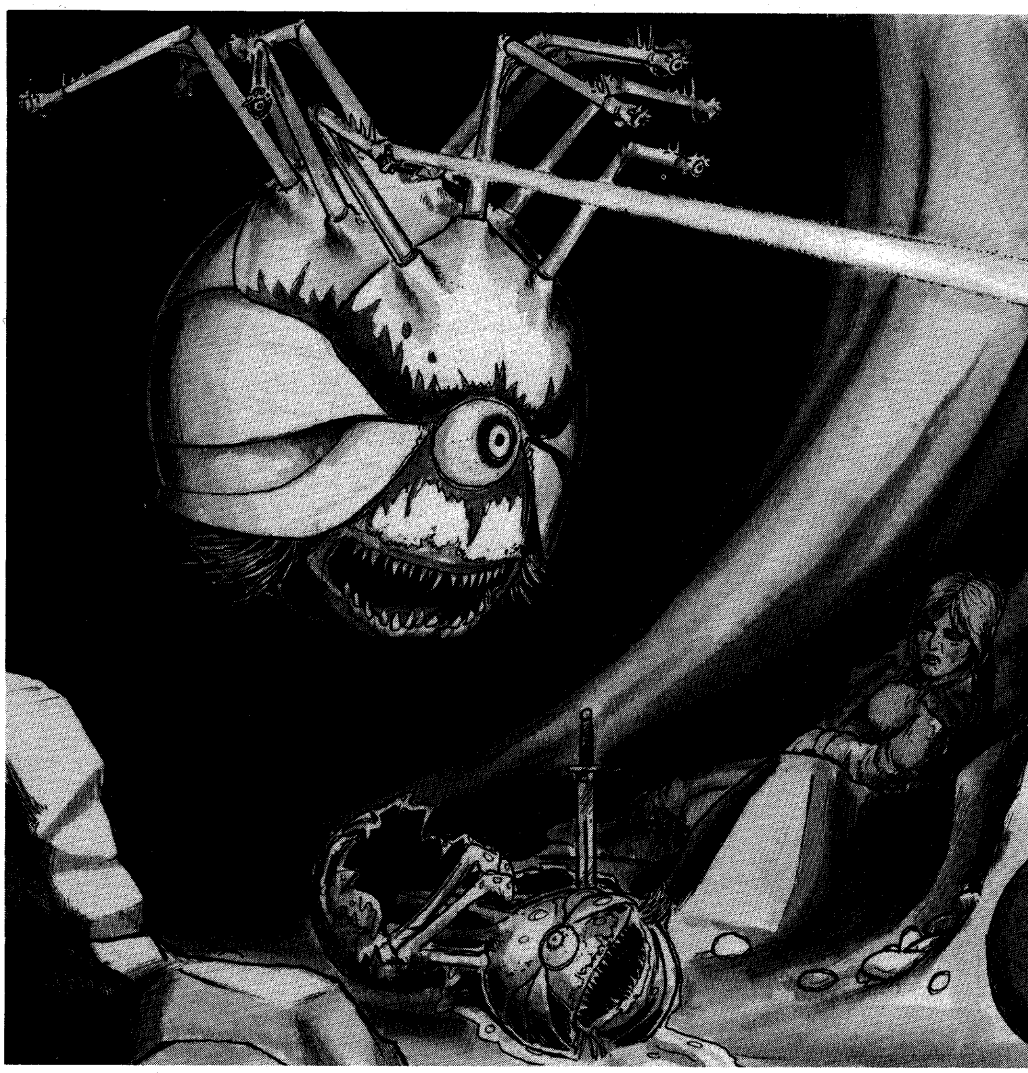
Jungle behir: As the name implies, the jungle behir is found in tropical jungles and rain forests. The large scales that cover the upper half of the body are emerald green in color, while the scales covering the lower half are a lighter coppery green. The jungle behir possess the same attack routines as the other behir types, but its breath weapon is a jet of acid that does 20 hp damage unless a successful saving throw is made. Half damage is applicable if the save is made. The jet can be used once every eight rounds.

Behir Growth Table

Age	HD	Size	Damage
0 year	3	6' long	1-4/1-2x4
1 year	4	12' long	2-5/1-4x4
2-3 years	6	20' long	1-6/1-4X4
4-5 years	8	28' long	2-8/1-6x4*
6-10 years	9	34' long	2-8/1-6x4**
11-15 years	10	36' long	2-8/1-6x4***
16-22 years	11	38' long	2-8/1-6X4
23+ years	12	40' long	2-8/1-6X4

* The behir gains its constriction attack during its fifth year (1-2 hp damage) as well as six claw attacks, regardless of the victim's size.
* * The behir becomes an adult at age 10 and does 1-4 hp damage with its constriction attack.
* * * At age 15, the behir gains its trampling and butting attacks. The behir also does 2-5 hp damage with its constriction attack.

The ecology of the Beholder



by Ed Greenwood and Roger E. Moore

"Many tales are told," began the sage, "of the dreaded eye tyrants." At the mention of this name, the restless students sitting around him in the outdoor amphitheater grew quiet. The sage smiled and continued. "You've listened to stories of these fantastic creatures, seemingly born to the art of destruction; wild tales of battle done with them, of the sorcerous powers of their many eyes, of their rich hoards of treasure. But few have cared to learn much of the habits and nature of these creatures. Know you now that I have studied the beholder for many seasons, and can tell you in truth what was not known before."

The sage paused and looked out at his youthful audience. "Some of you may be thinking about the good it would do to destroy the race of eye tyrants. Some of you may be thinking about the fame it would bring you to slay one, or the wealth it would have hidden away. . . . Well, no harm in dreaming." The sage's gaze fell upon a young boy who looked up at him with unusual intensity; the sage stared back at him, but the boy did not look away.

"Perhaps," he went on, "some of you may actually do battle with one of these monsters, for whatever reason. What I have to tell you may well save you and your companions as well."

The sage looked away from the boy and turned to a blank slate behind him. Producing a piece of chalk, he began sketching a diagram of the beholder with rapid but careful strokes.

"The beholder is shaped like a great sphere, almost the height of a man. The body is covered by several hard plates of chitin which overlap one another slightly, protecting the internal organs. A magical organ called the *levator magnus,* located in the center of the body surrounded by the creature's brain, produces an influence that causes the beholder to float in the air. This allows it to move about slowly, up and down, left or right, forward or back at a slow speed, like that of a pacing man. No magical spell or device can negate this levitation, though beholders cannot resist the push of great winds; most of them lair underground where they may go as they will, while others move about in desolate, windless areas where few other creatures will go.

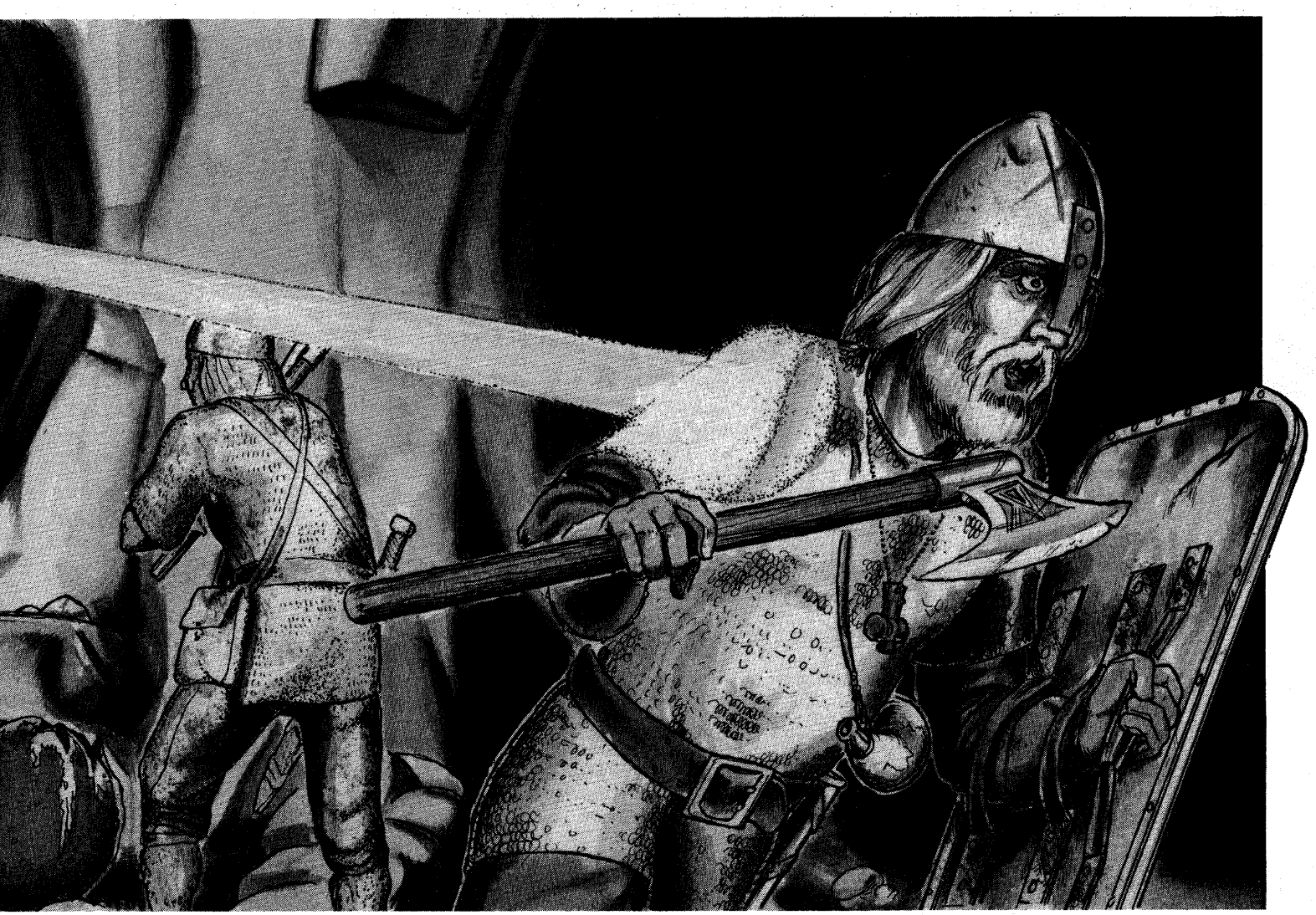
"From atop this armored sphere project ten eyestalks, each of which has a limited maneuverability and field of vision. These eyes, however, do more than just see. They are also able to project, instantly and at will, various spell-like powers of awful effect. Flesh may be turned to stone; armor, weapons, skin and bone disintegrated; charms may be projected, and the influence of death magic itself may be brought to bear.

"And there is also an eleventh eye, greater in diameter than the others, set in the midline of the spherical body. This great eye can project an anti-magical ray that negates the use of all spells, whether cast from a device or from the mind and hands. This ray is a faintly visible beam of grayish light, extending out from the eye in a conical shape up to 140 yards from the monster. This cone is one foot across at the eye, and reaches ten feet in diameter at its greatest extent. This beam will focus upon one target at a time, and may be shifted to keep track of a moving opponent. This beam has proven the downfall of many would-be slayers of an eye tyrant."

The sage tossed the chalk aside and rubbed the dust from his hands. The class was utterly silent.

"The diet of beholders," he continued, "is widely varied; of necessity, of course, since they can easily defeat most creatures, and thus soon exhaust their food supply in any given area. They vastly prefer raw meat, in large quantities, though they may also consume plant matter and small quantities of gravel to aid in digestion. They are omnivores who seem able, given the opportunity, to endlessly gorge themselves. Waste matter and indigestibles like bone they spit out, far enough away from their lairs to avoid betraying the hiding places of their wealth. They seem to prefer the flesh of horses, cattle, and humans."

Turning to the slate again, the sage picked up the chalk and sketched out a triangular shape. "You should all be familiar with the food-chain pyramid; at the bottom are plants, upon which feed the herbivores, upon which feed the carnivores, and so forth. Beholders sit at the top of the pyramid, preying upon all things. Because of their power, however, they must spread out widely to allow one



another food enough to eat, and to avoid competition. It is almost unknown for more than one beholder to be seen at a time, though it is known that they will cooperate with their own kind, and they can speak with each other in their own tongue.

"Though evil, they are prone to lawfulness as well and may take on servant creatures by duress or charm to serve as guardians of treasure, or as guardians of the beholder's personal safety. These servant creatures are also a means of implementing the eye tyrant's plans to carry destruction to all other life it encounters, and accumulate magical treasure. Gargoyles are highly favored for such uses, since they are too stupid and too undisciplined to resist the beholder's demands, and not powerful enough to give their master discomfort and perhaps bring about their annihilation."

The sage paused for a breath, then continued with, "We now come to reproduction." While this topic usually brought smiles and giggles to the faces of the class, now the students watched the sage with complete attention. "Once a year, every beholder lays a clutch of one to four eggs, each about a foot in diameter, by expelling them from the internal organ that produces eggs and spitting the eggs from its mouth. These eggs are dead-white, spherical, and leathery in texture and appearance. They have a repulsive odor that repels predators, but which unfortunately leads the more dedicated foes of the eye tyrants unerringly to the clutch.

"The laying of eggs is instinctive, but the beholder consciously chooses the site where the eggs will be left — always far from its lair, and usually upon a rocky, desolate height. Such spots have been used by beholders over many centuries, and it is thought that all such creatures remember their birthplaces and return there to lay their eggs. After being laid, the eggs will hatch in two to twelve months; egg-laying and hatching occur in no particular season.

"Once laid, the eggs are left alone to their fate. Few beholder eggs hatch any more; humans, demi-humans, and humanoid races all will go to great lengths to destroy them. And the influence of nature, with its storms and diseases, must be accounted for as well. Those eggs that survive will swell and grow over time until just before hatching, when they are three feet across. The young beholder then expands suddenly, splitting the shell apart, and it is free. At this time it eats its own shell, and is immediately capable of using all the powers of its parent. Its bite is less powerful, much like a dagger thrust in effect, and certain of its magical influences are at reduced effectiveness, but it will grow within a year's time to be as dangerous as any other of its race."

The sage settled himself against the stone table he used for a lectern. "The life span of a beholder is unknown, but thought to be very long indeed. One specimen has survived, if the legends about it can be trusted, for nine hundred seasons. As for social and philosophical aspects of the beholder's existence . . . your guesses equal mine for accuracy. They desire the extinction of all species but themselves and those they can manipulate to increase their power and influence. This is almost all that is known of their innermost thoughts and designs."

There the sage paused and looked about the class expectantly. After a moment, the young boy who had caught the sage's attention earlier spoke up. "Teacher," he said, "what is the best way to kill one of them?"

I knew you would ask that, thought the old man to himself. He looked over the heads of his audience, at a point far away. "The best way to kill one of them . . . . That is difficult to say. In combat,

beholders prefer not to close with an enemy, and will stand off a distance to use their spells. The little eye that performs telekinesis will come into play first, to hurl missiles at its opponents, catch light opponents and cast them into the air to be dropped, or to deflect oncoming missiles one at a time.

"The great eye, with its anti-magical influence, will focus on anyone who appears capable of spell casting, that is, anyone not wearing armor. As for closing with it, that cannot be done in the outdoors since it will levitate itself up out of the reach of weaponry, while tilting itself and allowing its eyes to continue to do their work. Perhaps the best way to slay one would be to attack it at long range with masses of archers, stout and paid well, and supported well by magic-armed fighters in case gargoyles lurked about. One could put poison in baited traps to catch the creature unawares, though a long wait is assured. One could use arcane and enchanted devices at either a great range, or at a closer range with the aid of protective rings or cloaks, and hope that the protection is enough. . . ."

At this juncture the sage's voice faded away as he looked into the eyes of the boy who had asked the difficult question. He remembered that the boy was a member of a nearby church, one that was rather strict and on the militant side, but a good church nonetheless. . . . And wasn't it said that this boy was taking some kind of special training?

"Or," the sage went on, "someone who was immune to most of the magical powers of the beholder, such as a paladin with a holy sword — such a person could catch a beholder in its underground lair, and would stand a good chance of closing with it to destroy it in combat."

The boy nodded, apparently satisfied.

After another pause, the sage dusted off his hands again. "Class is over. I will see you all again tomorrow morning." He reached around behind him for his books and scrolls and carefully piled them up to take them back to his library. Before he left he turned one last time to follow the progress of the boy who had asked the question, but the youth was lost in the crowd of children who were now scattering to the four winds.

"Good luck," said the sage in a soft voice, as if to himself. Then he too took his leave of the amphitheater, and all was quiet again.

Appendix

1. Whenever a hit is attempted on a beholder, roll percentile dice to see where the hit might land:

01-75: Hit vs. AC 0 body (takes two-thirds of hit-point total of beholder before creature is slain).

76-85: Hit vs. AC 7 main (11th) eye (takes one-third of hit point total of beholder before eye is destroyed, but beholder still alive).

86-95: Hit vs. AC 2 eyestalk, one only; roll d10 and use chart on p. 10 of the Monster Manual to determine which eyestalk is hit. Beholders with 45-54 hp have eyestalks that take 8 hp damage each before being severed; 55-64 hp beholders have eyestalks taking 10 hp damage; 65-75 hp beholders have eyestalks taking 12 hp damage. If severed, eye in question will cease functioning.

96-00: Hit vs. AC 7 small eye, one only; roll d10 as above to determine which eye is affected. Any hit on a small eye immediately destroys it and its powers.

2. The magic resistance of a beholder is listed as "special" because of the anti-magic ray emanating from the 11th eye. The ray, as stated by the sage, only causes magic spells and spell-like powers to cease functioning within its area of effect; the "plusses" of a magic sword, for instance, would remain functional (since this is not a spell-like power), but a *wand of fireballs* would not be able to cast a *fireball* spell while the ray was enveloping it and its wielder.

3. Beholders are considered as aerial maneuverability class A, despite their slow speed.

4. Newly hatched beholders may be considered to have 45 hp, and *charms, sleep, slow,* and *death* spells they cast are saved against at a +2 bonus. Unhatched beholders are AC 4, have no attacks, and take 25 hp to destroy.

5. The spell-like powers of the beholder's eyes work instantly, in the first segment of a melee round, but must "recharge" for the rest of the round before firing again.

6. Beholders may levitate themselves without limit, to the height of the breathable atmosphere.

7. The arrangement of each beholder's eyes is different from nearly all others; referees should work out this detail prior to combat to determine which eyes may fire in which direction, since the small eyes cannot point in just any direction.

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THE ECOLOGY OF The Bird Maiden

Mufti's Two Masters

by Paul Culotta

Artwork by Karl Waller

Ah, but it was warm, and Mufti eagerly looked forward to reaching the oasis. It was there that he would replenish his waterskins, refresh himself, and water Mandrake. The sturdy war camel had been pushed hard during this chase. Given the freshness of the trail, it seemed likely that it would end soon with finding the woman and child in the oasis. And it was there that Mufti would have to defeat the genie who had stolen the two females; it seemed unlikely in this heat that they would travel during the day.

As Mandrake kept up his steady pace, Mufti pondered the character of his foe. Some genies were known to be cruel and uncaring, but one who stole a noble merchant's wife and child through enchantment was certainly to be despised. And the fact that this magical opponent could not be seen meant that it would have to be dealt with carefully. But the most grating aspect was the genie's blatant pride. To leave a note to the husband bragging of the theft had to be the height of vanity. Did not the Loregiver teach that the intolerant who mock those beneath them shall choke on their own self-righteousness? This genie apparently felt no guilt about violating Her teachings, and that, above all else, was a threat not only to the family in this matter, but to all inhabitants of the land. Yes, Mufti concluded, this genie would have to be destroyed.

Which was why the merchant Suleman had sent for a faris, one who would not only undertake the mission without fear, but one who would destroy the magical thief and return Afta and her daughter without any thought of despoilment. Mufti had volunteered readily along with several others of his class, but Suleman had chosen him—due, no doubt, to Mufti's greater accomplishments and his carefully cultivated reputation for purity of heart.

Just on the horizon the warrior spotted the dim outline of the oasis. He stopped, mopped the sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his aba, and concentrated. Yes, it was the oasis, not a mirage. No doubt the genie could see him by now as well, and battle would soon be joined. There was no opportunity or need for approaching subtly. While surprise would have been an advantage, in the end either Mufti's skills at fighting blindly would prevail or they would not. Fate would decree the result.

Yet one should not tempt Fate sorely, the warrior reflected, and he commanded Mandrake to kneel. After dismounting, he kept his eyes shifting about for any telltale signs of an approaching unseen enemy. He drained what was left in one of his last waterskins and kept looking. But there was nothing that gave any indication of an invisible enemy anywhere. No sudden sifting of the sands, no break in the heat waves, no sound, nothing. Well, oh magical one, you want me fully clad, eh? So be it. My thirst for water is now quenched. Now my hunger for justice must be satisfied.

Mufti reached among the bundles secreted on Mandrake and unlimbered a carefully wrapped heavy package. Untying the knots, he took out a shirt of fine steel chain mail and, after a few quick glances all around, he put it on, suspecting that now would be a prime time for the genie to strike. But nothing happened, a little to his disappointment. Had the genie suddenly rushed in, it would have discovered that Mufti had grasped a sharp dagger concealed within the armor and had kept it in his hand the entire time, ready for instant use. The warrior sighed. Ah well, the genie apparently wanted him to come to the oasis. He pondered the matter some more. Since the wife and child probably would not remember the details of the fight once the enchantment was lifted, there was no sense in taking a chance. He reached into one of Mandrake's bags and pulled out a finely crafted bandolier that he slid over his chest and tightened. In it were three finely honed daggers, each one having a sunburst nicely etched into its blade, and they were joined by the fourth that had been hidden in the chain shirt.

All along Mufti had worried about being ambushed by his invisible opponent, but the genie now giving him the opportunity to get fully protected and armed was unsettling. All during this chase, it had not made the slightest appearance—no observations, no tracks, nothing. To be sure, everyone Mufti had questioned had seen the woman and child, and their tracks were quite visible once he had picked them up. But no one had seen anyone (or thing) with them. Perhaps the genie could fly and be invisible, an uncomfortable thought that caused him to scan the sky as well as the ground.

There—up above was a bird of some sort lazily circling. Peering intensely, Mufti finally recognized it, a desert owl up looking for a desert rat or snake for a mid-afternoon feast.[1] Hmm . . . could it be the genie in disguise? Mufti rebuckled his weapons belt nonchalantly, keeping his head turned just enough to keep the owl in sight, but it made no move toward him. Perhaps it lived in the oasis and felt disturbed by the genie's presence?

Certainly the owl would not have been uncomfortable with Suleman's wife, Afta. From everything he had heard from the farmers in the river valley, she was a

Level	Bird form	AC	MV	HD	THAC0	#AT	Dmg
2	Parakeet	9	1, Fl 24	1/2	20	1	1
3	Swallow	8	1, Fl 30	1-1	20	1	1
4	Parrot	6	1, Fl 30	1+1	19	1	2-4
5	Falcon	5	1, Fl 36	1-1	20	3	1/1/1
6	Owl	5	1, Fl 27	1	19	3	1-2/1-2/1
7	Eagle, Wild	6	1, Fl 30	1+3	18	3	1/2/1-2/1
8	Eagle, Giant	7	3, Fl 48	4	15	3	1-6/1-6/2-12

kindly lady, a kahina who had stopped along the way to cure a diseased oxen, share her water with an overheated farmer, and set the broken leg of a boy who had fallen from an apple tree. She had even spent an entire day with a village, instructing them how to better irrigate their fields.[2] So strange that the genie would have allowed her to do so, or perhaps it was that magical being's way of sneering at any pursuit by allowing such a clear trail. The latter was the more probable reason—otherwise it could have just taken the wife and daughter in its arms and spirited them all away, Mufti mused.

But Suleman's words of warning still remained with the faris. Afta was powerful in her own right and the magical garment the genie had placed on her, a veil of some sort, could make her a dangerous opponent as well. The upset husband had been most insistent: above all Mufti must remove the veil and bring it back along with wife and daughter.[3] He had given the warrior a potion, one that he said would put the kahina and her daughter in a deep stupor. It was necessary, he said, because there was no telling what would happen or what the desert priestess would say once the veil was removed. Better to drug them. Mufti had suggested to Suleman that he simply destroy the veil on the premise that destruction of the enchanting item would negate the charm, but the fat merchant had replied quickly, "No, just bring it back. I would give it to the College of Wizardry for their research and use.[4]

Mufti unpacked his steel helmet from another bag and strapped it in place, then untied the shield carefully secured to Mandrake's saddle. His final steps were to pull out the carefully slung lance, then remount his camel. A few nudges in the side got the beast up and trotting toward the oasis. Time to get this done and over with. At least the sun was to his back. Still there was no sign of the genie; even the owl had flown away. Mufti entered the oasis unopposed.

It was a fine place with a clear pool of sparkling water surrounded by numerous date and palm trees, and most of the ground was covered by a nice mat of green grass. There were several piles of rocks and boulders here and there. Mufti had been to this haven three times before in his travels, and it looked as normal and as peaceful as before.

Except for the girl who sat by the pool. She was dressed in a fine aba and sat cooling her feet in the water, her sandals beside her. Laying a few feet away was a spear, another aba, a wooden case with a handle, and another, slightly larger pair of sandals.[5] The girl looked at Mufti as he trotted up, and he was taken aback—the dark eyes behind the veil showed no surprise, relief, or fear—only a penetrating curiosity. It must be the daughter, Fatira, he decided—her body was far too unshaped and young (about ten years old) to be that of the mother. But where was the mother? And, above all, where was the genie? Mufti kept one suspicious eye on the pool. The girl just stared at him.

"Little one, where is your mother?" he finally asked.

"Off," was her only reply.

"Off? Off where? And where is your abductor?"

The girl cocked her head, her eyes looking confused, then asked in return, "Our ab-duc—our what?"

"The one who took you and your mother away. Come, you can trust me, I am here to take you back to your father," the warrior replied, looking all around for any sign of danger. But all he saw was the owl again, fifty paces away sitting upon a boulder, busily tearing something apart and eating its fill.

The girl got to her feet, put her hands on her hips, and gave him a piercing look and a surprising scornful rebuke: "You mean to take me and Mother back? To my wonderful, loving father, who only talks about how he can't wait for a few more years until he sells me? If I were you, I would leave before Mother comes back, mercenary! She promised me we would never return! Now you just better go away before she gets back!" With that, she picked up the spear and pointed it threateningly.

The large war camel snorted and grumbled—it was not smart to make such a display to his master—but Mufti kept a tight rein and muttered some words of restraint. Well, the daughter was enchanted as well, just as Suleman had suspected, and it seemed to be a powerful charm since Fatira did not have the dim faraway look in her eyes that he had witnessed in those who had fallen prey to unscrupulous sorcerers, priests, and genies. Perhaps the genie had used two veils, one for the mother, and the other for this child?

Suddenly the girl screamed in terror, dropped her spear, and ran.

Mufti's reflexes, developed from years of training, immediately kicked in. In one fluid motion, he jerked Mandrake about, dropped his lance, and pulled one of the daggers from the bandolier. With uncanny speed, the dagger went sizzling through the air and buried itself in the wide open mouth of a large, toothsome, spotted canine. It staggered back, choking and gasping, and fell, rolling spastically in the grass.

Five more of the creatures were running quickly toward the warrior, shrieking a high-pitched racking laughter that resounded throughout the oasis.

"Run!" Mufti yelled over his shoulder, then added, "Climb a tree!" Then a second dagger found its mark, buried to the hilt in the chest of another of the monsters. The beast stopped, looked down helplessly at the dagger, and collapsed.

Cursedly powerful genie, Mufti thought. There was no time for another throw as the beasts were upon him, and he pulled the scimitar from its scabbard. Mandrake responded to the quick nudges from his master and charged left, trampling another of the howling, devilish beasts under his large hooves. As Mandrake turned, Mufti slashed at the one that was jumping up to pull him from the saddle. It fell back, headless. But there were too many. One of the last two jumped up and caught Mandrake's neck in its jaws. And the last one vaulted up the back of the camel and knocked Mufti from his saddle. He hit the grass of the oasis with a thud, and there was an incredible burst of pain in his ankle, and the scimitar fell from his hand.

Instinctively, he rolled and slashed sideways with another dagger, but it only nicked the snout of his assailant, which jumped back with a shriek. Then Mufti tried to stand, but it was impossible. Something was wrong with his leg, and he was forced to fight on one knee. Breathing hard, the desert knight quickly surveyed the scene. The one who had knocked him from Mandrake was bleeding from the snout, but was approaching menacingly, no longer laughing but growling. A few feet away was the beast that Mandrake had trampled, but amazingly it was up, apparently unhurt. It shook itself, and then moved toward Mufti as well. Thirty paces away his prized war camel was thrashing about with the beast's jaws firmly clamped on its neck, and a sickening flow of blood was staining the grass. It was not a good shot but Mufti had to do something, so he threw his blade and just as quickly pulled out his last dagger. The monster on Mandrake was hit in its thigh, and the blow was enough to make it bark in pain, which unlocked its jaws. Mandrake staggered away, but collapsed just a few feet later. Mufti could see that it was a horrible bite, and knew that his camel would not last long. But the hyena left him alone, and loped over toward Mufti.

Mufti wondered whether he would survive this fight. Three angry hyenas (a little bigger than normal, he noted) faced him, and he had not even faced the genie yet! Mufti unsnapped the holder for his ceremonial hatchet and got it in his left hand. Then he quickly faked a throw with the dagger and scrambled on all fours for a tree as the beasts scattered momentarily. It was enough for him to get there and put his back to the tree, but the movement caused pain beyond words in his ankle.

The three hyenas recovered from the ruse, and approached slowly, laughing hellishly, and Mufti did not know whether it was in respect for his ploy or just to unnerve him. Not that it would take much at this point, he thought. One quick rush en masse would take him out.

As if they had been reading his thoughts, the largest gave a quick yelp and all three lunged toward the crippled faris. At the same time, Mufti heard a singing (a woman's beautiful voice, he thought),[6] and he raised his last knife to throw. But the dagger never left his hands. Instead the two palm trees at his back suddenly came

to life like writhing snakes, and his arm was knocked aside. Then the warrior found himself wrapped tightly by a thick trunk, which wound around his body and over his face. What in the name of Kor—but he thought no more as the breath was squeezed out of him and he blacked out. The last thing he heard was the hyenas shrieking in panic. They were laughing no longer.

"Are you all right?"

Mufti shook his head slowly, groaned, and opened his eyes.

Kneeling over him was a woman in a plain tan aba, her nose and mouth covered with the strangest veil he had ever seen. It seemed to be made of light brown feathers tightly woven together. Her eyes were dark and curious just like the girl's had been, and Mufti suspected that if the veil were removed, the face would be beautiful. Her hands, elegant but strong looking, offered a cup.

He grunted his assent and sat up to drink—only to be reminded of his ankle by a blinding flash of pain. Despite his training he gasped and nearly fainted.

"Here, drink this, it will help the pain," she said. "It is all I can do until I regain my spells."

Breathing shallowly (his chest hurt too!), Mufti sipped, then gulped from the cup. A sweet taste, far better than he expected.

"My thanks," he croaked, "but why waste your potion, lady? Certainly the genie will kill me for slaying his beasts?"

She looked at him curiously, and started to answer, but then saw there was no need. The potion had done its work as the warrior slumped to the ground unconscious.[7]

Suleman al Fataq stretched, yawned, and belched loudly. One of the harem girls woke up, wrinkled her nose, and closed her eyes again, pretending to be asleep. The other one was not as smart: she turned over to see what was making bullfrog noises, and Suleman saw her.

"Do you have something to say, desert blossom?" asked the merchant, grinning widely, exposing his crooked teeth from behind his thick lips.

The woman shook her head vigorously. No woman in her right mind ever did anything to annoy the mountain of flab that was master of this house. His jolly appearance could quickly become a terror to whoever offended him, and in these circumstances it was best to say nothing.

And this morning she was lucky, because Suleman was in a good mood. He roared with laughter as he smacked the buttocks of the lady who was trying to appear asleep, and howled hysterically as she bounded out of bed with a cry of pain.

"Go, both of you, and get Mustafa to prepare my morning meal and coffee!" he chuckled. "And tell Hassan to make sure the house is clean! Today your mistress returns, and I want the place to look presentable? He snickered nastily as the two women quickly gathered their night clothes, bowed, and left.

Ah, what a great day this was going to be, thought Suleman. His chubby, ringed fingers reached into the box of sweetmeats that was always at his bedside, and he plopped a few into his mouth. Chewing thoughtfully, he considered himself lucky. The story had worked, and the faris was returning with Fatira and Afta in chains, no less! Oh, how sweet his vengeance would be. Licking his fingers clean, the merchant poked his other hand into the box, grabbed another fistful of snacks, and then lumbered off to the eating room. May as well start with a good breakfast, he thought. Then we will receive the faris, get the veil, and pay him off. And finally, to top the day off, we will have some real private quality time underground with his beloved (he smiled as his mind lingered on that description) wife. The rivers of Zakhara would turn to ice before she ever got close to her veil again.

As his spies had said, the faris arrived a few hours later, with wife and daughter chained securely, their veils removed, and looking quite drugged. They were escorted into the courtyard where Suleman was enjoying his midmorning snack of glazed duck, honeyed artichoke hearts, and sweetened coffee.

"Ah, Mufti al Kaban, exalted faris of the land, I welcome you!" cried the merchant, not bothering to get up from his comfortable, pillowed lair, where he was being fanned by an attractive, lithe, dark-haired girl. "Come, sit, and enjoy a few delicacies I've saved for such an occasion. We must share salt and celebrate your success!"

"My thanks, Suleman," replied Mufti, "but I must get to my next mission quickly, and I would just as soon receive my reward and be on my way."

"Of course, of course," cried the merchant enthusiastically, gnawing the last morsel of meat from a duck leg, "but really, first let me hear of your success! Did you destroy the genie? Where did you find them?"

Mufti sighed. This was not going to be easy. "Very well, you deserve to hear the story, but first I should like to be paid," insisted the faris.

Suleman chuckled, then choked briefly on an artichoke heart. Coughing and laughing, he said, "Really, Mufti, you sound more like a beggar from the bazaar than a holy warrior! But you deserve it as much as I deserve to hear about the story. Oh, where is the veil?"

The faris produced the feathered garment and handed it over, and Suleman took it, stuck it in a pouch, and rubbed his hands with glee as his eyes gleamed triumphantly. Then he pulled a jingling sack from behind a pillow and tossed it to Mufti. Finally, he cleared his mouth with a swallow of coffee and spit it out over his shoulder. It splattered right on the feet of the girl with the fan, and she did not flinch.

Mufti looked inside the sack, but did not bother to count the dinars. It did not matter. The contract was completed. And now he could deal with this pig.

He sat down cross-legged in front of Suleman and stated dryly, "I don't know why you are inquiring about a genie. There was none."

"Hah! I knew it!" the merchant exclaimed. "Once the genie saw you, Mufti al Kaban, renowned faris warrior, coming after him, I knew he would flee! Lucky for him, too. But oh yes, there was a genie, don't you recall it left a note?" the merchant added.

Mufti's voice was cold: "The only luck involved was that your wife saved my life from a pack of hyena-men who happened to come to the same oasis where I caught up with her."

Suleman stopped eating, and looked at the faris carefully. "Truly? Well, perhaps she did so to defend herself and the child. Hmmm. Well, no matter, I am glad you are safe, and that you captured her. I see you drugged her as I instructed, and that is good, too. Well, uh, I am sure the genie left once it saw you. Perhaps Afta will remember something once the potion wears off and will let me know. Here, let me give you this as a bonus for your trouble and let you be on your way," he said, taking a jeweled ring off one of his fingers.

"No, that's quite all right, Suleman," Mufti said, holding up his hand, signaling refusal. "In a way, I am already on my next mission."

"What?" asked the merchant stupidly.

"After she saved me, Afta told me the most incredible story. She indicated that she was a slave to her husband who had power over her by keeping her veil, the one I have just given back to you. She also said that as long as the veil was parted from her, the holder became her master. And she said that her current master, you, Suleman, inflicted atrocities upon her and her daughter too unmentionable to name."

"That is none of your business, faris!" roared Suleman, waddling from the couch, and shaking his finger. "You agreed to this mission and swore your word to accomplish it! Nothing can change that! Now, get out!"

"That is exactly what I told her, Suleman," replied Mufti soothingly, holding his hands open while remaining seated. "Even though she had saved my life, even though she nursed me and my wounded mount back to health, and regardless of the fact that her husband might be cruel and inhumane, I advised her that I could not be broken from my oath."

Suleman relaxed a little, and nodded. "Good. Then we are agreed that what happens in a man's house is his own business. Well, you may be on your way."

"Well, if you please, remain," the warrior stated flatly. "You insisted on hearing the story so I shall finish it. I did not believe her until I put the pieces together. There was no genie, there never was. The note

was a hoax, similar to the tricks you perform on your competitors, and I remember you had me dine with you when we first talked. It is apparent to me now that you probably put something into my drink or my food to get me to believe such an incredible tale. Once I had agreed to the mission and given my word to complete it, you knew that something like this could happen. Thus, you gave me a potion to keep her and her daughter drugged."

"Yes," grinned Suleman, "but she is my wife, and an oath is an oath, whether by contract or by marriage. We have no further need for your services, faris, so if you please?" and he pointed toward the back door that led to the alley.

"Of course," Mufti stated, and he got up to leave, but then added, "but I did make an oath to her as well that you need to know about. I promised her that upon completion of my contract to you that I would ask that you release her from the vows of the marriage you have forced upon her by possession of this veil, and I do so now. You know that she is not only a creature of the wild, but a caring person who ministers to the land and its people. Her knowledge is great, and her ability to render assistance is considerable. Why keep her in this gilded cage when her knowledge and learning could be shared with the people? Please, Suleman, go to the qadi with her and declare that this marriage should be dissolved. She will agree readily and it will be done. You will have done a great service to her, yourself, and the Land. She will want none of your property. What say you?"

Suleman laughed heartily and long. He fell back on his pillowed couch and it creaked dangerously. Tears came to his eyes and he slapped his fat knees. Then he sat up and cried, "You self-righteous donkey! She is mine, I captured her fairly, I married her legally, and that is that! You have kept her promise to her. You asked me to release her, I refused, and that is the end of that! Now get out before I summon the mamluks to remove you from the city!"

"That is your final answer?" asked Mufti gently. "There is nothing I can say or do to change your mind?"

"No, now go!" shrieked Suleman.

'Very well," shrugged the faris, and he took the bag of money, and turned to leave, leaving the helplessly drugged wife and daughter standing there.

And as he did so, his hand slipped inside his aba and removed a dagger from a bandolier. A moment later, he whirled around, and a dagger with a sunburst on the blade hissed through the air of the courtyard.

"Tell me, grandson, do you think this was all really worth it?"

"Yes, grandfather," replied Mufti. "You will find this document in order. It deeds the household and all of the goods of Suleman al Fataq from his widow to our servant, Anwar. What we have gained far outweighs the loss. We have needed such a place for some time."

The old man brushed aside the document, then asked, "But, grandson, what of the woman and her child? Were they really drugged?"

"Yes, grandfather, they were. It was hard to convince her to allow it, but by the time we had left the oasis, we were firmly agreed that she had to have her freedom and that I had to fulfill my oath. It was the only way to accomplish our goals without both of us losing our honor. I trusted her fully, and once I convinced her that I was a holy warrior and told her of my training, she gave me her trust. Without drugging her, we might have been discovered by a sorcerer or hakima hired by the fat one."

"And where did the mother and child go?" asked the old man.

"Off to the mountains,"[8] replied Mufti. "She said that she had to take her daughter to receive training in the ways of her kind. I offered to accompany and guard them on their journey, but she refused, as I knew she would. Ah, what a wonderfully independent creature!"

"Independence!" snorted the grandfather. "If Kor could reveal total knowledge to me, I suspect the Old One would tell me that my grandson's lust for independence, especially being freed from keeping the garb of a faris, was the real motivation behind this incident!"

Mufti smiled. "Oh exalted one, I believe Kor speaks through your lips as he has for many years. Yes, being a faris was getting tiresome. Please tell me that I do not have to continue."

"Hah! You made your own wish come true, did you not? The city is still in an uproar over the killing of the fat toad and his six guards by a faris! How could you pose as one now? Mufti al Kaban will be searched for by mercenaries and bounty hunters all the way to the Isle of the Elephant."

"Ah, you are wise, grandfather," cooed Mufti.

"And you are impudent! But," he added with softness in his voice, "you are one of our best, and it is indeed time for a change. I think you should learn to cut hair and trim beards. There are certain people in Huzuz we want to keep track of, those who seem to be, well, unfriendly to the scholars of Kor's mosque for reasons yet to be divined. Are you interested?"

"Exalted one, I am yours to command," replied Mufti, bowing.

"Very well, go out and talk to Latifa. She will teach you the ways of the barber and brief you on your new background and mission. May the knowledge of the Old One protect you on this, your new life."

"Yes, grandfather," replied Mufti, bowing again, and he left the tent.

The old man laid back on the pillows in his tent and looked at the deed again. Justice had been done and there would probably be a day when the bird maiden could be called upon to return a favor. And what a wonderful home Mufti had procured. Posing as a faris for five long years, he had brought in much useful information. It would be interesting to see how well he would do in the Grand Bazaar of Huzuz posing as a enterprising barber. As a faris, Mufti had to rely on his brawn and fighting skills. This new role would require a lot more wits. If he did well, it would probably be time to consider even greater things for him among the Wrath of the Old. Yes, with followers such as Mufti, the future of the Order always would be bright with the blood of those who opposed it.

The Grandfather of Assassins smiled happily, looked at the deed again, and reached for a pear.

Notes

1. The bird maiden is a creature unique to Zakhara, the Land of Fate. It is always female, just like the swanmay living in the northern lands of Toril, and in some respects quite similar to that creature. Like a swanmay, a bird maiden may *shapechange* to bird form. While the former can transform only into a swan, the bird maiden can change into a variety of bird forms, depending upon her level.

It is important to note that as the bird maiden rises in level, she may elect to take the form for that level or any form of a lesser level. For example, a 6th-level bird maiden could *shapechange* into an owl or any bird form allowed for a 2nd- through 5th-level bird maiden.

There are other differences between swanmays and bird maidens. A swanmay is a ranger while in human form, while a bird maiden is a kahina, with all of the powers of that class (See *Arabian Adventures).* Another important difference is that swanmays are always good-aligned, while a bird maiden may be of any alignment. Most bird maidens (80%) are of neutral alignment, while 10% are good and 10% are evil. Whatever the alignment, it always has a neutral tendency (i.e., neutral good, true neutral, or neutral evil). It is rumored that evil bird maidens are able to *shapechange* into ravens, blood hawks, and giant vultures.

2. Good and neutral bird maidens see themselves as protectors of living things and guard against those who would despoil the land. Hence, they have a tendency to help and teach those who respect the land. Their protection applies to sentient beings as well, in line with the tolerance extended to all by the teachings of the Loregiver. Hence, a bird maiden would teach irrigation to farmers to help their crops grow, but she would ensure that the system would not harm the lake or river life being used as a water source.

3. The power of a bird maiden resides in a shawl, veil, or other significant object of clothing that is made of feathers. This

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me, to thank him for giving me a life. There was so much I wanted to say.

But as these words stuck in my throat, a memory wedged its way in. I remembered my youthful anticipation as I would wait in the castle for his return from distant lands, the warm look on his face as he burst through the doorway, and the smell of the woods on his hands and clothes when he greeted me with hugs of the same fervor as those he had for Averett and Kile.

What would my life have been without Davrin? Where would I have been without Lorien?

I gazed at him. His head shook with more than the cold. His lips were dry and creased, showing no signs of having been treated with the oils that Lorien would have made him apply. His hair blew about his uncovered head.

A new thought managed to struggle through my own selfish concerns. One so disturbing that it caught my breath and drew me harshly back into reality.

Davrin had never been alone before.

"When are you leaving?" he asked.

I swallowed and cleared my throat. There was only one answer to this question. My time of leaving would come when Davrin's came, and this was not it. "I am not ready yet."

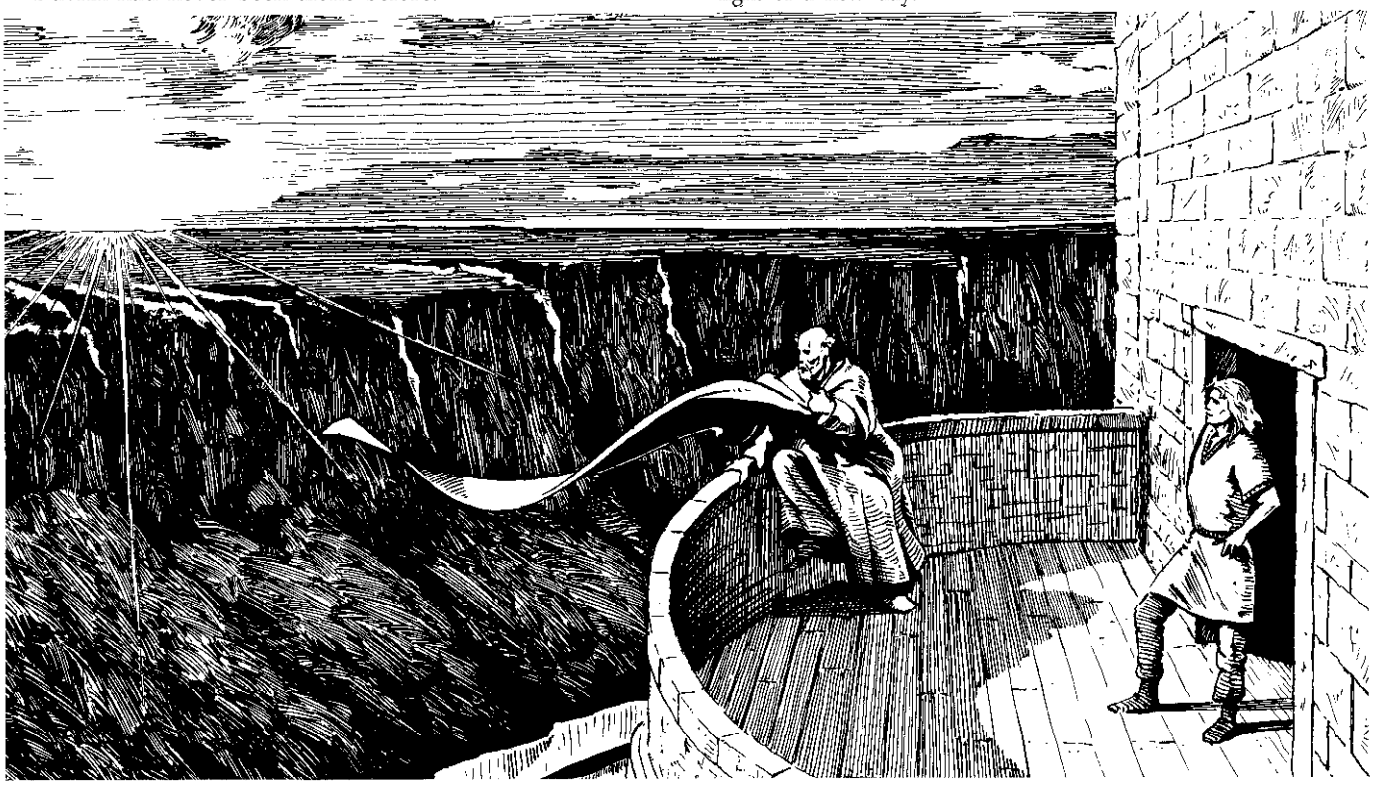
He grimaced. "I have nothing more for you, Garrett. You should go and live your life. Leave an old man in peace."

"No, I disagree. There is much more I can learn from you."

Davrin pursed his lips.

I walked to his chair and knelt beside him, warming his cold hand in mine. "I'll make our breakfast in a moment. But first, tell me about when you first met Lorien."

He sat in silence for a moment, staring at the cliffs. Then he began to speak. As he described their first meeting, the sun crested the far ridge of the canyon. I raised my free hand and shielded my eyes, squinting into the light of a new day. Ω



Bird Maiden

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object is given to her at the end of her initial training. If she ever loses it, she loses all her powers as kahina and shapechanger until she recovers it. Unscrupulous men have been known to come into the possession of a bird maiden's feathered garment, and with the creature helpless, have forced her into marriage.

4. Destruction of the feathered token of the bird maiden always results in the creature's death with no hope whatsoever of resurrection.

5. When *shapechanged,* only a bird maiden's feathered garment and her body transform. All other worldly goods must be taken off and guarded by someone else.

6. Just as mystics dance, bird maiden kahinas sing, and the verbal components of their spells are always sung in a sweet, warbling voice. They have major access to the spheres of All, Animal, Divination, Elemental, Healing, Plant, and Weather. They have minor access to the spheres of Creation, Protection, and Sun.

7. While bird maidens always have the nonweapon proficiency options allowed to kahinas, one proficiency they always possess is herbalism due to its connection with the land they are sworn to protect.

8. The place of training for bird maidens is said to be a place called the Crown of All Feathers. It is supposedly a great wooden fortress concealed among the clouds in high hills or mountains. There aarakocra teach the rituals, duties, and abilities of the bird maidens. It is rumored that a very special genie of enormous power guards this place and uses powerful illusions to keep it safe from the curious and unsavory. All bird maidens know where this place is, but no sort of magical compulsion or physical abuse can pry the location from them.

Ω

THE ECOLOGY OF

Slimy, Yet Deadly

By Johnathan Richards

Artwork by Terry Dysktra

The creature spasmed and quivered in the ebony darkness of the cavern interior Readjusting to its new form, it pulled itself together into a central mass. Had it any eyes, it would perhaps be able to see an identical creature a mere two feet away, undergoing a similar process. Each was a glistening mass of black protoplasm, roughly three feet in diameter.

Blind as it was, it could nonetheless sense the heat of its nearby companion, but disregarded it as not-food, and began oozing and slithering its way across the cavern, away from its twin. Gradually, the other creature faded out of range of its heat sense. It crawled onward, ever onward, in search of food.

Ahead, the steady dripping of water alerted passersby of the presence of an underground pool. The creature headed toward it, but not because of the telltale dripping sound—in fact, the creature was stone deaf, and the concept of sound was foreign to it. No, instead, its eerie ability to sense heat and analyze patterns identified the pool as that type of not-food that often has food inside of it. Without hesitation, the creature flowed into the water, seeking prey.

The pool was not deep, only two feet or so, but that was deep enough to hold a dozen tiny cave fish, white and blind and darting back and forth in the cold, clear water. The creature instinctively altered its shape, spreading itself out in two directions, forming a wall that closed around the fish like a net. As they came in contact with the jet-black creature, the fish immediately began to dissolve, as tiny mouths all over the creature's body ate them away. When all the fish were devoured, the creature moved on, leaving the shallow, lifeless pool and continuing on its random journey.

Several minutes later, the creature's travels brought it into a cavernous chamber, hundreds of feet in diameter, with stalactites reaching down from the ceiling and merging into the stalagmites growing up from the floor. The chamber was home to hundreds of bats, hanging upside-down from perches on the ceiling. To the flowing creature's heat senses, it seemed as if it had just entered the open fields of the surface world at night, with countless points of fire burning overhead. However, the stars were forever out of reach; the bats were not.

Without slowing for an instant, the creature flowed up a huge pillar formed by the meeting of stalactite and stalagmite. It spiraled its way up the pillar, and, upon reaching the top, flowed just as effortlessly along the ceiling, winding its way around jagged protuberances, straight toward the nearest sleeping bat. The bats had no warning, for the creature made no noise as it flowed up and over them, engulfing the small mammals with its syrupy body.

How long the creature spent on the ceiling gobbling up bats it neither knew nor cared, for it was simply going about its normal routine: finding food, eating food, finding more food. This was the sum of its existence, its reason for being. Eventually, the bats flew off, though whether they were somehow alerted to its presence or their sleep was over and it was time to hunt, it mattered not to the creature. The food was simply gone; more food would have to be found.

It didn't take long. Dimly, at the edge of its perception, the creature sensed a tiny movement in the heat-patterns of the cavern below. A spider, barely an inch across, was making its erratic way across the cave floor Size didn't matter to the ebony creature above; food was food, and this was the nearest. It dropped to the floor below and flowed over the spider, dissolving it instantly.

Its latest meal finished, the creature flowed in a random direction, looking for more.

"Do you really think we should go much further?" Shandrilla asked. She swung her lantern around, casting eerie shadows along the cavern walls, and shivered involuntarily. "I'd hate to get lost in here."

"Just a little further", insisted Javorik, her gnome companion. "I want to see what's ahead." He hummed softly to himself, happily and not quite in key. The dangers of the Underdark held no terror for him; after all, was he not Javorik the Bold, Illusionist Extraordinaire, Wielder of the Wand of Lightning, Slayer of Lizards, Tamer of Rats? So far, this underground exploration stuff was a cakewalk.

"Okay," Shandrilla replied, with a frown. "But not too much further, huh?" She didn't like it this far underground. She kept seeing movement at the edge of her vision, and even though her mind knew it was just a trick of the light, her gut kept telling her otherwise. She kept a firm grip on the lantern with her left hand, and an even firmer grip on the short sword in her right.

"Ooh, ooh, hey!" squealed Javorik in delight, as he ran ahead. "Look at this!" Shandrilla hurried to catch up, and found the gnome kneeling next to a clump of orange fungus, shoveling the mushrooms into a sack with his little dagger. "I was right, I was right, see? I was right! Squimmerall! I knew we could find some down here!"

"You were right, all right. Can we go now?"

"Just a little further. There might be more!" And he toddled off further into the depths of the Underdark. Shandrilla hurried to keep up.

The creature oozed over a rock formation, and found the corpse of a kobold, an arrow stuck in its back. The little humanoid was long dead; the coal-black creature sensed no heat from the body. However, heat or no heat, its senses could tell that its find was composed of once-living tissue, and it oozed toward the kobold without delay

The kobold wore a chain mail vest over ragged leather garments. Neither had been protection enough from the arrow that extinguished its life; neither provided much protection now from the creature devouring its body The night-black ooze flowed over the kobold, eating its way through armor, clothing, flesh and bone alike.

"C'mon, Javorik, enough's enough already. Let's go back."

"What, frightened? A big, strong human like you? Nonsense! What's to be afraid of, down here? Some bats? A patch of squimmerall? That's all we've seen so far. Nothing to be afraid of."

"Yeah, well, I've heard stories . . ."

"Stories? Stories of what?"

"You know. Drow. Snirf goblins."

"Snirf goblins?" He scratched his head. "Svirfnebli, you mean? Pah. Don't exist. Fairy stories. Evil gnomes, indeed. Come on, let's go down this way."

Shandrilla let out a sigh of exasperation and followed her diminutive companion.

The creature made short work of the kobold, and moved on. It was noticeably larger than it had been when it first split off from its twin, however long ago that was. Since that time, it had consumed its own weight in fish, bats, spider, and decaying kobold. Other than taking the time to feed, it had been on the move constantly. Now was no exception; it had finished its meal, and it was time to find another one.

Javorik let out another squeak of delight as they rounded a corner and found another patch of the orange fungus. "See, didn't I say? Didn't I?" he asked, as he squatted and untied the sack attached to his belt. "This stuff is great. You can use it in all types of potions. Good substitute component for a few spells, too, I think. And it tastes good in tea, eh? Ever have squimmerall tea, Shanny?"

"Huh? No." Shandrilla was looking in all directions at once again, her eyes interpreting the flickering shadows as the movements of malevolent creatures, just out of sight. "Can we go now, Javorik? Please?"

"Hey, hold that light steady, will you? I'm almost done here." He continued picking the odd-looking fungus growths and stuffing them into his sack, which was beginning to tug comically on his belt.

Shandrilla was suddenly aware of the devastatingly huge volume of rock all around her, and shivered again. She didn't like being so far underground—it was like being buried already. Still, Javorik didn't seem to mind, but then he was a gnome, wasn't he? Sure, he was raised in a gnomish village on the surface, and he spent most of his time in dusty libraries, but all the same. Spelunking was normal for gnomes, even if this was his first time in the Underdark, as it was hers. She'd just be glad to see the light of the sun again, and soon.

"Almost done," said the little gnome, fidgeting with the tie-string on the sack. It couldn't possibly hang from his belt now, not if he wanted to keep his pants up. Over the shoulder was probably the way to go. Better hurry, too, before that silly human girl worried herself. to death over flickering shadows. "There," he said at last. "All set. Let's go."

Which he followed almost immediately with a "Hello, what's this?"

As the creature followed the underground passage, it came to a dead end, where the ceiling collapsed some time ago. The way was impassible to most, but not to the amorphous, raven-black creature that now flowed up the pile of rocks, then oozed through the narrowest of cracks and crevices, winding above some stones and under others, tracing a path that the most nimble of mice would have a hard time following. After 30 feet of this, the creature found itself in an open passageway again and continued on its journey

The passageway twisted back and forth, and the creature followed its path, deviating only to crawl up to the ceiling to engulf a lizard it sensed scampering up the wall. It continued its winding journey on the ceiling for a while, before dropping onto an unsuspecting beetle it noticed with its heat sense. Then it turned another corner, and immediately sensed two more sources of food. Homing in on them, it flowed silently across the floor toward the two.

"What is it?" asked the human, nervously.

"I've no idea," replied Javorik. "Looks kind of like oil, doesn't it?"

"It's heading our way. Let's get out of here."

"Wait a minute, I think it's alive. Go poke it with your sword, see what it does."

"Go poke it yourself, gnome."

"Pah, I'll do better than that. Am I not Javorik the Illusionist, Wielder of the Wand of Lightning? Stand back, foul glop, or face the wrath of Mighty Javorik." The gnome set down his sack and fumbled at his belt, pulling out a slender wand, and aimed it at the approaching blob of darkness.

"Javorik . . ."

"Take that!" A sizzling flash of lightning bolted across the room, neatly slicing the creature in half. The gnome saw the two small blobs where once there had been but one, and smiled to himself. Cut the thing in two, he thought. Have to add Slayer of Oozing Menaces to my title.

Then the two blobs started to move, and his smile collapsed to a frown.

Each of the two creatures seemed to have picked a different target. While one oozed over to the gnome, the other was making its way toward Shandrilla. "Your ring!" yelled Javorik, and started a spell. This creature lives in total darkness, he thought. Let's see what a continual light spell does to it.

"Ring, right," said the human, mentally invoking the power of the ring her gnome friend had given her for added protection. As the illusionist finished his spell and the cavern lit up with the power of the light he had summoned, Shandrilla faded from view.

Neither ploy worked. While one creature seemed unaffected by the fact that it was now casting the light of a sunny day into the chamber, the other followed Shandrilla's invisible figure wherever she went.

So much for sneaking up behind it, thought the thief. Although, really, who's to say I'd even know when I was behind it? Kind of hard to tell when your opponent's a blob of goo. She raised her sword arm, preparing for a downward swing into the thing with her full weight behind it. Just as her sword started its downward arc, Shandrilla's invisible form popped back into view and her companion cried out.

"No! Don't hit it!"

Shandrilla twisted, yanking her sword to the side, missing the creature by a hair's breadth. The awkward movement sent

her spinning, and she fell forward. Instinctively, she threw her right foot in front of her to keep her balance—it landed on, and sank into, the creature's pliant body. Immediately, a sensation of heat pervaded her foot.

"A pudding! We're fighting a pudding!" yelled the gnome from across the chamber. "Federico told me about these things once; if you hit them, they split in two."

"Great, so we can't hit them," said Shandrilla, tugging her foot out of the evil-looking blob of darkness. The thing had been flowing up her leg, and her leather boot was already half-dissolved from the brief contact it had with the creature. "What can we do? How did Federico kill his?"

"Uh, he didn't, not that I recall," muttered the gnome. "Think he ran away from it after he split it into about six pieces." Javorik was getting winded, running back and forth away from the glowing blob, while simultaneously trying to remember his cousin's description of his battle with the pudding years ago, racking his brain for a good spell to use against these ones, and fumbling through his pockets for a weapon that might do some good.

"Sounds good to me," said the thief. "Let's go!"

Unfortunately, the two creatures blocked the way back to the surface, though whether they did so by accident or design it was hard to tell. One oozed its way to the gnome's sack of orange fungus and began absorbing it.

"Stand back, let me try something," the little gnome said, reaching into a pocket for the right material components and starting the words to a spell. At the spell's completion, a gaping hole appeared in front of the two adventurers, a jagged gash in the cavern floor that wasn't there a second ago, stretching across the chamber from one wall to the other. From the looks of it, it was at least 50 feet deep. "That should hold them a bit," he said.

It didn't. Without a moment's hesitation, both creatures oozed over the edge of the crevasse and continued across, seemingly floating over the pit until they reached the other side.

"Hmph," snorted Javorik. "So much for illusions."

As the two ink-black creatures flowed over the illusory pit, Javorik and Shandrilla had nowhere to go but deeper into the Underdark, the way the original creature had come. The cavern narrowed to a width of about six or seven feet, too narrow to risk a dash past the amorphous beings. So deeper they went, Shandrilla leading the way, her human legs taking her further with each hurried stride then Javorik's, who struggled to keep up and kept glancing nervously over his shoulder at their unrelenting pursuers. The passageway twisted back and forth, and Shandrilla kept praying for a forking path where they might lose the dark blobs so intent on making the two adventurers their next meal.

Then they turned a corner and found the way blocked by a pile of rocks, caused by a cave-in some time ago. Javorik summed up their situation in two short syllables.

"Uh-oh."

Onward the two creatures flowed, onward toward the fleeing food. Each entity was aware of the other, but discounted it as irrelevant nonfood. All that mattered was that food was nearby, food that must be pursued and devoured. While the taller of the two foods was faster than the creatures, it kept slowing down and waiting for the smaller food to catch up. Better yet, the smaller food was starting to slow down. Soon, very soon, the creatures would overcome the small food and devour it.

The two adventurers scrambled up the pile of rocks, hoping in vain to find some way over the top. They frantically explored each edge of the rock barrier, to no avail. Shandrilla felt panic closing in; never before had she been more aware of the enormous quantity of solid stone all around her. Bad enough to be buried alive under tons of rock, but to be devoured by some slimy horror from the bowels of the earth . . .

"Close your lantern," suggested Javorik. "Maybe they can track our light."

"I doubt that."

"So do I, but do you have any better ideas? Maybe they'll go away if they can't see us."

Reluctantly, Shandrilla closed the lid on her lantern, plunging the passageway into total darkness. The two waited in silence, and before long, Shandrilla's eyes picked up the faintest glimmerings of light from around the bend. It was the creature lit by Javorik's light spell, she knew. The light grew brighter, and then from around the bend flowed the glowing creature. Without hesitation, it headed straight for the pile of rocks and began oozing its way up, toward the two adventurers.

"No, no, no!" screamed the thief, and started flinging rocks at the approaching monster. She kicked with her feet, simultaneously trying to get as far away from it as possible and knock loose stones down on the vile thing. Several rocks hit the creature, but none struck with enough force to split it in two. However, perhaps sensing an easier approach, the pudding began to ooze between the rocks in the pile, gradually slip ping further in until it was no longer visible. As it submerged into the pile, the spell's radiance vanished with it.

"The other one! Where's the other one?" cried Javorik. "Quick, the lantern!"

Shandrilla fumbled with the lantern's lid and finally got it open. She swung its beam across the pile of rocks, down on the floor below, back and forth. Nothing.

Then a burst of light erupted beneath them, and they saw a dark form oozing up through the very rocks on which they were perched. Both adventurers screamed and rolled to the side, the gnome to the left, the human to the right. It was an instinctive response, and one that saved their lives, for at the same moment the other creature dropped from the ceiling onto the spot they had occupied a mere second before.

Shandrilla felt her footing give way, and arms flailing, fell backward off the pile of stones. She lost both sword and lantern on the way down and landed in a heap on the floor at the foot of the pile. She struck her head hard, and the world spun dizzily around her.

Then she felt hands gripping her arm, tugging her up. It was Javorik, face flushed and grimy in the flickering light. He was saying something, but it wasn't registering.

"Shanny? Come on, get up, we gotta go. Shanny, come on, we gotta get going."

Flickering light? Shandrilla sat up, got to her knees, thought about standing up, decided to wait. Anyway, at this height, she could look her companion in the eyes, and make intelligent conversation.

"Huh?"

"You did it, Shanny! The lantern hit that bugger square on! Thing went up like kindling. I don't know about the other one, though, so, if you're ready to go . . ."

Shandrilla staggered to her feet and looked up at the pile of rocks. A small fire was burning at the top. Almost as if on cue, shafts of light began streaming out of the rocks near the bottom of the pile. The glowing creature was oozing out between the cracks.

"Let's get out of here," said the thief.

"Let's," agreed the illusionist. Together, they staggered down the corridor. As they rounded the bend, Shandrilla realized that their only source of light was gone, burning on the rocks. Javorik sensed her unease. "I can guide us, Shanny. Infravision. No problem. And I promise, no stopping for squimmerall."

For the first time in what seemed like a long while, the beginnings of a smile appeared on the young thief's lips. "Deal."

The creature flowed out of the rock pile, still glowing from the effects of the gnome's spell. At the very edge of its awareness, it felt the two foods moving away. Reorganizing its mass, it sped along the twisting corridor, in pursuit.

"Almost halfway there. I think next time, we'll bring torches."

"Next time? There is no next time, gnome."

"No next time? That's no way to talk, human. Especially not now that you're Shandrilla, Slayer of Pudding."

"Sometimes I think you're Javorik, Brain of Pudding."

"You wound me."

"Seriously, gnome. Do you think that other one'll follow us to the surface?"

"Hard to say. I doubt it. I never heard of one above ground. I'll have to ask Federico."

"So once we make it back topside, we should be home free."

"Should be. We'll let this bugger skulk around down here to his little heart's content. And good luck trying to sneak up on anybody when he's glowing like a bright summer day."

"Who knows, Javorik? You might have created a new species. 'Javorik's Glowing Pudding.'"

"Sounds more like a recipe."

"Maybe you're right."

Silently, the glowing creature stalked the two adventurers. It sensed the presence of food, and so it would follow the food until it overcame it and fed. Nothing would stop it from repeating its endless cycle.

And then it became aware of a different food on the ceiling above it. A lizard was trying to scamper out of range of the light. The glowing creature changed direction, heading for the nearest wall and flowing up onto the ceiling. The lizard scurried off, but it was slower than the swiftly-flowing abomination. Before long, the little reptile had been dissolved.

Its meal finished, the glowing creature cast its senses forth in all directions. There was no food within range. Moving off in a random direction, it set out to find some.

Ω

Notes:

1. The black pudding can live underwater, as it can extract oxygen from water as easily as it can from air. However, water dampens its senses and its movement rate, halving them both. Thus, it can sense heat variations up to 45' away, and move at a rate of 3 while underwater. The pudding cannot swim or float but must flow along the bottom of the body of water.

Obviously, while underwater, the pudding is immune to fire, and one might think that it would adopt this environment for that very reason. However, water also dilutes its acid attack, reducing its damage per attack to 1d6 instead of 3d6. Once out of water, it takes two rounds to restore each die of damage: thus, after two rounds, it does 2d6 hp damage with each attack, and only after four rounds is it back to full damage.

2. The black pudding moves silently at all times, in a steady flowing motion, over any solid surface. The black pudding's movement can perhaps best be likened to that of a rolling ball of clay, if the clay were softened to an almost-liquid state, so that it hugged the floor as it rolled. The pudding can alter its shape and can also move snakelike in a long, thin mass; its soft, pliable body is equally silent when it moves in this manner. In fact, a black pudding can flow over a stone floor strewn with autumn leaves without making a single leaf crunch (it dissolves the leaves as it engulfs them).

3. A blow from a weapon divides a black pudding into two smaller puddings, each with half of the original pudding's hit points, but each able to attack as the original. This is because the blow strikes the pudding's soft body and sends it flowing away from the weapon in all directions, which invariably splits the pudding into two or more sections. Once this separation occurs, each piece of the pudding is a separate being, unable to merge into one being.

However, the stress from a weapon strike is largely due to its being unanticipated. When the blow lands, it takes the pudding by surprise; it cannot prepare for or prevent its separation into two or more entities. By contrast, the black pudding can drop from above and land on the floor without splitting. There are two reasons for this. First of all, it knows exactly what's coming, and what to expect, as it's doing it itself. Second, it's being "struck" by the floor, along its entire length, and this flattens the creature out but does not send it flying in two different directions.

4. A black pudding's senses extend a full 90' in all directions from its body. Within this area, it can distinguish the structural composition of its surroundings. While this sense is not fine-tuned enough to distinguish between different types of creatures, the pudding is aware of any animal or vegetable tissue in its range of awareness. Furthermore, it can tell whether the organic material is living or dead (not that this makes any difference whatsoever to the pudding's eating habits). Once a black pudding is aware of a living creature, it will immediately approach this food and attempt to eat it, stopping at nothing to do so (puddings never check morale, and they always fight to the death).

5. Black puddings destroy chain mail in one round, and plate mail in two. This is because the links of chain mail allow the creature to flow through the armor and devour it from all sides simultaneously, whereas plate mail presents a continuous solid surface, and the pudding must dissolve it from one side only. Dissolving weapons works the same way: a sword poked into a pudding can be dissolved from all sides, so it takes the pudding one round, whereas a sword left flat on the ground takes a pudding two rounds to dissolve. Each magical plus of the weapon or armor adds one round to the time required to dissolve it.

6. Puddings range in size from 3' to 8' in diameter. As they eat, they gradually get bigger. Of course, the rate of growth depends on the availability of food, but, regardless of how quickly it reaches reproductive size, the pudding will reproduce by fission at some time after reaching 6' in diameter, and before reaching 9'. Puddings splitting voluntarily (as opposed to as a result of being struck by a weapon or lightning) always form two equally-sized smaller puddings, each with half of the hit points of the parent pudding.

7. Black puddings do not need to sleep, a fact which gives them a distinct advantage over their prey, which usually does.

8. Black puddings are immune to damage from all forms of electricity, including lightning. However, although a lightning bolt causes no damage to the black pudding's body, it does cause an involuntary convulsive reaction that splits the pudding in two, regardless of the pudding's size. Lesser forms of electrical attack, such as a shocking grasp spell, cause a weaker convulsive spasm in the pudding, but this is not strong enough to split it.

9. Because black puddings have no sense of sight, they cannot be affected by sight-based spells. They cannot be blinded by *light* or *continual light* spells, and *invisibility* cannot mask a creature's presence from the pudding's heat sense; its heat sense is not a form of vision.

10. Since puddings neither see nor hear, they are completely immune to all illusions with visual or auditory effects. In addition, their blindness makes them immune to such sight-based attacks as a medusa's gaze, and their deafness makes them immune to such sound-based attacks as the roar of an androsphinx.

Puddings are also immune to all forms of acid. Their acid dissolves webs (both natural and magical) without slowing their movement rate. Finally, their odd metabolism allows them to ignore the effects of poison and cold. The latter ability is especially true of the white pudding, which thrives in arctic lands.

11. Since black puddings are immune to all forms of acid, including their own, one pudding cannot eat another. Furthermore, they are asexual, and do not need to interact with another in order to reproduce. Therefore, puddings generally ignore the existence of others of their kind. If no food is within range, two puddings in the same location will generally go separate ways instinctively; if there is food in the vicinity, each immediately heads toward it.

12. Black puddings tend to remain underground and out of sunlight for a good reason: their dark coloration absorbs heat a bit too well, and dries them out after about one day's exposure. This is true only of the black pudding; the white, dun, and brown varieties of pudding have all adapted to life on the surface. Note that black puddings take no damage from being briefly exposed to sunlight, nor do spells such as *sunray* harm them.

13. Puddings are nonintelligent, and so always head for the nearest food (animal or vegetable) available. Adventurers not willing (or able) to battle a pudding can usually escape a pudding by throwing some food its way and hightailing it in the opposite direction.

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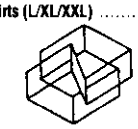

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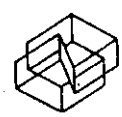

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Bugbear

"A creak from the porch steps and a hulking shadow flits across the windowpane. In the barn, the animals grow restless. They sense something in the dark. Inside, the family members sleep deep, coddled by their dreams, not realizing a nightmare stalks their home. A creature—all shaggy fur and murder—waits in the closet, under the bed, behind the windblown curtains. It will burn your barn and feast on your livestock, ruin your home and eat your sweet meats. A bugbear does not merely kill. It takes everything from a victim, shredding his sanity with the worst of his fears and nightmares."

—Euward Carnaby,
Things in the Darkness

There are things that go bump in the night, and many of them are bugbears. These shaggy cousins of goblins are larger, stronger, and far crueler, and spend most of their days seeking out civilized folk to frighten and slaughter. For the bugbear, acts of terror are the only joys they seek, drawing grim satisfaction in the horror of others.

Overview

Bugbears are the things in the dark. They are the monsters in your child's closet, tormenting him but avoiding detection when you wrench open the door. They hide beneath your window in the night, listening to you sleep, soaking up your nightmares. Fear of the night is universal among humankind, and bugbears are the truth to this fear. They feed on terror with an appetite no mortal man could ever understand. It is more satiating than food, more intoxicating than any drug, even more satisfying than the companionship of their own kin. Bugbears stalk mankind to satiate an urge more demanding than any other. The scent of fear drives them.

A victim's face aghast with horror as the bugbears emerge from the shadows is the only true joy they know.

Bugbears are hunters by nature, although instead of seeking food or glory, they only desire terror. Nothing but fear slakes this need, and every bugbear spends its life a slave to the hunger. Their addiction is our terror, as they prowl the shadows every night hunting man, woman, and child. They are stealthy and delight in giving away their presence to a victim slowly—at first in creaks or thumps in the night their prey can easily dismiss as the wind, next in an open window the person doesn't remember leaving ajar. The bugbear engages in a slow-building dance of innocuous noises and clues to raise the victim's hackles and draw out the scent of the victim's rising terror.

Bugbears care nothing for order, have no conception of ethics or morals, and discard family and traditions as mere obstacles to the hunt. What few trappings of civilization they carry are actually little more than mementos of particularly terror-filled nights of hunting, which they long to remember again and again. They take ears as trophies, but only when the night's sport proved particularly satisfying. On dismal nights when no prey is at hand, bugbears hold their necklaces of ears close and do their best to summon the memory of succulent fear-scent gifted to them by those dying victims.

Ecology

Bugbears are squat, ugly creatures, standing as tall as a man when upright, although preferring to hunch and skulk. They are strong, thick-shouldered louts, and their dark bushy fur hides rippling muscles and a hulking skeletal structure. Although comparable in height to humans, they outweigh humans of their height by a good 30 pounds. Bugbears are surprisingly light-footed for such beefy creatures, capable of navigating creaky old wood floors as carefully and quietly as beings half their size.

Bugbear eyes are frighteningly large—these alien-looking giant ovals on the sides of their heads lack of pupils, which only make the eyes seem even bigger. Their teeth are made for eating the raw meat of fresh kills. These needle-like sawing blades gnash and rend tissue to bits. Although larger than other goblins, bugbears are capable of slinking through small spaces when the need presents itself, and can hide in the shadow of a closet door as well as most of their smaller brethren.

Bugbears' porcine noses are incredibly keen. Their sense of smell is better than any other goblinoid and better than most animals as well. Still, their noses are far from perfect, and the air passages constrict to catch the nuance of a scent. The effect sometimes causes bugbears to wheeze freakishly as they sniff the air, puffing in nostril-fills of scent rapidly. When bugbears fail to sneak up on their foes, it is not their footfalls or the rustle of their leathers that give them away, but more often their wheezing.

Bramble-sick Brandy

In most forests, a bramble called tomb herald—because it grows near burial grounds—is prized by bugbears. When eaten (a painful experience), the thorny bush slightly enhances the monster's ability to smell fear. When fermented into a spirit, the bramble's power increases in potency. When a bugbear is drunk on bramble-sick during a hunt and catches the scent of a victim's fear, it temporarily gains a +2 morale bonus on all attack rolls and skill checks (for as long as it smells pungent fear from a foe within 30 feet). The drink makes the imbiber very ill once its effects wear off (1d4 hours after consumption), causing it to be nauseated for 24 hours. Many bugbears are willing to tolerate this in exchange for the power of the brandy. More than a few adventurers have happened across a bugbear after a night of indulgent bramble-sick-enhanced hunting and found their quarry particularly easy to defeat.

Bugbears smell fear more strongly than anything else and it intoxicates them. For a bugbear, the hunt is a narcotic experience, and the point is not to kill a victim undetected as much at is to inspire dread and unease.

The average bugbear lives only 20 blood-soaked years, during which it culls hundreds of lives with its homicidal nocturnal hunts. While goblins breed almost incessantly, bugbears tend to focus their attentions elsewhere. Bugbears only bother to breed a few times in their lives, as they tend to keep to themselves, even when hunting and living in groups. When bugbears do procreate they frequently give birth to twins or even triplets. Although the hardy goblinoids are physically capable of carrying several young, the birthing process often proves difficult, the danger increasing exponentially for each child. Even though birth is often a solitary affair, handled by a female bugbear alone, the mother's death during delivery typically proves little hindrance to her relentless young, most of which prove brutally capable of fighting their way into the world even under the most appalling conditions.

The impressive self-sufficiency of bugbear young only grows as they age, leaning to hunt by age 2 and reaching full-size within 5 years. Bugbears do not coddle the weaklings among their brood, and only infant bugbears who exude little or no fear survive at all. As they age, the weak are further culled by their own brothers and sisters, the games of war and sibling rivalries of other races taken to a brutal and often lethal degree among bugbear kin. As a result, those bugbears who survive their pitiless childhood are ruthless specimens who know nothing of fear or mercy.

Bugbear Scars

Bugbear have no families and raise no children to remember their hunts or deeds. Therefore, they record the stories of their lives on their skin in brutal, self-inflicted scars. These scars have no discernible shape to anyone besides other bugbears, but other bugbears decipher the scars with ease. Bugbears choose their mates based on the "tale of great hunts" told in these scars, picking worthy fathers or mothers for their broods to ensure the offspring are fierce hunters and can survive being abandoned at early ages.

Habitat & Society

Bugbears are the loners of goblinkind. One creation myth claims the first bugbears were born to goblin parents, but emerged from the womb covered in shaggy fur. They soon proved far different from their kin, delighting in terrorizing other children and eventually murdering several members of the tribe, until they were cast out to wander aimlessly forever alone. Some skulked in the shadows surrounding their parents' communities and preyed on their own, savoring the fear. On occasion, adventurers discover goblinoid settlements reduced to ghost towns. Some whisper that such places are laid to waste when a family in the tribe birthed a bugbear and it hunted them to the last.

Whether there is any truth to this tale or not, bugbears abhor the company of others most of the time. Their sense of community among their own kind is equally blunted by their thirst for the hunt. Bugbears rarely bow to any sense of family, and whatever camaraderie they bear for their mates, brethren, or children is always under attack. Most groups are short lived, torn apart from within before long, unless a steady source of prey remains readily available.

Bugbears are consummate hunters. It is in their souls to stalk and kill. Long ago, before humans claimed much of the land, bugbears hunted elves, lesser goblinoids, and animals in the sprawling wilds untainted by human civilization. Now humans take the trees, building houses in their stead. The prey and terrain might have changed, but bugbears haven't. They still hunt and terrorize. Creeping under porches and stealthily skirting rooftops, they prowl a forest of hewn wood and masonry as surely as their ancestors stalked in the shadows of tree and rock.

Humans proved delicious. Bugbears now prefer humankind to all other game. Only blink dogs, for some strange reason, issue as tantalizing a scent of fear, and they are much harder to catch than humans. As humans replaced elves as bugbears' preferred targets, stalking the loved ones of their intended prey became a favored sport. Elves seem to be less emotionally concerned for their families than humans, who experience great anguish when loved ones suffer.

As humans spread out into the wild lands, bugbears' ideas of perfect hunts evolved. To take victims' loved ones right from their beds without the targets detecting the intrusions became the favorite sport of many bugbear hunters. The bugbears claim the ears as trophies and leave the wrecked remains on the family's doorstep or in their barn, to be found only after a frantic search of the house. Sometimes, to sweeten the terror, the bugbears leave severed fingers or a few teeth for the family to discover first. The bugbears then prowl from window to window to observe and enjoy the victims' mounting panic as the search intensifies. In townships and cities, where other humans lurk close by, bugbears take great precautions to ensure their frenzied terror-fests go uninterrupted.

Bugbears are wanderers by nature. They prowl the wilds from town to town, hunting travelers and plaguing communities until forced to move on, when either the humans abandon the settlement in fear or meddling adventurers chase away the bugbears.

As the largest and most brutal of the goblinoid races, bugbears sometimes force their weaker cousins into service. Groups formed around these bruisers are typically little more than mobs that engage in short-lived rampages, typically ending when the bugbear's own brutality tears its band apart. More often, the better organized bands and armies of hobgoblins manage to direct bugbear savagery, employing them as front-line fighters or simply destructive distractions sent before their hordes.

Bugbears frequently engage in the ritual of scarification. Bugbears dig furrows and patterns in their flesh or brand themselves with heated irons. On most bugbears, these scars are well hidden beneath their fur, but on others the self-scarring is more extensive, leaving entire patches of their pelt laid bare to show ugly ropey clusters of scar tissue beneath.

The only other trapping of civilization bugbears take to is the collection of mementos. These mementos are no keepsakes to remind them of dead family or friends, but rather trophies to hearken back to memories of their favorite hunts. Bugbears usually take ears, but some claim possessions of the victims, such as articles of clothing or jewelry that caught their eyes.

Campaign Role

Use bugbears to bring a sense of dread to the PCs. The characters most likely encounter bugbears early in their careers, and you might use these monsters to give the party its first taste of true heart-pounding terror for terror's sake. If the players seem nonplussed by "fear," show them the true meaning of it with bugbears. Putting the PCs' own lives on the line is something they deal with everyday. Mortal danger comes with the territory and PCs get used to it quickly. Instead, use bugbears to go for the people the PCs care about. Bugbears have no real urge to slay a heroic PC, but they very much enjoy the scent of absolute terror pouring off an adventurer who learns his own sister is missing, especially when he finds a bit of bloody hair on the doorstep with the ribbon the PC gave her still tied around it.

Bugbears make the perfect foes for a serial-killer adventure, in which a night stalker preys on townsfolk, reaping the helpless and taking their ears for trophies. They also make good early boss monsters whom even their goblin minions fear.

Treasure

Bugbears have no need for treasure. They have no sense of society and therefore don't value currency in any form. On occasion, bugbears might claim valuable baubles or grisly trophies as mementos from victims, but they do not choose these for monetary value. Despite their disinterest in monetary wealth, the brutish goblinoids do have an innate sense for objects that terrify, often gathering fundamentally frightening or eerie items—bloodstained blades, yellowed bones, wooden fetishes—which they work into weaponry or armor. Thinking nothing of the inherent value of such accoutrements, what a bugbear might view as nothing more than another spike on its armor might in fact be a dirty, but finely crafted dagger or other useful tool.

While bugbears ignore gold and other treasures for the most part, they prize items that give them advantages in hunts, such as *cloaks* and *boots of elvenkind* or *rings of invisibility,* all of which make the bugbears better at sneaking up on victims. Magic items that allow the bugbears to spy on potential victims or travel from one homestead to another quickly reduce the agonizing time spent between hunts. Magic arms and armor, of course, are likewise valued by bugbears, although not to the same extent as other savage humanoids. Typically, bugbears have little knowledge or interest in the magic at work in their items, knowing only that they do what they do. Thus, even a bugbear's most valued and valuable magical treasure is likely to be a filthy, gore-stained wreck.

Bugbear Feats

Scent of Fear

All bugbears smell fear, but some sense it far more keenly than others. These bugbears gain advantages against most foes and prove particularly dangerous against those whose spirits are curdled by terror.

Prerequisites: Possess the scent ability, any evil.

Benefit: You can track by smell and automatically pinpoint the location of opponents by scent alone if they are within 30 feet. In addition, you gain a +2 morale bonus on attack rolls against shaken or frightened opponents, and you can detect them at twice the normal scent range (120 feet, pinpoint at 60 feet). You gain a +2 bonus on all Will saves as long as a shaken or frightened target is in range. You cannot be surprised by anyone who is shaken or frightened within range of your enhanced sense of smell.

Sow Terror

Bugbears are stealthy, and sometimes they use their skill at furtiveness to inspire dread in their prey.

Prerequisite: Stealthy.

Benefit: Anytime you win an opposed Hide check by 5 or more you might sow terror as a standard action. You do so by scraping your nails slightly on a solid surface, causing a board to creak ever so lightly, or rapping on a window pane. The victim cannot detect the source of the sound and dismisses it as the wind or some other mundane source, but the idea that something might be lurking nearby festers in the victim's subconscious. The victim must roll a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 you character level + your Charisma modifier) or become shaken for 1d4 rounds.

Variants

Bugbears of all kinds infest the world.

Some bugbears, known as kardans, have dark gray fur and prove far stealthier than their lesser brethren. These bugbears sometimes possess the vexing ability to appear as something other than their terrifying selves for short periods of time—such as chairs, rocks, tree stumps, or even the likenesses of loved ones. Kardans gain a +8 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently and have the following spell-like abilities: 3/day—*disguise self, minor image*. A kardan is CR 4.

In wintry climes, albino bugbears called wikkawaks prowl the glaciers by night, hunting settlers and prowling the frosted roofs of log cabins. These creatures fear no wind and bear the bite of cold remarkably well. They also purportedly leave no tracks, although sprinkling salt in the snow shows a wikkawak's prints. Wikkawaks can quell fire and lantern light with a thought. Wikkawaks have cold resistance 5 and the following spell-like abilities: at will—*pass without trace;* 3/day—*quench*. A wikkawak is CR 4.

In swampy environs or near great rivers, another form of bugbears, called murds, is said to exist. Its fur caked in muddy earth, the thing can turn into sludge-like tar at will. In this form, a murd flows through pipes, under doors, and up through cracks in the floor. These menaces easily seep into the homes of men and murder to their delight before slinking away again. It's said a murd fears all serpents and cannot enter a house where a snake is kept as a pet. Murds have the supernatural ability to use a version of *gaseous form,* at will, to become viscous mud. When in mud form, a murd can squeeze through any gap water can and can "flow" uphill, against gravity (although it must succeed on Climb checks as normal). A murd is CR 3.

Some bugbears adapt to human environs better than other goblinoids, and a relatively new species of these terrors has been rumored of late. Called slate-stalkers, these bugbears possess fur containing the gray-black-brown of most urban environments. In addition, these things feed on the coal of industry and woodsmoke. They fear no taste of flame and crawl down hearths where fire burns within to gain access to their prey. They also possess a horrid power of selectable invisibility in which they are visible only to their victims and unperceivable to others. Slate-stalkers especially enjoy terrorizing victims as family and friends look on, dumbfounded at their loved ones' "madness." Slate-stalkers have fire resistance 10 and a +4 racial bonus on Hide checks made in urban settings, and possess the supernatural ability to become invisible to all but one creature three times per day. Except for its chosen creature, the slate-stalker enjoys all the benefits of the *invisibility* spell. A slate-stalker is CR 4.

Some bugbears are stillborn, but suddenly wheeze in a sharp intake of breath and return to life a full hour after their dead birth. These are the worst bugbears of all. Forever half-dead, these things, called koblaks, have eyes even larger than their kin and see through walls and over hills. In addition, these abominations can terrorize victims after death and even learn the secrets of their victims. Koblaks can also scare victims to death and take great delight in doing so. Children slain by koblaks rise as attic whisperers (see *Pathfinder* #1). Koblaks are half in our world, half in the next, and they do not die easily. Time refuses to reap them, and some live for centuries. They are particularly difficult to slay, and any weapon employed against them is nearly useless unless it is sprinkled with grave dirt first (DR 10 against any weapon not sprinkled with grave dirt). It's said grave dirt is the only thing capable of calling them back to beyond the pale from which they were born. Koblaks have 8 HD, are immune to fear and mind-affecting effects, and possess the following spell-like abilities: at will—*clairaudience/clairvoyance, speak with dead;* 1/day—*phantasmal killer.* A koblak is CR 6.

Bugbears in Golarion

Bugbears menace lightly populated regions in Golarion, most notably places where humanity has recently expanded, such as the region of Varisia. The Mierani Forest used to be thick with these monsters, but since the elves departed, bugbears moved on to other prey. Some people claim the bugbears fled the forest, driven off by something even more terrifying. Now they are spread far and wide across Varisia, drawn to the fledgling cities of men clinging to the region's coastlines.

The island of Kortos was once densely forested before the arrival of Aroden, who hewed the trees while erecting Absalom. Bugbears long ago migrated to Kortos and some dwell there still, although now they creep in dark corners of the urban landscape. In particular, a koblak bugbear of great power named Vesper slinks about Absalom. Vesper makes his home in the desolation of Beldrin's Bluff, most likely among the undead children of the Drownyard. Vesper often travels the city, visiting the darkened attics of dozens of old estates to spend time with his "lost children"—a collection of attic whisperers he gave rise to with his predations.

Murds abound in the Mwangi Expanse. These deadly hunters are so populous that many native tribes revere snakes and snake gods as protector spirits, keeping several trained specimens in their homes to ward off the "things in the darkness."

Names

Bugbear names tend toward savage, simple constructions, often in combining fearsome words in human languages or Goblin.

Male: Bander, Bershank, Bilgra, Bogey, Daul, Geth, Grizzletooth, Halk, Hugga, Jabb, Roofer, Shak, Shamble-Gait, Slinker, Spalg.

Female: Banra, Bloodra, Fanka, Jalru, Libba, Melg, Narb, Rafter, Sill-Creeper, Silla, Shadow, Sniggletooth, Ulu, Wilda, Yarsha.

BUGBEAR

This ugly creature resembles a twisted shadow puppet's silhouette, a wild thing of flared black and brown fur whose pelt juts out from its body at freakish angles. The crouching shadow's ears are large and floppy, draping shoulder-length, adding to the creature's unnatural shape. Its eyes are too big for its head. Tremendous milk-white ovals loom on either side of the thing's wheezy pig-like nose. Its panting mouth is filled with bristly needle-teeth spider-webbed in disgusting strands of yellowish saliva, all vibrating to the tune of its wheezing breath.

BUGBEAR **CR 3**

Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16
(+2 armor, +1 Dex, +3 natural, +1 shield)

hp 16 (3d8+3)

Fort +2, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee morningstar +5 (1d8+2) or

Melee kukri +5 (1d4+2/18–20)

Ranged javelin +3 (1d6+2) or

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

Before Combat Bugbears slink in shadow and behind closed doors. They revel in the look of terror on a foe's face when they suddenly loom from the darkness, often with some horrible trophy in hand.

During Combat Bugbears do not enjoy protracted fighting and seek to down a foe and slip away as quickly and quietly as possible. They favor hit-and-run tactics when the situation allows, striking at the most vulnerable point or member of a group.

Morale A bugbear is not foolish enough to fight to the death, as that would preclude it from menacing others at a later date. It usually flees if reduced to 5 hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 12, **Con** 13, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +4

Feats Stealthy, Weapon Focus (morningstar or kukri)

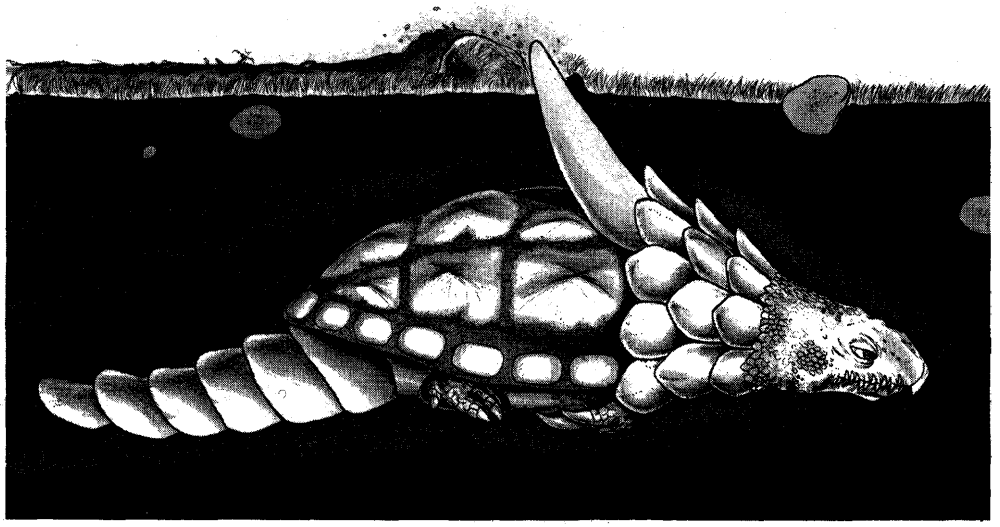
Skills Climb +3, Hide +6, Listen +2, Move Silently +8, Spot +2

Languages Common, Goblin

Gear dried human-meat rations, hammer and nails, javelins (5), jug of bramble-sick brandy, kukri, leather armor, light wooden shield, morningstar, pliers, trophy necklace of ears

You'd never guess such brutes could be so quiet, but let your guard down and they're on you—their breath like a wolf's, their eyes like death.

The ecology of the Bulette



by Chris Elliott
and Richard Edwards

"Brethren of the Guild of Naturalists!" The hum of conversation in the hall fell to an expectant hush as the speaker, a short, balding man in the robes of a Guildmaster, raised his arms for silence.

"For untold years, there has been no sighting of the Teeth in the Earth, more prosaically known as the Land Shark, and even in the Guild there were many who dismissed the tales of this spawn of sorcery as little more than legend.

"Tonight, however, we have with us a man who has not only seen one alive and been within three poles of the behemoth, but actually hunted it for trophy!

"From the land of Morn — A'ahb the Hunter."

The Guildmaster stepped back, his place taken by a tall, rugged man in sandy-colored robes; black-bearded, hook-nosed, burnt and weathered by sun and wind. Without preamble, he addressed the expectant Guildsmen.

"I've hunted all kinds of game, but like most of you I never thought the bulette, the land shark as you call it, was anything but the stuff of legend. How could such a beast swim through the earth like a fish through water, even if it was magical?

"Then, five years ago, I was in a little known and even lesser traversed area of Morn when I heard rumors of tribes that tracked such a beast, digging the earth from where the bulette had passed, taking the mud that they found, and smearing it on their plows.

"I asked the reason for this strange practice and was told that it made the plows cut the earth like the prow of a boat cuts the water. I began following the source of these rumors, to the east, deeper into the interior of the sparsely populated wilderness.

"I was approached by the headman of a native village shortly after my arrival on his premises. He confirmed the stories I had heard, and from what he said I began to get an idea of the nature of the beast.

"It existed — that much seemed certain — and its uncanny powers must come from an ability to secrete a slime from its skin that works like the potion for transmuting rock to mud, known to some wizards and alchemists. But this secretion must be weaker than the potion in strength and duration, and it seems to work only on earth, not rock.

"The headman said that he was glad I had come this way. His village was being terrorized by an enormous rogue bulette, an albino of the species, that the natives called 'Mobh Idich' — The Great White One. Many warriors had tried hunting it, but it would either pick them off singly, or, gathering speed beneath the surface, it would burst forth upon a small group, just as a porpoise leaps out of the water, and devour them all.

"The headman asked me if I thought *I* could kill it. I didn't know if I could or not — but I knew I wanted to try. . . ."

The hunter paused, perhaps savoring the anticipation that he knew his audience was feeling.

"When I first saw a bulette on the surface, it fitted all the partial descriptions I had heard. Its body was articulated, and covered in thick, scaly plates that built up into a carapace on its back. Part of this shell could be extended to become the horny fin that produces the weaving furrows that criss-cross the land shark's domain. Its stocky, powerful limbs can be retracted while its muscular tail is propelling the beast through the earth. The mouth opens almost to a right angle, revealing a gaping maw filled with rows of dagger-like teeth.

"The beast is warm-blooded and breathes air, surfacing to do so. It is likely they bear live young, but if so this is done beneath the surface. As far as I know, a pregnant female has never been seen.

"I can tell you are wondering how I got close enough to the beast to find out all of this without being eaten. Well, you can find out these things from a *dead* one just as well — and I found a way to *kill* the bulette that has worked for me time and again since the first.

"From what I had been told, I figured that the bulette hunts by tracing vibrations in the earth, rather than by scent. So, I caught myself a kobold. A horse would work just as well, but they're much too valuable to use for bulette bait. I found a solitary tree, tied the kobold to the trunk on a short rope, and nestled myself in the branches with my heavy crossbow in hand.

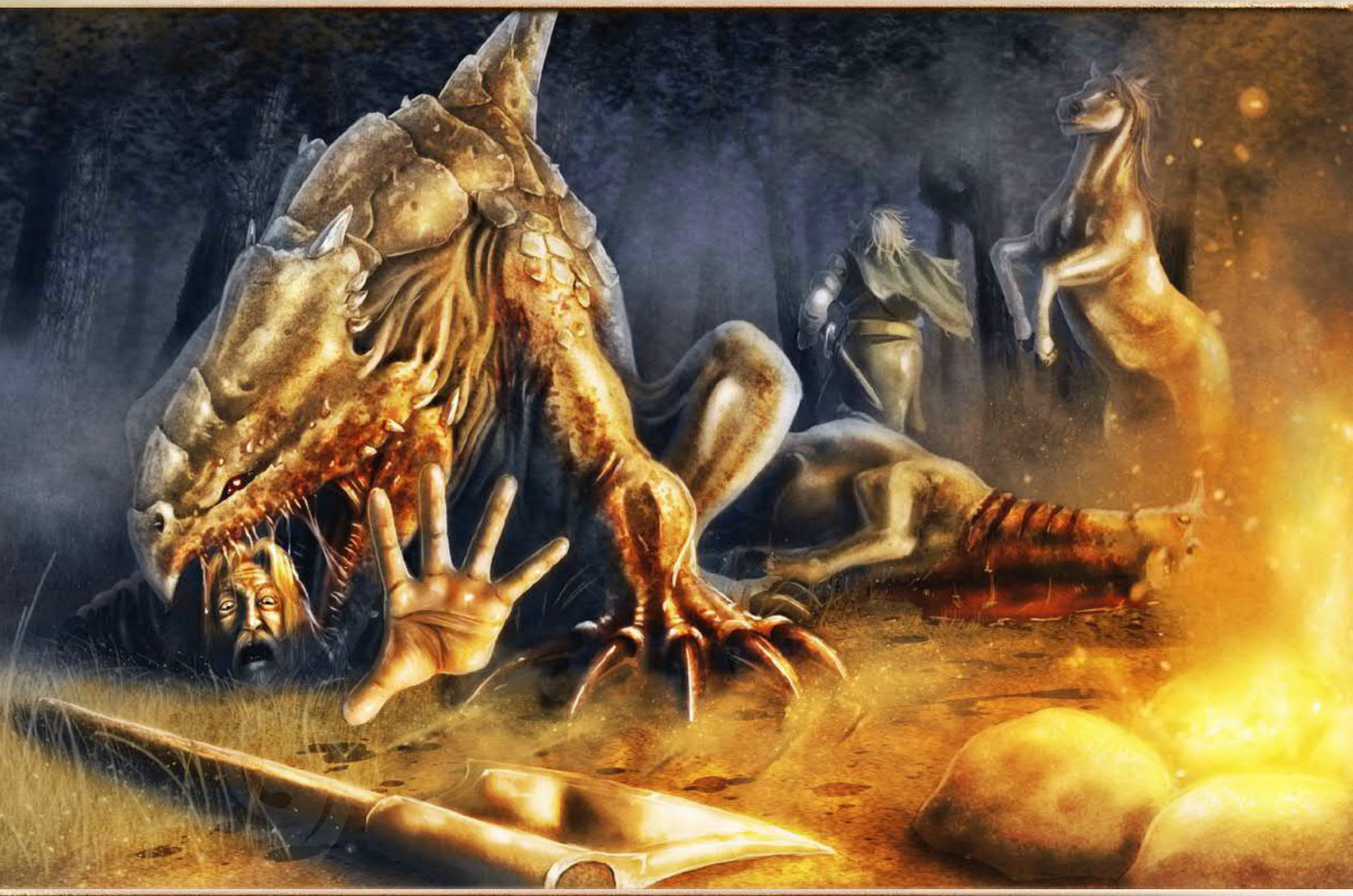
"The kobold circled frantically. I sent an occasional reminder in its direction with my crossbow when it started to slow down, and after a while the constant movement of the kobold in the small area had done its task. I sighted a large fin weaving across the plain. It circled the tree, spiraling inward, and then abruptly made its final rush.

"As it burst from the earth, jaws wide open and mud streaming off its flanks, I let fly with a large quarrel smeared with poison — right down its gullet.

"What's that? Yes — only one shot, thanks to the poison. Really, once you've got the technique down, it's quite easy. I've killed others since the first day, but there's always something special about the first one. I still keep the hide of The Great White One as a memento. . . ."

At this point A'ahb the Hunter pulled on a cord, and a cloth behind him fell away to reveal a huge skin stretched on a frame. The meeting dissolved in chaos as members of the Guild fought to be the first to examine it.

(An earlier version of this article appeared in *Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.*)



Bulette

Our sixth day out from Delmon's Glen we made camp by a small creek and settled in. Around the moon's apex, the ground rumbled, our tents collapsed, and rocks crashed into our camp from the cliffs above. Then silence. We had set to fixing the camp and mending wounds when the beast exploded into our midst like a ballista bolt, claws flashing, mouth agape, the canyon echoing with its bestial roar. Clansmen fled in all directions, but none could flee fast enough. The monster was on us all and fed on man and horse alike. It was as though Asmodeus himself opened the gates to Hell, and we were camped on perdition's doorstep.

—from the journal of Rolgar Ironsson, Ulfen merchant

Of all the beasts that populate the wilderness, few are as feared as the bulette. Known sometimes as the landshark, the bulette is a sleek predator, moving as fluidly through earth as those primeval eating machines move through water. Bulettes possess insatiable hunger and view anything that moves as food. They hunt constantly, and when their attention turns to new hunting grounds they feed until nothing remains. They are the stuff of nightmares, the bane of the wilderness—brutal, savage monsters whose ferocious majesty was not evolved, but intentionally crafted.

Overview

While the process that created the bulette is long lost, many rumors abound regarding the origins of the landshark. According to popular lore, a cabal of arch-wizards seeking new beasts to guard its secret lairs created bulettes thousands of years ago. Many claim bulettes are a cross between two ordinary animals—the snapping turtle and the armadillo being the most common—which were then infused with the essence, or ichor, of demons. Though

no one alive today knows the absolute truth behind their origin, one thing is clear: bulettes are insatiable predators. Simple creatures that roam from region to region seeking more abundant prey, they devour everything that moves. Nothing that can walk, crawl, swim, or run is immune to the hunger and rage of the bulette—though elves like to brag that their blood tastes too plant-like for the landshark, and dwarves brazenly claim bulettes dislike the taste of their flesh. These claims may have some truth to them, but most non-elves and non-dwarves assume they're the stuff of hubris rather than any specific truth. Bulettes especially favor halfling and horse flesh, and have been known to attack large parties just to kill and devour one of these treats.

Those who've come face-to-face with a bulette and lived to share the story talk of a mindless, emotionless brute. Sometimes they tell of a bulette heading into a village, gliding just beneath the earth's surface and snatching townsfolk or livestock. Others speak of a bulette erupting in the middle of their camp and consuming everything too slow to flee. Bulettes, it is clear, cannot be reasoned with—they are hard to trick, and can only be stopped with brute force. Voracious and tenacious, they hardly stop eating long enough to rest.

Ecology

Bulettes typically live for 20 years, and spend all but the last few as solitary hunters. They prefer to roam temperate hills and plains in search of food, but have been spotted in tunnels deep beneath the surface as well as in deserts, atop high mountain plains, and (rarely) in arctic zones.

It's rare to find bulettes dead of natural causes in the wild, as in addition to the creatures' tendency to die in battle, sages believe that most aging bulettes' organs simply give out while they are engaged in the physical exertion of tunneling, entombing them where they fall beneath tons of dirt and stone. Some primitive tribes believe that earthquakes are caused by the death throes of these great creatures, deep within the earth.

Physically, bulettes are very complicated creatures. Their bodies are massive, typically growing to 15 feet in length and standing 8 feet or more in height. Young bulettes mature quickly, reaching full size in less than a year. In regions where food is plentiful and competition scarce, bulettes have been known to grow to nearly 20 feet in length and 12 feet in height. A bulette's armor plating is made of the same material as its skeletal structure. Young bulettes bear soft and malleable armor plates, and dwarven blacksmiths pay exorbitant amounts of gold to acquire them, as they can shape the plates before they harden, thus producing custom bulette plate armor. Once a bulette reaches its full, adult size, its armor plating is as hard as steel, making it a very difficult creature to penetrate with either blade or arrow.

Creating a Bulette

It is commonly believed that the bulette was created by crossing an armadillo with a snapping turtle, infusing the union with demon ichor. While the specifics have long been lost, some researchers have attempted to duplicate the experiment. Their notes state that especially large specimens of each animal are needed, as well as the spells *animal growth*, *bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *darkvision*, *jump*, *permanency*, *polymorph*, and either *barkskin* or *stoneskin*. The animals are placed in a large sealable container, then doused with the ichor from a powerful demon, with stronger demons giving the reaction a greater chance of success. After adding the ichor, the creator seals the container, casts the required spells (alternately, potions of the weaker spells may be mixed with the ichor beforehand), and hopes for success.

How reliable the process is remains difficult to determine, as few of those who attempt it are ever heard from again.

Bulettes have massive torsos and thick legs that end in long, incredibly sharp claws that they use to burrow through the earth. Their musculature is entirely focused on moving the jaw (for eating) and the legs (for digging), making their claws a fearsome weapon and their bite a terrifying thing to behold. A series of elastic tendons runs the length of each leg and is anchored at the knees, hips, and ankles; originally evolved to help the creature quickly extricate itself from collapsed tunnels, these powerful muscles allow the ponderous beast to leap incongruously into the air with little effort, bringing all four claws to bear on an adjacent—and usually astonished—opponent.

Beneath the skin, bulettes are designed to eat. They have six stomachs, each one smaller than the last, and each processes food differently. The stomach acids of a bulette can melt armor and lay waste to magic trinkets. Only the toughest, magically enhanced metals can resist the digestive process. This lets bulettes eat their prey whole—gear and all, in the case of humanoids—without stopping to think about what they're eating. Their stomachs are disgusting, churning masses that break nearly everything down into a smelly pulp; alchemists prize the stomach acid of bulettes for its caustic properties.

A bulette's impact on its environment is severe. A peaceful valley of villages, farmland, and fish-filled streams can be turned into a wasteland of death and decay in just a single fortnight of bulette activity. When moving into new and bountiful territory, bulettes can go days without sleep. This same peaceful valley quickly finds its livestock gone, its buildings knocked down, its villagers eaten or fled, its streams emptied, and its forests devoid of wildlife. The constant burrowing also churns the farmland into a rocky waste, uproots trees, weakens or destroys the foundations

of dwellings, and drains entire ponds or lakes by opening tunnels into deep caverns.

Habitat & Society

Bulettes have a 5-month gestation period and are born singly to a mating pair. A baby bulette possesses the same insatiable hunger as its parents and begins to hunt the moment it's born. Though its armor and claws are softer than an adult's, they still offer a measure of protection to the young landshark, and the claws are sharp enough to rend flesh. Young bulettes always follow behind the mating pair as they burrow together from hunting ground to hunting ground, as it'll be a full year before the whelp's claws are strong enough to tear through dirt, rock, sand, and clay. A mating pair of bulettes can have as many as six young before reaching the end of their lifecycle.

Once a bulette reaches a year old, it sets out on its own, beginning a lifetime as a solitary hunter. Adolescent bulettes seek hunting grounds that yield no competition from others of their kind. They can roam as far as 1,000 miles from their birthplaces, but tend to restrict themselves to a well-populated region of 500 or so square miles. When a bulette settles into a region to feed and hunt, it tends to travel the same routes again and again, leaving behind a complicated, twisting, and often unpredictable tunnel network of hard-packed earth and rock. These near-permanent remnants of a bulette's travels are called "shark holes" and are very dangerous to travel. While cave-ins, rockslides, and burrowing bulettes are ever-present dangers, they can be very useful paths from the surface to the dark caverns below.

Bulettes are primarily nocturnal, and tend to sleep out the warmest parts of the day in crater-like nests on the surface called "drifts." A given bulette usually maintains dozens of drifts at intervals along the borders of its territory, which it uses as it makes regular circuits around the area. Sleeping bulettes curl into balls, with the armor plating of their backs protecting their slightly more vulnerable underbellies. Since most predators know better than to bother a sleeping bulette, clever creatures (including humanoid hunters) sometimes find temporary shelter inside empty drifts, usually determining the risk by the state of the droppings at the pit's bottom. If they're too fresh, the bulette may still be in the area. Too dry, and the beast is likely close to completing its route and returning. But for those drifts in which the droppings are dry on the outside but still moist in the center, their owner is likely several days away on the other side of its territory, making the drift a haven for those who know how to read the signs.

Bulettes seek out a mate around their seventeenth year of life. They roam far from their solitary hunting grounds and even bypass plentiful food sources in order to track a potential mate's scent. As their instinct shifts from eating and hunting to propagating the species, bulettes become more aggressive, seeking to expand their territories in order to provide for the forthcoming young.

Bulettes mate for the remainder of their lives and do not seek another mate if one is killed. The female bulette spends most of the last few years of her life pregnant, birthing over several seasons before the strain eventually takes its toll. A male's aggression peaks when the female bulette is pregnant, and his hunting prowess excels as he attempts to satisfy his mate's increased appetite.

Other than mated pairs, bulettes avoid direct confrontation with others of their kind. Whether this is simply a natural instinct or part of their magical "programming" from their creation is not known, but it is known that two bulettes, tossed into a fortified arena and expected to face off, will not fight one another, and will even work together to escape. All living creatures should be thankful that bulettes are solitary, as the only thing more dangerous than one hungry, captive bulette is two working together.

Campaign Role

GMs can introduce bulettes to a campaign in many different ways. A panicked village might hire the PCs to deal with a bulette that destroyed an outlying farm—given the creature's appetite, the rest of the village is surely next. Elven protectors of a forest might locate a series of bulette drifts and ask the PCs to find the bulettes responsible before the monsters depopulate the woods. Because it can travel underground, a bulette might pop up anywhere, while the PCs are traveling or even in the middle of a quiet camp. A location completely destroyed by a bulette attack could serve as a backdrop for an entire "home town" campaign, with the

PCs first discovering the aftermath of a bulette's hunger and then spending months or years helping the townsfolk rebuild and fortify against threats. The PCs may stumble upon a mated pair and experience a unique encounter wherein the female shields her young while her mate ferociously attacks the PCs. Finally, there's always the option of exploring the monsters' origin. Who created them? Was it a cabal of wizards, or a lone madman, and for what purpose? Did these early bulettes escape their creator, or were they released deliberately? Does the creator still exist, perhaps in a lich-like state? What other monstrosities were born in that ancient laboratory? Answering these questions could make for months of exciting gaming.

Variants

A common artificial origin has spawned a number of monsters closely related to the bulette. Some of these are simple variations of the base bulette, with mottled skin colors, thicker armor plates, or smaller sizes, while others are distantly related, barely recognizable mutations or experiments.

Leprous Bulette: Bulettes can contract leprosy, usually by eating an infected humanoid, and pass the disease on to any humanoid lucky enough to survive the creature's attack. For more information on leprosy, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #8.

Spiny Bulette: Sages believe this is either a mutation or a new breed created with a hedgehog or porcupine as the base creature rather than an armadillo. Large spines jut from between its armor plates; anyone attacking it with natural attacks or unarmed strikes take 1d6 damage and must make a DC 16 Reflex save or have the quill break off and embed in his flesh. Lodged quills impose a –1 penalty on attacks, saves, and checks per quill. The save DC is Dexterity-based.

Xenarth: The most feared bulette mutations are the xenarths. Also called ichor sharks, xenarths are an incredibly rare species of bulette that most believe long vanished from the world. Since the original bulettes were created with infusions of demon ichor, many have long associated them with demons despite the fact that they're simply magically created beasts. Xenarths, however, are actually demons. At the moment of the creation process when the fused animal parts were combined with demon ichor, xenarths were imbued with an excess of this essence, becoming demonic outsiders, creatures not of the Material Plane. Xenarths are covered in a slimy red ichor that burns like acid when touched and helps propel them through the soil much quicker than the bulette. Xenarths are brutal and even more frightening than their cousins. Bulettes eat to fuel an insatiable hunger—xenarths eat for the pure pleasure of destruction, and have been known to eat, regurgitate, and move on to other food.

Bulette Armor

Dwarves have long treasured bulettes for their thick hides and armor plating. In fact, some dwarf clans require their young to travel on long pilgrimages to areas thick with land sharks to hunt the reclusive and vicious beasts, intent on harvesting their plates for armor. A single adult male bulette has enough armor plating and hide to produce two sets of Medium bulette plate mail and four sets of Medium leather or studded leather armor. These armor sets are more often than not imbued with the delving armor quality, and veteran dwarf bulette hunters are rarely seen without their *+1 delving bulette full plate* while on the hunt. Creating bulette armor from the creature's hide requires a skilled armorer; crafted bulette armor may be normal or masterwork quality.

A set of bulette plate is functionally similar to metal full plate, but is prized by wealthy collectors and military commanders the world over, and tends to sell for up to 10 times more than a normal set. Bulette full plate is slightly heavier (65 pounds) than regular steel plate, but is more flexible and durable (max Dex bonus +2, hardness 12).

A suit of bulette leather armor weighs 20 pounds, and its appearance matches the coloration of the landshark from which it was made. It sells for 50 gp, but has the same statistics as studded leather.

Bulette Bulwark (Shield)

Aura Faint abjuration; **CL** 9th

Slot shield; **Price** 9,157 gp; **Weight** 15 lbs.

Description

Fashioned from a bulette's neck armor, this *+3 heavy shield* is as hard as steel (hardness 10, 20 hp). Because it is not made of metal, druids can use it without penalty.

Construction

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, 1 intact set of neck plates from a bulette; Cost 4,657 gp, 360 XP

Delving (Armor Quality)

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 5th

Price +2 bonus

Description

Wearing armor with this quality grants you a burrow speed of 10 feet. This speed allows you to tunnel through any type of soil, including rocky soil, but not actual stone. This quality does not give you the ability to breathe underground, so you must hold your breath or use other magic that provides air. You gain a +4 bonus on all saving throws against landslides, avalanches, tunnel collapses, and similar effects. This armor quality may not be applied to shields.

Construction

Requirements Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *soften earth and stone*, 25 lbs. of bulette armor plating

Xenarth

This huge beast rests atop four thick legs that end in sleek, curved claws, and its body is covered in red-hued armor plates that drip with foul ichor. Its eyes glow red like hot coals, and strange veins between its plates pulse and glow like flames. Along its spine, a slender armored crest peaks at mid-back, much like the top fin of a shark.

Xenarth **CR 10**

CE Huge outsider (chaotic, demon, evil, native)

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +16, Spot +16

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 10, flat-footed 22 (+2 Dex, +14 natural, –2 size)

hp 145 (11d8+88)

Fort +15, **Ref** +9, **Will** +9

Defensive Abilities demon ichor; **DR** 10/cold iron and good; **Immune** electricity and poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10, fire 10; **SR** 18

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee bite +20 (2d6+13 plus poison) and 2 claws +14 (1d8+9)

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

TACTICS

Before Combat Unlike their stupid cousins, xenarths possess some tactical skills. They prefer to sneak up on opponents and often trail potential victims unobserved from their underground tunnels, studying them and learning their weaknesses before ambushing them in advantageous terrain.

During Combat Xenarths are afraid of nothing and attack with reckless abandon. They revel in the act of violence and eat everything they kill, if only to vomit it forth again later in a grisly and triumphant torrent.

Morale Xenarths fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 29, **Dex** 15, **Con** 27, **Int** 6, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +11; **Grp** +28

Feats Alertness, Iron Will, Track, Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Climb +31, Jump +5, Listen +16, Move Silently +16, Spot +16, Survival +14

Languages Abyssal

SQ telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Demon Ichor (Su) A slimy red ichor coats the xenarth's armored plates. Any weapon that touches a xenarth takes 3d8 points of acid damage from the corrosive demon essence, and the weapon's hardness does not reduce this damage. A magic weapon may attempt a DC 17 Reflex save to avoid taking this damage. A creature that strikes a xenarth with an unarmed attack, unarmed strike, melee touch spell, or natural weapon takes this damage unless the attacker makes a DC 17 Reflex save. The save DCs are Constitution-based.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 23, initial damage 1d6 Con, secondary damage 2d6 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Bulettes on Golarion

Created at the beginning of the Age of Omens as guardians for magical libraries of the Azlanti, bulettes were trained, magically controlled soldiers for many ancient cultures, including Thassilon, Jistka, and Ancient Osirion. As those societies fell, the bulettes were loosed upon the world, and heavily infested the shores of the Inner Sea and the vast plains stretching east into Casmaron. After a few hundred years, however, the number of bulette attacks started to decline, and eventually the landsharks vanished altogether. Commoners and adventurers rejoiced, believing the creature extinct. During that time, cults of Lamashtu devoted to the bulette as their spirit beast began organized, ritualistic prayer ceremonies begging Lamashtu to return the landshark to Golarion. Over time these ceremonies evolved into complicated weeklong affairs culminating in ritual self-sacrifice and mutilation.

A century passed before another bulette was seen, but as it turns out, Golarion's landsharks have a cyclic population pattern in the wild. Starting with small numbers, the race multiplies over the course of 200–500 years until, either as a result of overpopulation or increased predation by even larger creatures such as dragons, a few fertile elder bulettes tunnel far underground and hibernate rather than mating, leaving a generation of suddenly sterile stragglers to die off. The elders sleep so deeply that dwarven mining expeditions have mistakenly believed them dead, with the beasts only rising groggily when the stout folk try to carve off their valuable armor plates. (It is now a standard practice for dwarves to decapitate any bulette corpse they find, just in case it's actually a hibernating specimen). The elders generally sleep for 50–150 years, then wake, find mates, rear a clutch or two of young, and die, leaving the world to the next generation. The most recent decline happened a century before the death of Aroden, with the bulettes returning just before the start of the Age of Lost Omens.

Now that bulettes are active again, their numbers and presence on Avistan, Garund, and Casmaron are larger than ever. Their once relatively small hunting grounds along the shores of the Inner Sea have expanded as far north as the Worldwound (where they flourish despite an unusually high population density, gorging on demon flesh), all the way east into Tian Xia, and throughout all of Garund other than the Mwangi Expanse. Outside of the Worldwound, bulettes are common in Rahadoum, Thuvia, Katapesh, Nex, Geb, and the Storval Plateau in Varisia, and less common across the heavily populated northern and eastern shores of the Inner Sea. Although bulettes have been known to hunt in swamps and marshlands, they avoid the Mwangi Expanse for unknown reasons.

Bulette

The ground rumbles as a giant fin pokes through the earth and glides effortlessly through the soil. Suddenly, the dirt explodes in a shower of roots and rocks and a mighty beast covered in huge gray armor plates emerges from the hole. Its eyes shine with malice, and an armored crest, much like a shark's fin, runs from the beast's neck back to a short, thick tail. It stands on four poweful legs, each of which ends in long, wickedly curved claws.

Bulette **CR 7**

N Huge magical beast

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent, tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +9, Spot +3

Defense

AC 22, touch 10, flat-footed 20 (+2 Dex, +12 natural, –2 size)

hp 94 (9d10+45)

Fort +11, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Offense

Spd 40 ft., burrow 10 ft.

Melee bite +16 (2d8+8) and 2 claws +10 (2d6+4)

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

Special Attacks leap

Tactics

During Combat Bulettes attack anything they think they can eat—and they can eat a lot. Their usual tactic is to focus on a single target until that opponent is dead, moving on to face any other targets attacking it, and stopping to feed as soon as no opponents are nearby. They erupt from the ground suddenly, the only warning their crests moving eerily through the earth, and attack everything in reach, disappearing as quickly as they appear.

Morale Bulettes are fearless and single-minded creatures; once they decide something is food, they fight to the death to get it.

Statistics

Str 27, **Dex** 15, **Con** 20, **Int** 2, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +25

Feats Alertness, Iron Will, Track, Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Jump +18, Listen +9, Spot +3

Special Abilities

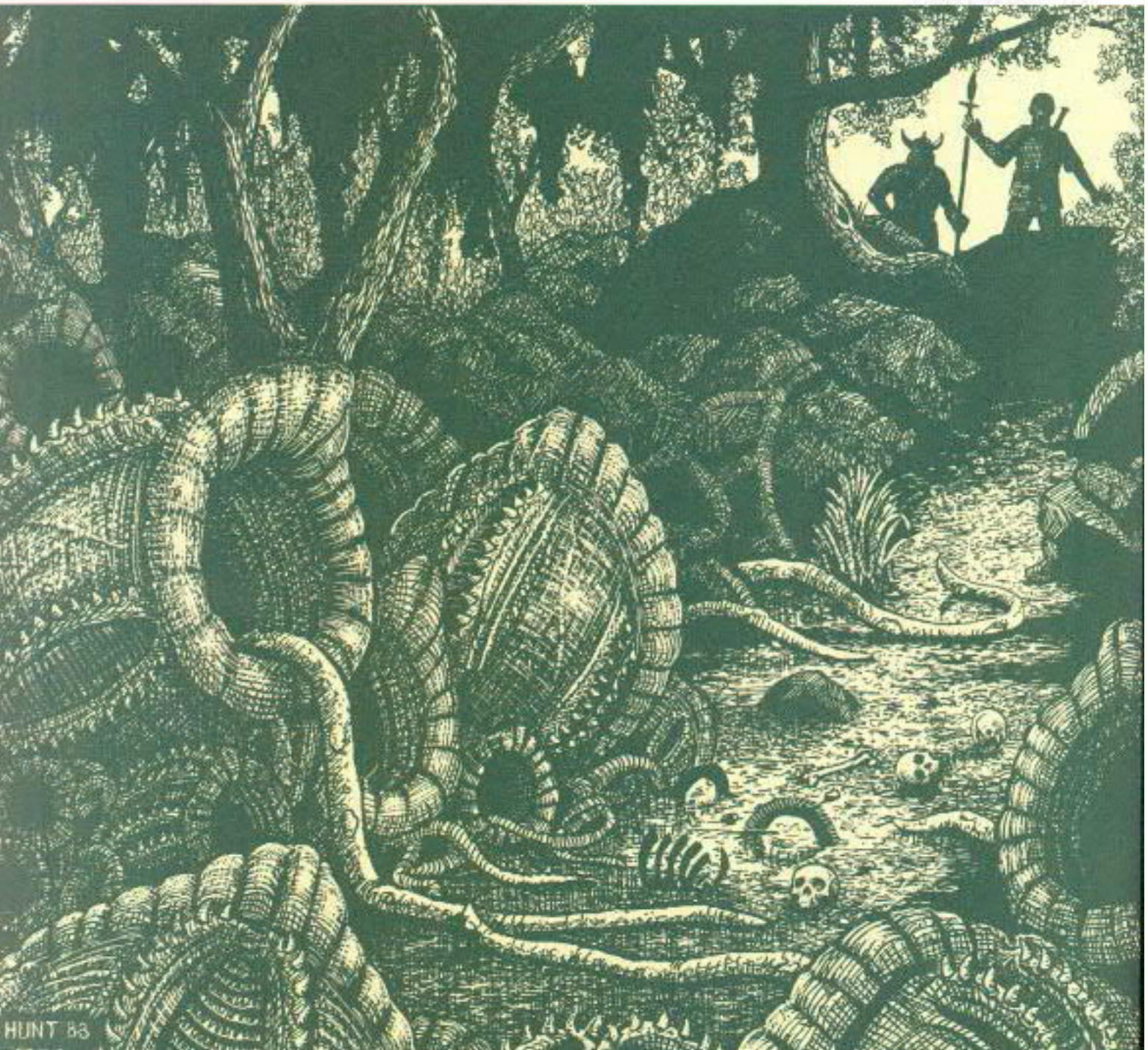
Leap (Ex) A bulette can jump into the air during combat. This allows it to make four claw attacks instead of two, each with a +15 attack bonus, but it cannot bite.

"Nothing stops a charging knight faster than a bulette eating his mount out from under him—in the middle of a joust, no less. The man was lucky he only lost his horse and a leg."

by Gregg Chamberlain

The Ecology of Carnivorous Plants

Illustration by Jonathan Hunt



Some plants like green thumbs all too well

Giant man-eating plants, like dragons, goblins, and other weird creatures, are staples of modern fantasy fiction and most traditional legends. In the realm of the AD&D® game, official "monster plants" (such as the hangman tree, the choke creeper, and the giant sundew) are representative of the genre. Carnivorous plants are not truly mythical, though the real ones are not as monstrous as fantasy works portray them. The following article explains the ecology of fantasy carnivorous plants based on that of their smaller, factual cousins.

In the real world, carnivorous plants are represented by the various species of sundews, pitcher plants, butterworts, bladderworts, rainbow plants, waterwheels, pink petticoats, and Venus' flytraps. In the AD&D game, these carnivorous plants are represented by the giant sundew *(Monster Manual II,* page 116) and by the giant pitcher plant and the giant Venus' flytrap (DRAGON® issue #89, "Creature Catalog," pages C-14 and C-18).

Most plants with which we are familiar sustain themselves through the process of photosynthesis. Chlorophyll, which is contained in the leaves of the plant and which gives green plants their color, transforms sunlight into chemical energy. This chemical reacts with water (which is absorbed through the roots) and carbon dioxide (which is taken in through the leaves) to produce carbohydrates. These carbohydrates, along with the minerals and trace elements absorbed through the root system, are then utilized by the plant for its growth and development. Mosses, lichens, mushrooms, ferns, and the like are considered lower members of the plant kingdom because they either do not photosynthesize or lack other characteristics of green plants (such as a proper root system, reproduction via seeds, fertilization through pollination, etc.).

Carnivorous plants belong in the category of green plants, possessing all the requirements for classification as such plus two other traits which take them a step beyond most such plants: the ability to self-reproduce without pollination and (most importantly) the ability to actively prey on insects and other minute animals for food.

Carnivorous plants are usually found in bogs, swamps, and freshwater marshes. The soil in these environments has a lower content of minerals and elements than is acceptable to most green plants. The lack of nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, and calcium results from the high acid content of the water, which may be caused by frequent rains that leech minerals out of the soil. In warmer climates, this lack may be caused by a higher rate of bacterial decay which also uses up precious materials needed for plant growth. Plants such as the sundew, pitcher plant, and others have adapted to these poor growing conditions by evolving means for trapping and digesting living prey as supplements to their diets.[1]

Despite the broad range of some species of carnivorous plants, they are on the whole limited by their specialization to their ecological niches — acidic bogs, marshes, and certain alkaline marls. In the northern temperate and subarctic regions, sphagnum bogs are a favored habitat. These bogs are the remains of ancient glacial lakes which have gradually become filled with decayed plant and animal remains. The stagnant waters are overgrown with moss and slowly become more acidic. The young bog then becomes the home of pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts, with butterworts growing along the sandy parts of the shoreline. A marl bog is formed by the seepage of spring water over a flat surface that has a foundation of limestone deposits. This results in the percolation of calcium carbonate throughout the water, making it more alkaline than normal and producing the same mineral-deficient conditions that exist in acidic bogs. Some pitcher plants and sundews have adapted to marl bogs.

In more temperate climates, acidic bogs may develop beside old lakes and sluggish streams and springheads. The movement of water under these conditions is too feeble to prevent stagnation. Here may be found pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts. In still warmer areas, savannah or grass-edge bogs form in low, flat, or slightly sloping areas with sandy soil and a high water table. The predominant vegetation consists of grasses, sedges, and widely scattered long-needle pines. Under these conditions may be found pitcher plants, bladderworts, butterworts, sundews, and Venus' flytraps.

Besides their restricted habitats (an especially serious problem for the Venus' flytrap, which is confined to savannah bogs), carnivorous plants are threatened by the encroachment of more common green plants as the bog matures. By adapting to the mineral-poor conditions of the bog, carnivorous plants eventually change the bog by increasing the supply of nitrates, phosphates, and other minerals when those plants die and decay. As the acid level drops and the soil becomes richer and sweeter, other plants more accustomed to such growing conditions move in and crowd out the carnivorous plants.

All flowering plants normally reproduce by cross-pollination of their flowers by insects or the wind.[2] Carnivorous plants normally reproduce by this means, but they are also capable of reproducing themselves asexually.

For instance during pollination, the seeds of the Venus' flytrap are black and pear-shaped when it reproduces. The Venus' flytrap's asexual means of reproduction involves a fleshy, white, underground rhizome that elongates annually and from which new Venus' flytraps may grow. This underground rhizome also makes it very difficult for fire and other natural disasters to completely destroy the plant. Where temperature conditions are subject to uneven fluctuations (alternating warm and cool spring days, for example), the plant can also reproduce itself by budding. Through this process, the flowers of the plant are replaced by miniature plants which take root around the "mother" and grow normally. As a result, Venus' flytraps may be found growing in colonies.

The seeds of the pitcher plant are teardrop shaped and range in color from brown to pinkish gray. Like the Venus' flytrap, this plant may reproduce asexually by means of a rhizome; resulting in colonies of pitcher plants connected to the mother plant). The giant pitcher plant in DRAGON issue #89 resembles the Australian pitcher plant, which can also reproduce asexually in a manner similar to that of the strawberry plant. The pitcher plant, in this case, possesses a root which acts as a central node for its thick, branching roots. Some of these roots form foliage leaves above ground in the shape of a rosette. In the fall, a pitcher plant embryo forms around the center of these rosettes. As the embryo grows, the runner leaf stalk lengthens, taking the embryo away from the mother plant. Soon, the leaf stalk ceases growing and the embryo plant rests on soil where it takes root.

The sundew's seeds are black and elliptical. Sundews living in the northern parts of the world or in mountainous climes form hibernacula to survive the winter. A hibernaculum is a small, tight, spherical

cluster of budlike young leaves that are hairy in appearance. The butterwort also shares this feature. Similarly, the hangman tree's taproot, which allows it to survive the winter, may be a further modification on the use of the hibernaculum.

The trapping season for carnivorous plants generally runs from spring until the middle of autumn and the winter dieback. Trapping methods among the carnivorous plants fall into either active or passive traps. Among the active traps are the bear-trap variety, used by the Venus' flytrap and the waterwheel plant, and the trap-door of the bladderwort. Less complex are the passive traps used by sundews, butterworts, and rainbow plants; these plants secrete a type of mucilage to form a sticky "flypaper" trap to ensnare their victims. The simplest trap is the passive pitfall used by the many species of pitcher plants.

The traps themselves are actually leaves that have been so modified by evolution that they are now barely recognizable as leaves. All the carnivorous plants, except for primitive species of pitcher plant, have developed digestive glands within these leaves. These glands secrete a mild enzyme to aid the breakdown and absorption of nutrients from the plant's victims. In the case of the flypaper variety of carnivorous plants, the leaves have also developed glands to produce and secrete the mucilage used in the trap.

How did these traps evolve, and how do they work? All plants have tropisms — reactions to particular stimuli — that help them find water, light, and nutrients; tropisms also help the plants avoid noxious substances and conditions. If seeking or avoiding something, a plant can control the growth of its cells and alter the direction of such growth by increasing and decreasing cell growth on either side of the plant. For example, the mimosa plant can fold up its leaves whenever certain insects approach with the intent of eating the leaves. For most carnivorous plants, this controlled cell growth is accelerated to the point where the plant's movements are faster than the eye can track.

In the case of the Venus' flytrap, prey is attracted to the plant's trap either by the red color on the inside of the trap-leafs lobes (which resembles raw meat) or by the scent of nectar produced by glands along the edge of each lobe. (All carnivorous plants have nectar-producing abilities and, except for the waterwheel and the bladderwort, use scent as a lure.) Within the trap are six trigger hairs arranged in triangular groups of three on each lobe. The victim must brush two of the trigger hairs or one trigger hair twice in order for the plant to react. The first brushing of a trigger hair causes an electrical impulse to be stored in the leaf tissue, readying the trap. The second brushing sends a second impulse that causes the outer cells of the lobes to grow an additional 25%, thus causing the trap to close.

This growth spurt is very rapid; closure time for flytraps has been clocked at one-twentieth of a second. During cool weather, when the plant's reactions have slowed, the spikes that fringe the edges of the leaf lobes help contain the prey until the trap is fully closed.[3] When fully closed, cell growth in the lobes continues, forcing the lobes together, pushing the air out of the trap, and squeezing the prey. To open, the inner cells of the leaf lobes grow an additional 25%, thus forcing the lobes to move apart from each other. The traps are capable of opening and closing several times a day; thus, rapid growth of individual traps is possible.

Venus' flytraps can survive periodic flooding, when their traps catch food in the form of insect larvae, tadpoles, and the like. A good-sized meal for the plant results in an overall growth spurt. The Venus' flytrap is capable of distinguishing between edible and inedible objects placed within its traps; it is also able to judge the size of objects so that it doesn't waste time on puny prey or things which it can't eat (as is also true for the giant Venus' flytrap).

The same principle of controlled cell growth permits the sundew to curl its armlike leaves around insects held helpless in the plant's glue. It also allows the butterwort to curl the edges of its trapping leaves to form a cup to hold digestive juices used for drowning prey that succumbs to the lure of its sticky surfaces.

Sundews, butterworts, and rainbow plants, by utilizing their mucilaginous surfaces to trap insect prey, are merely taking defenses used by plants a step further. Consider the South African roridgula, which has developed a carpet of sticky hairs over its stems and leaves as a defense against insect pests. The roridgula has also developed a symbiotic relationship with species of ambush bugs and spiders. Both of these creatures make their homes among the sticky strands of the plant and feast on insects caught by the glue.[4]

The pitcher plant may have been the first carnivorous plant to evolve because its method of catching prey is the simplest of all: a pitfall trap formed by the plant's leaves, which have grown together so that

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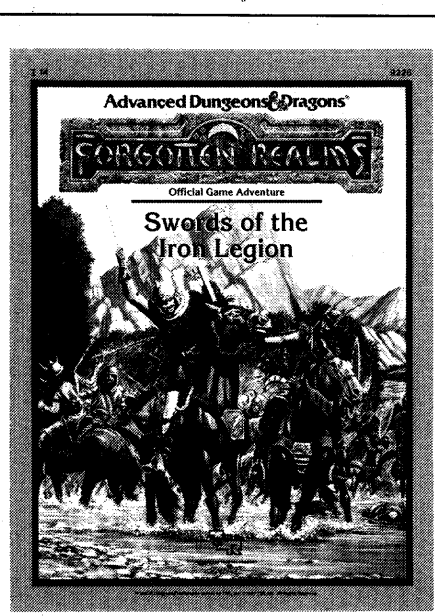

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water collects in the bottom of the pitcher and drowns whatever falls in. An intermediate stage in the evolution of the pitcher plant can be seen in the common teasel plant, whose cuplike leaves grow together around the stem, allowing water to collect and form miniature pools that protect the plant against insect pests crawling up the stem. The pitcher plant took this means of defense and evolved it into a means of trapping prey.

The more primitive species of pitcher plant rely on natural decay to break victims down into necessary nutrients for the plants to absorb. Other species of pitcher plant have developed digestive glands and wetting agents in the water inside the trap which help waterlog the victim and hasten drowning. There is some speculation among botanists that the nectar of the plant may contain a narcotic; this increases the likelihood that exploring insects fall in due to drunkenness.[5]

Fantasy carnivorous plants (i.e., the hangman tree and others) are higher on the evolutionary ladder than the common species of such plants. This higher evolutionary status may range from simple giantism without drastic departures from the original plant (as in the case of the giant Venus' flytrap) to improvements on the original plant design (as in the case of the giant pitcher plant which, in addition to giantism and heightened tropic senses, has great, long tendrils for snaring and drawing prey into its stomach).[6]

The carnivorous plants in the AD&D game world have further developed alternative methods of catching prey, as is evidenced by the tri-flower frond, the man-trap, and the bloodthorn. The tri-flower frond and the man-trap use their pollen as both a lure and a drug to entice and kill their victims, much as actual carnivorous plants utilize their nectar as an insect lure (and as the pitcher plant might use narcotic nectar).

The bloodthorn has taken two characteristics of plants — thorns as a means of defense, and the principles of capillary attraction (which enable plants to feed themselves) — and has combined these into a unique means of attacking prey and feeding on it. Capillary attraction is the tendency for liquids confined in small tubes to rise up through the tubes as a result of surface tension. An example of capillary attraction is shown by placing a straw in a glass of water. Surface tension draws the water up the straw from the open bottom until a balance is achieved and the water ceases to rise. If straws of different diameters are placed in the same glass, the water will rise higher in narrower straws than in wide ones because of the differences in surface tension.

Two types of tissues are involved. in a plant's use of capillary action and attraction: xylem and phloem. Xylem is the woody tissue that provides support for the plant, much in the same way that skeletons provide support for animal bodies. The cells in xylem, through capillary action and attraction, absorb the water and minerals taken in by the roots and move them up to the leaves for photosynthesis. This process in turn creates the food material that is transported throughout the plant by the phloem tissues through capillary action and attraction.

In the bloodthorn, the phloem tissues connect directly with the plant's hollow thorns. When a successful strike is made by the plant, the liquid blood of the victim rises into the narrow opening of each thorn tip and is absorbed by the phloem cells. By devising a method of feeding directly on the already-dissolved nutrients in its victims' life fluids, the bloodthorn has bypassed the need to develop digestive glands like other carnivorous plants.

Some of the species of fantasy carnivorous plants have evolved forms of vegetable musculature similar to octopus tentacles (the giant pitcher plant being the most obvious example). This has allowed some plants, such as the giant sundew, to become mobile and so increase their chances of survival by allowing movement from one location to another as an environment becomes unsuitable for them.

The development of musculature in fantasy carnivorous plants presumes also the possible development of some form of nervous system. An increasingly complex nervous system allows the evolution of intelligence, such as typified by the semi-intelligent giant sundew. Intelligence is a survival trait; the greater a plant's intelligence, the greater its chance of continuing as a species. In AD&D game terms, such intelligence may rise high enough to permit the development of a moral sense and an alignment other than the neutrality typical of lower animals and plants.

Both the hangman tree and the black willow are, at present, the only carnivorous plants in the AD&D game universe that deviate from an absolutely neutral alignment.[7] The tendency of both towards evil in their alignments may be due to the low level of intelligence ascribed to the plants (the black willow, though capable of possessing greater than average intelligence, does not use this intelligence to the

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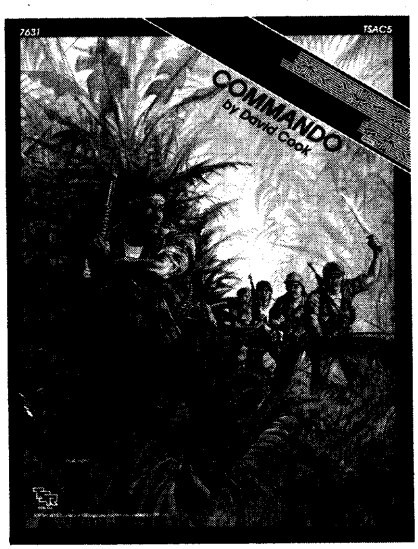

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best advantage). Creatures of low intelligence that do not possess the wisdom to control their impulsive actions tend to act to satisfy their immediate desires without consideration for others. This lack of control can also hinder the efficient application of high intelligence.[8]

The hangman tree has sufficient intelligence to learn and speak the common tongue — albeit haltingly (a feat the black willow hasn't yet accomplished).[9] Nevertheless, the deception abilities of both the hangman tree and the black willow are limited, with the hangman tree using hallucinatory perfume and the black willow using its aura of drowsiness). Neither plant uses even small treasure items as a lure, possibly because they themselves are uninterested in gold and the like. Even the killer mimic is smart enough to realize it has a better chance of attracting prey by disguising itself as some valuable object.

It is fortunate for adventurers that these trees, the highest forms of carnivorous plant presently known, are more cunning than clever; if it were otherwise, PCs might encounter these trees more often and more to their detriment. However, adventurers should be concerned by the hangman tree's development of magic resistance as a survival trait. If the trend towards greater intelligence in fantasy carnivorous plants continues, future species of carnivorous plants may very well use spells to hunt their prey.

Footnotes

1. Carnivorous plants, because they have retained their abilities to photosynthesize, can live a "meatless" existence; during these periods, however, their growth is slower than usual and may even be stunted. As a result, a carnivorous plant that has gone through some lean times may be only one-half to three-fourths normal size, with corresponding reductions in hit dice and damage.

2. AD&D game carnivorous plants may still be capable of reproducing this way through pollination via species of giant bees, wasps, and so forth, as well as via the normal smaller species of these insects. Seeds from carnivorous plants, though, are best harvested in the fall season. After the plant is destroyed, PCs may gather up to 2-20 seeds in perfect condition, undamaged by the battle. If PCs employ nonpoisonous means to subdue a plant peacefully, the number of useable seeds recoverable may be doubled.

3. In issue #89's version of the Venus' flytrap, the "teeth" that fringe the edges of the lobes act to trigger the trap and prevent the prey from escaping before the trap is fully closed.

4. Such a symbiotic relationship might exist between the AD&D game's giant sundew (or other sessile carnivorous plants) and certain large insects or other creatures. These creature may lure prey witthin the plant's reach in exchange for scraps from the plant's feeding; they may also find a safe home with immunity from the plant's attack.

5. The giant pitcher plant may have retained the narcotic qualities of its nectar. Thus, those characters who fall prey to the plant may become unconscious from the fumes inside the plant's stomach. Characters should save vs. poison each round they are inside the plant. Failure results in unconsciousness lasting until the victim is either consumed or removed from the plant. In the latter case, the victim remains unconscious for an additional 1-6 turns. After regaining consciousness, the victim suffers slowed reactions for 3d10 rounds, with all attacks, defenses, reactions, and dexterity bonuses at -1.

6. Popular belief has it that certain real species of pitcher plants are able to close off the mouths of their traps with their hooded leaves, preventing victims from escaping. The giant pitcher plant may have evolved the ability to actually seal off its mouth opening. Characters who attempt to open these coverings must be able to brace themselves and successfully roll their *bend bars/lift gates* chances.

7. The zygom also deviates from absolute neutrality due to its evil nature, although it cannot be rated on a scale of intelligence. The zygom has been excluded from discussion for the latter reason. Furthermore, while the *Monster Manual II* states that the zygom prefers living flesh and blood for sustenance, it does not actually hunt prey. Instead, it lives a parasitic existence on any host body it finds.

8. Since both the black willow and the hangman tree are members of the plant kingdom, perhaps they cannot truly be judged by human standards. They prey on animals (including humans) for food just as many animals prey on plants for food. (Such relativistic hairsplitting is best left to philosophers and sages.)

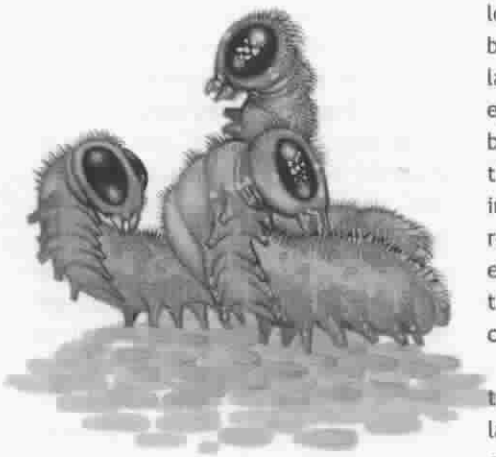
9. One of the knotlike protuberances on the hangman tree which usually serves as a sensory organ for the tree may have evolved a primitive vocal apparatus. This may also explain the halting nature of the plant's speech, as the tree draws in and stores air in the knot, later expelling it in brief blasts of vocalization.

Ω

THE ECOLOGY OF THE CARRION CRAWLER

Crawlspaces

The Underdark is the last place you want to make a wrong turn. You never know what you might meet.



by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
L.A. Williams

THE UNDERDARK CAVERN WAS COMPLETELY STILL and silent. Were there any illumination in that lightless cave, only one object of any interest would be seen: the rotting corpse of a hook horror, nine feet of insectoid monstrosity with a vulturelike head and sharp, curved hooks in place of hands.

The creature lay dead, its body covered in what appeared to be moist, juicy pustules, each the size of a small wineskin. Once the pustules began bursting open, however, their true nature became apparent, as wriggling larvae crawled forth.[1]

Each larva looked like a large caterpillar, with a soft, pliant body about a foot long, an inchworm's knobby pseudolegs bunched together at the front and rear, a large head equipped with oversized black eyes and a complex mouth.[2] The grubs' bodies were still wet with the muck of their eggs when they began burrowing into the corpse of the decaying hook horror, devouring its flesh. Wet sounds emerged from the once-silent cavern as the grubs chewed their way deep into the corrupted flesh.

The hook horror was a massive creature, but there were scores of the hungry larvae, each focused on the single, all-consuming task of sating their ravenous hunger. They devoured the beast in less than a week.

Then they began devouring each other.[3]

"Ta-dah!" announced Shandrilla with a flourish, popping open the lock on the massive iron chest her gnomish companions had uncovered. The two gnomes crowded closer, eager to see what riches lay within.

Javorik the Bold, Illusionist Extraordinaire, personally hoped for a stockpile of magical items, maybe even a replacement for the wand of lightning he had recently lost to the strange pudding they had fought in these very corridors a few weeks ago. His cousin Federico had simpler tastes: gold and gems, the more the merrier.

"Well?" Federico demanded. "Open it, you silly human girl!"

Shandrilla gave the warrior a quick scowl in the torchlight, then turned her attention back to the chest. "I'll take the lock," she said, dropping the device into her thieving kit. The lock had been a real challenge to pick, and she wanted more time to study it in better light.

"Sure, sure, fine, fine," Federico agreed. "What'd we get?"

---

1. Female carrion crawlers lay their leathery eggs (about one hundred in a clutch) among carrion, providing their offspring with a ready source of food when they hatch. That is the extent of the parental care the female provides for her young, for the eggs are abandoned immediately after being laid and are even occasionally devoured by the mother or any other adult carrion crawler that discovers them.

2. Newborn carrion crawler larvae bite for a single point of damage, have ½ Hit Die, and strike with a THAC0 of 20. Their soft bodies have an Armor Class of 9.

3. When the larvae chew their way out of their eggs (about a week after being laid), the newborn grubs immediately devour the adjacent carrion and often each other, falling into a feeding frenzy to rival those of sharks. Those grubs that avoid being eaten by their siblings are often devoured by an adult, for carrion crawlers enjoy the taste of their own young. As a result, few survive to adulthood.

The hook horror was a massive creature, but ... they devoured the beast in less than a week.

Shandrilla creaked open the lid of the weathered chest, then gasped in surprise. "Gentlemen," she said in an awed voice, "We. Are. RICH!" She scooped her hands deep into the pile of gold coins that nearly filled the chest, throwing them into the air in her exuberance.

Their hoots and hurrahs echoed eerily down the twisted corridors of the underground tunnel network.

The grub wriggled and squirmed out of its old skin. It emerged a larger version of its previous self, as it had after each of its previous molts. This was the creature's tenth molt in as many months; now its flexible body was nearly six feet long when fully extended.[4]

The grub had been one of the few of its brood to survive this long. Once the hook horror in their hatchery had been stripped to a mere exoskeleton, only the toughest and fiercest of the grubs had endured the cannibalistic frenzy that followed.

In the past several months, the grub had experienced a wide variety of new tastes: discarded spider husks, rotting lizard meat, the rank, decaying flesh of a small, horned humanoid creature. It had even once chased down a fire beetle, nudging it onto its back and biting through its underside to reach the juicy flesh within.[5]

But those meals were long gone and of no use to the creature now; as always, the process of molting had made the grub ravenously hungry. It wriggled and inched its way down the Underdark corridor, seeking food—any food, living or dead.

"Well, that's it," said Javorik, dropping the last of the golden coins into Little Biggie, the bag of holding he had spread out on the cavern floor at his feet and into which the three had been chucking the contents of the treasure chest. Even though the chest had been far too big for the gnomes to carry, its contents fit easily into the small sack, thanks to its extradimensional magical properties. "We'll count it all and split it up when we get back, but I'd say there's easily several hundred, maybe even close to a thousand, each!"

"Beer money for a couple months, anyway!" chuckled Federico, rubbing his little hands together in glee.

"What about you, Shanny?" asked Javorik. "Got any plans for your share? Gonna look for a magical weapon or two? Some better armor? Or maybe spend it all on frilly dresses and gaudy jewelry? Gonna forget the life of an adventurer and find some good-looking man to settle down with?"

"Never you mind, gnome," answered the young thief, blushing, who honestly hadn't given it any thought. "Let's just get back up to the surface, and then we'll worry about spending it." Shandrilla glanced around at her surroundings in the flickering torchlight; why did she always seem to spend so much of her time traipsing around in rough-hewn tunnels deep under the earth? Gods knew she didn't enjoy being so far below the surface, where one simple earthquake could send tons of rock crashing down on her head. And the monsters! If she came across one more weird pudding, she'd scream ...

"I'm with her," agreed Federico. "The quicker we get back, the sooner I can quench this thirst of mine!"

"Oh, all right," said Javorik. "Let's go." He took a left and headed down the passageway. His cousin, though, had turned right and was heading the other way.

4. Carrion crawlers molt in the manner of many insects and reptiles, shedding the outer layer of skin as their bodies grow. Grubs begin life about 1 foot long and molt every month or so, adding approximately 6 inches with each molting. Each shedding of skin takes about a day.

When a carrion crawler grub reaches a length of about 6 feet, it metamorphosizes into its adult form. This process takes 5–7 days, after which it rips out of its old grub skin and emerges as a small adult. The adult form looks rather like a cross between a giant green cutworm and a cephalopod, for the creature sports the eight flailing tentacles arranged in a horseshoe shape over its sharp mandibles that make the carrion crawler so distinctive. Instead of the soft, caterpillarlike pseudolegs of the grub form, the adult has twelve sets of insectlike legs, six pairs toward the front of its body and six pairs at the rear.

The adult carrion crawler continues to grow, molting each month (and adding another 12 inches with each molt) until reaching its full size of 9 feet long. Carrion crawlers have a 2-year lifespan, about half of which is spent as a full-sized adult.

5. As its name implies, a carrion crawler prefers a diet of dead, decaying flesh, but if carrion is unavailable the creature has no qualms against attacking living beings. As a result of their diet, carrion crawlers (and grubs) exude a constant stench of decay; this odor often gives others warning of the creature's approach. The DM should allow a +2 modifier to the

"Hey, just wait a minute, guys!" said Shandrilla. "Where are you going?"

"To the surface!" the gnomes said in unison, pointing in opposite directions.

"Oh great," said the young thief.

With a savage twist, the carrion crawler shook off the remains of its latest molting, letting the torn skin fall to the floor, and emerged for the first time in its adult stage.

While it still retained the basic form of its larval stage, there were several notable differences. The most noticeable were the eight tentacles sprouting from the front of the creature's head. These glistened with moisture and waved slowly back and forth as if responding to a secret breeze.[6] The head itself had grown a chitinous layer of armor, making it harder and tougher than the rest of the creature's flexible body.[7]

As with all of its moltings, the creature emerged ravenously hungry—this time more so than normal, for the metamorphosis from larva to adult had taken much longer than its larval moltings. Skittering along the rock floor of the tunnel network on two dozen newly developed legs, the carrion crawler eagerly searched for its next meal.

"I can't believe we're lost!" bemoaned Shandrilla. "You guys have been down here—what?— at least twice before!"

"Ah, but Shanny, you remember what a hassle it was finding our way down here in the first place! All of these tunnels start to look the same after awhile. Anyway, I'm certain the surface is this way."

"This way," corrected Federico, pointing in the opposite direction.

"No, it's this way," insisted Javorik. "Remember, there was that T-intersection where we took a right."

"That led to a dead end!" responded Federico.

"No, not that one! The one before then. First there was that squiggly bit, then the three lefts, then the right and the bit that sloped downhill ..."

"Wait a minute. Three lefts is a right," pointed out Shandrilla.

"Only if they're all right angles," responded the illusionist, his prodigious nose in the air. "Remember, that last one just kind of veered off funny."

"Then that's a 'Y,' not a 'T,'" argued Federico.

"So?"

"So, you said 'the T-intersection,' not 'the Y-intersection.'"

"I wasn't talking about that one then! First there was the T-intersection, then the squiggly bit—"

"Wait a minute, I thought the squiggly bit came before the T-intersection."

Shandrilla sighed. "Javorik, just how certain are you that you know the way back to the surface?"

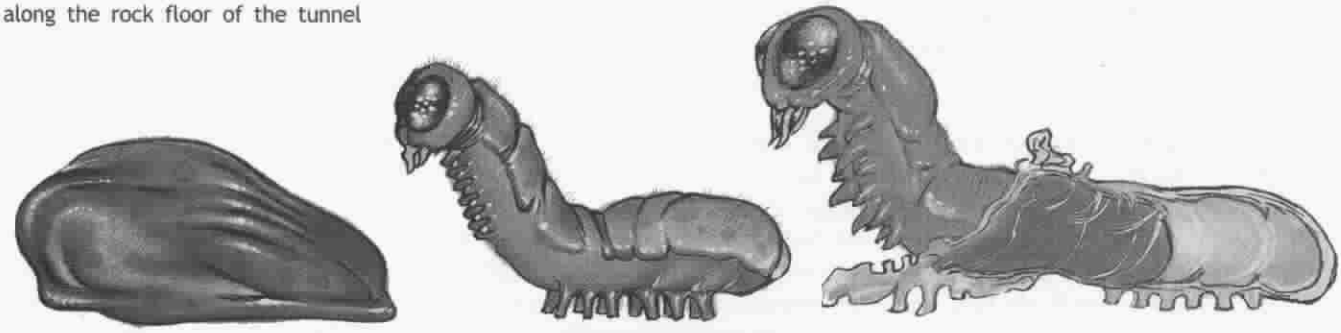
"Absolutely certain."

"How certain?"

"Okay, fairly certain."

Shandrilla crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow questioningly at her illusionist companion.

"Oh, all right then, just a slight little teensy tiny bit less than fairly certain."



Larvae

Grubs begin life about 1 foot long

Each molting takes about a day.

a group's roll to see if they are surprised when encountering a carrion crawler.

6. Carrion crawlers habitually wave their tentacles even when not attacking, for the tentacles are important sensory appendages, housing the creature's senses of touch, taste, and smell. In this aspect, they serve the same role as an insect's antennae.

Carrion crawlers also have keen senses of sight and hearing. They have two large, shiny multifaceted eyes well-equipped to pick up movement. The eyes also grant the creatures infravision to a range of 30 feet. Tiny hairs on their legs and body sense sound vibrations, providing the creature an acute sense of hearing.

7. The carrion crawler's hard, chitinous head plate grants that portion of its body a natural Armor Class of 3. The rest of its body is soft and fleshy like a caterpillar's, providing only AC 7.

8. Like many arthropods, carrion crawlers can walk along walls and ceilings at their full movement rate. They can also walk backward at full speed, a useful ability when they have crawled into a narrow dead-end tunnel.

9. A carrion crawler's primary attacks are with its eight tentacles, each of which is covered in a sticky secretion that causes paralysis in those touched by even one of the appendages. A carrion crawler always goes after a single opponent at a time, never splitting its attacks between two or more foes. This means that the poor victim might have to roll up to eight successful saving throws vs. paralyzation each round to prevent being immobilized for 2–12 turns! As might be expected, carrion crawlers are immune to the effects of their own tentacles and those of others of their race.

Being basically mindless, a carrion crawler attacks its enemies one at a time until they have all been paralyzed or fled the scene. The creature never checks morale, fighting to the death. Once no longer confronted by mobile enemies, the carrion crawler chooses a victim and begins eating, inflicting 1–2 points of damage per round with its sharp mandibles. A carrion crawler does not bite in combat; it paralyzes its prey first so that it can devour its helpless victim without interruption.

10. These holes are called spiracles, and they are the means by which the carrion crawler breathes. There are eighteen in all, nine on a side.

11. Carrion crawlers defy standard taxonomic classification. They are not insects, despite their many similarities to insects while in the larval stage. The closest approximation in the taxonomic system used by most human cultures would be phylum arthropoda, class myriapoda, putting the carrion crawler in the same general category as centipedes and millipedes.

There are differences, of course, primarily the carrion crawler's lack of antennae (present in all earthly myriapods) and the presence of the eight paralytic tentacles. Also, most myriapods have their multiple leg pairs spaced more or less evenly along their body lengths, while the carrion crawler's legs are bunched up in sets of twelve at the front and rear thirds of the creature's body.

The reason the carrion crawler differs so much from terrestrial creatures is that it is not native to the planet. It is instead believed to be a native to the home world of the illithids, or mind flayers, wherever that may be. Carrion crawlers not only share the same habitat as the illithids but also bear a ring of tentacles around the mouth much like the mind flayers (although mind flayers have only four tentacles).

tures who stood with weapons in hand.

It didn't hesitate but rushed toward the nearest foe, tentacles waving and mouthparts open wide in anticipation ...

"Hmm, that's funny," said Federico, staring at the solid wall of the dead end tunnel before them and scratching his chin in puzzlement.

"You'll notice I'm not laughing," said Shandrilla with a scowl.

The dwarf raised his shield up to the crawler as the thing attacked, its paralyzing tentacles flailing wildly, eager to embrace its intended prey. The dwarf brushed the tentacles aside with his shield and swung his warhammer in a vicious arc at the worm-creature's head. The weapon bounced off the carrion crawler's chitinous head plates.

At the same time, the other dwarf was methodically swinging his battle-ax right below the row of regularly spaced holes along the monster's side, spilling yellow blood from its soft body with each strike.[10] The carrion crawler rose up on its hind legs and swung its flexible body around to strike at the ax-wielding dwarf. That one, chanting obliviously with each swing of his weapon like a smith singing at the forge, didn't even see the attack coming. One minute he was carving chunks of fatty flesh from the worm-monster's side; the next, he was engulfed in a writhing mass of tentacles that had dropped over his head. Suddenly unable to move, his chanting stopped, as did his weapon blows. He fell over as soon as the creature released him, unable even to balance upright.

The other dwarf soon found himself facing a hungry and pain-crazed carrion crawler all alone. "Come on then, you stupid bug,"[11] he said between gritted teeth, hefting his weapon. The words were meaningless to the worm-monster, but the crawler was more than eager to comply ...

"Maybe we should try those stairs we passed," suggested Javorik.

"Those stairs went down," Shandrilla said. "We want up, not down."

"Picky, picky."

"Shh— What was that?" Federico asked suddenly, hand raised in the air to stop his companions.

"What was what?" asked Javorik.

"Quiet!" hissed his cousin. The three adventurers stood silent and still, straining their ears. All Shandrilla could hear at first was the sputtering and hissing of the torch in her hand, but gradually she made out the sounds of metal striking stone, and the echoes of shouted curses. There was no doubt about it, the sounds were coming from the stairway leading farther down into the Underdark.

"This way!" shouted Federico, drawing his short sword and leaping down the stairs three at a time, no small feat for a gnome in plate mail. "They might need our help!"

"This way!" shouted Federico, drawing his short sword and leaping down the stairs three at a time.

"Oh, great," sighed Shandrilla.

This final prey was proving to be more difficult than the carrion crawler had anticipated. Although it was severely wounded and there were already two potential meals lying helplessly on the stone floor, the thought of snatching one up and fleeing back to its lair never occurred to the creature.[12] There was still an enemy to overcome and overcome him it would, or die trying.

This one was armored like a beetle, but it was quick like a lizard. The other two like it had been dispatched quickly, but surprise had been on the carrion crawler's side then; now it faced its enemy without such an advantage. The prey seemed to realize the danger posed by the monster's tentacles, for it hid behind its removable shell each time the creature attacked. The prey kept trying to flee from the monster's head and attack its unprotected flank, but the carrion crawler was too efficient a fighter to allow that to happen, and the cramped quarters of the narrow tunnel worked against the prey.

And then more prey arrived on the scene.

The first of the new prey seemed an even shorter version of one of these beetle-lizards, but the other two who followed farther behind lacked the shells and would be that much easier to chew ...

Shandrilla raced down the steps behind Federico, marveling at the speed of the gnomish warrior. Then her foot slipped out from under her, and she bounced down the last of the steps to land in an undignified heap.

"Shanny! You okay?" called Javorik, bounding up behind her as fast as his little legs would take him.

Most worlds inhabited by illithids also house carrion crawlers; it is believed the mind flayers actively raise them as they do amorphs, fungi, and other dangerous creatures. Further details on the relationship between carrion crawlers and illithids can be found in Stephen Inniss' "The Sunset World" in *DRAGON® Magazine* #150.

12. Carrion crawlers keep permanent underground lairs, venturing out every few days to search for food. When they discover a meal, they usually drag it back to the lair so they can devour it in relative safety. The two main exceptions to this policy are when the meal is too big to drag away (as when stumbling upon the corpse of a purple worm) or when the flesh is so rotten that it falls apart when moved. In the latter case, the carrion crawler devours its meal in place; in the former, it usually attempts to bite off a large chunk of flesh and drag that portion back to its lair for consumption.

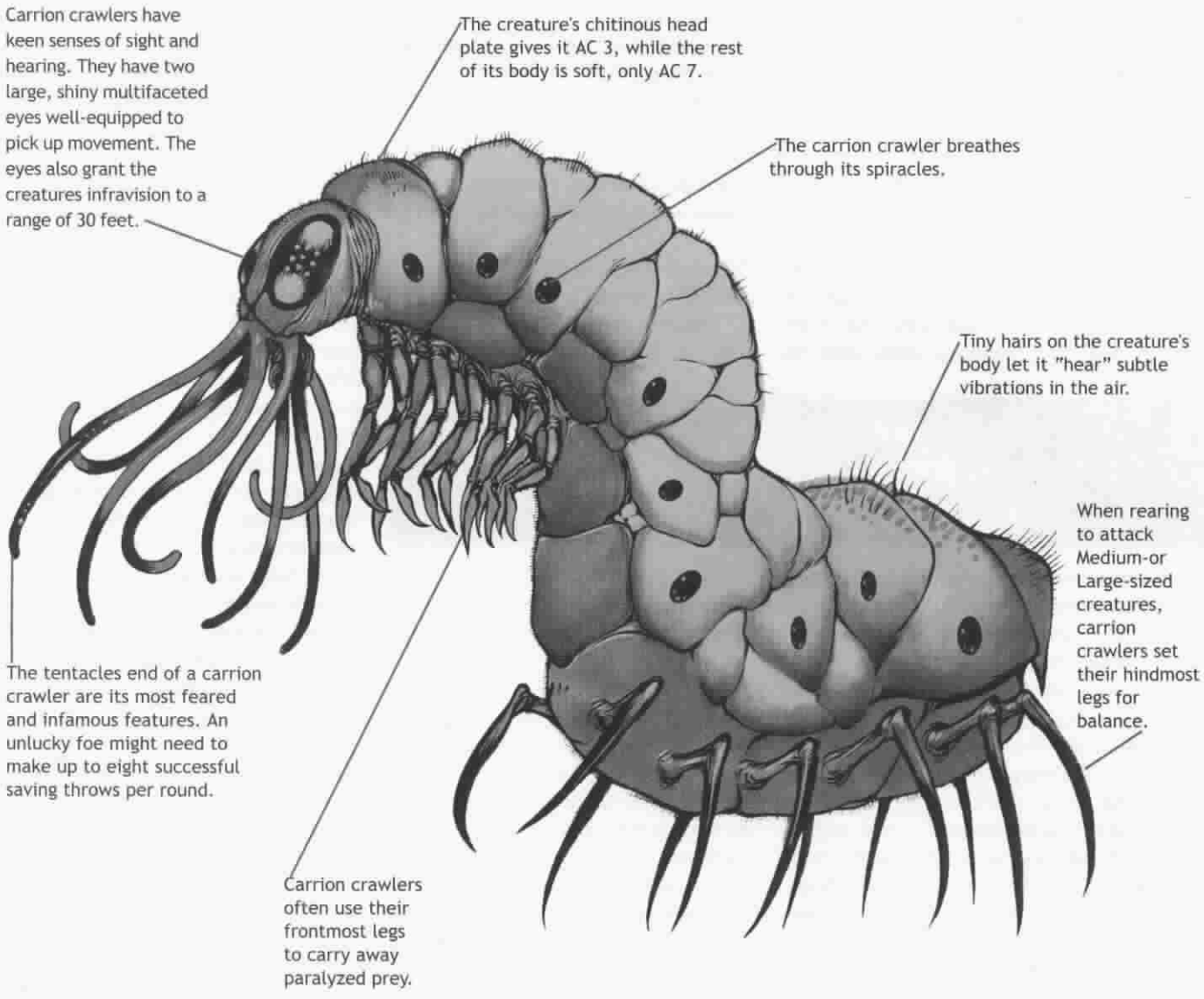
Since carrion crawlers customarily drag their prey back to their lairs, a crawler den is apt to include all sorts of incidental treasures, as typified by Treasure Type B. Coins, gems, and metallic objects are likely to be found intact (if scattered about), but most organic items (including those made of cloth or leather) are often partially eaten or rotting away.

13. Unbeknownst to Shandrilla, she's encountered the by-product of the carrion crawler method of reproduction. During the mating season, males deposit sticky blobs of spermatophores (usually around 20) along the surfaces they travel. Each blob is a small oval about as big around as a fist. If and when a female carrion crawler comes across such a blob, she picks it up in her tentacles and stores it in a special set of buccal pouches inside her mouth.

The process of storing spermatophores triggers egg production in the female. For the next several days, her body starts generating around 100 eggs, which are temporarily stored in her bloated abdomen. During this time, she hunts for an appropriate corpse of sufficient size to lay her eggs. When one has been found, she ejects the eggs through the genital orifice between the third and fourth pairs of her front legs, grasping each egg with her tentacles and placing it into position upon the carrion. The eggs are then fertilized by the sperm cells she's been storing inside her buccal cavities. The entire egg-laying process takes the better part of a day.

The female dies a few weeks after laying her clutch of eggs, exhausted from the effort. Immediately after laying her eggs and for the remainder of the short span of time left to her, her Movement rate drops to 3, and she suffers a –2 attack penalty.

The Anatomy of the Carrion Crawler



He held his thumb and index finger a hair's-breadth apart to demonstrate.

"Lead on, Federico," said Shandrilla.

The carrion crawler clung motionless to the ceiling, listening intently.[8] It had heard voices just a moment before—but where?

There, behind it! It did a quick U-turn on the ceiling and started racing toward the sound, its multiple pairs of legs rippling in wavelike unison with an almost hypnotic rhythm.

As the beast turned a corner, it received its first glimpse of its new prey: three small humanoid creatures staggering through the Underdark corridor under the bulky weight of their backpacks.

The trio carried metal lanterns and a wide assortment of weapons. Had the ravenous monster the intelligence to understand their language, it would have heard them exchanging opinions on the first bar they should hit when they got back to the surface, and which of the three would be able to drink the others under the table.

The carrion crawler therefore took them completely by surprise.

The creature dropped silently from the ceiling as they passed underneath, catching the rearmost creature with its tentacles before the others were even aware of the crawler's presence. That one froze like a statue in mid-stride and toppled over onto his face, breaking his nose in the process.[9] The carrion crawler scrabbled over his still form in a beeline for the others.

The sound of the fallen creature's armor clattering on the stone floor gave the other two enough warning to evade the tentacled monster. Spinning around, they saw the monster barreling toward them and dove in opposite directions; the creature's tentacles swished through the air just above one's head. Then the crawler faced the remaining two crea-

"Fine, fine," replied the young thief between clenched teeth, rubbing a bruised knee and trying not to curse aloud. "Slipped in something.[13] Go on, I'm fine."

Javorik sped on down the corridor in his cousin's wake, Shandrilla limping behind him.

When she caught up to the others, she gasped out loud at the sight before her. Shandrilla was a city girl, more accustomed to scaling high walls and sliding through the shadows of back alleys than slinking around in the bowels of the earth and fighting hideous monstrosities. The sight that greeted her made her blood run cold.

There in the corridor ahead was the biggest worm she'd ever seen. On closer inspection, she realized that it wasn't a true worm, for the creature reared up on its many hind legs and lunged at the dwarf immediately before it.[14] Thick, yellow blood spilled freely down its side, but the abomination hardly seemed to notice. The dwarf raised its shield to ward off the creature, but the nightmarish monster grasped the edges of the shield with six or eight of its front claws and hoisted the dwarven warrior into the air. A cluster of vile-looking tentacles snaked out and slapped the dwarf in the face; the stout warrior fell silent. Then, as if no longer interested in its current victim, the worm-monster released him to plummet hard against the stone floor. The creature dropped its front half back down to the ground and set its sight on Federico, tentacles whipping back and forth.

Federico had raced into the corridor filled with bravado and battle-lust, but if Shandrilla was reading his body language correctly, he'd had an almost immediate change of heart. Fortunately, before he had the time to turn tail and flee, a barrage of magic missiles raced past his head and found their mark. The worm's front half crashed to the ground. Its middle section arched up as the legs of the back half ran a couple extra steps before the creature toppled over in a tangled pile. By the time Shandrilla had hobbled up to the gnomes, the fell creature was lying on the floor, hideous, insectoid legs twitching spasmodically.

"Is he dead?" whispered the young thief, the blood drained from her face.

"I don't know," said Javorik. He went over to inspect the fallen dwarf. "He's breathing!" he called out.

"There's more behind the monster!" pointed out Shandrilla. She was slinking along the wall of the tunnel, trying to slip past the dead worm-monster without brushing up against it.

She found a second dwarf lying on his back just past the creature, an axe gripped tightly in both hands as if in mid-swing. Bending over his body, she saw that he was breathing and that his eyes were wide open, but he stared sightlessly ahead at nothing and his hands were rigidly clenching his weapon as if his life depended upon keeping a firm grip. "Paralyzed," decided Shandrilla out loud.

There was a groan from farther down the corridor. Shandrilla saw another dwarf stumble to his feet, then look up at her. "Hey! Get away from him!" he cried.

Javorik and Federico heard the commotion and came running over. "Lousy thief!" snarled the dwarf, drawing a sword from his belt. "Trying to loot me friend, eh?"

"I was doing no such thing!" replied Shandrilla, indignant at the accusation. She stood at her full height and crossed her arms over her chest. "And I'm not a thief! I'm a recovery specialist."

Federico scowled up at the dwarf, hand on the hilt of his sword. He might have flinched at combat with an enormous killer worm, but he wasn't about to let some stupid dwarf push him or his friends around. "Look here, buddy, we just saved your miserable lives," he snarled. "I'd think you might be a bit grateful, rather than spitting out accusations."

> The monster crashed into the warriors with a silence that seemed much creepier than if it had bellowed its defiance.

"I seen what I seen."

"Look," said Javorik, "Couldn't we settle this elsewhere? I don't know about you, but I for one feel kind of exposed out here. There's a chamber just down this corridor; maybe we could drag your pals in there until they come out of it? I don't really want to be standing out here in the open if another one of these big caterpillar-things shows up."[15]

"Hrrmph!" snorted the dwarf. "Ye lead the way, then, an' I'll do the draggin'. I don't want her near our loot."

Shandrilla turned to the ungrateful dwarf with a hot retort on her tongue, but screamed aloud instead. Another of the worm-monsters was barreling down the tunnel toward them.

"Shanny, get these two to safety!" ordered Javorik, readying another spell. "We'll hold off the critter!"

Shandrilla bent over the ax-wielding dwarf and started lugging him slowly down the corridor, toward the dead beast still oozing yellowish blood onto the tunnel floor. Gods, but the dwarf weighed a ton! Why did she always seem to end up dragging unconscious or

14. A carrion crawler often rears up on its hindmost twelve legs when attacking Medium-sized or larger creatures. This puts its body at about the same height as a human, making successful attacks more likely. Once its prey has been slain, it often carries the corpse slung under its upper body, holding it tightly with its twelve front legs, while walking back to its lair on its hind legs. Otherwise, the carrion crawler walks on all twenty-four legs, keeping its flexible body relatively flat. (It stands about 4 feet high when doing so.)

15. Although normally solitary creatures, several carrion crawlers can be found in the same area and even sharing the same lair, so long as food remains plentiful. No more than six of the monsters have ever been encountered together, and even this is highly unusual.

Even when encountered in numbers, carrion crawlers do not cooperate; each attacks its own opponents and moves on until all potential prey has been paralyzed or fled. In the event of a single victim and two or more carrion crawlers, the crawlers immediately attack each other as soon as the prey has been immobilized, often fighting to the death. Since carrion crawlers cannot paralyze each other and their mandibles inflict only 1–2 points of damage, a battle between two carrion crawlers can take

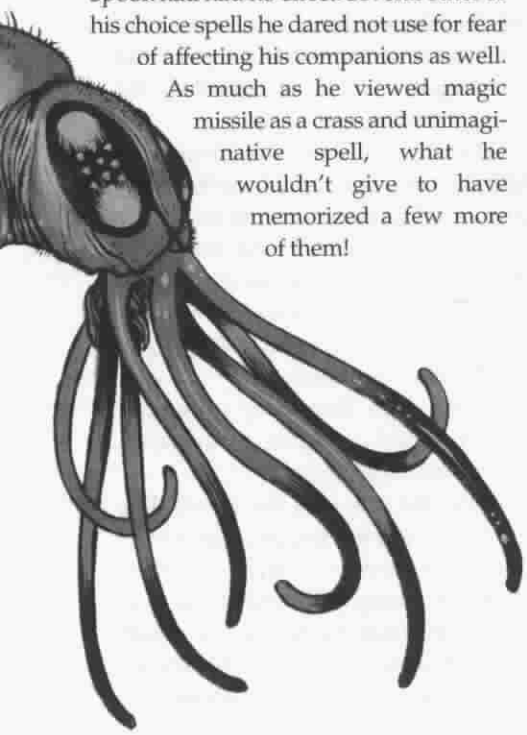
paralyzed armor-clad adventurers down Underdark passageways? Last time it was Federico, and he weighed even more than Shandrilla had imagined.

Javorik was out of magic missiles; instead, he threw up an illusionary wall in front of the rampaging beast. It might have slowed it down momentarily, but it was hard to tell. The monster popped right through the phony wall and continued its charge.[16]

Federico and the dwarf stepped up, swords drawn, ready to engage the beast. "You go right; I'll take left," said the gnome. "And watch those tentacles."

The monster crashed into the warriors with a silence that seemed much creepier than if it had bellowed its defiance.[17] They ducked and parted ways, swords poking up at the beast as it struck. The dwarf was hit on the back by a tentacle, but it struck only armor and had no effect.

Javorik, meanwhile, was struggling to find another useful spell in his inventory. Spook had had no effect. Several other of his choice spells he dared not use for fear of affecting his companions as well. As much as he viewed magic missile as a crass and unimaginative spell, what he wouldn't give to have memorized a few more of them!



Federico managed to stab into the worm-monster's side between two of its legs. He was rewarded with a spurt of thick yellow blood and the creature's undivided attention. Twisting its malleable body to face the little gnome, it slammed all eight grasping tentacles in his direction. Federico didn't have a chance fighting off eight attacks at once, especially when each tentacle was nearly as long as he was tall. He went rigid and was out of the fight.

"Oh, what the hell," muttered Javorik, casting a mirror image upon himself. Soon after, seven identical Javoriks went screaming down the corridor, daggers in hand.

Shandrilla watched all of this with mounting horror. With Federico down, they had lost half of their combat power.

She didn't think Javorik would last long armed with only a dagger and a handful of fake duplicates. That left only the dwarf, and if he couldn't handle it, herself. It was a shame these other two dwarven warriors were still paralyzed; they could use all the help they could get.

And then, looking down at the dwarves at her feet, she got an idea.

Javorik and the dwarf had been stabbing at the creature, opening several wounds in its flanks. As was common with the mirror image spell, it was hard to keep track of which Javorik was which, for they shifted around so much it soon became impossible to track any one image's movements. This apparently held true for the creature as well, for it attacked three false images in a row, popping them like soap bubbles with its tentacles.

In the heat of battle, fighting for his life against a smelly, tentacled beast from the bowels of the earth, and with a crazy illusionist going stab-crazy all around him (he half expected to get stabbed himself amid the frenzy), the dwarf caught sight of the little human thief down the corridor alone with his friends' helpless bodies, down by the slain monster. Confound it if she wasn't looting them of their hard-fought treasures. Blasted thieves! You couldn't turn your backs on them for an instant.

Of course, when fighting for your life against a carrion crawler, it's generally not a good idea to turn your back on it, either. The creature swung its body onto the distracted dwarf and wrapped its tentacles around his face. He fell to the ground with a litany of dwarven curses unspoken on his tongue.

But by then Shandrilla was ready. Wearing not one but two dwarven backpacks, each crammed near to bursting with loot, she hobbled awkwardly down the corridor, shouting at the top of her lungs.

"COME AND GET ME, UGLY!"

Even Javorik was shocked. He and his remaining two mirror images froze up and looked questioningly at each other. The silly human girl wasn't even holding her weapon! What was she thinking?

That didn't seem to bother the worm-monster, however; it struck out at her with tentacles spread wide to cover the greatest area. Stifling a scream, Shandrilla leapt into the tentacles' embrace.

She figured she had only a few seconds before the paralyzation kicked in, and put those few final moments of movement to good use. As a tingling sensation swept down her arms and throughout her body, Shandrilla wound her arms around as many tentacles as she could, gripping down hard on them with her hands and even biting down on one that happened to be right in front of her face. This had better work, she thought as all conscious movement was taken from her.

It did. Javorik and his two mirror images looked on as the creature's head was tugged to the floor of the tunnel under the weight of one slim girl and two overloaded packs. The mon-

quite some time. (If the intended prey is lucky, the effects of the paralyzation might wear off, allowing a chance to make a break for it while the two would-be devourers hash it out!)

16. The carrion crawler relies predominantly upon its senses of sight and smell. For an illusion to be effective against such a creature, it should have both visual and olfactory components.

17. Carrion crawlers make no vocalizations; usually the only sound they make is the scratching of their many claws on stone.

18. Severed tentacles can be sold to an alchemist, for when properly boiled, the essence thus distilled can be fashioned into a potion protecting the imbiber from all forms of paralysis (including that of ghouls, ghasts, and various other undead creatures) for 1d10+2 turns. Optionally, an alchemist can craft a potion that paralyzes the drinker for 2d6 turns. (This is often the unintended result of a poorly made batch of the potion mentioned above.) Finally, carrion crawler tentacle essence can be used to fashion a gummy ointment that, if spread lavishly over a pair of gloves, allows the wearer to paralyze other living beings for 1d8 turns by touch. The ointment generally wears off after 2–5 uses or 1d4+2 hours, whichever comes first. Of course, those foolish enough to try applying the ointment directly on their own hands usually end up paralyzing themselves.

Details on the uses of carrion crawler essence can be found on page 91 of the RAVENLOFT® campaign supplement *Lords of Darkness*.

ster worm thrashed around but was unable to extricate its tentacles. "Like spearing fish in a barrel," commented the illusionist to his nearest duplicate, as they simultaneously carved their way into the creature's body with their slim daggers.

Movement returned slowly to Shandrilla; as the last one paralyzed by the creature, she was also the last one to regain full movement. She sat up weakly and trembled.

"You okay, Shanny?" asked Javorik, obviously concerned for his human friend. He was covered nearly head to toe in sticky yellow blood. "We had to cut off a couple of that thing's tentacles to get you out from it."[18]

Now that Shandrilla was able to move again, she found herself shivering uncontrollably with the worst case of the heebie-jeebies she'd even known in her life. "I can't believe I really did that!" she said, scraping worm-slime from her tongue.

Three dwarves approached her, shame on their faces. "Uh, yeah. Us either," said one.

"Bravest thing I ever seen," commented another.

"Look, about what I said earlier ..." began the third, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Forget about it," said Shandrilla with a wave of her hand. "I'll consider us even if you guys can get us out of here and back up to the surface."

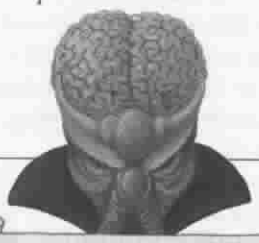
"No problem!" said the first dwarf. "Right up these stairs, down to the left, a quick T-intersection to the right, a squiggly bit, up a slope–"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the second dwarf. "I thought it was a Y-intersection."

"Didn't the squiggly bit come before the intersection?" asked the third.

"Oh, great," said Shandrilla.

Whenever Johnathan M. Richards researches an "Ecology" article, he is astounded by the vast complexity of the animal world. In this case, carrion crawler reproduction was taken directly from the Scutigerella, a species of earthly myriapod. Once again, Johnathan's copy of The Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom *comes through!*



MIND FLAYERS

by Mike Selinker

no. 8

The evil wizard has given you a list of his magic items—with a twist. All the items are "(something) of (something)" The FIRST WORD clue defines the type of items PLUS one letter at the front (so HAT might be clued as if it were CHAT). The LAST WORD clue defines the last word of the item with one letter changed (so HEALING might be clued as HEATING).

	FIRST WORD		LAST WORD		MAGIC ITEM
1	Bone contents	OF	Fixing, as a cat	=	
2	Manhandle lecherously	OF	The process of building	=	
3	Poke	OF	It gets the kinks out	=	
4	Rose's point	OF	Crowing about oneself	=	
5	Not flat or natural	OF	Toss out	=	
6	Carry	OF	Type of theater booth	=	
7	Government inquiry	OF	Female sheep	=	
8	Fencing sword	OF	Degrading	=	
9	"Dallas" oil family	OF	Hamburger cook's task	=	
10	Harsh-sounding	OF	Young deer	=	

The ecology of the

by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards

The debate about the nature of the catoblepas did not keep the proverbial man in the street awake at night, but it had for generations added fuel (as if fuel were needed) to the intense rivalry between the Wizards' and Naturalists' Guilds of To-Zen. The problem was one of demarcation. The naturalists could not deny that there were creatures of magic, and magicians could not help but admit that nature could at times achieve feats worthy of any wizard — but each side naturally wanted to claim the most bizarre beast for its own. And when it came to bizarre, the catoblepas certainly qualified.

To the wizards, a beast with the body of a buffalo, a huge tail and neck, the head of a warthog, and a gaze that slew was clearly a magical beast, and they bitterly rejected the jibe of the naturalists that such a beast, magical or not, would strangle on its own contradictions. The beasts had been seen, said the wizards, which proved that they existed, but any observer rash enough to meet the gaze of a catoblepas died instantly — and what more proof did one need of the beast's magical origin?

Fair enough, said the naturalists, but they pointed out that the catoblepas had been sighted in groups. So, how did they avoid killing each other — or themselves, for that matter — with their death-ray gaze? And how, in the name of the Mnoren, did they breed?

A magical creature, the wizards patiently explained, wouldn't need to breed, would it?

All right, retorted the naturalists, then how come there are so many of them? Is some deranged thaumaturgist turning them out as an occupation?

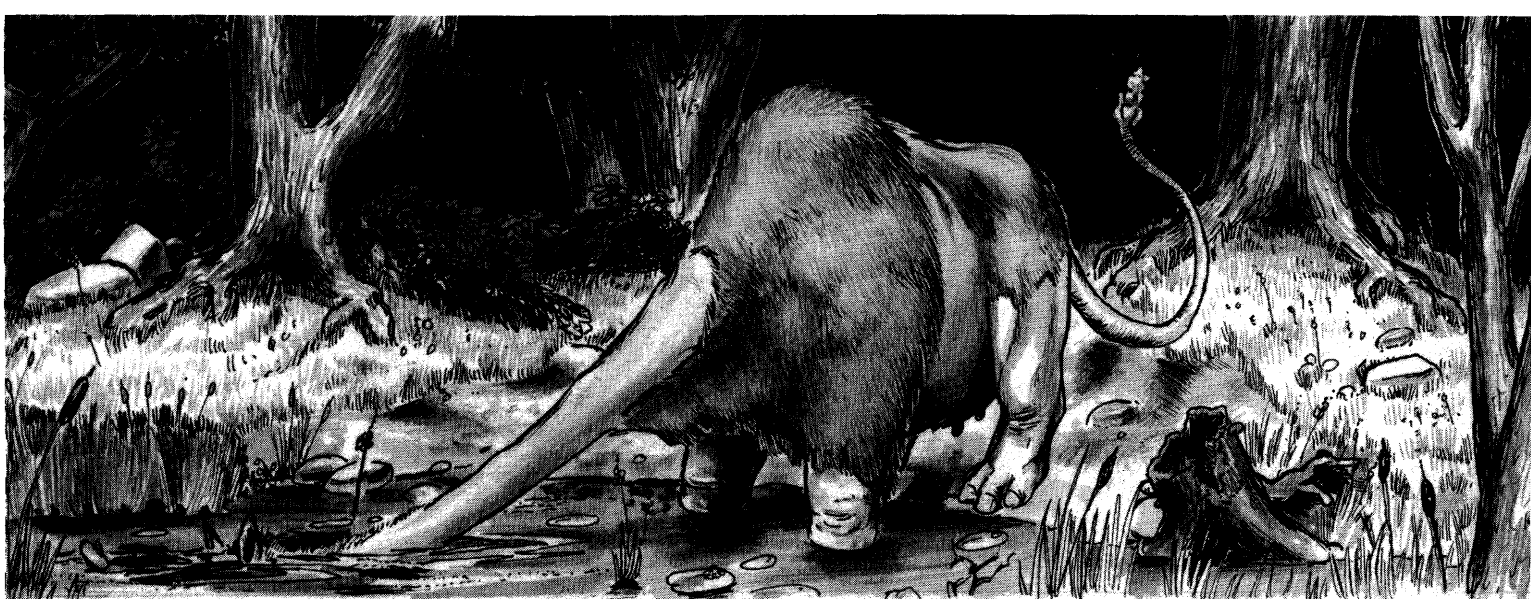
And so the debate continued, with each side having enough evidence to support its unshakable conviction that ***it*** was right, but neither having proof conclusive enough to convince the other side.

On one particular night, earth-shattering revelations were promised when the naturalist Bel-Ami, newly returned from an expedition to study the creature, was to address a capacity crowd in the Alchemists' Guild Hall, chosen as neutral territory. Inside the ancient vaulted hall, with its roof blackened by the fumes of countless demonstrations and its air pervaded by the sour reek of brimstone, the audience fell into three very different groups:

On one side of the hall were tight knots of black-robed apprentices surrounding splendidly gowned master sorcerers; hard-faced wizards, many in elaborately chased leather and silver armor; and a scattering of commercial-minded wizards and wizardly priests preserving a dignified silence. On the other side were the naturalists, dressed in all shades of brown and green, accompanied by almost as many tame hawks, hounds, birds and dragonets. And all around the upper gallery was crowded a mob of curious citizens, eagerly speculating on the outcome of the evening.

Suddenly, as if on a signal, silence fell over the hall. Bel-Ami, a stocky, bearded man in a curiously patterned green robe, came in from the side entrance leading an extraordinary creature. The height of a man, it shuffled nervously on its huge back legs and muscular tail, whilst its small forepaws twitched agitatedly and its delicate head swung this way and that, eyes, ears and nose straining in all directions.

"I expect you're all wondering what this little fellow is doing here," said the famous naturalist. "Well, after much patient and often dangerous observation in some of the wildest country in To-Zen, I can reveal that, far from being just another grazing animal, as we had formerly thought, this is a ***male catoblepas!"*** This remark immediately prompted a general uproar in the hall.



Catoblepas

(or, looks can be very deceiving)

"No, please — please relax! — no, he's perfectly safe, but he does hold the key to the mystery. You must all have read the classic description of, as we call it, the 'cat' in the Bestiary of Xygag, although how he worked out that its eyes are 'bloodshot' escapes me, and for a beast 'horrible beyonde alle description' he goes into a fair amount of detail!

"Well, as far as he goes, he's right, but he didn't realize that they were only the female of the species. From my studies, I have established that the female is a large omnivore, feeding mostly on ooze and water plants dredged from the swamps it lives in, but gaining an important part of its diet from animals it has killed. And no, she doesn't kill them with her deadly gaze, but with her *breath!*

"The female catoblepas secretes a gas, deadly to anything except the female catoblepas, that is belched out in an invisible cloud. The effective range is only about sixty feet before it disperses, but within that range, the only chance of escape is to run faster than the cloud expands. The gas is equally deadly if breathed in or absorbed through the skin.

"It was obvious from the time that I started to form this hypothesis that the 'cat' was immune to its own poison, but it was not for a long time afterward that I connected the female catoblepas with the small herds of grazers that were always found in the same area, following at a discreet distance, and realized that they were two forms of the same species!

"The male, poor fellow, is not immune to the poison cloud, and normally keeps well clear of the female. But in the mating season, the female exudes a scent which drives the male wild with a lust that frequently overpowers his instinct for self-preservation. He must try to wait until a solitary female is feeding with her head buried in the ooze of the swamp. Then, sprinting up to her, he dodges the heavy tail normally used as a defense, mates very quickly, and sprints off again.

"Six months later, the small, deer-like young are born. Since they are exposed to mild doses of the toxin before birth, they are immune to it. They are all weaned together, but at the end of the first year something very strange happens. The young scatter, and differentiate into sexes — a minority of females which remain immune to the toxin that they have begun to secrete, becoming fatter and thicker and eating flesh as well as plants; and the males, which undergo a radical change in their body chemistry, losing their immunity to the toxin and becoming fast-moving herbivores.

"As yet I can only speculate on the reasons for this division of the species; it may ensure a fitter breeding stock, or allow better use of existing food resources than the more conventional way, or both, or neither. Anyhow, enough talk. I'm open to questions from the floor."

During the course of his speech, all the magicians in the audience had been growing more and more restless. Now, one of their number burst from the audience with a horrified cry.

"You can't be serious! This must be your warped naturalist's idea of a joke!"

"Never more serious, I assure you," responded Bel-Ami.

"But, this is awful! When we heard that you had an astounding revelation in store for tonight, we were going to upstage you. My apprentices have gone out on an expedition to kill a catoblepas and bring it back as proof of its magical nature."

"That's quite possible. They can be killed."

"I know that, and you know that — but how far are they going to get with a polished shield?!"

(An earlier version of this article appeared in ***Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.)***

by Timothy Lethbridge

The Ecology of the Cave Fisher

Humans are its favorite catch

Arlach cursed as the flickering torch stub burned his fingers. He dropped it on the cavern floor and lit a new one from the dying flames. It was just one more annoyance on this wretched adventure.

He checked his remaining torches. Three left. He had spent an entire day exploring these tunnels, and he had found nothing but animal droppings and torch stubs — many, many torch stubs. These caverns were well explored, indeed. He could imagine the jeering laughter he would hear if he came out empty handed. But he would show them! He would show them all!

He had to, now.

Arlach sat down heavily on a nearby rock and pulled the map from his pouch. The Caverns of Gold Light, he read at the top. A bitter joke. Seventy gold autorachs just for a copy of this damned thing. But the map's name had promised treasure beyond all imagining. He had spent the last of his inheritance on this accursed map and the equipment to make the journey: his armor, horse, sword, torches, food, and waterskins. But everything had gone wrong from the very beginning. His armor rusted, his horse went lame, and half of his food rotted before he even reached the little village near these caverns. The only real shop in the whole hamlet was the stable, though it was full of fine horses for decent prices. Arlach decided to buy one when he finally found the treasure, when he could laugh in the face of the innkeeper just as the innkeeper had laughed in Arlach's.

"Perchance, could you direct me to the Caverns of Gold Light?" Arlach had asked him, knowing no better.

The innkeeper had roared with mirth. "No, can't say that I've ever heard of them! Unless you mean the Caverns of ***Cold*** Light, eh?" The entire tavern had joined the innkeeper in his laughter. Arlach's face reddened at the memory.

Arlach cursed and kicked at a patch of the slightly luminous fungus that grew all along the cavern walls, giving the place its true name. Without wanting to do so, Arlach looked closely at the map once again and saw where someone had altered the letter "C" to make it appear to be a "G." Sucker bait. He had been a fool not to have seen it before he'd started out, but he couldn't back out now. There was nothing left to do. Wearily, he clambered to his feet and began walking down the tunnel.

There, what was that? Arlach peered ahead into the dimly lit darkness. Was that a glint of gold up ahead? His depression forgotten, Arlach hurried forward and dropped to his knees in front of a pile of equipment and armor. He pawed through it. The gold was a brass buckle. Nothing of value here but three silver deneri — and a leatherbound book. Arlach held the torch high in one hand and opened the book with the other. The script was surprisingly large and sloppy, but it was literate. A diary . . . He flipped to the last entry.

I now write this testament not for my own salvation, but as a warning to others who come this way. If you find this book, take it out with you. You are in the gravest danger.

I have spent three days, as nearly as I can determine, in this sunless dungeon. In that time I have learned much of the creature that holds me prey — a cave fisher. I have heard little more than tavern rumors of these creatures. What I have heard gives me little hope; what I have seen gives me less.

There are two of these creatures: one that holds me and another on the far wall. The one that has me also captured Gastron and Marb; the one across the tunnel caught nimble Desell. Almost as soon as we were snared, Marb was butchered and eaten. His armor was stripped away like a corn husk by the monster's claws while he struggled and screamed, then it cut off his limbs and are him in pieces, devouring even his bones. The other fisher consumed Desell at the same rime, his shrieks of agony ringing in my ears. The fisher that caught me left myself and Gastron in its strands, securing us to the ledge on

either side of it. By chance, it left one of my arms free. It does me little good. Although I retained my dagger, I cannot cut through the strands. I can at least write this message by this living light.

Many long hours after our capture, the creature devoured Gastron. First, the monster dissolved his bindings with a liquid discharged through its snout. Gastron attempted to defend himself, but the creature dismembered my friend with the same ease as it had Marb. I watched him die. I know that I am cursed to be the last.

You who read this beware: Make no sound as you leave this area. I have discovered that the creature is blind. The great membranes that appear to be the cave fisher's eyes are actually ears. If I move my free arm as if to throw something at the creature, it makes no response — yet my pen scratches on this page agitate it. Were I to rap my knuckles on the ledge, I fear it would attack me. The one across the tunnel seems able to unerringly capture bats; perhaps it can hear the high-pitched cries they are reported by wizards to make.

I have noticed that these fishers have piled the gear from my dead comrades beneath them in the tunnel, as if they realize that such materials will attract prey. This indicates a greater intelligence than I have heard rumored of them, although it may simply be coincidence.

The last matter I must relay to you involves the possibility of escape. When Gastron was fighting the creature, he scored a blow on its head. The blood that dripped down fell upon his remaining bonds and dissol—

Arlach cursed as a glowing spark from the torch landed on his fingers. The torch dropped from his hand, hit the ground, and went out. Complete darkness fell. Continuing to swear, Arlach felt for his pack and began to rummage for his flint and tinder. He never felt the strand fall across his back until, with a startled cry, he was snatched off of his feet.

As the elf inspected the horse, the pudgy innkeeper rambled about its merits. "Yes, sir! That's one fine horse — a trifle lame, true, but that will pass in a few days. Besides, look at the price! Fifteen autorachs! You can't beat the price!"

The elf considered the offer in silence. Settling back to wait, the innkeeper reflected that maybe two days was too soon to be selling the boy's horse. But he had a buyer now, and the boy wasn't coming back. Young, cocky, treasure-happy — his kind never came back. It was not meant for regular folk to know what sorts of things lurked in caves and such. Why adventurers wanted to know, the innkeeper would never understand. Not that it mattered. Fools rushed in—

"I'll offer you eight autorachs," the elf said softly. "This poor creature is worth no more than that"

The innkeeper sighed, returning his thoughts to the matter at hand. "You drive a hard bargain, but for ten, I'll throw in an almost-new saddle. How 'bout it?"

Notes

The "eyes" of a cave fisher are actually multiple ears that allow it to capture its prey in the darkness with a high degree of accuracy. Because of this method of locating its prey, the cave fisher receives a bonus to hit when striking particularly noisy prey. Give the cave fisher a +2 bonus to hit against characters in metal armor or those who are talking. Give the fisher +1 to hit against characters performing less noisy actions such as carrying bags of coins or walking on hard ground. A thief (or an elf or halfling without metallic armor, attempting to surprise) may go unnoticed by a cave fisher if he can move silently; if he fails this roll, the cave fisher still has a -2 to hit due to the character's assumedly reduced noise. Tapping on the ground with a pole ahead of the party may induce a cave fisher to catch the pole instead (treat as AC 10).

The cave fisher's ears may hear sounds both below and above the human hearing range. Cave fishers often use this skill to catch bats flying nearby. If a cave fisher is presented with a number of different sounds associated with prey, it will fire at the loudest first; thus, it would choose an ogre in nailed boots over a nearby barefoot halfling. Casting a *silence 15'* radius spell on a cave fisher causes it to freeze, making claw attacks at -4 to hit if it is attacked.

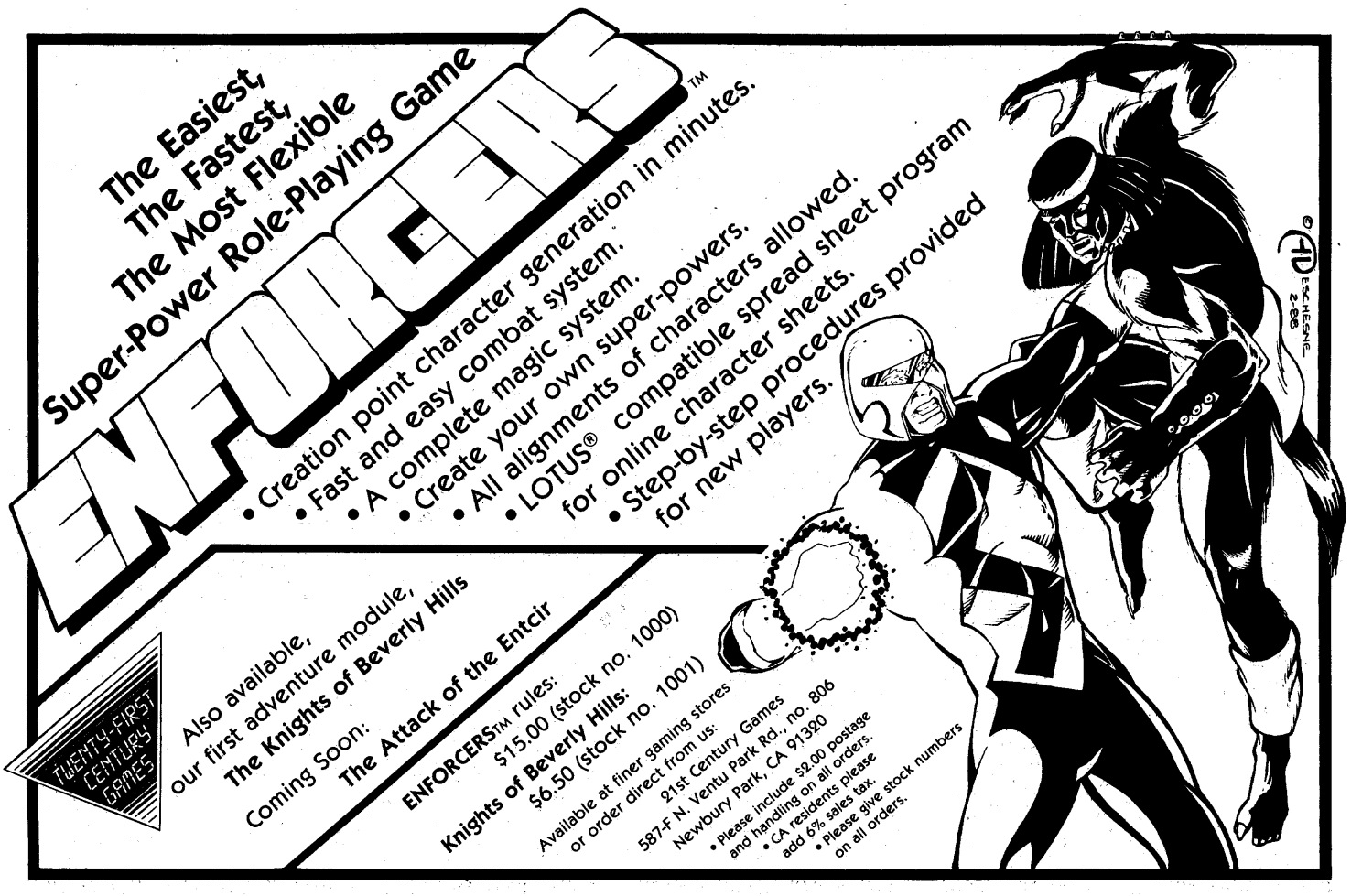
When the cave fisher captures more prey than it can eat, it stores the "extras" in a manner similar to a spider's. It wraps the prey in adhesive filaments, almost always tying down all of a victim's limbs. The fisher then uses its adhesive secretions to secure the victim to a wall or ledge nearby. When the creature desires to eat, it simply dissolves the bonds of the victim and dismembers him (this can lead to some interesting rescue scenarios). The cave fisher can survive on very little food, even a few bats a day if need be, but when there is a surplus available it can consume up to 200 lbs. of meat per day.

The filaments, the adhesive secretion, and the dissolving secretion are all discharged through the creature's proboscis. The filaments are stored in the organic winch behind the creature's head; the two secretions are stored in frontal cavities. Once removed from a cavity, the adhesive hardens within one turn. The dissolving secretion takes one round to work.

Cave fishers can live over 100 years. Once every 20 years, the female makes a high-pitched keening sound (above human or demi-human hearing) that brings all males within a 5-20 mile radius underground. The female mates with the first male to arrive, then kills him, rejecting the overtures of all others. Three days later, she lays a group of 5-9 eggs inside her mate's body and moves to a new spot. The eggs hatch within a month, and the young live for a short time on the carcass of their father. Three weeks after they are born, the young cave fishers are half grown, and they leave to establish lairs of their own. These half-grown cave fishers do half damage and 1+1 HD, but their armor class and movement remain the same. The young cave fishers reach full growth roughly one year after they are born.

Cave-fisher eggs 10 days old or less are greatly prized because of their high alcohol content, though they also contain other druglike substances. A single sip of the liquid found within the cave-fisher egg is enough to intoxicate a man for hours, bringing great delusions and hallucinations (save vs. poison or be confused for 1-4 hours; victim is merely *slowed* if he saves). Drinking an entire egg would be enough to kill a man (save vs. poison or die in 10-40 rounds). These fresh eggs bring 50-100 gp each in large cities. Neither the cave fisher's blood nor eggs older than 10 days have this property.

Cave-fisher lairs may have a large pile of equipment and treasure lying directly beneath them on a tunnel floor. Being semi-intelligent, the cave fisher is able to reason that this seems to attract prey, but it is not capable of more detailed planning. Ω



Ecology of the Centaur

Horse Raiders without Mercy

By Wolfgang Baur
Art by Joanna Barnum and Kathy Barker

The bow was impossibly thick: made of layered yew and horn, decorated with an ebony handle, and strung with a tiger-striped bowstring wound of horsehair as thick as a reed. The Rothenian elf pulled on it again to string it and barely bent the tips of the bow.

"It's not made for two-legs," rumbled Atropos. "It takes a real archer to string a steppe bow." Taking the bow back from the elf, the centaur stepped through the string, leaning 1,000 pounds of muscle and bone into the recurved spring, and grunted. Slowly, the wood bent beneath his huge hands and the half-horse affixed the string. "Shoot for distance?" asked the centaur.

The elf stared and then laughed. "Your bow is bigger than mine; I confess it. But I still think you smell bad." The centaur smiled and pulled an arrow from his quiver, fully four feet long.

Centaurs are strange, half-human wanderers with no home or nation. On the Rothenian plains, they are friends and rivals to the elves, half-foolish and half-wise when moved by drink or rage. The centaur clans are small, sometimes of little more than a dozen or so, and all too often, they serve as mercenaries, fighting someone else's war for little more than oats and cheese. When roused to anger, though, they burn out entire villages and sack small towns, before returning to the great plains, richer and avenged.

There, out in the extensive grasslands far to the east of Zobeck and high in the hills, the larger bands of centaurs make their own lives as hunters, bandits, and nomads, owing fealty to no one and nothing—fiercely independent, willing to die rather than be settled in any village, serving only their chiefs and khans. Humans and elves do not understand the centaurs' nomadic ways and fear their violent tempers and wild passions. Centaurs think humans and elves are fools to live in huts of wood or stone when they could live free while moving across the great grasslands. These horsefolk would not—could not—live any other way.

History of the Centaurs

The origins of the centaurs are unclear; they can claim many fathers. Most centaur priests near civilized lands claim their people were born of divine will and favor. Or perhaps it was Perun the Thunderer, who watches over the nomads of the great eastern steppes where the Rothenian elves claim dominion over the riverbeds and plateaus and where the centaurs rule the grasslands beneath their hooves from the Ruby Sea to the borders of Trollheim.

The centaur legends themselves claim that they are the true sons and daughters of the wind and sky gods and that both humans and horses are their lesser cousins. According to this tale, humans were made first, but their two legs and small size marked them out as runts and weaklings, and they were ultimately rejected by Perun as too slow and too weak to survive a nomad's life. Horses were the god's second attempt: fast and strong and able to live by grazing anywhere on the wide plains. But in time, their failings were clear as well, for they moved as a herd. The horses bred not heroes but followers, and lacked the cunning of a hunter and the clever hands of a smith or archer.

Mocked by his wife for failing twice, Perun the Thunderer decided to make the third time count for all, and he saw that the previous failings could be mended with the right match of human hands and equine speed and power, so the centaurs were his third attempt at making a race to rule the grasslands. This is a story they tend to keep to themselves most of the time but which they all believe in their hearts to be entirely true.

The stories that centaurs tell more freely are the tales of their arrival from the East, riding and pillaging along the hills to the River Argent, where they first met the ambassadors of the Court of the Shadow Fey. Unwilling to fight the fey in the dark forests and warned of disaster by the priests of Perun if they failed to carve out a home for themselves, many of the centaurs took to roaming a very particular set of pastures and grasslands.

The centaurs are true nomads, retreating to hills and Rothenian high meadows in summer and returning to lower elevations when the meadows are bare and the lure of rustling, banditry, and raiding grow strong. They are currently divided into those who live free in the Eastern grasslands and those who hunt and serve as mercenaries in human lands.

Centaur Medicine

Centaurs have a long tradition of healing and medicine, derived from both herbal and divine sources. This medicine is mostly meant for horses and centaurs and is remarkable in its ability to save even abused horses from the brink of starvation, strangles, or spongy hoof.

The centaurs dose themselves with the painkilling, hypnotic ridegrass before long journeys when a courier must travel without pauses for food or sleep. Ridegrass seems to have no effect whatever on two-legged creatures, though horses, mules, oxen, griffons, hippogriffs, and pegasi can all benefit from it, gaining a +4 bonus to Endurance checks for a day after consuming it.

Centaur medicine also extends to draughts for sleeping, poultices for healing both plagues and poison, and cures for curing impotence. The last of these, they claim, is made with centaur blood to help the two-legged, for "centaurs never suffer from this condition."

The only diseases they cannot cure in themselves or in horses are rabies and lycanthropy. Centaur healers are experts at the treatment of lycanthropy in its various forms, and though they cannot cure it, they can moderate the frequency and length of such shapeshifting and prevent the need to feed on fresh blood and flesh.

Centaur Grooms and Riders

Centaurs attract attention as mounts because of their resemblance to horses, but this is deceptive. Most centaurs consider it a bit presumptuous to even be asked to carry a rider, though the question comes up often. Asking a centaur to ride on her back requires a successful opposed Diplomacy check; if it fails, that centaur will not give the presumptuous two-legs a ride under any but life-threatening circumstances.

The major exception to this is the centaur paladin and certain knights, who deliberately take on human or halfling riders to help them with weapons, armor, and horseshoes—not to mention stairs and ladders. When a centaur paladin reaches 5th level, he may summon such a groom. The groom is a 2nd-level fighter, and in many cases is mute or at least unobtrusive. Halflings are especially prized as grooms, as they weigh less and require less fodder than a human groom.

Table: Centaur Lore

Characters with some knowledge of nature can learn more about the centaur. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

Nature DC	Result
10	Centaurs have the strengths of both human and horse, and live in nomadic clans.
15	Centaurs use lances and enormous composite bows and can trample foes underfoot with ease. They are surprisingly good at stealth and woodcraft for their size.
20	Centaurs worship nature gods, a thunder god, and the god of wine. They are terrible, violent drunks and are much stronger than a typical human, able to tear apart small foes.
25	Centaurs fear confined spaces and steep slopes; they cannot climb walls or cliffs, and even stairs are difficult. They rarely enter towns, preferring the open road. They make excellent mercenary scouts.

Anatomy and Appearance

Centaurs' human halves tend to be well muscled and longhaired with a bit

of a mane down their spine that fuses with their equine half. As half-horse, they come in all the colors and varieties of horseflesh, from bays and blacks to chestnuts and grays. Even zebra-centaurs have been reported on wide savannahs.

Centaurs are unlike their horse cousins in that they are omnivores and hunters, rather than herbivores and herd animals. Nevertheless, they rarely eat much meat (and never horseflesh). Centaurs preferr vegetables, roots, nuts, and (most of all) grains, such as rye, oats, and millet. They eat spring lambs and slow-cooked stews on major occasions, such as victories in battle and the marriages between major bloodlines of their chiefs.

Centaurs human halves are deeply muscled, but their faces are not quite human; they are long and horselike, with large and flaring nostrils that permit breathing deeply in a gallop. The human torso is almost entirely lungs; the large livers and the multi-chambered stomachs and intestines are contained in the equine portion of their body. Their enormous hearts lie between the two, somewhat forward from their position in a horse, and often protected by a "belly band" of typically centaur armor.

Both centaur men and women typically have a mane of black hair running down their back as well as a crop of human hair. Their horse bodies have a variety of coloring, though they run to dun and chestnut on the Rothenian plains, and more black and greys in the forests near Zobeck and the Arbonesse.

Centaurs live for 35 to 60 years, at which point they can no longer roam with their families. Elder centaurs tend to die on their feet, collapsing along the line of march. A clan may sit with a dying elder for days, striving to make their passing peaceful. Centaur burials on the plains are a matter of cutting the thick sod into grass bricks, then stacking them around a fallen centaur warrior or matron in a cairn. The size of the mound built around a centaur bears some relationship to the clan's love and respect for that centaur. Winter burials are perforce limited to mounds of snow when the steppe is frozen.

Magic & Equipment

Centaur magic is druidic, and they are powerful followers of both martial and earthy traditions. While a few centaurs thrive as merchants, ever practical in trading among the clans, most males are warriors first, and female centaurs are rarely seen outside the circles of a clan group. Centaur goods are the goods of nomads: lightweight and few in number. The heaviest goods of a centaur clan are the winter tents, heavy cloth panels that can be rigged with any stout wooden pole to create a shelter for young foals and centaur women.

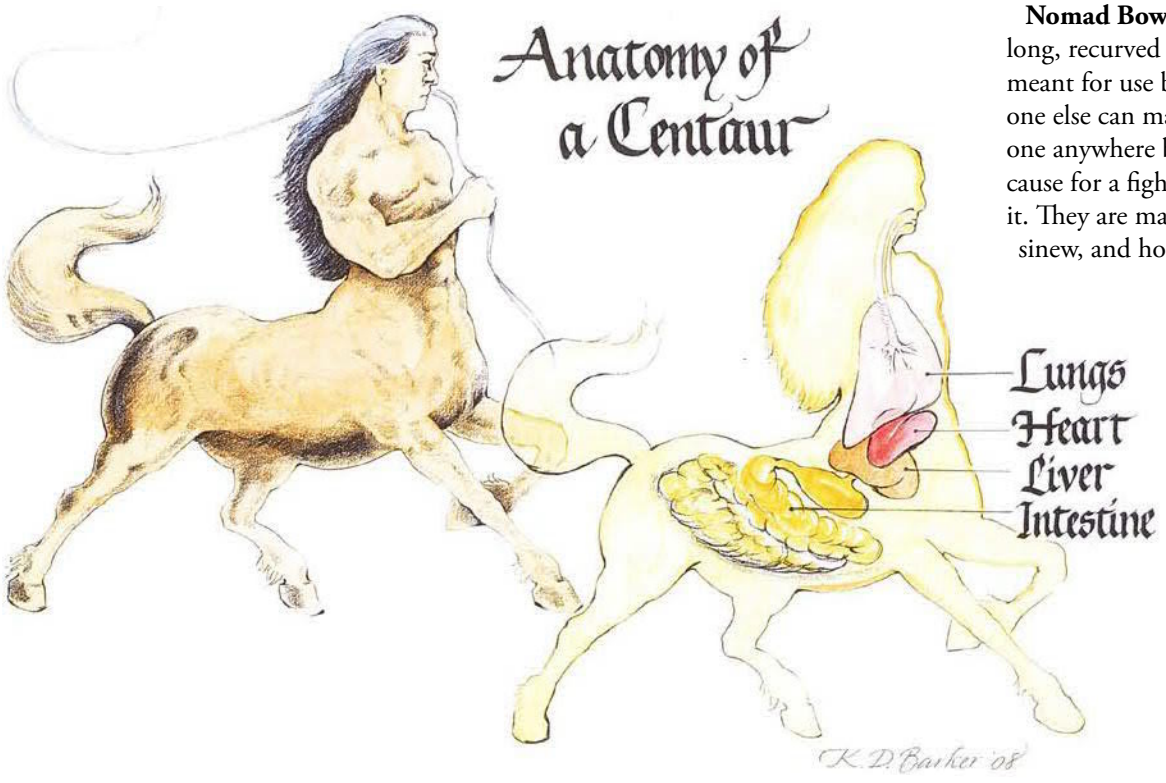
Clothing: Centaur garments are simple: a harness for weaponry and wineskins and a travelling pack slung over the back (never called saddlebags). In times of war, they wear leather armor and iron helmets but little else. Some clans wear colorful woven vests and long cloaks, but these are primarily for winter and the rainy season. Centaur women frequently wear sashes that cover one breast, a tradition they claim to have taught to the Amazons.

Horseshoes: Centaur hooves are small and tough. Some wear spiked horseshoes in battle but rarely wear them for travel. In cities, they prefer felt hoof coverings on stony streets.

Steppe Lances: These Large reach 2 lances are unusual only in that they are decorated with banners and tassels. The tassels for the deadliest warriors are the scalps and shrunken heads of their defeated foes. Centaurs use their lances primarily for the charge, and then, they trample foes.

Nomad Bows: These 7- or 8-foot long, recurved composite bows are meant for use by centaurs; almost no one else can make them, and finding one anywhere but in centaur hands is cause for a fight with any clan that sees it. They are made of layered woods, sinew, and horn and have a draw of at least 200 pounds. For this reason, they have exceptional range and penetrating power, making them able to punch through even the thickest armor.

These horse bows have a 30/60 range and damage of 1d12 plus Strength



modifier. However, stringing one requires a Strength of at least 18, and the bow is too large for any size Small creature to use. Size Medium creatures suffer a -5 equipment penalty with a weapon too large for them.

A well-made nomad bow never sells for less than 1,000 gp, and most have names and histories from their makers and wielders. A stolen bow with a long history may often be recognized by other centaurs who see it in the hands of a non-centaur.

Livestock, Tents, and Campsites: Centaurs measure wealth in goats and sheep, which they use for leather, wool, and meat, and the making of panniers, blankets, and tents. The last is especially important—a woolen tent is a sign of adulthood. "Leaving the tent" is a way of speaking of a colt or foal reaching maturity, and "joining tents" is the typical euphemism for two centaurs who marry or who sire foals.

Centaur tents are held up by ropes and a single tent pole. They provide excellent shelter from wind, snow, and rain, but there is a certain wooly smell about them, permeated with the smokiness of cook fires. In winter, the centaurs may build a wall of snow around their tent for greater warmth; their winter camps are matters of tradition and the same herd of centaurs may return to the same camp year after year or may circulate among two or three favored sites.

Society of the Centaurs

Centaur society can be divided into three main kinds of clans: the steppe nomads, the mercenary companies, and the bandits. Each of these has some kinship with the others, and all three share a fondness for direct election of their kings and war leaders. It is, above all, a meritocracy, where a king can be deposed by the will of his horde.

Clans, Hordes, Captains, and Kings While a herd of centaurs might seem like an accurate term, they prefer to call themselves "clans" for groups up to a dozen or so, and a horde for any greater number. Clans are led by a powerful male (a stallion, chief, khan, or captain). When enough clans gather, they sometimes choose to send a group of young warriors on a yearlong or two-year "bandit year" to raid the elven redoubts or to try the defenses of the Osmanli sultan or to strike west against the lands near Zobeck. During this bandit year, the young warriors learn both the rudiments of stealth and raiding and the tactics that make them successful on the plains.

In practice, many of those on their bandit year spend only a short time raiding, then hire their services to some respected caravan master and serve as guards. This way, they visit distant cities on the islands off the coast of Arbonesse or cross the snows of Trollheim or drink from the desert oases of Hatapesh and Siwal. These wanderers don't always return to the steppes, but those who do have learned the arts of many lands, strange sorceries, or tricks of healing which they share in the winter camps or the summer gatherings.

Those summer gatherings are when the captains, khans, and chiefs decide whether any clan or tribe has suffered such an insult that they must be avenged. These occasions are rare (perhaps twice a generation or so), but invariably, the entire centaur nation will sweep off the plains that summer to destroy all border settlements, burn crops, and run riot against the defenses of the offending nation. The trolls, the Osmanli, the slavers of Harkasa, the prince of Doresh and others have all learned this lesson well, so few dare to wipe out a centaur band.

Two-Legged Allies The best friends and allies of the centaurs among humanoids are humans, halflings, and elves; dwarves and kobolds distrust centaurs as too big and too dangerous, respectively. Among humans, the attitude is similar, but the Kariv wanderers and the centaurs often share a road, rustle livestock together, or raid a small hamlet for food. The Kariv understand the hardships of the road, and their smiths will always shoe a centaur for free (the practice is considered to bring good luck). In return, centaurs often act as scouts and

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defenders for Kariv wanderers who may face danger from human, goblin, or other bandits. More than once has a Kariv caravan been rescued by centaur information or lances, and centaur bandits never rob the Kariv (they consider the practice ill-fated).

Elves and centaurs are a more complex mix. Elves consider centaurs uncouth, foul smelling, and boorish but find them oddly charming for their honesty, directness, and superb woodcraft and archery. Though few elves admit it, centaur archery is superior to their own in raw power and in distance. The difference in accuracy lies in the elves' favor, but as many have pointed out, "one centaur arrow is worth three of the elves'."

Cults and Religion

Centaurs of Zobeck and the surrounding lands, west to Arbonesse, and east to the Rothenian plains are worshippers of many gods, from the Sun God to the harsh spirits of wind and ice. Most follow Perun, and they are invariably drawn to the primal gods: war, fertility, love, healing, and death, and have little patience for complex theology or subtle worship of magic, knowledge, or abstract codes of behavior.

Their favorite divine patron in the Free City is Porevit, the Green God in his aspect of god of wine and fertility. Centaurs are notorious for raiding wineries and brewer's shipments and for sacking them entirely.

Centaur Tactics and Combat

Centaurs are creatures of both the overwhelming charge and the steady fire-and-retreat schools of warfare; in both cases, their mass and speed make them dangerous.

The Charge: A centaur charge is dangerous because it is wild and reckless; it begins with a volley of enormous clothyard arrows from their bows and then turns into a rumbling approach as the centaurs put away bow and quiver and lower their steppe lances to strike with a 20-foot reach. If the shock of the lances does not break a group of defenders (rare, but dwarven pike and other well-trained troops can withstand it), there follows the trampling of hooves and the use of long, wicked falchions.

A lethal centaur charge is always directed against opposing troops and armed defenders; a rush against women, children, or old men will always end with centaurs carrying away slaves and hostages for ransom. These are not unknown, but rare.

The Slow Burn: Centaurs, when they are truly angry, use their bows as instruments of revenge rather unlike elven archery. They fire from up to 300 yards (180 squares), raining down death in the form of large, fiery arrows that set peasant huts or granaries to burning. In some cases, they poison their arrows by rolling them in dung, to bring on the blood rotting sickness in foes (see table below).

The Standard Raid: Centaurs are happy to take anything that other races do not value enough to protect properly; this is often livestock but also grains, cloth, and coin. A standard raid begins just before dawn or at night, with centaurs shooting sentries with arrows enchanted with silence 15' radius and, then, galloping to the attack in two groups; one is a diversion, meant to draw defenders away from the object of the raid, whether that be a corral, barn, or a storehouse for grain.

Blood Rotting Sickness		**Level 6 Disease**	
Any cut from centaur arrows taints the blood and leaves victims feverish and weak.		**Attack:** +9 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 23 maintain DC 19 worsen DC 18 or lower	
The target is cured.	**Initial Effect** The target loses one healing surge that it cannot regain until cured.	The target permanently loses one point of Constitution.	**Final State** The target is immobilized.

Centaur Trample (Centaur Racial Power)

You rear up and smash foes beneath your hooves, knocking them sprawling.

Encounter • Standard Action

Effect: You make a normal move, stepping into enemy squares (drawing an opportunity attack) and make a Reflex attack against the foe for 1d6 + Strength on a successful attack. You must end your turn in an unoccupied square. Increase the extra damage to 2d6 at 11th level and to 3d6 at 21st level.

Rothenian Centaur Bandit — Lvl 5 Brute

Large natural beast (mount) — XP 200

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40
AC 17; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 13
Speed 8

Lance (standard; at-will) • **Weapon, Reach 2**
+8 vs. AC; 1d12 + 6 damage.

Thundering Lance (standard; encounter) • **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 3d12+6 damage; attack must be made as part of a charge action.

Falchion (standard; at-will) • **Weapon, Reach**
+8 vs. AC; 2d6+6 damage.

Nomad's Longbow (standard; at will) • Weapon
+ 9 vs. AC; 1d12 + damage.

Trample (standard; at-will)
A centaur can move up to its speed and enter enemies' spaces. This movement provokes opportunity attacks, and the centaur must end its move in an unoccupied space. When it enters an enemy's space, the centaur makes a trample attack: +6 vs. Reflex, 1d10+4 damage, target is knocked prone.

Charger (while mounted by a friendly rider of 3rd level or higher; at-will) • **Mount**
The centaur grants its rider a +5 bonus to damage rolls on charge attacks. Foes knocked prone are pushed 2 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills +12 Athletics, +7 Healing, +7 Nature, +7 Stealth
Str 19 (+6) **Dex** 20 (+7) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 20 (+7) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)

Equipment leather armor, lance, falchion, nomad bow, 30 arrows

Rothenian Centaur Bandit Tactics

The centaur tactics are those of nomads and horse archers: fire, move, and fire again, until your enemy is dead. They prefer not to engage in melee with an unbloodied foe, but once they sense weakness, they charge en masse to strike with their lances and then trample foes underfoot.

Centaurs are easy to provoke with taunts; they will charge and engage foes who challenge them to combat.

Centaur Racial Traits

Average Height: 5' 0" – 5' 6" (at the horse shoulder), 7' to 7' 6" at the human head
Average Weight: 750–1,200 lb.
Ability Scores: +2 Constitution, +2 Dexterity
Size: Large **Speed:** 8 squares
Vision: Low-light **Languages:** Common, Elven
Skill Bonuses: +2 Athletics (cannot climb walls)

Centaur Leap: When you are jumping vertically, divide your Athletics check result by 6 instead of 10 (round down) to determine the height you jump in feet. With a running start of 2 squares, divide by 3 instead of 5.

When you are jumping horizontally, divide your Athletics check result by 6 instead of 10 (round down) to determine the distance you jump in squares. With a running start of 2 squares, divide by 3 instead of 5.

Rothenian Centaur Chief — Lvl 7 Elite Artillery

Large natural beast (mount) — XP 600

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
HP 156; **Bloodied** 77
AC 21; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16
Saves +2 to all
Action Points 1
Speed 8

Lance (standard; at-will) • **Weapon, Reach 2**
+14 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage.

Nomad's Longbow (standard; at will) • **Weapon**
+ 9 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage.

Crippling Shot (standard; recharge ⁙ ⁝⁝) • **Weapon**
+12 vs. Reflex; 2d12+5 damage; and the target is slowed (save ends).

Falchion (standard; at-will) • **Weapon, Reach**
+14 vs. AC; 2d6+5 damage.

Spellseeker Shot (immediate reaction) • **Weapon**
The centaur chief fires a standard longbow shot immediately before a centaur is targeted with a ranged spell. If the shot hits, the spell fails.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills +14 Athletics, +7 Healing, +7 Nature, +12 Stealth
Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 20 (+7) **Int** 8 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)

Equipment leather armor, lance, falchion, nomad's bow, arrows

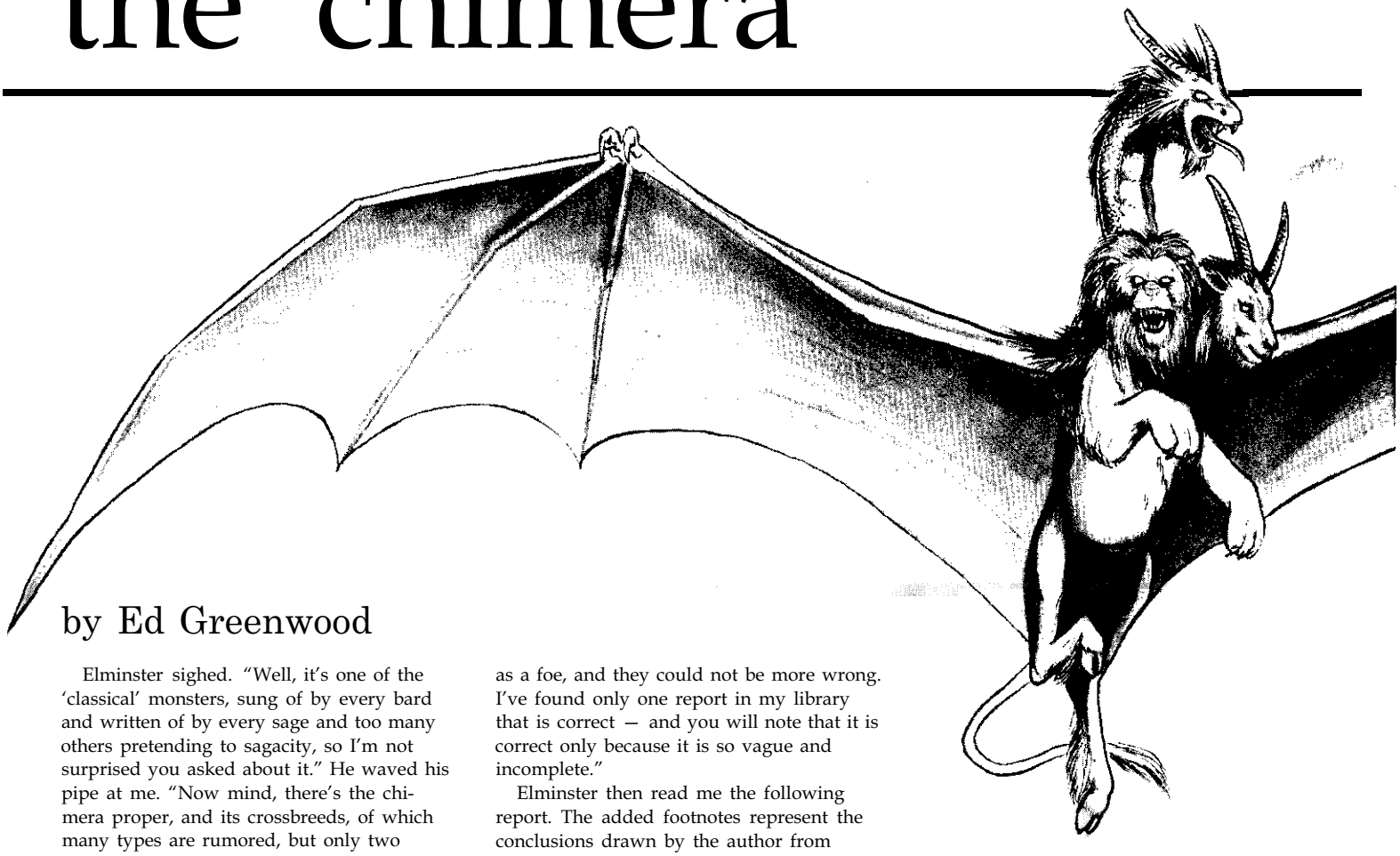
Rothenian Centaur Chief Tactics

Unlike his followers, a Rothenian centaur chief will almost never charge into combat, unless his quiver is empty. Instead, he strikes from a distance with shots intended to cripple and harass a foe.

A Rothenian centaur chief often has magical arrows as well, able to create burst fire or other effects.

When a chief is slain, his followers retreat in disarray.

The ecology of the chimera



by Ed Greenwood

Elminster sighed. "Well, it's one of the 'classical' monsters, sung of by every bard and written of by every sage and too many others pretending to sagacity, so I'm not surprised you asked about it." He waved his pipe at me. "Now mind, there's the chimera proper, and its crossbreeds, of which many types are rumored, but only two confirmed: the gorgimera and the thessalmera."

"Thessalmera?" I repeated, astonished. "There is such a thing as the offspring of a chimera and a thessalhydra?"

"Aye. And a more ugly, ungainly, and deadly creature you cannot imagine. Thankfully, they cannot breed." The sage sucked on his pipe and considered. "You'll be wanting a story, of course, and all that I can recall are untrue." At my questioning eyebrow he continued: "All of the ballads and folktales concerning chimerae are always either simple, bloody fights with them, and this or that hero prevailing — or they involve heroes and heroines too weak to fight a chimera, who overcame it and slew it, stole from it, or escaped from it by setting its various heads to arguing among themselves.

"This is pure piffle. Chimerae are too stupid to argue. They know only when to attack and eat weak opponents or withdraw when badly hurt. Instinct tells them what is good to eat, what is too hot or too cold for comfort, and when to mate. Most sages think of chimerae as somewhat less cunning than dragons, but otherwise about the same as a foe, and they could not be more wrong. I've found only one report in my library that is correct — and you will note that it is correct only because it is so vague and incomplete."

Elminster then read me the following report. The added footnotes represent the conclusions drawn by the author from Elminster's detailed additions, comments, and explanations, for the study of chimerae was a hobby of his in the days when he worked with the late Laelun of Teshendale.

From the *De Naturis Rerum* ("About the Things of Nature") of Alaphondar, Sage Most Learned of the Royal Court of King Cormyr:

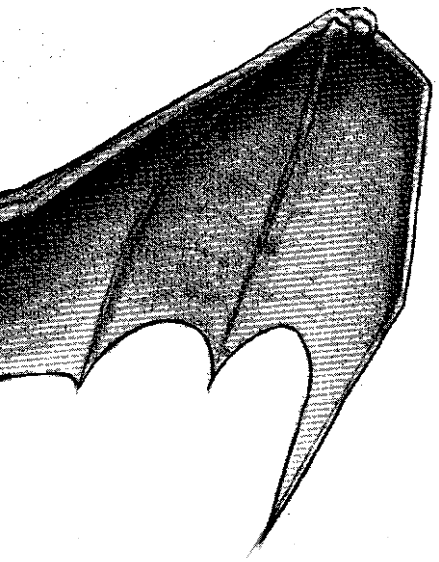
Of the weird and misbegotten creatures of nature, most repellent and infamous to men, one of the most ungainly and terrible is the thankfully rare chimera.

Chimeras (or "chimerae") have three heads: a goat head well equipped for cropping grass and the eating of all manner of rotting vegetables and the like; a lion head admirably suited for battling and devouring game — and a dragon head that can roast flesh and subdue even the strongest prey: man himself. It is an old and cruel joke that the chimera is the only beast that cooks its repast to the desired degree before partaking — old men roasted well done, but young ones only toasted medium rare. Much else is said, often wrongly, about this monster most foul, so herein I do set down the record straight.

A chimera is a stupid beast, but it needs little finesse to survive with the powers it possesses. It seldom cooperates with other creatures, but only rarely does one chimera fight with another. A chimera ranges widely while hunting, trusting to its powers to keep it safe from harm, avoiding only large cities or the lairs of creatures that have bested it before. It is a clumsy flier,[1] able to use its fiery breath, or only one of its heads, or its claws, in aerial combat. It prefers to pounce from flight or high ground onto prey, using its bulk to drive its victim to the ground, where it can rake with its lionlike foreclaws and bite unhampered.[2]

Chimeras are omnivorous, but prefer to dine on raw flesh. They kill their prey themselves, rather than scavenging or hunting with other creatures. They are largely solitary, banding together with others of their own kind only for short periods to undertake specific hunts or to mate. Chimeras take no permanent companions, but often mate with another of their own kind upon first encounter.[3]

These beasts have awesome powers of vitality and regeneration.[4] In a month, one can grow a new head to replace one that is lost or badly damaged. The creature can, of its own will, cut off the blood supply to a damaged head. Then it will ram and rub against rocks to remove the wounded appendage, or sometimes bargain with another creature to devour or remove the useless flesh. If a chimera loses its dragon head, it will hide in its lair until the head grows back and the creature regains its



power to breathe fire (a gas-producing internal organ is involved). This entire process takes between two and three months.

Chimeras speak a grunting, crude form of red dragon language, and sometimes bargain with red dragons for prey and aid, in return for treasure or spell scrolls. A chimera hides such treasure (gained from prey) in its lair, usually under a concealing layer of boulders. Chimera lairs are typically in caverns, disused mines, or ruined castles, particularly if the latter structures rise high to command a view of the surrounding terrain.

The origin of the chimera is unknown; some believe it was human experimentation that initially caused the interbreeding of a red dragon, a lion, and a goat. The truth is lost in the mists of time; it is only certain that chimeras are now a stable, if rare, species, and can breed with their own kind (to produce chimeras), with red dragons (to produce more chimeras), with lions (to produce lions), with gorgons (to produce the sterile gorgimera), or with thessalhydrae (to produce the sterile thessalmera).

Notes

1. A chimera is of maneuverability class E, as are its cousins the gorgimera and thessalmera. The creature's body is very bulky, so even its powerful dragon-wings can do little more than keep the chimera aloft; high speed and abrupt sharp turns are out of the question, which is why the beast only uses flight as a means to gain a positional advantage over a ground-based opponent. A chimera will almost never voluntarily engage in aerial combat with another flying creature, not even one as ungainly as itself.

2. The fiery breath of a chimera does as much as 3-24 points of damage to a target within a 5″ distance from its dragon head, in a cone-shaped area 2″ in diameter at the farthest point. Against a formidable foe, it will use this attack as frequently as possible (as often as once per round, up to 6 times per day). In a less challenging situation, the creature will rely on its claw, hoof, and bite attacks and only use its breath weapon on a 50% chance (roll separately for each round of combat). A target within the area of effect can take only half damage by making a successful saving throw vs. breath weapon.

A chimera's lion head bites for 3-12 points of damage, the slash of its goat head's horns can do 1-2 points of damage if a target presents itself, and its dragon head does 2-8 points of damage on every bite that hits. The lion foreclaws do 1-4 damage each, and the hooves on its rear goat-legs do 1-3 points of damage each from kicking (only possible against targets behind or below the chimera). The creature's tail and wings do no damage, but can buffet, trip, distract, and sometimes even knock over opponents. A chimera is capable of wielding all of its various appendages against separate foes simultaneously. Its scaled, sinuous dragon head is armor class 2, its leathery wings AC 5, and its vast, bulky body (including the lion and goat heads) is AC 6.

A gorgimera's body is entirely AC 2 except for the gorgonlike hindquarters and bull-head, which are AC 5. A thessalmera's body is AC 0, except for the gorgon-head (AC 5) and the wings and dragon-head (both AC 2).

3. The mating of two chimerae will produce offspring only 30% of the time. When it is successful, the mother will give birth to 1-3 small, mewling, helpless young 6-9 months afterward. (The gestation period is longer when multiple births are involved.) For a month after giving birth, the mother hunts for the young, dragging her kills back to the lair, and then leaves them to fend for themselves. By this time the young can breathe fire (3″ range, 2-12 damage, save for half damage, same frequency limits as an adult). A young chimera does 1-6 damage with its lion bite, 1-4 with its dragon bite, and 1 point of damage apiece with any of its claw or hoof attacks. Immature chimeras are size S (2′ at shoulder), can move 9″ on land but only fly at 12″ (for a maximum of 2 rounds at a time before needing to rest for 1 round). They have 3 HD and have AC figures of 8/7/4.

For 3 months after being left alone, the young will hunt together out of mutual necessity. At the end of this time they will have grown to 7 HD and acquired full adult powers, except that they can only breathe fire 4 times per day. At 4 months of age they strike out on their own, and 2 months later they reach full adult size (9 HD) and powers. Thereafter they may slowly gain weight with age and heavy eating. Chimeras sometimes mate with gorgons (see Monster Manual II, "Gorgimera") or thessalhydrae (see below).

THESSALMERA

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *5/2/0*
MOVE: *12″/18″*
HIT DICE: *10*
% IN LAIR: *40%*
TREASURE TYPE: *All possible, lair only*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *See below*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-6 (x6 to x8)/ 1-12 (tail)/2-8/3-12*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Breath weapon; poison*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Immune to petrification and acid*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Animal*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: *L (12′ tall, 20′ long)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil*

The very rare thessalmera lairs in swamps, jungles, or caverns, and can endure extremes of climate with impunity. A sterile crossbreed of thessalhydra and chimera, the cunning thessalmera is often found close to civilization (where it can feed upon isolated bands of travelers or upon livestock, hunting in stealth by night). It preys chiefly on the choicest of red-blooded creatures: man.

The thessalmera has the scaled, lizardlike body and pincer-clawed tail of the thessalhydra, six to eight snakelike heads, a central lion's head, and a red dragonlike head. The dragon head can bite for 2-8 points of damage or (up to 6 times a day) breathe fire in a cone up to 5″ distant, ½″ wide at its jaws and widening to 2″ across at maximum range. This breath weapon does 3-24 points of damage, or half damage if the target makes a save vs. breath weapon (objects save vs. normal fire). The lion jaws bite and rend prey for 3-12 damage. The pincerlike tail does 1-12 damage on a hit, and can grasp one M-sized or smaller opponent, holding that victim immobile (roll less than Str on d20 to escape, one attempt allowed per round). The snakelike heads do 1-6 damage per bite, plus an extra 1-6 on each hit from the creature's acidic venom (unless the victim saves vs. poison). The thessalmera cannot spit its acidic venom like a thessalhydra can.

4. Chimerae, gorgimerae, and thessalmerae can all regenerate 2 hit points of damage every 24 hours, regardless of activities engaged in during that time. They are also all resistant to fire (+3 on saving throws vs. all types of heat and fire) and immune to

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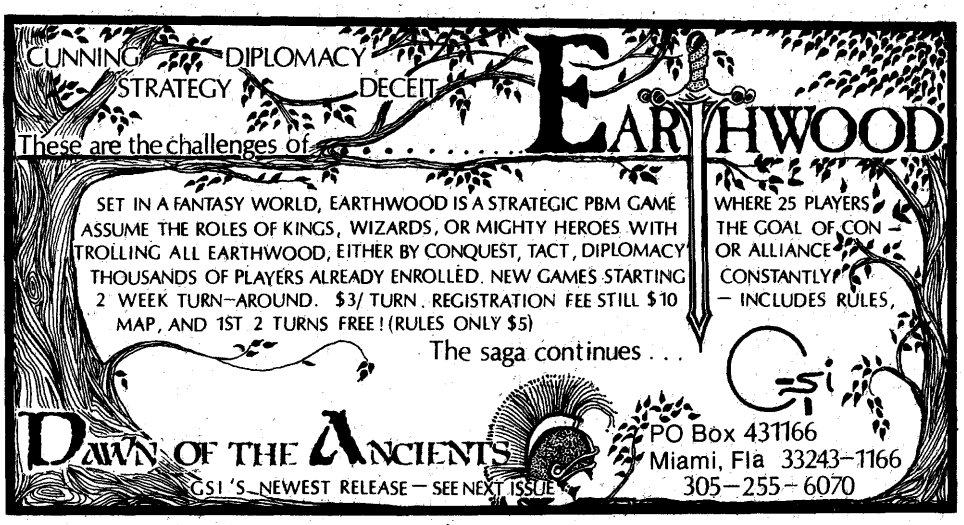
petrification, and the thessalmera (like its thessalhydra parent) is also immune to the effects of any sort of acid. The natural lifespans of these three creatures are unknown, but are thought to be more than 30 years in every case.

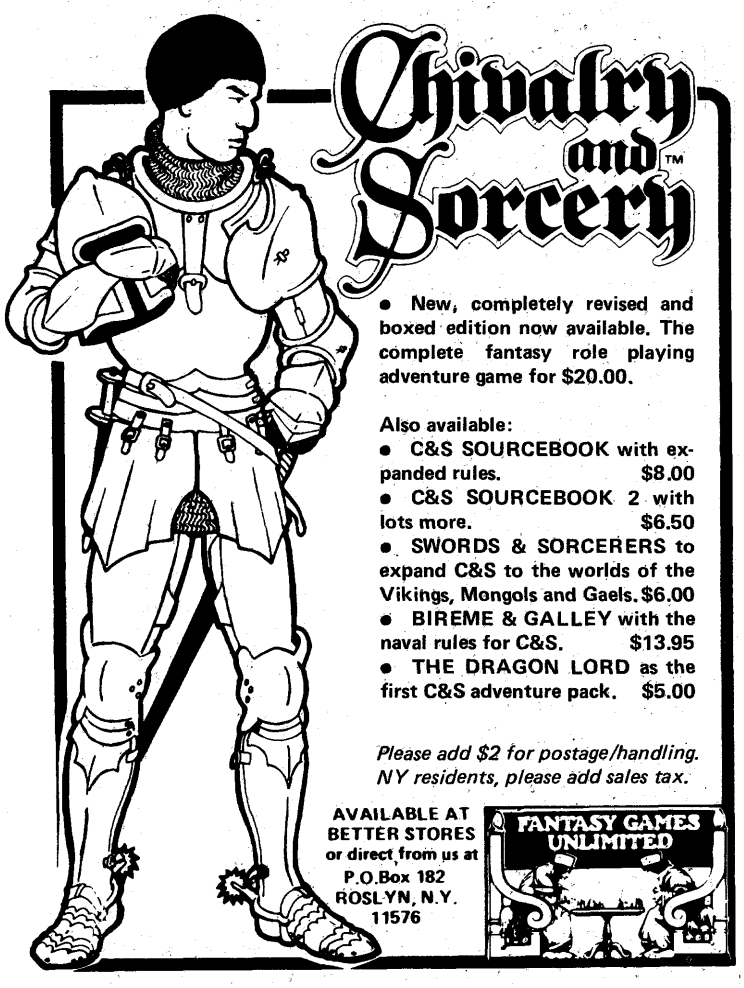
A mature chimera has 9 hit dice, distributed as follows: dragon head 2, lion head 2, goat head 1, wings ½ each, and body 3. Its dragon head can swivel 360 degrees about to attack creatures behind, above, or below the chimera, and its long, scaled neck can dart with great speed (in 1 segment) up to 1" outward, or around corners, etc., to breathe fire at opponents. The chimera never falls into a complete, deep sleep; rather, one or two of its heads will nap at one time while the third remains watchful, able to bring the whole beast awake and alert in an instant.

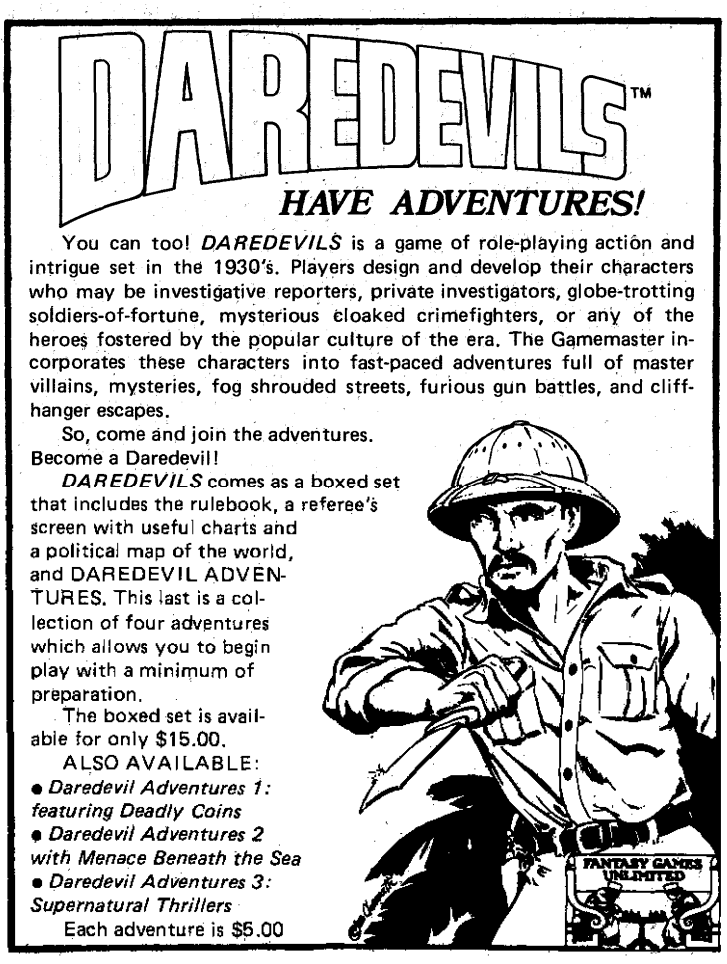
The hit dice of a mature gorgimera are distributed identically to those of a chimera, except that the gorgon head has 2 hit dice, whereas the chimera's goat head has only 1, and the creature sleeps in a like manner.

A thessalmera (see above) has hit dice as follows: dragon head 2, lion head 2, tail 1, body 5. The snakelike heads can be severed by dealing them 12 points of damage each, but harming or severing one or more of them does not diminish the HP total of the rest of the creature. The venom of the thessalmera loses its efficacy upon the death of the creature, and has not yet been successfully duplicated or preserved by alchemists.

Chimerae and gorgimerae are too stupid for their heads to argue among themselves, and are in any case immune to their own breath weapons. A thessalmera is always controlled by its lion head unless it is destroyed or damaged, whereupon the dragon head takes over; if that is also destroyed, a thessalmera will become a semi-intelligent, frenzied killing machine, fearlessly and recklessly attacking all living creatures it can perceive and reach. When all such creatures are slain and eaten, it will seek a lair and remain hidden therein until its lion and dragon heads have regenerated.







THE ECOLOGY OF The Chitine

by Belinda G. Ashley

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

As reported by scout Relirva, drow, of House Teh'kinrellz, twenty-first house of Ched Nasad.

To Weapon Master Durdyn Teh'kinrellz:

I must report my findings on the two patrol members found dead from similar "accidents" last week. While this sort of thing is normal, particularly when rival Houses are involved, I believe the deaths were deliberate attacks from creatures of the Underdark. A few days before the accidents, I had discovered chitines near the Outerways. My patrol hunted down the half-dozen chitines and liquidated them.

After finding the two mangled bodies of the patrol members, I began to suspect that there may be more than a just a few wandering chitines about. After spending some time scouting the area, I came across a rather large tribe of chitines (some 55 in all) living not a day's travel from Ched Nasad. Invisibly, I spent several days watching the evil creatures. The resultant information I have gleaned for this report should impress even the Archmage Ildibane!

Obviously, we must dispose of these chitines. Might I suggest having Tlathar's patrol sent unawares into the area? Their group is weak and has our rival House's second boy amongst their members. My patrol can come in as a back-up, finish the fight, and claim the victory. Survivors from Tlathar's group, if any, can be absorbed into my own group.

I hope that the following report can be of use.

Relirva

Through my close observations I have discovered that the chitines can see in the dark as well as we. [1] Their multifaceted eyes range in color from black to light grey and sometimes green. During my brief stay, they slew a newborn because the creature had red eyes; it seems they feared that the thing was possessed by a drow spirit!

Despite our previous supposition, the chitine's mandibles are only used for grasping their food while they suck the fluids from it; they are not used for attacking. Females, in general, have smaller mandibles than the males even though the two genders are roughly the same size. Nearly all their meals are caught in the wilds of the Underdark, though I did spot a small herd of rothe (probably stolen from us) corralled in a rock enclosure.

The chitine seem to use their sense of feel as much as their excellent eyesight to catch their prey. It may be that they are capable of feeling vibrations through the cavern floor,[2] and that may be why, despite our stealth, we have had difficulty in successfully ambushing the creatures. I should note that levitation and flight nullify this advantage, as should be obvious by my successful mission.

I know you are familiar with the chitines' devious web traps and mazes, but I have discovered another mode of attack. I watched a patrol of chitines surround a group of goblins. Instead of killing them outright as is their wont, they wrestled the creatures to the ground, bound them, and took them to the temple to be offered to Lloth. I was quite surprised by their efficiency."

We know the chitines live, tribe-like, in houses of web. The village is designed in concentric circles with the central building a pitiful copy of our own temples to Lloth. Chitines living the farthest from the center are the lowest in rank, while those living closer to the temple are higher. They call the circle surrounding the temple *"Wun Quarvalsharess ord'naen"* (literally, "in Lloth's arms"). The individual households, unlike our own, are very unsophisticated. There is no Matron mother, and they even have males leading households. (Barbaric!) The members of the house may or may not even be related.[4] I saw very few young and never saw them in any of the houses. Instead, they were kept in a special section of the temple. [5]

The chitines have no organized trade so have few, if any, shops. I was surprised to find two in this village. There was an alchemist selling poisons and potions and a simple barter shop. During my brief visit, I witnessed a caravan of duergar come to trade weapons for a small chest of potions. [6] The presence of the shops and the caravan lead me to believe that the chitines have been here for some time and may be stockpiling weapons for future conflict.

The chitines seem to spend much of their time in worship. Everyone goes to the temple twice a day at various times. When not engaged in worship, they usually go off on patrols. [7] In my five days of observation, I noticed an increase in these patrols in the area of Ched Nasad.

This leads me to another unpleasant thought: the chitines may be responsible for more than just the two deaths last week. How many of us have they slain unawares? I'm curious to find out.

One of the most bizarre things I saw was a contest held in a pen outside the temple. In the pen was a huge spherical cage of webbing. Two contestants were given bone clubs, put into the sphere, and

then the sphere was set into motion. The object of the contest was to be the only one standing (or should I say, conscious?) at the end of the competition. The winner was then recognized as the new head of a household. I was disappointed that the loser was allowed to live (the shame!), but he was shunned, and became literally, houseless. His few belongings were thrown out in the street and he wandered off towards the outer circle. Whether this is a permanent station or not wasn't clear to me. [8]

Our most pressing concern with this village, however, is the chitines' unusual priestesses, or *choldrith,* as they are called (see entry below). They are similar in build to the chitines, but with several differences. For one, they are completely hairless and their smooth skin is a dark, charcoal grey. They're also larger than chitines and have small, almost negligible, mandibles. Their silver-white eyes are not multifaceted like those of the others. They have incredibly long, pointed ears that resemble horns. A revolting sight I assure you!

I only saw three of these creatures and did not get the chance to watch them perform their rituals inside the temple so I can only guess at their limits of power. As far as I could tell, the choldrith were concerned only with the temple and did not interfere with other chitines except to run the contest. I also noted that the choldrith were never without their armor and weapons and were fiercely guarded over by several carrion crawlers. Through some magical means, the priestesses had control over the creatures and used the monsters to guard the temple as well as themselves. No doubt they could use the carrion crawlers to aid in defending the village.

I had to leave my observation to return to my regular duties. I stand ready to follow any orders you may have.

1. Chitines have 120" infravision.
2. Their hearing is only average, but they are very sensitive to ground vibrations. Because of this, they are taken unaware on a 1 on a surprise roll.
3. If a chitine is so inclined, he may forgo his weapon attacks and wrestle an opponent to the ground. Chitine, because of their extra arms, gain a +3 on their attack rolls.
4. In the hierarchy of the chitine, the strongest take the choicest houses and positions; the weakest are subjected to the lowest ranks and have to do the dirtiest work and are moved further from the center of the tribe. In this way, when under attack, the weakest near the outer ring are killed first. As intruders work towards the middle of the tribe, the chitines' defenses become progressively tougher.

   All heads of households within the *Wun Quarvalsharess ord'naen* are considered the same rank and form the council by which the tribal laws (such as they are) are made. Their goal, as a society, is to become Lloth's favorite children by destroying all drow and driders. Their lives are run in an orderly fashion: worship, patrol for food, kill their enemies, and create more chitine.

   Chitine live in communal houses lead by the strongest individual, be it male or female. A typical house will have 2-7 members of mixed gender.
5. Because chitines were originally cast-off experiments of the drow, it is difficult for them to give birth and many infants are stillborn. Only 15% of a tribe will be offspring. Chitines give birth to one young every 25-35 years and keep no permanent mates.

   Children are given to the Temple of Lloth at birth and raised independently of their parents. At the age of 30, the young are considered adults and leave the Temple to start a house of their own or join an existing household. This is the only time in their lives that they will not have to challenge the right to membership in a house. They may or may not return to a parent. Chitines live to be 100-150 years old
6. Chitines seldom have visitors other than their own kind and seldom barter with non-chitine, preferring to kill, trick, or steal (in that order) to get what they want. However, occasionally they will trade trinkets, potions, and other odd items for weapons and food stuffs with those they deem either too powerful or difficult to kill.
7. Patrols consists of 3-6 chitines and one superior with an AC 4 (web armor as described in the FRMC1) and 3 Hit Dice (XP value: 120).
8. The Contest: Anyone can challenge any member or head of any household to gain a higher ranking. The contest is fought until one surrenders or is beaten to unconsciousness. (Priestesses heal all wounds at the end of the battle.) The winner can choose to take the loser's belongings if he so desires. Meanwhile, the loser must obey and work for anyone asking for his services. The loser, after six months, can work his way back into the system by challenging another member or head of a household.

***

CHITINE PRIESTESS, (CHOLDRITH)

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Tribal
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15-16)
TREASURE:	D (R, S)
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:	1-5
ARMOR CLASS:	8 (4)
MOVEMENT:	12, Web 9
HIT DICE:	4+2
THAC0:	16
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (1)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-6/14, or 1-3 bite plus poison
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	45%
SIZE:	M (5′ tall)
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP Value:	450

Choldrith are a peculiarity among the chitine race. They are born to normal chitine parents and are always female. The birth of a choldrith is considered a great blessing from Lloth and the parents are given rank within the *Wun Quarvalsharess ord'naen.* One out of every 20 births is a choldrith and they live to be 150-250 years old. Choldrith are sterile so cannot bear young; instead, they raise all the young of the tribe under their strict care in the confines of the temple, twisting their minds to the glories of Lloth.

The choldrith's tough skin gives her a natural AC of 8. Their quickness and agility give them a -2 bonus to their AC (dexterity 16). Though they have the web-making ability, they seldom use this, preferring the tribe to provide their weapons, armor, and clothing. Choldrith are quite intelligent and know several of the Underdark languages such as duergar, goblin, and orcish.

Whenever encountered, Choldrith will be wearing their webbed armor, spiked mace, and dagger. If prepared for battle, they will also carry a webbed shield and fight with both weapons and shield leaving one free hand for casting spells. Unlike the chitine, the choldrith can bite with their mandibles and inflict a poison. The bite causes 1-3 hp of damage and injects a paralytic poison that lasts 1-6 hours. Normal saving throws apply. They cannot attack with their weapons the same round as they bite or cast spells. Their daggers are often coated with poison, class A.

Choldrith have the casting ability of a 7th-level priestesses. They can use scrolls and magic items and have two innate abilities: *darkness 15′ radius* and bless. Each can be used twice a day. Choldrith live for the glory of Lloth and spend their entire lift? teaching others how to properly worship their deity. They seldom concern themselves with the daily lives of commoners or anything outside worship, teaching, and the protection of the tribe. Their one outlet from the temple is the running of the Contest which they passionately adore.

Though not known to be forgiving, choldrith seldom take the lives of their own people (even if from another tribe) because they are so few in numbers. On the rare occasion that they kill one of their own, they are usually doing so because of their beliefs (as is the case for red-eyed infants) or because an individual has committed some grave heretical transgression. Backstabbing is considered by the priestesses a crime against the people and is punishable by excommunication from the tribe.

Choldrith are fanatics, willing to take their lives for the glory of their goddess. They fervently believe that their people will overcome the drow and become Lloth's blessed children. Choldrith are enraged by the sight of drow and gain a +2 to their attack rolls.

Other than the above changes, choldrith follow the same outline as the chitine entry in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®.*

Priestesses can charm carrion crawlers with a special rod granted by Lloth. These rods are very rare as Lloth grants them to a priestess only once in the priestess' lifetime. The charm is cast at 12th-level and has a two-month duration. The rod has 20-30 charges, is non-rechargeable, and can only be used by priestesses of Lloth. Each charm uses one charge. Carrion crawlers get their saving throws at a -4 to their rolls. The charm is broken only if the priestess takes offensive action against the carrion crawler or if *dispel magic* is cast upon it.

Ω

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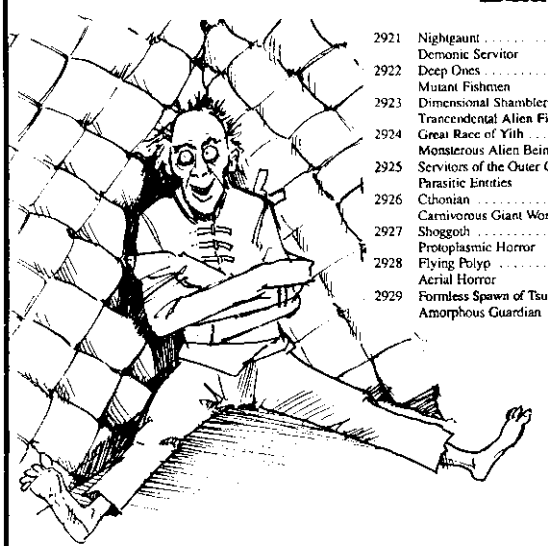

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THE ECOLOGY OF CHOKERS

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

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

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

HISTORY OF CHOKERS

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

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

The chokers, barely sentient themselves, have no knowledge of their origin and show little interest in discovering the truth of their past. They seem to care only about how to get their next meal and collecting shiny trinkets.

PHYSIOLOGY OF CHOKERS

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

Choker Knowledge

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

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF CHOKERS

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

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

Greedy creatures, chokers covet bright, shiny objects, such as coins, gems, and jewelry. If a group of creatures comes across a choker and approaches cautiously, they might succeed at making it an offer for some sort of trade. Chokers lack any sense of diplomacy and have low Intelligence and Charisma scores, causing the most elaborate choker bartering to consist of "I give this, you give that." A choker might offer its services as a guide through the tunnels and caves of the Underdark in exchange for coins, gems, and food. If negotiations go poorly in the first few minutes, however, the choker quickly retreats, and it refuses to reenter negotiations with the erstwhile bargainers.

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

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

The Life and Times of the Choker

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

CHOKER LAIRS

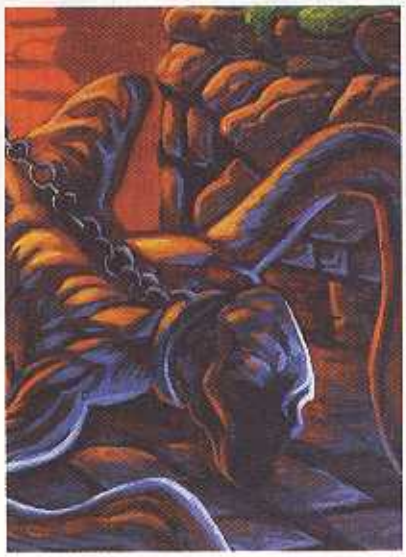
A choker typically sets up a den in some twisting cave difficult for larger or less flexible creatures to navigate. Bones, bits of trophies from various victims, and indescribable chunks of meat squeezed to a pulp typically litter the filthy den. Chokers are intelligent enough to hide their stash of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

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

VS. CHOKERS

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

Despite the choker's Small size, it has the 10-foot reach of a Large creature. The choker always uses this to its advantage, attacking from ceilings, around corners, or from holes in the ground, gaining as much cover as possible. In order to get around the reach issue, front-line fighters should use reach weapons to hold the choker at bay, while the rest of the party attacks with ranged weapons and spells. *Magic missile*, always a solid choice, ignores whatever partial cover the choker might find. Ray spells and area of effect spells, especially those that don't allow a Reflex save, also can be effective. The ranged touch attack of ray spells eliminates most of the choker's relatively high armor class, giving the average sorcerer or wizard a decent chance of hitting it. Other useful spells include those that hinder a choker's movement or keep it trapped, such as *hold monster*, *slow*, and *web*. The various wall spells, such as *wall of stone*, block its egress and force the choker to fight more on your terms. Other useful items include smokesticks (to flush it out of a hiding space), tanglefoot bags (to stick it in place), or nets.

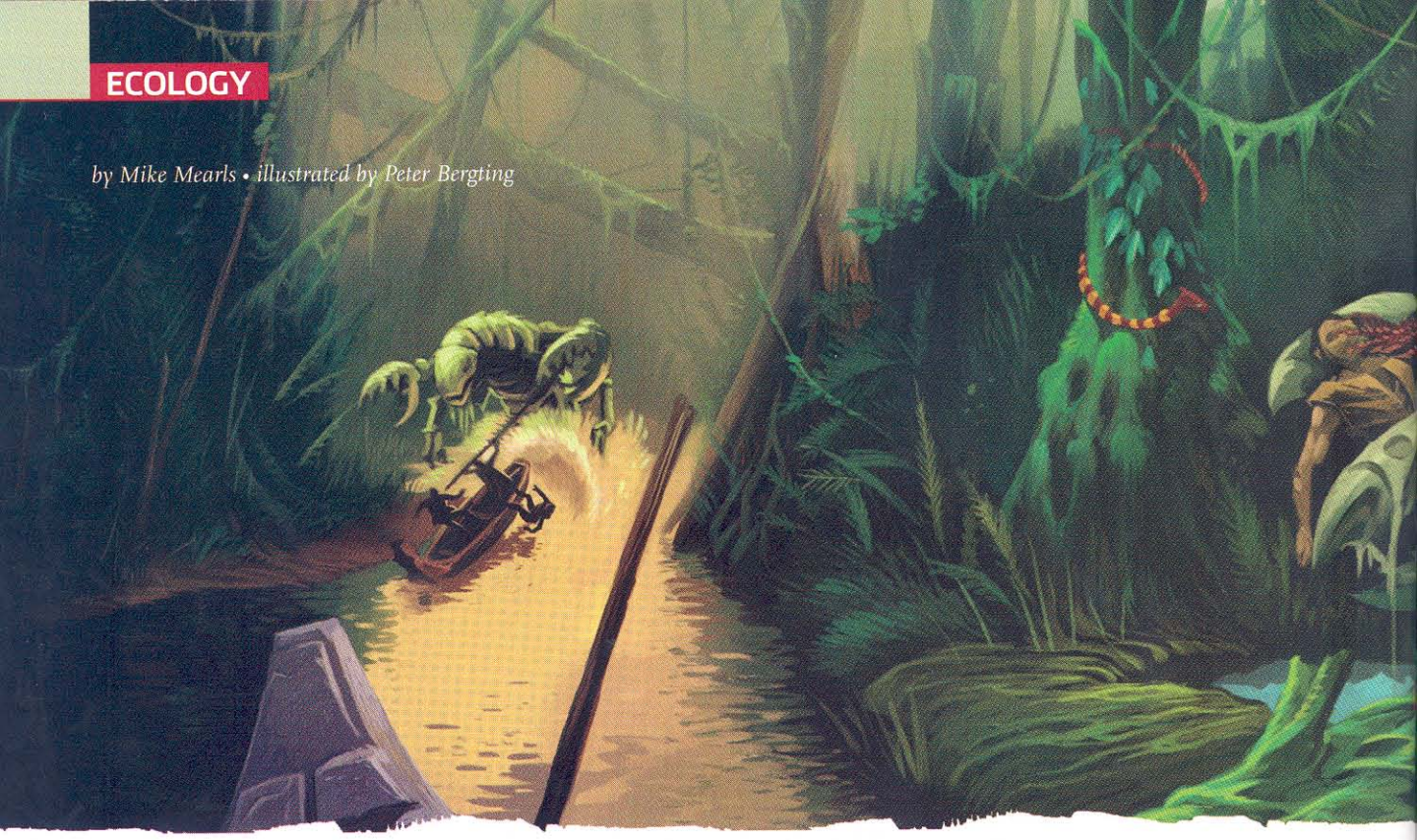


The choker is very particular about which victims it attacks. Given a choice, it goes after creatures in the following order: a creature by itself, a creature of size Small or smaller, a creature with no obvious weapons, a creature more than 15 feet away from its comrades, and a Medium or larger creature.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

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

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

by Mike Mearls • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE CHUUL

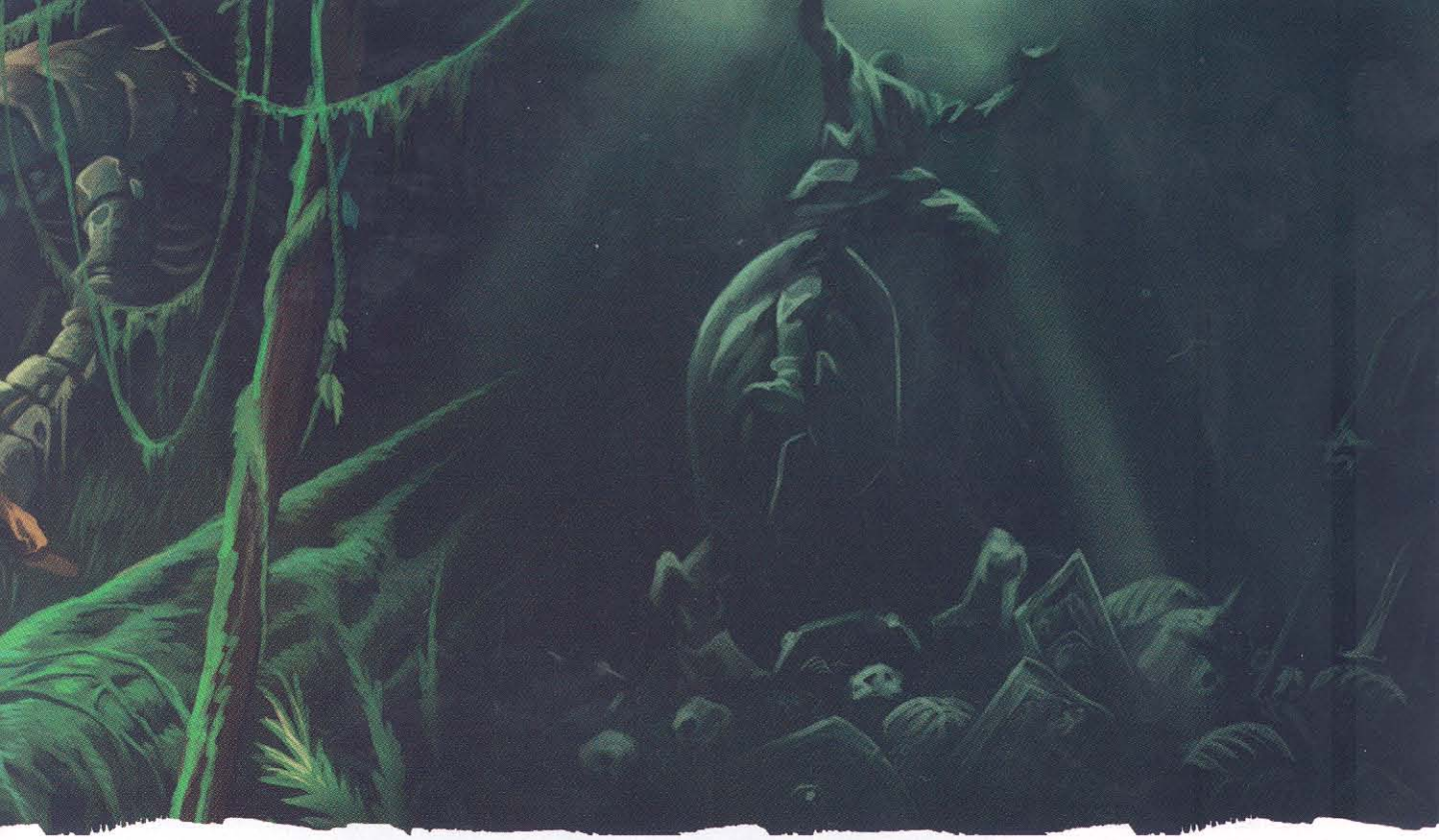
With crushing claws and crippling tentacles, one creature has torn itself a niche among the fetid waters of the land's most deadly wildernesses. Although the vicious chuul has only recently appeared in the lands of civilized races, already it is renowned as one of the world's deadliest swamp predators.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

History of Chuuls

The first chuuls appeared within the world's swamps merely a few dozen years ago. Most sages assume that, given their strange physical mixture of insectile, reptilian, and crustacean traits, they are the result of a madman's experiments. After all, many of the world's most terrible monsters arose from arcane tampering with the secret processes of life. None can say where chuuls first arose, but the methods by which they spread paint them as an insidious, cunning enemy.

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

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



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

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

CHUUL KNOWLEDGE

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

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

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

What the lizardfolk's gibbering did reveal was that the creatures of the island had fought and died for centuries. The lizardfolk spoke of a mighty god who had once ruled the island. One day a horde of monsters that walked upon the water beached themselves and unleashed a torrent of smaller beasts that killed the god and reduced his temple to dust. It spoke of beings called the enforcers, hulking warriors that once defended the god but had walked across the sea on some unknown quest before the god's demise. Since that time, the island had fallen into chaos as the god's progeny, freed of his calming influence, battled for supremacy. Every year, new species arose to fight for dominance, either dying at their enemies' jaws or carving out a link in the food chain. The entire ecosystem seemed to be focused on producing the deadliest creatures imaginable in an evolutionary process

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

On the night before Tarthalas's departure, the primitive mind flayers made their final assault and slew the wizard. During the fighting, the sailors failed to notice three large, clawed beasts that slipped pulsing egg sacs through a porthole into an empty cabin. In the morning, relieved that they had survived, the remaining sailors cast off for home. None would live to see their destination. The newborn chuuls picked off the crewmen one by one, carefully pacing their attacks to satisfy their hunger while leaving enough survivors to guide the ship to its destination. After slaying the last sailor, the chuuls leapt overboard in sight of land and swam to their new homeland.

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

Physiology of Chuuls

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

The divide between the chuul's brutish appearance and its surprisingly keen intellect traces back to this symbiotic link. Its basic body form derives from a monstrous animal that fused qualities of crustaceans and insects. This simple creature lacked the chuul's intellect and its paralytic tentacles. The second half of this duo was a small, snakelike aberration that hunted by paralyzing its prey, burrowing into its brain, and slowly feeding as it controlled its victim's body like a puppet.

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

Chuuls are relatively new to ecosystems beyond their home island. That they have spread so quickly across the world, and even into the planes, illustrates the potent combination of their keen minds and mighty bodies. Worst of all, most of the chuuls that dwell near civilization are relatively young. Who can say what horrors await the world as chuuls grow old and develop into growth phases beyond adulthood?

Psychology and Culture of Chuuls

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

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

CHUUL LAIRS

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

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

CHUUL TROPHIES

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

d10	Example Chuul Trophies
1	A totem of six halfling skulls impaled upon a lizardfolk spear.
2	An entire dwarven skeleton, purposefully shattered then reassembled.
3	A humanoid spine fashioned into a necklace with a number of finger bone bangles.
4	An elven skull randomly punctured by seven arrows of elven make.
5	A pouch filled with humanoid teeth of wildly varying sizes.
6	The skull of a giant crocodile with lizardfolk claws in place of teeth.
7	A stack of human hands and snake meat stacked upon a rapier like a shish kebob.
8	The dismembered arm and claw of another chuul.
9	A finely stitched quiver crammed with elven rib bones.
10	A number of humanoid femurs arranged in a sunburst pattern with a black dragon skull at the center.

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

Even the most simple humanoid activities in an area a chuul considers its territory are sure to attract its murderous scorn. A caravan bound through a swampy region might find that its sentinels disappear one by one over the course of several nights, dragged off by an unseen opponent smart enough to avoid a large scale confrontation. Hiding amid the rampant vegetation, a chuul might then attack supply wagons, knocking them over and destroying the food and water stored within. Next it strikes at the horses, mules, and other beasts of burden. Finally, when the surviving guards and merchants teeter on the verge of starvation, when the endless panicked hours of marching through deep mud and foul water have drained their strength, the chuul closes in for the kill. To a chuul, this carefully planned assault is little more than a game of cat and mouse.

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

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

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

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

Vs. Chuuls

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

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

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

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

Cowardice: Despite all their cunning and strength, chuuls universally possess low Charisma scores. Such a flaw most commonly manifests as intense cowardice. As such, chuuls are easily scared off or unnerved when faced with larger or obviously more powerful creatures or groups.

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

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

Given their hatred of humanoid life, chuuls rarely parley. They can speak Common, but if they stop to talk, one can count on a trick or an offer intended to cause havoc. When a chuul truly does wish to parley, it most commonly uses a servant as a mouthpiece.

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

OUT OF THE WADING POOL

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

Ecology of the Cloaker

by Paul Leach
Art by Jon Hodgson
Diagram by Kathy Barker

An awful face stares from its thin sheet of a body, and its wings move with a slow, steady beat.

With its entire core vibrating from deep within, a powerful groaning disorients victims until the creature finally finishes them off with its whiplike, spiny tail and shallow maw.

The monster thinks nothing of the terror it inflicts on lesser beings, which it feels differ little from the vermin that infest the cavernous depths that the cloaker and the swarms of its brethren haunt.

Rarely venturing to the surface world, cloaker swarms haunt deep underground caverns and rifts. Though long associated with deep caverns, they trace their ancestry back to the Plane of Shadow and before that back to a lost plane filled with luminous clouds and plasmic storms.

The cloakers express no desire to return to their ancestral home, for they enjoy a comfortable position among the weaker denizens of the "world below." Besides, their centuries-spanning exodus gave this race of opportunistic and inquisitive flying monstrosities new powers that they are loathe to give up.

The Great Exodus

Long ago, in a time when extraplanar travelers commonly visited the Material Plane and shaped its history, a cabal of wizards accidentally opened a gate in the midst of a gigantic cloaker swarm.

The powerful magi closed the portal as soon as they could, but this only delayed the arrival of the cloakers. As the portal dissolved, the cloakers slipped into the Plane of Shadow rather than directly into the material world, buying the magi time.

Embracing the Shadows

The Shadow changed the cloakers forever. They embraced the stygian darkness, and its taint gave them the power to manipulate shadowy illusions. The cloakers' fibrous skin absorbed the plane's twilight essence as readily as cloth absorbs pitch. The monsters soon learned to use ripples in their flexible bodies to weave shad-

ow shapes that took on brief lives of their own, creating effects similar to obscure vision, dancing images, and silent image. Strengthened by their new powers, small colonies of cloakers dominated isolated regions of the plane. They brutally interrogated any shadow creatures they could capture, but it was the humanoids, whose beliefs were entirely foreign to the curious invaders, that intrigued them the most. Experimentation proved useless, for the frail forms fell apart under sonic probing.

The persistent shadow flyers refused to surrender their dream of tasting the now-legendary solid world and its intelligent, limbed beings. To this end, they established an alliance of sorts with the twisted shadow fey, servants of a shapeless power of twilight and evil.

The pact forever marked the cloakers as one with the Shadow, allowing them to retain their illusory powers even if they left the eternally gray realm. From that time forward, all cloakers received the innate gift of shadow shifting. The dark fey led the cloakers to the "world below," where the deepest crevasses end not in stone or steaming magma but simply pass into the Plane of Shadow.

Into the World

In the "world below," drow, dwarves, and other humanoids provided the cloakers with unwholesome diversions. They found the humanoid concepts of divinity and mythology quite odd: why would such weak creatures believe themselves to be superior to animals and insects? Cloaker inquiries met with blank incomprehension from both drow and dwarves.

At last, the cloakers found the mysterious and lush world that their progenitors had briefly glimpsed so long ago, but they found their plans of conquest already thwarted. Failing to comprehend the semi-divine nature of the amorphous Shadow entity, the cloakers could not grasp the full extent of their bond with the being and its plane. The cloakers discovered they could only make short ventures to the "world above," for they found the moonlit nights repulsive and the sun-filled skies lethal. Given enough time on the surface, a cloaker withers away to a rubbery patch of shadowstuff. With no allies, the cloakers remain in the depths and tend to their own needs, and possibly those of the Shadow Goddess.

What of the eldritch gatekeepers who sought to protect the races of the sun and moon from the incredible flying terrors from the edge of the cosmos? None of the magi could agree on how to defend the world, and the cabal dissolved as each arcanist sought the best way to stop the cloaker invasion. All failed to create a spell or artifact able to defeat the nightmare creatures. However, one wizard—a shadow fey—returned to his home plane to tempt the enemy with their own hubris and ally them with his own dark goddess.

Physiology

Cloakers superficially resemble the manta rays found in the world's oceans. However, a closer examination of the two species proves that they share no connection. Its outward appearance is simple, if not disturbingly alien; a black dorsal and palest white underbelly marred by fiendish ruby eyes and a round maw filled with jagged teeth. Single claw appendages emerge from the body on either side of its face, giving the cloaker the ability to crawl when necessary. A flexible tail composed of bone, cartilage, and muscle completes the nightmare. The monster's body, as thick as a sturdy woolen cloak, enables the cloaker to make the most impossible twists and turns, which allows it to make difficult maneuvers in mazelike tunnels, vents, and sinkholes.

The cloaker's terrifying body, mouth, and tail are horrifying, but its victims most often succumb to the creature's hateful moaning. It's the reverbatrix, an internal organ that lies along the spinal axis, that creates an array of sonic effects that sicken, panic, or stupefy the cloaker's prey.

This organ is composed of three distinct parts: a ribbed, cartilaginous fluting (part of the cloaker's upper respiratory system, similar to a human's bronchial tubes) which produces all normal and magical vocalizations; a bladder that controls air flow through the lower throat; and a bone-hard aperture, which controls the frequency and pitch of the creature's sounds by vibrating some or all of the organ. The upper throat and digestive tract both feed into the bladder, providing

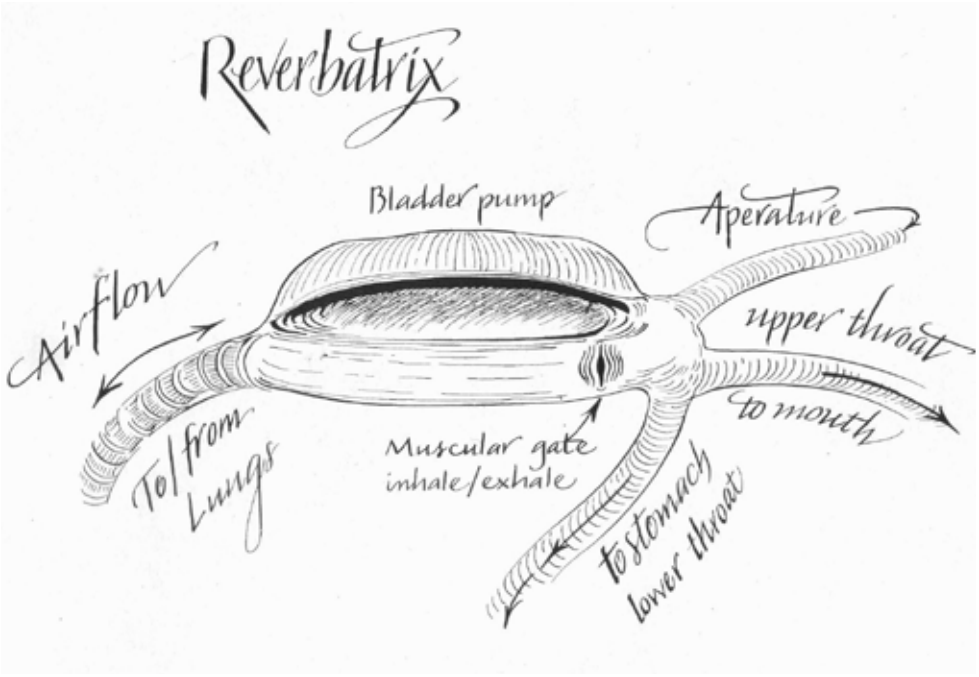


Table 1: Knowledge of the Cloaker

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to cloakers. Those who study cloakers or aberrations, as well as those who inhabit or make their living in the "world below", are most likely to possess this information.

Knowledge (Dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Cloakers are monstrous cloak-bodied creatures that inhabit underground caverns. They fly and sometimes attack enemies by using their tails or engulfing them within their folds and biting them.
15	Cloakers use their extraordinary moan to frighten and disable their victims. These sonic attacks may unnerve, cause fear, nauseate, or stupefy opponents. They also have illusory powers in regards to shadow magic. They speak Undercommon.
20	Cloakers migrated from the Plane of Shadow. Sub-species exist, and they utilize even more shadow-based powers.
25	Cloakers originated in some unknown plane, but they became trapped on the Plane of Shadow when they first attempted to reach the Material Plane.
30	Large groups of cloakers can gather in their cavernous hives, especially during the month-long mating season each year.

the reverbatrix multiple air and gas sources.

The reverbatrix does more than disable the monster's foes. The organ controls blood and airflow throughout the cloaker's body, enabling its sheets of muscle to suddenly take flight and make unexpected engulfing attacks. The reverbatrix provides essential support to all of the cloaker's bodily systems, and when a cloaker is wounded, its hum keeps the creature in a state of mild euphoric detachment. A cloaker suffers and dies if its reverbatrix is severely damaged, but it has an excellent chance at a full recovery of even the most serious wounds if its reverbatrix is intact.

Cloakers give birth to live young in small litters of half a dozen. No larger than rags, the newborns look like tiny versions of adult menaces and most take flight immediately after leaving the mother's womb. Many expectant cloakers birth their brood from the heights of great caverns, so they have plenty of time to catch any failed flyers. Mothers and fathers carry weak or sick offspring in their mouths if necessary.

A cloaker that shows no sign of mastering flight has little chance of survival, and its parents surrender it to the cavern depths.

A cloaker grows to maturity in 4 years, watched over in a creche of hundreds of other young by cloakers charged with teaching them the history and power of the race. Most live about 30 years, although specimens that attain Huge size may live twice as long or more. The greatest cloaker lords measure their lifespan in centuries.

Cloakers live on the bats and vermin that inhabit their cavernous homes, but they sometimes eat larger prey, such as humanoids. The monsters require little food in spite of their Large size. In times of food shortage, a cloaker's reverbatrix converts external vibrations into metabolic energy, much like a plant converts sunshine.

Psychology

During the cloaker's childhood, it learns of its race's origins and planar wanderings. It receives encouragement to master its own power and impose its will on the lesser creatures of the world. While not inherently evil, the cloaker thinks nothing of tormenting and killing any creature other than another cloaker. A victim's intelligence makes no impression on a cloaker's territorial morality. Cloakers view themselves as the supreme beings of the multiverse, and all other beings only qualify as beasts. Nevertheless, in addition to its own strange language of hollow moans, most cloakers find it useful to learn the Undercommon tongue of the dangerous drow, duergar, and svirfneblin.

While the cloakers display a great level of arrogance, they rarely underestimate their victims and always treat them cautiously. They subtly observe unfamiliar creatures whenever the opportunity arises, even going so far as infiltrating an enemy's nest in order to gather intelligence before they strike. Few foes watch their cavern ceilings as carefully as they should, where cloakers may lurk for days or weeks.

Cloakers show special interest in the members of the surface world (often represented by adventurers) that they encounter in natural caverns, mines, and dungeons. They respect aboleths and their unfathomable agendas but consider them nothing more than extremely dangerous monsters. When a cloaker bothers to parley with another being, it has paid that creature the greatest compliment.

The cloakers' sense of superiority clashes with the ideologies and religions of most humanoids. Whether or not they are brutal and savage or peaceful and enlightened, the god-worshipping mortals of the Material Plane contradict the cloakers' understanding of the multiverse.

A cloaker's mind innately rejects the notions of a divine creative spark or spiritual transcendence beyond the material world. While they understand powerful beings called gods exist, they do not believe in their inherent divinity. A god is not a god to a cloaker.

Dread Cloaker CR 7

Usually CE Large aberration
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +17, Spot +17

Defense

AC 20, touch 13, flat-footed 16
(+4 Dex, +7 natural, -1 size)
hp 76 (9d8+36)
Fort +7, **Ref** +7, **Will** +9
Immune cold, electricity; polymorph and mind-affecting attacks

Offense

Spd 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)
Melee tail slap +11 (1d6+6 plus poison) and bite +6 (1d4+3 plus poison)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (5 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks engulf, moan, poison

Tactics

Before Combat Dread cloakers typically wait to ambush passing prey. They prepare for combat by activating all of their shadow shift powers, if possible.
During Combat A single dread cloaker facing multiple opponents often initiates combat by using its moan ability to nauseate as many enemies as possible. Otherwise, it will use its moan fear effect to remove as many foes as it can before it weakens foes with poisonous tail slaps. If facing a lone opponent, the dread cloaker will open combat with a stupor effect. If the enemy resists stupor, the monster makes tail slap attacks followed by an engulf attempt.

In a group, two dread cloakers make sonic attacks to support their companions in melee.
Morale Dread cloakers are bloodthirsty and fight until they are at 1/3 hit points. They often return to a combat site a few rounds later to finish off any victims of their poison.

Special Abilities

Engulf (Ex): A dread cloaker can wrap a Medium or smaller creature in its body as a standard action. The dread cloaker attempts a grapple that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and bites the engulfed victim with a +4 bonus on its attack. It can still use its whiplike tail against other targets.

Attacks that hit an engulfing dread cloaker deal half their damage to the monster and half to the trapped victim.

Moan (Ex): A dread cloaker can emit a dangerous subsonic moan as a standard action. By changing the frequency, the cloaker can cause one of four effects. Dread cloakers and normal cloakers are immune to these sonic, mind-affecting attacks. Unless otherwise specified, a creature that successfully saves against one of these effects cannot be affected by the same moan effect from the same cloaker for 24 hours. All save DCs for moan effects are Charisma-based.

Unnerve: Anyone within a 60-foot spread automatically takes a –2 penalty on attack and damage rolls. Those forced to hear the moan for more than 6 consecutive rounds must succeed on a DC 17 Will save or enter a trance, unable to attack or defend themselves until the moaning stops.

Fear: Anyone within a 30-foot spread must succeed on a DC 17 Will save or become panicked for 2 rounds.

Nausea: Anyone in a 30-foot cone must succeed on a DC 17 Fortitude save or be overcome by nausea and weakness. Affected characters fall prone and become nauseated for 1d4+1 rounds.

Stupor: A single creature within 30 feet of the dread cloaker must succeed on a DC 17 Fortitude save or be affected as though by a hold monster spell for 5 rounds. Even after a successful save, the creature must repeat the save if the dread cloaker uses this effect again.

Poison (Ex): The dread cloaker's tail sting and bite are toxic, injecting shadow essence poison into the victim with each hit (Fort DC 18, initial damage 1 point of Strength drain, secondary damage 2d6 points of Strength damage). The save DC is Constitution-based.

Shadow Shift (Su): A dread cloaker can manipulate shadows. This ability is effective only in shadowy areas and has three possible effects.

Obscure Vision: The dread cloaker gains concealment (20% miss chance) for 1d4 rounds.

Dancing Images: This duplicates a *mirror image* spell (CL 9).

Silent Image: This effect duplicates a *silent image* spell (DC 16, CL 9). The save DC is Charisma-based.

Statistics

Str 23, **Dex** 18, **Con** 19, **Int** 16, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 17
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +16
Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Stealthy
Skills Escape Artist +16, Hide +14, Listen +17, Move Silently +18, Spot +17
Languages Cloaker, Undercommon
SQ shadow shift

Ecology

Environment underground
Organization solitary or mob (3-6)
Treasure standard
Advancement 10-18 HD (Large), 19-27 (Huge)
Level Adjustment —

A black raylike creature glides and turns in the cavern, whipping its long, bony tail. Blood red eyes glow dully and a wide slit of a mouth reveals bone yellow fangs. An oily substance, dark as midnight, oozes from the monster's clicking teeth and quivering tail stinger.

The ancestors of dread cloakers delved long into the evil and forbidden mysteries of the Plane of Shadow, growing crueler and more dangerous than their normal cloaker kin. They love to kill and devour victims and particularly enjoy weakening them with their poisonous tail slaps.

Dread cloakers are not as numerous as the normal run of cloakers and most of them live solitary lives in small mobs of no more than half a dozen creatures. Every now and then, a dread cloaker dominates a hive of normal cloakers, urging the community to greater acts of terror and slaughter. These are sometimes referred to as a "Hive Queen" or "Cloaker King," though the cloakers themselves claim no such titles.

Much like their cloaker brethren, the minds of dread cloakers are inscrutable to most humanoid minds. They limit communication with lesser beings to sonic assaults and poisonous bites and stings.

A dread cloaker is slightly larger than a normal cloaker, with a wingspan of 9 feet. It weighs 120 pounds. Its black body assumes a reddish tone after it feeds.

This unwillingness or inability to accept the core mysteries of humanoid religions, mythologies, and ideologies creates an impasse between cloakers and intelligent mortals. These elusive concepts fuel the cloakers' curiosity about the bestial humanoids they harass and destroy.

The Great Dissonance

Beyond its personal pursuits, a cloaker learns the importance of the Great Dissonance, the communal experience that transcends individual cloakers and binds them together into hives and swarms. A Great Dissonance occurs when at least a dozen cloakers drone and moan a number of bizarre chants collectively and purposely.

Cloakers find the simultaneous variations of sonic vibrations soothing and therapeutic, while most other creatures find the event nothing less than a mind-bending aural assault. A group of cloakers creates the Great Dissonance on no known schedule, although the strongest ones typically initiate such an event, and it is more frequent during the mating season.

The Great Dissonance notwithstanding, a cloaker has few social obligations to its community. It hunts, mates, and raises its young as it wills during mating season and migration. The elder cloakers exert a measure of authority, and they assign certain tasks as needed. Typical assignments include sentry and patrol duties, prisoner snatches, and foraging.

Treasure

Cloakers collect treasure because most humanoids value it, and they place rather less value on gold and gems themselves. Coins are used in those uncommon transactions with them.

Rings are especially prized, for they can be worn on a cloaker's tail. Cloakers rarely produce even the simplest magic items, so they must rely on thievery, purchases, and spellcasting slaves to acquire them.

Heroes Vs Cloakers

Cloakers use powerful sonic attacks that can unnerve, entrance, panic, nauseate, or stupefy opponents. Besides flight, the creature protects itself with several illusory shadow-shifting tricks that provide either concealment or the benefits of mirror image or silent image. A cloaker's saving throw bonuses (especially the +7 Will save bonus) give it a fair chance against most spells cast against it. As the average cloaker's ability scores are 15 or higher (especially Strength), enemies find it difficult to defeat the monster by inflicting ability damage that drops their scores to 0 or less.

Touch Attacks: Considering the cloaker's aerial mobility, its low Touch AC 12 provides reason enough to prepare spells that rely on touch attacks. A ray of enfeeblement (or two) lowers the risk of a successful engulfing attack, and touch of idiocy reduces the effectiveness of the cloaker's moan attacks (the saves against those attacks are Charisma-based). Shocking grasp, acid arrow, and vampiric touch are effective damage spells, especially if delivered via spectral hand. Finally, alchemist's fire flasks allow easy touch attacks that anyone can make against this monster.

Enjoy The Silence: Cleverly applied, a silence spell suppresses the cloaker's moan attacks while allowing PCs to continue to cast spells at will. Considering its good saving throw bonuses, the spellcaster might be more successful by placing the spell on an area or on a willing recipient that is mobile enough to close with the cloaker and keep it within the spell's radius (or a flying summoned creature).

Sticky Situations: If the PCs need a delaying tactic to ready an assault or make a getaway, solid fog and web work well against flyers such as cloakers.

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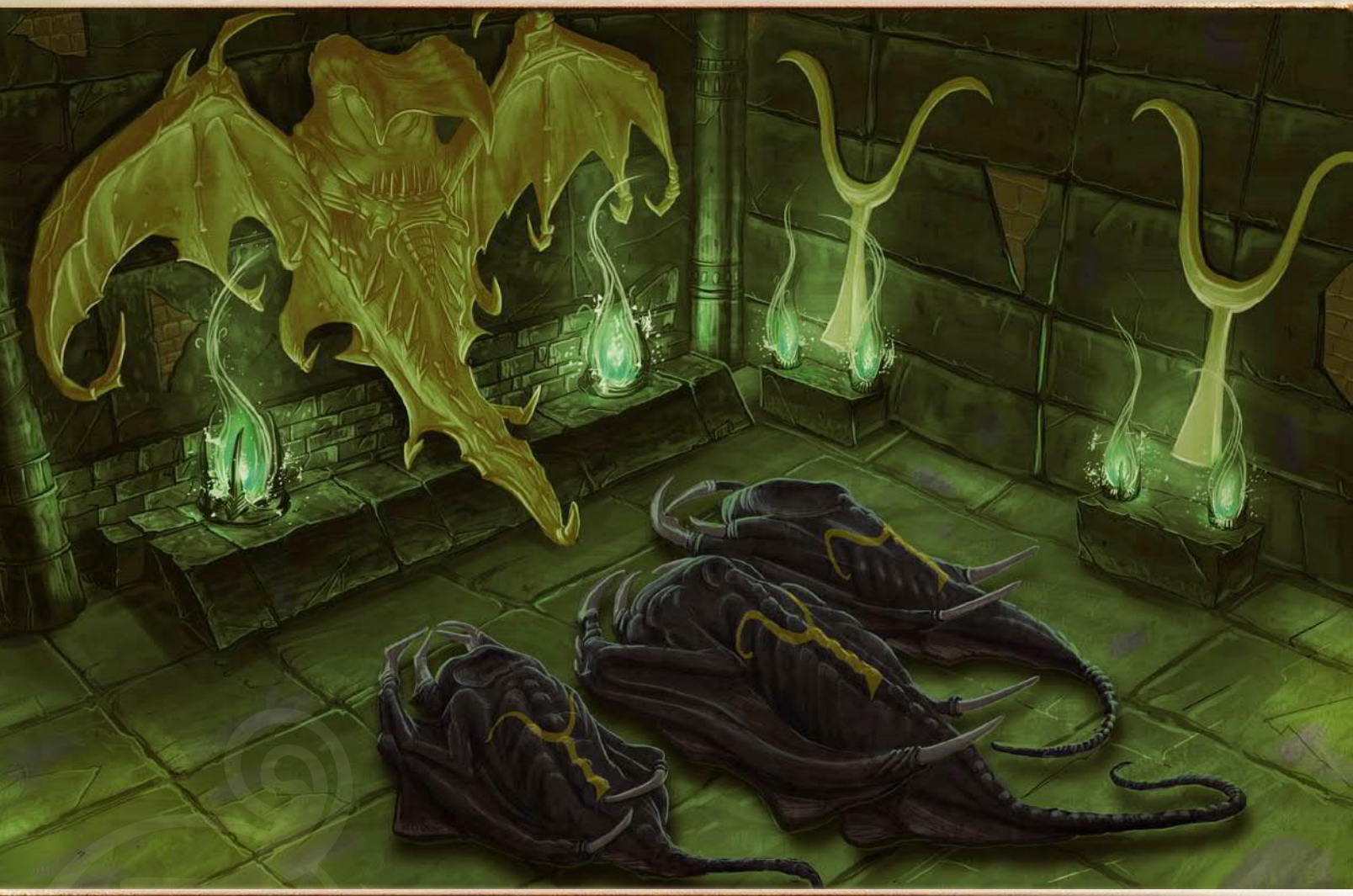


Cloaker

"People blame 'mad wizards' for a lot of strange creatures—bulettes, rust monsters, and so on. I used to think cloakers had the same origin, crushed into their current shape by some fool wizard, escaped into the wild to plague explorers, half-mad and hating their own existence. I was wrong. Their origin is much older, much darker, tied to the civilizations before the rise of Old Azlant. Deemed unfit, their masters abandoned them, and they turned to even older horrors for survival. By calling upon powers darker than the deepest oceans, they found madness... and freedom."

—Hadren Kost, Darklands survivor

Cloakers are bizarre creatures whose interactions with surface folk are almost universally violent. Avoiding the upper levels of the Darklands, they murder unsuspecting visitors, leading many to believe they are little more than aggressive beasts. Cloakers are actually quite intelligent, but cursed with a terrible paranoia that makes them antisocial even toward most of their own kind.

Overview

Cloakers are inclined to be solitary, as most of them are quite paranoid that all other creatures wish to kill them. Some overcome this fear to the extent that they believe there is safety in numbers, and live with like-minded cloakers for communal vigilance. A rare few throw off the shackles of paranoia (in exchange for a different mental illness) to become leaders of cults. But most cloakers live and hunt alone, preferring the comfort of absolute darkness, where their mental demons quiet themselves to a dull roar.

Gifted with natural camouflage that helps it blend into rocks, a cloaker can rest in one place (often clinging to a wall or ceiling) for hours at a time, lightly sleeping.

If startled, it is inclined to flee rather than fight, as it assumes anything capable of sneaking up on it must be an assassin intent on killing it, and is therefore prepared for any contingencies the cloaker may have thought up. Their solitary nature makes cloakers fringe predators at best, and (ironically) few creatures consider their race a threat worth exterminating. The reverse stands true for cloakers who can get the drop on intruders—if a cloaker can attack with surprise, it usually does so, eager to attack and kill likely assassins before they have a chance to strike themselves.

Cloaker leaders are the exception. These brilliant and charismatic individuals are capable of organizing followers and slaves into dangerous forces, typically intent on striking out at perceived or imagined enemies. Often tainted with some otherworldly power, these cults usually wipe themselves out when facing a greater enemy, or self-destruct in an orgy of suicide and murder... which might be a part of the leader's plan in pursuit of some greater goal.

Ecology

Cloakers bear live young, anywhere from two to a dozen. However, these young actually mature inside leathery eggs carried within the cloaker's body for 9–12 months, hatching internally before the mother expels them from her body. In emergencies, a cloaker can lay these eggs prematurely, leaving them to hatch on their own or (rarely) in the care of a guardian. Cloakers usually reproduce with their own kind, though their paranoia means this may only happen once or twice in a lifetime. They can also breed with Medium or Large rays, though these couplings usually result in imbecile offspring with no supernatural abilities. In emergency situations where an isolated cloaker believes itself to be the last of its kind, they have been known to gestate unfertilized eggs, birthing yellow-gray "vampiric cloakers" that feed on blood.

Once born, a cloaker depends on its parent for the first few weeks of its life, after which it can fend for itself. Most cloakers drive away their young at this point, though cloakers living in a cult prefer to indoctrinate their young and provide food and education for a much longer period. Cloakers become mature and able to breed at approximately age 5. They have roughly the same lifespan as a human, though mental illness and battles with supposed enemies mean that most don't live past age 40.

Despite their size, cloakers are simple organisms and can subsist on small animals, fungus, and even moss or lichen. Their only bone-like structures are their teeth, claws, and tails, and their nutritional requirements once fully grown are minimal. They fly by flapping their wings, but can crawl along the ground in an inchworm-like manner or even lie almost completely flat and creep at half speed like a slug. Cloaker flight is based on strength, not magic, despite a form better designed for water travel than air; it is strong enough to leap into the air from a standing start and fly immediately (much as dragons do in confined spaces). The flat shape of its body means a cloaker can pass through a gap 6 inches high as long as there is room for its 8-foot wingspan; it can fold itself in half or even in thirds to reduce this horizontal requirement at the expense of greater height.

Given their ray-like shape and ability to breed with true rays, it is clear that cloakers are an evolved form of the docile aquatic ray. Their origin is tied to the aboleths, who wanted a race of spies who could watch over their human and skum minions, and even advise or defend key agents on land, yet could never band together to overturn the aboleths themselves. The result of the aboleths' breeding programs and magical experimentation was the cloaker—stealthy, intelligent, and suspicious. They may be distantly related to darkmantles, or darkmantles may be a failed early prototype of the cloakers that escaped and thrived.

Those who study the creatures often speak of the mystery of the cloaker's brain, and how understanding its thoughts or even its words is nearly impossible. The reason for this confusion is threefold. First, cloakers are insane, and that insanity acts as a filter on what they say and think; any sane person listening to one has difficulty parsing when the cloaker is trying to participate in a conversation and when he's merely hearing fragments of the creature's internal monologue. Second, a cloaker's brain is more like a shark's than a humanoid's, and prioritizes information very differently; someone unfamiliar with this quirk may think the cloaker is focusing on trivial or obscure points, but limited evidence from sahuagin and druids with awakened shark companions illustrates that the thought processes and manners of speech are similar. Third, they are the creations of the aboleth, and their use of

Potion Fungi

While cloakers can handle objects with their tails, claws, and mouths, they are not as good as humanoids at dealing with fine manipulation, which makes using potion flasks problematic. To get around this problem, cloaker potion-makers (or someone working on their behalf) invented potion-infused fungal stalks or caps. These function exactly like potions except there is no stopper to remove before using the item—as a standard action, the cloaker puts the fungus in its mouth, chews, and swallows. Potion fungi are usually only 1–2 inches across, and many cloakers impale one onto a grasping claw for easy use in combat (as they have no easy way to carry objects). Other creatures can use potion fungi just as if they were potions, but the paranoid cloakers have been known to add materials that are irritating or toxic to all but the cloaker race, just in case they fall into the wrong hands.

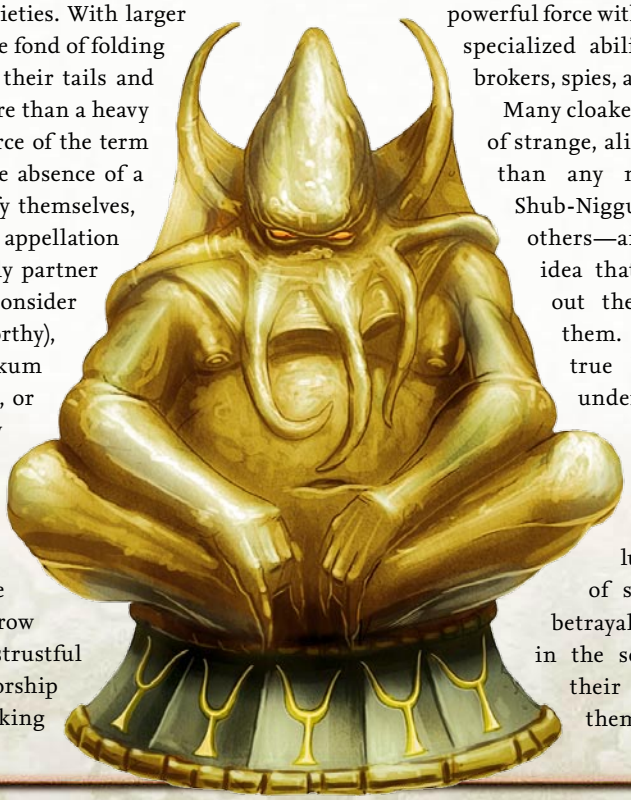
certain words and the structure of their sentences can be traced back to the psionic behemoths; those unfortunate enough to talk with both aboleths and cloakers recognize similarities in their speech.

Habitat & Society

Cloakers prefer solitude. Most are mentally unstable and believe that all other intelligent creatures seek to murder them, so they avoid contact with other beings, rarely forming partnerships with humanoid creatures they can physically dominate—only when a cloaker believes it can easily kill its "partner" does it relax its suspicions. This also means that groups of cloakers are usually led by an older, smarter, stronger individual dominating younger, naïve, weaker ones.

Sometimes a cloaker's insanity takes a different form, such as egomania, sadism, or psychopathy. For reasons appropriate to their condition, these individuals prefer the company of others in the forms of sycophants, victims, or collaborators, and become leaders of larger groups of cloakers. Often such cloakers become priests of unearthly gods, leading others in chanted prayers to horrors beyond the darkness, or sacrificing victims in the name of unpronounceable, unspeakable evils.

A cloaker will sometimes ally itself with a humanoid creature, typically a native of the Darklands, especially skum who have been cut off from their aboleth masters. In fact, while such alliances are rare, they ironically constitute the majority of surface folk's encounters with cloakers, for only in an alliance will the normally isolated creatures venture forth into other societies. With larger humanoid allies, cloakers are fond of folding over on themselves to hide their tails and faces, posing as nothing more than a heavy cloak. This habit is the source of the term "cloaker," in fact, and in the absence of a name by which they identify themselves, has become the de facto appellation for their kin. Cloakers rarely partner with derro (whom they consider insane and untrustworthy), humans, aboleth-bonded skum (whose loyalties are suspect), or sahuagin (too warlike). They never associate willingly with aboleths. Duergar are too rigid for most cloakers' tastes and too short for the monsters to easily disguise themselves as a cloak. Drow and cloakers both have distrustful societies and a tendency to worship chaotic and evil gods, making them suitable partners once peaceful contact is made. Some cloakers (particularly the psychopath and sadist types) have gone so far as to learn drow fleshwarping techniques (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #16) and practice this trade on their own minions. Cloakers interested in partnering with humanoids sometimes get weave-like patterns tattooed on their backs to help them look more like rugs (when clinging to walls) or cloaks (when worn by other creatures). A few lucky ones have magical tattoos, giving them extra defenses (such as +4 to natural armor or +4 to Dexterity) or spell-like abilities (*mage hand* and *magic missile* are common choices).



The cloaker race was not always as it is now. Long ago, they were merely suspicious, tasked by their aboleth masters with keeping an eye on the skum and human slave races. Able to spy on a leader or cling to an ally like a garment, the cloakers were well suited for their work. When the humans rebelled against their enslavement, their former aboleth masters destroyed what they could of human civilization. Without human slaves to spy on, the aboleths discarded the cloakers as well, driving them into the wild places. Bereft of goals and leadership, the cloakers eventually turned to ancient primordial gods who filled the empty void in their lives with madness, permanently altering their minds. Distrustful of even their own kind except under the best circumstances, the cloakers scattered, finding places to hide where food was plentiful, yet still compelled by their aboleth-programmed urges to observe and remember. If cured of their madness in such a way that their offspring would also be born sane, cloakers would quickly become a powerful force within the Darklands, using their specialized abilities to become information brokers, spies, assassins, and bodyguards.

Many cloakers find solace in the existence of strange, alien gods that are more insane than any mortal—Azathoth, Rovagug, Shub-Niggurath, Yog-Sothoth, and others—and are comforted by the idea that there are powerful beings out there with no desire to kill them. This is the closest thing to true benevolence a cloaker can understand; they believe even benign deities like Desna and Sarenrae are secretly plotting against them, using a pleasant façade to lull them into a false sense of security before the ultimate betrayal. Most cloakers are religious in the sense that they acknowledge their weird gods exist and made them what they are today, but few

spend any time performing rituals or praying, mainly because the cloakers understand that the gods don't care if they are worshiped and any layperson's efforts beyond simple obeisance is a waste of time and effort. Only rarely do cloakers embrace religion in the way that humanoids do, and these devout cloakers are usually the ones who replace paranoia with some other mental affliction.

Campaign Role

Cloakers are best used to ambush, annoy, confuse, and terrorize PCs. Their fear generally makes them unwilling to fight extended battles with groups of adventurers, so usually a cloaker encounter sees the creature attacking in a surprise situation, then retreating if it doesn't think it can quickly kill all of its "enemies." If one target looks especially weak, the cloaker engulfs it in the hopes that the others will kill their own ally while trying to hurt the cloaker. A cloaker might lair in a hazardous area, such as a cave with trapped floors, a large pit, or a river of water or lava, relying on these hazards to keep it safe and using its moan and shadow shift powers to hinder the PCs without revealing itself. An egotistical cloaker might aid an ogre chieftain in dominating the rest of his tribe, and when the PCs reach the chief they'll be surprised to find the true power behind the throne—especially if the cloaker is a spellcaster. In the rare cases where a cloaker is sane enough to interact with PCs without attacking or fleeing, they make excellent diplomats and guides through dangerous areas.

Treasure

Lacking heads, necks, feet, hands, or limbs, cloakers have difficulties using items designed for humanoids. They can wear rings on their finger-claws and use *ioun stones* and potion fungi (see sidebar), but few other items are suitable for their shape. They prefer small, portable items they can carry in a small pouch (held in the mouth or by its straps), such as magical gems, *figurines of wondrous power*, or *hands of the mage*. Some use magical brooches or necklaces as body piercings near the claws or tail, which function normally despite the odd location. Anything they can't use they bury so that nobody else can use it against them. This means a cloaker's treasure is often kept in a single small bag, typically resting in a niche high above the ground, though greater treasures may be hidden nearby where the cloaker can keep an eye on them.

Variants

While most cloakers have a fairly uniform appearance, there are several varieties, crossbreeds, and inbred mutations that stand out from the norm.

Amphibious: True to their ancient heritage, some cloakers can breathe water as easily as air, and have a swim speed equal to their fly speed. Some may have devolved so much that they cannot breathe air at all, and live only in the waters of the Darklands or the crushing depths of the ocean, perhaps once again serving the aboleths.

Assassin: Cloakers sane enough to work with or for others may study advanced techniques of murder, taking levels in ranger, rogue, and assassin.

Fungoid: Some cloakers become infested with one or more kinds of parasitic fungi, perhaps from battling Darklands vegepygmies. Usually these don't bother the cloaker except to increase its appetite to compensate for nutrients stolen by the fungi. These cloakers usually have large patches of mushrooms growing on their backs, making it less likely they'll be mistaken for a wearable cloak but allowing them to lie flat on the ground and look like a pile of refuse. Some have patches of phosphorescent fungus growing on their underbellies, which they use as lures to attract prey or lead unsuspecting creatures into traps (the glow is blocked if the cloaker clings to a wall or floor). Some achieve a kind of symbiosis with a more dangerous type, such as brown mold, violet mold, or yellow mold. Brown mold fungoids deal 1d6 points of nonlethal cold damage per round to all creatures within 5 feet and take double damage from cold attacks. Violet mold fungoids deal violet fungus poison (MM 113) with every bite and tail lash attack, as well as to any creature striking them with natural weapons or unarmed strikes (CR +1). Yellow mold fungoids release a 10-foot-radius cloud of spores if struck (up to three times per day), with effects equal to yellow mold (DMG 76). Any type of cloaker (assassin, halfbreed, and so on) may become a fungoid.

Halfbreed: These cloaker-ray crossbreeds are looked down upon by all cloakers, but their slow wits (Int 8) mean they make excellent thuggish minions for normal cloakers. Halfbreeds are sterile with regard to their own kind, but can breed with rays or normal cloakers (producing offspring of the same kind as the other parent). A halfbreed's skill modifiers are Hide +5, Listen +3, Move Silently +4, and Spot +3. It does not have a cloaker's normal shadow shift abilities.

Priest: Technically not a separate breed of cloaker but possessing a different derangement, cloaker priests are usually clerics (or more rarely druids) who worship the Great Old Ones; they typically have access to two of the following domains: Chaos, Madness, Knowledge, Rune, and Void (see *Pathfinder Chronicles: Gods and Magic* for information on the Void domain). A rare few priests worship Lamashtu, breeding and birthing insane, monstrous offspring.

Shadowbrood: Believed to be cloakers infused with the energy of the Plane of Shadow (perhaps by the efforts of the church of Zon-Kuthon), these midnight-black cloakers are often mistaken for incorporeal undead. They can use their shadow shift ability to produce effects identical to

darkness and *dimension door* (self only). Once per day they may use *maze* and *shadow walk* as spell-like abilities (caster level 8th). (CR +1)

Stinger: Some cloakers have poisonous stingers on the ends of their bony tails; these cloakers make a sting attack instead of a tail slap attack for 1d6+5 plus poison (injury, Fortitude DC 16, 1d4 Dex, 1d4 Dex).

Vampiric: The yellow-gray cloakers born of unfertilized eggs thrive on blood and attach themselves to their prey like leeches. Despite the name, most vampiric cloakers are not undead; however, explorers have reported vampiric cloakers that recoil from holy symbols and are damaged by water, so presumably they somehow can become true vampires, though the mechanics for this are unknown. In addition to the normal powers of cloakers, they have the following abilities. (CR +1)

Attach (Ex): If a vampiric cloaker hits with a bite attack, it uses its powerful jaws to latch onto the opponent's body and automatically deals bite damage each round it remains attached. An attached cloaker loses its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class and has an AC of 16. An attached cloaker can be struck with a weapon or grappled itself. To remove an attached cloaker through grappling, the opponent must achieve a pin against the creature. A vampiric cloaker can use this ability while it engulfs an opponent.

Blood Drain (Ex): A vampiric cloaker drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage in any round when it begins its turn attached to a victim. Once it has dealt 10 points of Constitution damage, it detaches and flies off to digest the meal. If its victim dies before the cloaker's appetite has been sated, the cloaker detaches and seeks a new target.

Webspinner: Created by drow fleshwarping using ettercap and spider essence, these cloakers can create sheets of sticky webs like monstrous spiders and shoot web nets like ettercaps up to eight times per day. Many of these have poisonous bites or stingers as well.

Cloakers on Golarion

Aboleths created the cloakers to spy on their Azlanti thralls, rewarding loyal leaders with cloaker bodyguards and assassins. When the aboleths destroyed Old Azlant, the cloakers were cast out, fleeing to the Darklands to eke out a living. Most aquatic cloakers have returned to the service of the aboleths, aiding skum and gillmen as directed, and sometimes acting as contacts or bait for normal cloakers. The remainder of the cloakers informally serve the Great Old Ones (see *Pathfinder Chronicles: Gods and Magic*), with a few actual clerics and druids of these gods leading cults of like-minded Darklands creatures, kidnapping, sacrificing, or indoctrinating surface-dwellers.

Cloakers are native to the Darklands, equally distributed between Sekamina and Orv. They usually avoid Nar-Voth, disliking the humanoid settlements there and the proximity to countless conspirators on the surface world. Built for stealth, they creep along the edges of other civilizations, eager for news that might help them outwit some imagined enemy, and occasionally preying on a straggling scout or lost exile. The tattoos of cloakers living among humanoids resemble Varisian tattoos, though these magical markings stem from a much older source.

In the Land of Black Blood, an Orvian vault deep beneath the forests of Kyonin, various tribes battle for their portion of the necromantic substance called the Black Blood of Orv. These tribes—cloakers, driders, derro, amphibious humanoids, and exiled fiends and genies—harvest this material to sell to ghouls, liches, and necromancers at high prices, and battles over the blood are frequent. The cloakers here directly or indirectly serve the Moldering Emperor, a very powerful neothelid, banding together in a mutual fear of their monstrous lord and the hostile creatures that share their vault. As their roost is a mushroom forest, they have easy access to fungi suitable for making potions. For more information on the Land of Black Blood, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #18.

Cloaker

This flying creature looks like a monstrous manta ray with a long tail ending in a bony whip and horns ending in thumb-like claws. On its pale underside are a fang-filled mouth and two glaring red eyes. Its top side is as black as the darkest night, its belly as white as a dead fish. With wings spreading farther than a grown man can reach, it swims through the air with a strange grace and agility.

Cloaker **CR 5**

CN Large aberration

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +13, Spot +13

Defense

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 16
(+3 Dex, +7 natural, –1 size)

hp 45 (6d8+18)

Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +7

Defensive Abilities shadow shift

Offense

Spd 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (average)

Melee tail slap +8 (1d6+5) and
bite +3 (1d4+2)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (5 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks engulf, moan

Tactics

Before Combat If a cloaker knows it faces a difficult fight, or a group of cloakers is preparing for a raid, they use their potion fungi (see sidebar on page 11) in advance. They like to harry and disable potential opponents with the nausea and unnerve effects of their moan ability before attacking, counting on the resulting chaos to keep them relatively safe while they pick off the least dangerous foes.

During Combat In an ambush, a cloaker tries to engulf the weakest-looking opponent, hoping to bite the engulfed target to death, perhaps with the target's allies unintentionally "helping" by splitting their damage between the cloaker and its target. Cloakers prefer hit-and-run tactics, killing one target and then fleeing into the darkness, only to return later and repeat the process.

Morale A cloaker has a strong survival instinct, and if it believes its opponents may kill it, it uses its moan ability to create fear or nausea and tries to flee.

Statistics

Str 21, **Dex** 16, **Con** 17, **Int** 14, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 15

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +13

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative

Skills Hide +8, Listen +13, Move Silently +12, Spot +13

Languages Undercommon

Combat Gear *potion fungus of cat's grace, cure moderate wounds, delay poison,* or *resist energy*; **Other Gear** *hand of the mage,* 300 gp

Special Abilities

Engulf (Ex) A cloaker can try to wrap a Medium or smaller creature in its body as a standard action. The cloaker attempts a grapple that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and bites the engulfed victim with a +4 bonus on its attack roll. It can still use its whip-like tail to strike at other targets. Attacks that hit an engulfing cloaker deal half their damage to the monster and half to the trapped victim. A cloaker cannot fly while it is engulfing a creature.

Moan (Ex) A cloaker can emit a dangerous subsonic moan as a standard action. By changing the frequency, the cloaker can cause one of four effects. Cloakers are immune to these sonic, mind-affecting attacks. Unless otherwise specified, a creature that successfully saves against one of these effects cannot be affected by the same moan effect from the same cloaker for 24 hours. All save DCs for moan effects are Charisma-based.

Fear: Anyone within a 30-foot spread must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or become panicked for 2 rounds.

Nausea: Anyone in a 30-foot cone must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be overcome by nausea and weakness. Affected characters fall prone and become nauseated for 1d4+1 rounds.

Stupor: A single creature within 30 feet of the cloaker must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be affected as though by a *hold monster* spell for 5 rounds. Even after a successful save, the creature must repeat the save if the cloaker uses this effect again.

Unnerve: Anyone within a 60-foot spread automatically takes a –2 penalty on attack and damage rolls. Those forced to hear the moan for more than 6 consecutive rounds must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or enter a trance, unable to attack or defend themselves until the moaning stops.

Shadow Shift (Su) A cloaker can manipulate shadows. This ability is effective only in shadowy areas and has three possible effects.

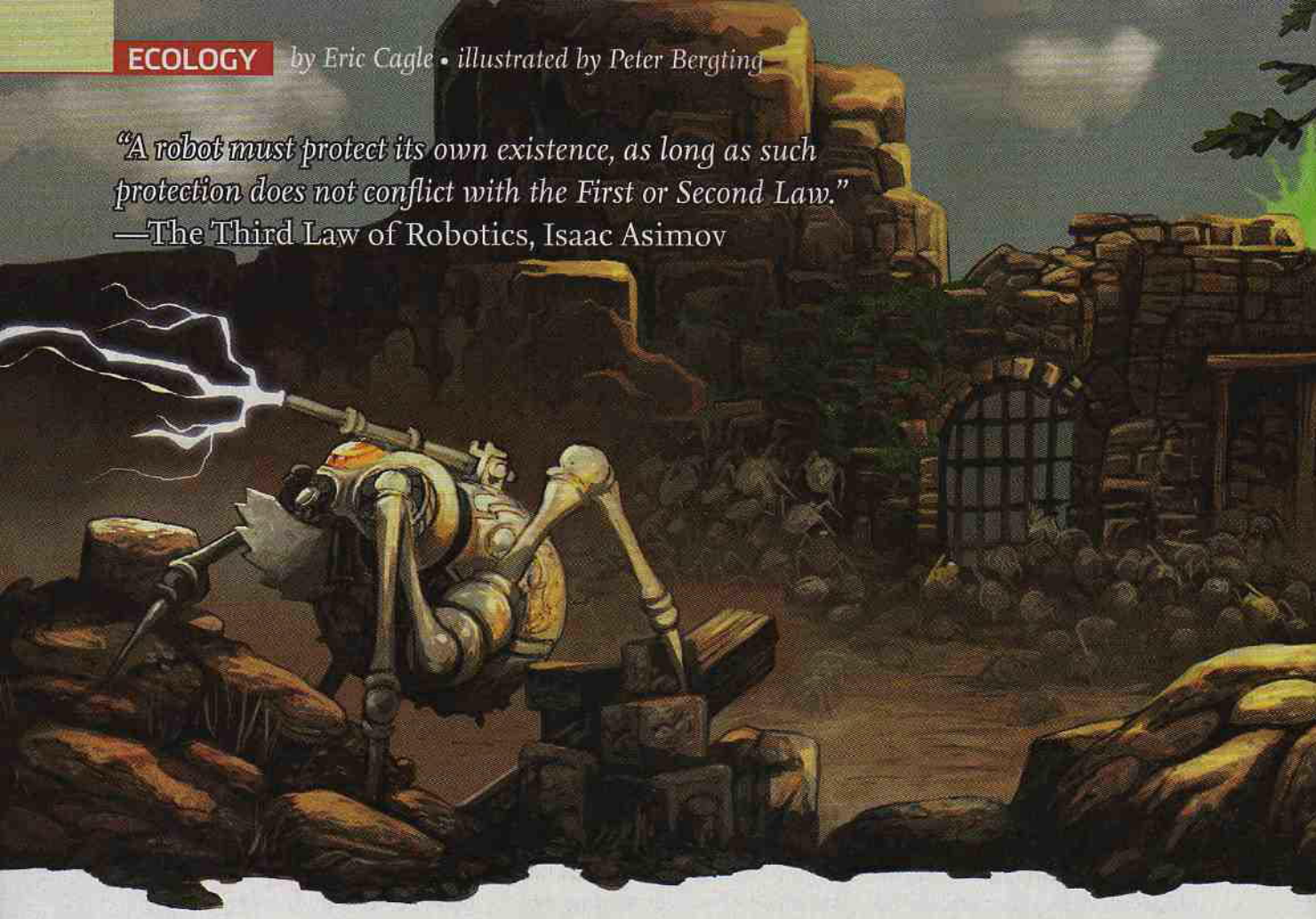
Dancing Images: This effect duplicates a *mirror image* spell (caster level 6th).

Obscure Vision: The cloaker gains concealment (20% miss chance) for 1d4 rounds.

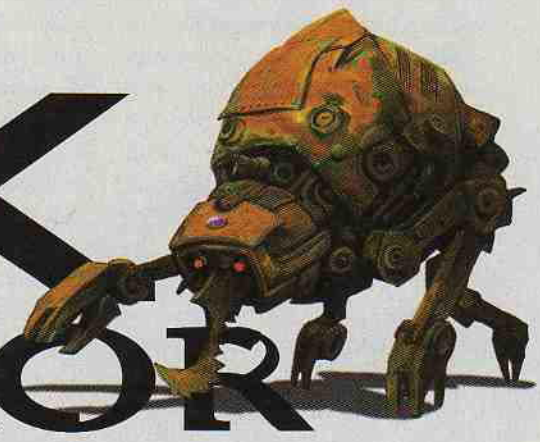
Silent Image: This effect duplicates a *silent image* spell (DC 15, caster level 6th). The save DC is Charisma-based.

by Eric Cagle • illustrated by Peter Bergting

"A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law."
—The Third Law of Robotics, Isaac Asimov



the Ecology of the CLOCKWORK HORROR



Those races that create mechanical life do so to make loyal warriors, servants, and laborers. Few of these constructs possess any real intellect, much less individuality or free will. There does exist, however, a race of constructs do that pursues its own agenda—to raze the landscape and spread its cold, metallic kind. As these constructs not communicate with anyone but themselves, other races gave them the name clockwork horrors. Merciless, driven, and unstoppable, they possess a strict hierarchy, organized to kill, destroy, and render down resources to bolster their numbers with cold efficiency. They are a mechanical plague upon the living worlds of the Material Plane and possess no greater mandate than the destruction of all they encounter.

History of the Clockwork Horror

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

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

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

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

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

While the death of an entire world is tragic beyond measure, the threat of the clockwork horrors might have been contained were it not for the intervention of another kind of evil. When a spidership—a star-faring vessel of neogi slavers—landed upon the ruin of the Lost Ones' world in search of captives, the cruel neogi were intrigued by the race of mechanical insects they discovered. The clockwork horrors ignored the neogi until the aberrant visitors attempted to take a number of the constructs back to their vessel. Reacting to the danger as one, hundreds of clockwork horrors attacked the neogi, destroying the slavers and their captive cargos, ultimately claiming the spidership as their own. Under the direction of the adamantine horror, the constructs unraveled the technology of the neogi spidership, providing them with the ability to ply the stars. Some rumors say that, in thanks for their gift, the neogi's lost home world was the first to fall to the gears of their beneficiaries' mechanical war machine.

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

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

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

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

Knowledge (arcana)

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

Clockwork horrors are so named because their internal workings are made up of a complex array of gears, screws, pistons, and other machinery. Externally, a clockwork horror resembles a four-legged, mechanical beetle with a body about 2 feet in diameter. Although every clockwork horror possesses a tough frame of base metal, such as iron or steel, each is covered with a thin precious or semi-precious carapace, often etched with obscure symbols. Copper and electrum horrors have very simple, almost blocky craftsmanship, while gold and platinum horrors bear elaborate swirls and other embellishments. Every clockwork horror boasts a large gem embedded on top of its head. This is one of the few parts of a clockwork horror that shows some form of individualism, as no two gems are exactly alike in shade or cut, although the colors are the same among members of the same variety: purple for copper horrors, green for electrum, blue for gold, yellow for platinum, and red for adamantine. A serrated mechanical saw sits in place of a natural insect's mandibles—the more powerful the horror, the more complex and magically enhanced the saw. Copper and electrum horrors also possess small compartments in their bulbous bodies where they store raw materials, carrying them back to the main group for processing into new clockwork horrors (see the "Creating a Clockwork Horror" sidebar). Gold and platinum horrors contain special machinery that "exudes" processed metal in order to create new horrors.

Clockwork horrors are capable of defending themselves in a variety of ways. The worker caste, copper horrors, possess powerful pinchers, as useful for fine manipulation as for battle. Electrum horrors come equipped with steam-powered pressure dart launchers, often called spring casters, built into their heads. The bodies of gold and platinum horrors bear special rods attached to the top of their carapaces, each resembling miniature cannons or magical wands, which can cast powerful *lightning bolts* at their enemies. The elusive adamantine clockwork horror possesses a similar wand, a weapon sometimes called the nightmare stick, capable of casting *disintegrate, implosion,* or *Mordenkainen's disjunction.*

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

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

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

CREATING A CLOCKWORK HORROR

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

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

Clockwork horrors are powered by magical energy—the large gems in their heads acting as the main source. They do not eat, sleep, or rest, but a gold or superior clockwork horror must "recharge" lesser horrors at least once a month. The superior clockwork horror gives the inferior construct a minor jolt of electricity provided by the rod on its back. If a lesser clockwork horror fails to get this rejuvenating charge, it is affected as per the spell *slow* until it falls into torpor one week later. It remains inactive, effectively helpless, until it is struck by the equivalent of 6 points of electrical damage. If it receives this jolt, the clockwork horror immediately awakens and operates at full capacity. Because of this hibernation, clockwork horrors sometimes create reserves of lesser horrors as backups and reinforcements, awakening them to attack interlopers or to tear apart large caches of ore for processing. Gold and platinum horrors do not require these restorative charges, as they can create them themselves, and the adamantine horror is immune for more mysterious reasons. Clockwork horrors are aware of any shut-down horror within the 10-mile radius of their linked mind ability.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE CLOCKWORK HORROR

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

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

THE ADAMANTINE HORROR

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

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

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

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

NEW CLOCKWORK HORROR

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

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

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

COPPER HORROR **CR 2**

Always LE Small construct

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +3, Spot +4

Languages Clockwork Horror, mindlink (10 miles)

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

hp 14 (2 HD)

SR 12

Immune electricity

Weakness *shatter*

Fort +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +1

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee razor saw +1 (1d6)

Base Atk +1; **Grp** –3

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 2nd) 1/day—shocking grasp

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

SQ construct traits, linked mind, spell vulnerability

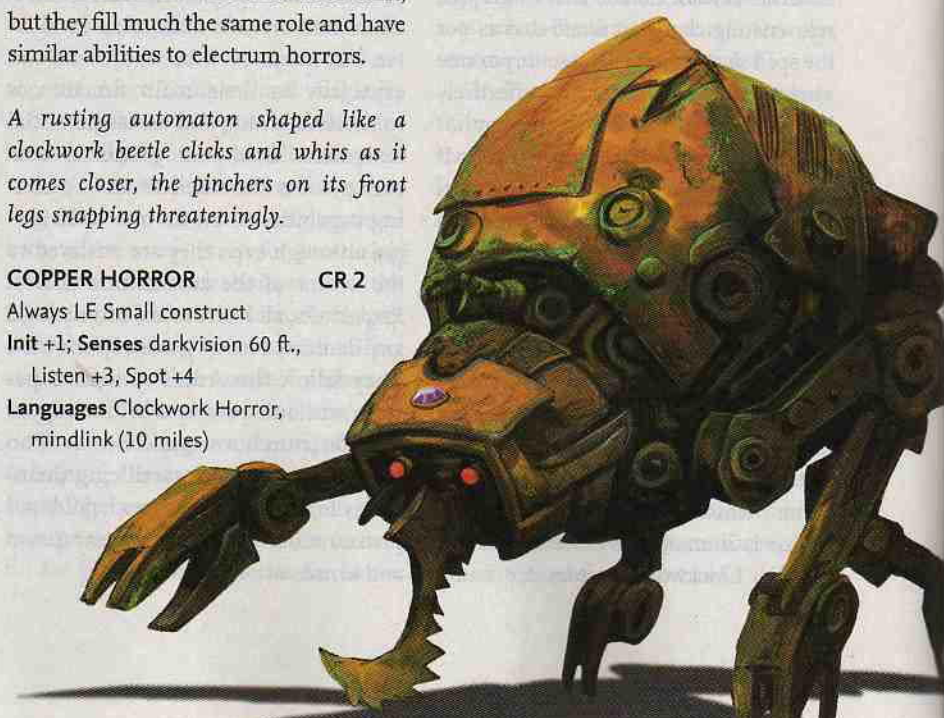
Feats Toughness

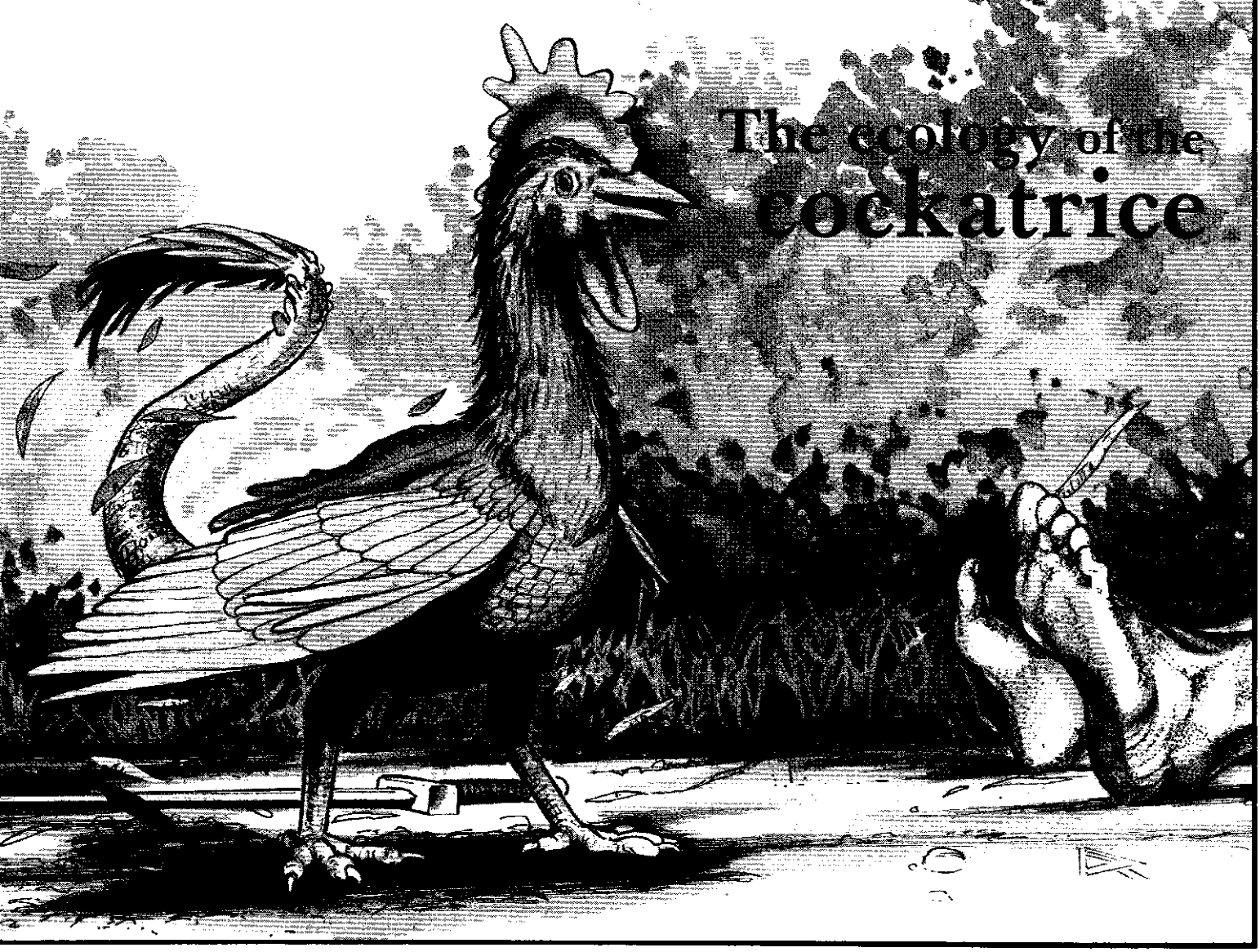
Skills Listen +3, Spot +4

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

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

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





The ecology of the cockatrice

by Ed Greenwood

Recently, I asked Elminster if he knew of any folk tales of the Realms involving cockatrices. He thought for a while and then said, "Aye, many mention them briefly, turning some poor unfortunate to stone, but none dwell on their lives and habits. They are thoroughly nasty creatures and presumably are both avoided and ignored as much as possible." Then his face brightened a bit, and he continued:

"Oh, there's one good story. It concerns King Verovan of Westgate (in those days when Westgate had a king), who was a famous sea-master." Following is the tale, just as the old sage related it to me.

King Verovan delighted in rowing-races against any and all who would oppose him, wagering lands, jewels, and shiploads of wine against the freedom of the opposing crew. The king never lost, but delighted in the racing more than the winning. He needed the armies of men he won to replace those of his own rowers whose hearts, arms, or backs had given out under the furious strain of the competition.

There was no place he liked better than the tall afterdeck of his galley, the ship cutting through the waves while his slaves below heaved and grunted and sometimes screamed at the rowing-benches, and the stroke-drum thundered its beat, and the long whip in his hand leaped as though it was alive, to mark with red the sweating backs of even the prow-bench rowers as he urged his men on.

He raced, and won, for a dozen years, ranging far and wide over the seas and lakes and rivers of the Realms, until he challenged the wizards of Thay, who had, men said, a boat of magic that sat above the waves so that it flew like a bird and its hull and holds stayed dry.

Verovan wanted such a boat, if it did indeed exist, but as a mariner, he wanted to see its strengths and shortcomings first. He thought it might fare ill in a storm, for the winds could blow it about helpless as a leaf severed from its tree — and so, on the eve of a storm, he sent his challenge to the wizards. They accepted, and asked in return for the wager of their ship merely the wager of his own. Moreover, they promised, to settle any fears of magical trickery, that only the merest of their apprentices would crew the magical vessel.

Verovan agreed, delighted at such fairness and courtesy (for the wizards of Thay had a fell reputation), and the race began. Across a great gulf of the Inner Sea, round an island by a certain headland, and back again to the harbor where the wizards had received Verovan's challenge was the route, and although the strengthening wind blew in great gusts, Verovan plied his whip so eagerly that his suffering men had built up a lead of a league or more before the storm broke.

When the storm came, it was a horrible wall of wind, howling waves, and slashing rain, and Verovan saw with some satisfaction that the grey sails of the wizards' vessel were down in disarray, and the ship was being swept aside by the storm, while Verovan's rowers fought steadily on against the waves and made headway.

The waves grew mighty and broke over the rowers, running down the decks. Verovan seized a set of empty rowing-chains and fastened himself to the lashings of the great steering oar only minutes before an enormous wave swept over the afterdeck, carrying all thereon with it except for the helmsman, the stroker (who, clutching his drum, fetched up in a groaning tangle against the rail), and the king. Verovan's whip and helm were gone, swept out of his hand and off his head by the mighty wave.

The king turned to a chest nearby where spares of these items were kept, and outfitted himself once again — failing to notice that the whip he now grasped was slightly different in appearance from the one he had lost. Verovan resumed his place with angry yells, kicking the stroker upright and urging him on with shouts. The rowers picked up their cadence again, and Verovan held the whip at his side for a while, satisfied with the progress his men were making under the stroker's call.

Shortly after the worst of the storm passed, the king's galley drew abreast of a string of six jagged, rocky islands — which the still-terrible winds and waves sought to drive the ship against. The rowers roared and pulled as though demented, and Verovan again began to ply his whip like a landsman threshing grain.

But the men, it seemed, had been pushed to their limit. The more he struck them now, the more their efforts lessened, and the boat swept down rapidly, sideways on, to the crashing surf about the base of the islands. Verovan redoubled his lashings in fury — and then stopped in sudden horror as the smiling face of the wizard he had challenged appeared in the storm-wracked air before him. The visage looked at him, but did not move or speak.

In a moment Verovan was over his initial shock and had regained his usual cruel composure. "Do you mock me?" the king snarled, cutting through the image with his whip, to no effect. And then, looking away from the evil smile on the face of the wizard-image, Verovan noticed for the first time that most of his men sat at their benches motionless, as though carved of stone — and the rocks were drawing nearer.

"What has come over you?" Verovan bellowed at the statues that were once his men. "Row! Row!" he raged at them, but they did not seem to hear.

Verovan raised his whip yet again — and as the tip of it flew through his field of vision, he saw that the end of the whip bore a barb, shaped like a hawk's tail, made of feathers — cockatrice feathers! The stone-like figures on the benches grasped their unmoving oars, and now the rocks were close enough that escape from them would be impossible.

For the first time, the wizard's smiling face changed expression, breaking into a deep laugh. Then the wizard-image spoke. "It appears that the touch of your new whip is more merciful than the touch of your old one, Verovan. You cannot win the race, and so — you must forfeit your ship."

And with that, most of the galley vanished into thin air — except for a portion of the afterdeck, including the massive steering oar that Verovan was still lashed to. The king's screams were lost in the howling wind as he and the oar crashed into the waiting rocks. And it was in this way that Verovan of Westgate lost his last race.

Elminster sat back, finished with the tale, and I sighed. "A good tale, Elminster," I said, "but how can it be true? The wizards of Thay, as you admit, are not to be trusted. Is this not a mere minstrel's fancy?"

The sage shook his head. "Nay, for the stroker survived, thrown up onto one of the isles with his drum, and it is from his lips that the tale comes down."

"It is true, then," I conceded, "as much as such tales ever are. But this says little of cockatrices themselves, only that the wizards placed a magical whip in Verovan's gear — a whip of cockatrice feathers that petrified as though the creature still lived."

"Aye, I have details of that process," Elminster replied. "And I can tell thee something about the creatures themselves, besides." He then did so, and I made careful notes, so that I can summarize his remarks as follows:

The cockatrice is an unintelligent, nasty, avaricious creature, about the size of a large goose or turkey, that often flies into a fit of rage. The creature is infamous for the (permanent) *flesh to stone* power of its touch, but man is not its deliberate prey. Its habitat and habits are little known, and much confused by myth and old wives' tales. What follows is, however, known to be true, as far as it goes.

Males are more numerous than females (which lack the wattles, and have much smaller combs), and the latter are very seldom without a mate — or several mates, who will fight constantly among themselves over the female.[1]

Cockatrices are immune to their own and fellow cockatrices' petrification powers, and spend much time strutting, fighting among themselves, or foraging. A male-and-female pair (or the more unusual grouping of one strong female with several "consort" males) will mate often and noisily, screeching and cackling all the while. The female will lay a clutch of 1 or 2 eggs a month, at the waxing of the moon, which she guards watchfully while the male (or males) hunts food for her. The eggs are brownish-red, flecked with rust-red speckles, and they have hard, brittle shells. An egg that is fertile[2] will hatch in 11-19 days. An immature cockatrice is small (roughly fist-sized), but otherwise identical in appearance to its parents.[3] Such chicks grow to mature size and attain full powers in four to six months. They are then driven away by the parents, left to fend for themselves.

Cockatrices are vain, bullying creatures, and amongst themselves there is a constant battle for status. Nesting pairs consider themselves above solitary creatures or those who do not have a nest, and once a lair has been found, the cockatrice pair will build a permanent nest and continually enrich it (and thus their individual status) by lining it with treasure.

Status increases with the shininess and quantity of treasure, and there must always be the yellow gleam of gold somewhere among it for the owner to achieve true "class." Cockatrices are thus always foraging for food and treasure. Their preferred

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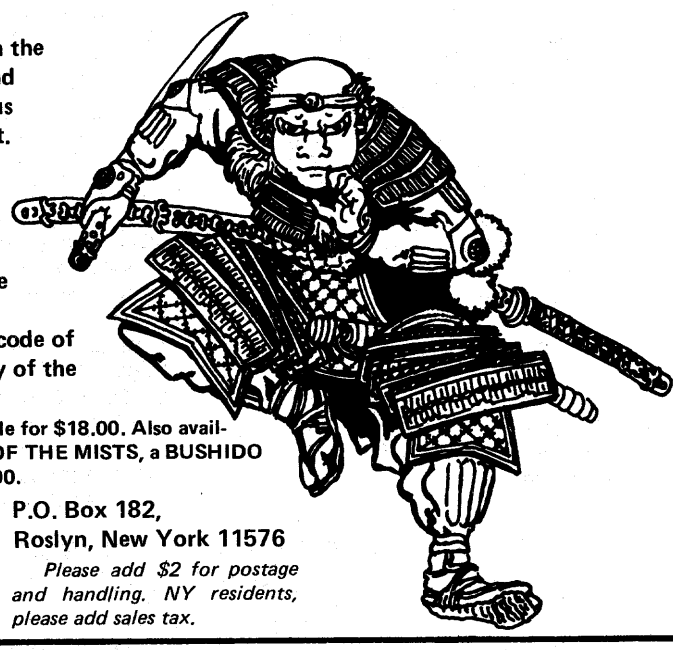

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diet consists of large, juicy beetles, small lizards, and snakes, although a cockatrice will eat all small reptiles, birds, mammals, seeds, fruit, and even fish it can catch, often subsisting largely on rodents.

It is important to note that the cockatrice can choose not to petrify by its touch (if it could not, it would never be able to eat), but this is a conscious, deliberate act of will on its part, and at all other times its touch automatically petrifies.[4] Be aware, however, that the *flesh to stone* power of the cockatrice is just that — its touch only affects the actual flesh or body of a creature, and does not work through (or upon) clothing, armor, or other inanimate objects. Thus, someone covered in head-to-toe armor has little to worry about — but someone with any sizable patch of flesh showing is in danger, for the cockatrice knows instinctively where to strike to bring about the "stoning" effect, and will aim for the vulnerable spot.[5]

Cockatrices are not strong flyers, but prefer to fight in the air against foes they deem dangerous, because they move more quickly when airborne than when on the ground. They can grapple opponents while flying, petrifying them upon a touch — whereupon most foes fall helplessly to earth.[6]

Cockatrices will never leave a nest unguarded, and will fight to the death to protect eggs or young. If a clutch of eggs happens to be entirely infertile, the parents will leave that nest (and its treasure) and go elsewhere to nest, never returning to the former location, which they seem to hate and fear; apparently they consider it cursed, bad luck, or somehow contaminated.

Large groups of cockatrices encountered are usually young driven from the nest, all of one sex and temporarily together for safety and mutual hunting strength, or several males who have located, and are now vying for the attention of, a female.

The most feared foe of the cockatrice is the pech. This creature, being immune to petrification, hunts cockatrices with impunity both for food and trade. This trading, conducted via svirfneblin, results in a few secretive sales of live cockatrices to alchemists, paranoids of all types seeking guardians, jaded collectors of exotic pets (cockatrices sell for 500-1000 gp, eggs for 300-600 gp each), and so-called sculptors. (A famous "sculptor" in Waterdeep once plied his trade by drugging human models, posing them, and then releasing his pet cockatrice upon them.) Cockatrices are generally too stupid to be easily trained, but they can be taught (by repetition) to recognize their owner and carry out the simplest of commands given by that owner, so long as those commands do not go against the creature's basic nature.

Notes

1. The cockatrice depicted in the Monster Manual is a male (males outnumber females 65% to 35%). Cockatrices may live as long as thirty winters, but the normal lifespan (assuming the creature survives infancy) is 16-20 years.

2. There is a 65% chance for each cockatrice egg laid that the egg is fertile and will hatch. This chance drops by 5% if the egg is abandoned by the mother or she is slain before it hatches. Eggs that do not hatch are eaten by the growing chicks.

3. The only substantial difference between an adult and an immature cockatrice is that the petrification effect of an immature cockatrice's touch is saved against at a +3 bonus.

4. The willful switch from petrification to non-petrification or vice versa is effectively instantaneous (taking less than 1 segment), and is believed to be both a mental and a chemical change. The direct touch of any part of a cockatrice's body causes petrification within 2 segments (unless the victim makes a successful saving throw). A cockatrice has a partial, intangible existence on the Astral and Ethereal planes as well as its corporeal existence on the Prime Material. This intangible existence consists of an aura corresponding in shape, size, and location to its physical form, and its aura petrifies on the Astral and Ethereal planes just as its body does on the Prime Material.

When a cockatrice chooses not to petrify, all parts of its body (and on the Astral and Ethereal planes, all parts of its visible aura) become "safe" (and invisible on the Astral

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and Ethereal planes) — except for the feathered end of its tail. This remains active at all times, able to petrify all living things it touches. Note that a cockatrice is well aware of this, and — not wishing to petrify its food — has careful and exact physical control and precise knowledge of the location of its tail. Note also that if a group of two or more cockatrices is encountered feeding, only one at a time actually "turns off" its petrifying power and eats; the others stand guard.

The cockatrice's petrification power does not "turn off" automatically when the creature falls asleep or is rendered unconscious, but a dead cockatrice does not retain the power — except for the uncontrollable "stoning" power of its tailfeathers, which remains in effect for 1-4 days after the creature's demise. (Saving throws against petrification by the tailfeathers are made at +1 if the cockatrice is dead or the feathers have been separated from the creature.)

Some mages (see Elminster's tale, above, and AD&D® game module WG5, "Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure") have devised means of preserving the petrifying powers (and physical integrity) of cockatrice tailfeathers. One such method (from the notebooks of Arbane the Mighty) is reproduced here:

For the making of whips, hats, cloaks and the like adorned with cockatrice tailfeathers, the feathers must be magically preserved. To do this, take a cauldron, and into it pour equal parts of *oil of etherealness,* aqua regia, and human tears (at least half an ounce of each). Mix this liquid well with a glass or crystal rod, and heat it to boiling while stirring in at least 6000 gp worth of powdered agate and either six whole (live or dead) cerebral parasites or the blood (7 drops or more) of a slaad, a githyanki, or a nightmare.

Stir this mixture until the solid components are dissolved, and then immerse the cockatrice feathers in the liquid while it is boiling. (A *mending* spell must be used beforehand on the feathers if they are broken, bent, or crumpled.) Take the cauldron away from the heat immediately after putting the feathers into the liquid, and let the cauldron stand until the liquid evaporates.

The cockatrice feathers will then be intact, resilient, and flexible, and will remain so forever (unless damaged or destroyed), retaining the power to permanently petrify living creatures (save vs. petrification at +1) by touch.

Feathers preserved in this fashion can only affect other creatures by direct contact on the Prime Material Plane or on the plane occupied by the bearer of the feathers; they cannot simultaneously affect creatures on the Astral or Ethereal planes or any other plane except the one that the feathers are physically present on.

5. If the flesh of a cockatrice's opponent is revealed to any substantial degree (bare arms or bare legs, for instance), it can be assumed that a hit by the creature in melee has struck the vulnerable part of the target's body, and thus petrification is possible. If a would-be victim is almost entirely covered (only showing a bare head, bare hands, or bare feet, for instance), then the Dungeon Master must use judgment to determine the outcome of a cockatrice strike. For instance, it might be ruled that after a successful "to hit" roll, the cockatrice has a chance of striking exposed flesh, and that chance is equal to the approximate percentage of the victim's body which is uncovered (perhaps 10% for bare feet, 15% for bare head, 25% for bare arms, etc.). Then, if that percentage is achieved on a second roll, the cockatrice has succeeded in striking the exposed flesh. (If more than one quarter of a target's body is exposed, it can be assumed that the cockatrice automatically lands its strike in that area.) The victim is always allowed a saving throw to avoid the petrification effect, but even if the save is made the target will take damage from the strike of the cockatrice's beak.

6. Cockatrices are of maneuverability class C, and must rest for at least 1 turn after 2-5 turns of flight. (How fast each creature tires depends upon the strength, weight, age, and present condition of the individual cockatrice.) Note that the creature's aerial movement rate is fully three times faster than its ground movement; the cockatrice is well aware of this, and often uses short, flapping flights to pursue prey or escape immediate danger.

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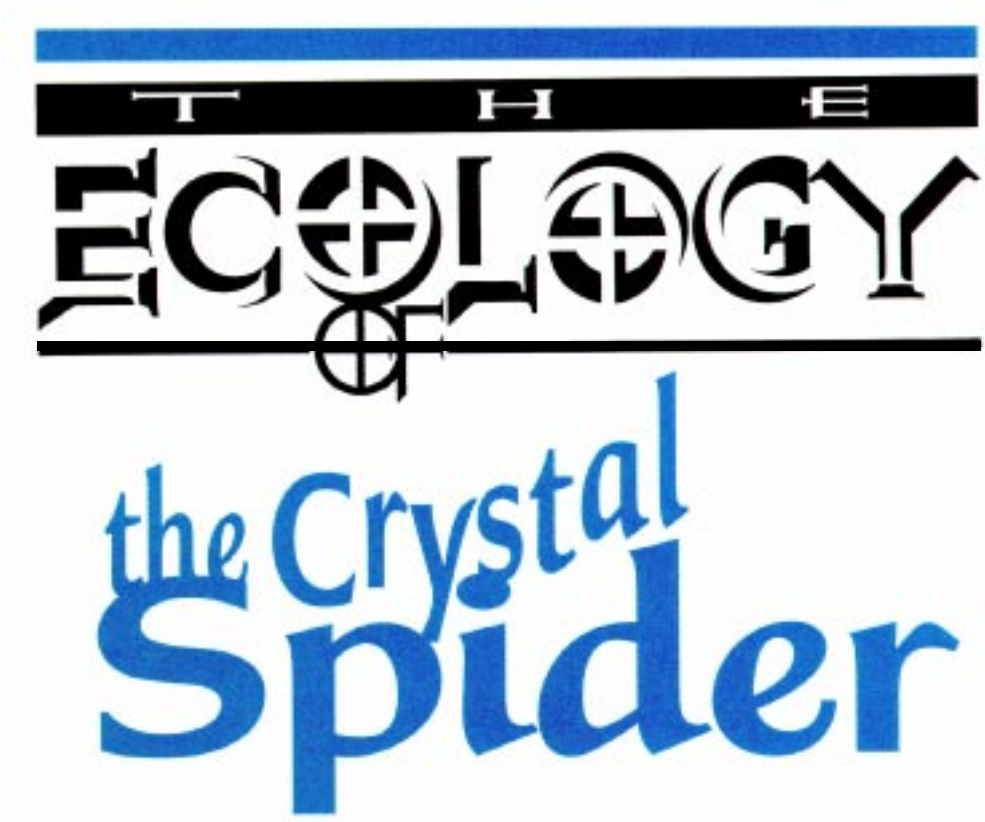
Brighter than diamonds, sharper than glass

by Rudy Thauberger



Talla unwrapped the glass shaft and handed it to Quarr. "Be careful now," she said, "If you grip it too tightly the edge will cut you to the bone."

Quarr held the glass in the palm of his hand, watching the light of the fire play of its surface. The edges were straight and remarkably sharp. "It's beautiful," he said.

Talla sneered. "Beautiful," she said. She leaned close and pulled back her hair. A web of scars ran down the side of the half-elf's face, from the tip of her ear to her jaw, each scar running across half a dozen others. "Is this your idea of beautiful?"

Quarr stared, afraid to speak. He looked down at his feet until Talla settled back next to the fire. The ranger made him nervous. He had paid her a fortune to teach him how to survive in the wilderness. As a merchant, he felt that the knowledge would serve him well on long caravan journeys. So far though, all she had done was drag him out into the desert and scare him with tales of monsters he never knew existed: kirres, agony beetles, sand cacti. After a week of it, he wanted nothing more than to return to the relative safety of Balic and never leave again.

Talla seemed to sense his anxiety. She smiled. "Ah, but you are correct," she said, "A crystal spider standing in the heart of its web is one of the most beautiful sights I've ever seen, and very nearly the last. Listen closely now, merchant, for I will tell you all I know about this terrible beast."

The first thing you must understand about the crystal spider is that it may not be a spider at all. Its crystalline shell and glass webs are unlike those of any other spider on Athas. Most sages suspect that it is a creature of magic, created by a defiler or perhaps even a sorcerer-king as a weapon. Others claim that it is a mutation, spawned by the rigors of the Athasian wilderness. Even others say that it is a creature from a different world, or that it was a spider once, but has since become something else. Its appearance is merely an echo of its heritage.

Most travelers, when they first see a crystal spider, are astonished by its beauty. In full daylight, the spider scintillates with every color, shimmering like a desert mirage. It resembles a creature of living glass, magical and—like much that is beautiful on Athas— extremely deadly. Few realize that most of what they see is, in fact, not living tissue at all, but an unliving crystalline shell animated by the power of the Way.

The living tissue of the crystal spider has a vaguely spiderlike shape when removed from its shell, but it is soft, boneless, and capable of only rudimentary movement. The body is a round segmented sack with eight long and several short ganglia extruding from it. These ganglia extend into the creature's legs, mandibles, and sensory organs. While safely hidden inside its shell, the spider's tissue is transparent, except on those occasions when the creature has recently fed on blood. At these times, the tissue turns faintly red, bringing a blush to its crystal shell. Once the tissue is removed from the shell, it blackens rapidly, especially if exposed to direct sunlight.

The shell itself both supports and protects the soft tissue, allowing the spider to move while shielding it from exposure. The tissue is nourished largely by sunlight, and the spider can survive for extended periods on nothing else. The hard outer shell is crucial to the spider's survival, focusing and amplifying the sunlight so that the spider gains the maximum benefit from every moment spent under the sun. The shell also retains heat, allowing the spider to remain active at night.

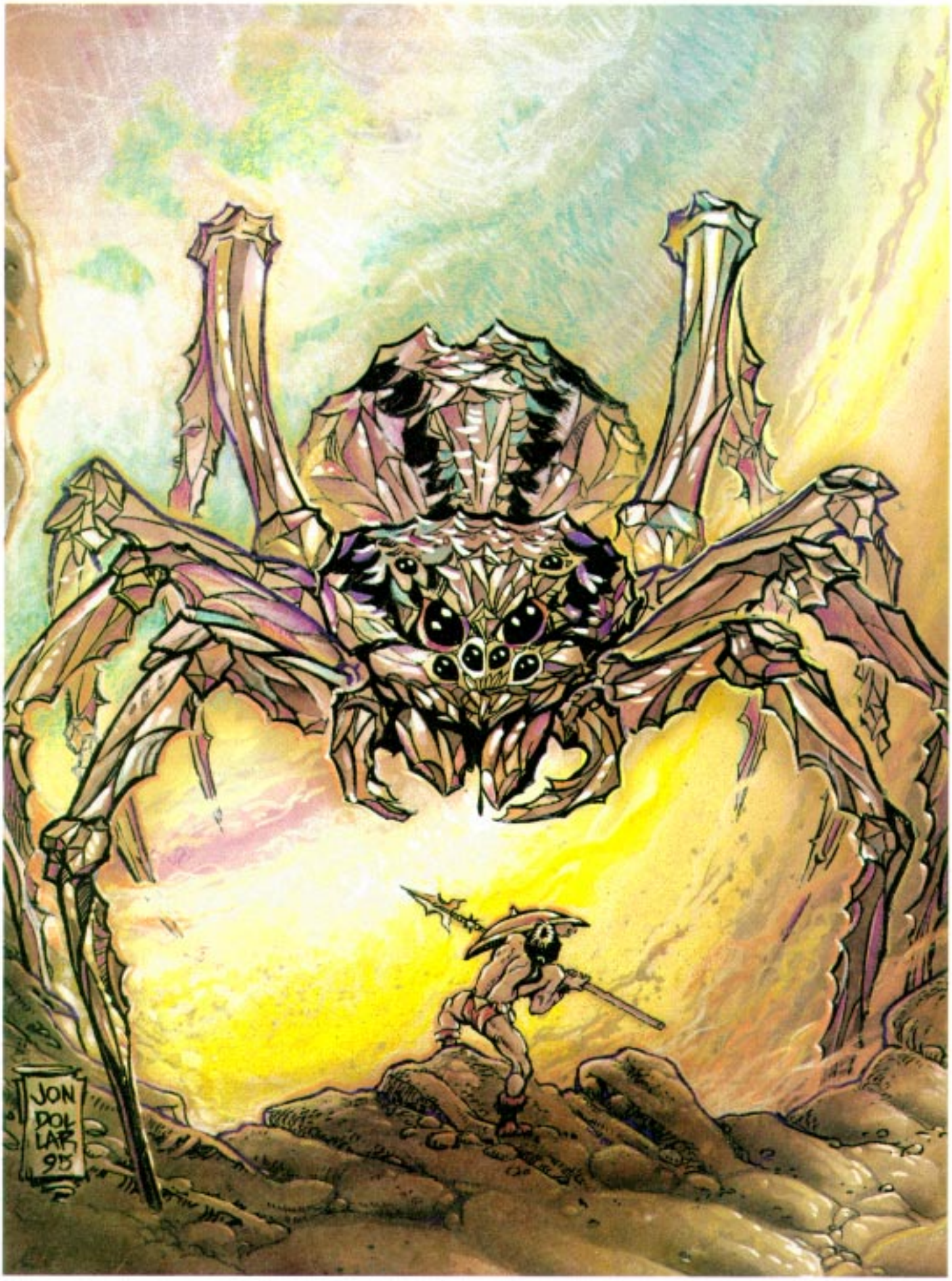
In spite of this highly efficient feeding system, the crystal spider periodically needs to ingest the blood of living creatures. Some say that it actually requires the blood of humans. The spider may prefer human blood, but I suspect any animal's blood will do. What is certain is that without an infusion of blood at least once a month, the crystal spider weakens and eventually dies.

Blood provides the spider with the essential nutrients it needs to manufacture the two substances necessary for its long-term survival: first, a sticky goo that hardens into a tough, sharp-edged crystal; and second, a powerful acid that dissolves the crystal and serves as the source of the creature's poisonous venom.

The spider uses these two substances to build it's shell. The crystal coats the spider's body and ganglia, building up layer upon layer, shaped by judicious applications of the acidic venom. Once completed, the shell is animated by the spider's psionic powers. The animation takes the form of a telekinetic field that radiates from the creature's ganglia. In moments of crisis, the spider strengthens the field, creating a barrier against missile attacks.[1]

The shell is several feet thick in places, giving rise to the notion that the creature is entirely made of crystal. The joints are lubricated by a diluted form of acid venom, which allows the spider to move quickly and silently. Most spider hunters, in fact, underestimate both the speed and the amount of noise a spider makes, thinking that something so big and solid should be clumsy and noisy. They fail to realize that, since the motive power of the creature comes from psionics rather than muscles, the spider can move with uncanny grace and precision. Fortunately, the crystal shell is vulnerable to *shatter* spells and other magic that affects glass and glasslike substances.[2]

In combat, the spider's crystalline forelegs inflict great damage and are remarkably strong. The creature's bite is its most feared attack, due to its venom.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Because the spider's venom is highly acidic, it quickly destroys all the flesh it touches. Most victims die quickly and in great pain, and those who survive suffer terrible burns from the acid and are often crippled or disfigured. If that were not enough, the spider's telekinetic powers extend to fine control over the very light it feeds on.

The spider's ability to control light has several functions beyond combat. It uses the power to communicate, to hide itself in shadows, and to illuminate its surroundings. When combined with the creature's glass webs, the power becomes deadly.

The crystalline webbing, on its own, is dangerous enough. Sharper than an obsidian blade, it is also nearly invisible. Because the spider doesn't hang from its web like most spiders, its web can lie on the ground or hang like a curtain, as long as it is exposed to sunlight. More than one adventurer has been crippled by walking over strands of the web laid out on a valley floor. More have suffered terrible wounds by walking into an invisible web hung between stone pillars or narrow canyon walls.

In addition to cutting damage, the spider's web can focus and amplify its ability to control light, producing an intense burning beam. The beam generally originates from somewhere near the center of the web, but not always. As long as the point of origin is more than 5′ from the edge of the web, the beam can come from any point on the web.

Most spiders use the beam as their primary form of attack, but the control the crystal spider exercises over light creates effects other than heat rays. A few spiders can produce bright rays of light to blind or stun their victims. Others produce glowing balls of light that confuse and distract their foes. There are even rumors of crystal spiders that can create images of themselves on their webs, to deceive their enemies and lure them into traps.[3]

The strategies crystal spiders use to hunt prey are fairly complex. The creatures are smarter than most animals, although not highly intelligent by any means. However, they should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to the construction of their webs. They are experts at concealing the web's razor-sharp threads of glass, and they use a number of strategies to drive their prey into the heart of the webbing, where the victims are cut to pieces while trying to escape. Crystal spiders often create more than one web in a single location, one obviously visible and the others hidden, covering potential avenues of escape. The spider then uses its heat ray or other abilities to herd victims into a web. There is a limit, however, to how much webbing the spider can effectively hang, because the webs must be cleaned, lubricated, and repaired on a regular basis. Without proper care and repair, the spider's webs collapse.[4]

Among the elves, the webbing serves as raw material for short blades, such as knives and spears, as well as arrowheads. Once removed from the care of the spider, the glass grows brittle unless polished and lubricated with oil. The blades must be replaced regularly because they tend to shatter after being wielded in combat a few times.[5]

The crystal spider reproduces only once in its lifetime—just before it dies. In order to reproduce, it weaves a large hatching web. Like its regular web, the hatching web is carefully positioned in relation to the sun, allowing the spider's gemlike eggs to absorb a maximum amount of energy. The web's razor-sharp edges deter most predators from raiding the eggs.

The crystal spider does not actually lay eggs. Instead, it constructs the egg's shells out of its own webbing material or from gems taken from unlucky travelers. The acid venom opens a hole in the gem, into which the embryonic spider is placed along with a supply of blood. The spider then seals the hole and sets the egg into the hatching web, where it is exposed to the amplified rays of the sun. Up to 200 eggs can be prepared, depending on the size of the hatching web. The strain of preparing the web destroys the spider's ability to produce additional webbing and venom, and it severely weakens its ability to absorb sunlight. Most spiders live only a handful of days after completing their last great project.[6]

After a few weeks, the tiny spiders begin secreting acid that dissolves the gems, and they hatch. Once they emerge from their shells, the majority of the tiny crystal spiders fall victim to the very sunlight that grants them life. Without a shell to focus and harness the sun's energies, the spiders grow sluggish, and their soft tissues lose moisture. The first thing a newly hatched crystal spider must do, therefore, is to spin itself an exoskeleton. This first shell is usually crude and clumsy, but once constructed, it allows the spider to move and hunt. Because the acid dissolves the exoskeleton, the crystal spider can easily modify and improve its shell in sections without shedding it completely. Usually no more than a single limb is exposed at one time[7].

Once they complete a shell, the young spiders begin looking for sites to build their first webs. A few remain near the hatching web, but the solitary nature of the crystal spider and the lack of sufficient resources eventually drives all but one away.

The shell of a dead crystal spider quickly loses its beauty. Without the oils provided by the spider's venom, the shell's luster fades, and the crystal dries out and cracks. Within a few weeks, the shell breaks apart, becoming little more than a handful of worthless pebbles. Ω

Notes

1. DMs may opt to substitute the Telekinetic Barrier power described in *The Will and the Way* for the Inertial Barrier power normally used by the spider.

2. Other spells that can affect the spider's shell include *shout*, which inflicts 6d6 hp damage, and *glassteel*, which actually improves the armor class of the creature to −4.

3. By manipulating light, the spider can duplicate such spells as *color spray*, *dancing lights*, *phantasmal force* (spider's image only), and *mirror image* (1d4+1 images).

4. The maximum amount of webbing the crystal spider can effectively tend is roughly 1,200 square feet. Each new web increases the spider's need for fresh blood, so generally a crystal spider spins no more than two 400 square foot webs. The exception is the hatching web, which is much larger than a normal web. Because the spider produces only 12′ of webbing per day, the construction of even a small web is time-consuming. A 400 square foot web takes 13 to 20 days to construct (12+1d8 days). Twelve additional days are added for each web the spider must maintain while building the new web. If a web is left untended for more than six days, it must save vs. crushing blow each day until it collapses.

5. Blades must be oiled at least once a week. Each week without oiling results in a cumulative -1 modifier to the blades' saving throw vs. crushing blow. Such a save is rolled at the beginning of every melee. If the saving throw fails, the blade shatters within 1—4 rounds.

6. Each egg requires 50 square feet of web to nourish it. Therefore, a web capable of producing 200 spiders would have to cover roughly 100′ x 100′. The gestation period is roughly 40 days, and all eggs hatch within 1-3 days of each other.

7. The newly hatched spider has an AC 10 and 1d4 hp. Once it has constructed its first shell, which takes only a few minutes, its AC improves to 7 and its hit points double. Within a few days, the AC of the shell improves to 4 and the spider can fight with an THAC0 of 19, inflicting 1d4 hp damage with its forelegs and biting for 1d2 hp damage. Since its body is constructed, rather than grown, the crystal spider can achieve its full adult size in less than a year, depending on the available supply of blood.

THE ECOLOGY OF THE CYCLOPSKIN

Brokk's Lucky Day

All Brokk had to do was keep his eye on the slaves. How hard could it be?

by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Matt Mitchell

AS USUAL, BROKK WOKE TO THE BITING OF FLEAS.

He sat up in the filthy nest of uncured hides that comprised his bed, yawning. Scratching the side of his belly with one hand, he made a quick darting motion into his matted hair with the other, snatching at one of the irk some fleas that plagued his existence.

As usual, the flea avoided his grasp.

Brokk spent the next few minutes, as was his custom, groping through the thick, black hair that framed his head,[1] hunting for pests. The fleas, as was their custom, avoided his probings, but he did manage to catch a few lice. These he popped into his mouth as a snack, crunching absently as he rose to face the day.

The others were stirring as well. Gulokk, the leader, rolled the boulder from the cave entrance, the morning sunlight falling over his well-muscled arms. As the strongest male, he was the leader of the cyclopskin band, so the duty fell to them—mostly as a reminder to the other males in the band as to just why *he* was the leader, not them. Brugar and Turogg, weapons in hand, stood ready to defend the cave should anything be waiting to pounce upon them as the boulder was rolled away.[2] Even Old Gork, wounded in the leg from a bad fall some fifteen winters ago, had a part in the morning ritual: he stumbled over to the women and kicked them awake with his twisted foot.[3]

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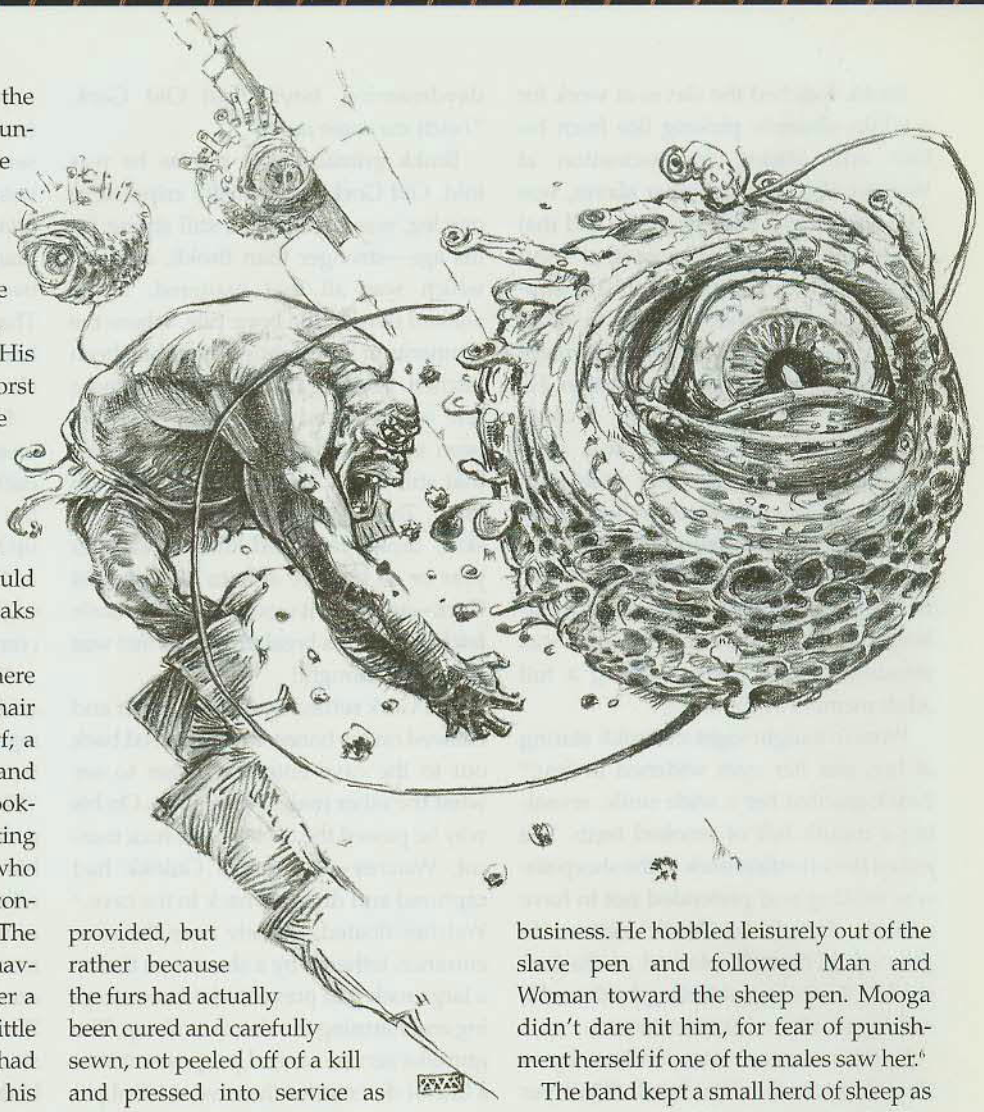
1. Cyclopskin hair is long, shaggy, and unkempt, a haven for lice, ticks, and fleas. Usually black, it can also be a dull, deep blue. Grooming is uncommon; usually a cyclopskin just tucks his hair behind his ears to keep it out of the way.

Members of both sexes lose their hair at an early age. By the time a cyclopskin enters adult society he's already thinning on top, if he doesn't already have a full-fledged bald spot. By age twenty-five, most cyclopskin are completely bald. They don't mind the lack of hair, since it keeps the vermin at bay.

In addition, cyclopskin don't grow facial hair, so beards and mustaches are unknown among the race.

2. Many creatures prey upon cyclopskin: tigers, wyverns, giants, and trolls, to name a few. As most cyclopskin bands live in permanent lairs, their locations are often known to the larger predators in the area. Mountain dwarves even go out of their way to attack cyclopskin, receiving the dwarven bonus against giants when doing so. For this reason, cyclopskin block their cave entrances with boulders or a stout wooden gate when they retire for the night. Cyclopskin caves always have but a single entrance; any naturally occurring additional entrances are sealed off with boulders and large stone slabs by the cyclopskin before they inhabit it.

3. Cyclopskin society is completely male-dominated and led by the strongest male. The weaker males follow his lead only through fear. Females and children are in turn subservient to the males and occupy the lowest niches of cyclopskin society. Cyclopskin have nothing but disregard for those weaker than themselves, even members of their own tribes or clans. Thus, the leader is brutal to everyone; the weaker males obey the leader but are in turn brutish to their mates and children. Cyclopskin children, if they're lucky, can vent their frustration on the clan's slaves. If the clan has no slaves, they just bide their time in silence until they are big enough to fight back successfully. Most cyclopskin clan leaders are killed not by one of the many creatures that habitually prey upon cyclopskin but rather by another male of their own clan that has had enough of subservience and has decided that it's time he gets to be the boss.



A cold, strong wind blew into the cave entrance. It brought in fresh, mountain air, contrasting sharply with the stenches in the cave: the smells of the slaves and sheep penned in the back, the dung and offal strewn about all parts of the floor, and above all, the unwashed bodies of eight cyclopskin.

The fresh air felt good to Brokk. His thick skin protected him from the worst of the low temperatures found in the mountain environment.[4] He wore only a ragged loincloth of moldering cave bear skin and scraps of the same skin tied around his feet with leather cords. Thus garbed, he could walk among the snow-covered peaks with little discomfort.

The slaves were not so lucky. There were three: a human male with gray hair covering his lower face like a dwarf; a human female, light in complexion and nervous in mannerisms, constantly looking about her with fearful, darting glances; and a pointy-eared elf male who said little but whose face betrayed constant resentment toward his masters. The elf had but one good foot, the other having been chopped off by Gulokk after a failed escape attempt—now he had little more than a heel where his right foot had been. The loss of his foot had soured his attitude, and he spent his days moping about the unfairness of his lot in life. The slaves no doubt had names they used among themselves, but to the cyclopskin they were simply "Man," "Woman," and "Elf," or else "Slave" if it didn't matter which one was being called.

The three of them huddled together for warmth in the corner of their pen, shivering in their thin garments. When they had first been captured half a year ago, they had each worn fine fur cloaks. Those cloaks now graced Gulokk's muscular frame, not for the warmth they provided, but rather because the furs had actually been cured and carefully sewn, not peeled off of a kill and pressed into service as clothing immediately afterward.

Mooga, belly swollen in late pregnancy and in a foul mood because of it,[5] opened the slave pen and growled at the slaves to get out. Woman jumped up at once and complied, fearing retribution; Man stumbled up wearily on old, stiff bones but followed Woman out of the pen. Elf, as usual, sat where he was and stared insolently at Mooga, daring her to come get him. She growled again; he stayed put. She took a step into the pen and he stood up slowly, stretching, as if just now deciding to get about the day's business. He hobbled leisurely out of the slave pen and followed Man and Woman toward the sheep pen. Mooga didn't dare hit him, for fear of punishment herself if one of the males saw her.[6]

The band kept a small herd of sheep as an easy source of food. Not only did the sheep provide wool for the clan, but they were also a backup source of food when hunting was slim—or when the cyclopskin just didn't feel like exerting the effort necessary for hunting. With the sheep, meat and milk (and now cheese, thanks to the skills of Woman) were always available. The animals were kept in a separate pen to prevent one of the slaves from killing and feasting on a sheep in the middle of the night—it wouldn't be hard to imagine them doing so, since the slaves were fed so little.

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4. A cyclopskin's tough hide grants him a natural AC of 3. Because their thick skins provide them such ample protection, cyclopskin never wear armor and seldom carry shields.

5. Cyclopskin life expectancy being somewhat short (reaching the ripe old age of fifty is quite an accomplishment), cyclopskin women are kept pregnant as much as possible. This brings more clan members into the world, replenishing the ones who are killed in raids against enemies and power struggles within the clan. Due to the poor treatment of the pregnant mothers and the unsanitary conditions of cyclopskin dwellings, miscarriages are frequent, and infant mortality ranges from 10–20%.

A female cyclopskin has little to look forward to in life. Her gender puts her at the bottom of cyclopskin society straight from birth. Almost immediately after puberty, she becomes little more than a brood mare, delivering baby after baby and still being treated as little more than a slave herself. Worse, her sons eventually grow up to become adult males who treat her as badly as the others. Eventually, she will no longer be of childbearing age—at which point she is unceremoniously banished from the tribe to survive on her own (rather than be allowed to drain the tribe's resources).

6. Technically, cyclopskin females are higher in rank than are slaves in cyclopskin society. However, cyclopskin value their slaves highly, since a slave can be forced to do a great deal of work that the cyclopskin would otherwise have to do for themselves. A slave's value grows higher the fewer their number: if a tribe owns twenty slaves, no one's going to mind a female abusing a slave or two. However, if there's only a small handful, the females had better keep their hands off the slaves. As might be expected, this only leads to further resentment on the part of the females.

Brokk watched the slaves at work for a while, absently picking lice from his hair and staring in fascination at Woman. She, like the other slaves, was somewhat ugly, with two eyes and that preposterously skinny nose that went all the way to her forehead.[7] He supposed she was good-looking to other members of her race, but try as he might Brokk just couldn't see the attraction. He compared her to Gruba, the favored female of the tribe.[8] Gruba was truly beautiful: the classic, wide nose with gaping nostrils, the hairless scalp that glinted in the sun. Even Little Aga was better looking than Woman, and she was only three, still a few years from adulthood (unlike Brokk, who at age nine was standing on the brink of being a full adult member of the tribe).[9]

Woman caught sight of Brokk staring at her, and her eyes widened in fear.[10] Brokk granted her a wide smile, revealing a mouth full of crooked teeth. She jerked her attention back to the sheep she was milking and pretended not to have noticed. But Brokk knew better. He grinned to himself, pleased at the fear she felt. It was a good feeling, he thought, making smaller creatures fear you.

Brokk's reverie was broken by a slap to the back of his head. "Quit yer daydreaming, boy!" spat Old Gork. "Fetch me some meat!"

Brokk grimaced but did as he was told. Old Gork, while badly crippled in one leg, was nonetheless still strong for his age—stronger than Brokk, anyway, which was all that mattered. Brokk walked over to the bone pile, where the remnants of last night's dinner had been pitched. Digging through it, he found a few well-gnawed bones (the rats had been at it again last night, he noticed) that still had a few chunks of meat on them. Tossing them to the old cyclopskin, Brokk reckoned that in another year or so he'd be able to take on Old Gork—and then it would be the old male fetching him his breakfast. Now *that* was a pleasant thought!

Old Gork settled down in a corner and chewed on his bones. Brokk moved back out to the cave entrance, eager to see what the other males were up to. On his way he passed the tribe's good-luck mascot, Watcher—a gurokka Gulokk had captured and dragged back to the cave.[11] Watcher floated serenely near the cave entrance, tethered by a short rope tied to a large rock that prevented it from straying and harming the slaves or sheep. The gurokka served several purposes: it was a line of defense for the cave, a tribal pet requiring little upkeep, and a constant reminder of the days when the tribe had served a beholder-god, Jzemnix. Fortunately, the adventuring band that attacked the tribe and their god had managed to slay Jzemnix before being overcome themselves by the cyclopskin. That had been a truly lucky day: the tribe had not only gotten rid of their god but also gained their three slaves!

Gulokk and Brugar were gathering weapons, preparing for a hunt. They each selected three sturdy spears from the tribe's stock; each warrior grabbed up his lucky bardiche as well.[12]

"I will go with you," offered Brokk, eager as always to be accepted into the company of the adults.

"You will stay here with the females and the slaves," countered Gulokk, equally eager to keep irritating children from his presence whenever possible. "Make yourself useful, though, and grab a skin of kragh."[13] Brokk did as he was bid and watched the two males saunter off down the mountain. "I will guard the cave!" he called to the leader; Gulokk merely waved his hand as if swatting an annoying fly and continued walking. Pride stung, Brokk grabbed a spear and stood at the cave's entrance, trying his best to look fierce.

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7. Because their single eye is directly above their nose, cyclopskin do not have "bridges" to their noses. Instead, a cyclopskin's nose is broad and flat, with wide nostrils. The oversized nostrils allow for a greater air intake in the higher altitudes, where many mountain-dwelling cyclopskin lair.

8. "Favored female" status is often not based upon physical attractiveness, but rather on storytelling ability. In cyclopskin society, the females are the keepers of the spoken history of the tribe (cyclopskin do not have a written language). They actually must keep track of two separate histories: the "official" history, in which all benefits are attributed to the current tribal leader (the strongest male), and the "real" history, which by necessity is spoken of only among the females. As might be expected, the "official" history changes each time a new male takes over leadership of the tribe. At that time, a new "favored female" may be chosen, based upon which female can present the new leader with the most impressively revised "official" history (starring himself, of course).

9. Cyclopskin mature quickly—another evolutionary adaptation to counter their often short life spans. A cyclopskin reaches adulthood by nine or ten and has an average life span of 35 to 40 years.

10. Cyclopskin occasionally breed with members of other humanoid species. Most unions do not result in offspring, with a the few exceptions. Cyclopskin/orc crossbreeding results in larger, one-eyed orcs. As their single eye is reminiscent of the one-eyed orcish god Gruumsh, these half-breed orcs often become tribal shamans or witch doctors.

Unions between cyclopskin and ettins result in an ettin-sized, two-headed creature with a single eye on each head. (See the "biclops" entry by Spike Y. Jones in *Dragon Magazine* #172.) Fortunately, humans and demihumans cannot breed with cyclopskin.

11. Unlike most other mammals, cyclopskin are immune to the rhizomes produced by gas spores ("gurokka" in the cyclopskin language) and can therefore touch them without harm. As a result, cyclopskin often keep gas spores as "pets" or "lucky guardians" in their caves. They like the fact that gas spores have a single large eye. (Cyclopskin ignore the smaller, eyelike organs on the ends of the rhizome growths.) In fact, cyclopskin are preternaturally disposed toward liking beholders and ropers for the same reason, but unfortunately they have no natural resistance to the attacks of these creatures. (Some beholders make use of cyclopskin minions; these beholders are generally believed to be gods by the cyclopskin tribes they dominate.)

Cyclopskin bands that domesticate sheep or goats, or those with mammalian slaves (such as humans and demihumans) must take precautions to keep them safe from their gurokka. This is usually done by tethering the gas spore in place or putting it in a cage. Being well aware of the gas spore's explosive power, cyclopskin occasionally use gas spores as last-ditch weapons in defense of their cave, throwing the creatures at invading dragons or wyverns looking for a quick cyclopskin meal.

12. Cyclopskin prefer simple weapons—clubs, spears, slings, and bardiches. The clubs can be either standard size or, more commonly, great clubs (see *The Complete Guide to Humanoids*, page 112, for details). The cyclopskin bardiche is a stone axe head mounted on a 5' wooden shaft. Cyclopskin have simple battle tactics: they see a foe and immediately close to fight using clubs or bardiches. The spears and oversized slings (which inflict 1–6 hp damage) are used only if the enemy is out of range, and also for the rare occasions cyclopskin go out to hunt.

Occasionally, cyclopskin fill their slings with a handful of small rocks and pebbles. Such "buckshot" spreads over a larger area, negating the –2 penalty on missile attack rolls by dint of having a better chance of hitting their target with at least one of the stones. A natural 20 inflicts 2d6 + 4 hp damage as a result of the target being hit more than once. On the down side, it takes a full round to reload a sling with such "buckshot."

Because of their monocular vision and resultant lack of depth perception, cyclopskin strike at –2 to hit (but not to damage) with most missile weapons. For this reason, they put little stock in ownership of missile weapons; slings and spears are community property, to be used by any tribe member requiring them. Melee weapons, on the other hand, are more reliable, inflicting greater damage to the cyclopskin's enemies (owing in no small part to the brutes' enormous Strength, which adds +4 to all melee weapon damage)—thus, nobody had better mess with a cyclopskin's club or bardiche. These weapons are private property, and taking another's melee weapon is grounds for a fight, often to the death.

Cyclopskin are more than willing to make use of captured weapons, but as metalsmithing is unknown to them, they do not manufacture swords, daggers, or the like.

13. Kragh is an alcoholic beverage, much like the koumiss, or fermented mare's milk, enjoyed by the Mongols of the Asian steppes. Kragh is made from either goat's or sheep's milk.

As much as pretending to be a fearsome sentry assuaged the young cyclopskin's pride, it got boring rather quickly. Time passed; he amused himself by repeatedly throwing his spear at a tree, by gathering up pebbles and seeing how far he could throw them down the mountainside, by watching the females carve spearheads out of stone,[14] and by picking berries from the bushes that grew near the cave. Once a squirrel came near; Brokk threw the spear but came nowhere close to hitting it. The animal scampered off to safety.

Out of ways to amuse himself, Brokk approached Gruba and asked for a story. Always eager to speak the tribe's history, Gruba gladly complied.

"I tell the tale of the wicked troll," intoned Gruba. The other females stopped their carving and paid attention, listening not only to the favored female's words but to her storytelling technique as well.

"This was back in the days of the beholder-god Jzemnix, before Gulokk tired of his demands upon us and slew him. There were many trolls in these mountains in those days, and they often preyed upon us as if we were sheep!" This last word brought a gasp among the listeners, Brokk included. Imagine, he thought, a creature able to bring down a powerful cyclopskin as easily as we slay a sheep! The mind staggered.

"In exchange for our worship, Jzemnix was a protector to our people. He kept the trolls and the dragons, the tigers and the wyverns at bay. Or ..." Gruba said, looking around at each member of her audience, "he was supposed to. But Jzemnix was a bad god! While he wandered the mountains in search of other gods, a fierce troll snuck up on our tribe. Great were its claws! Wicked were its teeth! Mighty was its hunger!

"The troll struck with a wild fury. Many warriors met its attack, but with every swipe of the monster's claws, another cyclopskin fell dead.

"Finally, Gulokk approached the troll. He hefted his lucky bardiche in his mighty hands, and the troll knew fear! Jzemnix knew fear too, for he knew that Gulokk would kill the troll and show us all that we did not need a useless god! So Jzemnix raced to the scene, and the troll ran away. But before it did, it snatched up a dead warrior in each of its wicked claws—and that night, the sounds of the creature feasting, tearing flesh and snapping bones, could be heard for many miles."

Her story finished, Gruba returned to the spearhead she was carving. Reluctantly, the other females followed suit. Brokk, bored again, looked for something else to do.

Fortunately, the sheep were being herded out of the cave to graze. Turogg, a male only a few years older than Brokk, gave him the choice of watching the sheep or the slaves. Thinking it over, Brokk chose the slaves. Sheep were boring. So were slaves, for the most part, but at least the young cyclopskin could lord over the slaves—sheep were never properly intimidated. Turogg gathered up a spear and his lucky club and led the sheep higher up the mountain where the good grazing was to be found.

That left only Old Gork, the three females, and the slaves with Brokk. He gathered up the slave restraints—lengths of leather cord used to hobble them at the ankles to prevent them from fleeing—from a pile on the floor and beckoned them over. Woman, usually eager to comply with the cyclopskin's demands, cringed behind Man and Elf as they ambled over. She shivered as

14. While females are not permitted to use weapons, they are usually in charge of making them. The males are too lazy to do it themselves, and they don't wish to delegate the task to slaves. (Disgruntled slaves and hand weapons are never a good mix.) The cyclopskin females become quite good at fashioning spearheads and axe heads, whittling down wooden shafts for spears and bardiches, and sewing together leather slings. The males reserve club production for themselves, as this usually entails nothing more than finding a sturdy tree limb.

Brokk tied her ankles, fearful at the nearness of the brute. Brokk grinned smugly at her obvious fear.

Once the three slaves had been hobbled, Brokk gave them each a crudely made basket and sent them waddling down the mountainside with a prod of his spear. Old Gork looked up from the cave interior, grunted once, and returned to his rat-hunting among the bone-piles, ever searching for fresh meat.

The trip down the mountainside was boring, as expected. The slaves were listless, so firmly entrenched in their servitude it seemed pointless to have to guard them. Brokk almost wished they'd try to escape or something, so he could put a stop to it. That would impress the adults, singlehandedly quelling a slave revolt!

But no such luck. The closest thing Brokk got to a slave revolt was when he caught Elf grumbling aloud to the others. "Shuddup up there!" bellowed the cyclopskin,[15] whacking Elf on the side of the head with his spear and causing him to fall to the ground. The other two slaves helped him back up and then resumed their trek in glowering silence.

It was midafternoon by the time Brokk's slaves (for that was how he thought of them, without others of his kind around) had filled the baskets with sufficient foodstuffs—mushrooms and tubers, mostly, with some wild berries and scraggly weeds thrown in as well.[16] He was leading them back up the mountain and was finally within sight of the cave, disgusted with the pathetically slow progress of the maimed elf, when he heard shouts coming from above. It was Turogg's voice, roaring a battle challenge. There was also the bleating of frightened sheep.

Brokk was in a quandary. There was a battle up ahead—a chance to fight! And yet, if he left the slaves, they might escape. But a battle! Brokk twisted his head back and forth, looking first at his hobbled charges and then back up the mountain, at the sounds of combat. What to do? What to do?

Finally, he came upon a solution. Grabbing Man's head in one hand and Elf's in the other, he smacked their heads together—clunk! Both slumped unconscious to the ground. Woman shrieked and went to Man's aid. "Stay there," warned Brokk, then grabbed his spear and raced up the mountainside, shouting for Gork.

Old Gork poked his head out of the cave to see what all the commotion was about. "The slaves," panted Brokk, pointing down the mountainside. "See to the slaves!" Then he was past the cave, racing to the pasture lands above. Old Gork grunted, grabbed up a spear, and limped down to find the slaves. He grumbled to himself as he walked.

Brokk, out of breath, followed the sounds of frightened sheep and popped up onto a flat stretch of ground. There he saw the green, hunched back of an enormous troll—just like from Gruba's story! The powerful creature had one arm raised above its misshapen head, and Turogg dangled in its grasp. The cyclopskin's feet kicked feebly in the air, his hands desperately trying to pull the troll's gnarled green hand away from his windpipe. Turogg's face was turning blue, his single eye bulging as if about to pop.[17]

The troll's back was to Brokk. Stopping only long enough to tighten his grip on the spear, Brokk charged the fearsome creature. The stone tip of the spear made a pleasant tearing sound as it ripped through the troll's back. Unfortunately, it plunged right through the vile creature's body and impaled Turogg through the belly as well.

The troll dropped Turogg and spun around to face this new threat. Of course, the weight of the falling cyclopskin, still pinned to the spear that pierced the troll's body, threw the troll off balance, and it landed awkwardly atop its one-eyed prey. Brokk, now weaponless, found his tribe-mate's lucky club lying in the grass a few feet away. Turogg did not look like he'd be offering any complaints, so Brokk grabbed up the weapon and brought it down onto the troll's head. There was a satisfying thunk as he caved in the creature's skull, but that didn't stop the hideous troll's movement. Half of its head caved in, it still wriggled in an attempt to get free of the spear. Brokk brought the club down again, and again, and again, crushing the troll to a bloody pulp. Turogg's body didn't fare much better. Then again, he was already dead.

Thoroughly winded, Brokk sat down to catch his breath. The sheep had spread out in all directions, but now that the excitement was over, they settled down and returned to their grazing. Brokk thought about trying to gather them together but didn't have the energy.

Then, several minutes after Brokk had killed the troll, it started moving again, struggling to get up. Brokk picked up Turogg's club and bashed the creature until it stopped moving. He kept a wary eye on it, and sure enough, it started moving again a few minutes later. Brokk kept up the routine, killing the troll over and over again every few minutes, scaring the sheep, until finally, some time later, Gulokk and Brugar appeared.

"What the—?" sputtered Gulokk, amazed at the sight of the dead troll. He looked at Brokk with admiration clearly showing in his eye. "My son," he said. "My son, the warrior!"[18] Brokk felt his chest swell with pride.

Gulokk quickly took control over the situation. He and Brugar pulled the spear out of the battered troll's body, dragged it off of Turogg's stiffening corpse, and stretched it out on the grass. With a mighty swing of his bardiche, Gulokk severed the troll's head and sent Brokk scampering after it. Brugar, meanwhile, did the same with the troll's hands. Then, gathering up the severed appendages, Gulokk pitched them off the side of the mountain in three different directions to prevent them from reat-

15. Cyclopskin speak the common language of giants among themselves, although some individuals may also learn to speak an additional language as well: usually the Common tongue or either the hill giant or ogre dialect.

16. While cyclopskin prefer a diet of meat—any meat—they can live off of nearly any animal or plant diet. During the harsh mountain winters, cyclopskin have learned not to be particular about what they eat, so long as they eat.

17. A cyclopskin's eye tends to bug out somewhat anyway. The position of its eye grants the creature a wide range of vision, nearly 180 degrees in front of it. Cyclopskin rarely have vision trouble (such as nearsightedness or farsightedness); this is probably an evolutionary adaptation: with only one eye, it's important that the cyclopskin retains strong vision.

taching to the rest of the troll's body, as they were wont to do.

Brokk helped drag the troll back to the cave. "Old Gork!" cried out Gulokk. "We have brought you fresh meat!" The females came forward at the call, but Gulokk sent them up the mountain to watch over the sheep. "This is a warrior's meal!" he cried out to them. "You will feast later, with the slaves! Gork, where are you? My fine son Brokk has killed a troll!" Gulokk searched the cave in all directions: Old Gork was not to be seen. "Where is he?" he asked.

"I sent him down to look after the slaves," ventured Brokk.

"Old Gork tending slaves?" roared Gulokk. He slapped Brokk on the side of his head. "Fool! Idiot!"

"But they were hobbled ..." began Brokk.

"Pah!" spat the leader. "Even hobbled, they can outdistance Old Gork! Come, quickly!" And he raced out of the cave, Brugar and Brokk on his heels.

It was too late. Gulokk and the others came upon Old Gork pushing Elf up the mountain with his spear. "Where are the other slaves?" demanded Gulokk.

Old Gork snorted in contempt and pointed down the mountain with his thumb. "They ran. You can go after them if you like, but I'm too old. Caught this one, though."

"I did not try to flee!" sputtered the elf. "The others ran when the young cyclops[19] left us, but I didn't! I— I tried to stop them!"

Gulokk pointed down at the slave's feet. "Your bonds are gone," he pointed out, smacking Elf in the side of the head with his fist. The slave crumpled over. "Drag him back to the pen," said Gulokk. Then, looking directly at Brokk, he said, "This is your fault! Find those slaves at once! Brugar, go with the idiot!" The two cyclopskin rushed off. As he raced down the mountainside, Brokk realized he had fallen from the leader's prized son to the tribal idiot. Such were the ways of luck, he decided.[20]

That night, Brokk and Brugar returned to the cave empty-handed. The two

18. Since most cyclopskin don't keep regular mates (breeding with whoever's available in the tribe), questions of paternity are seldom answered accurately. The tribal leader usually takes credit for being the father of particularly strong warriors, as obviously they could inherit such strength only from him. Of course, once the leader is killed and a new one takes his place, the new leader takes credit for being the "true" father of the powerful young males of the tribe. Cyclopskin are thus generally never aware of their true fathers.

19. Many people don't differentiate between true Cyclopes and their smaller cousins. Whereas the cyclopskin stand only 7' tall, a cyclops is normally about 20' tall, able to hurl boulders at a range of 150' like true giants (causing 4–10 hp damage, not 410 as incorrectly printed in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ book, page 133). The name "Cyclops" means "wheel-eyed," named because their eyes are said to be as big and round as wagon wheels.

20. Most cyclopskin do not bother worshipping gods. The main exception to this rule is when a band of cyclopskin serves as a beholder's minions—then, they revere the beholder as their all-powerful god. After all, a beholder as a god makes perfect sense to them: the creature is very powerful, has one big eye in the center of its head (like them), and can actually be seen (and thus no effort is required to believe in the beholder's existence—this doesn't hold true for other, less visible gods).

Instead of a god, cyclopskin fervently believe in luck as a powerful force of nature that affects every aspect of their lives. If they have a successful hunt, luck was with them that day. If their favorite weapon is dropped down a crevice and lost, it is an unlucky day. A cyclopskin's change in fortune is blamed on others whenever possible; a cyclopskin "scapegoat" is chosen as the cause for the individual's misfortune, and a fight usually ensues. If the scapegoat loses, it is believed by the winner that his luck will now change for the better. If the scapegoat wins, then he has proven that he wasn't responsible for the bad luck, and the challenger must find another cyclopskin to blame for his misfortune. Such luck-fights are limited to the males, since how could a lowly female have any effect on a male's luck?

Since most cyclopskin bands do not worship gods, they do not have a shaman or witch doctor among them. In fact, magic is seen as a powerful and unnatural force to be feared and destroyed whenever possible. A band of cyclopskin attacking a party of adventurers always targets wizards and priests first—warriors they understand, but you never know when some robed human will start throwing *fireballs* at you simply by pointing a little stick in your direction. Magical items known as such are usually discarded by cyclopskin in an attempt to ward of their "unlucky" properties. On the other hand, cyclopskin often wield magical swords or other weapons, simply because of their ignorance of

slaves were gone, vanished without a trace.[21] Brokk slumped into the cave, ready for a night of abuse from the tribal leader.

Surprisingly, Gulokk's mood had mellowed during their absence—no doubt a result of the abundant feast of troll-meat. As Brokk tore a piece off of the green-fleshed troll corpse, he was amazed as the missing piece started growing back.

"Great, huh?" asked Old Gork as he settled down beside Brokk. "You did good, boy."

"But the slaves ..." began Brokk, tears starting to well unbidden in the corners of his eye.[22] He blinked them back, not wishing to appear foolish, even before Old Gork.

"Pah!" spat the elder cyclopskin. "Who needs 'em? Now that we got a troll for food, there's less work for a slave to do! We don't need them to gather as much food when we got all the meat we'll ever need right here!" Old Gork cackled in delight. "Besides, we still got us a slave, all right. He'll do plenty for now. And maybe, if we're lucky, someday we'll get more!"

Later that night, back in his bed of mismatched hides, Brokk thought back on the day's events. He had killed a troll. That was lucky. He had also killed Turogg and allowed two slaves to escape. That was unlucky. He had gained Turogg's lucky club, though; that was lucky. He had become an adult in the eyes of the tribe, too: definitely lucky. Still, he'd miss Woman, even though she was so ugly. Unlucky. But then, he did have a belly full of troll flesh, and was more comfortably full than he had been in a long time.

Oh well, thought Brokk. All in all, a lucky day. He rolled over, scratched at a few pestering fleas, and was soon asleep.

Johnathan M. Richards has amassed quite a collection of lead figures. He refuses to paint them on the grounds that, unpainted, they're fine statuary. Painted, they're toys.

their magical properties. If the *long sword +2* he took from a slain adventurer allows a cyclopskin to hit his enemies in combat more often than usual, surely that's because of the cyclopskin's skill, or because the weapon is "lucky," not because of any inherent magical power in the sword.

21. Cyclopskin are universally recognized as pathetic hunters and even worse trackers. Evading a cyclopskin in the wild is not difficult at all. On the other hand, tracking one is almost embarrassingly easy, as they make no attempts to hide their trails or cover their tracks merely plod along in their bumbling way. Even those without the tracking proficiency can follow a cyclopskin's trail one time out of three; those with the tracking ability gain a +4 bonus to their attempts when following cyclopskin. As a noted ranger once put it, when it comes to a cyclopskin's knowledge of tracking skills, the word that best describes them is "clueless."

22. Cyclopskin have two tear ducts, one at each side of their single eye. Since they have just the one eye, evolution has made it easier for them to keep it free of grit and dust.

The Ecology of the Dakon

by Nick Parenti

Remember the dakon? An old race made new for the AD&D® game

Many of the creatures cataloged in the AD&D® 1st Edition game's tomes are no longer utilized, their gaming potential now unnoticed. This is disappointing, since many of them diverge from the basic Tolkien-style races and monsters in both appearance and characteristics.

The following expanded description of the FIEND FOLIO® tome's dakon (a monster not found in the FIEND FOLIO appendix to the AD&D 2nd Edition Monstrous Compendium) is provided as an example of what can be accomplished with limited resources (its original description was only two paragraphs long). By choosing new behavioral, cultural, and regional themes, I constructed a more colorful and useful creature.

A brief synopsis of the creature's statistics follows, fleshed out for both editions of the AD&D game, with the two paragraphs that originally described it (edited slightly):

Dakon (1st Edition): FRQ uncommon; #APP 6-60; AC 5; MV 6"; HD 1 + 1; %LAIR 50%; TT E; #AT 2; Dmg 1-10/1-10; SA nil; SD nil; MR standard; INT average; SZ M; PSI nil; LVL/XP I/20 +2 per hp.

Dakon (2nd Edition): C/T Tropical/jungle; FRQ uncommon; ORG tribal; ACTIVE day; DIET omnivore; INT average; TREAS E (community); AL LN; #APP 6-60 (village); AC 5; MV 6; HD 1 + 1; THAC0 19; #AT 2; Dmg 1-10/1-10; SA missile); SD nil; MR nil; SZ M; ML 11-12; XP 35 (more for multilevel warriors and spellcasters).

A shabby, intelligent ape with a reasonable grasp of the common tongue, a dakon never attacks except in self-defense or to recover treasure stolen from it. When it attacks, it does so with a +2 bonus to hit because of its strength and the sharpness of its claws, using each clawed hand to inflict 1-10 hit points of damage.

The dakon is usually a light brown color with green eyes and black hands. It is found in all locations except near large expanses of water. It is normally on good terms with lawful humans and demi-humans, though it has learned to distrust the motives of humanoids and so will not communicate with them.

The revised dakon

In the jungles of tropical continents live the gorilla-like dakons, who are seldom seen elsewhere. These advanced primates are powerful and proud, and they guard their culture with the same fierceness with which they guard their young.

Highly social beings, dakons can be found living in villages, towns, and even cities. They build their homes in the largest of trees but are equally able to construct their thatched houses on stilts. Climbing is no problem, as all dakon can climb trees and rough surfaces in calm, unhurried circumstances; even in tense, combative situations, they have a 99% chance to avoid falling. Unaccustomed to using stone for building, their communities are surrounded with wooden palisades for protection.

A dakon village has under 100 residents. Towns have populations ranging from 100 to 500, and cities rarely are home to more than 1,000. Children and young adults make up 40% of any community; adult females constitute 35%, and the remaining 25% are adult males. Mated couples never have more than two children at one time and usually remain together for life. Dakons have character classes among their more powerful members; of the males, one in 10 is a warrior of level 1-6 (1st-level warriors start with maximum hit points).

Each dakon community has a dominant male leader called the *ghana,* or war chief. His duties include leading the adult males of his group in the defense of their community and carrying out the policies and commands of the region's *kaya maghan* ("king of the gold"). A ghana may choose his mate and gets first pick of any communal property, including food. The most powerful ghanas compete to become the kaya maghan when the latter position is vacant because of forced retirement or death. The ghana is always the highest-level warrior in the community.

Competitions for the title of ghana are held in each community about every five years, or sooner as the result of an existing ghana's death, cowardice, or failure to carry out his duties. The competition, open only to males, includes a ritual show of strength and fierceness through a visual display that always includes bared teeth, war cries, chest-pounding, and excessive arm-flailing. In the end, the most impressive and persistent competitor is left standing as his former peers skulk nearby, submissively avoiding eye contact with their new leader. Occasionally, two individuals prove worthy; in this event, the community splits. The senior ghana remains in the old community while the junior ghana leads his followers to settle a new community. In the past, such incidents in the competition for kaya maghan have lead to brief periods of civil war.

The kaya maghan is named so because his office gives him ownership of all gold mines worked by his people. He keeps whatever amount of gold he wishes and distributes the rest as gifts to his most loyal retainers, ghanas, and warriors. The dakon love gold and spare no expense in adorning themselves in gold jewelry. The mines are run by local ghana and worked by dakon criminals and slaves. Slaves are taken from the many other races found in the jungles near the dakon, such as gnolls, banderlog, kobolds, humans, elves, orcs, and tasloi.

Although dakons tend to dominate and look down upon the banderlog (the baboonlike folk from the 1st Edition *Monster Manual II*), the banderlog view the dakon as kin and have been known to fight alongside them against the brutal, evil, and often mad yuan-ti, qullan, tasloi, and gnolls. Part of this may be due to the dakons' possession of a form of beast-mastery over other primates; they are known to keep monkeys, gibbons, chimps, and gorillas as pets and guard animals. Although harder to train, carnivorous apes are also maintained in much the same way that other races keep war dogs. In fact, any nonhuman primates may be

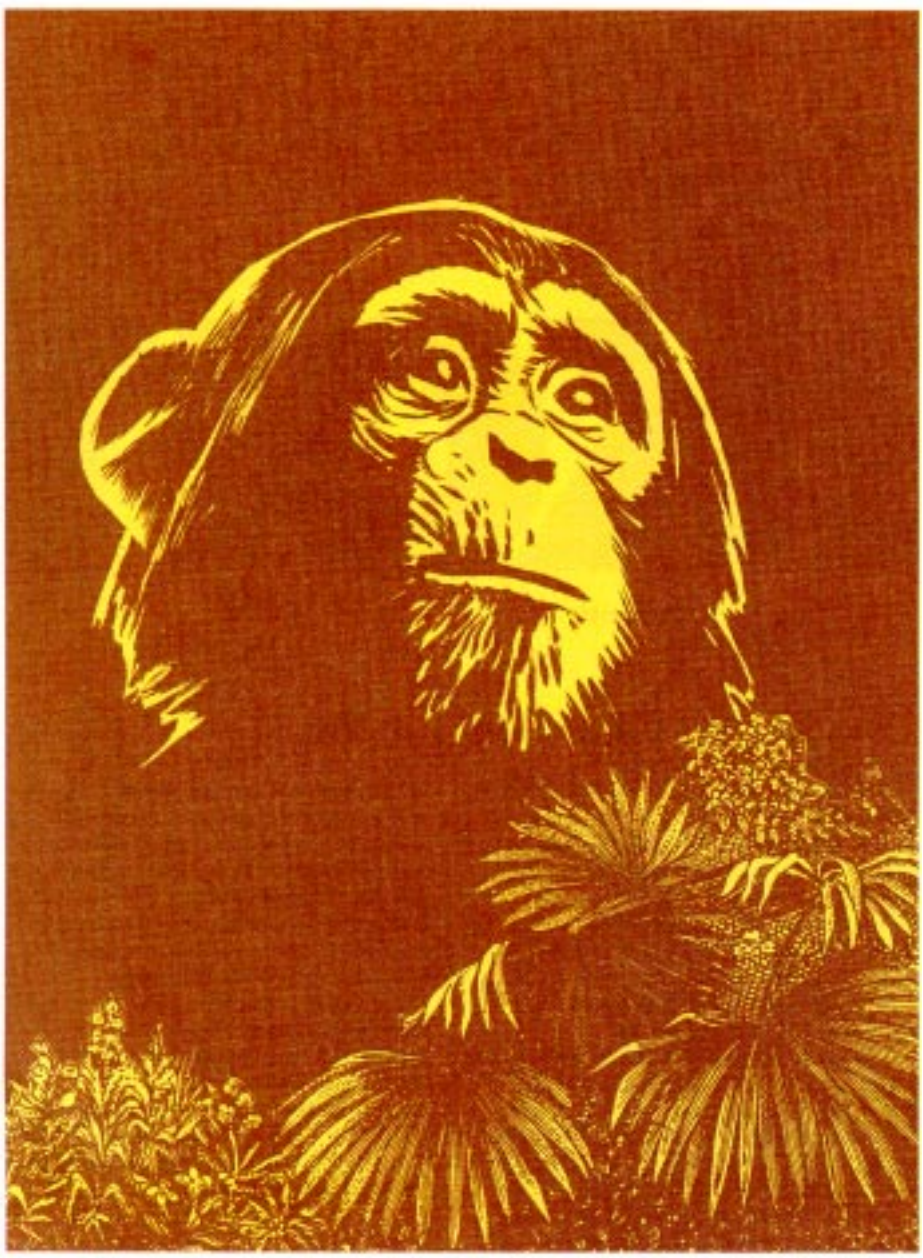


Table 1
Dakon Ability Scores

Ability	Min. *	Max. *
Strength	15 (12)	18/00 (18)
Intelligence	3	13
Wisdom	3	18
Dexterity	8	18
Constitution	12	18
Charisma	3	18**

* Scores in parentheses are for female dakon.
** This applies to dakons only; the maximum charisma score to a non-dakon is 12.

subject to a dakon's innate *animal friendship* ability, which functions like the cleric spell but without the use of a holy symbol. A dakon need only approach a primate with an intelligence of at least 1 (animal) and at most 7 (low), then spend one hour speaking to and physically touching the prospective follower. The primate has a 1% chance per hit point it possesses of resisting the dakon's wishes; only full, unwounded hit-point totals are considered here. If the primate resists the dakon's influence, it will leave peacefully. Otherwise, it follows the dakon and becomes its petlike associate, able to learn whatever tricks it can be taught. Dakon care well for their primate followers but, because of the problems in caring and feeding for them, usually avoid having many "helpers."

Dakon prefer the company of their own kind. They have good relations with other intelligent apes, such as the grommams from MC7, the first SPELLJAMMER® appendix to the *Monstrous Compendium*. They tolerate the presence of banderlog and other primatelike or monkeylike beings, such as the hadozee from MC7. Humans, demihumans, and needlemen are regarded neutrally; humanoids and giants are greeted with antipathy (and threats of attack); qullan, tasloi, and yuan-ti are hated and attacked on sight.

Dakon are almost exclusively traders and hunter/gatherers. They practice agriculture on a small scale by cultivating plots for individual needs. The males hunt on foot or elephant-back using spears, javelins, blow guns, or clubs, gaining bonuses in melee for their 18/91 strengths (+2 to hit, +5 to damage; all other lifting and door-opening abilities apply). These weapons are the same ones they use in war; they use their sharp claws only when they have no other weapons handy. (Dakons have never learned wrestling.) One or two carnivorous apes are often used to track, flush, and retrieve game. Females and children are organized into foraging parties with armed male escorts. The escorts check and maintain the community's traps while the foragers comb the jungle in search of food and natural medicines.

All the food gathered, as with most other property except for gold, is community owned. The local ghana chooses what is his; the rest is divided equally among the populace. Occasionally an individual's bravery in battle or prowess in hunting earns him extra rewards, usually in the form of gold jewelry. Bracers, arm bands, anklets, and head pieces predominate among males, while females prefer necklaces, nose rings, and earrings.

Possessing little skill as blacksmiths, their weapons and tools are made of wood, stone, ivory, and bone. A dakon war club is known as a *knobkerrie* and may be elaborately shaped and carved. Wooden shields covered with colorfully painted leather are common, as are helmets made from the skulls of past opponents (AC 3 to head at best). Dakons do not use armor, as they consider it cowardly. They sometimes ride trained elephants into battle; each elephant is ridden by a mahout armed with a club and a warrior armed with one or more missile weapons (including rocks). During wartime, a logical ghana leads most of the adult males of his community into battle. A few adult males are left behind with the old and adolescent to defend their homes. Females are expected to protect and care for the children and are ferocious if threatened. Females always attempt escape with their young before resorting to violence.

Drum towers in each dakon community are used to pass news, report disasters, coordinate relief, and make public announcements from ghana of the kaya maghan. During battles, the signal drums of the dakon can be heard directing the action and making reports. Dakons also imitate animal noises, howling to communicate over long distances. All dakon know at least a few drum signals and howl-calls. Aside from speaking their own language (which is based in large part on hoots, grunts, finger and hand gestures, and body postures), most dakons are capable of limited communication with apes and know other racial languages common in their area. Most dakon are at least able to understand the common tongue if the conversation is kept simple, but very few are fluent in it.

Dakon religion is based on the existence of a spirit world where fiends and their ancestors' spirits live. The spirits, which are lawful neutral and equal at most to demigods, influence the material world through magic and possession. Dakon shamans are known as *sakirs* and perform community service with the powers they receive from their ancestors. Each community has a 25% chance of having a sakir of level 2-7, who will have 1-3 initiates living with him and his family. Before an initiate can acquire the title and power of a sakir, he must survive a year as a hermit with no shelter but the jungle's trees. His task is to commune with the spirit world. If he survives, he gains the knowledge to pen spells, which may be written on parchmentlike tree bark with berry inks. Scrolls may be manufactured only by 7th-level sakirs; they cannot make potions or other magical items.

Occasionally during these hermitages, initiates discover that tempting powers can be learned from fiends. Those who seek this arcane knowledge become zaras (witch doctors). Zaras remain hermits, and most maintain their alignments, though with great difficulty. A few zaras who seek power too quickly or in too great a quantity often become the servants of their demonic teachers. Eventually, their alignments change to chaotic evil; in extreme cases, they become possessed. Zaras may make scrolls at their highest level, too.

Dakons are active traders. Dakon merchants travel, often on elephants, in large, armed caravans. Merchandise is carried by the elephants or on the heads of caravan members. Trained gorillas and carnivorous apes are employed as guards and assist in foraging for food. These caravans bring the fruits of the dakons' mines (gold, silver, gems, and diamonds), as well as exporting ivory and slaves to other communities in exchange for metallic mining tools, finished jewelry, fabrics, rugs, and any other richly colorful items considered exotic by the dakons.

Dakon justice is quick and harsh. Although there is no death penalty, a ghana or sakir who tries a suspected criminal has several options as he is both judge and jury. Punishments include banishment, slavery, public service, mine labor, and corporal punishments. All punishments are accompanied by the permanent removal of a hand-wide strip of fur down the individual's back, the mark of a criminal. Due to the great shame this causes, crime is rare among dakons. Marked criminals often flee, sometimes becoming bandits to raid and steal for a living. Crimes in dakon society include theft, murder, adultery, cowardice in battle, destruction of community property, and failure to obey the kaya maghan. Local ghanas add to this list, often including the failure to obey the ghana or a sakir.

Dakons are offered for use as intriguing nonplayer characters for game campaigns in tropical areas. The tables with this article offer information on converting them into an NPC race with character classes; their use as player characters is left up to the players and DM™. Ω

Table 2
Dakon Class Statistics

Class	HD	Max. level	Weapons	Armor?	Shield?	Poison?
Warrior (fighter)	d10	10	spear, javelin, blow gun, dagger, knobkerrie (club)	helmet only	Yes	no
Sakir (priest)	d8	7	blow gun, knobkerrie (club)	helmet only	Yes	Yes
Zara (priest/wizard)	d8/d4	7/4	as per sakir	no	no	Yes

THE ECOLOGY OF THE DARK NAGA

Fool Me Twice

Never send a wizard to do a rat's job.

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Brad McDevitt

"THIS FIELD SESSION OF THE MONSTER HUNTERS Association is hereby opened," whispered Dreelix. To everyone's amusement, he pantomimed banging three times with an imaginary gavel in the air in front of him as he said it.

"You all know why we're here," Dreelix continued in a low whisper, casting a quick glance over his shoulder at the narrow, dark hole in the side of the hill. "Does everyone know what they're to do?"

"I can hear you out there, you know,"[1] called a voice from the hole.

Dreelix ignored him. "Buntleby, are you ready with that cloudkill spell?" he whispered.

"Certainly," replied Buntleby in a normal tone of voice. "But you realize that it'll probably have no effect on the creature."

"Shhh! Keep your voice down!"

"Why? It can obviously hear us."

"I can hear you just fine!" confirmed the naga from the hole. "But please, do carry on. Just ignore me. Pretend I'm not here—oh! But that would defeat the purpose, wouldn't it?"

"Go on, then," urged Dreelix.

Buntleby approached the naga's hole and hesitated. "I feel funny doing this, knowing that he knows what I'm doing," he said.

"Don't mind me," chirped the naga's voice. "It's OK—I don't mind being chased into a deep, dark hole by a bunch of crazed humans with some hair-brained scheme of cutting me up and turning me into a bunch of magical paraphernalia[2]—really, I don't mind at all."

"Sarcastic little begger," muttered Zantoullios.

"Still, I feel like a creep," said Buntleby.

"Go ahead," said Willowquisp. "I don't think it's going to work, anyway. As far as I know, dark nagas are immune to all

1. While a dark naga has no external ears, it does have a limited sense of hearing. Its snakelike body conducts ground vibrations to the inner ear via the bones of its skull, so a dark naga can "hear" footfalls approaching it, but air-transmitted sounds (like voices) are much more difficult for a dark naga to pick up.

To compensate, dark nagas have an inherent, continuous *ESP* ability that allows them to pick up the surface thoughts of anyone within 80 feet. This ability allows them to "hear" spoken words mentally (since the words are in the speaker's mind as he says them), although it doesn't allow them to "hear" a finger-snap, belch, hiccup, or other nonverbal sounds not transmitted through the ground. A dark naga can "hear" everything being spoken aloud within the 80' range of its *ESP* power, although it can only concentrate on one voice at a time if more than one person is talking.

Oddly enough, the dark naga's *ESP* power makes it immune to attempts at mind-reading. This includes spells, magical items, and psionics.

2. The cranial portions of dark naga skulls are often used to craft *medallions of ESP* or *amulets of proof against detection and location*. The rubbery, bag-like organs in their gullets (see note 18) are sometimes used in the manufacture of *bags of holding*. Dark naga blood is one of several possible types of blood used to empower a *periapt of proof against poison* and is also employed in the creation of *potions of ESP* and *oil of acid resistance*. Finally, the dark naga's hide itself is sought for its unusual color, and the poison sac near the creature's tail spike can be siphoned to harvest a single dose of sleep venom.

poisons; I don't see why your cloudkill spell should be any different."[3]

"OK, then, stand back everyone," Buntleby warned. As he intoned the arcane words and performed the intricate finger-gestures necessary to trigger the spell, a cloud of ghastly green vapors began to form like fog from the ground. At a gesture from the young wizard, the noxious cloud billowed into the naga's hole and sank below the earth.

"Say, this isn't so bad," came the naga's voice. "In fact, I wouldn't—Gack! Aagh! IT BURNS! GODS, HOW IT BURNS!"

Buntleby, horrorstruck, put his hands to his face at the sounds of the naga's pitiable cries. "What have I done?" he cried, as the naga's torturous screams became more and more pain-ridden. "I didn't mean for him to suffer like this!"

"MAKE IT STOP! MAKE IT STOP!" screamed the naga. Buntleby staggered back in horror; Willowquisp grabbed him by the shoulders and led him back from the creature's hole. Ozzie, Buntleby's faithful osquip familiar, trotted to his master's feet and licked his ankles in sympathy with a raspy tongue. "There, there," comforted the elderly sage. "I'm surprised that it worked, but this should all be over with soon."

"THE PAIN! OH, THE UNHOLY PAIN!" The Monster Hunters all looked at each other guiltily. Grindle the Coin-Counter, all three hundred pounds of him, looked about to burst into tears. Lady Ablasta held a perfumed handkerchief to her face and looked away. Even Dreelix, who cared only for the money to be made from the magical items fashioned by the strange creatures his association hunted down and slew, looked a little green. And still the naga's tortured cries emanated from the hole.

"THE INHUMANITY! TO BE SLAIN IN SUCH A CRUEL FASHION! ALL FOR GREED—FOR THE SIMPLE LOVE OF MONEY! OH, WOE IS ME! THE PAIN—THE UNENDURABLE PAIN! NEVER HAVE I KNOWN SUCH AGONY! NEVER HAVE I SUFFERED SO! MY SCALES BURN LIKE HOT COALS! MY THROAT BLISTERS AND CHARS FROM WITHIN!"

"I can hear you out there, you know," called a voice from the hole.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Zantoullios, scowling.

"THESE POISONOUS FUMES! EACH GASP OF BREATH IS UNBEARABLE PAIN![4] EACH BEAT OF MY HEART SENDS THE POISON DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO MY PAIN-WRACKED BODY! OH, THE HORROR! THE HORROR!"

"He's sure got plenty of breath for somebody choking to death," observed the gangly wizard, hands on his hips. "What do you think, Dreelix?"

Dreelix wiped surreptitiously at a tear in his eye, then scowled back at Zantoullios. "He's faking!" he agreed.

"THE TERRIBLE, GUT-WRENCHING TORMENT! THE DREADFUL, MIND-NUMBING HORROR! THE AGONIZING, PANIC-INDUCING—"

"Oh, shut up down there!" Dreelix yelled. "We're on to your tricks!"

"Righty-ho," agreed the naga in a cheery voice. "What's next then?"

"Okay, so that didn't work," said Dreelix. "Let's move on to Plan B: Grindle, do you have the hook and bait?"

Grindle shrugged off his pack and removed a sturdy rope, to the end of which was attached a metal grappling hook. Rummaging through the pack, Grindle pulled out a roast chicken and stuck it onto the hook, careful all the while to keep the side where he had already taken a few nibbles hidden from view. "Okay," he said finally.

"This isn't going to work," lamented Willowquisp, shaking his head sadly. "This is an even dumber idea than the poison cloud."

"You were the one who said it was a carnivore,"[5] hissed Dreelix. "Plus, you said it had to swallow its food whole.[6] This'll work. Just give it a chance. Go ahead, Grindle."

Grindle walked up to the hole and paid out the rope, sending the roast

3. Dark nagas are immune not only to all normal and magical venoms and poisons, but also to all acids. In fact, many dark nagas habitually drink a vial of poison and then spit it out at opponents later in battle. Such poison-spitting attacks have a range of 10 feet; optionally, the naga can hold the poison in its mouth and add the poison effects to its normal bite damage of 1d4 hp. While far less common, a dark naga can also spit acid in a similar fashion.

4. Actually, like most snakes, nagas are able to go without breathing for some time. The standard sequence is: breathe out, breathe in, pause without breathing for awhile. The pause without breath is called *apnea*, and its duration depends upon the naga's activity. A resting and undisturbed naga can go without breathing for several minutes; during hibernation, the naga can actually go without breathing for several months at a time. (Cutaneous respiration—the exchange of gas through the creature's skin—provides the naga with enough oxygen and also disperses the buildup of carbon dioxide during these motionless periods.)

5. Given a choice, a dark naga would live a strictly carnivorous diet—they are especially fond of hot, fresh blood. However, being practical, they supplement their diet when necessary with lichen and the occasional green plant when prey is scarce.

6. The dark naga must swallow its prey whole, since it lacks the teeth necessary for chewing. (Its fangs are used only to stab prey and hold it in the naga's mouth.) Even though the dark naga has a human-like head, its lower jaw is hinged like that of a snake, allowing the creature to swallow prey larger around than itself. For the same reason, its ribs are flexible, and its scales can stretch to accommodate swallowed prey. An adult dark naga can swallow a victim of up to size M, although the prey must already be dead (or at least paralyzed with sleep venom) before the naga attempts to devour it—the creature cannot swallow prey in combat.

The easiest creature for a naga to swallow is a snake or snakelike creature: Being narrow in build and limbless, such creatures slide effortlessly into a naga's gullet. A dark naga will not eat another dark naga, but all other creatures, dead or alive (including other types of nagas) are fair game. The dark naga's immunity to venom makes even poisonous snakes easy prey.

chicken plummeting down to the naga. "Oh no!" he cried out in mock anguish.

"What's wrong, Grindle?" asked Dreelix on cue, bending close to the hole to make sure the naga would be able to hear him.

"My chicken! I dropped it, and it fell down the naga's hole! That was going to be my lunch!"

"This is embarrassing," muttered Buntleby to Willowquisp. The sage shook his head in agreement.

"Hey, what's this?" came the naga's voice from the hole. "Why, it looks like free food! Thanks up there!" There was a short pause, then the creature called up, "Hey, this is pretty good!"

"He fell for it!" cried Dreelix, wringing his hands together in anticipation. "Quick, pull him up!"

"He can't have fallen for it," reasoned Buntleby. "How could he talk to us if he had a roast chicken in his mouth?"

"No, I've got him—I can feel it!" cried Grindle, pulling the rope up hand over hand, the flab under his arms jiggling with each movement. Zantoullios gripped the end of his staff tightly, ready to bonk the naga over the head as soon as it appeared.

Sure enough, a human-sized head and snake-like body popped up out of the hole, attached to the end of Grindle's line. However, while the Monster Hunters expected the creature to be covered in dark scales,[7] this one was white—bone white. As more of the creature was pulled out into the open, the reason for this became apparent: it wasn't a dark naga after all, but merely an animated skeleton.[8]

Twin magic missiles shot out of its eyes and one bolted from its open mouth, striking the gangly wizard and bowling him over backward.

While the Monster Hunters stood motionless in shock, the creature opened its jaws wide and spit out the chicken impaled on Grindle's grappling hook. As if on cue, Zantoullios brought his staff crashing down upon the bone naga's skull, but it merely shrugged off the blow and attacked. Twin magic missiles shot out of its eyes and one bolted from its open mouth, striking the gangly wizard and bowling him over backward with a howl of surprise and pain.

Buntleby pushed Willowquisp back out of the way, knowing that the elderly sage was of little use and in considerable danger in a battle. Grindle, meanwhile, dropped his rope and rushed to close with the creature. It got in a couple of jabs with its tail spike, but the heavyset wizard managed to crush the bone naga's skull between his powerful hands, and the thing fell to the ground in pieces, each bone falling apart from the others. Winded, Grindle wiped his forehead with the back of one hand, shuffled over to the end of the rope, and retrieved his roast chicken. Brushing the dirt from it, he helped himself to a massive bite.

"Hey, bone nagas don't come cheap!" whined the dark naga petulantly from its hole. "I spent a lot of time on that one!"[9]

"Good work," said Dreelix, clapping Grindle on the shoulder.

Buntleby helped Zantoullios to his feet. "I'm fine, I'm fine," grumbled the gangly wizard, brushing off the dirt from his robes.

"Now what?" asked Willowquisp.

"We've got to get him out of there, out into the open," said Dreelix, fuming. "If we could just get within visual range of

7. Coloration varies among dark nagas: Most are either black or a deep, purplish-black, although there a few whose scales are a very dark blue. A dark naga's scales are so small as to be almost invisible to the naked eye, giving the creature a smooth, eel-like appearance (which is further enhanced by a crest along the top of the naga's head and back; this crest is the same color as the naga's scales). Regardless of scale color, the dark naga's eyes are yellow and glow eerily in low light.

8. The bone naga is an odd form of undead, created from the bones of a dark naga. Created by dark nagas (and some evil mages) as guardians, these fell creatures serve their masters with absolute loyalty, communicating with them silently through a limited form of telepathy (60' range).

The similarities between bone nagas and dark nagas are many: both attack twice each round, inflicting 1d4 points of damage with their fangs and 2d4 points of damage with their barbed tail spike. However, the bone naga's bite also temporarily drains 1 point of Strength. In addition, while a dark naga's tail spike requires victims to make a successful saving throw vs. poison or suffer an additional 1–2 points of damage and fall into a drugged sleep for 2d4 rounds, the bone naga's tail spike instead automatically (no saving throw) causes 1d4 points of of chilling damage (bringing its tail spike damage total to 3d4).

Both creatures cast spells as a 6th-level wizard (4/2/2), although a bone naga's spells are fixed when first created, cast by silent force of will (no verbal, somatic, or material components required), and return unbidden to the bone naga's mind 20 hours after use. Typical spells include *magic missile, blindness, flaming sphere,* and *lightning bolt*.

Bone nagas share the dark naga's immunity to all acids and poisons, plus have the standard undead immunities to *charm, hold, sleep*, death magic, and cold-based attacks. Further details on the bone naga are available in the *Monstrous Compendium® Annual Volume One*.

Because of their similar appearance (basically a human skull on a snake's skeleton) it is easy to mistake a bone naga for a necrophidius, or death worm (see the *Monstrous Manual™*, page 170). Closer examination shows the necrophidius lacks the bone naga's tail spike and has a solid lower jaw (unlike the bone naga, which shares the dark naga's two piece, detachable lower jaw). It should be noted that a naga drinking a *skeletal potion* could easily pass itself for either creature.

9. The process of creating a bone naga is long and exacting. At its heart is a specialized magical ritual known only to dark nagas and a few evil wizards.

The ritual requires the full skeleton of a dark naga personally known by the spellcaster (dark nagas often animate their slain comrades as bone nagas; this practice often creates distrust among dark nagas living and working together, as each one must worry about which of its "friends" is really harboring ulterior plans). The dead naga's body is arranged in a circle with the tip of its tail spike inside its own mouth, and the living naga crawls inside the circle thus formed. The living naga must chant a litany of arcane words over the dead one as its flesh decomposes naturally; this process can take many weeks, during which time the naga must not leave the circle formed by rotting naga's body. Once the skeleton has been stripped clean of all flesh, the rest of the ritual is completed, during which time the bone naga's spell arsenal is chosen and implanted. (Obviously, the spells must be known by the dark naga performing the ritual.) Finally, the bone naga is brought to unholy life by a temporary (and voluntary) draining of one-half of the dark naga's hit points; the dark naga can only heal this damage over time, at the rate of 1 hit point per day of rest. Because of the toll the animation of a bone naga places on the dark naga, bone nagas remain a rare commodity.

10. Not necessarily: A dark naga receives a +2 bonus to saving throws vs. *charm, sleep, hold*, and similar Enchantment/Charm spells. This bonus is due in part to the creature's exceptional Intelligence rating (16 is standard for the race).

11. Dark nagas give live birth to a squirming mass of 11–20 (1d10+10) young, which are immediately abandoned and left to survive on their own. While sharing the standard dark naga coloration, they otherwise appear to be foot-long worms—their human-like heads and barbed tail spikes don't develop until after their first molt. In the meantime, the immature nagas subsist on a diet of lichens, fungus, and molds.

After shedding their skin for the first time (a process known as *ecdysis*), the dark nagas develop their innate *ESP* powers and learn the languages of intelligent creatures around them. They continue to molt on an irregular basis (based upon their food intake—the more they eat, the larger they grow, until eventually they get "too big for their skin"), adding 6 inches or so with each molt until they reach their full size. The largest dark naga ever recorded was a full 12 feet long.

Because of their low metabolism, nagas can survive without food for extended periods of time. Therefore, when encountered in any numbers, the largest naga isn't necessarily the oldest, merely the most well fed.

the thing, one simple charm monster spell, and we'd be home free!"[10]

"Why don't you just come down here and get me?" taunted the naga from its hole. "Well, some of you, anyway—Grindle's obviously way too fat!" Grindle looked up from his chicken, shrugged, and returned to his meal.

"How about you, then, Willowquisp? Care to crawl on down here? You could learn all sorts of fascinating things about dark naga development[11]—you'd like that, wouldn't you? Just think of the knowledge you could add to that notebook of yours. No? Then how about you, Zantoullios? You're thin enough to squeeze down my bolt-hole.[12] No? Well, how about you then, Ablasta? You should be able to fit that scrawny chicken-body of yours down here. Come on, my dear. Apparently none of the others are man enough!"

"Well, I never!" huffed the conjurer Ablasta, eyes blazing and nostrils flared.

"That might not be such a bad idea," whispered Dreelix.

"What do you mean—crawl down there with him?" asked Buntleby. "That doesn't seem wise."

"We could lure him, catch him off his guard."

"How?"

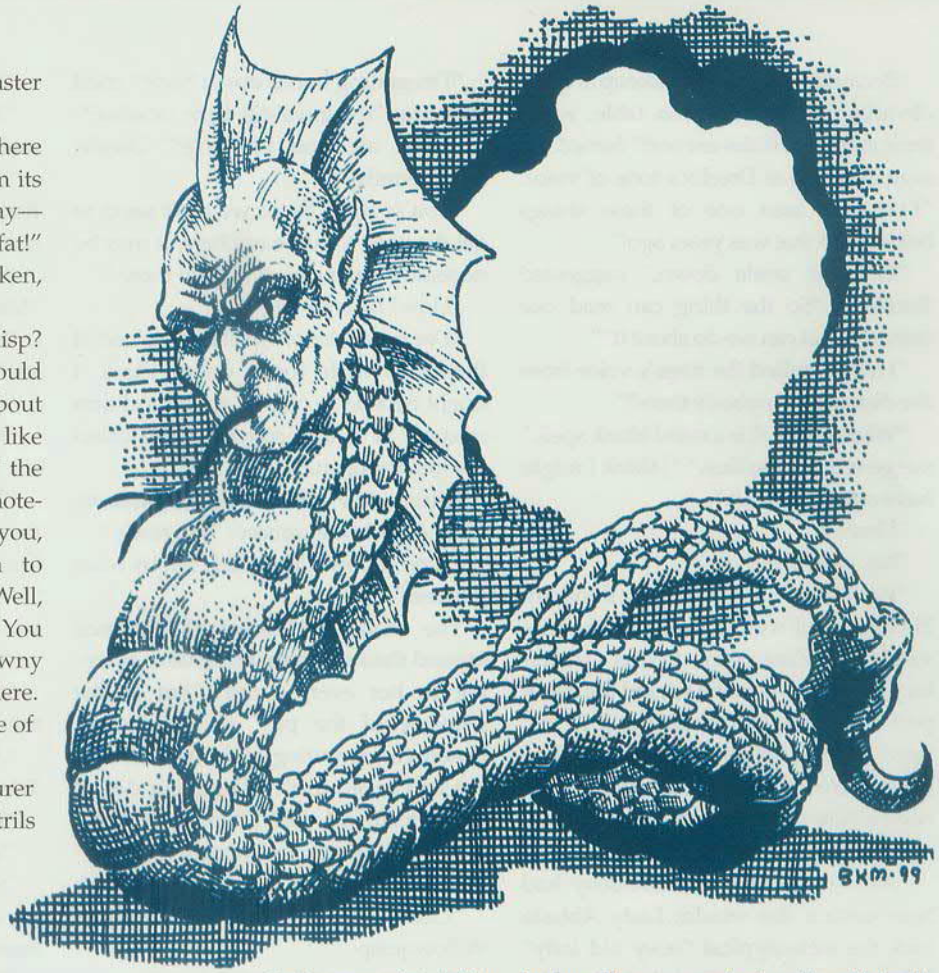
"Well, you and Grindle both know polymorph self, right? One of you polymorphs into a female dark naga, and, you know, makes nice."

"Great plan!" called the naga from the pit.

"Absolutely not!" cried Buntleby.

"It wouldn't work anyway," said Willowquisp. "There are no female dark nagas. No male ones either, for that matter."[13]

"Then how do they…?" asked Dreelix.



Dark nagas prefer to lair in rocky places like caverns and ruins with multiple exits.

"Quit messing around up there, and send me a partner!" called the naga.

"SHUT UP!" cried Buntleby and Dreelix in unison. The naga just chuckled.

Willowquisp pursed his lips in thought and walked away from the others, motioning for the others to follow him.

"Had enough?" called the naga. "Giving up so soon?" The Monster Hunters ignored it and kept walking.

"What's up?" asked Zantoullios, after they had formed into a huddle a good hundred feet away from the naga's hole.

"Did you notice how it calls us by name?" asked the sage.

"So what?" asked Dreelix, irritably. "The thing's got good ears."

"That's what I thought at first, too, but I don't think we've said Lady Ablasta's name aloud since we came here."

"Your point?"

"I think the thing's been reading our minds."

"What? Why didn't you mention this at the beginning?" demanded Dreelix.

"For a simple reason: I didn't know."

"How is it that you know all about their sexual makeup but know nothing about their mental abilities?"

12. Dark nagas prefer to lair in rocky places like caverns and ruins with multiple exits. At least one exit will be narrow enough for the naga to block with its body to fight off intruders. However, they don't like their tunnels to be too narrow, for the creatures are unable to crawl backward. They crawl through narrow tunnels using *rectilinear creeping* (pulling themselves forward by the edges of their belly scales); thus, to move backward in a tunnel, they must turn the front half of their body around and move head-first in the opposite direction.

Dark nagas are fond of traps, and their lairs often have numerous traps ready to be sprung upon the unwary. These traps are most often designed by the nagas but built by other races (orcs, hobgoblins, etc.) in exchange for services from the naga (usually casting spells).

13. Dark nagas are hermaphroditic, having both male and female reproductive organs. When mating, both nagas end up pregnant, giving birth 5–6 months after mating. Dark nagas usually mate once a year, in the late fall, giving birth in the springtime.

14. Several spells and magical items are of great use when combating a dark naga. For obvious reasons, the *mind blank* spell, an *amulet of proof against detection and location*, a *ring of mind shielding*, or similar magic is indispensable, preventing the dark naga from being able to read the user's mind. Since the naga's *ESP* is its most powerful sense, depriving its use greatly hampers the naga's ability to target enemies. (The naga has only short-range visual acuity.) Regardless of level, a mentally unshielded thief has virtually no chance of sneaking up on a dark naga; remove the naga's use of *ESP* and not only does moving silently around a naga become feasible, but the thief enjoys a +10% bonus to his Move Silently and Hide in Shadows die rolls.

Since dark nagas are reptilian, all reptile-specific magical items (*potions of reptile control, sword +1/+4 vs. reptiles, arrows of reptile slaying*) can be used at maximum efficacy against them. It should be noted that while nagas are not snakes, they are nonetheless subject to the effects of a *snake charm* spell (although they still receive a +2 to their saving throw). They are not affected by the *snakes to sticks* spell, however.

"Because their sexual makeup is quite obvious on the dissection table, while their mental abilities are not!" fumed the sage, angered at Dreelix's tone of voice. "I've only seen one of these things before, and that was years ago!"

"Let's all settle down," suggested Buntleby. "So the thing can read our minds: What can we do about it?"

"Hello?" called the naga's voice from the distance. "Anybody there?"

"What we need is a mind blank spell," suggested Zantoullios.[14] "I think I might have one, on a scroll."

"Here?"

"No, back at the lab."

"Well, forget it then," said Buntleby. He knew full well the state of the converted barn Zantoullios used as a laboratory—it would take the wizard the better part of a week to find anything in that mess of notes, papers, and half-finished experiments. "We need to see what the naga's hole is like. Lady Ablasta—do you have a wizard eye spell available?"

"As it happens, yes." Buntleby had been certain she would; Lady Ablasta took the stereotypical "nosy old lady" image to new magical heights. Her neighbors kept few secrets from her magical snooping—not that she'd admit to anything, mind you.

"Then, if you don't mind, cast it here, out of range, and send it on down the hole." Buntleby helped the conjurer to the ground, where she sat ramrod straight, skirts tucked beneath her, and prepared the spell.

"I'm getting bored down here!" cried the naga. "You guys still there, or what?"

"What are you thinking?" Dreelix asked Buntleby.

"You're right: Since we can't seem to get the naga to come out here, it may be necessary for one of us to go in there."

"How? By crawling?"

"I've got a teleport spell memorized. If there's enough room down there, I might be able to pop in, throw a charm monster at it, and convince it to crawl out into the open."

After a few minutes of preparation, Lady Ablasta announced: "I'm ready."

"Send it down, then, and tell us what you see."

The Monster Hunters all gathered around their sole female member, listening to her every word. "I'm at the entrance of the pit," she said, eyes closed, concentrating on the invisible eye she had called forth. "I'm going down: ten, fifteen feet. Oh! There's the nasty critter right there, looking right at me.[15] Well! It's sticking its tongue out at me!"[16]

"Can it see you, do you think?" asked Willowquisp.

"I'm not—no, I don't think so."

"What do see around you?" asked Buntleby. "How big is the chamber?"

"Not very. It's roughly circular, maybe fifteen or twenty feet across.[17] There's a small pile of coins along one side, and something sticking up out of them. No, several somethings."

"Take a closer look if you would, please."

"Flasks. They're glass vials."

"Potions," said Willowquisp. "That makes sense."[18]

"How tall is the ceiling?" asked Buntleby. "Would I have room to stand?"

"It's hard to say," said Lady Ablasta. "Maybe if you stood hunched over."

"Anything else in there that you can see?"

"No, I don't think so."

"What about the naga itself? Anything else I should know?"

"No, it's just sitting there. Wait—there's something on the end of its tail. Goodness, it's a ring!"

"Magical, do you think?" asked Willowquisp.

"I have no way of telling."[19]

"Okay, I think that's all we can learn this way. Thank you, Lady Ablasta."

"Are you going to do it, Buntleby? Teleport in?" asked Willowquisp.

"It seems like our best bet."

"What should the rest of us do?"

"Stay here. I don't want you getting too close, or it'll read your minds and learn about the plan."

"Makes sense," agreed Dreelix, always willing to stay out of danger whenever possible.

"Okay, then," said Buntleby, crouching over and mentally preparing himself for the teleport. "Wish me luck."

A few magical words and gestures, and the young wizard popped out of view. Almost immediately, he found himself in a dim cavern, standing in a

15. Like all snakes, the dark naga has no eyelids. Instead, it has developed transparent scales that completely cover its eyes, protecting them from dirt and grit. As a result, the naga is unable to close its eyes, and they remain open and staring even when the creature sleeps.

16. Like a snake, the dark naga has an organ (called the *Jacobson's organ* or *vomeronasal organ*) on the roof of its mouth with which it identifies scents. The forked tongue flickers out, captures molecules of scent, and transfers them to the organ for identification. This process goes on constantly and allows the naga to track prey by their scent-trails.

17. Dark nagas hibernate during the winter months in underground burrows, or *hibernaculi*. The available number of such winter dens determines how many nagas one might find in each hibernaculum—in areas where such holes are uncommon, a greater number of dark nagas than are normally found together will be present. Once warmer weather returns in the springtime, the dark nagas each go their separate ways.

18. Lacking hands, a dark naga's treasure tends to be those things that it can actually use. Coins and gems are hoarded to pay humanoid races for services the naga is unable to perform itself (like digging pit traps). Potions and scrolls are common items in a dark naga's treasure hold, as the creature can use each of these items easily. (They usually prop up potion flasks with coins or rocks, and have the cork stoppers on loose enough to enable quick opening with their mouths.) Scrolls are usually unrolled and held open with a small stone in each corner, allowing the naga to cast the scroll spells quickly. Dark nagas also collect spellbooks, turning the pages with their tail spikes or tongues.

When transporting its treasure from one location to another, the dark naga swallows the items and shifts them to a rubbery, baglike organ attached to one side of the creature's esophagus. This organ is thick and resilient enough to resist being punctured by sharp objects (the dark naga can therefore swallow daggers, knives, and other bladed weapons), and has an added bonus: The organ shields magic from all detection spells.

19. Dark nagas occasionally wear a ring or two on their tail spikes. This is done merely for ornamentation; lacking fingers, nagas cannot use magical rings. However, there are a few types of worn magical items that nagas can employ, among them hats, caps, and helms. For obvious reasons, they cannot wear magical eyes, capes, cloaks, robes, girdles, gauntlets, gloves, boots, slippers, or shoes. It might be possible for a naga to wear a magical brooch, amulet, or medallion, if some way of attaching it could be contrived (pinning it to a worn hat, perhaps).

20. All of a dark naga's spells require verbal components only; besides the verbal-only spells listed in the *Player's Handbook (feather fall, hold portal, blindness, knock)* and *Tome of Magic (Hornung's guess, far reaching I, minor malison)*, nagas learn verbal-only spells from evil dragons, phaerimm, or other creatures able to cast act-of-will spells. The naga can also devise new spells and learn to modify standard spells to verbal-only versions, but such experimentation is both slow and expensive. It generally prefers to work for an evil, spell-using creature, receiving spells as its pay.

A dark naga in the employ of another creature usually serves as an overseer of the lower servants: It might be a black dragon's chief lieutenant in charge of keeping the lizard man minions in line, or slither into battle with a band of orcs, serving as the magical strike force commander. In the RAVENLOFT® campaign, dark nagas are most often found in the service of a hebi-no-onna (see the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM RAVENLOFT Appendix III: Creatures of Darkness*, page 55).

loose pile of coins. The dark naga was directly in front of him, its head turned away, looking toward the nearly vertical tunnel to the surface.

Buntleby began the words of the charm monster spell. Halfway through, the creature spun around, stared the wizard straight in the eye, and began the words of a spell of its own.[20]

Both spells finished about the same time. Before Buntleby could see if his spell worked, the world went gray, as if a deep mist had covered his eyes. Blindness spell! he realized. "Stay where you are!" he commanded.

"I live to obey, master," responded the naga; Buntleby breathed a sigh of relief. He was therefore taken completely by surprise when the creature's tail spike jabbed him in the side of the leg. "Fooled you!" the evil serpent chuckled in glee.

Buntleby tried to come up with the words to an appropriate spell, but his thoughts were getting sluggish, and it was hard to concentrate. Magic missile? No, he'd have to see to target it. Dispel magic on the blindness then? That sounded right. But how did that spell go again?

Buntleby crashed to the floor of the cavern, snoring loudly. The naga cast its ESP senses quickly around: None of the other humans were within range. "Dinner time," it said. "Thank you, Dark One, for this bounty which so foolishly delivered itself to me."[21]

Running its forked tongue across its finely scaled lips in anticipation, the naga unhinged its jaws and maneuvered them over Buntleby's head. Shifting back and forth and side to side, the creature managed to work its jaws past the young wizard's shoulders when the cavalry arrived quite unexpectedly.

A small clattering of pebbles falling down the entrance hole was the only warning before Ozzie came flying out of the shaft, to land squarely on the naga's back. The naga had been concentrating on its meal and scanning only for nearby human thought with its ESP powers; Ozzie's animal thoughts snuck right past its awareness.

With its mouth extended over Buntleby's prone form, both the naga's fangs and its spells were inaccessible for combat. That left only its tail, which it swung wildly in an attempt to pierce the six-limbed creature that hung onto the back of its neck.

Ozzie wasn't in much danger, though. The naga couldn't see the osquip from its prone position and had no way of extricating Buntleby now that he had passed beyond its mouth.[22] A few bites to the back of the head with teeth that could eat through solid stone, and the dark naga was no more.

Several minutes later, Zantoullios wriggled his skinny body headfirst down the naga's entrance tunnel and landed in a heap. There he found an amazing sight: Buntleby's lower half projecting from the dead naga's mouth, and Ozzie nibbling contentedly on a pile of stone pebbles by his master's feet. Buntleby's snores echoed strangely from deep inside the slain creature's throat.

"Is he okay?" came Willowquisp's worried voice from above.

"He's fine," called Zantoullios, as he bent over to pat the top of Ozzie's leathery head. "Who's a good boy then, Ozzie?" he asked.

Ozzie just chuffed and returned to his snack.

Ozzie just chuffed and returned to his snack.

Oddly enough, in Johnathan M. Richards' home campaign, many of the monsters and NPCs his players encounter are as sarcastic as the dark naga portrayed in the story above. Johnathan claims this is mere coincidence.

21. There are two main gods in the naga pantheon: Shekinester of the Triple Aspects, and her son, Parrafaire, the guardian of magical secrets and hidden places deep below the ground. Parrafaire has no formal worshippers; Shekinester, as the creator of the "true" nagas, is thus worshiped by lawful good guardian nagas, neutral water nagas, and chaotic evil spirit nagas alike.

The lawful evil dark nagas, however, are not "true" nagas—they are believed by some to be a mutant strain of spirit naga, possibly the result of wild magic. (The fact that dark nagas are hermaphroditic while "true" nagas have two distinct sexes is the greatest argument against their being a form of "true" naga.) In any case, dark nagas rarely worship the naga gods, preferring "generic" evil gods such as the Elder Elemental God or the Dark God. Those dark nagas serving closely with powerful creatures like beholders or dragons often adopt their leader's faith. Regardless of the god or gods they choose to revere, dark nagas never become priests or gain priest spells.

Details on the gods mentioned above can be found in *Monster Mythology*.

22. Like snakes, a dark naga's teeth point backward down its throat, preventing struggling prey from escaping once the naga bites down on it. Once the prey is dead (or immobilized), the naga works the body down its throat with a back-and-forth ratcheting motion, shifting one side of its hinged jaw further down the prey's body, then repeating the process with the other side, and so on. Because of the angle of the naga's teeth, once a body has made it past the naga's throat, there's no way for it to "spit" the body out; it must continue the process until the prey has been completely swallowed.

Once it has devoured its prey, the naga takes up to a week to digest it. Elevated body temperatures can speed up the digestion process, so a dark naga may seek to bask in the sun after eating a large meal.

Ecology of the Dark Ones

Enigmas Wrapped in Shadows

by Paul Leach • illustrated by Peter Bergting

For our kind, there is nothing but the darkness.

—Dark Ones' Proverb

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

Few people know the origins of the secretive dark ones or why they appear to be split between two different races: dark creepers and dark stalkers. The diminutive dark creepers are hoofed and pale, while the lithe, almost ghostly dark stalkers look frighteningly akin to normal humans. The truth of their genesis and dual-species society is one of the endless night's best-kept secrets, a past that all but these enigmatic denizens of darkness have forgotten.

DARK ONES IN THE WORLD

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

Dark ones are subject to the Underdark's predators, but they use their stealth and special abilities to avoid most creatures. Purple worms, umber hulks, and xorns are more difficult to circumvent, since these monsters all hunt using tremorsense, leading dark ones to exercise extreme caution when in areas roamed by such creatures. Dark ones rarely antagonize communities of dangerous humanoids, out of fear of provoking retaliation, and every now and then, they make alliances with such races or local monsters. More commonly, dark ones support their communities by raiding caravans from distant lands and travelers passing through their territory.

THE LIFE OF THE DARK ONES

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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY

Darkness ultimately defines all aspects of dark one life, from the core beliefs of each individual to their society as a whole. They believe nothing lasts forever, except for the dark, and therefore little else really matters. This is not a morbid or depressing certainty to dark ones, but the basis for their freedom, which they value above all else. They see no reason to tie themselves to the demands of land, industry, or conquest; neither do they have much use for glory or honor. Dark ones believe city walls and ideals were created to provide false security; city walls only make it easier for an enemy to find you, and moralistic ideals can only convince you to die for no reason at all. Dark ones see the civilized races of the world as pathetically clinging to ruinous traditions of self-deception, greed, and hatred, and dark ones eagerly capitalize on these conceits to take what they need. They think of themselves as wary survivors, while others call them cowardly parasites.

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

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

DIET

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

INDUSTRY AND THE ARTS

Dark ones obtain most necessities by gathering what they need from nature or hapless humanoids, but they do craft some items for themselves. They excel in preparing dyes from fungi, algae, and strange minerals, which allows them to darken their garments to the color of deepest shadow. Other substances are used to cure monster hides, enabling dark ones to make leather armor, pouches, and belts. They sometimes weave their own tunics, pants, and cloaks, but they usually prefer to modify stolen items.

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

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

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

DARK ONES AND THE FIEND FOLIO

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

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

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

RELIGION

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

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

SOCIETY

Dark stalkers have always been the leaders and caretakers of dark ones. There is no formality to their rule, and authority is usually shared between all of the community's stalkers. In a feat of governing unheard of in nearly all other societies, dark stalkers never flaunt their rule or lord their authority over dark creepers, showing an unaccustomed affection for and understanding of their underlings. While the dark creepers are not servile, they rarely disobey their leaders.

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

KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VS. PCS

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

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

NEW ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

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

BROWN MOLD OIL

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

Cost: 75 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

OIL OF NAUSEA

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

Cost: 60 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

POISON-FRIEND POD

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

Cost: 50 gp; Weight: —.

SHADOW HAZE DUST

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

Cost: 30 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

SHADOW VEIL

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

Cost: 40 gp; Weight: 1 lb.

SECRETS OF THE DARK ONES

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

ORIGINATING IN SHADOWS

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

THE WORSHIP OF DARKNESS

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

A SOCIETY OF SECRETS

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

TWO SPECIES, ONE RACE

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

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

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

Evasion: Dark ones always have an escape plan and typically break off an encounter after only a few rounds. They slow down adventurers by impairing their vision, leading them through difficult or confusing terrain, or causing them more damage. Examples of these tactics include using a dark stalker's *fog cloud* ability at tunnel junctions, and using pitfalls or underground streams to force pursuers into making Climb or Swim checks, especially after the adventurers have lost Strength due to shadow essence poison. Their evasion tactics are often designed to split up their victims so they have another chance at executing a second ambush on fewer numbers.

VS. DARK ONES

Adventurers should expect short fights intended to relieve them of their treasure and attempts to seriously wound or kill one of them. If the party is dedicated to wiping out dark ones, they must prepare and execute a cautious search and destroy mission.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Magic missile is the best damage-causing spell to use against dark ones, since it ignores anything less than total concealment. Good secondary spells are *acid splash, chill touch, flame arrow, ghoul touch, poison, scorching ray, searing light,* and *stinking cloud;* these spells either do not allow a saving throw or are negated by a Fortitude saving throw, which is a dark one's weakest save. *Spectral hand* is almost a necessity for delivering spells with a range of touch. If a spell allows a Reflex saving throw, it is likely to be ineffective against a dark creeper's evasion ability.

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

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

DARK ONES AS CHARACTERS

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

Dark Creepers

Humanoid

Dark creepers are known to be naturally stealthy and prefer the cool comfort of shadowy places. Spry and sinister-looking creatures, these dark ones' activities are usually assumed to have some nefarious purpose often far worse than their actual intent. Feared in numbers and demonized alone, dark creepers are able pilferers, but not innately evil creatures. Their interests lie in maintaining their own comfort and the safety of their communities, regardless of the cost to other races.

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

Racial Traits

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

Class Skills

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

Class Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEW FEATS

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

CUTPURSE

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

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

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

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

DEEP POISONING

Your sneak attacks with poisoned weapons are more potent.

Prerequisites: Poison use, sneak attack.

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

EXPERT TUMBLER

You can tumble with exceptional deftness.

Prerequisites: Tumble 5 ranks.

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

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

MONSTER CLASS BASICS

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

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

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

Dark Stalkers

Humanoid

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

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

Racial Traits

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

Class Skills

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

Class Features

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DARK CREEPER

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

DARK STALKER

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

Creature Codex

The Ecology of the DARKMANTLE

by Johnathan M. Richards • illustrations by Dennis Cramer

The eggs started to hatch in complete darkness. This was no surprise, for the subterranean cavern had never before seen the light of day, had never felt the warmth of the sun's rays.[1] In this pitch-black world, a small clutch of leathery gray eggs began warping and buckling as the squirming larvae inside struggled for release.[2] Finally tearing through the membranes of its shadowy prison, the first of the small, sluglike creatures squirmed out into the eternal gloom permeating the Underdark. Its black hide glistening with the slime of its egg, it instinctively crawled away from the other hatchlings, making its way alone into this new world of darkness and gloom. As it inched along, it scraped the ground with its raspy tongue, tentatively probing for the drab mosses and lichens that would support it during its few short months as a grub.[3]

Behind the departing grub, others of its kind began hatching. Each slowly inched its way across the cold, damp stone, making its solitary trek in a random direction through a world that knew no light.

"Barkeep, another round!" called Ardorrak heartily, slamming his now-empty mug down on the table. On either side of him, Thorvin and Haaj swigged down the last of their ale and did likewise, sighing gustily and wiping their beards with the backs of their hands.

Across the table from them, Federico and his cousin, Javorik the Bold, Illusionist Extraordinaire, did their best to keep up. Federico practically inhaled his drink. Rivulets of ale cascaded down either side of his chin as he drank, but he didn't stop until his mug was empty and he could slam it on the table with as much force as his dwarven companions. Blasted if he was going to let a bunch of dwarves one-up him in a drinking contest! Javorik wasn't in quite as much of a desperate hurry; he drank quickly, but not so quickly as to spill any of the ale, wanting to savor its unique taste.

Shandrilla, meanwhile, quietly sipped her mug of dwarven ale and winced at the strong, unfamiliar flavor. She peered distrustingly down at the liquid, as if expecting to find something vile floating in her mug. This was her first time in a dwarven bar, her first sampling of dwarven spirits. Had it been up to her, she would have gone straight back to her room in the inn, maybe indulged in a hot bath. The dwarves, however, had insisted on treating their new-found friends to a few rounds at their favorite watering hole, and she didn't want to offend them by refusing their hospitality.

The barkeep, a retired dwarven adventurer whose face carried a wealth of battle-won scars, strolled over to their table with a tray of heavy mugs balanced on one meaty hand. "Who're yer friends, then, Ardorrak?" he asked, squinting at Shandrilla and her gnomish companions as he plunked the tray down on the table.

"These here're our new best pals: Federico, Javorik, and Shandrilla," replied Ardorrak, grabbing up a new mug and quaffing down a large swallow. "Ran into a bit o' bother with a carrion crawler or two, we did, an' these three gave us a bit o' needed 'sistance. Wouldn't be here to tell the tale if'n it weren't for them!" The dwarf clapped Javorik heartily on the shoulder as he finished, nearly spilling the little gnome onto the floor.

"Shandrilly here rassled one to the ground, she did, all by herself!" offered Haaj, grabbing up a second mug himself. The bartender looked in disbelief at the slim woman, trying to imagine her in hand-to-hand combat with a carrion crawler. He couldn't do it. Shandrilla just

1. **Darkmantles are highly developed gastropods,** believed by some to have evolved from the common piercer (a classic monster from earlier editions of the D&D game—and, incidentally, the first creature ever covered in an "Ecology" article). They are found almost exclusively underground, lairing in subterranean caverns.

2. **Darkmantles are hermaphroditic,** each creature having both male and female reproductive organs. After mating, each darkmantle goes its separate way and lays a clutch of 6-8 eggs in a secluded crevasse, afterward abandoning them forever. A darkmantle egg is about the size of a chicken's, but with a soft, grayish shell that allows it to blend in against stone surfaces.

   About two weeks after they are laid, the eggs hatch into darkmantle grubs. Each grub is about 2 inches long and resembles a common slug. It has eight primitive eyespots along the sides of its head (three on each side; two toward the front) and a moist skin covered with mucus. Darkmantles leave slime trails behind them as they crawl around on the ground.

3. **A darkmantle grub begins life as a herbivore,** devouring mosses, lichen, and fungus with its radula—a tonguelike organ covered in rows and rows of tiny teeth that scrape away minute particles of edible fiber from the surrounding stone. Only after developing into its adult form does a darkmantle become carnivorous.

smiled at him in embarrassment and shrugged. "'S'true!" insisted Haaj.

"This I gotta hear fer meself!" said the barkeep, grabbing up a stool from a nearby table and making himself at home. He scooped up Shandrilla's second mug of ale without thinking and claimed it as his own. As Shandrilla had yet to finish even half of her first mug of the stuff, she said nothing.

The grub had grown during its first few months of life, not just in size but in form as well. Now a full foot in length and as wide around as a human wrist, it crawled along the walls of a gloomy cavern near its birthplace, probing the stone ahead for edible plant fibers with its prototentacles. The grub's tonguelike radula had split in two a week after the creature's birth, then split again, and one final time, leaving a ring of eight writhing appendages wriggling from around the grub's lamprey-like mouth. The tips of each of the prototentacles were still covered in hundreds of tiny teeth, and each housed the creature's sense of taste. As it used its single foot-muscle to crawl along the cold stone, its prototentacles darted about, tasting the stone ahead of it for tiny morsels of vegetable matter.

As had happened several times already during its wanderings, the grub detected one of its own clutchmates clinging to the cavern wall a short distance away.[4] Suddenly, from out of the darkness of the cave scurried a tenebrous worm, its wicked mandibles wide open in hunger. As its clutchmate was silently devoured by the giant caterpillar-beast, the grub instinctively flattened itself into a narrow crack in the wall of the cavern, vanishing from view.[5] Peeking out of the crevice, the grub watched as the tenebrous worm finished its meal and crawled off, finding its way out among the many branching corridors that led to other caverns and other prey. The grub remained safely inside its hidden niche until hunger once again forced it out in search of food.

"So when I find I kin finally move again, there's Shandrilla wearin' two of our packs, and she's got the critter's head pinned to the ground," said Ardorrak. "An' this one"—pointing a thumb at Javorik—"he's carving its guts out with his dagger. I tell you, it was a sight to see!" There was a roar of laughter as the assembled dwarves pictured the image in their minds.

Shandrilla noticed that several other dwarves had gathered around their table during Ardorrak's tale. She looked around at a sea of bearded dwarven faces, all gazing at her with looks of admiration and respect. Nervous at all the attention, she focused her gaze on her mug of dwarven ale and drained it dry.

"Ah, now that was nothing," said Javorik, looking over at his flustered human companion with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "You should have seen how she took care of these two puddings we ran into one time." Seeing that all eyes were upon him, Javorik began the tale.

"We were down in this tunnel network, the first time either of us had been in the Underdark, looking for some squimmerall. Anybody ever have squimmerall tea? No? Good stuff. Anyway, so Shanny and I are walking down this tunnel, when we see what at first we think is a pool of oil, oozing right at us..."

Embarrassed, Shandrilla reached for another mug of ale.

The creature, now in its full adult form, was ready for the next big step in its life. It hung suspended from the cavern roof by its muscular foot, hidden among the many stalactites reaching down toward the floor below. Despite its precarious hold it had an excellent sense of balance, thanks to an organ barely hidden underneath the front of its shell.[6]

In the half-light streaming in from the cavern entrance, it would be nearly impossible to distinguish the darkmantle from the stalactites: The creature kept its eight tentacles pressed together in a ring so that they tapered to a point below it. Its eyespots were now spaced evenly about its body, but they provided little more than a vague awareness of the sunlight streaming into the far side of the cavern. As always, the creature's sonic blindsight provided it with an excellent "view" of the surrounding

4. **Darkmantles, both in grub and adult stages,** have blindvision, a form of echolocation that uses high-frequency sound-pulses that are completely inaudible to most other creatures. These pulses provide a sonarlike "sight" to a maximum range of 90 feet. A magical *silence* effect negates the darkmantle's blindvision and effectively blinds the creature. With its blindvision, a darkmantle is able to detect the presence of invisible objects or beings.

The darkmantle's eight eyespots are vestigial, provide the creature with only the slightest differentiation between light and dark—just enough to realize when it has wandered out into the sunlight. (Since their blindsight sonar allows them to "see" only out to a 90-foot range, darkmantles tend to be agoraphobic; they prefer the cramped quarters of the Underdark to the open spaces of the surface world.) The eyespots do not provide the darkmantle with any sort of true vision.

Darkmantle eyespots can replace bat's fur as a substitute material component for the arcane version of the *darkness* spell.

5. **Darkmantles are born boneless** and remain so throughout their lives. As grubs, they can flatten themselves to a half-inch's thickness, squeezing through cracks to avoid predators. In maturity, however, the gastropod shell begins to develop, preventing adult darkmantles from performing such acts of extreme bodily compression.

territory. The shell that had grown from the creature's back[7] was itself the color and texture of limestone, serving as excellent camouflage on the cavern ceiling. Even without the ever-present shadows that served to cloak the creature from view, the darkmantle's skin color shifted to blend in with nearly any stone surface; to any casual observer, there was no difference between the darkmantle and the stalactites among which it hung.

Then it dropped from the ceiling.

Instinctively, the darkmantle spread wide its tentacles. Doing so spread the tough membranes that had formed between them.[8] The membranes filled with air and slowed the creature's descent; then, by flapping the "wings" thus formed, the darkmantle flew erratically through the cavern for a short distance.[9] Its aerial path took it briefly outside the cave entrance and into the bright sunlight.[10] Dropping to the ground in surprise, it scuttled quickly on its tentacle-tips[11] back into the comforting shadows of the cave, back to the world it knew.

Shandrilla realized with a bit of surprise that she was quite drunk.

She looked suspiciously at her empty mug—her third? fourth? it was hard to remember—with eyes narrowed, as if the ale had conspired against her. What time was it? She looked around at the patrons of the bar; it must be getting late, for the crowd around her table had dispersed, leaving her two gnomish companions and their three new dwarven buddies to drink and talk quietly amongst themselves. Shaking her head to clear it, Shandrilla realized there was a drone of voices coming from her table. Looking bleary-eyed at Javorik, she saw that he was speaking. She focused her attention on him and caught him in mid-sentence.

"...never told us what you guys had been doing down there," he said.

"'Splorin', mos'ly," replied Thorvin, tripping heavily over his tongue. "Foun' us a way into this secret temple or sumpin' down there. Real old stuff, nobody'd been around there fer cent'ries."

"Secret temple," echoed Haaj, tapping a finger to the side of his nose and winking suggestively.

"So's we figgered nobody'd mind if we helped ourselves," put in Ardorrak. "Cleaned up pretty good, too, we did! Didn't leave too much behind us, no sir-ree!" Of the three dwarves, he seemed the least affected by the mass quantities of hard ale they'd all been pouring down their gullets for the past several hours.

"'Cept them eyes," remarked Thorvin, belching loudly.

"Eyes," echoed Haaj, tapping under one of his own bloodshot orbs and nodding knowingly.

"Yeah, 'cept for them eyes," agreed Ardorrak. "There was this big old statue carved right outta the stone—some kinda snake-god thingy with glowing red eyes this big around!" He held his hands out, cupping an imaginary circle some four inches in diameter.

"Rubies, I betcha," suggested Thorvin, scratching absently at his beard.

"Rubies, I betcha too," added Haaj.

"Why'd you leave them?" asked Javorik.

"Couldn't get up there!" replied Ardorrak. "They musta been, oh, I dunno—mebbe thirty, forty feet up. We tried climbing the stupid statue, but none o' us is much fer climbing."

Javorik scootched himself forward across the table until he was face-to-face with Ardorrak. "Shanny could do it," he said quietly.

"Huh?" said Shandrilla, perking to attention at the sound of her name.

"You could climb a forty-foot statue, couldn't you, Shanny?" he asked. "A big, strong human like you?"

"Sure," agreed Shandrilla woozily. "No plarbrem—prollbim—kee hee hee hee!" She giggled at her tongue's sudden rebellion.

"All right then!" said Ardorrak, eyes shining wildly with the thought of retrieving the one piece of obvious treasure the dwarven trio had left behind.

"No. Prob. Lem," enunciated Shandrilla carefully. When finished, she smiled in triumph at her success and immediately passed out onto the table, much to the amusement of the dwarves.

The darkmantle crawled slowly across the cavern ceiling on its gastropod foot.[12] Its tentacles dangled below it, tasting the moisture of a rainy night[13] as it made its deliberate path away from the cave opening leading to the outside world.

As it crawled along the ceiling, the darkmantle suddenly sensed a flurry of motion below it. It was a flock of bats, preparing for a night seeking prey on

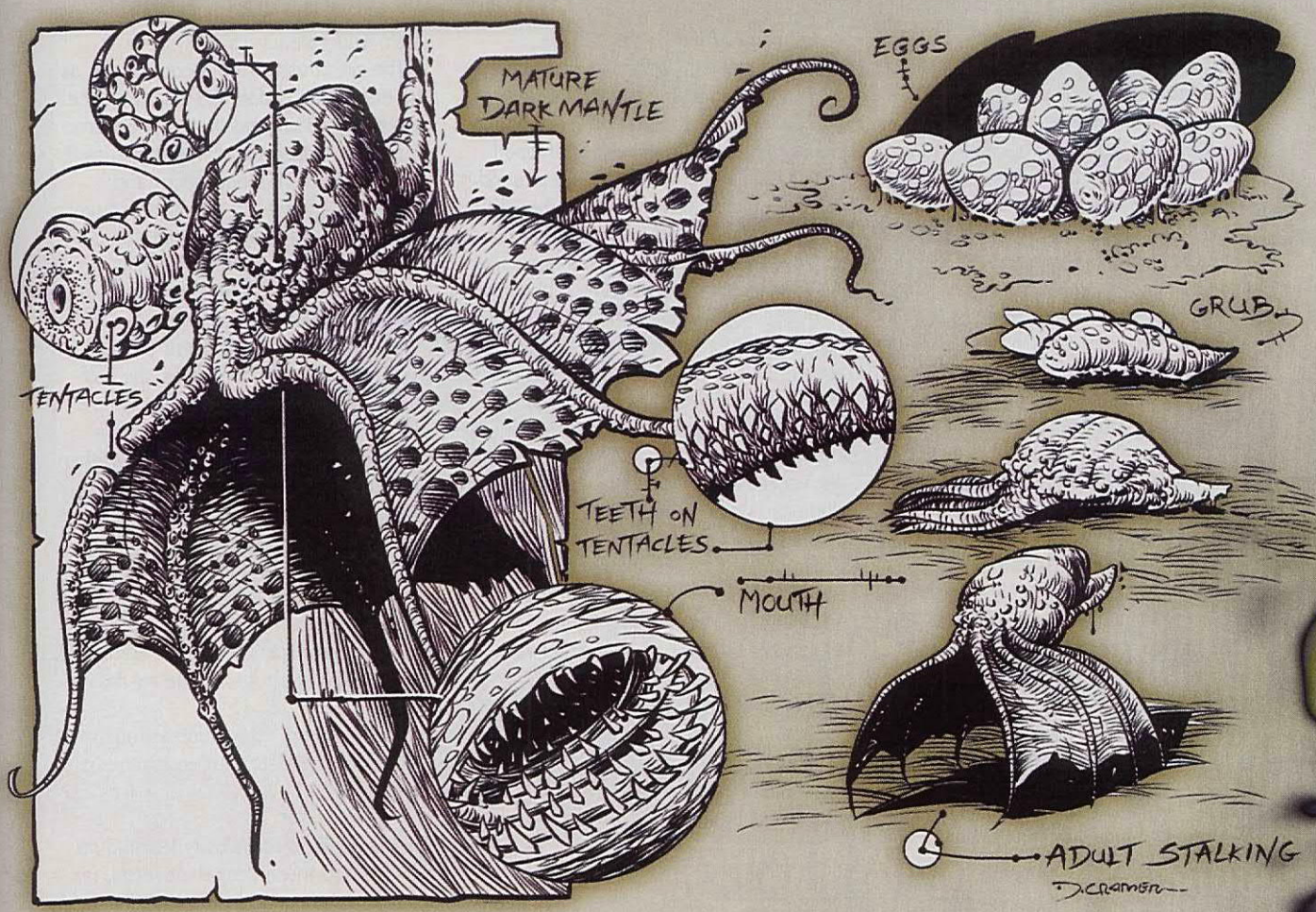
DROPPING TO THE GROUND IN SURPRISE, IT SCUTTLED QUICKLY ON ITS TENTACLE-TIPS BACK INTO THE COMFORTING SHADOWS OF THE CAVE, BACK TO THE WORLD IT KNEW.

6. **The statocyst is a small, baglike organ** common in many gastropods. It contains numerous small, sandlike grain particles suspended in liquid, and it aids the darkmantle's sense of balance. In that respect, the statocyst is equivalent to a human's inner ear.

7. **The darkmantle's shell begins growing** at about the same time as the creature's prototentacles grow long enough to account for half of the creature's total body length. The shell results from mineral intake as the darkmantle's radula scrapes rock surfaces in search of food. Mineral secretions from the pores of the darkmantle's dorsal area gradually build up to form a hardened shell, which continues to grow and thicken as the darkmantle ages and the mineral buildup continues.

8. **In its full adult form,** the darkmantle's appearance becomes similar to that of an octopus: the narrow body, the long tentacles surrounding the mouth, and the flaps of skin between the tentacles all give the creature a cephalopodic look. However, an adult darkmantle retains its lampreylike mouth.

   In addition, the flaps of skin connecting the tentacles reach two-thirds of the length of the tentacles. The darkmantle spreads its tentacles and can use the skin-flaps as primitive wings.



IN FUNCTION, THE DARKMANTLE COMBINES FEATURES OF MANY ANIMAL SPECIES—OCTOPI, SNAILS, AND EVEN FLYING SQUIRRELS.

the surface world. Without hesitation, the darkmantle released the grip of its suction-foot and swooped down upon an unsuspecting bat.

As the two creatures collided in midair, the darkmantle wrapped its tentacles around the hapless bat and squeezed tightly. Immediately, both creatures began plummeting toward the ground.[4] The darkmantle didn't seem to notice, however, refusing to loosen its grip upon its prey even as both creatures struck the hard cavern floor. Absorbing the impact with its rubbery tentacles, the darkmantle concentrated completely on its goal: crushing the life out of the bat it had captured. Only after the bat was dead did the darkmantle release its vicelike grip and transfer the carcass to its circular mouth, filled with many sharp, tiny teeth.

"I agreed to this?" asked Shandrilla for what must have been the tenth time, as she traipsed through the underground cavern network once again.

"You were very insistent," agreed Javorik, holding out a torch and hurrying to keep up with the others. Up ahead, the three dwarven fighters marched at full speed through the roughly-hewn tunnel, eager to get to the secret temple they'd discovered and let their new human companion get about the business at hand—namely, prying the giant rubies from the statue of the weird snake-god they'd uncovered. Federico marched right along with them, determined not to let a bunch of dwarves show him up. If any of the four were feeling any after-effects from their night of heavy drinking, they didn't show it. Javorik

A darkmantle is about 2 feet long when it first reaches adulthood, and it continues to grow until attaining a length of 4 feet. Darkmantles live to about six years, provided another predator doesn't eat them first.

9. **Darkmantles are poor fliers,** flitting through the air at a speed of 30 feet. Because of their boneless bodies and relatively light shells, darkmantles can glide for short distances without moving their "wings," but must otherwise "flap" like a bird to propel themselves. Darkmantles can fly only short distances at a time, usually only up to the ceiling from a cavern floor or from perch to perch. Darkmantles expose their round mouths while flying, occasionally catching quick meals of small flying insects while in flight near the surface world.

10. **Darkmantles spend almost all of their lives** in subterranean caverns or caves and can be found throughout the Underdark. Those that lair in caves near the surface might occasionally crawl outside at night or on overcast days, but they rarely stray too far from their cave entrances. Sunlight does not actually harm darkmantles; they're just unaccustomed to it and prefer staying in dark areas. A *daylight* or similar spell can sometimes be used to drive off a darkmantle or at least keep it at bay for a time. However, darkmantles suffer no combat penalties in areas of bright light.

didn't seem particularly affected, either, come to think about it. Only Shandrilla seemed to carry a reminder of the previous night with her: a throbbing headache that wouldn't go away and a mouth that felt like it was filled with old socks. She'd had some tea in the morning, and that had seemed to help for awhile, but not by much, and not for long.

"I don't believe it," muttered Shandrilla to herself, for what must have also been the tenth time. "No more dwarven ale for me, Javorik, ever again!"

"Whatever you say, Shanny."

Since moving deeper into the subterranean passageways, the darkmantle had discovered that it was prey as often as it was predator. In a burst of frantic energy, it flapped its tentacle-wings, lifting it into the stale air and up to the top of the cavern ceiling, where it hoped it would be safe from the large, multi-legged predator that had stumbled across it.[15] No such luck: The carrion crawler merely altered its course, walking up the wall of the Underdark cavern on its way to the ceiling, its tentacles writhing hungrily before it.

As the worm-monster closed the gap, the darkmantle dropped from the ceiling, gliding a short distance before landing back on the floor. The carrion crawler was again forced to change course, diverting to the wall to once more reach the floor. The darkmantle took the opportunity to crawl down a narrow corridor and out of sight. It couldn't keep running for long; its only hope lay in camouflage.

Temporarily out of the carrion crawler's view, it flapped to the ceiling again, snagged a stalactite with a tentacle, and found a quick perch on the ceiling. Getting a good grip with its gastropod foot, it spread its tentacles wide around it in all directions, covering its body with its skin-flaps. Tucked inside itself in this fashion, the darkmantle looked like nothing so much as a slight bulge in the rock of the ceiling.[16] Using only quick pulses of sonar to gain an idea of any movement around it, it watched as the carrion crawler entered the cavern, wandered around aimlessly for a short time, and exited by another passageway. The danger was over for now; it had managed to elude its hunter. Nonetheless, it rested motionlessly on the cavern ceiling for several hours, replenishing its energy and making sure that all potential danger was gone before uncoiling its tentacles and exploring the new tunnel network in which it now found itself.

"There it be," said Ardorrak proudly.

"IT'S BEAUTIFUL," SHE WHISPERED. "DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S RIGHT TO PRY OUT ITS EYES? IT SEEMS—WELL, SACRILEGIOUS."

Shandrilla looked up at the stone carving in appreciation of its fine craftsmanship, but she also noticed that the scale patterns on the serpent god would make suitable hand- and footholds during the climbing process. The red eyes of the stone beast glowed softly as if with an inner light.

"It's beautiful," she whispered. "Do you really think it's right to pry out its eyes? It seems—well, sacrilegious."

"Don't worry about it," responded Ardorrak. Then, in a louder voice he called out: "Hey! Snake-god! We're gonna pull them eyeballs outta yer face, less'n you give us a sign!"

The six adventurers stood silently as the echoes of Ardorrak's last sentence reverberated around the huge cavern. Shandrilla looked up at the statue, as if awaiting a cue. It stood, silent and unmoving, gazing out across the cavern.

"I reckon it's okay with him, then," replied Ardorrak matter-of-factly.

"Whaddaya think, Shanny? Can you climb it?" asked Javorik.

"No problem," replied the young woman, smiling to herself as she half-remembered tripping over the simple phrase the night before. She took a deep breath to clear her head and then got down to business. Removing her pack, she started unloading its contents and distributing what she'd need into various pockets and loops on her belt. She checked that her dagger and short sword were in their sheaths; a small hammer went into her belt; a number of short spikes went into a pile on the floor.

"Light 'em up," she commanded Javorik, and the diminutive gnome bent to comply.

The darkmantle had slowly learned its way around these deeper caverns, far away from the world of sun and rain.[17] In many ways these caves were different from those near the surface, but in all of the important ways they were the same. The stone passageways housed abundant life: bats, spiders, insects, lizards. There were stalactites among which to hide, pools of cold, clear water from which to drink, endless passageways and corridors in which to explore. Life was good, food was plentiful: the darkmantle was content.

Then it met up with an entirely new type of food.

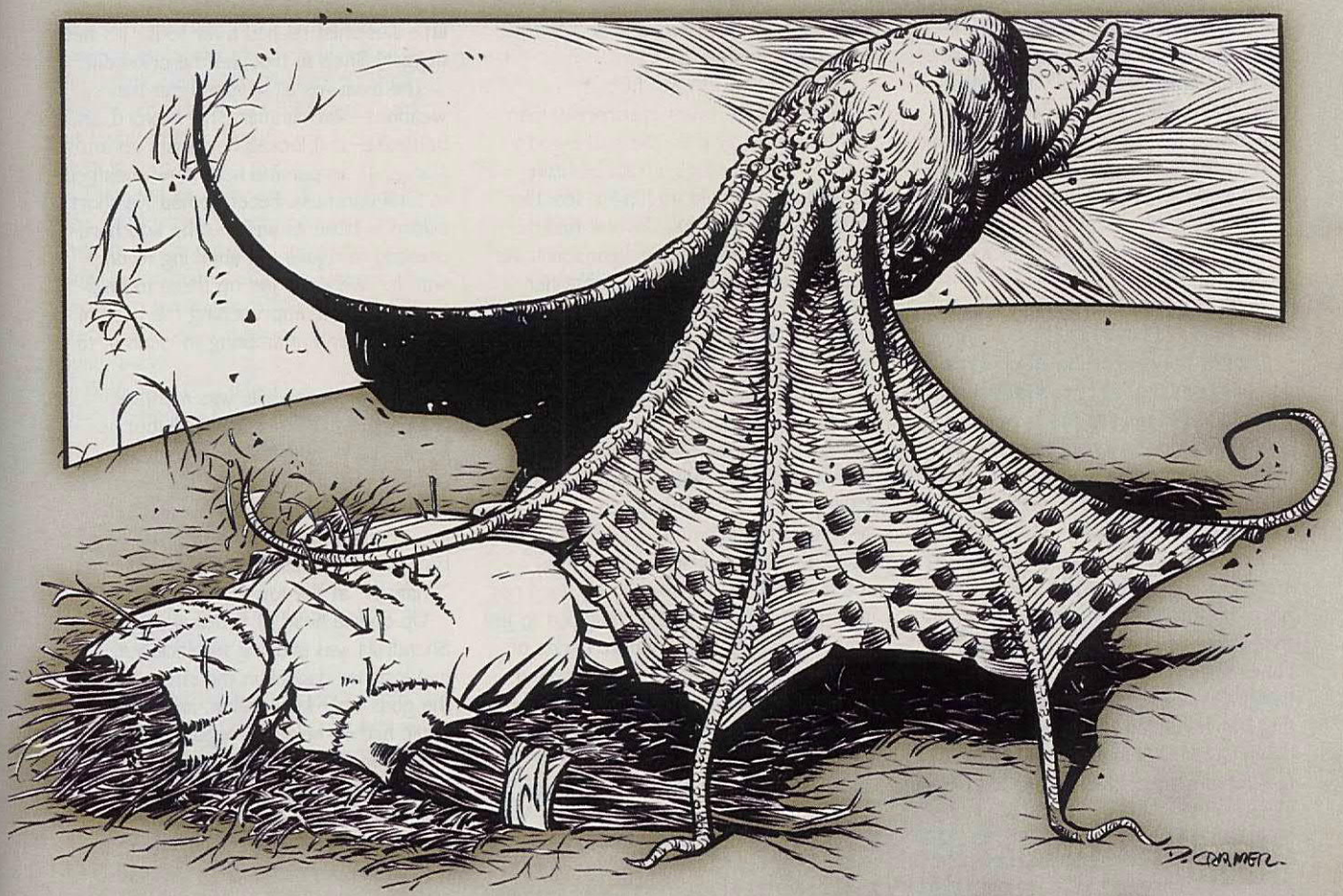
Shandrilla paused in her ascent up the stone statue. Pulling one of the small spikes from between her lips with her left hand, she positioned it between her

11. **Although the adult darkmantle** retains its gastropod foot situated directly above its dorsal shell, it can reach a speed of 20 feet by employing its tentacles as "legs." This is the darkmantle's fastest method of transportation over longer distances; while its flight speed is faster, it is an awkward flier and can stay airborne for only short distances at a time.

12. **The darkmantle uses its gastropod foot** to climb along walls or ceilings at a speed of 5 feet. It cannot use its tentacles for this purpose, as they are not "sticky."

13. **Even in its adult form,** the darkmantle's tentacles remain its organs of taste. The last third of each tentacle (the part extending beyond the creature's skin-flaps) remains covered with thousands of tiny teeth, just as they did as a radula and prototentacles. This makes a strike from a darkmantle's tentacles more painful than it would be otherwise; darkmantles inflict 1d4+4 points of damage with each buffet from their tentacles, and such strikes are made with a +4 melee attack bonus.

14. **Unfortunately for the darkmantle,** it can use its tentacles as wings or as attack appendages, but not both at the same time. For this reason, darkmantles prefer attacking victims on the ground, swooping down from above and engulfing them in their tentacles. Being clumsy fliers, darkmantles rarely target aerial prey, although they might drop down on low-flying creatures that pass by below them. In either case, the darkmantle has a +4 initiative modifier due to the Improved Initiative feat.



IN THIS CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT, THIS CAPTURED DARKMANTLE DEMONSTRATES ITS LASHING TECHNIQUE.

thumb and forefinger while gripping a jutting stone scale with the rest of her hand. Reaching down for her hammer with her right hand, she tapped the spike into place. The light spell that Javorik had cast upon the spike heads illuminated the side of the statue for twenty feet in all directions. There was another such spike down at the bottom of the statue, where she'd hammered it firmly into place before beginning her dangerous ascent.

She looked up: less than halfway left to go. Returning the hammer to its loop on her belt, she found a good handhold and continued her climb, the last two remaining glowing spikes protruding from her mouth.

The darkmantle crawled slowly along the ceiling, curiously investigating the steady stream of air blowing its way.

Sure enough, along the edge of the cavern wall was a one-foot-tall gap, twice again as long as it was tall, from which emanated a steady current of air. The darkmantle squeezed its body into the gap, crawling along upside-down on its gastropod foot and probing ahead with its tentacles.

There were voices coming from the narrow gap.[18] The darkmantle did not recognize them as voices, merely as sounds made by some other creature; the concept of a language was beyond its animal intelligence. It scurried forward, through the gap and into a large chamber. Oddly, there was some sort of light source at work in the chamber; even the darkmantle's weak eyespots could detect the illumination.

Puzzled, the darkmantle crept forward.

15. **Short bursts of flight not only allow** the darkmantle to move faster than it can travel on its tentacle-tips but also breaks up its scent-trail. Many Underdark predators hunt by scent; these creatures often give up when the scent-trail suddenly ends.

16. **This is the second form of camouflage** employed by the darkmantle (the first, of course, being its stalactite "disguise"). Darkmantles usually cover themselves up with their skin-flaps when actively hiding from predators; naturally, the stalactite disguise works only when the creature is among other stalactites, whereas looking like a lump of rock works just about anywhere.

When sleeping, or during the many months of hibernation, a darkmantle prefers hanging from the ceiling disguised as a stalactite, as it requires less effort for the darkmantle to hang from its foot than to find comfortable holds for each of its eight tentacles. Darkmantles also passively "hunt" in this fashion, hanging motionlessly from the cavern ceiling and then dropping down upon unsuspecting prey that passes beneath.

When actively "disguised," either as a stalactite or a lump of rock, darkmantles have a +11 bonus to Hide skill checks.

Shandrilla pulled herself up onto the snake-god's head, using its carved teeth as a convenient foothold. Then, straddling the statue's broad snout, she hammered the last remaining light spike into its forehead, right between its red-glowing eyes. "I'm up!" she called down to her companions.

"Are they rubies?" called back Ardorrak.

"Yes, looks like it! Big ones!" replied Shandrilla.

"I knew they was rubies!" chuckled Thorvin, rubbing his hands together in greed and grinning at the thought of how much money a pair of four-inch rubies would fetch.

Up on the snake-god's head, Shandrilla pulled out a large iron spike and proceeded to anchor it into the statue's muzzle. This spike had a hole near the top, through which the young thief secured her thin coil of silken rope. After all, climbing up was one thing; she could see where she was putting her hands on the way up. Climbing down would be harder; she'd have to feel for each foothold in turn, and there was no guarantee that she'd be back down on the ground when Javorik's light spells ran their course. Shandrilla didn't plan on being plunged into sudden darkness halfway down a forty-foot statue.

Satisfied that her line was secure, she scooted her way back up to the first of the snake-god's eyes. Pulling out her trusty dagger, she ran its blade along the bottom surface of the gem, trying to pry it from the stone. With a few grunts of exertion and some frantic wiggling back and forth of her slim blade, she felt the gem begin to give way.

Then the world went black.[19]

Shandrilla shrieked in surprise, then tightened her grip on the snake-god's muzzle with her legs, afraid of falling off now that she could no longer see. Her first thought was that Javorik had mistimed the duration of his light spells. As she opened her mouth to berate her gnomish companion about his spellcasting skills, she felt something solid strike the back of her head and wrap several ropy appendages around her face, preventing her from making a sound.[20]

Panic overtook Shandrilla. In the back of her mind she realized that she was balanced forty feet up in the air and that any sudden movements could potentially push her off the statue's head to a messy death below. Still, it was hard not to squirm around as she struggled to get free. She could feel separate bands of rubbery appendages wrapped around her head and throat, squeezing tightly; instinctively, she stabbed backward with her dagger in an attempt to dislodge the creature from the back of her head.

SHE COULD FEEL SEPARATE BANDS OF RUBBERY APPENDAGES WRAPPED AROUND HER HEAD AND THROAT, SQUEEZING TIGHTLY.

Down below, the sudden lack of illumination up at the top of the statue hadn't gone unnoticed by the dwarves and gnomes. "What's that silly human girl up to now?" muttered Federico under his breath.

"Shanny? You okay up there?" called out Javorik, worry in his voice.

No answer.

"Shanny?" he called out again.

As if in response, an object came hurtling down from above, clattering to the stone floor with a metallic clang. The little illusionist rushed over to it. "It's her dagger! She's in trouble!" he cried out.

The dwarves all whipped out their weapons—warhammer, short sword, and battleaxe—and looked helplessly up at the statue, its serpentine head now sheathed in total darkness. Federico had his short sword in hand as well, but he was hard-pressed to figure out anything to do with it. "We gotta get up there to help her!" he cried, approaching the base of the statue and attempting to climb it, to no avail.

Javorik, meanwhile, was mentally readying a magic missile spell, but he knew that without being able to see a suitable target, the spell was useless. He had no magical means of flying, levitating, or even spider climbing. Gnashing his teeth in helpless frustration, he cried, "Shanny!" at the top of his lungs.

Up on the head of the snake god, Shandrilla was starting to black out. She had lost her dagger in the struggle with the gods-only-knew-what, and in her panic had completely forgotten about the short sword strapped at her left hip. Blindly grasping around for a weapon—any weapon—her fingers brushed the multifaceted orb of the snake-god's left eye, which she had been prying loose with her dagger before the attack. Grasping it with all her might, she tugged and felt its solid weight fall into her hand. Without further thought, she swung it at the creature adhering to her face. There was a solid thunk as it hit something hard; pleased at the result, Shandrilla repeated the action and noticed the grip of the tentacles loosening up somewhat.

Then the ruby slipped from her fingers, to bounce off the side of the snake-god's head and plummet toward her companions, forty feet below.

The darkmantle was surprised at the initial ferocity of this new type of food. After stealthily creeping up to its intended meal along the cavern ceiling, it

17. **Given its flight abilities,** a darkmantle can travel over quite a wide area. For this reason, darkmantle infestations might seem to spring up overnight, as the creatures cover many miles of territory in their search for food.

The darkmantle, with its tendency toward a high activity rate, can last about a week between meals.

18. **Unlike most gastropods,** darkmantles have an excellent sense of hearing. Their "ears" take the form of numerous tiny grooves or pits spaced evenly through the exterior surfaces of their tentacles. As a result, darkmantles have a +4 racial bonus to Listen skill checks, as well as 1 rank in the Listen skill, for a total bonus of +5.

19. **Darkmantles can cast the equivalent** of a *darkness* spell once per day, cast as if by a 5th-level sorcerer, giving the sphere of darkness a 20-foot radius and a duration of 50 minutes.

Darkmantles habitually employ their *darkness* ability immediately before attacking. Like the spell of the same name, the darkmantle's *darkness* must be cast upon an object touched by the creature. Depending upon circumstances, the darkmantle either casts its *darkness* on a low-hanging stalactite (in low caverns where the

triggered its magical darkness on a hanging stalactite and then pounced to the attack. Gliding to its prey on widespread tentacle-wings, it landed smack on target and enveloped the victim's head in its crushing grip.

Then, without warning, the darkmantle's flesh was suddenly being ripped and torn. It was apparently some type of claw, but it tasted of metal when it bit deep into the darkmantle's tentacle. A quick buffet sent the strange claw flying away.

Then, just as suddenly, solid blows were striking the darkmantle's shell, hard enough for it to begin cracking. The darkmantle winced in silent pain,[20] but kept gripping its prey. Surely, the creature would tire before long!

Then, apparently, it did just that; slumping to the left, the victim slid off the side of its perch and fell toward the ground below.

Shandrilla felt the world start to spin and realized she was mere seconds away from blacking out. Her left hand brushed against her coil of silken rope; acting on little more than instinct, she grabbed it from somewhere in the middle, wound it around her wrist a few times, and leapt from the snake-god's head.

Her consciousness left her at some point on the way down.

Javorik saw her emerge from the inky blackness like a falling rock, some sort of bag over her head. It wasn't until she suddenly stopped her descent and crashed sideways into the statue that he realized she was hanging suspended from her thin line. She dangled by her left wrist, her toes some ten feet above the ground.

The bag was moving, tightening its grip around Shandrilla's head.

"Hands!" yelled Javorik at the dwarves, interlocking his fingers to demonstrate what he wanted, then spouting off the words to his magic missile spell. Ardorrak and Thorvin dropped their weapons and locked hands, while shafts of magical energy struck the grayish "bag" on Shandrilla's head.

"Up!" yelled Javorik, as he raced toward the two dwarves and placed his right foot in their interlocked hands. They straightened their postures and threw their hands up over their heads, flinging the gnomish illusionist high into the air.

Javorik landed on the back of Shandrilla's legs and climbed his way up to her shoulders. On the way up he slipped her short sword from its scabbard and stabbed the creature that was even now tightening its grip around her neck.

The results were as Javorik had hoped. The monster released its grip on the human to better deal with this new threat; Javorik pierced it under its hardened shell with the sword and flipped it, sword and all, off of his friend and into the air.

The darkmantle found itself unable to fly with a metal sword poking out from the side of its body; it plummeted to the ground and struck hard. Reacting quickly, it rolled up onto its tentacle-tips, ready to scurry away—only to be cut in half by a single stroke of Haaj's battleaxe.

Shandrilla awoke on the ground, surrounded by five worried faces. There was a throbbing pain in her left shoulder, and the skin on her left wrist felt raw.

"Shanny? You okay?" asked Javorik, worry in his voice.

"Okay," croaked Shandrilla. "What—happened? What was—that—thing?"

"Beats me," admitted the little illusionist. Some kind of weird tentacle monster. It's dead, though. You sure you're okay?"

"Fine," rasped Shandrilla in response, swallowing hard. Her throat felt raw; it was difficult to get the words out.

"You think you can move, then? We're ready to go, if you are."

"Ruby?" croaked Shandrilla, casting her gaze up at the snake-god statue. Its head was still sheathed in darkness.

Ardorrak approached with a handful of tinted shards. The slivers glinted red and glowed slightly. "Colored glass," he said disgustedly. "The thing shattered when ye dropped it. Complete waste of yer time."

"Then—let's—go," gasped Shandrilla, pulling herself up to her feet. She cradled her left arm against her stomach, thinking she had probably dislocated her shoulder from the sudden lurch at the end of her descent.

Ardorrak picked up his torch and silently led the others back the way they had come. Javorik and Federico flanked Shandrilla protectively on either side, ready to catch her if she stumbled.

As they exited the forgotten temple, Shandrilla took one last look back at the giant statue. As if on cue, the darkness spell expired, and the snake-god seemed to wink at Shandrilla with its one good eye, glowing a faint red in the shadows.

Shandrilla shivered and turned away. D

THE DARKMANTLE WINCED IN SILENT PAIN, BUT KEPT GRIPPING ITS PREY. SURELY, THE CREATURE WOULD TIRE BEFORE LONG!

20-foot radius of effect is certain to encompass the darkmantle's intended prey) or upon a small pebble that the creature usually carries with it under its shell for that very purpose. The pebble is imbued with *darkness* and dropped down near the intended victim; the darkmantle follows immediately afterward and attacks.

A darkmantle's echolocation works perfectly within the area of effect of the *darkness* spell, allowing the creature to "see" well enough to attack without the standard chance of missing.

20. **When a darkmantle attacks with its tentacles,** it makes a grapple attack with a +4 bonus without provoking an attack of opportunity. Once attached, the darkmantle constricts for an automatic 1d4+4 points of damage each round until the victim is slain or escapes. Grappling is described fully on page 137 of the *Player's Handbook*.

If the darkmantle's initial attack misses, it usually flies up to drop onto its prey again.

21. **Other than the subsonic pulses of sonar,** darkmantles make no vocalizations.

Marc Sasso
©

Ecology of the Death Knight

BY MATTHEW SERNETT
ART BY MARC SASSO AND STEVE ARGYLE

“

From the dark into the light,
From the small unto the great,
From the valleys dark I ride
O’er the hills to conquer fate!”

— “*Horseman Springing*,” *Lilla Cabot Perry*

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

HISTORY

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

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

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

undead, entombed behind miles of rock by those few dwarves who escaped his reign alive.

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

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

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEATH KNIGHT

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

Religion DC	Result
15	Death knights are skeletal warriors who retain the intelligence and combat skills they had in life. They often lead other undead soldiers in a war against the living.
20	Death knights are warriors who chose to become undead. Often they have a specific goal or vendetta that provoked their transformations, but some simply fear the afterlife so much that they instead choose an eternal living death.
25	A death knight carries its soul in its weapon. This weapon has the power to become ghostly and pierce armor as if it was not there. If you take a death knight's weapon, you weaken the knight. A death knight can also surround itself in a burst of unholy fire that burns the living and wreathes undead in dangerous green and black flames.
30	A death knight's soul weapon weakens anyone else who wields it as long as the death knight has not been destroyed. If you break a death knight's weapon, the knight can restore it with a touch. Death knights bolster nearby undead allies, so it's best to separate the knight from its minions.

BECOMING A DEATH KNIGHT

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

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

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

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

SOUL WEAPONS

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

A soul weapon is similar to a lich's phylactery in that the death knight's soul resides there instead of in its body. But in most other ways, the soul weapon is the opposite of a phylactery. For a lich its phylactery is a weakness that allows its permanent destruction, but the soul weapon is the death knight's greatest strength. A death knight literally wields its soul as a weapon. The soul weapon's strikes burn with death, and at the death

knight's command it can become immaterial, passing through armor and shields to strike at its foes' unprotected flesh.

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

PHYSIOLOGY

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY

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

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

of undeath must offer them something mortality cannot: power unmitigated by age.

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

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

Newly made death knights and those who regret their decision usually act alone, but with time most death knights accept their status among the undead and use it as a tool for power. Death knights can command lesser undead, and though they

will work with dim-witted creatures such as zombies, most prefer minions that can accept and act upon complex commands. In particular, death knights prefer the services of undead that behave like warriors. Humanoid skeletons, battle wights, and sword wraiths serve them well as foot soldiers, captains, and bodyguards.

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

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

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

MONSTER EVOLUTION

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

MECHANICS

Until 3rd Edition, the death knight changed little from its original form as envisioned by Charles Stross (also the creator of the githyanki) for the original *Fiend Folio*, published in 1981. Stross designed the death knight as an armor-wearing lich with a sword. It could cast eleven different spells, including *wall of ice* at will, a 20d6 *fireball*, and *gate* to bring in demon allies. When the death knight reappeared in 2nd Edition, it lost the *gate* spell but retained virtually every other aspect of its mechanics. The death knight's translation into a template for 3rd Edition gave the lich some space by removing nearly all the death knight's spells, but it didn't really define the death knight as something other than an undead with a fear aura and 20d6 fiery blast.

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

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

APPEARANCE

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

FAMOUS DEATH KNIGHTS

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

Saint Kargoth: First introduced in *Dragon* and then adopted by the *Greyhawk* campaign setting, Saint Kargoth was a noble

human knight who, along with thirteen fellow knights, became a death knight after being corrupted by Demogorgon. Kargoth was jealous that another knight was chosen to lead the Great Kingdom's knight protectors, and his fury and envy lead him to seek the power of undeath to pursue his revenge. He became a hero to the worshipers of Hextor, hence his appellation as a saint.

Lord Soth: Like Kargoth, Lord Soth was also a great knight, but Soth's transformation into a death knight is a far more twisted tale. Soth's wife gave birth to a monster that was a representation of Lord Soth's soul. Thinking his wife had been unfaithful, Lord Soth murdered her and his child, even though Lord Soth was himself unfaithful to his wife. When his crime was discovered, Lord Soth was spirited away from his execution by knights loyal to him. While besieged with his knights, Lord Soth was informed that he could save the world from a great cataclysm. He left to pursue the quest that would save the world, but he turned back when told lies about his new wife's fidelity. Soth confronted his new wife and their child while the cataclysm occurred, refusing to save them from a fiery death. The fire that killed them engulfed the whole keep, killing Lord Soth and his allies, but the cursed Lord Soth arose as a death knight and his followers joined him in undeath.

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

Vanthus Vanderboren: Vanthus featured as a villain in Dungeon magazine's "Savage Tide" adventure path. Appearing as a human foe throughout the first two adventures, he returns as a half-fiend after visiting the Abyss and being transformed by the Flesh Forge. Following his death at the hands of the PCs, Demogorgon turns him into a death knight, and he bedevils the PCs again only to meet a second death. Upon this second failure, he is transformed into a larva, and the PCs meet him in this lowly form during the last adventure.

SAMPLE DEATH KNIGHTS

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

King of Brigadoon: The death knight might be the lord of a roaming fortress that appears at certain times in particular places. The death knight and his minions can threaten the PCs wherever they are, and the haunted ruin of the castle can offer an unexpected opportunity for exploration and

adventure. It might be like Brigadoon (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigadoon), appearing for a time and then vanishing for years, or perhaps it's like the flying citadel of Dragonlance fame (http://www.geocities.com/~kitiaria/LancePics/ArtOfDL.jpg). The Ravenloft setting offers obvious possibilities, but if your players are familiar with Lord Soth's time in that land (http://www.amazon.com/Knight-Black-Rose-Ravenloft-Terror/dp/1560761563/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2/102-8602245-6680940?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1186605666&sr=8-2), you might want to try something different.

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

The Headless Horseman: The Headless Horseman from Washington Irving's The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (http://authorsdirectory.com/b/sleep10.htm) could very well have been a death knight. A dejected death knight might become the unseen menace of an area that the PCs frequent. Based on the PCs' actions in the area, the death knight might gain a purpose and abandon random murders in favor of a more strategic effort against the PCs.

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

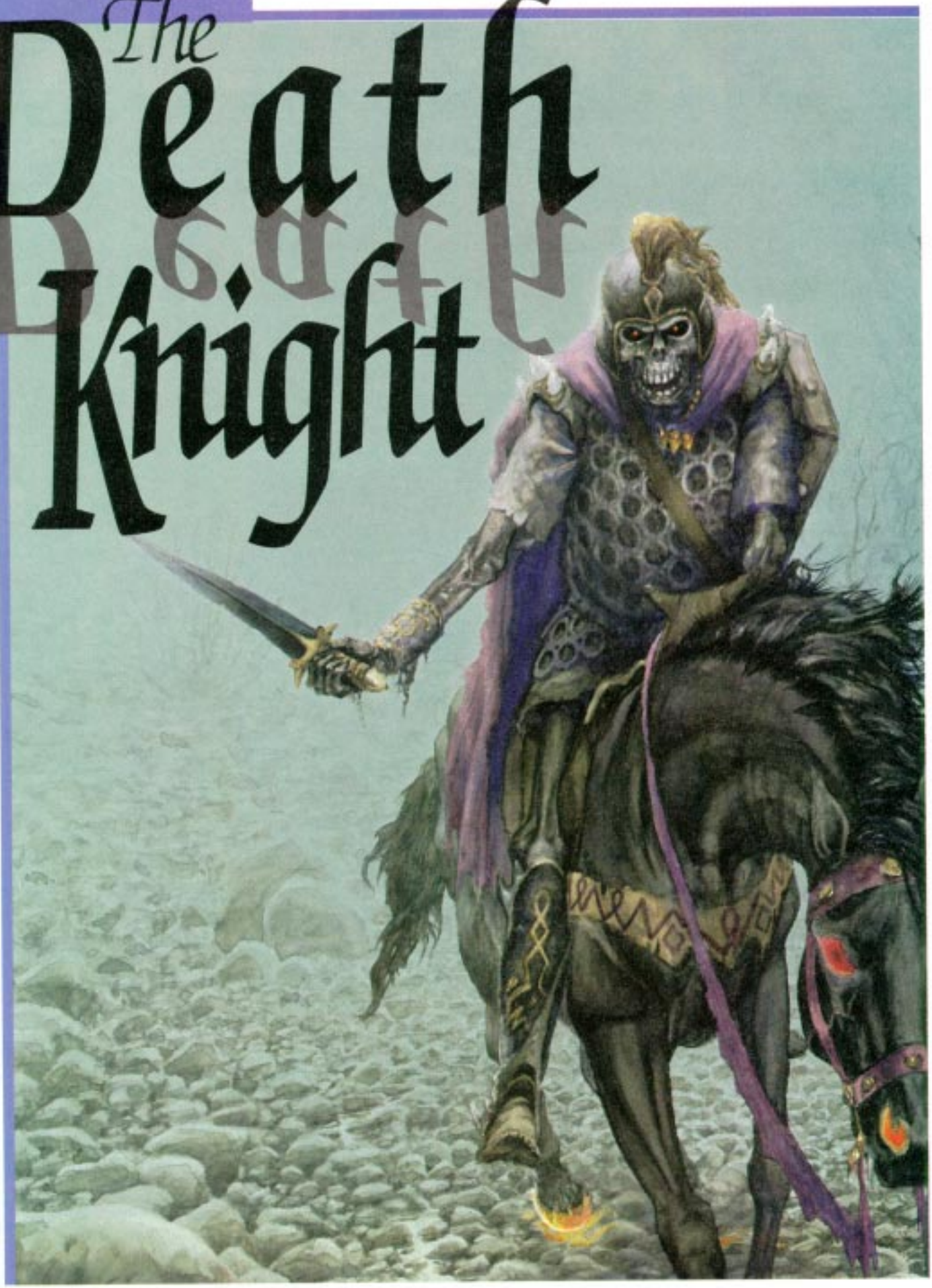
The Black Knight: A death knight ably fills the role of a stereotypical Black Knight (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Knight_%28disambiguation%29). This works best if you disguise the death knight's status as an undead warrior, and the death knight works as an ally of the PCs for a time. Like some of the black knights of literature and legend, the death knight might follow a strict code of honor despite his villainous nature.

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

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

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

The Death Knight



Inject a little life into your campaign

by **Ed Stark**

Artwork by Robert Klasnich

"As you force the door to the tomb open, dust and cobwebs blow into your faces-"

"I hold up my cloak to ward it off!"

"I hold my breath!"

"I turn away and close my eyes!"

"Okay, okay. The dust and cobwebs don't hurt you, and the stale air from inside the tomb starts to dissipate. You push the door inward, slowly but firmly, and its ancient hinges groan —"

"I pull out some oil and splash it on the hinges!"

"I ready my crossbow! I'm also ready to throw a torch in the room!"

"Remember — we're not stepping inside the door! We're pushing it open from outside!"

"Fine. The door's open. Inside, you see dust and cobwebs covering two large mounds. Gold and silver, only partially covered by the dust, peek out through the cracks in the cobwebs. There apears to be a body lying on top of each of the piles—"

"I'm throwing some oil on the nearest pile!"

"My torch follows it, buddy! Oh, and I've still got my crossbow ready!"

"I pull out my holy symbol and peek out between the two fighters!"

"Good. Fine. The oil splashes on both piles, and the cobwebs catch fire easily. Old garments and death shrouds burn away, and you see gold and silver underneath. You also see the bodies of two large warriors, covered in ancient armor and clutching mighty swords. They are skeletal—any remnants of flesh left on their bones has been burned a way."

"All right—undead!"

"I put away my crossbow—it's no good versus skeletons."

"Hah! Don't worry about these skeletons, boys—I'm 4th level! They're going bye-bye af they start to move!"

"Right. And move they do. The body on the right stands up clutching a two-handed sword. It swings it once, as if to make ready, while the other pulls a morning star and a shield out from under its feet. Both are moving fluidly, as they were once practiced warriors."

"Yeah, yeah. C'mon, let's start counting the gold."

"Do I see anything that looks magical?"

"I hold up my holy symbol. 'Begone, foul creatures! Bach to the sleep of death!'"

"Nice. They don't seem impressed. In fact, they seem so unimpressed that one strides forward and points at the fighter looking over its pile of gold. The other one doesn't seem nearly as dramatic-it steps forward and takes a swing at the thief."

"Wait a minute! I thought you said these were skeletons!"

"Yeah! What do you mean it swings at me? Skeletons are slow! I'd have plenty of time—"

"Hold it! I turn skeletons automatically at 4th level! These can't be—"

Silence.

"Death knights! Aaaah!"

Are you up to your armpits in nameless undead? Are low-level encounters with the spawns of evil becoming predictable and tiresome? If you hear one more player joke "Brains, we want brains..." when your supposedly horrific necromantic creations shamble forth to do battle, are you going to scream?

Well, then, inject a little *death* into your campaign.

A death *knight,* to be specific.

The Death Knight as NPC

Originally found only on the world of Krynn, death knights pervade the planes and worlds of the AD&D® game like, well, undead warriors out for blood. They do battle with the forces of good and evil alike, pursuing their nightmarish destinies on their own terms. They make your game a little more interesting in the process.

The NPC death knight described in this article is based on the "Death Knight" entry in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome for the AD&D game. That book features the "basic" death knight-a powerful, interesting adversary for the heroes in its own right, and a good place to start with this terrifying new NPC class.

Creating the Death Knight

All death knights were once proud and able warriors, and their statistics reflect this. Even the most inexperienced death knight must have had *some* ability before it died, or it would not have been made a death knight in the first place. Incompetence is not the same as true evil, after all (though it may sometimes seem like it).

As a result, death knights seldom have *any* ability scores below 10. The following chart shows how to determine a death knight's basic abilities.

Characteristic	Die Roll
Strength	18+d100*
Constitution	14+1d4
Dexterity	12+1d6
Intelligence	8+1d10
Wisdom	8+1d10
Charisma	10+1d8**

* The death knight's Strength may improve (see below).
** Living beings may or may not find the death knight horrific in appearance, but there is no denying its presence or power of command.

All death knights are evil in alignment. Almost all are chaotic evil, but a few (10%) are able to resist the chaotic pull of undeath and stay either lawful (30%) or neutral (70%) evil.

Death knight NPCs seldom start out at 1st level. Whatever evil force creates them usually "rewards" them with power to reflect the evil might they had in life. And, because the death knight is an intelligent and fairly independent creature, it can advance in level after its creation.

Death knights use the same XP table as rangers and paladins, roll ten-sided dice for hit points, and have the same rules for proficiencies and weapon specialization as warriors. Their THAC0s are the same as for warriors of their level, though many death knights specialize in their chosen weapons and, therefore, gain certain bonuses.

Death knights make saving throws as either warriors or priests, whichever save is better. They have no level limits, though

death knights over 9th level are extremely rare (thank goodness!).

Unlife Abilities

The evil that creates and motivates a death knight rewards its servant with certain special abilities. All death knights have the following characteristics:

• When a death knight performs an act of pure, unmitigated, imaginative evil (like corrupting a lawful good character and convincing him to take evil actions), it gains +10% to its Strength. But with each such act, it becomes more and more difficult for the death knight to gain another bonus. Thus, death knights with high Strength bonuses are extremely inventive in their evil. The Strength incentive inspires them to new lows in evil. (There are rumors that some death knights, by achieving acts of unspeakable horror and depravity, have actually advanced their undead Strength *beyond* the 18/00 limit and up to 19 or 20.)

• Unlike most other undead, death knights cannot be turned by a priest of any mythos or level. Death knights can be dispelled by a *holy word* spell, however, and this one weakness makes them hate and fear all good priests.

• Each death knight gains a magic resistance equal to 30% plus 5% per level of experience. A 4th-level death knight has a 50% magic resistance, while a 9th-level death knight resists magic at 75%. However, no death knight may have a magic resistance higher than 95%.

• All death knights involuntarily radiate *fear* in a 5′ radius. This sometimes makes their dealings with the living much more interesting.

• Death knights can use any magical items not prohibited to fighters. Some death knights (who were multi- or dual-classed in life but lost those abilities in undeath) can use wizard (10%) or priest (15%) items as well. No death knight can use a potion or item that must be ingested, since it has no natural bodily functions and cannot eat, drink, or breathe, even if it desired.

• The force of evil that creates a death knight often provides it with magical weapons, armor, and other equipment it can use in the fight against good. The most basic magical item a death knight usually has is a magical sword or other weapon.

• Every death knight has a 10% chance per level of gaining a roll on the table below. For example, if you create a 5th-level death knight, check five times to see if it gains a magical weapon; once at 10%, then 20%, 30%, 40%, and finally 50% to reflect the five opportunities the knight has to gain such a weapon. Swords are listed, but feel free to substitute other weapons with corresponding powers.

• A death knight's magical weapon is not acquired in the manner of other such items. The weapon is usually placed where the death knight will find it only if he commits a terrible, evil act. Once the death knight has rolled successfully for a special weapon, he can never roll again on the following table, even if he loses his weapon.

Roll	Death Knight's Weapon
1	*Long sword +2*
2	*Two-handed sword +3*
3	*Two-handed sword +4*
4	*Short sword of quickness*
5	*Short sword of dancing*
6	*Short sword of life stealing*

Experience Before and After Death

As mentioned above, living warriors who become death knights retain some of their experience and abilities, depending on how evil they were in life and how terrible the force of evil is that creates them. For example, Lord Soth, the most famous (if not most powerful) death knight of all, murdered his wife so that he could continue an affair with an elf maid. The fact that Lord Soth was supposedly an honorable Knight of Solamnia made this an even more terrible crime, and it "earned" him great power at the beginning of his death knight "career."

It is unlikely that any force of evil, no matter how weak or powerful, would create a death knight at less than 4th level-except as an extraordinary punishment for a warrior who once fought against evil but finally succumbed. Begin your death knight NPC at the lowest experience total possible for the level desired, and let it progress using the ranger/paladin XP chart in the *Player's Handbook.* Remember, death knights use the same rules for proficiencies and specialization as living warriors, so determine their abilities along those lines.

As do some living characters, death knights earn more abilities as they achieve higher levels of experience:

• At **4th level,** a death knight radiates *fear* in a 5′ radius, and it can cast *detect magic* and *detect invisibility* at will.

• At **5th level,** it can cast *dispel magic* twice per day.

• At **6th level,** it can cast *wall of ice* at will.

• At **7th level,** it can cast one of the following spells, once per day: *power word stun, power word kill,* or *power word blind.*

• At **8th level,** it can cast *symbol of fear* and ***symbol of pain*** once per day.

• At **9th level,** it can cast *firball* once per day.

All of the death knight's magical spells function at twice its own level of ability, to a maximum of 20th level. For example, a 2nd-level death knight casts spells as a 4th-level caster.

Companions of Evil

Upon achieving 9th level, a death knight becomes an extraordinary force of evil in its own right. It begins to radiate dread and undeath wherever it goes, and other undead sense and seek out the source of the evil. The death knight attracts undead followers and allies that it can use to hatch and execute its schemes.

Undead Followers

The followers of the death knight include skeletons, zombies, ghouls, ghasts, wights, and other low-intelligence undead that may be wandering around the DM's chosen world. These creatures feel the evil in the death knight and rise from their resting places, wandering by twilight and darkness toward the death knight's abode, knowing only that they must serve a power greater and more evil than their own.

For every month that a death knight spends in a particular area, it attracts 1d20 undead followers of this type. Many death knights actually loathe these followers and either assign them menial or pointless tasks (like digging a hole through the earth or carrying water from the sea to an adjoining river) to get them out of the way, or send them on suicide missions against more powerful foes-like walled towns or armed citadels. The undead respond without question and obey the death knight; that's all they can contemplate doing.

But some death knights use their followers to set up a gruesome parody of a living court. Inside a death knight's castle, zombies and skeletons act as pre-programmed servitors, jugglers, and ghastly courtiers, playing out roles the death knight sets for them. They act out plays, fight duels, and guard the walls, all as if they were living, breathing men and women in a high court of the land.

The most common use a death knight has for its undead followers is to disturb the living. The death knight uses its minions to raid villages, carry off the living, and wipe out caravans. The death knight has no concern for its own losses-more undead find it every month. It is fortunate that the chaotic nature of most death knights makes them feel this way; if they merely waited a few months or years, they could build unstoppable armies of the dead.

Undead followers who must normally check morale do not do so when following a death knight. Perhaps this is because the death knight is such a charismatic leader, or, more likely, it is because the undead innately fear the wrath of the death knight more than any other possible fate.

Undead Allies

Once per month the death knight has a chance to attract a powerful undead ally such as a lich, vampire, skeleton warrior, or other creature. This chance is equal to 5% per level of the death knight. The ally arrives at the death knight's lair as a possible servitor, master, or partner in evil, depending on the death knight's power and prestige.

For example, a newly arrived death knight could attract a powerful lich that

would attempt to subvert it and force the death knight to do its will, resulting in a battle between the two creatures. Most likely, however, the force of evil that controls the death knight keeps the two from becoming deadly enemies, and they work together (at least at first) to plague the living. Once a death knight has attracted an undead ally, it will not attract another until the first has departed or been destroyed. It continues to attract undead followers, however.

The Lair of the Death Knight

Death knights can and do exist anywhere. They usually try to make their abode in undeath mimic the abode they had, or wanted to have, in life-if they do not still possess that lair, that is. But a death knight's strange nature wars with its desires, and the holding becomes a house of horror soon enough.

All death knights "remember" being great warriors and, possibly, lords in life. They seldom build castles or palaces, but they are happy to take them over after putting their occupants to the sword. On rare occasions, death knights construct their own castles, and these tend to be horrors of impossible architecture and torture, maintained only by the evil will of the death knight and the efforts of its undead followers.

The interior of a death knight's lair smacks of incongruity. All the floors and furnishings in a given room may be old and covered in dust and cobwebs-except for a vase full of fresh, red roses that seem to thrive in the dark, dank atmosphere. Or a wall might be covered by moth-eaten tapestries, majestic, sad banners from battles long lost or won-and the freshly killed body of a cleric, pinned to the wall with a spike through his chest. Something old, something new, something bloody, something blue-death knights lead the undead with their "fashion statements."

As a result of this strange life-and-death juxtaposition, hirelings and henchmen (and other NPCs) who venture into a death knight's lair automatically lose two ranks from their morale. The bizarre horror and twisting terror of the lair strike fear into even the bravest and most loyal souls.

Building the Death Knight

Begin with the living character. Who was he (or she)? What order of honor and goodness did he serve? What heroic deeds made his later fall so tragic and his betrayal so complete? How has he made himself so infamous since becoming undead? The following is an example of a death knight you can use to make your world darker and more deadly

Lady Jane Restfield, a.k.a. "Bloody Jane the Damned"

Lady Jane Restfield once served the forces of order and goodness with bright steel and an even brighter soul. A paladin, she fought to keep evil at bay and bring goodness and fair play to all the corners of her world. She numbered among the Twelve Knights of the Golden Realm, and she was chief in their order when darkness fell.

It began with an attack on her family. It was not a physical attack, oh, no-Lady Jane and the Restfields could handle any battle an enemy brought to them. Two of the three Restfield sisters (Lady Jane included) had distinguished themselves at the Battle of Broken Lances, and Jane's third sister, Antonia, was a wizardess without peer.

The attack was slander. First, Antonia was accused of dabbling in dark magic and forbidden lore. The family's own investigators, employed to clear the young woman's name, found evil tomes hidden among her belongings. Though Antonia swore she'd never seen or used them before, doubt began to grow.

Then Lady Jane's second sister was killed. That would not be dishonorable, but her body was found in a tavern of ill repute, a knife in her back and a tankard in her hand. Though her own retainers swore that she'd been nowhere near the tavern that night and that they'd never seen her drink a drop of ale in her life, the body (and the evidence) was plain.

Amidst all the scandal, Lady Jane strove to distinguish herself and shield her family. She became more aggressive in battle and won the nearly impossible Siege of Hightower almost single-handed. But when rumors of bribery and dishonorable battle practices shrouded even that victory in shadow, Jane found herself in despair.

No one knows what pushed Jane over the edge. Perhaps it was her mother's apparent suicide, or Antonia's lapse into madness. Whatever the cause, one day Lady Jane killed an entire audience of courtiers who had come to demand her presence at a trial of honor, and she rode off into the night.

The next time anyone saw "Bloody Lady Jane," she had changed dramatically. Her skin, once white and clear, was now bleached and gaunt to the bone. Her eyes were hollow and her beautiful, raven tresses were gray and brittle. She was undead.

Lady Jane the Damned, as the people of the Golden Realm call her, rode down on the estate of her birth with an army of undead. She slew the groundskeepers and those of her distant family who still inhabited the place, and she butchered all who came to fight her off. Now she holds court in that villa of the damned, content to sing of her terrible betrayal and expedition into unlife only so long as no one approaches her gates. If anyone ventures onto the lands of Bloody Lady Jane, they are never seen again . . . *Alive*.

Adventure Suggestions

Death knights come from anywhere and can go anywhere. Though they tend to be territorial, inhabiting places that remind them of their previous lives, a few wander the land almost like revenants, seeking some lost meaning for their undead lives.

Most death knights are not motivated by a hatred for the living but by a loathing for their own horrible existence. While no death knight would ever succumb to destruction voluntarily, they resent all those who have and cherish life, since they, at some point, despaired and embraced evil and unlife (consciously or not).

As a result, death knights exist to torment the living and sorely test the valorous. They desire to prove that they made the only choice possible to them during their lives by continually corrupting the good and noble and bringing them down to their level of evil. A death knight that succeeds in corrupting a truly good individual does not experience bliss or triumph, however. Something in its makeup forces it to loathe even *that* victory, and the death knight usually destroys anyone who succumbs to its evil.

Death knight adventures should be centered around cleverly woven traps and hard choices. For example, it would be characteristic for a death knight to kidnap the entire family of a good character and threaten to torture and kill those innocents, while at the same time sending its undead legions and allies against a village the PC is sworn to protect. The PC has time to save only one group, his family or the village-which will it be? If the death knight has its way, the PC's choice is always the wrong one.

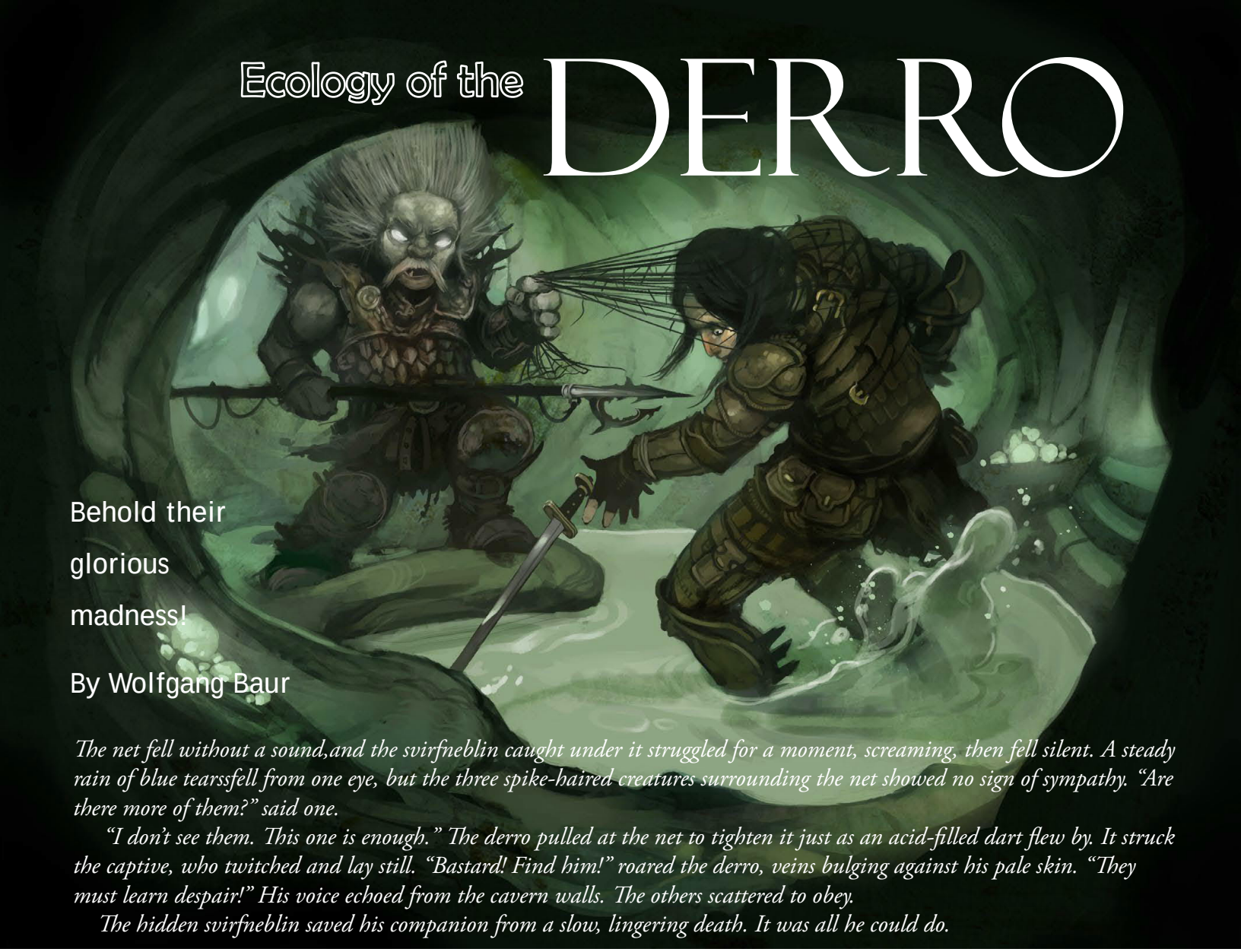
Sometimes, death knights hatch even less straightforward schemes. Kidnapping and torture are always good motivations, and the death knight seems to have an uncanny ability to manipulate PCs into doing what it wishes. It might kidnap a loved one or loyal retainer and force the PC to "prove" his valor by fighting monsters, performing quests, and eventually choosing between good (and the death of his loved one) or evil (and the loved one's survival).

A Final Word

Though this article must end, there is no end to the usefulness of the death knight as an NPC villain. The death knight begins as a tragic character that the PCs might actually feel sorry for (make certain they know or learn of its history), but it becomes a terrifying evil that must not be allowed to roam free.

What's more, the death knight is not just a villain: It is a *promise*. PCs who ignore their alignments, break their vows, or make "the hard choices" too easily and without conscience can look at a death knight and wonder: How far away from that am I? Ω

Ecology of the DERRO



Behold their glorious madness!

By Wolfgang Baur

The net fell without a sound,and the svirfneblin caught under it struggled for a moment, screaming, then fell silent. A steady rain of blue tearssfell from one eye, but the three spike-haired creatures surrounding the net showed no sign of sympathy. "Are there more of them?" said one.

"I don't see them. This one is enough." The derro pulled at the net to tighten it just as an acid-filled dart flew by. It struck the captive, who twitched and lay still. "Bastard! Find him!" roared the derro, veins bulging against his pale skin. "They must learn despair!" His voice echoed from the cavern walls. The others scattered to obey.

The hidden svirfneblin saved his companion from a slow, lingering death. It was all he could do.

The derro are the only permanently insane species to live in the underdark. Ropers, scourges, aboleth, and the various aberrations are alien but not insane; their thoughts are ordered, if entirely foreign. The fishfolk are prone to insanity but not all of them suffer its lash. Even the endless despair of driders and the insatiable hunger of the ghouls are understandable, powerful versions of normal feelings.

The derro are different. They survive not in spite of but because of their particularly passionate embrace of madness, and they thrive on it. Saner species fear the strange little dwarves because they seem to believe themselves subject only to forces no one else can see. Each derro believes that he and his race are the masters of the underdark. Other races believe that this is part of their megalomania; derro believe their superiority is just a fact, and act accordingly, as if they already ruled the underworld.

History of the Derro

In the dark caverns where the River Styx presses close to the surface world, time rolls slowly and history is an illusion. Without day and night, without seasons, time passes marked only by the cycles of sleep, birth, and death. Entire species slip into the worship of dark gods, into the contemplation of the dark and empty voids around them, and despair. This is what happened to the derro.

Long ago, the derro were the bastard offspring of humans and dwarves, no more loved than half-elves are, but tolerated by human society. Dwarven society shunned them as abominations and pushed them down into the darkness. Most perished quickly; they were eaten by ghouls, gobbled by purple worms, or they simply starved to death. The drow, aboleth, and duergar enslaved the survivors. They became a distinct dwarven race, scarred by their servitude.

Over centuries, the derro's resentment of their pitiful lot led them to the worship the ancient elemental gods and to enter into pacts with demon lords of madness and revenge. Among the drow, this distasteful gutter cultism was not considered especially dangerous, or even terribly unusual. They treated the derro as favored idiot children, too foolish to worship a proper demon goddess like their own.

Among the aboleth, they were treated with pride as proper acolytes of gods behind most creatures understanding. The duergar simply worked them until they died in place.

The derro slowly grew in numbers and found a place as bullies, slave overseers, and torturers. Each year a few gave in to their deviant appetites and were slain if they raised a hand against their masters. Over the years, the underdark races came to view that as "just the way derro are." Even the madly violent ones were allowed to live.

Gradually, the derro turned from madness as a refuge from pain, to madness as a source of strength. Legends tell that some escaped from their masters and built a small settlement of their own, where their madness resonated more strongly the more of them gathered. The strength and skill they had learned from the duergar, the forbidden lore they had taken from the aboleths, and the tolerance for bitter suffering they had learned from the drow all came together as they toiled to create a metamagical planar resonating device called "the ship of night", a piece of engineering combining dwarvish craft, stolen aboleth lore, and the evil of drow.

Through the use of its projectors and lenses, the derro called forth their gods, creatures from beyond the veil, and took a terrible vengeance on their former masters. Then, legends say, the gods retreated from the world.The derro vengeance was complete, but their gods had abandoned them in the cold and dark. The gods gave the derro freedom from slavery in exchange for this summoning, at the price of their minds. No derro was ever sane again.

Ever since, the derro have followed a path of cult frenzies, slaughters and slow torture to please their demon gods, to bring them back, to show themselves worthy of the rulership of the underdark, their destiny and gift. Torture and madness and despair are the derro's pleading worship.

Other races don't fear the derro because of their military or arcane power. They fear that the derro madness hold deep and forbidden truths, knowledge that destroys other races outright. They fear that the derro gods might come back and teach their mad little servants new tricks. Certainly derro seem able to draw on reserves of strength and strange arcane lore that other races lack.

Derro Knowledge and Craft

Derro are famous for their knowledge of secret lore, their poisons, and their mastery of many underdark elements and resources that others do not care to discover, such as the proper care of oozes or the divinations to be read from thoqqua entrails. The wisest savants often have ranks in a wide range of disparate skills, from Knowledge (Dungeoneering) to Craft (Stone), Profession (Worm Farmer), and Knowledge (Arcane). If you use Knowledge (Forbidden Lore) in your game, all derro savants have at least 3 ranks in that skill.

The body of derro knowledge does not come from books or scrolls. Instead, half of it is imparted to those who become the derro savants by the tearing of the veil, and the other half is learned through oral repetition. Some claim that the derro wisdom comes from creatures beyond the veil who speak to the derro; indeed, careful listening does reveal that savants often mutter to themselves for days and hours at a time, with pauses in their conversations as if something were answering them. No one else hears the answers given, and this condition is usually ascribed to their insanity.

Derro Anatomy and Appearance

Derro are short, stocky creatures with flat white eyes and spiky hair often glued into spikes using bat guano; this gives them both a strangely wild appearance and a peculiar smell. Many adult derro have cataracts that should completely obscure their vision, yet their milky eyes can see.

Derro insanity is the defining feature of the race, but it is not present at birth. Derro children are all clear-eyed and normal, but they are scarred and driven insane by their parents quite deliberately, usually at the age of 4, when their speech and motion are fully-formed. The ritual used goes by many names, again as a matter of preference from tribe to tribe and even year to year; sometimes they call it Staring into the Abyss, sometimes it is the Heartless Fire or the First Drink of True Knowledge.

In every case, the derro child is led away from the tribe into darkness and given a potion brewed by the group's leader from centipede venom and hallucinogenic fungi. The result is vomiting and visions, and in many cases the end of the derro child's life: roughly one in twelve is "taken by the gods". The derro do not mourn these losses; they consider them a blessing by the gods of madness on the child, and the parents comfort themselves with the knowledge that their child is spared a long life of struggle and want.

Knowledge of the Derro

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (Nature) can learn more about the derro. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

Table: Derro Lore

DC	Result
10	Derro are monstrous humanoids, the warped crossbreeds of human and dwarf, who live below the earth.
14	Derro worship gods of madness and despair, and yet they are powerful sorcerers and clever fighters. They often use poisoned weapons and magic to trap victims for ritual torture.
18	Derro are insane, prone to terrible rages and unprovoked violence. They use repeating crossbows, nets, and spells to catch their victims.
22	Derro are easily swayed by power; Bluffs work well against them, and they adopt new leaders and new gods frequently. They use incantation magic.

Their madness makes attempts to get information from them simply by asking suspect. They often wander into complex delusional fantasies of personal power and megalomanical tirades of the injustices visited on them and their clan by outside forces.

Derro are short-lived, perhaps because of the filth and madness that they consider normal. Few reach the age of 40, considered the mark of decrepitude and the blessings of elder gods by the derro. Persistent tale that derro elders are sacrificed in powerful blood rituals have never been confirmed.

Derro Magic

Derro magic is most common among the savants, their cultish sorcerers, wizards, diabolists, and warlocks. Many if not most of them follow schools of divination, elementalism, illusion, clockwork magic, and evocation; relatively few are transmuters, necromancers, star and shadow mages, or enchanters.

Most derro understand at least a few incantations and can chant them with a leader to generate form of group magic. These incantations include Parting the Veil, Scuttling Wisdom, The Black Road, and Calling Forth the Dweller.

Parting the Veil
Enchantment
Effective Level: 4th
Skill Check: Knowledge (Forbidden Lore or Arcana) DC 20, 5 successes
Failure: Death
Components: V, S, M, F, XP
Casting Time: 60 minutes
Range: Touch
Target: One creature
Duration: Instantaneous
Saving Throw: Will (special)
Spell Resistance: No

This incantation open a channel between the mind of the caster, the mind of the target, and powerful, semi-divine extra-planar entities who reveal a momentary glimpse of the dimensions normally invisible to corporeal creatures of the material plane. As a result, the target's eyes turn milky white, and the affected creature gains 1 rank in Knowledge (Forbidden Lore) – if it doesn't die of the shock.

To part the veil, the caster uses both symbols drawn on the target's face and eyelids, as well as chants and supplications to the elder elemental gods and the derro Mother of Madness.

If the incantation succeeds, the target learns to see normally through multiple dimensions and becomes an adult derro, doomed to both madness and secret knowledge.

Failure: If the caster fails two consecutive Knowledge (Forbidden Lore) checks, the Parting of the Veil adds one to the caster's ranks in Forbidden Lore and reveals far too much to the target. The target must make an immediate Will save in the face of this knowledge or die, their brain unable to correlate this alien knowledge with their own.

Material Component: Using a paste of bat dung, derro savant blood, and rare, fluorescent minerals, the caster inscribes lines and spirals around the eyes of the target.

Focus: An open grave, a cavern filled with centipedes, and other memento mori are used to bring the target close to the veil between planes.

XP Component: 200 XP.

Backlash: After Parting the Veil, the caster is fatigued.

Campaign Use: This incantation is purely a tool to reveal starry wisdom to the derro childen and ensure their eventual insanity. However, the derro are ecumenical in their madness, and will gladly offer to share their wisdom with anyone who professes any interest in learning it.

Derro Equipment

Derro gear is rarely well-kept, but some of it is surprisingly well-made and inventive.

Clothing and Armor: Derro wear good armor and clothes, but care for them sporadically. The strangest garment common among the derro is their love of bone-inlaid helmets with openings for hair, ears, and eyes. The eye and ear openings make sense from a practical point of view, but the derro insist that their hair must also have a way to reach the air (and thus create a point of vulnerability) for their leader's voices to reach them.

Derro studded leather armor is often dyed and decorated much more elaborately than most: some suits are simply black with white spots, others have swirls in shades of brown, black, and grey.

Cave Dragonscale Shields: These size Small masterwork dragonscale shields weigh 4 lbs, provide a +2 bonus to Armor Class, have a 10% arcane failure chance, and grant a -1 armor check penalty. Only derro seem to make them; gluing cave dragon scales to a heavy metal frame requires a special technique. They sell for 250 gp or more when they are available.

Messenger Bats: Some derro have a strange affinity for small cave creatures, typically bats (though sometimes also cave scorpions, rats, or centipedes). Their trained messenger bats do go where they are told, and carry small messages in tiny scroll cases attached to their hind legs. Because they resemble all other cave bats, they are usually a safe way to transmit messages quickly; the bats cover 32 miles per 8 hours flying. Messenger bats usually sell for 25 gp.

Poison Net: The derro have learned how to weave a complex type of netting using a combination of monstrous spider silk and fibres from a dried mushroom they. They coat these nets with contact poison such as weeping poison or dragon bile (Fort DC 26, Initial 3d6 Str, Secondary 0, 1,500 gp), and use it to make it easier to capture living victims for ritual torture and sacrifice to their dark gods. Any creature caught in a poison net must make a poison saving throw during each attempt to escape the net. Creatures that help a victim out of such a net must make also make such a saving throw. The poison net is almost identical to a normal net, weighing slightly less (5 lbs) because of its construction. They are never sold to outsiders.

Weeping Poison: Brewed from a com-

bination of mineral toxin and vermin venom, derro bluetear or weeping poison is a powerful injected poison that is made only by derro elders and alchemists. It is named for the copious tears that its paralyzed victims shed, both when they are captured and when the derro begin their vile tortures. The poison is Fort DC 17, Initial 2 Dex, Secondary 1d6+3 Dex and paralysis, 750 gp.

Society of the Derro

Derro society is a place of extreme violence and free-form dictatorship; they recognize no law but the law of brute strength and power, and they often fall victim to leadership cults, wherein a particularly powerful derro (or just as often, a powerful outsider, undead, dragon, or other creature) becomes the undisputed and frequently worshipped leader of the clan.

The non-derro leaders include cave dragons, undead such as liches or powerful ghouls, and demons of various stripes. In every case, the derro submit entirely and unthinkingly to their new overlords until the day they turn on them and attempt to tear them apart: that day is usually the first day that the new overlord disappoints the derro, failing to provide food, victims to torture, or other forms of entertainment.

Derro and Cave Dragons: Both the derro and cave dragons love darkness and blind-fighting, and the two get along well, as long as the derro show themselves as submissive, fawning, and generally obsequious creatures — which they are usually quite willing to do. They frequently form alliances, with derro providing information and support to a cave dragon in exchange for dragon bile poison and cave dragon scales.

Derro and Drow: Derro serve as torturers and bullies to the drow, flaying, crushing, and breaking those whom the drow themselves do not wish to bother with (or those who they fear to destroy, if they are taking political or religious risks). Drow treat derro are mildly retarded, violent imbeciles, and kill any so bold as to raise a hand to a female drow priestess or a powerful noble. What derro benefit because they gain the opportunity to torture many prisoners and they take payments in cash and foodstuffs. Derro also enjoy drow fungal wines, which they are too impatient or too demented to brew themselves.

Derro and Ghouls: Derro are foolish enough to sometimes follow the powerful darakhul ghouls who promise eternal life. The ghouls rarely make derro into ghouls, because their madness continues as undead, but the two do coexist fairly well.

Cults and Religion

The derro worship a ridiculous number of minor, piddling gods, who can best be described as bitter and meddling – because none of them except Mother Madness retain the derros' attention for long. Most of these gods are evil and all of them chaotic and deeply insane. These derro cults are constantly changes; in the past, they have worshipped the Goddess of Night and Magic, elder elemental gods of the deep underdark, and the Demon Eater, as well as goddesses of redemptive suffering, bat gods, and great worm gods.

Perhaps because of their shallow, flitting piety, few derro have much of a connection with the divine; their relgious passions are powerful but shallow, and they change their minds about gods as quickly as they do about leaders. Each season brings a new twisted god to their altars, and the old one is shoved aside at the least sign of failing to heed the derros' wishes.

Bandegreb, the Torture God

Bandegreb love inflicting pain, relishing the abuse of his power against the weak and helpless. His evil is complete; he hides his misdeeds under cloaks of darkness, but derro always attribute any strange echoes and screams in the underdark to "Bandegreb finding a new victim." Worship consists entirely of finding and torturing living things; everything else is secondary.

Domains: Chaos, Darkness, Destruction, Evil

Addrikah, the Mother of Madness

Addrikah is a strange elderly derro who babbles constantly; her voice is said to "spill wisdom", but her hymns are nonsense and her voice seems to hear only itself. She is revered as the derro savior, who saved all derro from slavery through the gift of madness. She is also the derro's connection to much more alien gods, as an oracle and interpreter, but to other races she seems completely cracked.

Despite her age, Addrikah is said to crush skulls with her tiny hands, sucking out the juices within and then somehow transforming brain matter into gemstones and ioun stones. Her worship and legends are disjointed, even by derro standards.

Domains: Chaos, Evil, Madness, Strength

Tikalekka, the Lord of Vermin

The god of centipedes, spiders, cave crickets, and all things verminous resembles a mass of chitinous fibers held together by swarms of beetles and roaches. The mass has poisonous fangs, a variable number of limbs, and complex mandibles rather than hands. His voice is the buzz of decay.

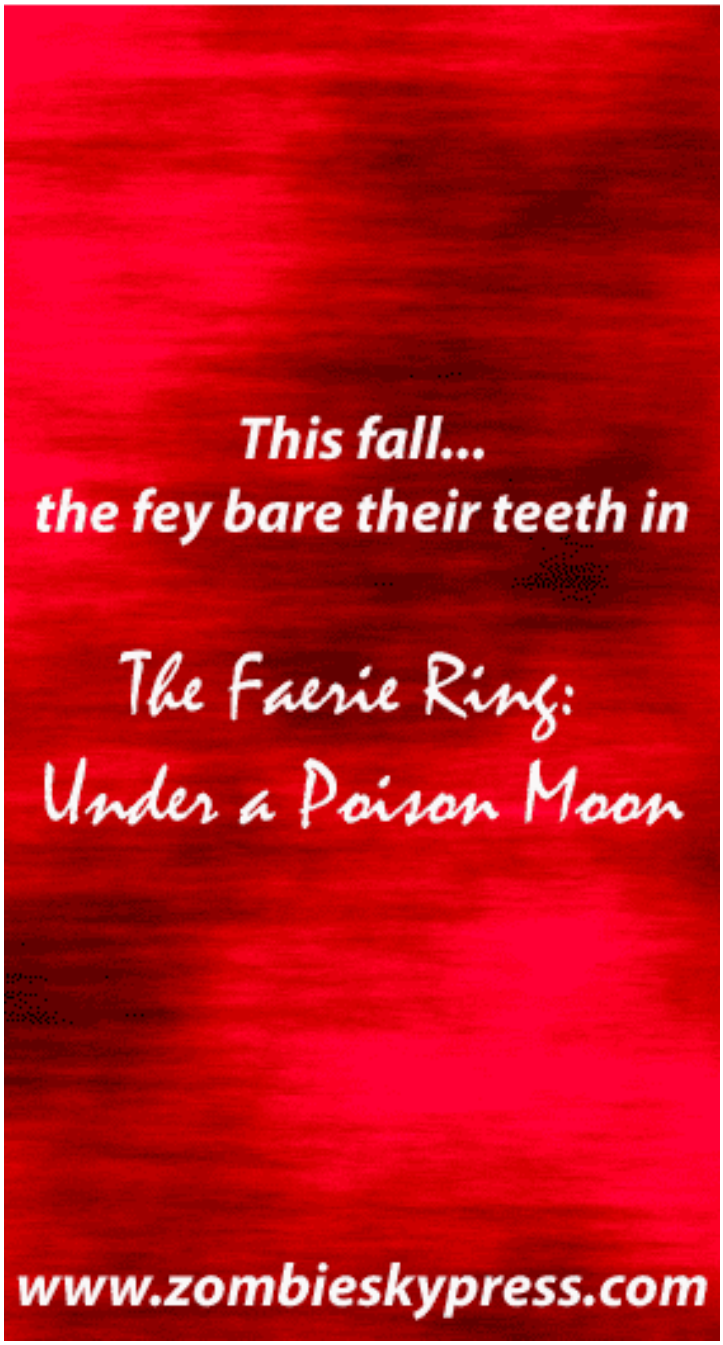
Poison, nets, and the Black Road are all his domain, and he is a powerful trickster. He is also completely insane, but (in derro legend at least) he is not evil, merely concerned for the safety of his followers, who are scorned by all living things.

Domains: Animal, Earth, Madness, Trickery

Derro Tactics and Combat

In combat, derro make little use of the Black Road and other incantations; instead, they rely on the information they gain from the elder gods to craft their battle strategy and they make heavy use of false retreats. In this tactic, after a quick exchange of blows they fall back in a "panic" toward a prepared area that has already been rigged with poisoned nets or a crossfire of poisoned bolts.

Zombie Sky Press



There they suddenly turn to make their stand, capturing as many foes alive as they can.

In larger fights when they need to seize and hold an objective, they often use their understanding of vermin and animal handling skills to capture and train the largest carrion beetle they can find. They use this beast as a fighting platform for overrunning positions, and they use their acid to melt the doors or obstacles that would otherwise require powerful magic or siege engines.

Advanced Derro Netter

Ulthor CR 10

Male Derro Fighter 7

CE Small Monstrous Humanoid

Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Imp Init); Senses Listen +2, Spot -3

Languages Derro, Undercommon

AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+6 breastplate, +4 Dex, +1 size, +2 cave dragonscale shield)

hp 81 (10d10+30 HD)

SR 15

Fort +10 **Ref** +9 **Will** +8

Speed 15 ft. (3 squares)

Melee +17/+12 heavy flail (1d8+8/x3)

Ranged+14 mwrk net (entangle touch+poison DC 16)

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +10

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3) at will - *darkness, ghostsound*; 1/day - *daze, sound burst*.

Special Atk sneak attack +1d6 and spell-like abilities

Abilities Str 18, Dex 18, Con 16, Int 12, Wis 5, Cha 16

SQ spell resistance 15, derro traits, poison use, vulnerability to sunlight and madness

Feats Blindfight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Sunder, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Quick Draw

Skills Bluff +12, Handle Animal +10, Hide +9, Listen +2, Move Silently +7, Ride +13

Possessions *+1 breastplate, +2 heavy flail*, 10 gp, 7 sp

Sneak Attack (Ex): Any time Ulthor's opponent is denied his Dexterity bonus to AC, or if a he flanks his opponent, he deals an extra 1d6 points of damage.

Derro Traits: As a small size humanoid, Ulthor gains a +4 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently.

Sneak Attack (Ex): Any time Ulthor's opponent is denied his Dexterity bonus to AC, or if a he flanks his opponent, he deals an extra d6 points of damage.

Vulnerability to Sunlight (Ex): Ulthor takes 1 point of Con damage for every hour he is exposed to sunlight, and he dies if his Con score reaches 0. Lost Con points are recovered at the rate of 1 per every 24-hour period spent underground or otherwise sheltered from the sun.

Madness (Ex): Ulthor uses his Charisma modifier on Will saves instead of his Wisdom modifier, and immunity to confusion and insanity effects. Ulthor cannot be restored to sanity by any means short of a *miracle* or *wish* spell.

Chapter One

Derro

Sunday, Rova 20th, 4709 AR—Patient 23 continues to believe the father of her unborn child is a demon. Last evening's additional exams did indeed produce scarring evidence along the lower abdomen, and recent damage to the back of the head near the base of the left ear. She refuses to sleep at night, complains of "the empty moon eyes that watch" and "the blue pit to Hell." She panics whenever she is brought down to the basements, as if she fears the very proximity of the ground. This evening I shall venture to the district in which she was found, bloody and amnesic, and ask around. If I can find evidence of this "blue pit to Hell," perhaps I will find more clues as to the frightful mystery that put her in my care.

—From the notes of missing Egorian alienist, Avakar Sivanchi

It is something of an irony that civilization, a result of a society's reaction to the perils and dangers of living in the wild, brings with it new dangers of its own. The concentration of life in such relatively small locations as one finds in the world's towns and cities magnifies many perils present to a lesser degree in lower populations. A single fire that might burn down a house in the rural parts of the world can spread and wipe out an entire district. A sickness that could devastate a family of farmers on a frontier can lance through a tightly packed population with frightening speed. A deadly predator that picks as its hunting grounds an acre of land will find much more to sate its appetite in a city's slum ward than it would along a lonely moor road. And when that predator is a master at hiding, stalking, and snatching its prey, and has developed exacting methods of covering the traces of its presence, a city becomes not a bulwark against disaster but the very catalyst for despair.

Every city is haunted by missing souls—citizens who simply vanish on the way home from a day's work or while out on a mundane errand. Some are lost forever. Others are returned, alive or dead, their bodies and minds changed from their experiences while abducted. And it seems that for every missing person case that reaches a satisfying (if sometimes tragic) conclusion, two more remain forever mysteries without solutions. What then of society's morale should it be learned that, in a horrifying preponderance, the causes of these unexplained vanishings and abductions stem from the same sinister source?

Cities cast shadows into the depths of the earth as surely as their buildings drape alleys in darkness on the brightest day. In the world below, strange creatures dwell and listen and lurk, the perpetrators of so many vanishings—the derros. Even if the sound of the distant thrum of civilization doesn't carry down through the deep and forgotten tunnels, the heavy concentration of life seems to draw these diminutive but sadistic, pale-skinned, vacant-eyed maniacs near. They build their lairs below the sewers and secret ways of society, creating hidden holes to the surface if none exist and using these passages as highways to make secret invasions under the cover of darkest night. Possessed of a hideous familiarity with the fragile pathways of the mortal frame that allow even the smallest knife to cut deep and kill or maim, they snatch the unsuspecting from beds and midnight walks, dragging them down to the blue-litten catacombs of their laboratories below. For these monsters seek not only to sate their lust for pain, but to discover why it is that those who live above can abide the searing light of the sun, their experiments an attempt to discover the source of this unique quality that the derros lack. They do not always kill in the methodic pursuit of this quest, but those they return to the surface are only rarely released with their minds intact. For most, the time spent among the derros persists only as paralyzing night terrors and repressed memories of pain and fear.

Ecology

The derros were not always the deranged lunatics they are today—in fact, they were once among the only denizens of the deepest vaults of the world who were not consumed with cruelty and hatred. In these ancient times, before the first derro emerged from its glowing cavern lair to look with jealousy upon those who lived under the sun's ruinous rays, their kind were known as the pech. Fey emigrants from the First World with strong ties to the Plane of Earth, the pech served even stranger masters as slaves. Under the direction of these now all but forgotten lords known today only as the Vault Keepers, the pech built and maintained immense caverns deep underground, their knowledge of earthcraft and its secrets allowing them architectural wonders that survive even to this day, untold eons after the Vault Keepers fled this world and abandoned the pech to their own fates.

Many of these pech grew angry and wrathful in the years following this abandonment, and turned on their kin in increasingly bloody and sadistic civil wars. It isn't clear which of the pech factions first abandoned their deep homes and began the long journey upward in search of a new place to live, but what is clear is that the further they drifted from the deep vaults, the more of this world they became. Just as gnomes have adapted to the world and have lost their deep connection to the First World, the wandering pech found themselves growing weaker and increasingly susceptible to mundane horrors like starvation and thirst. That the tunnels they ceaselessly climbed grew more and more barren further drove the pech to madness, and when it seemed that they must surely perish, for they had no supplies to return home for food or water, they came upon a savior—a pale blue fungus filled with life-giving nutrients and dripping with moisture.

Whether it was their long journey and evolution to be true denizens of this world, the effects of the strange blue fungus known as cytillesh (or "brain mold"), or a combination, the pech had forever transformed. Their bodies grew even lankier, pale and wiry with ivory hair and rough skin. Only in their basic humanoid frame, their white eyes, and their four-fingered hands did any real echo of the pech remain physically apparent—in their minds, no trace remained at all. And when the derros found that, not far above, the caverns opened into the limitless vault of the Overburn and that their flesh blistered and bled under the remorseless rays of the sun, they realized that they had come to their homes.

As centuries wore into eons, the derros spread throughout the upper reaches of the Darklands, yet they never grew numerous. Fecundity is a trait that eludes the derros, primarily because of the mainstay of their diets and the source of their bluish skin. Cytillesh causes brain damage, madness, and an inordinately high number of stillbirths, making the savior of the lost pech also their curse. Today, cytillesh holds an almost holy place in derro society—brain mold is their primary source (in many societies, the only

Facets of Fear

Of all the monsters discussed in this book, the traditions of fear that fuel the derros are perhaps the most recent—for derros embody a combination of mass hysteria with the fear of abduction and unnecessary invasive surgery. Cattle mutilations and alien abductions are a very modern source of terror, one that despite persistent mundane explanations continues to haunt our nightmares. And tying derros to the themes of modern science fiction and horror as one encounters in shows like *The X Files*, movies like *Fire in the Sky* or *The Fourth Kind*, or books like Whitley Streiber's *Communion* isn't as far-fetched as one might initially think.

Although the derro race has been a part of the game for decades (since their first appearance in the first edition of the game in Gary Gygax's classic adventure, *Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth*), this was not their first appearance in literature. In the late '40s, *Amazing Stories* featured a series of tales by Richard Sharpe Shaver collectively known as the "Shaver Mystery." In these stories, Shaver claimed to have had contact with a sinister, ancient society of creatures deep underground. The stories were presented in the guise of fiction, but Shaver claimed that they were based on his actual experiences in the underworld, after he supposedly uncovered an ancient language that was the source of all languages on Earth. The creators of this language had long since departed the world, but they left behind their descendants—the rare and human-like "Teros" and the much more populous and deformed "Deros." Shaver claimed he had been imprisoned by the Deros, and that they had dealings with horrific aliens and could travel in spaceships. The deros kidnapped surface-dwelling people by the thousands for meat or torture and wielded strange powers and technology their masters had left behind long ago, and were responsible for many of the world's misfortunes and disasters. The stories were enormously popular, with many writing in to add their own experiences and encounters with the deros, leading to a strange sort of mass hysteria as the lines between fiction and reality blurred. Even after the stories faded from popularity, the myth of the deros persisted.

It's worth noting that the race we've chosen to approximate the role of the "Tero" on Golarion, the pech, also first appeared in the game alongside the derros back in *Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth*. Coincidence? Or Dero/Tero conspiracy?

source) of nourishment. They distill mind-altering drugs and poisons from its sap, dry its fibers into tough sheets for use as leather armor or the cords of their aklyses, light their caverns with its glow, and pen their rambling manifestos with brain mold ink. Much of derro society revolves around the consumption of cytillesh, such that even if the race could shrug off the addiction to the fungus, they would be unlikely to want to change.

Those derros who survive the process of being born grow to maturity quickly, their growth likely enhanced by a diet of the strange fungus. A derro is full grown and ready to take part in raids or experiments by age 9, but can live as long as the oldest human if it doesn't succumb to violence before then.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of a derro's physiology is its violent allergy to sunlight. Bright light, while something of a discomfort for these creatures, holds no terror for them, but the rays of true sunlight can reduce a derro to a stinking pile of scabs, scorched bits of flesh, steaming blood, and dry bones in only a few days. Even exposure of an hour is enough to cause skin to blister and crack and hair to fall out in clumps, almost as if the creatures were suffering from an accelerated form of radiation poisoning.

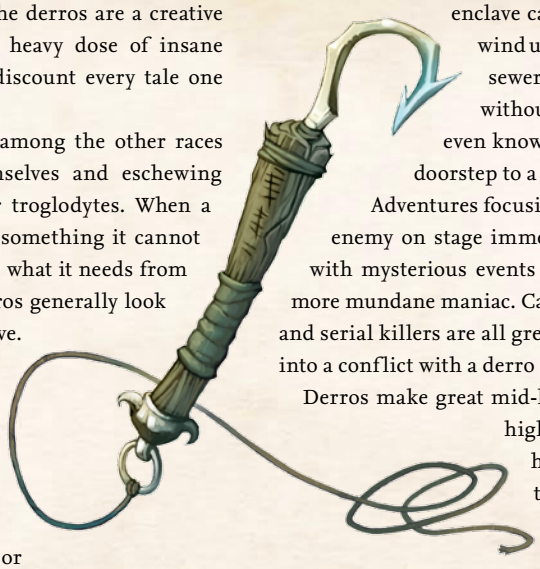
Habitat & Society

In their madness, the derros as a race have become obsessed with the sun—and with those creatures above who dwell in comfort under its rays. The driving racial goal of the derros is to discover what it is about the surface races that their own bodies lack—experiments with cytillesh deprivation or inflicting similar photogenic allergies upon surface dwellers have to date met with failure. Certainly, the race's endemic madness hurts their chances at progress, as progress by any derro conclave is quickly forgotten by its mad offspring. Yet still the derros toil on, ever driven to abduct new stock for their increasingly horrific experiments. They know their numbers pale in comparison to the denizens of the Overburn, and so are stealthy about those they take. They prefer to abduct only those whose presence won't be missed, focusing on prey found along waterfronts or in slums of the surface cities they invariably dwell below. On occasions when they need to return an abducted victim (either to test the results of their experiments in the world above or because of a fear that a victim allowed to go missing long enough for allies to notice might draw too much attention), the derros use mind-altering poisons to erase their victims' memories. When such unfortunates return to their homes, they often wake in unusual locations, disoriented and sometimes bearing strange aches or unusual scars (remnants of invasive surgeries hastily patched up by magical healing) and with patches of missing memory often stretching into several hours. Frightening and confusing, the long-term results of a derro abduction can be nightmares, personality changes, and even eventual madness—an insidious side effect of the creatures' attempt to keep their workings secret from the world.

Other strange occurrences can also be attributed to derro activity. Livestock mutilations are sometimes the result of derro hunting parties that steal out at night to procure exotic

meats for their platters or raw materials for their experiments, or might only be the derro version of a relaxing trip to the countryside after a particularly grueling week of work. In some places, folks tell fantastic tales of derros using strange circular flying machines to secure a vantage point from above to spy upon their victims, or rumors of derros with the ability to transfer their minds into the minds of human victims in order to live human lives for a day or a year. It is likely these tales are the result of hysteria—yet the derros are a creative and intelligent race infused with a heavy dose of insane insight, and it would be foolish to discount every tale one hears about them.

The derros are isolationists even among the other races of the Darklands, keeping to themselves and eschewing trade with races like the duergar or troglodytes. When a derro enclave finds itself in need of something it cannot provide, its first inclination is to take what it needs from its neighbors. In this regard, the derros generally look to nighttime raids of the surface above. Derros need a constant source of new experimental stock, and are thus drawn to caverns below large surface cities—as a result, they are generally able to procure anything they need from these raids, targeting specific warehouses, merchant halls, or whatever happens to contain the objects of their desire.



Most non-derro denizens of an enclave are slaves. Morlocks and mongrelmen are the most common slaves found in derro society, simply because their flesh is not deemed edible by derros. Members of other races who find themselves captured by derros typically have only a short amount of time as prisoner, ending up on a derro platter, lightly cooked and seasoned with brain mold spores. Derros are consumed by a constant mental storm of new theories and ideas for their sadistic torture-experiments, and as such usually have little time for religion. Most derro enclaves leave matters of spirituality and faith to one or two priests—these derros invariably turn to a demon lord for enlightenment. Lamashtu is a favorite, for her association with madness and deformity, but other demon lords that derros favor include razor-lipped Andirifkhu, pustulant and fungoid Cyth-V'sug, master necromancer Orcus, or murderous and sadistic Shax.

Derros live in settlements known as enclaves—typically networks of caverns filled with traps and guardians along the outer edges, with derro living quarters and laboratories in the heart of the maze-like warrens. Their leaders are invariably known as magisters despite their actual class and training (typically alchemists, sorcerers, or rogues). In large enclaves, a triad of magisters sometimes shares responsibility of leadership, but this is somewhat rare—derros are nothing if not paranoid and quick to murder their kin for perceived conspiracies.

Campaign Role

Derros are an excellent race to use for an urban campaign that has ties to the Darklands. Whereas most of the races of the underground world are isolationists with little contact with the surface world (like the drow or duergar) or tend to dwell in remote regions when they do establish lairs in the upper reaches (like troglodytes or vegepygmies), derros almost always select caverns under large cities as their homes. A derro enclave can feature numerous tunnels that wind up through the dark to connect with sewers, basements, and dungeons, often without the owners of such locations even knowing their homes have become the doorstep to a hideous horror from below.

Adventures focusing on derros should not bring the enemy on stage immediately. Instead, present the PCs with mysterious events that could well be the work of a more mundane maniac. Cattle mutilations, missing persons, and serial killers are all great "cover stories" that can develop into a conflict with a derro enclave.

Derros make great mid-level foes; they have an unusually high number of Hit Dice for a humanoid race, and when you start to stack class levels on a derro, he can quickly grow into a powerful foe. It can be fun to have a long investigation into a sinister case of missing memories culminate in a horrific basement battle against a single derro. With their skill at stealth and their ability to use *darkness* and *ghost sound* at will, a derro can single-handedly "haunt" an old house. The PCs might track the clues left by a serial killer or an abduction to an old decrepit house rumored to be haunted, only to find that the house is in fact a front for an entrance to a derro enclave.

Known Derros

The most infamous of derros are generally their magisters. Yet when a lone derro gets separated from his society (either as a result of being the lone survivor of a cleansing raid from enemies or, perhaps more distressingly, after being exiled from his enclave for crossing some unknown extreme that even other derros might blanch at), these loners can make for incredibly dangerous foes. An example of each of these types of derros are presented here.

Mirgik: Whereas most derros are quite chaotic in their mannerisms, sometimes a derro emerges with the capacity to organize her thoughts and maintain well-laid plans. In many ways, these derros who manage to focus their evils are the most dangerous of all. Mirgik is one such magister, the leader of the derro enclave of Kmlin-Bru, the second largest derro settlement under Avistan. Located deep beneath the dungeons of an ancient dwarven Sky Citadel, Mirgik has formed a powerful alliance with Primarch Bremovir of Galt. Using

Derro Weapons

The derros use several signature weapons designed to incapacitate foes for easy capture, but also enjoy using weapons that make clean slashing wounds that do not overly damage tissue on the mass scale that large bludgeoning weapons tend to do. Listed below are four of the more unusual weapons utilized by derros—all derros gain proficiency in the use of these weapons for free.

Aklys: The aklys is a short throwing club, usually of wood or bone, attached to a 20-foot-long cord. Most aklyses feature short iron hooks as well. An aklys has a maximum range of 20 feet, allowing the user to retrieve the thrown aklys as a move action after it has been thrown. Some derros wield aklyses drilled with holes so that, when thrown, they make eerie whistling sounds that can alert nearby derros of danger.

Crystal Chakram: Shaped and carved from quartz or stranger subterranean crystals, these circular throwing discs have jagged razor-sharp edges. When a crystal chakram strikes a foe, the weapon shatters into tiny sharp fragments; if it misses, there is a 50% chance the chakram shatters when it hits the ground or another solid object; otherwise it can be retrieved and used again. A crystal chakram is treated as ammunition for the purpose of creating magic weapons.

Fauchard: This polearm is similar to a glaive, being a curved blade affixed to the end of a pole. Unlike a glaive, though, the cutting edge of a fauchard is along the concave side, causing the blade to resemble that of a sickle or scythe. The resulting weapon is more awkward to utilize (and as such is an exotic weapon), but its increased threat range over a glaive and the ability to trip foes make it a dangerous weapon in the hands of a skilled user.

Injection Spear: The design of this insidious weapon, often stolen by surface races like gnolls or troglodytes (invariably resulting in lesser, one-use variants), allows the wielder to inject targets with poisons, drugs, or potions. The hollow head of an injection spear contains a reservoir that can contain up to five doses of liquid. When the head pierces flesh, a pressure-sensitive valve injects a single dose into the target. An injection spear is somewhat awkward to use; those without proficiency can wield it as a spear, but cannot use it to inject targets.

Simple Weapons	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range	Weight	Type	Special
One-Handed Melee Weapon								
Aklys	5 sp	1d4	1d6	×2	10 ft.	3 lbs.	B and P	Max range 20 ft.

Exotic Weapons	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range	Weight	Type	Special
Two-Handed Melee Weapons								
Fauchard	14 gp	1d8	1d10	18–20/×2	—	10 lbs.	S	reach, trip
Injection Spear	60 gp	1d6	1d8	×3	—	8 lbs.	P	injection
Ranged Weapon								
Crystal Chakram	20 gp	1d4	1d6	18–20/×2	—	2 lbs.	S	—

magic to appear as an attractive torturer and jailor, Mirgik has deceived the Primarch into thinking she is little more than the keeper of the massive underground prison known as the Dread Dungeons, a place where Primarch Bremovir can ensconce his enemies and various political prisoners and never worry again about their plots against him. Of course, these prisoners are little more than a steady and controlled supply of experimental stock and exotic food for the derro of Kmlin-Bru, and should she wish, Mirgik could organize the increasing number of lobotomized lunatic-thralls of the Dread Dungeons to mount a devastating assault on the world above.

Zyregek: Zyregek didn't survive a raid on his home, nor was he exiled by his magister. This violent and dangerous monster is a murderer among his own kind, a cannibal and sadist who quenched his thirst for pain by secretly slaying and then feeding on the bodies of his brothers and sisters in the small enclave of Voord under Ustalav's capital city of Caliphas. By the time the other derros of Voord found Zyregek out, he was able to hunt and murder them all before they had a chance to kill him. He built a throne of their bones and now stalks the streets of Caliphas by night, seeking children, halflings, or gnomes that he can kidnap for his ever-consuming desire to surgically craft a bride and queen for his empty enclave. To date, his hideous attempts to turn a victim into a derro queen have failed, and he has gorged on their bodies and added their bones to his ever-growing throne.

Derro Poisons

Derro create a unique poison from their favorite fungus.

Cytillesh Extract

Type poison, ingested; **Save** Fortitude DC 18
Frequency 1/hour for 8 hours
Effect victim loses all memory of events that took place in the previous hour and cannot form new memories for 8 hours; these lost and prevented memories might return later as dreams, and can be returned with a *restoration* or *heal* spell; **Cure** 2 saves. **Cost** 800 gp

Sample Derro

Presented here is a sample derro magister, a female sorcerer that represents the lower end of what one might expect to find leading a derro enclave. A derro magister like Evehxa is unlikely to be encountered on her own—she surrounds herself with loyal derro bodyguards or keeps close a charmed minion selected from her enclave's experimental stock to whom she may have taken a liking.

EVEHXA, DERRO MAGISTER **CR 8**

XP 3,200

Female derro sorcerer 6 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 70)
CE Small humanoid
Init +4; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +6

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed +7 (+3 armor, +1 deflection, +4 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)
hp 70 (9 HD; 3d8+6d6+36)
Fort +7, **Ref** +7, **Will** +14
SR 14
Weaknesses susceptible to sunlight

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +1 *aklys* +11 (1d6)
Ranged +1 *aklys* +11 (1d6)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with melee touch attacks)
Special Attacks bloodline arcana (increase polymorph subschool duration by 50%); sneak attack +1d6
Derro Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd)
At will—*darkness*, *ghost sound* (DC 16)
1/day—*daze* (DC 16), *sound burst* (DC 18)
Bloodline Spell-Like Ability (CL 6th; +10 ranged touch)
9/day—*acidic ray* (30 ft., 1d6+3 acid damage)
Spells Known (CL 6th; +10 ranged touch)
3rd (4/day)—*hold person* (DC 19)
2nd (7/day)—*alter self*, *invisibility*, *see invisibility*
1st (8/day)—*charm person* (DC 17), *enlarge person*, *hypnotism* (DC 17), *ray of enfeeblement*, *shield*
0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *bleed* (DC 16) *detect magic*, *dancing lights*, *mage hand*, *message*
Bloodline aberrant

STATISTICS

Str 9, **Dex** 18, **Con** 18, **Int** 14, **Wis** 5, **Cha** 22
Base Atk +5; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 17
Feats Arcane Armor Training, Brew Potion, Derro Magic, Derro Magister, Eschew Materials, Weapon Finesse
Skills Craft (alchemy) +14, Heal +7, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +7, Perception +6, Spellcraft +7, Stealth +17
Languages Aklo, Common, Terran, Undercommon
SQ long limbs, madness, poison use
Combat Gear cytillesh extract (2 doses); **Other Gear** +1 *leather armor*, +1 *aklys*, *handy haversack*, *ring of protection* +1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Madness (Ex) Derros use their Charisma modifier on Will saves instead of their Wisdom modifier, and are immune to insanity and confusion effects. Only a *miracle* or *wish* can remove a derro's madness. If this occurs, the derro gains 6 points of Wisdom and loses 6 points of Charisma.
Poison Use (Ex) Derros are not at risk of poisoning themselves when handling poison.
Vulnerability to Sunlight (Ex) A derro takes 1 point of Con damage after every hour it is exposed to sunlight.

Ecology of the Deva

by Chris Sims

illustrations by Howard Lyon

Neither fire nor wind, birth nor death can erase our good deeds.

–Prince Gautama Siddhartha, Buddha

Do not be too moral. You might cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something.

–Henry David Thoreau

Most immortal beings are separate from the world. They live on another plane altogether, detached from the worldly concerns. Angels and devils, gods and exarchs pursue otherworldly agendas in the Astral Sea, often without concern for the world.

Not so with devas.

Devas are immortals who chose to join the world on its perilous journey. Although a few of these strange beings transcend the mortal plane, most are bound to whatever fate the world suffers. As a people, devas struggle to make sure that destiny is a positive one.

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History

As a race, devas are among the eldest beings in the world. In the earliest days of existence, they were goodhearted angels, some of whom served the good gods. Looking upon the forming world, these angels felt a yearning they could not resist. They descended from the heavens to take on mortal seeming out of a love for the world's countless wonders. Out of a desire to protect and nurture, they came. With a desire to experience the world, they manifested in the world.

To do so, legend holds, the would-be devas made contact with the great primal spirits awakening in the ancient world. With these spirits they struck a bargain. The angels gained the ability to manifest in a form like that of worldly humanoids, but they had to bind themselves to the world. Never could they return to the Astral Sea. Caught in the endless coils of the World Serpent, the would-be devas would make the world their home . . . forever.

Although the primal spirits recognized the purity of the angels' intentions, the spirits also wisely saw the changeability of creatures born into the world. They knew that this dynamism helped ensure the cycles of nature continued. So the spirits sought balance, naming another price as part of the bargain. As long as the angels manifested as devas expressed virtue, they could be reborn in immortal bodies marked by their astral heritage. In this "Wheel of Rebirth," as devas name it, each deva's memories would be preserved by tenuous connections carried from life to life. However, deviation from the high ideals the angels professed could cost a deva everything.

The spirits declared that a "fallen" deva—one who became corrupt and valued worldly desires in wicked ways—would not escape the Wheel of Rebirth. Instead, that deva would be reborn in a form that revealed his or her wickedness in bestial features. Such beings, bearing the memories of lifetimes with them and serving evil ends, would be the bane of devas and other mortals.

Assured of their ability to remain pure despite the temptations and trials of the world, the angels who became the first devas agreed to the bargain. Their immortal forms fell away as they passed into the earth and into the care of the primal spirits. After a period of vague dreaming, each awoke alone and in an unfamiliar body. Each made his or her way in the early world.

These were but the first among a host of angels that made the world their permanent home in the dawning of time. When the Dawn War began to rage across existence, more good angels came earthward to defend, lead, and teach other mortals. Among these astral warriors were more servants of the good gods than came in the earlier days. All struck a pact with the primal spirits, an agreement that evil angels seemed unable or unwilling to make. They then took up the cause of the gods against the primordials.

When the primal spirits declared an end to the Dawn War, the gods and primordials left the world behind. It became a middle place where matter and spirit can coexist in a vibrant manifestation of possibility. Devas endured as they had before—as zealous astral spirits tied to the mortal world and to fate.

Another myth attributes the emergence of devas to this particular time. During the war across the world, numerous angels had developed affection for the place and its creatures. They had relationships they refused to sever and desires they could not fulfill as immortal servants of the gods in the distant Astral Sea. Although this tale differs in its timing, the manner by which the devas tied themselves to the world remains much the same. This fable indicates that only some gods, none of them evil, gave their servants this freedom of choice. It also suggests that only the noblest angels were willing to give up the glory of life in the Astral Sea for a series of incarnations in the world.

No matter what the truth of deva origins, it was by the leave of the primal spirits that angels could manifest in the world as devas. The assent of the primal spirits for such a transition between planes disappeared when the Dawn War finally ended for good. The same ban that holds the gods and primordials away from the world prevents the creation of new devas.

From their beginning, devas have led lives largely isolated from one another. Unlike tieflings and dragonborn, devas have never been numerous enough or in close enough contact with each other to raise a deva empire. Regardless of this, few devas have lived quiet and peaceful lives in which they influenced little in the way of goodness and progress. Devas are drawn to oppose evil and to thwart oppression, as well as to ease suffering.

Some of the world's greatest heroes have been devas or those with deva heritage. A few of the vilest villains known to history have also been devas. A deva seldom falls so far from a state of grace that he or she cannot reincarnate as a deva. Those who do fall know it, and the certainty of reincarnation as a rakshasa leads such devas to embrace evil without regret or remorse.

Devas cannot die, but most sages suspect that devas are a still race in shallow decline for a couple of reasons. Those who become rakshasas diminish the number of devas in the world, to be sure—but it seems likely that devas still outnumber their evil counterparts. Devas can also transcend the world (see "Culture" and "Religion"), evidenced by the few legendary devas who have reached such a state. Still, one might consider a transcendent deva to still be a deva. Further, devas and those who study them suspect that a parallel reincarnation cycle affects rakshasas, which begs numerous questions. What happens to a rakshasa that redeems itself? Can a rakshasa become a deva again? If so, how?

Physiology

The physiology of a deva is much like that of other humanoids—humans in particular. As living creatures, devas have physical needs and capacities for which their bodies are shaped. Much of this shape is a result of the deal the original angels made with the primal spirits. To experience the world, devas received a form suitable to the world. Their striking differences from humans and other humanoids are what set them apart and mark them as worldly creatures with a truly otherworldly origin.

Appearance

Deva bodies are almost always perfectly formed by the standards of attractiveness humans and similar races, such as elves and eladrin, hold. As a being with a soul from a realm where form follows thought, devas have some unconscious influence on the form in which they manifest. Therefore, a typical deva is tall, slim, and athletic. He or she has an imposing air, along with poise and grace few can match. Combined with the pleasant personality most devas have, this physical perfection makes devas extremely attractive to other humanlike humanoids.

An ideally shaped body is essential for working well within the world. When a deva deviates from this expected norm it is because he or she has suffered grievous harm, such as the ravages of a disease or severe injury. Even so, where life continues, a deva's body eventually recovers from all but the most debilitating injuries, reshaping itself according to the soul's superlative model. Occasionally, however, the deva has elected—in a past life, and perhaps even unconsciously—to experience the world in a different way during a particular incarnation (see "Psychology" for why). Further, even the most robust devas can't regrow lost limbs and organs.

Despite the fact that deva bodies are usually ideal, devas are clearly marked as "other" by their unusual skin, hair, and eyes. Deva skin harkens to the coloration of the heavens, varying in hues of blue, violet, gray, or black. A deva's body also has lighter areas that are white or pale gray, and the lighter or darker areas might be dominant. The two colors that make up a deva's skin tone form patterns unique to the individual. These hues, or only one of the two, also color the deva's hair, although some variance has been seen, often stemming from a past-life event. Although the weight of a deva's gaze is always apparent, deva eyes are pale gray or white, without an iris or a pupil.

Deva coloration and patterns are thought to be marks primal spirits imparted to show a deva's particular past-life experiences, lineage, and/or destiny. Therefore, they are sometimes referred to as "signs." Similarities in signs can indicate a pair of devas is related in some way, but the rarity of the deva species and the devas' habit of concerning themselves with tasks that are more important than academic pursuits make detailed study of signs difficult. Another limiting factor to subjects for study is that a single deva is immortal, and so he or she might outlive generations of a would-be studier's people.

Life Cycle

Devas are immortal beings, and from the beginning of their existence as a people they have sprung into the mortal world as fully formed adults. A deva's immortal nature manifests as agelessness. It, along with the tie to the world from the bargain with the primal spirits, also shows up in the uncanny deva ability to reincarnate.

Although a deva comes into the world as an adult and does not age, a deva can die. Disease takes a few. Violence takes a greater number—rare is a deva who remains passive in the face of threats to people, places, and objects he or she loves. Those who make it to an age other races might consider elderly are frequently still hale. But world-weariness or a desire for a fresh perspective can lead such devas to "drop the body," which is a deva phrase describing the transmigration of a deva soul out of a physical body without the presence of any other condition normally required for death. Such devas simply choose to die for the sake of achieving some other desire.

When a deva dies, his or her body remains like those of other mortals, although some who drop the body have been said to disperse as motes of light. Whatever the case with the body, a deva's soul doesn't go to the Shadowfell like the souls of other mortals do. Instead, the soul stays in the world where it is bound by the ancient primal pact. The soul undergoes the "bodiless dreaming," as devas call the period between incarnations. During this time, the soul wanders the spirit realm of the world, and some claim it experiences up to an entire lifetime in that ephemeral region of time and space. What the soul does in the spirit realm is a mystery, but the few revelations that exist suggest that the deva acts as a powerful ancestor spirit and caretaker of the world even in this in-between space.

Stories of this "bodiless dreaming" come from various sources, including druids, shamans, and others who interact most directly with the primal spirits. It is said to be a blessed state wherein the deva remembers all lives lived and can put that knowledge to use. The most compelling proof of this state comes from a small number of devas who have had what devas call "bodiless waking," "waking dreaming," or "disincarnate." Such devas are between physical bodies, but through strange fate, outside influence, or powerful willpower, they can interact with the material world as ghostlike beings. These "disincarnates" often remember more than one past life. They usually work to fulfill some unfinished task from the previous life or to help the progress of the world. Some serve the aims of mighty primal spirits, while others strive to avoid or hasten reincarnation. A fraction of such disincarnates is wicked or corrupt,

sowing mischief from the spirit realm and perhaps trying to evade reincarnation as a rakshasa.

The time a deva spends between bodies is variable, but it is almost always more than a year and often seven years, or more. Tales have spoken of devas who die and fail to reincarnate for more than a century, but such legends include an unusual factor, such as a particularly horrible death or a long period of disincarnation. During this time between incarnations, a dead deva can be raised from the dead if he or she is willing and if the ritual is powerful enough. Rituals also exist that allow a ritualist to speak to a departed deva's wandering soul.

When the bodiless dreaming comes to an end, the deva reappears in an explosion of dazzling light at a safe place sacred to the spirits and, at times, the gods. A humanoid body spontaneously forms from available elements in the environment, aided by the primal spirits. The deva's new physical body-mind, more limited than a spiritual form, cannot contain the weighty memories of myriad lifetimes. These slip away so the deva can experience life anew, unpolluted by notions formed in another time and place. However, such memories remain ingrained just out of conscious reach, accessible in meaningful visions, insights, and dreams. The deva's new body and mind are wholly different, perhaps even down to the sex.

Even though they have sexual characteristics, devas cannot propagate their own species. This being the case, a few among the wise have wondered why devas incarnate in bodies that are clearly and functionally masculine or feminine. Strangely, devas can and do mingle with some other humanoid species, passing a measure of angelic power into nondeva bloodlines. Those who have a deeper understanding know the primal spirits intended this manifestation of the astral within the natural humanoids of the world all along—perhaps even as a balance to the elemental genasi, who have a history at least as long as that of the devas.

Psychology

When a deva is reborn, his or her personality is mostly formed. Although past life experiences and drives influence this new personality, it is wholly new. The deva can function as a mature and responsible adult, with morality according to the current incarnation's inclinations. Life's trials and experiences, of course, shape a deva's views, but the typical deva is simply born good.

From this beginning, a deva has a strong personality and, most often, an overwhelming yearning to do good. A powerful will coupled with strong desire and purity allowed a deva to incarnate in the world for the first time. Multiple lifetimes, perhaps uncountable, have shaped that resolve and drive. Each deva is unique, but they share common personality traits rooted in the truths of their being.

Purpose drives a deva's daily existence. Although the purpose might differ from deva to deva, few devas while away the years idly. The principles and aims driving a deva's life are sometimes mysterious, linked to unfulfilled goals and flashes of memory from previous incarnations. More often, however, a deva has clear goals related to his or her current incarnation, personality, and circumstances.

Dedication to a goal, ideal, and/or cause comes easily to devas. Immortality facilitates this tendency in more than one way, tempered by the deva tendency to fix problems. First of all, a deva realizes he or she has time to accomplish a task, but a deva is rarely content to wait and see when direct action might work. Secondarily, a deva knows that death is not the end, and therefore he or she pursues aims with a fearless zeal. This keenness can border on or spill over into fanaticism in some cases.

Even so, thoughtfulness and tolerance tempers the zeal of most devas. Numerous lifetimes in the world give each deva a broad, subconscious sense of the wondrous diversity creation holds. A deva's heart

Knowledge of the Devas

Arcana

DC 10: Devas have a talent for various forms of magic power. This natural talent comes from their incisive minds and curiosity. Their power is honed through each deva's perfectionist nature.

History

DC 10: Devas appear regularly in chronicles from very early times, and they rarely play merely minor roles in major events. It seems they are a people given to action and greatness.

DC 15: Devas are few in number. Their population is spread widely across the world so much so that two devas are seldom in close proximity to one another.

DC 20: Devas are bound to the world through an ancient pact good angels made with primal spirits. This is the source of their ability to reincarnate. The primal spirits no longer allow angels to incarnate as devas in this way.

DC 25: The Vale of Descending Stars, a lush region of primal wilderness, contains a platform and henge shaped of rocks that seemingly emerged from the earth fully formed. Around this location are the remains of an ancient settlement. Legend has it that this is where angels who became the first devas made their bargain. The word spread from the vale across the world among angels who wanted the same transformation. Some remained or came to the valley in the early days, until time scattered the devas. Some whisper that rakshasas have since claimed this holy place, which has connections to the Astral Sea.

Religion

DC 10: A character with this level of knowledge knows the general traits of devas—such as the fact that they are immortal humanoids who reincarnate when they are killed.

DC 15: A character with this level of knowledge knows the details of deva physiology and development, as well as the intricacies of their society. For instance, devas have strong ties to the Astral Sea because of their origins as angels that chose to incarnate in the world in humanoid form.

DC 20: A character with this level of knowledge knows the details of deva reincarnation, such as soul recognition, bonded incarnation, and corrupted devas reincarnating as rakshasas.

DC 25: The Raven Queen bears no ill will toward devas, despite the fact that devas seem to be outside the normal cycle of life and death. Devas experience death and loss, as well as the renewal that death allows. Some devas break the cycle of reincarnation, and a few of those have truly passed into death.

smiles at the possibilities the world holds, and he or she feels a strong pull to nurture these possibilities.

Most devas are fine with the practices of a culture or individual, as long as such customs or deeds do no harm. Further, devas stand up for the rights of others to express their beliefs and desires in progressive and positive ways. A deva judges events and creatures situationally, rather than according to traditions or preconceived notions. For instance, a deva is unlikely to help quash a cult if that cult is improving the lives of others—even if the religious authority in an area disapproves of the cult. A deva is more likely to pay for the bread a street urchin stole to feed himself and his sister rather than punishing the desperate child for stealing.

Love and a desire for bettering the world deeply color the actions of the typical deva. Even a zealous deva tries to find the good in a situation and to bring that good to the fore. A deva also gives freely of skills, time, and resources, seeing everything as transient but wishing to ease suffering. Open-mindedness and enthusiasm lead a deva to apply this giving nature across all aspects of life.

This is because devas enjoy being in the world, and they love exploring and experiencing it. They like to have contact with a diverse set of acquaintances and friends, and they prefer variety in their experiences. The deva capacity for love, influenced by the willingness to explore life, also leads devas to engage in deeper relationships, even marriage, with other humanoids that are much like them in physical structure and size.

Any kind of relationship with a deva—enemy, friend, or lover—is intense. Devas are ardent in their emotions, although the typical deva is seldom given to outbursts of so-called negative feelings. Righteous outrage is more likely than self-indulgent wrath, for instance. But when a deva feels an emotion, those close to him or her know it. A deva is honest about his or her feelings and thoughts, only holding back when the truth might injure another or decorum demands

restraint. Even then, a withering glare or smile shown in the eyes might give the deva away.

Most devas are too collected, however, to give away any emotion unintentionally. Devas are exceedingly self-aware. What seems like self-control and preternatural calm to others is really just a deva's willingness to look at his or her emotions and points of view with a measure of detachment. This objectivity stems from the deva's intuitive connection to the experiences of countless lifetimes, as well as a willingness to be honest despite appearances. Again, things of the world are transient—especially emotions—and oftentimes a deva can't shake the feeling that this has all happened before.

Deva calmness isn't altogether mystical, however. Their unique origin and history provides the mental space for devas to foster grace and sophistication. Their tendency toward kindness allows devas to see the best in situations and people. Reincarnation carries with it the fleeting influences and tastes of past lives, meaning that devas are also born with sensibilities refined in ways a human couldn't hope to acquire in one lifetime.

Striving for perfection is also part of the deva psyche. What a deva lacks in natural inclinations or mystical refinement, he or she makes up for by living purposely in a way he or she considers right. In fact, devas believe that focusing on smoothing out rough mental and spiritual edges ensures outcomes—in this life or the next—that are more favorable. A few devas also seek perfection in the belief that reincarnation has this as one of its purposes, and that one can transcend reincarnation through perfection.

For this reason, devas don't shy away from unpleasant experiences—although neither do devas seek or perpetuate such. Suffering can point one in the right direction to go in a worldly life. Such events shape the deva's personality going forward in time, and they can lead to enlightenment through the understanding and overcoming of suffering or disability. In such sorrows, a deva also expands his or her compassion.

Although suffering is sometimes necessary as a pointer, devas know it is not essential to existence. Few devas allow others to suffer if the deva has the power to lend a hand. Unknowable are the paths of fate, and when destiny places the needy under the eyes of one who can help, the message is clear. Devas recognize that part of perfection is harmony with the world and its inhabitants. Part of harmony is working together for the good of all.

Devas strive for perfection. For various reasons, few have accomplished such an ideal. Devas are fallible. Enthusiasm and curiosity can lead a deva astray, away from ideals, toward pleasure, or into worse fates. Some stumble into wickedness and find they cannot turn back, while a few walk knowingly toward evil and become irredeemably corrupted. Less grim, perhaps, is the fact that devas are bold doers all too willing to stand in the breach to save and protect others. Countless devas die before perfection becomes a realistic option. Then reincarnation forces them to start over, at least in a manner of thinking.

All devas know that with death comes the loss of all concrete connection to the life they now know and love. This disconnect—the disappearance of memory, of all that one is, into the hazy past—is a typical deva's greatest dread. (Few tread a path so dark that they actually fear reincarnation as a rakshasa.) Yet so fearless are these immortal folk that one would quickly choose a courageous death over survival at the cost of allowing others to suffer and die. Loss of memory is a price worth paying to make the world a better place.

Culture

Time, space, and the fickleness of memory separates devas. They have no lands to call their own, and few threads of history unite them. A deva might die only to reincarnate half a world away from the place of

death. Nevertheless, devas have a shared ancestral memory all the way back to their original incarnations as angels. Through this, devas share traits that can be described only as cultural.

Society

No overarching deva society exists. Incarnated as fully socialized adults, and advantaged with unearthly beauty and a wholesome reputation, devas have little trouble integrating into other societies. Most non-evil humanoids welcome a deva among them. A deva lives where he or she feels comfortable and useful, usually in a larger settlement. In such a place the deva builds a home and relationships, and mixes with the population.

This is not meant to suggest that a deva disappears among the masses, becoming one with the crowd. On the contrary, devas are exemplars and leaders among their fellow citizens. A deva might champion social causes that increase health, justice, and prosperity. He or she might devote time and talent to defending the populace from monsters and evil. Often, a deva does both.

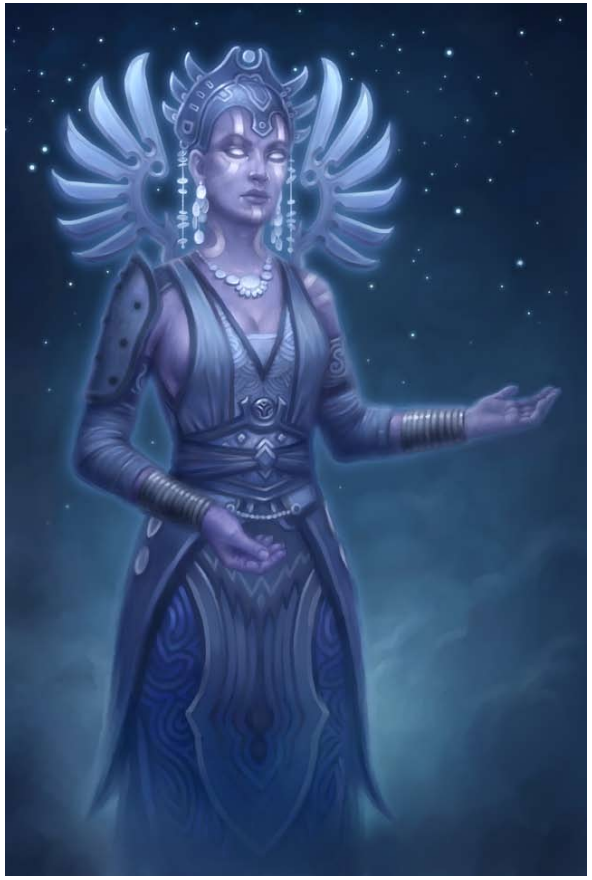
In this active role, a deva quickly makes friends and gathers hangers on, and he or she surely makes a couple of enemies. Amiable and giving, a deva is likely to have a large circle of admirers, fond acquaintances, and boon companions. In a deva's mind, close friends form his or her family or clan.

Devas can also have actual families, although this practice can be hard on those involved. A deva might marry, and he or she can even have children with a nondeva. When this happens, the family unit is very important to the deva. Devas nurture their loved ones, taking proper responsibility and teaching youngsters with the utmost care so that they know right from wrong. Immortality, however, can force a deva to watch a beloved spouse and children age and die. The deva's family must relate to their ageless member, as well as his or her nature as a heroic seeker of spiritual perfection.

Some of this applies equally to normal friendships. Getting along as or with a deva isn't always easy. More than one deva has fallen while attempting to relate to the world.

Rebirth and Death

Devas aren't reborn just anywhere. Specific areas in the world seem to be focal points for reincarnation. These places are usually sacred in some way, either to the primal spirits or to the gods. Most commonly, reincarnation occurs in a hidden, pristine natural locale. Guardian primal spirits keep the vicinity free of danger and provide the deva with what he or she needs to move forward in a new life. Occasionally, such a place has humanoid stewards as well, and these persons are likely to be helpful toward the deva. Even when a place is sanctified to the gods, the primal spirits are involved somehow. A godly reincarnation spot is more likely to have humanoid keepers who see the deva's arrival as a holy omen. If the spirits don't provide for the newly born deva, these humanoid caretakers are likely to do so.



The occurrence of reincarnation is unpredictable, and thousands of possible sites exist across the mortal world. Only rarely does a location become a target for evil creatures, much less become lost to corruption. Even when one is, devas simply cease reincarnating at that spot until it is reclaimed. The spirits and forces of good move aggressively to do so.

Bonded Incarnation

In exceedingly exceptional cases, two or more devas have a strong bond that sees them reincarnated at the same time and in the same place. Two is the usual number. Devas and primal spirits refer to the rebirth of two devas in this way as "twinning," while the birth of more devas is called "bonded incarnation." The link for bonded incarnation might be as simple as love or a shared set of beliefs and goals, or as complex as a plan concocted by two deva souls during a period of waking dreaming.

Soul Recognition

Clear memory fails devas when they reincarnate, at least until one approaches or achieves transcendence. Still, devas have been known to instinctively recognize creatures, objects, and places important to them in a past life. Similarly, those

who knew a deva in a past incarnation might have a similar experience when they meet the same deva in its current incarnation. Animals are particularly affected by this occurrence. Devas call this phenomenon "soul recognition."

Soul recognition occurs most often to facilitate renewing of contact among old acquaintances or to impart an important piece of information to the deva. Fate seems to have a hand in soul recognition, too. Seldom do two devas meet each other, a rarified event on its own, and fail to have a soul recognition moment.

Death

Death usually comes quickly to devas, since many die in battle against evil. A deva is rarely concerned with what happens to his or her body after death, seeing the body as a mere shell to contain the soul. On the other hand, a deva is very respectful of the dead, honoring them in whatever way seems appropriate or necessary.

A deva who plans to drop the body might surround the event with some ritual or celebration of life. When transcendence is assured but the body must pass, a deva might undertake similar rituals or celebrations before dying. Devas are unified in preferring that their loved ones not grieve for them, since death is surely not the end. To nondevas, this philosophical point of view is easier said than done.

Magic

Devas are magical creatures—of this there is no doubt. They are also incisive, clever, and altogether strong of mind. The arcane power that flows through the planes sings to some devas, drawing them to experience its flow. As with all aspects of life, a relationship to the arcane is personal and spiritual to a deva. Mastery of arcane forces, like the mastery of the self, requires exploration and firsthand knowledge. No path of arcane skill reflects the deva mindset better than that of the wizard. Being a wizard means dealing with arcane forces without intermediaries, such as a warlock has, or taking a connection to the arcane for granted, as a sorcerer might.

A deva uses magic with precision, favoring astral and angelic energies that are unlikely to go out of control, such as cold, lightning, psychic, radiant, and thunder. On the battlefield, a deva magician is composed and deadly. Guided by careful study and clear intent, he or she directs magical forces to bring conflict to a favorable outcome. In doing so, a deva is careful to manage collateral damage to friends, innocents, and the environment. Control comes naturally to devas in the way they practice spellcasting, as well as the way they help their allies and hinder their enemies.

Religion

To devas, life is a personal spiritual journey for the individual and for those with whom the individual has contact. Religious beliefs and practices are private to devas, and each deva prefers to keep a relationship with gods and/or godlike entities as he or she sees fit. Equally, a deva respects the beliefs of others—unless those beliefs are malevolent or harmful. Deva clerics, for instance, gain converts by being a shining example of the tenets of good deities rather than by actively seeking or preaching. Few devas are members of any specific religious order, and anyone a deva influences is unlikely to be directed toward an institution. Instead, such a one might be encouraged to seek the holy on a very personal basis, as the deva does.

A deva might show respect at a shrine or even offer sacrifices at a temple. However, devas live their spiritual beliefs instead of saving their piety for holy days and the temple sanctuary. They are also open with displays of religion when doing so is not offensive to others. For instance, most devas devote time to restful meditation. A deva might openly vocalize small prayers throughout the day, even invoking differing deities for different events and tasks. He or she might make a ritual offering at a certain time of day or when omens dictate. A specific action could be ritualistically performed. Each deva has quirks surrounding his or her individual spirituality.

Direct connection is important to devas. Divine power is the ultimate expression of such a link to the deities, so that source of power is particularly appealing to devas. This is one reason why invokers—unequivocal conduits of divine power—are common among devas, as are clerics. Similarly, direct ties to the primal spirits might appeal to a deva, and a shaman has the closest relationship to these spirits. The druid is a close second.

Transcendence

Eventually, and sometimes intuitively, devas learn of the concept of transcendence. Stripped to its most basic meaning, this word refers to a deva rising above the normal state of deva being. It connotes removing oneself from the Wheel of Rebirth by reaching an ultimate level of spiritual perfection. A deva who reaches transcendence invokes a secret part of the agreement with the primal spirits. Such a deva is no longer bound to the world and resurrection. At the next death, the deva is free to choose another path. Commonly for a transcendent deva, all the details of all the deva's past lives can be recalled at will.

Although few devas accomplish this sort of transformation, the outcome for each transcendent one is different. A deva who becomes an exarch or other sort of immortal being, maintaining his or her current incarnation across the ages, is a transcendent being. So is one who breaks the bonds of reincarnation and passes into legend and beyond the mysterious veil of death. Other devas transcend the

Wheel of Rebirth but voluntarily remain in the world among its greatest spirit guardians and teachers.

Art

Deva artistic expression, from architecture to smithing, is cerebral, simple, and elegant. It also is only a part of the average deva's active life—devas have and engage in diverse interests. Spiritual themes are common—angelic, primal, and godly. Devas engage in artistic endeavors for the experience and refinement doing so offers. They are careful and patient, creating elaborate works that evoke precise emotions or present otherworldly beauty. Many deva artisans see performing the work of creation as a form of meditation on the nature of existence and reincarnation.

Thus, even if it is later displayed or used, a deva's artistic work is intensely personal—a labor of love. If the work is intended as a gift, it expresses what the deva feels about or sees in the receiver. Whether a created object later brings social or monetary reward is of little concern to a deva. This fact doesn't change another: The end result of a deva's toil is usually breathtakingly exotic or beautiful, and often suited only to a specific person.

In this vein, devas take the most care with their personal look and environment. Although devas prefer a simple lifestyle, they take the time to give everything a touch of beauty. A deva wears fine clothes and uses fine tools, and keeps such items in good condition. A deva's living space is clean, with even utilitarian objects given an ethereal or angelic flair.

Leisure

When life is about accumulating experiences and learning, how one spends one's leisure time becomes important. Devas are relaxed about leisure activities, even though they like to spend their time well. Devas don't feel they always have to have something tangible to show for their leisure activities—a closer bond of friendship might be more valuable than learning something new. Further, devas usually feel they have plenty of time to engage in each activity to the fullest. Devas love celebrations (and sweets), sporting events (as participants or spectators), games (especially intellectual ones), and the like. They also enjoy whiling away the time with a good conversation, the more philosophical the better. Crafting and decorating is also another deva leisure pursuit.

Devas have little use for what some consider to be leisure activities. They avoid dissipation and indolence, although they might tolerate such in others. However, a deva cannot abide activities that harm or abuse some of the participants. For instance, no normal deva would put up with a gladiatorial event in which the bouts are unfair or the participants unjustly coerced. That said, most devas work within the law to change distasteful aspects of society. Doing so might be another "leisure activity" for a heroic deva, who takes up sword or spell against darker facets of life.

Feats

Devas and those related to them have access to an array of feats in every tier.

Bloodline Feats

The Deva Heritage feat and related feats are bloodline feats. All bloodline feats are noted as such in the feat's name. You can have bloodline feats of only one type. If you choose the Deva Heritage feat, you can have only Deva Bloodline feats.

If you are a deva, you have a couple of considerations with regard to bloodline feats. You can choose Deva Heritage, but you don't need to do so to access Deva Bloodline feats. Taking Deva Heritage just means you have focused on your angel heritage, strengthening its expression. Since devas don't have deva children, bloodline feats other than Deva Heritage are hard to come by without a unique story. It's ultimately up to the DM whether you, as a deva, can acquire other bloodline feats.

Heroic Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Battle Intuition

Prerequisite: Deva

Benefit: You can use your Wisdom modifier in place of your Dexterity modifier to determine your initiative bonus. Additionally, you gain a +2 feat bonus to initiative checks.

Deva Heritage [Deva Bloodline]

Prerequisite: Living humanoid race

Benefit: You gain astral splendor as a utility power. Also, you gain a +2 bonus to Perception and Insight checks against angels, devas, devils, and rakshasas.

Astral Splendor **Feat Utility Power**

You take on an imperious aspect, and silvery light—that of your astral soul—shines from your eyes, mouth, and heart

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be not bloodied
Effect: Until the stance ends, enemies take a –2 penalty to attack rolls made against you. You also shed bright light within 6 squares.
Special: This stance ends when you become bloodied.

Heavenly Heritage [Deva Bloodline]

Prerequisites: Wis 13, deva or Deva Heritage
Benefit: When you take cold damage or fire damage, you gain a number of temporary hit points equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Immortal Skill

Prerequisite: Deva
Benefit: When using *memory of a thousand lifetimes* to modify a skill check or ability check, you treat a result that is lower than the average for the die you roll—3 for d6 or 4 for d8—as the average.

Radiant Recovery [Deva Bloodline]

Prerequisites: Con 13, deva or Deva Heritage
Benefit: When you hit with or are damaged by an attack that has the radiant keyword, you gain a number of temporary hit points equal to your Constitution modifier.

Scourge of the Fallen

Prerequisites: Deva, good or lawful good alignment
Benefit: When using *memory of a thousand lifetimes* to modify an attack roll against an evil immortal creature, you can also add the result to your damage roll.

Upright Revival

Prerequisite: Deva
Benefit: If you drop to 0 or fewer hit points and fall unconscious, when you regain 1 or more hit points and become conscious, you stand and shift 1 square as a free action.

Paragon Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of 11th level or higher who meets the feat's other prerequisites.

Immortal Resilience

Prerequisites: 11th level, deva, Immortal Skill
Benefit: When using *memory of a thousand lifetimes* to modify a saving throw, you treat a result that is lower than the average for the die you roll—3 for d6 or 4 for d8—as the average.

Remembered Mother Tongue

Prerequisites: 11th level, deva
Benefit: You can speak, read, and write Supernal. If you wish it, listeners who don't speak Supernal can understand your words as if you used their native language.

Shared Channeling

Prerequisites: 11th level, deva, Channel Divinity class feature
Benefit: Your Channel Divinity powers that have a range of personal gain a range of close burst 5, enabling you to target yourself or one ally within the burst. If the power has a trigger, you or the ally can trigger the power, but the triggering creature must also be the power's target.

Epic Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a character of 21st level or higher who meets the feats other prerequisites.

Immortal Prowess

Prerequisite: 21th level, deva, Immortal Resilience
Benefit: When using *memory of a thousand lifetimes* to modify an attack roll, you treat a result that is lower than the average for the die you roll—3 for d6 or 4 for d8—as the average.

Winged Revival

Prerequisites: 21th level, deva, Upright Revival
Benefit: As a free action triggered when you stand due to Upright Revival, you can fly a number of squares equal to your speed.

Enemies and Allies

Devas are champions of the innocent and the righteous. Since they live among other races, and they have personality traits that make them easy to like, devas work well with a variety of people. Equally, nondevas usually admire devas and look to a deva as someone who can be relied upon to do right and abide by the law. Long-lived races, such as eladrin, have a better handle on the deva mindset. Through this like-mindedness, some devas end up in the Feywild, enjoying a circle of friends less likely to dwindle and disappear over time.

A deva is likely to be the center of a party of heroes. When that's not the case, a deva is often a lone do-gooder. When one meets a deva, an honest request for the deva's aid in a good cause is apt to be answered positively. Normally, devas stand against all evil—especially that of the Astral Sea and Elemental Chaos. Most evil beings return this hostility, although some—devils, for instance—prefer to target devas for corruption.

It must be remembered that devas are indeed corruptible. The existence of rakshasas proves this, which most devas willingly admit. Good-hearted devas consider their corrupted kin only marginally

better than rakshasas. Both are capable of great wickedness, yet legend holds that both are potentially redeemable. Still, an evil deva is a fearsome opponent. He or she has the fearlessness and zeal of any other deva, but these qualities are turned to iniquitous ends. Evil devas, knowing the fate that awaits them, are more likely to fear death and fight viciously to avoid it.

Even in between incarnations, a deva can be an ally or an enemy. Some deva disincarnates can manifest in the world to pursue their goals. When one does, the disembodied soul might seek out agents to influence or students to teach, for good or ill. The wisdom imparted from the world of the spirits is profound indeed, made more so when it comes from a being that can remember multiple lives in the world. An disincarnate could guide or thwart heroes or villains, only to reincarnate later as a potential ally or enemy in physical form.

Devas maintain an affinity for angels—those who have the form devas once held. To good angels, typical devas are polite and respectful, like one might be to a kind elder sibling. (Corrupted devas vary in their approach to angels.) Angels recognize the nature of their worldly kin, and as such, they show a deva some deference in turn. If the angel and deva do not share a bond of common morality, the relationship can range from fine to tense to antagonistic.

ENCOUNTERS

Devas are natural warriors in the broadest meaning of that term. Each deva meets a challenge with courage born of immortality and fierceness birthed of a desire to end conflict quickly and, often, with minimal suffering. Most devas try to manipulate the battle to assist their allies and to deal with enemies efficiently.

Deva Seer

The deva seer is deeply connected to the world and the primal spirits as a way to eventually transcend ties to either. Learning, experiencing, and seeing clearly is the goal, rather than the normal deva pursuit of goodness.

Deva Seer **Level 8 Controller (Leader)**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 350
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +14
Clarity Shared aura 5; each ally within the aura gains a +4 bonus to Perception and Insight checks.
Convey Weaknesses aura 2; each ally within the aura who can hear the deva seer has combat advantage against enemies within the aura.
HP 87; **Bloodied** 43
AC 22; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21; +1 to all defenses against bloodied enemies; see also *seer's trip*
Resist 9 necrotic, 9 radiant
Speed 6
⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+13 (+15 on opportunity attacks) vs. AC; 1d8 damage plus 1d8 radiant damage, and the target slides 2 squares.
↯/↻ **Forced Detachment** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Melee or ranged 10; +12 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target cannot take standard, immediate, or opportunity actions until the end of the deva seer's next turn.
↯ **Seer's Trip** (immediate reaction; usable when hit by an attack; requires quarterstaff) ✦ **Weapon**
Targets the attacker (if possible); +13 vs. AC; 1d8 damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Effect:* The seer can shift 1 square, and one ally that can see the seer can shift 1 square closer to the target.
Resonant Memory (usable when the deva or an ally would fail an attack roll, saving throw, or check; recharges when first bloodied)
Add 1d6 to the triggering roll.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +9, Insight +13, Religion +15
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 10 (+4) **Wis** 19 (+8)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 17 (+7) **Cha** 16 (+7)
Equipment robes, quarterstaff

Deva Seer Tactics

A deva seer engages enemies fearlessly, facilitating allies with auras and *resonant memory*. Although the deva likes to regularly use *forced detachment* to pull an enemy's attention from the battle, fighting in melee is fine too. Doing so enables the most effective counterstrikes with *seer's trip*, which is otherwise only useful for a little free movement.

Deva Disincarnate

Between the world of the living and the dead, the deva disincarnate pursues clear goals until the day it reincarnates or dreams the bodiless dream again. These creatures are careful, because violence cannot destroy them, but it can force them into dreaming again and delay reincarnation.

Deva Disincarnate Tactics

When a deva disincarnate attacks, it starts off by moving among its enemies and using *psychic wave*. It then uses an action point and chooses one foe to bring into a waking dream. This foe is lost in the wonder and horror of the world's spirit lands where the disincarnate lives. Set up in this way, the disincarnate simply employs *disincarnate's fury* to maneuver and attack until it has the ability or the reason to use its other powers.

Deva Catspaw

The deva catspaw is caught between wicked existence as a deva and reincarnation as a rakshasa. Serving as an ally to the worldly fiends who will one day be allies, this deva has betrayed all the deva race stands for.

Deva Disincarnate **Level 11 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (undead) XP 1,200

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +15; truesight 1
HP 160; **Bloodied** 80
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Resist insubstantial
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing
Action Points 1

Disincarnate Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Radiant**
+15 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 5 psychic and radiant damage, and the target cannot make opportunity attacks against the deva disincarnate until the end of the deva disincarnate's next turn.

Spirit Roots (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Radiant**
+15 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 lightning and radiant damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the deva disincarnate's next turn.

Disincarnate Fury (standard; at-will)
The deva disincarnate makes two basic attacks, or it shifts 3 squares and makes one basic attack before or after shifting.

Waking Dream (standard; recharges when no target is affected by this power) ✦ **Psychic**
+14 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dominated until the end of the deva disincarnate's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).

Psychic Wave (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +14 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Salient Memory (when the deva disincarnate would fail an attack roll, saving throw, or check; recharges when first bloodied)
Add 1d6 to the triggering roll.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills History +17, Insight +15
Str 8 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 21 (+10)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 20 (+10) **Cha** 16 (+8)

Deva Catspaw Tactics

The deva catspaw prefers to take foes unaware, whether through guile or stealth. Striking when close to opponents, the deva opens with *betrayer's lunge*, tackling and stabbing an enemy from hiding or after surprising that target. The deva uses *faceless* on its next turn, fading from view and memory to perform *betrayer's lunge* again on the next turn. Only if the deva cannot repeat this process, or another need arises, does he or she use other powers.

Encounter Groups

A deva seer travels the world and its echoes in search of knowledge, listening to the spirits and discerning illusion from reality. Along the way, the deva also explores different ways of living among differing creatures. This encounter group finds the deva seer among the fey, probably at a sacred site.

Level 9 Encounter (XP 2,000)
✦ 1 deva seer (level 8 controller)
✦ 1 eladrin fey knight (level 7 soldier, see *Monster Manual* page 102)
✦ 1 flameskull (level 8 artillery, see *Monster Manual* page 109)
✦ 2 satyr rakes (level 7 skirmisher, see *Monster Manual* 228)
✦ 1 unicorn (level 9 skirmisher, see *Monster Manual* 257)

This next encounter group shows a deva catspaw in the usual place—among rakshasas prepared for battle. Among disguised rakshasas, the deva works to strengthen the ruse, lulling enemies into a false sense of safety before any conflict starts. Such a team could also work as a strike squad or guardians of a site that rakshasas value.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,400)
✦ 1 deva catspaw (level 15 lurker)
✦ 1 rakshasa archer (level 15 artillery, see *Monster Manual* page 216)
✦ 1 rakshasa assassin (level 17 skirmisher, see *Monster Manual* page 217)
✦ 2 rakshasa warriors (level 15 soldier, see *Monster Manual* page 216)

Deva Catspaw **Level 15 Lurker**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 1,200

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15
HP 114; Bloodied 57
AC 29; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28; +1 to all defenses against bloodied enemies
Resist 12 necrotic, 12 radiant
Speed 5

Retractable Katar Gauntlet (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage (crit 15 + 1d6), and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Betrayer's Lunge (standard; requires combat advantage; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+20 vs. AC; 3d6 + 3 damage, ongoing 10 damage (save ends), and the target is knocked prone.

Kinslayer Dart (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Radiant, Weapon**
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 psychic and radiant, and ongoing 5 psychic and radiant damage (save ends).

Faceless (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Illusion**
Close burst 5; +18 vs. Will; the deva catspaw is hidden from the target until the deva catspaw attacks. *Effect*: The deva catspaw can shift 2 squares, including through enemy spaces, and is subject to no attacks for doing so.

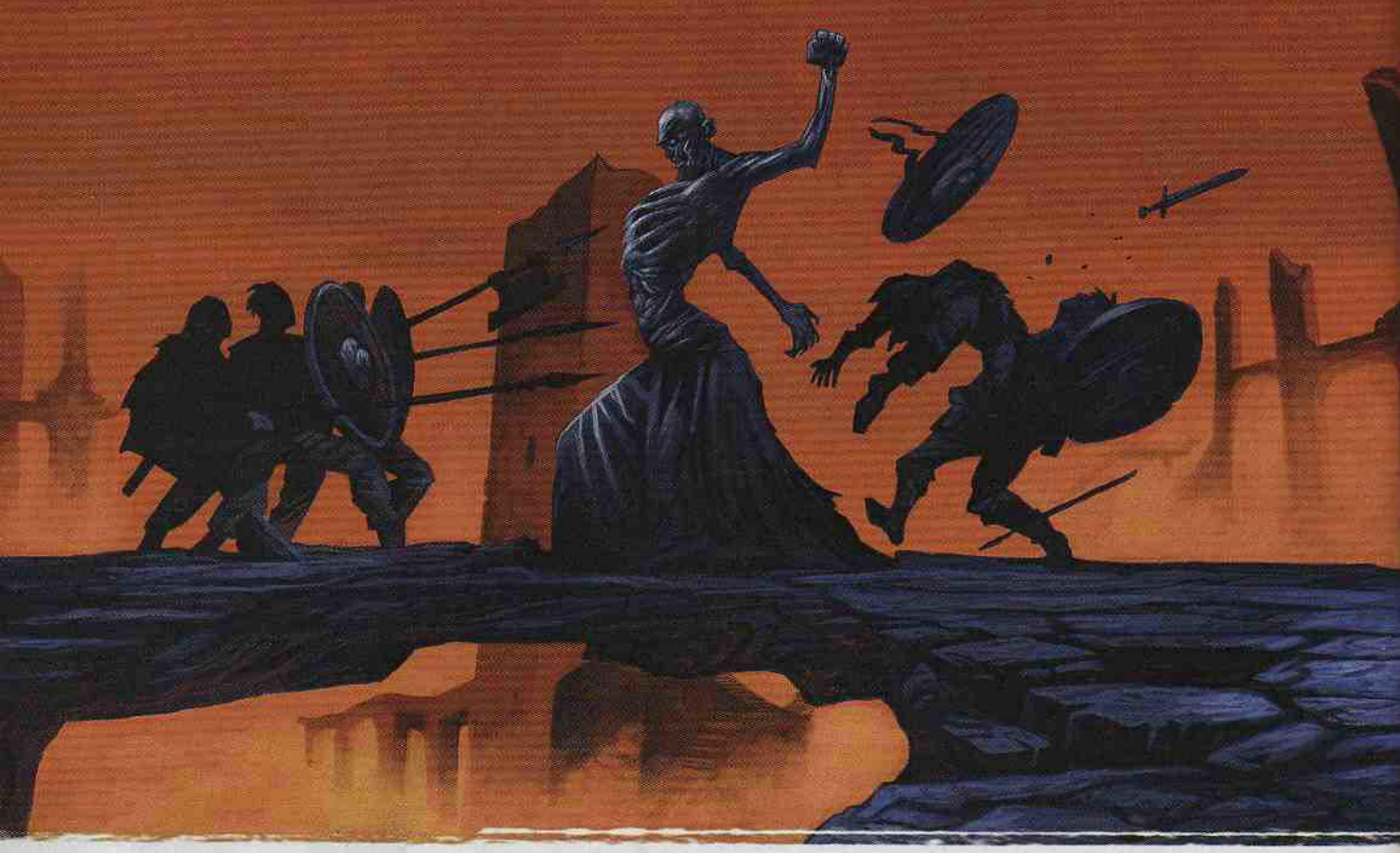
Killer's Memory (when the deva rolls a 19-20 on an attack roll against a target granting the deva combat advantage; at-will)
If the attack hits, it is a critical hit.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +18, Insight +14, Stealth +15
Str 16 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+9)
Con 18 (+11) **Int** 20 (+12) **Cha** 22 (+13)
Equipment leather armor, 2 retractable katar gauntlets, cloak

About the Author

Chris Sims works as a game designer and web specialist for Wizards of the Coast. His recent credits include the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*® and *Dungeon Master's Guide*®, as well as the *Forgotten Realms*® *Campaign Guide*.

by Owen K.C. Stephens • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE DEVOURER

"Hunger is misery; a full stomach is trouble."
—Haitian Proverb

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

HISTORY OF THE DEVOURER

Githyanki life ends in one of three ways: death in combat, execution by mandate of cruel racial laws, or sacrifice to Vlaakith, their dreaded Lich-Queen. Beyond service and glory in battle, there is little future for the servants of the githyanki empire. Even the most successful and skilled must eventually submit to the "ultimate honor," their souls consumed by the Lich-Queen to fuel her profane immortality. Such is the way of the githyanki—a bleak, hopeless march to glories few survive to see. Those who rebel are hunted with the utmost prejudice.

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

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

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

The resulting battle devastated Xinfyrit's forces, and only by sacrificing the vast majority of his troops did the warlock and his closest apprentices manage to escape to the depths of the Astral Plane, pursued by the Lich-Queen's most zealous champions. The renegades' flight took them far and lasted six grim years, but finally they were captured by Vlaakith's agents, their souls stripped and shackled within black gems, their bodies left to drift in the far-flung reaches of the Astral Plane.

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

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEVOURER

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

Knowledge (religion)

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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DEVOURER

As undead creatures, devourers do not have a functional physiology and have no place within the natural environment. Although they do not age, sleep, or reproduce, they do hunger. Devourers are literally soulless husks motivated by the hate-filled echoes of their living memories. All devourers seek to reunite with their lost souls, whether that essence be held prisoner somewhere or has departed to the Outer Planes. To fuel their hunt, and any of countless insidious schemes they might concoct to regain their essences, devourers temporarily sate their infamous hunger with the stolen souls of other creatures. Such souls are consumed, digested, and ultimately annihilated, denying their victim any form of afterlife.

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

Although the first devourers were doubtlessly spawned of the githyanki race, devourers of other races have likely formed. The method by which devourers are created remains unclear but seems to rely upon three elements: a body killed by the draining of its soul, energies from the Negative Energy Plane, and a third mysterious animating force. As the first devourers animated on the Astral Plane, some source there unquestionably provides the requisite vim, perhaps the astral winds, influences of countless planar energies, or the echoing memories of the dead gods floating in the astral depths. The ghostly energies of the Ethereal Plane and sinister emanations of the Plane of Shadow both also make those transitive planes fertile grounds for the creation of devourers. These strange energies cause a variety of unusual alterations in a devourer's physical (and possibly mental) state—including hastened desiccation, the visible collapsing of the corpse's chest cavity, and an increase in size.

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DEVOURER

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

DEVOURER PLOTS

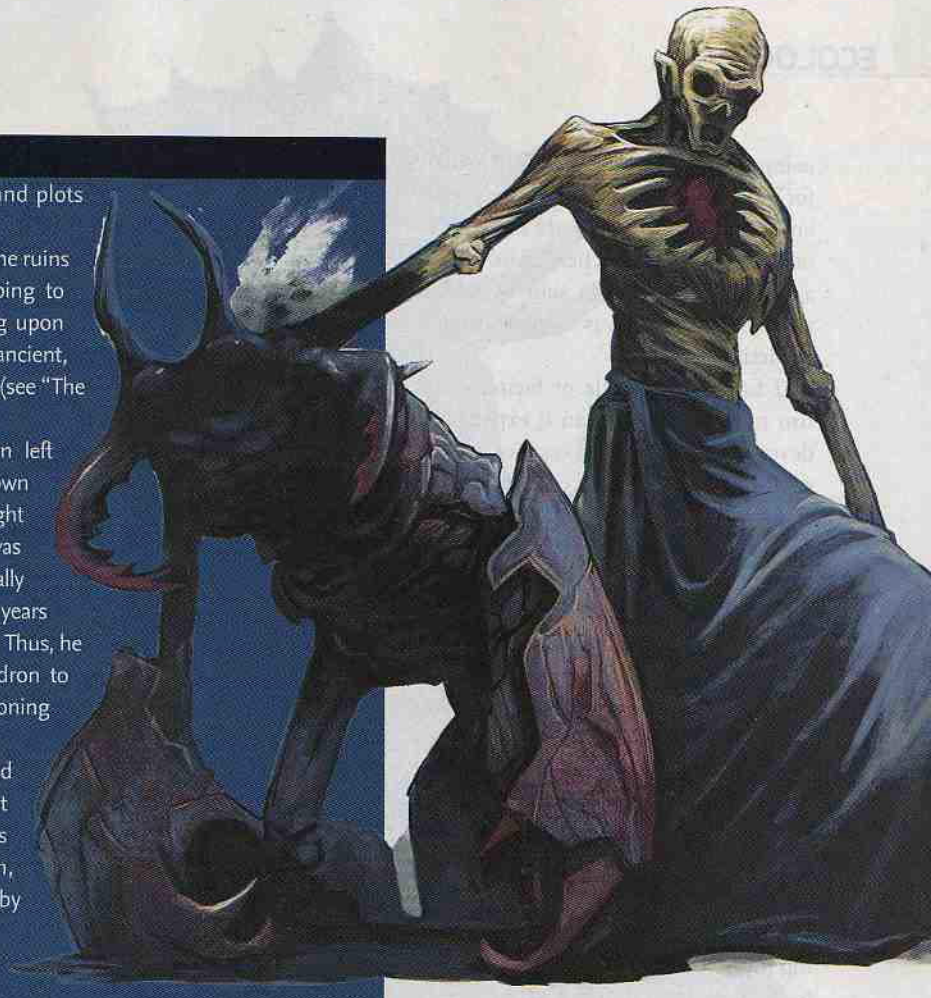
Devourers are insidious in their methods and plots to regain their lost souls.

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

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

Soullessness: An ancient, abandoned githyanki fortress is rumored to be a lost storehouse of imprisoned souls and is haunted by undead githyanki call kr'y'izoth, the result of necromantic experiments by the Lich-Queen herself (see "The Lich Queen's Beloved," in *Dungeon* #100). What's not known is that the devourer Drazramml is the one spreading these rumors, intent on interrogating and consuming any creature attracted by such tales. Although the other resident undead are free willed, the devourer has subjugated them into working for it.

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



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

As most devourers actively scour the planes for their lost souls, these undead are nomadic hunters, most often encountered on the Transitive Planes as they roam from world to world. When encountered on the Material Plane, they are most commonly hunting for souls, searching for clues as to their souls' whereabouts, or in the midst of some plot to reveal their essences' locations. Often being quite intelligent, devourers are able to see the benefits of allying with living creatures. Powerful clerics, sorcerers, and wizards, especially those with potent divination magic or the ability to question deities, prove most helpful to devourers, as such magic-users might aid in locating their souls. Alliances with mortal spellcasters rarely end well, however, as impatient and unstable devourers are quick to let their anger and hunger take hold at the slightest delay or failure. As such, devourers are most comfortable in the presence of outsiders and other undead, creatures whose souls are fundamentally different from those for which they hunger. Some githzerai have come to surprisingly beneficial agreements with the eldest devourers, possibly the apprentices of Xinfyrit's rebellion. These monks employ devourers as guardians of monasteries in Limbo, feeding the undead horrors a steady steam of souls from captured githyanki as they meditatively search for the creatures' lost essences.

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

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

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

DEVOURER ALLIES

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

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

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

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

ALTERNATIVE DEVOURER ORIGINS

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

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

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

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

ADVANCED DEVOURER

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

SHIVRA **CR 15**

Always NE Huge extraplanar undead

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +28, Spot +28; darkvision 90 ft.

Languages Common

AC 33, touch 7, flat-footed 33 (–1 Dex, –2 size, +7 armor, +19 natural)

hp 162 (25 HD)

Immune spell deflection, undead immunities

SR 26

Fort +8, **Ref** +9, **Will** +17

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee 2 claws +24 each (2d6+13 and energy drain)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Base Atk +12; **Grp** +33
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm
Spell-Like Abilities* (CL 22nd; ranged touch +9):
At will—*confusion* (DC 18), *control undead* (DC 21), *ghoul touch* (DC 15), *lesser planar ally, ray of enfeeblement, spectral hand, suggestion* (DC 17), *true seeing*
* Expend one level of trapped essence per 5 spell-like abilities used

Abilities Str 36, Dex 8, Con —, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 18
Feats Ability Focus (trap essence), Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (claw)
Skills Climb +28, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +23, Hide –9, Jump +28, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +28, Move Silently +14, Search +29, Spot +25, Use Magic Device +29
Possessions *wrappings of armor +5* (as *bracers of armor +5*), *ring of blinking, ring of force shield*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The ecology of the displacer beast

by Bill Mickelson

What you see is not what (or where) you hit

The following was taken from the lecture notes of the mage and naturalist Jen-Ahb, after he was mauled to death by a rogue displacer beast in the bestiary of the University of Sarkawan.

The displacer beast is a magical creature that resembles a large black panther, save for its six legs and the pair of horned tentacles sprouting from its shoulders. Its name derives from its ability to appear up to a full yard away from its actual position, caused by subtle vibrations emitted from its flesh that apparently refract light to distort the beast's apparent location. This enables the beast to avoid most initial attacks, which are directed at the illusionary form which usually appears closer to the attacker. From this power and from their own stamina, ferocity, and lighting skill, they are also highly resistant to magical effects, poison, and attacks that may be dodged (such as a dragon's breath). They are devilishly hard to kill.

In order to learn more about these strange creatures, I had to capture one alive — a task made most difficult by their rarity. What few displacer beasts there are prefer to live in the deep wilderness — in old forests, mountains and hilly regions, on vast plains, and even in the desert. Occasionally a pack of them is found in a swamp. The swamp variety tends to be somewhat larger than other sorts and swims very well. It is especially dangerous because of these facts, and because the swamp provides excellent cover for ambushes.

I was able to obtain a grant from our lordship and a leave from this university to obtain a specimen of this creature for study. I gathered a force of porters and armed men and proceeded into the Broken Spire country, where we searched for three weeks. Finally, we sighted a large male displacer on a mountainside, and one of my more zealous followers cast a net at the beast — missing, of course. It then ran off with incredible speed, apparently without using its front legs for travel. The beast looked for a few moments like a feline centaur.

After a few more luckless days, we were blessed to come across a displacer beast cave, which I identified at once by the abrasions left on the cave mouth from the beast's habit of sharpening its claws and tentacles on bare rock. Realizing our danger as well as our fortune, I deployed the twelve mercenaries with us about the cave in pairs, arming them with short swords as well as their nets. Two of my assistants carried long darts, especially prepared with a sleeping venom approved by the Council of Scholars and our lordship for use against rogue creatures who share no humanity.

Having prepared my spells and said my prayers to the gods and the university's alchemical staff (who had mixed the sleeping venom), I gave a signal and every man present gave out a roaring shout. We abruptly discovered, as the displacers emerged, that we had found a family lair. An enormous male, purple-black in color, a smaller female of blue tone, and two cubs rushed forth. My amazement could only be imagined, as no young displacer beasts had ever been known in these lands, and it had been assumed that such creatures were somehow generated full-grown. I was barely able to recover myself to raise the iron nail in my hands and speak the words to the spell of holding. The mercenaries hurled their nets at the male, almost forgetting about the rest of the pack in their haste to bring down the greater threat, and chaos reigned for the space of perhaps a minute.

Merciful are the gods of the university, and wise are the old men in the alchemical department! At our moment of greatest peril, the male beast's natural resistances failed him as the iron nail vanished from my hands and the male displacer vanished — only to reappear several feet away, flat on the ground, paralyzed! Only one of the many nets hurled had even struck him, entangling his horned tentacles and perhaps sparing the life of a soldier that the beast had begun to maul. The soldier himself was caught by the spell, but was no worse for the experience and was quickly treated by Brother Synon of Saint Ardan's, who accompanied us. The blue-black female succumbed to a dart from one of my aides, and the cubs were quickly netted as they tried to escape.

A marvelous find, I must admit. The male was huge, measuring 11' from nose to tail, with 7' tentacles. It weighed in at about 600 lbs. The female was quite a bit

smaller, only about 8′ long and 450 lbs., but was in excellent health. Each cub was about the size of a large housecat, but lacked the characteristic tentacles, having only knobby growths instead. In captivity here at the university, the cubs quickly developed their adult size and appearance within a matter of weeks. Their growth rate was astonishing. It appears that they reached full maturity at the ripe old age of four months.

The displacer beast's claim to fame is, of course, it's power to appear 3′ away from its actual location. The sage Dunmeyer has written extensively of displacers, though he had not studied live ones, and he once conjectured that his remarkable effect was somehow caused by molecular vibrations. Until I was able to shed new light on this mystery, anyone else could do nothing but guess, though my research is far from complete itself. It seems now that the molecular vibrations, stimulated by a specialized group of nerves, occur only in the outer layers of the beast's skin cells. Where as the vibrational movement is too minute to be normally noticed, it is sufficient to bend and redirect the rays of colored light. The refracted light rays form the illusionary image while the true form is masked, virtually invisible. This magical power is automatic, but it may be consciously directed by the beast itself.

It is still unknown, even to me, precisely how the light rays are deflected by the vibrations. Due to the beast's magical nature, I would not be at all surprised if the supernatural had a fair hand in the origin of the talent. Interestingly enough, displacer beasts are able to see each other's true forms and are not deceived by displacing — in fact confirmed by watching them in captivity.

Although only full-grown displacer beasts are found in packs outside the lair, obviously there are young. They never leave the lair until they are full-grown or the family moves to another locale. It seems as if the beasts do not want the young to be out before their displacing talent has been acquired. As violently disposed as they are to other creatures, they do not fight among their own species and exhibit no sense of rivalry among themselves, except for the play of young cubs. This playful behavior vanishes with adulthood. I am currently attempting to familiarize one of the grown displacers in the bestiary to my presence, though without much success.

Given the observations of other explorers who have recently visited the Broken Spires on other quests, we have a more complete picture of the life of the average displacer beast. Lairs contain two adult displacer beasts — male and female, of course — and perhaps as many as four cubs, though usually only one or two are produced. The birth rate among displacers appears to be quite low, given their small numbers. Little is known about their mating or birthing procedures. Unlike most carnivorous mammals, displacer cubs are born with their eyes open and a set of usable teeth for eating meat right away. Adult females have mammary glands and nurse their cubs until they leave the lair at the age of four months. Newborn kittens have no tentacles and are about the size of small housecats, though after the first eight weeks their tentacles sprout and grow at the rate of an inch or so a day until after about 30 days more have passed. At this time, the cubs will measure close to 4½′ long, weigh near 90 lbs., and generally be the same size as a large lynx. At the end of the first year, length and weight will be approximately 7½′ and 350 lbs., respectively.

From then on, the length of the tail will be around one-third of the overall body length, and tentacles will typically equal half the total length. When the beast reaches full maturity after two years, 10′ is average length for a male, with 9′ being the norm for females. Weight is about 500 lbs. for males, females 450. The extremely fast growth is even more impressive when one stops to consider that the beast's average lifespan is perhaps close to 100 years.

Distantly related to the true cats, the displacer beasts hunt in a similar fashion but often for more powerful game, such as giant deer, boars, cattle, buffalo, bears, and (as every child knows) blink dogs. They move silently until within striking distance for a lightning-fast attack made by several adults at once. They generally use only their tentacles, but their fangs and talons may be brought into play in close combat. Though they walk at a quick pace on all six legs when fighting or running, they raise their forelegs to claw at victims if they so desire and can run on their rear four legs without difficulty.

Displacer beasts can leap 20′ straight up, 25′ across on a standing jump, and double that on a running jump. Unlike many other creatures with more than four legs that have slow metabolisms, the displacer beast can move with great speed and with high dexterity despite the extra pair of legs that might get in the way.

I regret to say it, but a great many of those who have followed my work care little about my discoveries on how the displacer beast hides its form and creates an illusionary one, being more interested in the creature's violent temperament. "Why are they so vicious around blink dogs?" is the most often-asked question that comes from visitors to the university bestiary. Indeed, the murderous fury of a displacer beast is fit only for nightmares, of which I had several after our successful hunting expedition. Not being especially intelligent or cunning, displacers are not subtle when they burst into attack. They have been seen to maul any beast that comes within striking range of them, from humans to small dragons, and rumors abound of howling battles between some large carnivore and a hungry pack of displacers, shrieking and screaming their fury as they savagely tear their prey to shreds.

I know of few things to compare such madness to in the animal kingdom, not even excepting the behavior of certain berserkers and were-beasts. I have evidence that some process connected to their maturation, likely a growth hormone, affects their minds as they go from amiable kitten to adult killer. From the moment that the tentacles of the two kittens we had captured began to grow, the kittens became irascible and violent. I have scars on my left arm from wounds caused by Emerald Fire, the larger of the pair, that have only recently healed. This terrible nature only grows worse over time, though, as I've said before, they will not attack their own kind. Perhaps the scent of one another is the key element in preventing these attacks; I cannot say, though I have further experiments planned.

As foul-tempered as it is, the displacer beast reserves its most intense hatred for blink dogs. There seems to be a particular reason for this, as my research has shown, but the explanation was hard to come by. The two species both prefer temperate climates, but the displacer beast usually lives in the forests and mountains, whereas the blink dog is generally a creature of the open plains, so there are no territorial disputes or fights over prey on a species-wide basis. The "dog-and-cat" hypothesis holds no water here, as you might guess, since cats and dogs are not enemies by nature.

My explanation is based upon prolonged experimentation (and the deaths of several blink dogs). The very actions of displacement and blinking seem to interfere with the nervous and mental systems of the opposing creatures. I have seen a blindfolded displacer beast jump and yowl when a blink dog was allowed to teleport itself within several feet of the former's cage. The blink dog, in turn, began to snarl and bark in the direction of the displacer even though it, too , was blindfolded, had its sensitive nose covered, and was within the area of a spell of silence. Detection of the other is automatic for each, and appears to trigger hate, ferocity, and violence in both animals, especially the displacer beast, whose special nerves are spread throughout its entire body. This occurs whenever the creatures are within 150′ of one another.

Even if the blink dogs are not using their power or if the displacer beasts are asleep and not using theirs, both have learned to identify the other by scent and sight, provoking automatic flight or attack, depending upon the circumstances. Both species can also detect the approximate location of their enemy should their respective special powers be brought into play, and some rather sophisticated wild blink dogs have learned to not use their powers when preparing ambushes for the displacers. Blink dogs get a general feeling for the direction in which a displacer beast lies, but the displacers can find a blink dog as soon as it blinks in with unfailing accuracy.

As a side note, I would be curious to learn the effect upon a blink dog of wearing one of those remarkable displacing cloaks that adventurers talk about. I would wager

that being caught by a pack of the creatures would not be a pleasant experience!

A truly unique and interesting creature, the displacer beast. I am more than happy to spend the rest of my life studying it.

Appendix

1. To determine the orientation of a displacer beast and its illusionary form, roll d10. On a result of 1-5, the illusion is in front of the creature (positioned between the creature and an opponent it is facing). On a roll of 6-7, the illusion is to the creature's left; 8-9, to the creature's right; and on a roll of 0 (10), the illusion is behind the creature's actual position.

2. A lone opponent facing a displacer beast has a - 2 penalty "to hit" on any occasion except when the displacer beast has scored a hit earlier in the current round of combat. If more than one opponent is involved against a single beast, additional foes have their "to hit" penalties reduced by 1 for each extra foe involved: the second opponent hits at - 1, and the third and all subsequent opponents have normal chances to hit. (This assumes that the multiple opponents have arranged themselves so as to partially or entirely surround the creature.) If a beast is hit by any attack against it in a given round and it does not move, then all opponents who viewed the successful hit can attack at no penalty in the following round. Infravision will reveal the actual location of a displacer beast, as will *true seeing* or other similar magical means.

3. Displacers rarely use their claws and teeth unless near death or fighting a very large opponent. Each claw attack does 1-6 hp damage, and each bite 2-12 hp damage. Such an attack routine involves two tentacles, two claws, and a bite, though it can claw with the middle and rear pairs of feet as well if it can leap down upon an opponent or attack a prone one. Very large beasts will also be attacked with all available clawed feet.

4. When it is running on four legs, the beast's movement rate is doubled (30") for 3-12 rounds.

5. Attacks for immature displacer beasts are as follows: Treat those 1-4 weeks in age as a normal cat *(Monster Manual II,* and those 5-8 weeks old as a wild cat. The growth spurt begins here, so those kittens from 9-12 weeks old attack as a lynx (with the middle set of claws doing 1-2/1-2 on rakes), but cannot use their tentacles effectively (1-4/1-4 for attacks in the 11th and 12th weeks). Attacks between claws, teeth, and tentacles are evenly divided at this stage. As the cub grows older, it comes to rely heavily upon its tentacle attacks, using them as whips. Displacers 13-16 weeks old attack as adults, using their tentacles to cause 1-6/1-6 damage. Attacks are normal at the end of the first year. Those kittens under one week old have no effective attacks.

6. Although listed as neutral in alignment, some displacers have truly evil natures, and this will show up in *detect alignment* spells.

7. Blink dogs will attack anyone wearing a *cloak of displacement* with great ferocity. Displacer beasts, however, are not bothered by those who cast the spell *blink* upon themselves. The cause for the latter's distress lies in the magical biology of the blink dog, not in the nature of the spell itself.

8. A displacer beast's illusionary form is not like a regular illusion, in that it is not dispelled upon contact and it cannot be "disbelieved" out of existence. Striking the illusionary form will not reveal the actual location of the beast, but will of course reveal the illusion for what it is.

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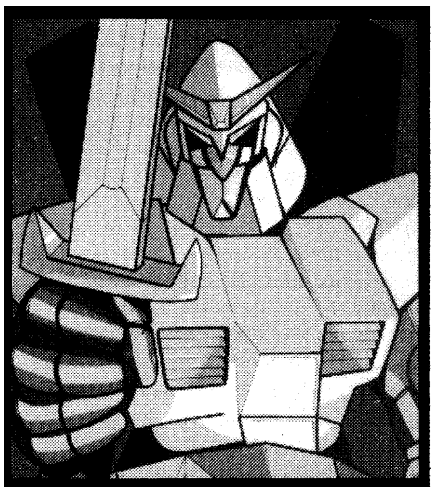

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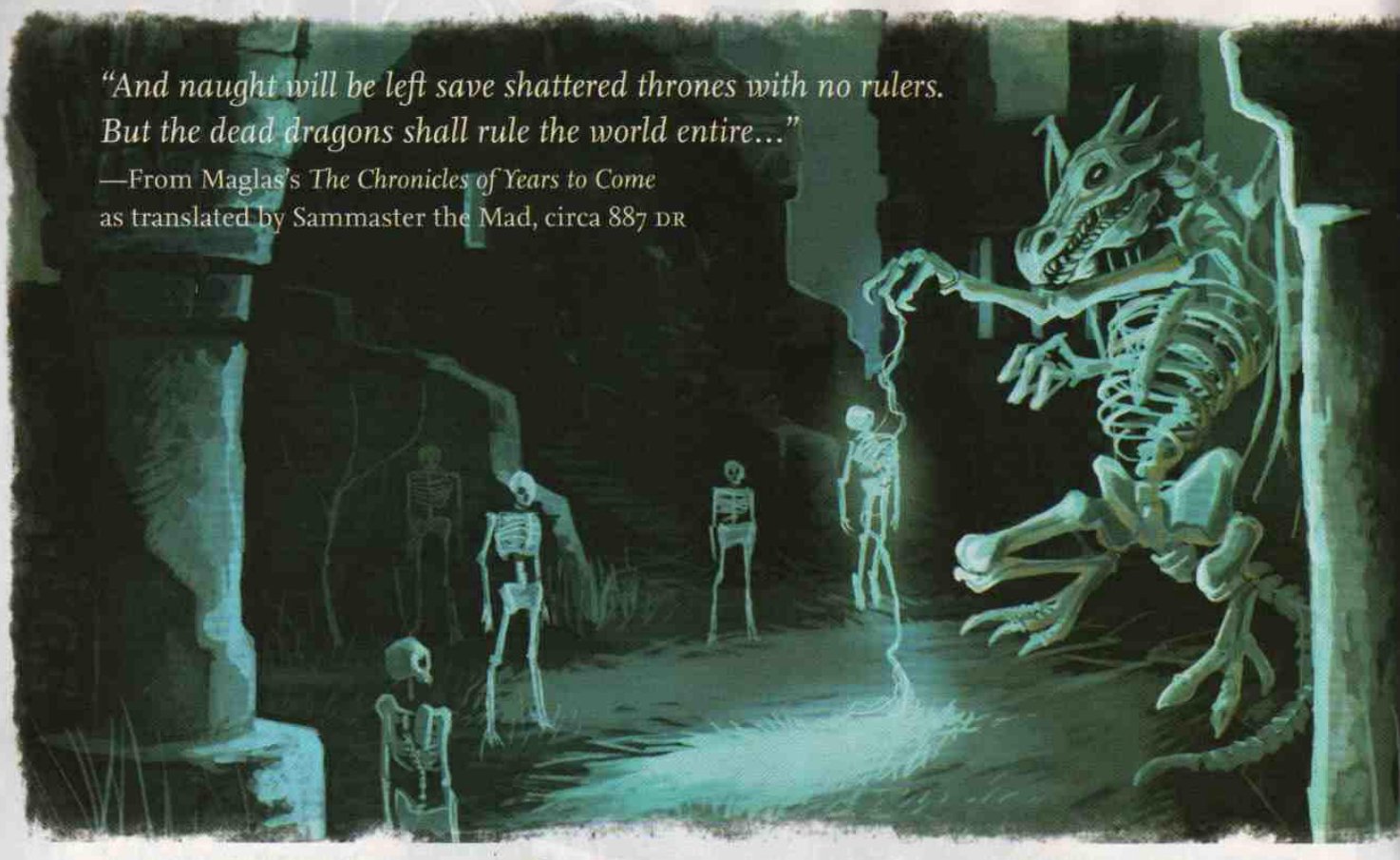


"And naught will be left save shattered thrones with no rulers.
But the dead dragons shall rule the world entire..."
—From Maglas's *The Chronicles of Years to Come*
as translated by Sammaster the Mad, circa 887 DR

The Ecology of the Dracolich

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

History of the Dracolich

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

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

One other commonality in the origins of dracoliches is their absolute reliance on a magical phylactery in which to store their souls. In this they parallel their humanoid counterpart in undeath, the lich. No one is sure how they came to follow this path and no other form of undead is so reliant upon such a receptacle—except perhaps vampires' connections to their coffins. Perhaps dracoliches rely upon these essential repositories for their nigh invulnerability, although they trade it for extreme vulnerability at the hands of anyone who should locate their soul-storing phylactery. Perhaps this crucial vulnerability holds some symbolic significance, such as being a representation of the Hades Pyxis, the receptacle of Falazure hidden somewhere within the

KNOWLEDGE OF DRACOLICHES

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

Knowledge (religion)

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

THE FIRST DRACOLICH

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACOLICH

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACOLICH

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

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

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

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

PHYLACTERIES

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

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

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

Phylacteries are as unique as the dracolich to which they belong; examples include sheets of paper-thin iron covered in sigils and bizarre illustrations, a length of horn from some impossible creature woven into an incredible knot of rune-inlaid ivory, or a stone puzzle-box with a hundred different possible shapes. Regardless of how a phylactery looks, most possesses the same statistics—a Tiny object with 40 hp, hardness 20, a break DC of 40, and immunity or resistance to a variety of energies, often related to the color the dracolich possessed in life. If the phylactery is destroyed, the dracolich suffers no physical harm but it is unable to create a new phylactery. Thus, if it is slain, its death is permanent. (More on dracolich phylacteries can be found on page 120 of the *Draconomicon.*)

EXAMPLE DRACOLICHES

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

THE BREATHER OF LOCUSTS

At the heart of the rainforest lies a steep hill strangled by twisting jungle boughs. This hill is alive: a brooding draconic terror that merely appears to be held amid the overgrowth. Yellow bones and decaying green flesh fester in the vines—a rotting olive spider in the heart of its web, a living building of bone, decay, and hate. Vast canvases of skin flap from the frame, like sails on some huge vessel, and ribs like towers rise sharply upward to a gablelike back and a great green head. Two huge blackened sockets stand like caves at the top of this terrible form, and from within them burns a malicious green fire.

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

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

DRACOLICHES IN FAERÛN

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

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

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

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

SIN FEASTER

Sin Feaster—the LychSpider, Slayer of Harvests, the Nightmare that Watches and Waits—dwells in an abandoned cathedral on the edges of a cliff overlooking the ruins of a city the dracolich destroyed on a whim. The Feaster, a corrupted wyrm black dragon dracolich (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*), has made an alliance with the followers of Lolth and claims to be a consort of the Spider Queen herself. Its ruinous cathedral is choked with vast webs, with the dracolich lairing in the spire itself, hundreds of feet up, where it watches and broods over its phylactery, an iron sphere that sits at the top of the spire. Driders and spiders live in vast numbers in the dreadful city of webs, making it a nightmare of arachnid horrors. The spiders have spread their influence over the rocky hills and deep valleys, giving the region its name: the Ill-Woven Vales.

AURGLOROASA

Within the lost dwarven city of Thunderhome—a realm she personally destroyed—the shadow dragon dracolich Aurgloroasa scrys all those she calls foes. Vain and powerful, Aurgloroasa is an obsessive schemer and calculating adversary—traits exemplified by her fixation with collecting every scale she has ever lost and fusing each brittle obsidian shard back onto her undead form, partially disguising her undead nature. Through her subtle manipulations from deep within the mountain, Aurgloroasa controls a vast network of worshipful agents, dictating events through them and from the shadows that cloak her every movement. The poisoned whispers she hisses from the darkness and her mastery of shadows have led her to be known as the Sibilant Shade.

AURGLOROASA **CR 23**

Female ancient shadow dragon dracolich
CE Huge undead
Draconomicon 146 and 191
Init +2; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft.; Listen +31, Spot +29
Aura frightful presence (300 ft., Will DC 35)
Language Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Dwarf, Elven, Gnome, Goblin, Infernal, Terran, Undercommon

AC 52, touch 8, flat-footed 52
hp 387 (31 HD); **DR** 15/magic and 5/bludgeoning
Immune cold, electricity, energy drain, paralysis, polymorph, sleep; undead traits
SR 33
Fort +22,

Ref +19, **Will** +26

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

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

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

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

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

Spells Known (CL 13th, +29 ranged touch)
6th (5/day)—*create undead, disintegrate* (DC 26)
5th (8/day)—*magic jar* (DC 27), *mind fog, persistent image* (DC 25)
4th (8/day)—*bestow curse* (DC 26), *crushing despair* (DC 24), *summon monster IV, unholy blight* (DC 24)
3rd (16/day)—*clairaudience/clairvoyance, dispel magic, fireball* (DC 23), *ray of exhaustion* (DC 25)
2nd (8/day)—*alter self, blindness/deafness* (DC 24), *darkness, desecrate, web* (DC 22)
1st (9/day)—*chill touch* (DC 23), *magic missile, obscuring mist, ray of enfeeblement* (DC 23), *shield*
0 (6/day)—*arcane mark, dancing lights, daze* (DC 20), *detect magic, ghost sound, mage hand, message, prestidigitation, read magic*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 13th)
3/day—*mirror image, nondetection*
2/day—*dimension door*
1/day—*shadow walk*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th)
1/3 days—*control undead*

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

SQ invulnerability, shadow blend

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

Skills Appraise +24, Bluff +44, Concentration +25, Diplomacy +35, Gather Information +40, Hide +30, Intimidate +44, Knowledge (arcana) +39, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +34, Knowledge (history) +34, Knowledge (local) +24, Knowledge (nature) +24, Knowledge (religion) +43, Knowledge (the planes) +43, Listen +31, Move Silently +35, Sense Motive +39, Spellcraft +43, Spot +29

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

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

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

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

Invulnerability If Aurgloroasa is slain, her spirit immediately returns to her phylactery, a single unremarkable onyx gem she hides in plain sight upon a towering obsidian pillar within her lair. If no dragon-type corpse lies within 90 feet for her spirit to posess, the dracolich is trapped within her phylactery until such a time—if ever—that a corpse becomes available. If her phylactery is destroyed while it contains the dracolich's spirit and a suitable corpse is not within range, Aurgloroasa is permanently slain. Likewise, she is unable to possess the corpses of other dragons if her phylactery is destroyed.

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

DRACOLICHES IN EBERRON

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

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

BECOMING A DRACOLICH

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

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

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

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

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

Spiritgorgers: After uncounted eons of undeath some liches'—and even some dracoliches'—physical forms decay to dust, leaving only their phylacteries behind. In most cases such undead reform in some hateful new body, refreshed and more powerful than ever—but occasionally they return to their phylacteries as trapped souls. Such phylacteries, known as spiritgorgers, are dangerous to deal with. The hateful unlife within the phylacteries whisper and make promises to anyone who has the misfortune to find them. If the owner makes a willing pact with the phylactery he curses himself with lichdom—his physical form is instantly destroyed and he rises as a lich with two minds in one corrupt body. Such schizophrenic abhorrences are usually driven mad by their impossible double mind or are wholly overwhelmed by the lich's ancient sentience.

Rare cases exist of demented dracoliches being created in such a way. The mad dracolich of the Corusk Mountains calling himself the Infernal Skald is one such example of this sort, combining the essence of the ancient dragon Prystisthese the White with the frost giant sorcerer/bard Beostagg. Able to assume either form, the Skald alternates between visiting the giantholds of the mountains as a lorekeeper and entertainer or razing them as a draconic attacker—often both on the same lodge within a week.

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

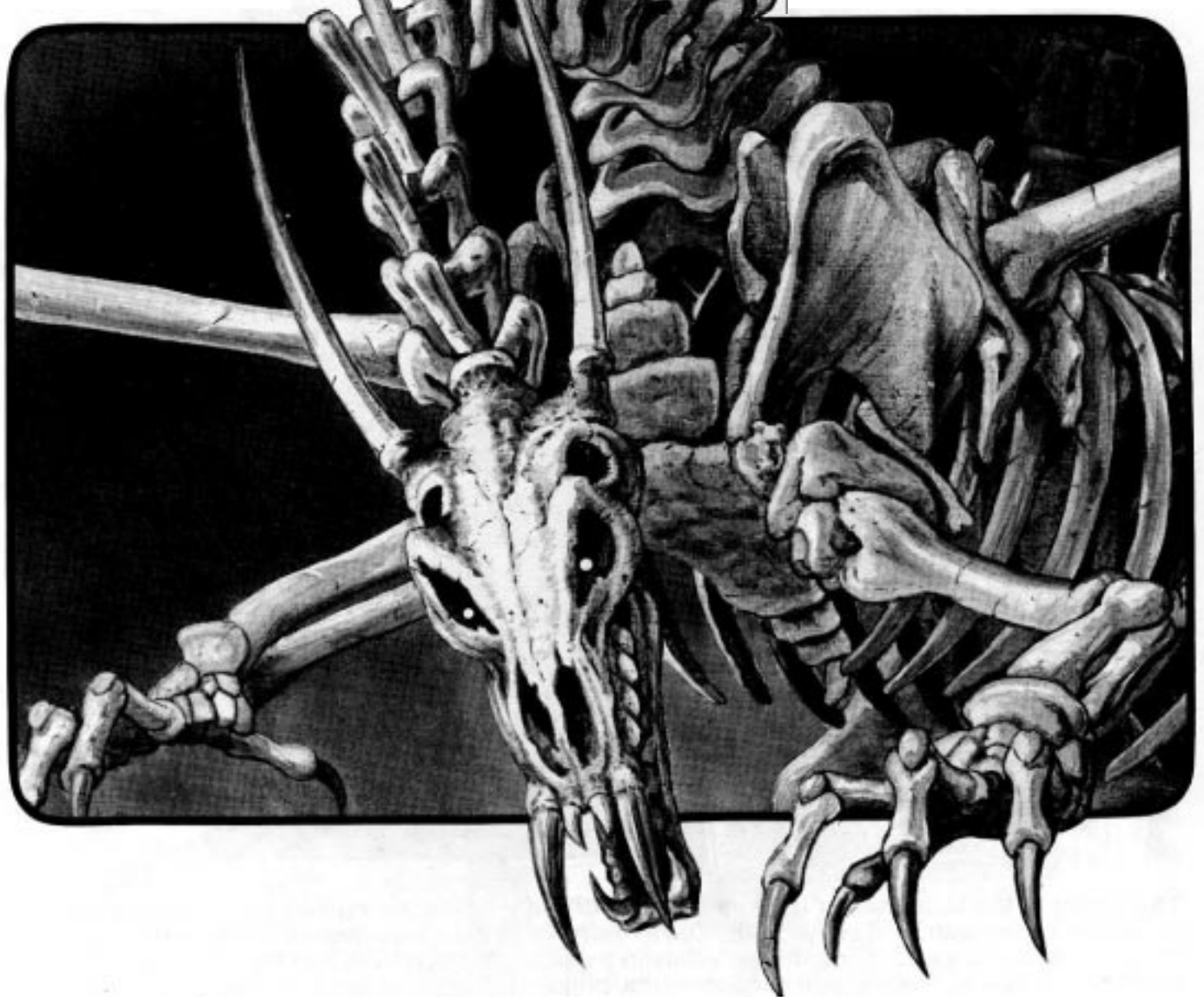
ALTERNATE DRACOLICHES

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

Dracolich Phylactery

The CULT OF THE DRAGON

by Ed Greenwood



Describing the dreaded dracolich and the sorcerers who create them

The series of DRAGONLANCE™ modules and novels from TSR, Inc., have given us a detailed campaign setting dominated by warring dragons: the world of Krynn. This world is an admirable setting in which to begin an AD&D® game campaign, or "a nice place to visit" (via interplanar spells) for player characters in an established campaign.

Krynn is otherwise rather difficult to integrate into an ongoing AD&D campaign. It is too polarized a world for casual adventuring, and comes complete with its own gods, powerful magic, and large-scale strife-in-progress. For those DMs who like their dragons less dominant, but still fancy some sort of dragonkind organization or power group (rather than using dragons as a succession of isolated, unsuspecting targets), I present some details of the mysterious Cult of the Dragon, from my Forgotten Realms campaign.

Less powerful — thus, necessarily more secretive — than the forces at work in Krynn, this group of human dragon-worshipers (and a splinter group or independent sect, the devil-worshiping Dragon Lords who serve Tiamat directly) has been one of the behind-the-scenes continual adversaries for a group of quite energetic players over the last five years or so. There is no reason its activities could not serve as a similar incentive to challenging adventures in other campaigns.

Respectful non-believers refer to the Cult as "The Followers of the Scaly Way." "Dragon-lovers" is a less complimentary term. The Cult serves as a communications network between members of evil dragonkind throughout the Realms, as well as directly aiding (by physical defense and healing magics) and monetarily enriching (by means of offerings of precious objects of all kinds) the creatures of their veneration. The sign of the Cult, used as a way-marker or recognition signal among members, is a claw grasping a crown — the crown representing rulership of the Realms, the claw representing the dragons revered by the Cult. There is also a gesture used by Cult members to identify themselves to colleagues and allies — extending a hand, palm down, from one's chin directly outward and forward, fingers held straight out and together, and blowing along these extended fingers from one's lips. Cult members include many powerful evil mages, fighting-men of all levels of skill, and a few evil clerics. Most of the more powerful Cult members can converse in one or more evil dragon tongues (most commonly red or blue).

The origins of this cult can be traced precisely to the writings of the long-ago mage Sammaster (the same who, much later, was destroyed as a lich by "The Company of Twelve" paladins in the ruined city known as "The Gates of Hell"). Sammaster translated a particular passage of *The Chronicle Of Years To Come,* written by the legendary oracle Maglas, and took from it a meaning different from most. Here is the passage as rendered by Elminster and most other sages:

> "And naught will be left save shattered thrones, with no rulers but the dead. Dragons shall rule the world entire, and . . ."

Sammaster, however, interpreted the passage thus:

> "And naught will be left save shattered thrones, with no rulers. But the Dead Dragons shall rule the world entire, and . . ."

Followers of Sammaster (who himself achieved lichdom) interpreted this to mean that the ultimate rulers of the world would be "dead dragons" — and, as Sammaster's own researches had just resulted in the rediscovery of the process of creating a lich, someone (thought to be the renegade cleric Algashon) seized upon the idea of creating undead dragons by a similar process. The Cult was founded with the aim of creating and serving these "dead dragons," elevating them to dominance over all dragonkind, by dint of their lich-powers and the allied strength of the Cult organization, and ultimately ruling over the world itself. The Cult — or, rather, the dracoliches of its creation — can claim to have conquered the kingdom of Peleveran in the far southeastern Realms, but only by means of laying waste to the kingdom. What was once a tree-cloaked, fertile land is now barren, stony, open country.

The goal of mastering the means to create dracoliches (or, as non-believers who knew nothing of their origins first dubbed them, "Night Dragons") was achieved with surprising rapidity, considering that until the process was proven to work, there were certainly no willing, cooperative subject dragons to be found. The earliest dracoliches created by the Cult have now existed in their undead status for some four hundred and sixty winters — and all of these dragons were of ancient age when the process began. Most sages believe that, like the once-human monsters known as demi-liches (see *Monster Manual II),* the body of a dracolich will decay with time, becoming skeletal and later collapsing entirely into dust. The magic then preserves the dragon's spirit more or less as a disembodied entity.

What will then occur is not known. Will these demi-dracoliches have even more fearsome powers? Or, will they pass away into nothingness? Some sages, notably Raglar "the Worldwatcher," hold that any dragon unable to ***physically*** hoard, handle, defend, and acquire more treasure will ultimately go insane — as continual, sensual contact with the hoard is so great a part of a dragon's nature. Others, notably Askarran of Selgaunt, say that it is unwise to speculate in so murky a field — ***nothing*** is yet known, so nothing can be intelligently hazarded. Some sages, such as Ahlimon of Iriaebor, assert that ultimately all "disembodied" dracolich spirits are drawn to the Lower Planes, as are all evil spirits upon death, and there become larvae.

The process of creating a dracolich is now well known among sages, however, for the cultists have implemented it vigorously — particularly upon huge, very old or ancient evil dragons with spell-casting powers. The difficulty, for the cultists, has traditionally been in getting dragons to agree to undertake the process. In the early days of the cult, this was usually solved by forcing a dragon into it, an activity that took its toll in both warriors and mages. This tactic is now frowned upon.

The traditional initial step in preparation for lichdom is the imbibing of a potion. The potion for dragons differs from that used by humans in both ingredients and effects — but, as with the latter, it must all be imbibed in one dose for it to work at all, and it does not always cause the desired effect. The ingredients are as follows:

- Two pinches of pure arsenic
- One pinch of belladonna
- One measure of fresh (less than 30 nights old) phase-spider venom (at least one pint)
- The blood (at least one quart) of a virgin of a demi-human individual, of a long-lived race (or, alternatively, a gallon of treant sap; this ingredient must have been drawn seven or less nights previously)
- The blood (at least one quart) of a vampire or a person infected with vampirism (this ingredient must have been drawn seven or less nights previously)
- One complete ***potion of evil dragon control***
- One complete ***potion of invulnerability***

The seven ingredients must be mixed together in an inert vessel (such as one of stone) by the light of a full moon, adding the ingredients to the vessel in the order listed, stirring all the while with the blade of an undamaged, magically whole *sword +2, dragon slayer* (which may be of any alignment, and strikes for triple damage against any sort of dragon). It may be imbibed at any time thereafter; the mixture will only lose its efficacy if it is touched by direct sunlight while uncovered, or if it is mixed with other liquids.

When such a potion is drunk by any sort of true dragon, it will have the following effects:

Dice	Result
01-46	Potion does not work. The dragon suffers 2-24 hp damage, is helpless with convulsions for 1-2 rounds, and loses any spells memorized.
47-66	Potion works. The dragon lapses into a coma for 1-4 rounds, and when it rouses knows that the potion has worked.
67-96	Dragon slain instantly, but potion works. If the "host" has been prepared, the dragon's spirit will go there and continue the process of becoming a dracolich.
97-00	Dragon slain instantly; potion

does not work. A full *wish* is needed to restore dragon to life. (A wish to transform it to undead, dracolich status will cause another roll on this table, instantly.)

If any creature other than a true dragon imbibes any portion of a dracolich potion, use the following table to determine the potion's effects:

Dice Result

01-44 Painful death in 1-2 rounds. The victim shrieks and has convulsions.

45-67 The imbiber is dealt 3-36 hp damage, as the potion corrodes his internal tissues.

68-72 The imbiber is *feebleminded* and affected by a withering disease (treat as the "rotting disease" inflicted by a mummy).

73-80 The imbiber goes into a coma for 1-6 turns, and is driven *insane* (as per the *DMG).*

81-84 The imbiber goes into a coma for 1-6 turns, and upon awakening can speak all evil dragon tongues.

85-90 The imbiber goes into a coma for 1-6 turns, and thereafter nothing appears to occur. (DM's note: The imbiber has been rendered forever immune to vampirism, the disease — but can still be life-drained and physically damaged by any vampire(s) encountered.)

91-00 The imbiber goes into a coma for 1-6 turns, and nothing more occurs.

No *charm,* aura reading, or similar spell or mental test will reveal that a dragon has successfully drunk such a potion.

The Cult of the Dragon always prepares the dragon's "spirit-host" before administering the potion, in case the potion slays the dragon instantly. This host must be a solid item of not less than 2000 gp value that will resist decay (wood, for instance, is unsuitable) and was magically prepared. Gems are commonly used, particularly specimens of carbuncle and jet — although peridot, sard, ruby, and sometimes even fragile black pearls or obsidian have been employed. It is desirous that the host item be often close to corpses (as explained below); for this reason, such a gem is often set in a sword-hilt.

The host first has *enchant an item* cast upon it (and must save vs. spell as though of the caster's level for this to be successful). If desired, *glassteel* can then be cast upon it, to protect the host, and then *trap the soul* must be cast upon it. Upon the speaking of the dragon's *truename* during the casting, the dragon will instantly lose 1 hp per hit die it currently possesses; these pass forever into the host. (The host should not have a *maze* spell cast on it; it is not a "soul-prison.") The dragon will fall instantly into a coma for 1-4 days, and during this time its mind cannot be contacted or attacked by magic or psionics. Its mind is unreachable, as it's spirit flits back and forth constantly between the host and its dragon body. (Any spells memorized by the dragon at the time *trap the soul* was cast are lost.)

If the dragon dies or is slain at any time after this, and it has before death imbibed the aforementioned potion, its spirit will go into the host, regardless of the distance between dragon body and host (which can even be on different planes of existence) or the presence of *prismatic spheres,* lead boxes, *cubes of force,* or similar obstacles. At this time, the host will *levitate* for 1-6 rounds, rising two or three inches upward.

Cult mages (or any other mage wishing to aid a dragon in attaining lichdom) must then provide a reptilian corpse, ideally that of a dragon or related creature. The body of an ice lizard, firedrake, wyvern, or fire lizard is ideal; that of a dragonne, dragon turtle, or dracolisk has only a small chance of successful use by the dragon's spirit. The corpse of a pseudo-dragon, pterandon, or other non-draconian creature is extremely unlikely to work. The body must be freshly killed (or, at least, dead within the period of the current moon, or 30 days), and within 90' of the host. The mage must then touch the host, cast a *magic jar* spell that includes the *true name* of the dragon, and then touch the corpse. In effect, the mage carries the dragon's spirit from host to corpse within his or her own body.

The corpse must *fail* a save vs. spell for the dragon's spirit to successfully possess it; if it saves, it will *never* accept the spirit. For this saving throw, the corpse is treated as a fighter of the same level as the dragon had hit dice when alive, with the following modifiers (any that apply) to the roll:

-4 if the corpse is of the same alignment as the dragon
-4 if the corpse is that of a true dragon (any type)
-3 if the corpse is that of a firedrake, ice lizard, wyvern, or fire lizard
-1 if the corpse is that of a dracolisk, dragonne, pterandon, or dragon turtle
+3 if the corpse is that of a non-reptile (i.e., not a lizard man, snake, ophidian, or the like)
-10 if the corpse is the dragon's own former body (which can be dead *any* length of time)

If the dragon's spirit cannot enter the body, it will take over the magic-user's own body, unless the magic-user returns it to the host by touching the host again within 2-12 rounds. It can remain in the host for any length of time without harm — unless the host is itself destroyed.

If the corpse accepts the dragon's spirit, it becomes animated by the spirit, and has the dragon's own mind and its dracolich immunities (see below). It will be telepathic if the dragon could speak in life, but unless it is the dragon's own former body, cannot speak — and therefore cannot cast spells with verbal components. (If your campaign rules dictate that dragons must use their forepaws to manipulate material and somatic components, then the dracolich may meet further difficulties if the corpse has no usable forepaws.) It can learn spells if they are available to be memorized, until its roster is full, whereupon it can never learn spells again. If the Cult of the Dragon is involved, the Cult will see that powerful and useful magics are learned.

The "proto-dracolich" has but one goal: If it is not itself the body of the dragon, it hungers for the original body, and will seek out and devour that corpse. (For this reason, Cult members favor using the dragon's own body — *i.e.,* keeping the host near it — or else providing corpses with wings, to make any journey to the original body as rapid and easy as possible.) The dragon's spirit can sense the direction and distance of its own former body, regardless of distance (although it cannot pass without aid to another plane of existence to reach it), and will tirelessly seek it out, not needing other meals for sustenance, nor rest.

If the dragon's own body has been burned or dismembered, the proto-dracolich need only devour the ashes or pieces. Total destruction of the dragon's body is possible only through use of a *disintegrate* spell (the body gets a normal save vs. the spell). If a Cult mage or other magic-user casts a *limited* (or full) *wish,* the body can be reincorporated if it was disintegrated on the Positive, Negative, or Prime Material Plane, as long as the *wish* is cast in the same plane as that *disintegration occurred.* Typically, various teeth and organs of a dragon are carried off by magic-users, alchemists, or adventurers wishing to sell such remains to mages or alchemists, and the proto-dracolich need only wait until such individuals are asleep or engaged in other activity (such as combat or spell-casting) to seize and devour the parts.

Only 10% or so of the body must be so devoured for the proto-dracolich to achieve its aim (it will know when this has occurred). Thereafter, within seven days, the proto-dracolich will metamorphose into a body resembling the dragon's original body in life — able to speak, cast spells, and employ the breath weapon just as the dragon could when it was alive. (If the dracolich possesses its own former body, it regains speech and the use of its breath weapon within seven days of possession.) It is then a dracolich, with the powers and properties described below, and becomes an object of worship, aid, and protection for all members of the Cult of the Dragon throughout the Realms.

The dracolich will immediately be gifted with gold and gems by the most senior members of the Cult, "The Keepers of the Secret Hoard," and these mages will provide it with spells if it so desires. The Keepers have carefully gathered, recorded, and improved a selection of powerful spells for

the use of its winged leaders. The Cult is known to have and provide the following magics:

1st Level	2nd Level
Affect normal fires	*Audible glamer*
Dancing lights	*Continual light*
Identify	*Darkness 15' r.*
Light	*ESP*
Magic missile	*Flaming sphere*
Mending	*In visibility*
Message	*Knock*
Push	*Levitate*
Shield	*Locate object*
Sleep	*Magic mouth*
Unseen servant	*Pyrotechnics*
Ventriloquism	*Ray of enfeeblement*
Write	*Stinking cloud*
	Web
	Wizard Lock

3rd Level	4th Level
Blink	*Charm monster*
Clairaudience	*Confusion*
Clairvoyance	*Dig*
Dispel magic	*Dimension door*
Fireball	*Fire trap*
Gust of wind	*Ice storm*
Hold person	*Minor globe of inv.*
Lightning bolt	*Polymorph other*
Slow	*Polymorph self*
Suggestion	*Remove curse*
Tongues	*Wall of fire*
Water breathing	*Wall of ice*
Wind wall	*Wizard eye*

The report of one adventurer, thus far unverified, suggests that *Nystul's* magic *aura* (or an equivalent spell that places false magical auras upon items in a dragon's hoard) is also in the Cult's list of dragon spells, and perhaps also *Melf's minute meteors,* or a similar "multiple balls of fire" spell which is within the reach of dragons and dracoliches aided by the Cult.

Dracoliches employ their spells as though they were magic-users of the same level as their number of hit dice (at the time of the original full-roster memorization, "host" hit points included).

The Cult cannot directly control any dracolich. Members of the Cult revere dragons, and work instead by trying to build friendship, trust, and mutual respect. Dragons and dracoliches are loners, but they *do* enjoy the knowledge that they have allies, and place value in such relationships. The Cult can, however, request (by messenger or signal) the aid of any and all dracoliches. It does so only when necessary, and is careful to reward with treasure any dragons or dracoliches giving such aid. The signal mentioned here is given by means of a magic item developed by the Cult: the ring of dragons. Worn only by powerful Cult members (there are perhaps seventy such rings in existence), these rings are activated only by the will of the wearer, who can cause such a ring to become a beacon for all dragonkind.

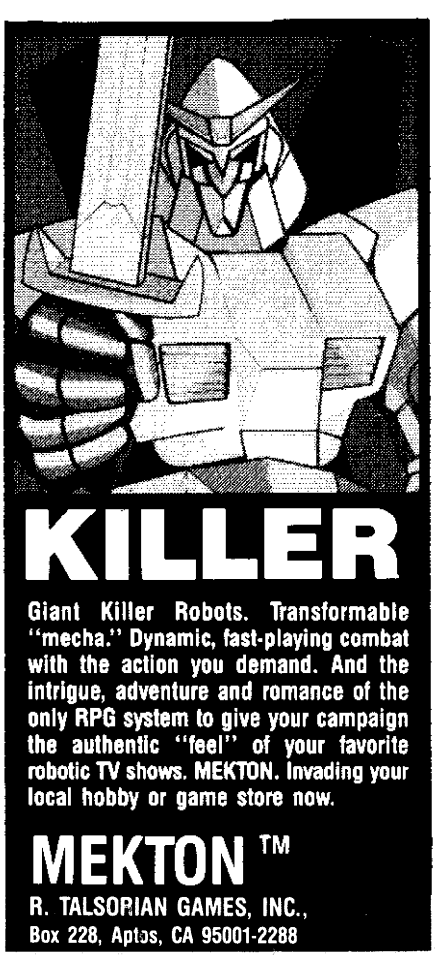
The ring of dragons (which appears as a normal brass ring) causes a twinkling radiance and a mental calling, confined to the plane of the wearer, but of unlimited range on that plane, audible and visible only to dragonkind Only evil dragons will feel the calling; any interested dragon may respond. The signal has a pinpoint location *(i.e.,* an observable, precise direction and distance from any dragon becoming aware of it), and will continue until the wearer wills it to end, moving with the ring, but ceasing if the ring is removed from the wearer who activated it. No control or influence over any dragon is conferred by the ring

The *ring* also empowers any wearer to communicate verbally in any dragon tongue, and telepathically with any true dragon, and the wearer can also cast (once per day) the *illusion* of a dragon, within 6" of the wearer, such an illusion having any appearance and sounds that the ring-wearer can recall, but having no physical existence, no ability to cast spells, and no ability to do any form of damage, even if believed. No true dragon will be fooled by such an illusion. The illusion serves as a recognition symbol or, in a pinch, as a diversion. A *ring* of dragons is usable by any intelligent creature, regardless of race, alignment, or class, who can physically place it upon a manipulative digit Most sages value such rings at about 15,000 gp. The method of their making is presently unknown outside the Cult, and they are not offered for sale

Each time a dracolich is slam, its spirit

can return to the host; if it possibly can, the dracolich will try to bring its body with it (i.e., escaping before being brought to zero hit points) by spell or magical aid. Each time a dracolich returns to its host, it loses permanently one hit die (ld8) of hit points; if by such means a dracolich is ever brought to zero hit points, it passes away (presumably to the Lower Planes) as a helpless, disembodied spirit. If it ever returns to the host and there is no corpse within range for it to possess, or if it fails to possess all corpses within range, it is trapped in the host until such later time (if ever) that there is a corpse within range that it successfully possesses. (After the initial *magic jar* described above, the later assistance of a magic-user is not necessary.) The dracolich must devour its former body each time it possesses a new one, if it is to regain its dracolich powers.

If a proto-dracolich cannot devour its original body, due to barriers or the destruction of its original body, it is trapped in that form until again slain; it cannot leave its proto-form at will to return to the host and await a "better" form to possess. Proto-dracoliches can never cast spells, nor do they possess the chilling damage, breath weapon, or fear-causing powers of the dracolich — but they do have the hit points of the dracolich, its immunities to spells and to clerical turning, and the wisdom and intelligence of the dragon or dracolich. Strength and armor class are those of the possessed body — and the dracolich can use any special magical or physical powers of the possessed body not destroyed by its own original death, including (recall its inteiligence) status, possessions, and the like if the possessed body is of an intelligent, social race. A dracolich can ***never*** forcibly possess a living body. Details of the dracolich form follow:



DRACOLICH (Night Dragon)

FREQUENCY *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: 1 *(unless called by a* ring of dragons)
ARMOR CLASS: -2
MOVE: *As per former dragon type*
HIT DICE: *As per former dragon type*
% IN LAIR: 20%
TREASURE TYPE: *B, H, S, T*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *As per former dragon type*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *See below*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Breath weapon and spell use*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Spell immunities and spell use*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: See *below*
INTELLIGENCE: *As per individual dragon*
ALIGNMENT Evil *(any sort)*
SIZE: *L (dimensions vary)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil/nil*
CHANCE OF:
Speaking: *100%*
Magic Use: *96%*
Sleeping: *0%*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *Varies/As per former dragon type, plus 1000 + 1O/hp (if destroyed, along with host)*

A dracolich is an undead creature, an unnatural transformation of evil dragonkind by powerful magic known to be practiced only by the mysterious Cult of the Dragon. Like human liches, dracoliches are immune to *charm, sleep, enfeeblement, polymorph, cold* (magical or natural), *electricity, insanity,* and *death spells* or *symbols.* By the nature of its making, a dracolich is also immune to potions or items of *dragon control.* Dracoliches can be affected only by magical attack forms (against which they have standard magic resistance, except for the immunities listed), or by monsters with magical properties of six or more hit dice. They cannot be poisoned, paralyzed, or *held.* They cannot be turned by clerics, and the knowledge of their ability to escape destruction works in dracoliches a transformation from cowardice to confidence; if a dracolich ever triumphs in any battle, from that point on, it is fearless (including immunity to magical *fear* or psionic attacks causing fear) and cannot be subdued.

A dracolich retains the keen senses (60' infravision, ability to *detect hidden* or *invisible creatures* within 1" per age level) it enjoyed in life, but its bodily processes are maintained magically; it need never eat again for sustenance. Most dragons enjoy eating — and a dracolich must eat if it wishes to refuel its breath weapon — but a dracolich never feels weakness, fatigue, or hunger. Attacks upon a dracolich, due to its magical nature, do *not* gain "to hit" or damage modifiers by type and breath weapon of dragon attacked.

All physical attacks by a dracolich (jaws, claws, and wing or tail buffets, where applicable) do the damage dealt by the dragon in life, plus 2-16 hp chilling damage. Opponents struck who fail to save vs. paralyzation will also be paralyzed for 2-12 rounds by the touch of a dracolich. (The victim's immunity to cold damage, temporary or permanent, negates the chilling damage but not the chance of paralyzation.) Dracoliches cannot drain life energy levels. They retain the ability to cause *fear* in opponents (as per the *Monster Manual)* that they had in life; as a lich, the fear they cause is slightly stronger — opponents must save vs. spell against the *fear* aura at -1 (after all other modifiers are taken into account). The gaze of their glowing eyes can also *paralyze* creatures within 4"; creatures of 6th level or above, or 6 hit dice or greater, save at +3. If a creature ever saves against the gaze of a particular dracolich, it is immune to the gaze of that dracolich from then on.

Dracoliches can use any magic available to them in life; once they have acquired a full roster of spells (most are aided in this by the Cult), they can never gain new spells, but never need to study or concentrate to replenish their arsenal. Their magical natures revitalize their spell ability, each spell being replaced 1 day after it is cast. Instead of casting a spell, a dracolich may attempt *undead control* (as per a *potion of undead control)* once every three days. Such control, if successful, lasts for one turn only, upon any sort(s) of undead present, and such undead save at -3 vs. the control. Control can be exercised up to 6" distant; undead cannot be *summoned* by means of this power. While *undead control* is being exercised, spells cannot be cast. A dracolich cannot drop *control* of undead, and regain it immediately after casting a spell — it must wait three days before any attempt at *control* will again be successful. Dracoliches without spell-casting ability can use *undead control.*

Dracoliches can employ their breath weapons only three times a day, as in life. Note that they will *teleport* (if provided with a means, such as a magical ring, by the Cult or through their own acquisition of treasure), or merely leave their bodies behind and flee in spirit-form, to return to the vicinity of the host (often a sword in their own hoard) that contains the essence of their spirit before being reduced to zero hit points; few opponents can destroy a dracolich outright. A dracolich can be destroyed by a *power word, kill,* or by the destruction of its host at a time when a suitable corpse is not within range for the dragon's spirit to possess.

Dracoliches usually appear as they did in life, except save that their eyes are glowing

points of light floating in dark eyesockets. Some few are reported to appear skeletal or semi-skeletal.

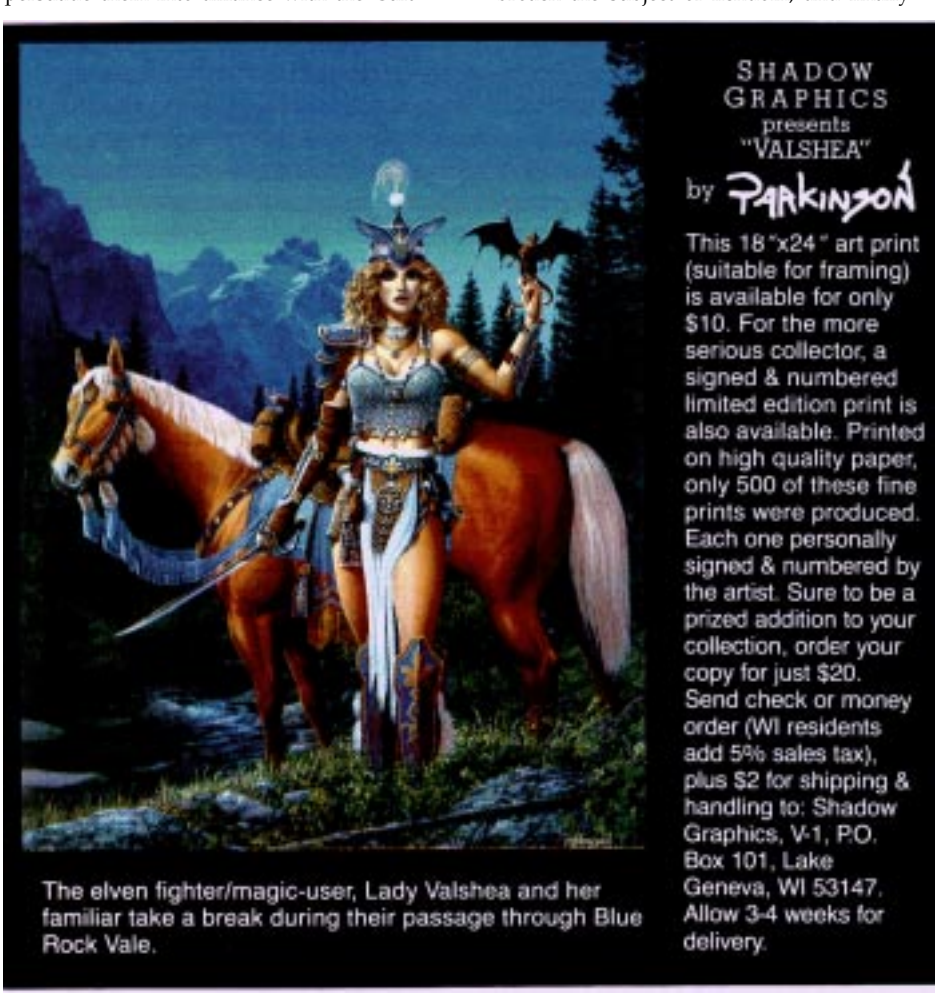
From all of this, it can be seen that members of the Cult of the Dragon are busy folk. Like independent adventurers, they are always seeking treasure — particularly "old" treasure found in ruined cities, tombs, or dungeons. If a party should encounter Cult members, it is likely that the Cultists will strike to slay, unless they already have treasure in their possession and believe they can escape or avoid those they have encountered. In any fight, members of the Cult of the Dragon are to be feared; they are almost all powerful fighters and magic-users, and will always be led by a mage or mages of 12th or greater level (usually 16th or so). Such leaders always wear a *ring of dragons.* As previously mentioned, this ring may serve to bring dracoliches to the aid of the Cultists, if they are sorely pressed.

Cult members also undertake regular visitations to all evil dragons and dracoliches they know of, offering riches for the hoards of each, proffering healing potions or physical aid in enlarging a dragon's treasure chamber or access tunnel, or arranging mechanical traps to slay adventurers who would plunder dragon-hoards. Any evil dragons they hear of or see evidence of are tracked down tirelessly, and attempts to persuade them into alliance with the Cult are made — an arrangement that leaves their hoards and solitude largely intact, broken only by the occasional messenger from the Cult, who always carries news (news is something dragons of any sort are always eager for) of events in the Realms, the doings of the Cult, and the affairs of all dragons. Such messengers always ask if there is any service that they or their companions can render to the dragon or dracolich (and will undertake such tasks instantly if the nature of the task allows), always flatter the dragon respectfully in speech, and always bring large amounts of treasure as an offering. In return, the Cult asks that its members can seek sanctuary in the dragon's lair if *in* extremis, and that the dragon respond to any call for aid by a messenger or by means of a *ring of dragons,* by flying to the source ready for combat. Such messengers always announce their coming by utterance of a password chosen by the dragon, and always remind the dragon of the Cult's aim of raising dragonkind to rulership over all the world — a rule in which, of course, the particular dragon addressed will be of great rank and importance. The powers and apparent immortality of the dracoliches is mentioned, offhandedly, every so often, too

After some years (at least ten winters, if the Cult is allowed to operate without hindrance) of visiting a particular dragon, the Cult messengers will begin to delicately broach the subject of lichdom, and finally put it as a proposal to the dragon, promising immortality, and (if the dragon can cast spells) the Cult's provision of the most powerful possible spells It is known that few dragons have refused, in the end, although some have taken a score of years or more to "think it over." Most sages do not believe that the Cult forces dragons into imbibing the potion that begins the process any longer, fearing that this might affect their ultimate loyalty to the Cult. The Cult will, as part of the process of achieving lichdom, ritually put to death a prepared dragon, if the latter so wishes. The Cult prefers (and urges instead) that dragons prepared for lichdom instead go forth and engage in combat too dangerous for them to contemplate in life — attacking a city, or the tower of a powerful wizard, perhaps, or a rival (non-Cult, and probably of good alignment) dragon — and die gloriously. This has the threefold advantage of damaging opponents or potential adversaries of the Cult, of increasing the Cult's reputation throughout the Realms (Cult members make sure word of such events gets around, and that the Cult is mentioned as a reason), and of urging the particular dragon to rise above its own innate cowardice, perhaps for the first time ever — a psychological feat that will serve it well when it becomes a dracolich.

Cult members are also kept busy finding, capturing, and tending (or training) dragon eggs, hatchlings, and creatures related to dragons, such as the wyvern, firedrake, ice lizard, fire lizard, airdragon (pterandon), pseudo-dragon, dracolisk, and dragonne — if these are not used for host bodies in attaining lichdom, they serve as work-beasts or mounts for the Cult, or in the continuing experiments to speed (and increase the power of the end product of) the process of dracolichdom. Cult members also gather at every opportunity any substances required as ingredients in the dracolich potion.

DMs should view the Cult as a vast network of evil (largely neutral evil) images and fighters, all dedicated to a cause and finding their lives' work and fulfillment in furthering that cause — a Cult which works tirelessly in loose teams of adventurers, working as described above (which activities could well bring Cult members into repeated encounters with player character adventurers), and communicating amongst themselves by means of magic, messengers on airdragons, innkeepers in certain Cult-run or Cult-sympathetic inns, and by means of message caches (often magically concealed writings on rock in prearranged locations). Cult fighters who attain the necessary levels often found a stronghold in some locale they favor, and it becomes a safe haven for the Cult The owner of the stronghold continues to adventure for the Cult, and Cult members aid in the defense of the area (if necessary) and assist in the running of the stronghold owner's business while he or she is adventuring "And the day will come," as Cult members say, "when the dead dragons rule over all"



The elven fighter/magic-user, Lady Valshea and her familiar take a break during their passage through Blue Rock Vale.

by Cam Banks • illustrated by Peter Bergting

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

THE ECOLOGY OF THE DRACONIAN

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

HISTORY OF THE DRACONIAN

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

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

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

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

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

After months of battle, the beleaguered forces of good discovered the secret behind draconian creation, a revelation that proved a turning point in the war. Gilthanas, an elven prince of the Qualinesti, and D'Argent, a silver dragon who had defied her oath of non-intervention, infiltrated the tunnels underneath Sanction and learned the truth. The heroes defeated Dracart, Wyrllish, and Harkiel, and brought draconian creation to a standstill. D'Argent and Gilthanas returned the uncorrupted dragon eggs to the Dragon Isles, freeing the dragons of light from their oath. The good dragons released their fury by striking back at evil dragons, avenging their murdered young and allowing the allied goodly races to resist the dragonarmies.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DRACONIAN

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

Knowledge (arcana)

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

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

Yet the real question arose: could a race of warlike, unstable, and cruel creatures ever hope to regain some of the noble potential of their draconic sires? Would they simply go violently into history's night, a footnote of corruption doomed to extinction?

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DRACONIANS

As scaly bipedal creatures with claws, snouts, and tails, draconians superficially resemble lizardfolk or troglodytes. In truth, they bear a closer relation to their draconic progenitors than to humans or reptiles. This becomes more obvious when examined internally, for a draconian is a dragon forced into humanoid form. Most possess wings like dragons, share the same ocular structure that gives dragons their exceptional eyesight and darkvision, and rely upon the same heightened auditory and olfactory senses. Draconians even possess many draconic glandular systems such as the *draconis fundamentum*, a gland attached to the heart and central nervous system that regulates and charges the draconian's body with the elemental power inherited from its dragon "parent." As a result, draconians are immune to almost all pathogens and can survive for long periods with very little food or water.

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

THE DRACONIAN CREATION RITUAL

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

characteristics, vary from one breed to the next.

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

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

Kapak: Slightly taller and sleeker than baaz draconians, kapaks have longer snouts and snaggle-toothed jaws. Their whiskers, a mane of thin, dark hair, and softly padded feet give them an almost catlike appearance, but the coppery-brown scales and wings indicate otherwise. Kapaks possess a set of two glands underneath their tongues, which constantly produce venomous saliva. This, together with the acidic quality of the *draconis fundamentum*, betrays their copper dragon progenitor. When a kapak dies, this caustic fluid reduces the kapak's body to a hazardous pool of acid.

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

Sivak: The broad-shouldered sivak draconians easily top 8 feet in height, making them the tallest of the draconians. Their fully-functional wings, unlike those of the other breeds, permit them the ability to fly as well as glide. Underneath their silver scales sivaks are muscular and powerful, and the transformative magic of their silver dragon progenitors allows them to easily take the physical forms of opponents they slay—often to the horror of those who witness such transformations. Such illusions also take on a morbid cast when sivaks die, as they take on the appearances of whatever beings killed them. These deceptions, however, reveal themselves three days after sivaks die, as their bodies collapse into piles of ashes.

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

SAMPLE DRACONIAN WARBAND

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

Sakiel's Company

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

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

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

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

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

ADVANCED DRACONIAN

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

SHOCK TROOPER KURZ **CR 6**

Male baaz draconian fighter 4
NE Medium dragon
DRAGONLANCE Campaign Setting 217
Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, scent; Listen +2, Spot +3
Languages Common

AC 19, touch 9, flat-footed 19
hp 53 (6 HD)
SR 12
Immune disease, paralysis, sleep
Fort +11, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

Spd 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee *+1 scimitar* +10 (1d6+4/18–20) and bite +4 (1d4+1)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +9

Abilities Str 16, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 12
SQ death throes, glide, inspired by dragons, low metabolism
Feats Die Hard, Endurance, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Run
Skills Bluff +3, Intimidate +3, Listen +2, Spot +3
Possessions *+1 scale mail, +1 light steel shield, +1 scimitar, cloak of resistance +1*

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

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

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE DRACONIAN

As a created race, draconians respond to the social behavior instilled in them as they mature. The Dark Queen's armies intended to use them as soldiers and strict disciplinary methods employed by their superiors ensured that the dragon-men served loyally and efficiently. Before reaching full-size, leaders assign each draconian to a training group, where it remains until mature. A draconian first sees a member of another breed only when ready to go to war. Their wartime roles therefore dictate the structure of their society.

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

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

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

Bozak: Bozaks make exceptional sergeants, lieutenants, and political officers. Their training includes a significant amount of spiritual education, and most bozaks learn from their educators that their innate spellcasting powers come from devotion to Takhisis. Combined with a love of psychological warfare inherited from their bronze dragon parentage, bozaks exhibit a sense of earned authority over the lesser draconians. Many feel their gifts bring with them a tremendous responsibility and their role is one of faith as well as leadership.

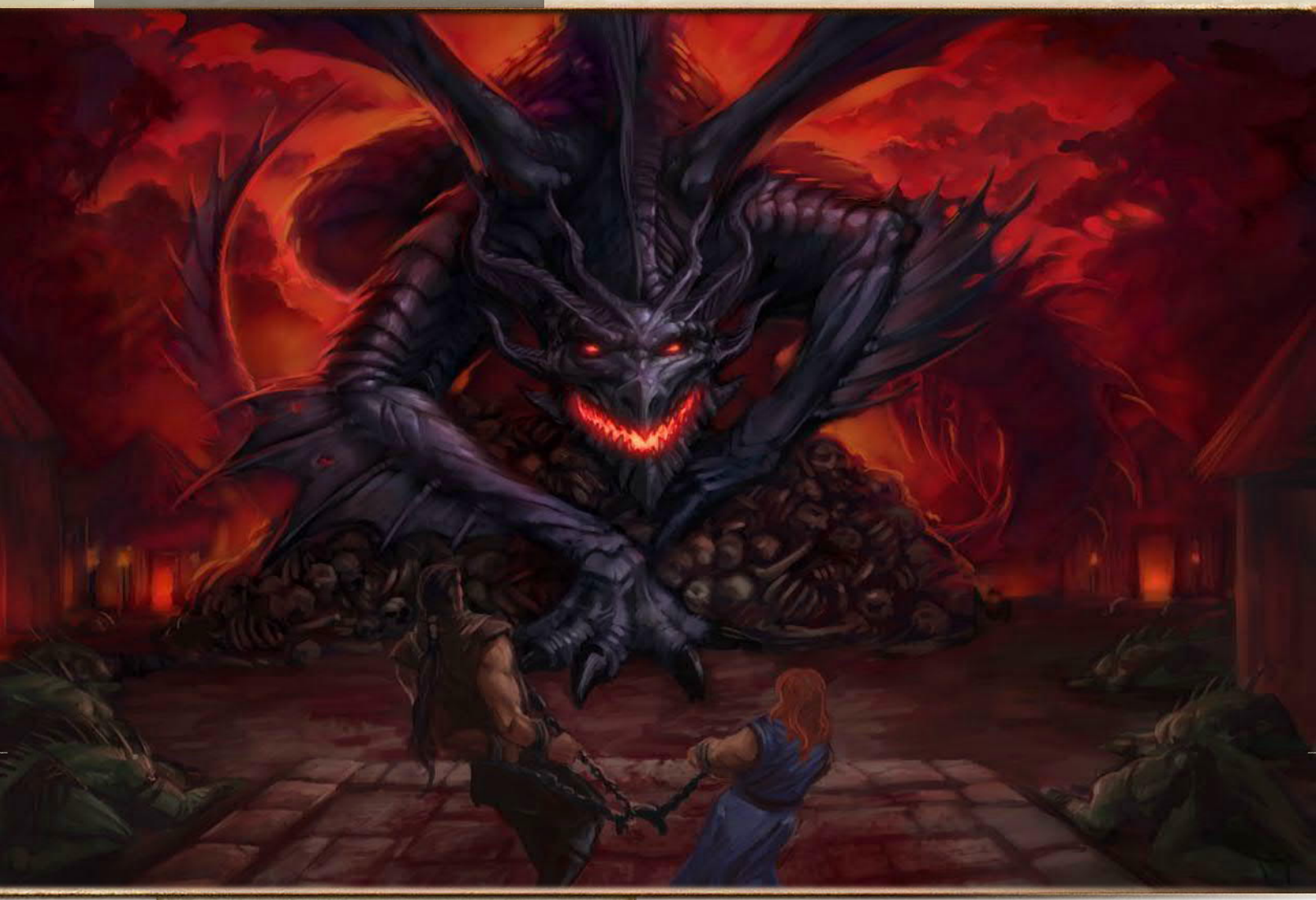
Sivak: Like bozaks, these draconians make effective leaders and commanders. They are fewer in number than all but the aurak draconians, and this makes them a precious commodity in the eyes of the Dragon Highlords. Sivaks train intensively and undergo rigorous conditioning. When twisted into a sivak,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

Auraks: The least common of the draconian breeds, auraks are also the most independent. Few in number, immature auraks grow up in small, focused training groups of three or four individuals. Intelligent and insightful, an aurak quickly learns that it occupies the top rung of draconian society. Each develops a feeling of superiority and privilege, a twisted remnant of the gold dragon's nobility and sense of purpose. Auraks thus master strategy, manipulation, and politics, never happy unless they are controlling something or someone.

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

FULL FRONTAL NERDITY by Aaron Williams

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



Black Dragons

"Hatred drives them like a barbed whip, pushing them ever forward to wallow in the toils of sadism and evil." Thus draconic scholar Atarvex described the race of black dragons nearly nineteen millennia ago. His account seems apt, all these centuries later. Sadists even beyond the cruelties attributed to the frightening reds, black dragons seem to gain greater sustenance from the sufferings of others than the food consumed by other creatures. They perform their evil acts for no greater reason, it seems, than merely to cause hurt.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 11

Sociopaths and murderers of the worst sort, black dragons terrorize their territories with a fury few other dragons bother to muster. The dragon kind most likely to rampage, black dragons combine the short tempers of their white dragon cousins with a superior intellect and greater physical prowess. Cruel in ways their less-intelligent kin cannot contemplate and far less sophisticated than the greater chromatics, black dragons delight in causing physical and mental pain. These horrible sadists use their frightful presence and acidic breaths to crack minds and burn bodies, all the while cackling gaily and reveling in the despair and torment they create.

Black dragons are the epitome of villainy, committing evil for evil's sake, and they require no greater motivation to pillage and plunder than simply because they can. Where white dragons lash out from a sense of frustration and red dragons launch into their murderous rampages in order to exert their dominance, black dragons kill because they want to. Some black dragons find offense in the most innocent comments and consider every real or imagined

slight (and black dragons possess inventive minds) justification enough to cause localized genocide. Attempts to communicate with black dragons require continuous and unending supplication and groveling, and even then most creatures that try end up as captives, subjects of bizarre but unmistakably creative tortures, or food.

Possessing distinctively large curving horns growing out the sides of their skulls just behind their jaws, black dragons strike impressive and easily recognized silhouettes. Aside from their iconic horns, black dragon faces possess as much individualism as those of any other dragon kinds. Most black dragons grow many smaller horns and hornlets all around their heads and faces, while a small number only gain their two major horns and no others. A few black dragons deliberately crack or break their horns (causing themselves considerable pain) and then let the sharp protrusions heal at jagged and unnatural angles. Black dragons tend to have relatively short necks and tails and thick, muscular bodies. Most black dragons' toes are connected by thick membranes of webbed skin that help them glide through the brackish waters of their homes.

Ecology and Society

According to a quip made in the margins of the original *Drakanov Codex* and subsequently repeated in all later copies, black dragons live in swamps because no other kind of terrain would take them. Like their unwelcoming homes, black dragons do not treat well those creatures unused to their many and subtle dangers. Black dragons are the undisputed masters of their territories, partly because few creatures care enough about swamps to fight the dragons for control.

Although they live comfortably in ever-damp morasses, like other dragons, blacks prefer dry lairs in which to sleep. This push for a home above the water level of their swampy demesne drives black dragons to lair in unusual places, such as within the roots of immense mangrove clusters or in the boughs and canopies of cypress groves.

Within their quaggy homes, black dragons reign supreme in a way few other dragons can. They are almost always the undisputed masters of their domains, and even those few swamp-dwelling creatures that could challenge them do not bother. Most victories over black dragons are costly at best and pyrrhic at worst. The acidic breath of black dragons leaves unhealing scars on their enemies, while their sadistic cunning constantly invents new and terrible ways of inflicting pain and suffering on those who oppose them. Even in death, black dragons can strike at their enemies, in the form of carefully laid traps, contingency plans, and the actions of cowed humanoids still under their control.

Black dragons torment their environment in much the same way they torture intelligent creatures. Like the pitiful creatures that somehow survive their sadism—even for a short while—the lands around black dragon lairs bear horrible scars and vast areas burned clean by acid, never to heal again. Except for whatever copse or grove the dragons call home, the lacerated trees near their lairs twist and writhe in sad imitation of animate things attempting to flee. Through careless pogroms and occasional genocides, black dragons drive off or slaughter all living things surrounding their lairs, creating wide swaths of barren swamplands. Those learned in the ways of dragons who find themselves suffering the misfortune of traveling through marshlands know at once when they arrive near black dragon lairs, for the teeming life of the ever-buzzing swamps suddenly quiets and the explorers come into a vast clearing, at the center of which stands a copse of trees, an outcropping of rock, or some other high indicator of dry land. Many scholars speculate that black dragons clear the lands around their lairs out of a sense of paranoia, so they can easily spot those who would approach their homes. Other sages of draconic lore argue that black dragons kill all life around their lairs simply out of uncontrolled hate. The dragons themselves remain silent on this debate.

When black dragons dine, the ground around them sizzles with the burning of acid as it slavers on all things nearby. Like all dragons, black dragons can survive on omnivorous diets of animal meat and various swamp plants, but they prefer the flesh of intelligent creatures, particularly those still alive and begging for mercy. More stalwart beings who do not scream out or who call out instead for a swift death take some of the dragon's pleasure, and to make up for it the monster usually tortures such victims for days or weeks to make the meal at least somewhat satisfying. Black dragons kill more creatures and rip up more plants than they can eat, and their wasteful and reckless ways do unending harm to the swamps they call home.

Black dragons prefer the brackish tides of saltwater swamps over the gently flowing currents or stagnant stink of fresh water. Many survive on fish and pool-dwellers brought inland by the rhythmic pulsing of the tides. In general, black dragons allow such rich tidal zones to live unmolested, founding their lairs several miles inland, away from their best hunting and scavenging grounds.

No one wants to interact with black dragons, especially other dragons (including members of their own kind). Both physically and socially noxious, black dragons repel those who approach them. While individual black dragons can sometimes overcome their own instincts and form short-lived alliances with other intelligent creatures, these truces rarely end well for the other party, and the list of creatures willing to ally with black dragons grows shorter every century. For their part, black dragons hate

all creatures, often including themselves, and they only subdue their loathing in order to gain an advantage.

In general, black dragons see intelligent neighbors as competitors and enemies or else potential prisoners and servants. Many black dragons who share their swamps with lizardfolk or boggards become leaders of the primitive tribes. Some black dragons transcend mere worldly leadership and are seen by their neighbors as nigh-unappeasable gods to whom they offer sacrifices of living, thinking creatures (usually prisoners but in desperate times members of their own tribes as well).

Black dragons avoid their kin, and other dragons avoid them. In the rare convocations of dragons, few black dragons receive invitations, a situation that suits most of their kind but angers the few who wish to participate. They most frequently interact with bronze and green dragons, as bronzes occasionally live in coastal areas bordering swamps, while greens infrequently live in tropical jungles that sink into swamplands before connecting with seas. Almost without exception, whenever black dragons meet dragons of other kinds, the confrontation becomes violent. When they interact with bronzes, black dragons always try to gain an early advantage by attacking from ambush. In situations where surprise proves impossible, they rarely hesitate to flee from the more powerful bronzes. Against greens, black dragons occasionally attempt to deal peacefully with their physically and mentally superior cousins. These attempts at nonviolent negotiation and discussion rarely end well, as black dragons lack patience and find offense or insult easily. Only when dealing with red dragons (even those they could obviously overpower if they felt brave enough) do black dragons attempt to govern their short tempers and propensity to attack without provocation. Fortunately for the impatient and hate-filled black dragons, their interactions with reds are extraordinarily rare at best.

Occasionally, pairs of black dragons come together and engage in what look to outside observers like fierce, bloody duels. During these day-long battles, the dragons attack one another relentlessly in flurries of spattering acid and flashing claws. As the sun sets, one of the dragons slinks away and disappears into the ruin left in the wake of their battle, while the other loudly declares itself to the swamp's many inhabitants. These horrible conflicts, easily heard from miles around and avoided by all creatures of the swamp, result in a clutch of eggs roughly 17 months later. In all cases, the crowing victor of these battles, who declares his blood-soaked virility with ear-pounding roars, is the male. The slinking "loser" is the female, who slips away to return to her own domain and begin the process of readying for her eggs, letting the male attract attention to himself while she nests in safety. After mating, the male has no more connection with the female or her eggs, and if ever again the two meet, they treat one another as bitter and hated enemies. Females can lay eggs roughly a dozen times in their lives, and every time they do so it is with a different male partner.

Hoard and Home

The greatest treasures black dragons possess are living, thinking creatures. Black dragons keep prisoners whenever possible, usually chained or caged near enough to their submerged coin beds for their hot, noxious breaths to wash over their captives. Those prisoners able to speak plead for release and beg for food almost constantly, for they quickly learn that groveling captives tend to remain living captives. Prisoners too tired or simply unable or unwilling to soothe their captors' acidic personalities quickly become sport or food. For the prisoners of black dragons, the line between prized treasure and snack is a very thin one, but the wiliest of captives can live for years under their masters' watchful and jealous eyes. No prisoners escape injury for long, as black dragons are known to vent their wrath on whatever living things are closest at hand. Within a few months, every captive bears acid scars.

Thanks to the inhospitable nature of their native environment and their own hated

personalities, black dragons can rarely find intelligent creatures to capture and torment. They consider swamp-dwelling humanoids such as lizardfolk and boggards to be slaves and servants, and do not count such creatures as treasure. To black dragons, treasured captives include humans and elves (who they especially love to scar with their acidic breath), as well as other intelligent creatures of similar size. Aasimars make for especially prized captives, while gnomes and halflings are considered insignificant refuse.

For non-living treasure, black dragons prefer items that can withstand their acidic breath, such as precious stones and glasswork. They disdain most metals, not only because such materials succumb easily to their breath, but also because the ever-present dampness of the swamp further corrodes all but gold, platinum, mithral, and adamantine. Thus, the coin beds and hoards of black dragons consist largely of gold and platinum coins, although black dragons do keep lumps of silver and copper coins corroded together in places other than their coin beds.

Black dragons ascribe no value to art and generally consider beautification as wasted effort. Those pieces of art and fine jewelry that do come into their possession survive only a short while before corrosion, acidic damage, or active defacement occurs. This disdain for beauty carries over into the prized possessions of black dragons as well, and many formerly attractive captives who escape emerge with hideous scars across their faces, which they describe as punishment for being beautiful—though perhaps the dragon's standards of beauty are so vile that by making things hideous it feels it is improving the value of its treasures.

Black dragons seek out stone statues and cut crystals to add to their hoards. Black dragons show no preference to the style, subject, or composition of the statues they collect, although they deface or vandalize works they consider too attractive. For crystals, black dragons prefer quantity over quality and size over value. Massive quartz crystals several feet long appeal more strongly to black dragons than do flawless but tiny diamonds. The stone and crystal collections of the oldest black dragons can sometimes compare with the greatest princes of the Elemental Plane of Earth. Although they seldom have much use for such items, black dragons particularly prize magical stones, crystals, and glassworks (such as mirrors or orbs), and place such items in prominent positions.

Black dragon lairs vary greatly, thanks to their environment and the wildly divergent topography therein. Like all dragons, they prefer to live within natural caverns or otherwise inside protective structures, but in general caves of sufficient size are extraordinarily rare in swamps. Usually, the best black dragons can muster are crevices within stone outcroppings or else sheltered indents in cliffs or steep hills.

Many black dragons live in unsheltered locations above the water level of their swamps. The boughs and canopies of cypress groves and the extensive twisting labyrinths of mangrove roots commonly act as their lairs and resting places, generally with extensive modifications made for them by lizardfolk allies or boggard slaves. Black dragons frequently employ lizardfolk and boggards, through coercion and threats, as guardians for their lairs, particularly in these relatively exposed examples.

Around their lairs, black dragons and their slaves set up numerous traps hidden beneath the dark waters of the swamps. These primitive but remarkably effective traps generally consist of spiked pits, fields of concealed spikes, deadfalls, and simple tripwires. Generally, the static defenses around black dragon lairs extend as far as the lifeless clearings surrounding their homes, significantly slowing already exposed land-bound trespassers.

To stave off airborne attacks, black dragons wrap the trees around their lairs with ropes or vines. Creatures attempting to fly into lairs protected in this way often become enmeshed or otherwise stalled by the ropes and vines, trapping them or sending them crashing to the ground. In order to avoid surprise from the air, black dragons often enlist the aid of spotters from among the lizardfolk or other creatures of the swamp.

The heavy stones and precious metals that comprise black dragon hoards tend to sink quickly in the swamp. Because of this and because their lairs are often open, black dragons are unique among true dragons in that they sometimes keep most of their hoards in places other than where they sleep. Black dragon treasure vaults are always carefully concealed and heavily guarded with a number of passive defenses. These vaults are usually artificially constructed by the dragons and their captives (who are then eaten so they cannot share their knowledge) deep within the still-living sections of the swamps. Vaults rarely stand farther than a mile from the dragons' lairs, and many are within a few hundred feet of the clearings around their homes. Black dragons prefer to be able to see their vaults from their lairs (or when flying over their lairs), but such a luxury is not always possible.

Campaign Role

Black dragons are unsubtle in their hate. They attack without provocation and fight with a terrible ferocity. Hardly heavy thinkers, black dragons are inclined to fight directly, bringing the battle straight to their opponents with acidic breath and flesh-slicing claws. Unlike their white cousins, though, black dragons are not cowards, and they do not back down from any non-draconic opponents. Their draconic pride keeps them in fights they cannot win, except when pitted against obviously superior fellow dragons.

Black dragons do take and keep prisoners, especially in the form of tribute from local tribes, passersby, or villages within a half-day's flight. Foes of other races they simply kill or, more often than not, leave for dead. Black dragons exert their cruel creativity in the uncounted wondrous tortures and torments they devise. The least creative among them simply allow their acidic saliva to drip onto their victims, slowly tracing acid burns into soft humanoid flesh. While this remains effective and frequently practiced, older and more sophisticated black dragons consider that form of torture too simplistic and scarcely worthy of the term. More practiced, older black dragons prefer slower forms of torture, extending the sadistic glee they derive from watching other creatures suffer. Many use water in their practices, including allowing drops to fall on their victims' foreheads at irregular intervals or simply dunking their victims underwater for several seconds at a time. Some are lazy and have their prisoners torture each other while the dragon watches. Regardless of the methods used, black dragons rarely ask questions of their victims, and practice torture only for their own enjoyment.

Usually the most dangerous hazards in the most hazardous of terrains, black dragons are often the entities responsible for whatever foul reputations certain swamps might have. Those who encounter these near-legendary nightmarish dragons that torment accursed swamps rarely survive unscathed—if the dragons' acidic saliva doesn't affect such victims, the psychological trauma of their oft-dramatic entrances almost undoubtedly does. When black dragons do deign to attack intruders in their swamps, they always aim to leave a significant impression upon the trespassers. Many leap suddenly from the dark swamp waters, while others drop out of thick canopies of trees or erupt from mounds of vegetation.

On Golarion

Although it is the largest swamp in Avistan, relatively few black dragons live in the Mushfens. Most dragons avoid the area and control smaller swamps along the northwestern coast of Cheliax and the northern and eastern coasts of Lake Encarthan. Numerous flooded lowlands in the various River Kingdoms also play host to black dragons, many of whom establish defensive pacts with whichever short-lived lord or princeling hopes to claim the territory that year.

The Mushfens, though, make most black dragons nervous. Racial history among their kind recalls that long ago the humans of the area discovered ways to control and pacify their unfortunate ancestors. For centuries, black dragons served the humans of Thassilon as guardians, pets, or—worst of all—heavy laborers. When Thassilon fell, the black dragons fled the place, vowing never to return. Millennia later, though, a few black dragons did go back, and those foolhardy few (as other black dragons consider them) have established themselves as masters of their particular domains in the vast Mushfens. This bizarre learned fear, however, is made all the stranger because the Mushfens did not exist during the time of Thassilon—the area only became a vast marsh when Eurythnia sank into the ocean. Black dragons consider this fact unimportant, however, and are inclined to violently lash out violently at those who push the point.

Unlike their more impressive cousins, few black dragons gain notoriety enough to warrant fame outside their immediate areas of control. Seryzilian of Ustalav ranks as one of the most famous black dragons currently active in Avistan, but he and his contemporaries lack the fearsome reputations of their ancestors. Indeed, with each passing millennium, it seems the terrible sadistic fury of black dragons wanes more and more. The histories of humans and dragons alike record the terrible activities of black dragons past—such as mighty Theratylus, who slew an army of 10,000 (human records put the army's size at 2,000), or sly Esaolathus, who tricked a Taldan baron into granting him hunting rights over the entire barony and then quite legally killed every man, woman, and child living therein—but bards rarely sing of their more recent descendants. Many draconic scholars debate the decline of black dragons, but most agree that the spread of human civilization and the undeniable drag of inbreeding hamper modern black dragons in ways their ancestors never faced.

Names

Black dragons favor long but easily pronounceable names, particularly those with an abundance of the "s," "th," and "z" or "zh" sounds, coupled with extensive use of the various sounds for "o" and "u."

Black dragon names: Asorazaklyn, Drakzuul, Karazathak, Sarolozoth, Throkzuun

Seryzilian

Terrible Seryzilian haunts the tiny swamp north of Karcau in northeastern Ustalav, where he torments the impoverished people of that land with unexplained abductions carried out in the dark of night and mutilated corpses of cattle bumping against the city's piers. The exact nature of Seryzilian remains a mystery to the humans who live near him, and many speculate he is a ghost or other foul undead, never believing that a living creature could perform such terrible acts unseen and ever hidden.

For his part, Seryzilian delights in the confusion of the humans, but he himself knows that some darker menace also plagues the swamp. His attempts to contact or summon whatever unknown entity lurks within the swamp have thus far failed, and with each new frustration he exerts his anger anew upon his bewildered and beleaguered neighbors.

Seryzilian **CR 20**

Male wyrm black dragon
CE Gargantuan dragon (water)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +39, Spot +39
Aura frightful presence (330 ft., DC 31)

DEFENSE

AC 39, touch 6, flat-footed 39 (+33 natural, –4 size)
hp 459 (34d12+238)
Fort +26, **Ref** +19, **Will** +23
DR 20/magic; **Immune** acid, sleep, paralysis; **SR** 26

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft., fly 200 ft. (clumsy), swim 60 ft.
Melee bite +43 (6d6+12 plus 1 acid plus nausea for 8 rounds, Fort DC 34 negates) and 2 claws +37 (2d8+6) and 2 wings +37 (2d6+6) and tail slap +37 (2d8+18)
Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft. (20 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (120-ft. line of acid, 7d6, Reflex half DC 34), crush 2d8 (Reflex DC 34 or be pinned), tail sweep 2d8+18 (Reflex half DC 34)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th):
3/day—*darkness* (110-ft. radius), *insect plague*
1/day—*corrupt water*, *plant growth*
Spells Known (CL 13th):
6th (4/day)—*chain lightning* (DC 20), *circle of death* (DC 20)
5th (6/day)—*baleful polymorph* (DC 19), *cone of cold* (DC 19), *wall of force*
4th (7/day)—*animate dead*, *bestow curse* (DC 18), *polymorph*, *wall of fire* (DC 18),
3rd (7/day)—*fireball* (DC 17), *haste*, *lightning bolt* (DC 17), *vampiric touch*
2nd (7/day)—*darkness*, *glitterdust* (DC 16), *scorching ray* (DC 16), *shatter* (DC 16), *web* (DC 16),
1st (7/day)—*cause fear* (DC 15), *chill touch*, *color spray* (DC 15), *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement*
0 (6/day)—*arcane mark*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *ghost sound* (DC 14), *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*, *prestidigitation*, *open/close*

TACTICS

Before Combat When he knows of an approaching enemy, Seryzilian readies himself by first slipping under the waters of his home. Carefully and quietly, he approaches his prey and watches them for a time, learning what he can of their strengths and weaknesses through their conversations and displayed abilities. When the time of his attack comes, he attempts to distract his foes with illusions.

Noxious Bite

Your acid-dripping breath causes those you bite to become ill.

Prerequisites: Acidic breath weapon, bite attack.

Benefit: Your bite attack deals 1 point of acid damage in addition to its normal damage. Living creatures you bite must make a Fort save (DC equal your breath weapon's DC) or be nauseated for a number of rounds equal to 1 + your Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round).

During Combat Seryzilian begins combat by leaping suddenly out of the water to catch his prey by surprise, then sprays his terrible breath on as many foes as he can. On his next turn, he makes a full attack, concentrating all of his attack on one target at a time. Each round, he randomly changes targets, making as many attacks as possible against that single foe, only attacking additional opponents if his target drops, and using his breath weapon whenever it becomes available, hitting as many opponents as possible with each breath. Seryzilian only uses Power Attack if an enemy appears particularly easy to strike. He prefers greater accuracy over more damaging attacks, especially when attacking with his Noxious Bite.

Morale Seryzilian fights to the death. His draconic pride and love of battle work against his sense of self-preservation.

STATISTICS

Str 35, **Dex** 10, **Con** 25, **Int** 18, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +34; **Grp** +58
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Noxious Bite, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Wingover
Skills Escape Artist +37, Hide +37, Intimidate +37, Knowledge (nature) +37, Listen +39, Move Silently +37, Search +37, Sense Motive +37, Spot +39, Swim +37
Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Common, Draconic
SQ water breathing

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Water Breathing (Ex) Seryzilian can breathe underwater and freely use all of his abilities while submerged.
Corrupt Water (Sp) Once per day, Seryzilian can stagnate 10 cubic feet of water, making it become still, foul, and unable to support animal life. The ability spoils liquids containing water. Magic items (such as potions) and items in a creature's possession must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or become fouled. This ability is the equivalent of a 1st-level spell, with a range of 330 feet.

Blue Dragons

A note to would-be dragonslayers: you will never fight your way through the layers of intrigue to strike down the blue dragon at his heart. You will most likely never meet the blue dragon manipulating your lives. The only time you will ever meet a blue dragon you wish to slay is when he makes an error.

They are are more than content to shift pursuers off their trails and wait the fifty years or so for their human antagonists to simply die. They never grow so frustrated that they venture forth to eliminate threats in person.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 12

Blue dragons share many commonalities with brasses, and the two kinds of dragons frequently compete for water, food, and influence over nearby humanoids. The two take remarkably similar approaches to dealing with water and food, although blues are typically more controlling than their metallic rivals. What varies between these kinds is how they exert their power over their humanoid neighbors. Where as brass dragons form vast networks of friendly and casual connections with people of similar interests, blue dragons maintain smaller but better-controlled webs of contacts over whom they can directly or indirectly exert vise-like authority. In short, where brass dragons are socialites, blue dragons are puppet masters.

Neurotically, almost obsessively tidy, neat, and careful, blue dragons manage every aspect of their lives to a minute level. This desire to control manifests from the moment of their hatching and is not limited to external forces, actions, and creatures. Blue dragons also strive to remain stridently in control of themselves—their own actions, thoughts, and

even their own feelings and emotions. Unfortunately for the blues, they lack the natural predilection for discipline possessed by their green brethren. Most blue dragons find this deficiency of self-control an exhilarating challenge for them to micromanage out of existence. When they become so tightly wound as to snap, rather than launch into self-destructive rampages, blue dragons seethe in their thrones and mobilize their armies. In the language of Qadira, the saber-rattling that often occurs before the start of outright war is known as *al-dra aksu*, "waking the dragon," in reference to the belief that most wars in the desert begin because blue dragons want them to happen.

As befits their sand-burrowing ways, blue dragons are sleek, muscular creatures with small, tightly overlapping scales and thick, short claws perfect for digging. Their swept-back horns and relatively small and sparse cheek hornlets add to their swift-moving appearance, such that even when at rest they seem in motion. The wings of blue dragons have thick scales on their leading edges, which protect the relatively delicate membranes of their leathery wings from stones while they burrow. Unlike most other dragons, blues can also fold their wings tightly to their sides, which prevents the wings from acting as obstacles to movement through the sand.

Ecology and Society

Blue dragons most often inhabit the edges of hot, arid deserts, preferably near crossroads, oases, waystations, or other places where humans gather or frequently pass by. Whenever possible, blue dragons control these vital locations, generally through intermediaries, allowing them to also exert influence over the creatures that rely on the places. Like almost all dragons, blues like to live within dry caves, which are common amidst the badlands, hills, or broken rocks that form natural borders of their desert homes. Many blue dragons live in the homes of brass dragons, once they drive off or kill the previous occupants.

Although one of the least playful of true dragon kinds, even among the taciturn and joyless chromatics, blue dragons do enjoy swiftly burrowing through desert sands. Blue dragons engage in these sand swims for a variety of reasons. Many go off into the deep desert for solitude, giving them time and clarity to work out some trouble that vexes them. Some swim in the hot sands simply for pleasure, as the close grains envelop them in a massaging warmth. As blue dragons age, they sometimes grow hornlets, bone spurs, or other unsightly protrusions on their faces and at their joints; swimming through the irregularly sized grains of desert sand polishes their scales and grinds away the unprotected growths.

Above the ground, blue dragons delight more in aerial combat than any of their kin. Thanks to the strong lungs that allow them to find air even when burrowing under thousands of tons of stone and sand, blue dragons can fly higher than any other true dragons. When they hear of other, non-blue dragons in their territories, they do not hesitate to take to the air and spy upon the trespassers from high above, circling gently in the rarified air far above the flight ceiling of their kin. If the trespassers have metallic scales, the blues dive down and immediately attack, trusting to their often-superior maneuverability in the air to defeat metallics weaker than themselves or escape from those they cannot hope to defeat. When blue dragons meet to discuss business or political proposals, they often open negotiations with relatively friendly competitions of aerial combat. They first agree upon the terms of the opening battles before they begin, with the losers entering the discussions from a position of weakness.

Relentless carnivores, blue dragons refuse to willingly eat vegetable matter, calling it "cattle food" to those who might suggest such a thing. If hunger gnaws too strongly at their stomachs, blue dragons can gain sustenance from minerals and nutrients trapped within stone and earth. Many blues stave off hunger by finding areas of sand relatively rich in nutrients, swimming through the area and allowing small amounts of the sand to filter into their mouths through their clenched teeth. Many sages speculate that this process is also necessary to generate their lightning breath weapon.

Although they habitually opt out of advanced magical techniques and knowledge, blues nonetheless retain the impressive retinue of inherent magic common to all true dragons. They most often focus their magical acquisition on spells and magical items concerned with deceit and manipulation. Blue dragons favor the schools of illusion and enchantment above all others, and while they have natural talents with illusory effects, their tendency to control all aspects of their lives makes them also favor spells of charm and domination.

Blue dragons produce more half dragons and dragon-blooded offspring than all other dragon kinds combined, usually created by altering a creature with draconic blood rather than actual mating. These creatures serve as loyal lieutenants or trusted operatives. As blue dragons tolerate no disloyalty from their half-breed minions, all half-blues are exceptionally dedicated to their draconic parents. This trait they teach to their own descendants, although those generations further removed from their blue dragon ancestors become increasingly independent and prone to familial betrayals.

Blue dragons are loath to reveal themselves or their direct influence. They know that brass dragons and other high-minded creatures hate and fear them, and they exert great amounts of energy to remain hidden from those who might otherwise become their enemies.

Because they lack the natural ability to change their forms, blue dragons must rely on other creatures—preferably humans but any creatures either of the humanoid form or who can physically change their shapes—for the maintenance and direct supervision of their vast networks of contacts. Younger blues usually employ only one or two of these seneschals or lieutenants, while the oldest great wyrms might command a dozen or more. Cultivating these trusted lieutenants requires at least several years. Generally, a future lieutenant begins at the periphery of a blue dragon's network of contacts and slowly works his way up the chain of command and ever closer to the dragon resting at the heart of the elaborate web. Blue dragons rarely take the time or expend the effort to know all of their underlings, trusting instead that their lieutenants can handle the daily operation of their vast networks. Once a minion proves his worth and advances sufficiently high in the chain of command (usually within three or four steps of the dragon himself), one of the blue's lieutenants mentors the follower and grooms him for his continued rise. When a blue loses a lieutenant, whether through the passage of time or misadventure, he advances an underling mentored by the fallen lieutenant. Naturally, a minion who attempts to advance by killing his lieutenant faces his enraged blue master instead.

In general, only a blue dragon's direct lieutenants know of his true form and location, although truly exceptional underlings relatively close to the dragon also occasionally uncover or meet his identity. Most of the minions in a blue dragon's network of spies and contacts never learn of their true master. Only the blue dragon himself knows the true scope of his network, although his lieutenants generally know at least one other creature of their rank, in addition to most or all of those who work beneath them. Usually, lieutenants do not know the number of their fellows, and in many cases a blue attempts to convince each one that he is the only creature the dragon trusts that closely.

Blue dragons see some amount of camaraderie in their green cousins, with whom they share discipline and an adherence to order. While green dragons have a tendency to focus their energies internally, blues manifest their personal codes of honor and discipline externally, controlling their surroundings and neighbors. Most blue dragons respect and attempt to emulate the self-discipline of their green cousins, but many fall frustratingly short. In addition to greens, blue dragons also respect and willfully work with reds. Although the chaotic and unpredictable nature of their red kin causes them frequent difficulties, blue dragons nonetheless recognize the value in possessing allies of such magnificent power. To that end, blue dragons sometimes carefully employ themselves as advisors to reds, and red dragons who control vast territories more often than not have blue dragon lieutenants who carefully work to engender continuing dread in the local populace. By using red dragons as public figureheads in this manner, and keeping public attention fearfully fixed upon the powerful reds, the blues can establish and operate ever-larger networks of underlings and lackeys with much less fear of discovery. With the two lesser chromatic kinds, blue dragons have no dealings.

Blues struggle endlessly with their brass dragon rivals, vying not only for land, but also for contacts and underlings. In some uncommon cases, a blue and a brass might both count on a particular creature as a contact, who might unknowingly work for both dragons at once thanks to the long chains of intermediaries separating him from his two masters. Blue dragons particularly enjoy placing paladins and other virtuous creatures into this situation of dual servitude. Generally, though, the matrixes of underlings employed or otherwise directed by blues and brasses rarely overlap except in violent ways. Through their networks of contacts, blue and brass dragons sometimes wage proxy wars lasting for decades.

Among their own kind, blue dragons generally work together in mutually beneficial ways. By chance or design, groups of blues sometimes cluster together, with their areas of influence abutting one another peacefully. These groups of blue dragons very carefully and precisely define the borders of their territories, often putting such definitions in writing. Border wars between blue dragons are therefore exceedingly rare, although blues do occasionally fight proxy skirmishes against one another for other reasons. Crossing from one blue dragon's territory into another is seamless, and no creatures except the blues and their lieutenants can clearly define when such a transition occurs. The areas controlled by different blue dragons usually ignore the borders established by humans, which occasionally leads to civil wars and border disputes among the humans as the dragon exerts its influence. For the most part, though, wars disrupt the trade routes on which blue dragons typically depend, such that desert regions blanketed by blue dragons are almost always more stable and wealthier than those that are not. Of course, these areas tend to gain stability through despotism, although few of the people living therein suspect that they actually live under the control of two tyrants—one human, one draconic.

Hoard and Home

Blue dragons favor expansive lairs with several layers of complexity and serving multiple functions. A blue dragon's ideal lair stands publicly in the center of a city, such as a temple, fortress, or other large but privately owned building, usually possessed in the name of the blue dragon's most trusted lieutenant. Beneath this legitimate and functional façade wind dozens of hidden passages and

tunnels, themselves serving some darker purpose (such as the headquarters of an assassin's guild, also indirectly controlled by the dragon). Beyond these, either physically beneath or simply farther away, the tunnels open into vast natural caverns the dragon calls home. Blue dragons are not stupid, though, and their cavernous homes always have hidden exits that lead directly to the surface.

Such ideal lairs characteristically belong only to extremely old and well-established blue dragons, who spend their long lives building up webs of contacts that span multiple generations. A very few exceptionally lucky younger blue dragons inherit such extravagant lairs from their parents, but because of the longevity of their race, few dragons care to wait for such boons. In general, blue dragons begin with less ideal lairs and slowly and steadily build up their size and grandeur over time.

To start, many blue dragons find brass dragons (who bear an exceptional aptitude for finding excellent natural lairs) and steal their lairs. When these lairs contain natural outlets of fresh water, the blue dragons leverage water rights into ever-increasing control and profit for themselves. Over time, through their lieutenants and intermediaries, blue dragons sometimes coerce semi-nomadic peoples to settle near their lairs, using the water found therein as the basis of their newfound villages. Truly fortunate blue dragons instead find fanatics of some kind who are willing to establish bases of operations atop or near their lairs, using the water there to exert control over nearby people. As their settlements grow, so too do the buildings that form the public portions of the dragons' lairs, with the dragons themselves moving farther away from their public epicenters as they extend the size of their chains of informants and contacts.

With the use of magic and direct informants, blue dragons carefully monitor their lairs and the activities occurring within them. Every power group that exists within a blue dragon's lair reports through the group's leader directly to one of the dragon's lieutenants.

Blue dragons put much of their accumulated wealth into the growth and decoration of their lairs. From gilded domes to exquisite marble statuary, the extended lairs of blue dragons contain unimaginable treasures that dragon-slaying mortals cannot hope to loot. Thus, although they are easily the wealthiest dragons, the portable portions of blue dragon hoards are no more impressive than any other dragon's.

Because of their constant need to buy loyalty and bribe bothersome bureaucrats, blue dragons prefer to keep their wealth in forms both easy to carry and easy to spend. Coins form the basis of their hoards, and the coin beds of blue dragons are usually far larger than their relative size and power would otherwise dictate. In addition to coins of all kinds, blue dragons favor gems and jewelry, the value of such items being disproportionate to their size. These items are generally kept separate from the rest of their hoards, so the dragons may use them as payment without needing to access their most private chambers when hosting guests.

Campaign Role

Entire campaigns can exist at the whim of blue dragons without the adventurers ever actually meeting them. Consummate masterminds and manipulators, blue dragons control events from behind the scenes. Only when caught by surprise or betrayed are they disposed to show themselves to those who wish to defeat them. Under no circumstances do blue dragons become frustrated with the failures of their underlings and approach powerful characters in order to take care of

Convocation of Dragons

When a great wyrm gold dragon calls for a gathering of other dragons, even the disobedient chromatics listen. With the exception of the unrepentantly antisocial black dragons, representatives of every draconic kind flock to some neutral location (often an uninhabited island off the western coast of Garund) to discuss, argue, and battle over the topic at hand. Convocations rarely last for more than a few days, and even the longest and most productive of them tend to end in bloodshed and violence. Despite the palpable tension brought about by so much deep animosity pressed into a confined space, convocations of dragons do frequently create some kind of subtle change in pan-draconic society.

The gold dragon Aostralya called the last convocation in 4607 AR, in response to the apparent death of Aroden and the impact on Golarion and its dragons. Although the chromatics took the predictable position of human problems not mattering to dragons, the red dragon Grathalax noted hope for the pan-draconic goal of finding and killing Dahak.

Notable topics discussed at past convocations include the destruction of Dahak (the most commonly raised topic), the rise of Daralathyxl and what (if anything) to do about him, the return of elves, and the meaning and implications of Earthfall.

their antagonists themselves. Instead, when groups of troublesome would-be heroes continue to thwart their plans, blue dragons manipulate people and events to subtly but firmly turn the adventurers' attentions elsewhere—even if that means pushing the characters toward neighboring blue dragons.

Exceptions exist, of course, and some blue dragons actually enjoy performing dirty work. These unusual (and often shunned) blues maintain relatively small chains of contacts and control tiny amounts of land—if they control anything at all. These are almost always immature dragons who mistake the gaining of personal power with somehow proving themselves to their elders; they do not wait patiently for their underlings and contacts to neutralize or distract those who disrupt their simplistic schemes, but they instead go forth to confront their problems directly.

Ironically, many of these younger blues are themselves subtly controlled and influenced by older relatives—typically their fathers, grandfathers, or uncles—in order to test their mettle and to weed out undesirable personalities. Those young blues who do give in to the whispered pressures to personally confront their opponents are not the worthy of continued tutelage and mentorship from their older kin, and even if they somehow survive their foolishness, they are frequently cut off from further aid. Thus, most blue dragons adventurers actually confront are young and relatively inexperienced, and it is rare for mature dragons to give in to such folly.

Many humans blame border wars and conflicts over water rights on blue dragons. Outside of Thuvia, they are correct about half the time. Sometimes, when water wars or border skirmishes erupt, one or more of the human leaders involved send out groups of their own underlings or—preferably—hired freelance adventurers to try to find the blue dragon responsible and bring about an end to the conflict. If blue dragons are even involved, such attempts result only in the deaths of those sent to investigate. History has yet to record a successful bid to end such a war early with the death of a blue dragon, but despite this many humans hope to be the first responsible for such a success.

On Golarion

Dragons have taken root in the mountains of Absalom many times over the centuries, though any who grow to adulthood are inevitably put down by heroes and treasure-hunters from the city. Most other blues live in Rahadoum, Thuvia, Osirion, and Qadira. There are a few dozen in Cheliax, especially near Garund, but they are otherwise scarce on the northern coast of the Inner Sea because of their great hatred for Andoran.

Names

Blue dragon names fall somewhere in the middle of draconic naming schemes in regard to length and complexity. Even the longest blue dragon names tend to be easy for humans to pronounce, as they favor vowel sounds more than other kinds of dragons. Some blue dragon names sound almost elven, and it is not unheard of for blue dragons to grant elven names to their offspring—a practice co-opted by the elves with regard to dragon names only to celebrate a parent's victory over a blue dragon.

Blue dragon names: Aristidir, Hoythus, Olarissilax, Thessylimnias, Warsilix

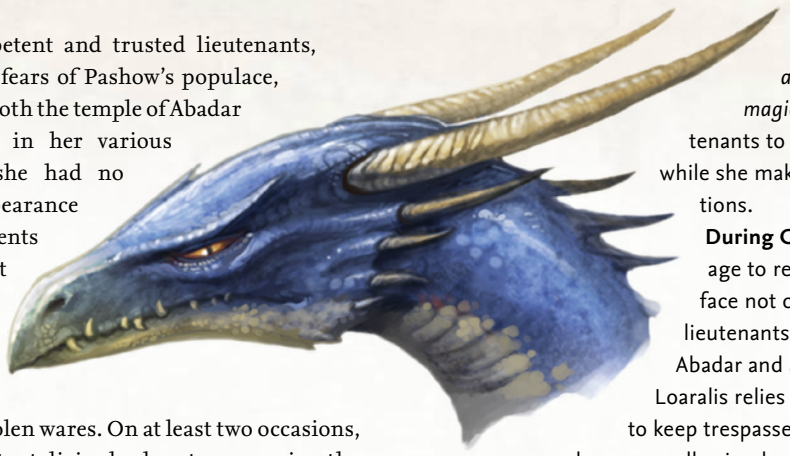
Loaralis

There are those who believe that Loaralis does not exist, that she is merely the name given to a string of misfortunes that plague the goodly peoples of Pashow, including the losses of the two most recent *sun orchid elixir* shipments. In whispers spoken among adults and stories told to unruly children, Loaralis is the unseen bogeyman who haunts the city-state and feeds its paranoia.

Loaralis, of course, is delighted that many of Pashow's people dismiss her as a story told to frighten children, for such blissful denial allows her to operate in relative peace, without fear of reprisal from those who might seek vengeance against her. Hidden deep within a

grand vault of worked stone she herself designed, Loaralis coordinates an ever-growing web of intrigues and servants who unknowingly toil for her. Once a day, Loaralis's lieutenants—a cleric of Abadar who serves in the temple above her lair and a mid-ranking city guardsman charged with maintaining order in the streets near her home's urban entrance—report directly to her in her grand chamber deep beneath the city. These two men alone know her true form, and they serve her without question.

Through her competent and trusted lieutenants, Loaralis feeds off the fears of Pashow's populace, gently manipulating both the temple of Abadar and the city guards in her various schemes. Although she had no hand in the disappearance of the last two shipments of *sun orchid elixir* out of the city, Loaralis spares no expense in her efforts to uncover who did and where they took the stolen wares. On at least two occasions, her agents have come tantalizingly close to recovering the elixir or uncovering the thieves, but whoever pulls the strings behind the disappearances so far remains at least one step ahead of her.



Unless gifted with incredible luck or skill, no one can simply walk into Loaralis's lair without one of her agents (and thus Loaralis herself) knowing about it. For all intents and purposes, it is impossible to catch Loaralis off guard in her center of power.

Loaralis **CR 11**

Female young adult blue dragon
LE Large dragon (earth)
Init +0; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +25, Spot +25
Aura frightful presence (150 ft., DC 21)

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 13, flat-footed 30
(+4 armor, +17 natural, –1 size)
hp 189 (18d12+72)
Fort +15, **Ref** +11, **Will** +13
DR 5/magic; **Immune** electricity, sleep, paralysis; **SR** 19

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor)
Melee bite +23 (2d6+6) and
2 claws +18 (1d8+3) and
2 wings +18 (1d6+3) and
tail slap +18 (1d8+9)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (80-ft. line of electricity, 10d8, Reflex half DC 23)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd):
3/day—*create/destroy water*
Spells Known (CL 3rd):
1st (6/day)—*charm person* (DC 15), *hypnotism* (DC 15), *mage armor*
0 (6/day)—*detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, open/close, prestidigitation*

TACTICS

Before Combat Loaralis casts *mage armor* and *detect magic*, expecting her lieutenants to deal with opponents while she makes these preparations.

During Combat Those manage to reach Loaralis must face not only her, but also her lieutenants (a 9th-level cleric of Abadar and a 5th-level fighter). Loaralis relies on her lieutenants to keep trespassers from moving into melee range, allowing her to use *charm person* and *hypnotism* with little risk. She uses her breath weapon whenever possible, and is careful not to strike her loyal cohorts.

Morale Loaralis fights to the death within her lair. Outside her lair, she is cautious and flees if brought to 100 hp or less.

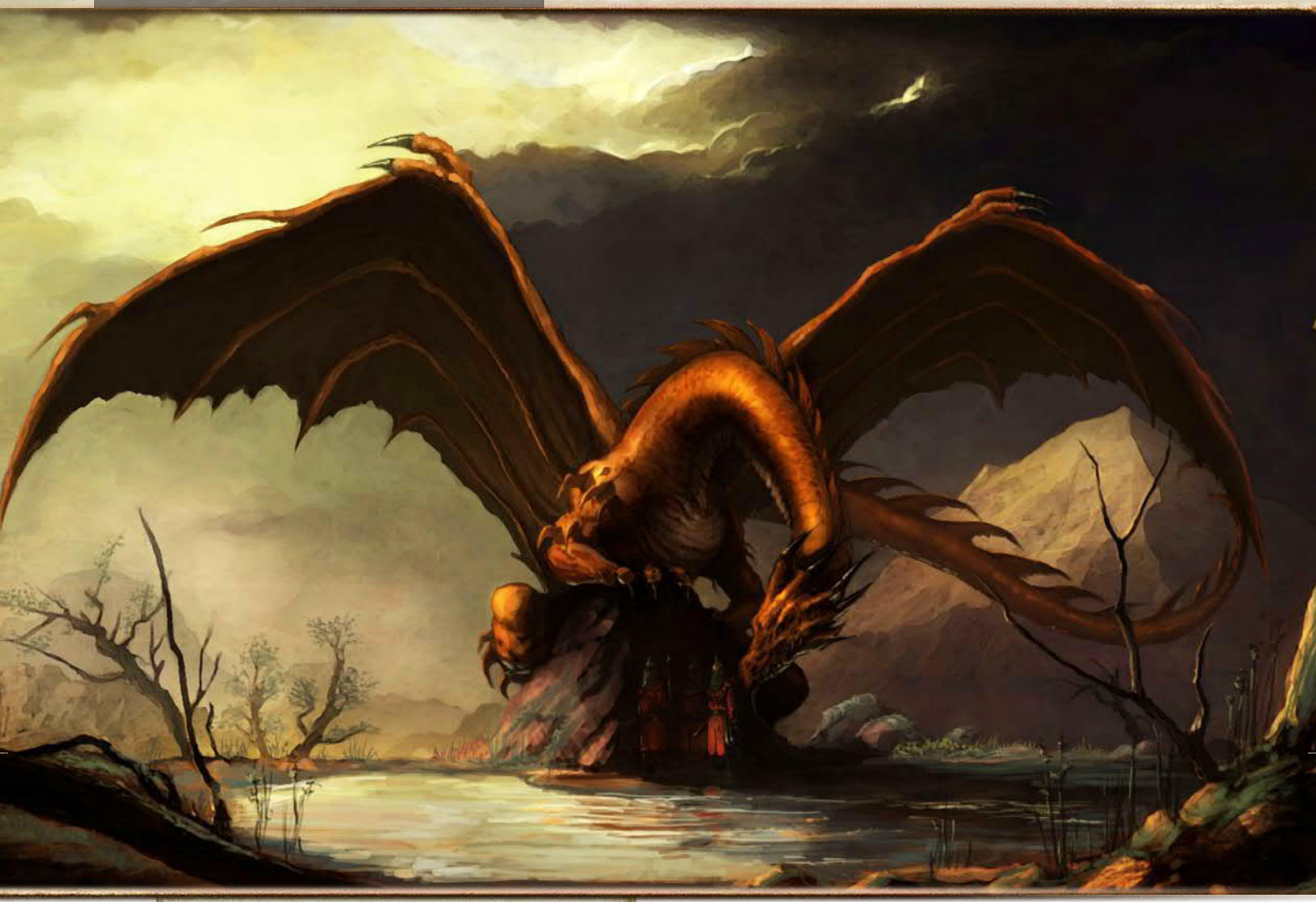
Base Statistics Without *mage armor*, Loaralis has the following base statistics: **AC** 26, touch 9, flat-footed 26

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 10, **Con** 19, **Int** 14, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 14
Base Atk +18; **Grp** +28
Feats Alertness, Flyby Attack, Greater Spell Focus (enchantment), Hover, Negotiator, Persuasive, Spell Focus (enchantment)
Skills Bluff +25, Diplomacy +21, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (local) +23, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +23, Search +23, Sense Motive +25
Languages Common, Draconic, Terran
SQ sound imitation

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Create/Destroy Water (Sp) This ability works like the *create water* spell, except that Loaralis can decide to destroy water instead of creating it, spoiling unattended liquids containing water. Magic items (such as potions) and items in a creature's possession must succeed on a DC 10 Will save or be ruined. This ability is the equivalent of a 1st-level spell, and Loaralis can use it three times per day.
Sound Imitation (Ex) Loaralis can mimic any voice or sound she has heard, anytime she likes (Will DC 19).



Brass Dragons

A brass dragon knows everyone worth knowing in the nearby cities, and many not worth knowing, though they are likely to forget specific names. Do not assume, though, that brass dragons are fools. No, their minds whirl with information and gossip, despite their tendency to lose track of what stories belong to which persons. Still, the parties and feasts they throw are gala affairs, and if ever you should be invited to one, you should make every effort (and then some) to attend.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 13

Of all the true dragons, brasses are the most whimsical and light-hearted. Many a brass dragon acts the fool, carousing and jesting with shorter-lived races as an equal or—occasionally—even a simpleton. This play at stupidity is usually just a ruse meant to put others at ease and cause them to underestimate the brass dragon's intelligence, which at hatching equals that of an adult human. While brass dragons are not as dim-witted as they let on, they are nonetheless flighty and easily distracted.

Gregarious and absentminded, brass dragons make for memorable patrons or helpers of goodly adventurers, particularly near rocky edges of deserts or in close proximity an oasis. A brass dragon can easily play the role of desert guide, advisor or diplomat for a powerful caliph, or uniquely uproarious tavern patron. Above all else, brass dragons genuinely wish to help others and work extremely hard (in brief spurts of labor separated by long periods of distraction and idle conversation) to mediate or otherwise seek agreement among discordant and opposing groups. Despite their friendly and passive demeanors, however,

only fools assume that brass dragons are harmless or unwilling to strike at those who annoy or anger them.

Brass dragons appear—like their preferred homes—as a mixture of smooth beauty and craggy ruggedness. Thick ridges of keratin just beneath their scales sweep back from their jaws to eventually grow into long, disjointed horns that proliferate as they age. Hatchlings typically have relatively smooth faces with only two horn nubs projecting out above and behind their skulls, while the eldest brasses sport more than a dozen horns extending back from faces so wrinkled and folded with keratin that some become blinded by their own horn ridges (though they normally use magic or their own sharp claws to remedy this problem). Beyond their distinctive faces, these keratin folds appear on the backs of brass dragons' legs, where their wings connect to their flanks, and along the last two vertebrae of their tails. These folds usually produce only tiny hornlets in even the eldest of brass dragons, but occasionally a brass's legs, wings, and tail are studded with curving, slightly crooked horns extending a foot or more in length.

Ecology and Society

Perhaps the most gregarious of all dragons, brass dragons enjoy conversation and the company of others. Ironically, they also prefer some of the least hospitable homes of all dragons, subjecting them to long swaths of time wherein they sleep away their boredom. Woe unto those in need of great haste who awaken such a sleeping dragon—not for fear of life and limb, but rather for the time required to entertain the great beast.

The lairs of brass dragons typically exist inside rocky outcroppings in otherwise sandy deserts. They prefer to live within a half-day's flight (or roughly 80 to 120 miles) of an oasis, river, or other source of fresh water. A perfect combination of these factors puts brass dragon lairs along busy trade routes, allowing them to remain in relatively steady contact with human traders and nomads, with whom they exchange information.

Brass dragons are likely to share water resources with travelers in need. This makes them sought-after allies among nomads and caravan masters but can set them at odds with blue dragons or others who attempt to control the flow of water in deep deserts. The Water Lords of Thuvia frequently attempt to befriend or ally with brass dragons in their territories in the often-unfulfilled hopes of controlling the brasses' propensity to freely share information and water. Brass dragons do not forge alliances with known evil beings, and that includes friendly Water Lords with reputations for cruelty, avarice, or lack of compassion.

Even when rudely awakened from a boredom-induced nap and hungry to the point of near-starvation, brass dragons crave companionship and intelligent conversation more than a quick meal. Of course, those foolish enough to annoy a hungry or freshly awakened brass dragon and not offer interesting discourse find themselves in very real danger of becoming the dragon's next meal. This happens so rarely, though, that among dragon experts brasses are considered the safest breed with which to converse.

In fact, thanks to their love of sharing information—for a price, of course, almost always exacted in the form of knowledge they do not already have—most of what is known about dragons comes directly or indirectly from brass dragons. Because brass dragons are inclined to exaggerate for the sake of a better story, though, scholars of draconic lore must occasionally revise their books when other factual evidence contradicts what was previously "known," as told by a brass dragon. The most famous case of this to date involves the revision of volume 11 of the *Pathfinder Chronicles*, wherein a naïve Dalania Pontius recorded as fact a story told to her by the brass dragon Helexa that led—directly and indirectly—to numerous deaths and injuries among the Pathfinders.

Brass dragons tend to get along quite well with their non-evil neighbors. Often considered the friendliest of dragon breeds, brass dragons nonetheless remain self-serving egotists. The brass dragons' particular form of egotism manifests in large, often elaborate networks of contacts throughout their territories, usually consisting of human traders and nomads, djinn, the various sphinxes (especially the androsphinxes, with whom they exchange nonsensical riddles), and other intelligent desert dwellers. Brass dragons enjoy setting up these large and tightly interconnected networks, but they often fail to maintain their allies or remember what subtle manipulations they have performed through their intermediaries. It is not uncommon for allies of the same dragon to oppose one another in missions indirectly assigned to them by the brass.

Some brasses use magic to disguise themselves and thus better fit in with their neighbors, especially humans. Most never bother to hide their true forms and enjoy the notoriety and local fame they gain as a result. Usually, the owners of the taverns, inns, restaurants, and flophouses they frequent welcome the brass dragons and their spendthrift ways, for gaining the reputation as a place patronized by an actual living dragon almost always draws in large crowds—particularly when the dragon visits.

Despite their rampant gregarious natures, brass dragons generally avoid one another directly, although they frequently interact via proxies and their often large networks of contacts, allies, and underlings. Through these long chains of contacts, some of whom two or more brass dragons share, males and females develop their plans to mate with one another, competitors for an area's resources battle in proxy wars (generally with a minimum of casualties, although these conflicts infrequently grow

vicious), and those who seek water trade for rights to the dragons' reserves. These networks almost always contain metallic dragons of other breeds, especially coppers (who are, like brasses, quite chaotic), as the other metallics find the friendly and sociable brasses both personally enjoyable and strategically useful—brass dragons gladly take on the roles of ambassadors to lesser races.

Amiable and flighty, brass dragons make friends and allies quickly and easily, not because they are particularly charismatic, but because they are the dragons most likely to interact with humans and other lesser races. Their associates help brass dragons fulfill their twin aspirations of gaining as much knowledge as they can while doing as little as possible. More so than any of the other metallics, brass dragons are lazy.

Like all dragons, brasses enjoy indulging themselves in their favorite pastimes and vices. Thanks to the oppressive heat and aridity of their favored homelands, brass dragons love to sleep and eat. Among the metallics, brass dragons are among the most lean of their sept, due to a scarcity of food near their chosen homes. Only the active blues, who compete with brasses for their desert territories, are more often thin and lithe.

Even the most active brass dragons rarely interact directly with their surroundings. They prefer to trade within their large networks for food, water, and valuables rather than to go out and seek such commodities themselves. This reliance on others means brasses tend to only alter the geologic, organic, or sociopolitical landscapes around their homes in order to halt the spread of desertification and to provide water for those who have none. A few ambitious brass dragons act as advisors and aides on Manaket's massive desert-halting terraforming project in Rahadoum.

Brass dragons hoard knowledge, both written and oral, and are prodigious readers. Unfortunately, their ability to retain information is weakest among the metallic dragons, which combines poorly with their propensity to exaggerate facts for the sake of better stories. Together, these traits make brass dragons unreliable fonts of knowledge, news, and information. That said, brass dragon hoards sometimes contain more books, scrolls, and engraved tablets than many human libraries—and unlike every other aspect of their being, brass dragons are obsessive about keeping their personal libraries organized and well-cared for.

Sappy, sentimental, and emotional, brass dragons openly express their deepest feelings with earnest zeal and unbridled passion. They cry when they need to cry, laugh when they need to laugh, and fly into fierce but mercifully short-lived rages when moved to anger. Brass dragons seldom stifle their emotional outbursts, and they loudly proclaim their state of mind without shame or dignity. Easily moved by tearful tales of woe, brass dragons respond more favorably toward ill-conceived but emotionally evocative arguments than to carefully reasoned appeals to logic and sensibility.

Such mutability often manifests in the magic they favor. Either as result of millennia of selective breeding or as divine irony meant to exacerbate their ever-changing ways, brass dragons typically favor magics that alter the world around them, particularly from the school of transmutation. They particularly enjoy spells that allow them to mold and shape materials, although they also frequently take up transmutation magic that alters themselves in some favorable way.

Living in deserts, brass dragons learn to dine on scarce, simple fare that is full of flavor. Along the western and southern reaches of the deserts covering

Rahadoum, where the endless sand and lifeless rocks give way to living deserts rich with cacti, rodents, and small predators, brass dragons feast upon cactus blooms, coyotes, rattlesnakes, and desert eagles. In the more inhospitable deserts that cover Thuvia, Osirion, and Qadira, they make do with what they can trade with passing caravans or the occasional desert bloom they uncover. They favor hot spices, particularly those from Qadira and distant Vudra, and they find the typical foods of Avistan bland and nigh unpalatable.

Brass dragons are generally considered the diplomats and heralds of dragons, but despite their long record of service to the draconic father-god Apsu in this regard, they do not consider themselves overly religious. Few brass dragons devote themselves to Apsu, much less the deities of lesser races, but most willingly serve their immortal father-god whenever he calls.

Although much is written about the ever-changing interests and desires of brass dragons, of their mercurial and carefree personalities given to whim and flights of fancy, in one respect alone are brass dragons almost completely immutable. Second only to the nigh-immutable golds, brass dragons are the least likely to tarnish and slip into the uncaring malaise of neutrality or—more pitiable still—the cruel selfishness of evil. Because of their strong resistance to tarnishing, those brass dragons who do fall from grace almost always lose their sanity in the process. Their minds simply shatter with the weight of tarnishing, and only the most powerful of magics and long years of rehabilitation can bring these poor wrecks back to a semblance of the glory they once possessed.

Hoard and Home

When brass dragons have their way, they set up their lairs within sand-scoured caves and alcoves near or beneath ground level within rocky up-thrusts—the larger the cave complex, the better. Unusually patient brass dragons sometimes use their inherent mastery of wind and weather to scour the walls of their lairs, slowly enlarging them. The lairs of these dragons are spectacles of windblown sandstone. Strangely, despite their love of wide-open deserts and expansive cave networks, brass dragons like the entrances to their lairs as narrow as possible, going so far as to partially collapse overly large entries to make them tighter. Of course, because brasses rarely plan ahead, they must periodically widen the entries to their lairs to make room for their ever-growing bodies.

Thanks to their love of transmutation magic, their long lives, and their sense of aesthetics, brass dragons spend more effort and time beautifying their lairs than setting up defenses. Brass dragons remain inherently lazy and easily bored, however, so their lairs frequently contain numerous abandoned beautification projects. The defenses that do exist in their lairs are haphazard at best, and rarely reflect any sort of coordinated effort or stratagem. Because of this, dragon hunters and scholars find brass dragon lairs the easiest to enter. Brass dragons enjoy friendly company more than any other dragon types, however, and many claim their lack of defensiveness to be a part of that personality trait.

Some brass dragons invite other creatures to act as the guardians of their lairs. More often, though, the dragons invite others to come stay and talk with them. Over time, those long-term guests become de facto guardians of the dragons and their hoards when even the mightily talkative brasses grow tired and must sleep. How long these guardians stay and their loyalty to their brass dragon hosts vary considerably, although most willingly risk injury (rarely death) in order to protect their draconic friend and patron. Creatures most often encountered half-heartedly defending brass dragon lairs include nomadic humans, riddling sphinxes, loyal djinn, and oft-drunken bralani.

Partially because of their own mercurial nature and partially because more powerful blues occasionally drive them from their half-completed homes, brass dragons are the most mobile and nomadic of all true dragons. Most brass dragons rarely live in one lair for more than a couple dozen years, and particularly long-lived brasses sometimes live in the same location two or three times in their lives, with their habitations separated by hundreds of years.

A large and growing minority of brass dragons eschew traditional lairs and consider anywhere they lay their heads as their home. These anthrodraconi (singular anthrodraco) live among humans and other lesser species, and act much like their shorter-lived mortal neighbors. Although they rarely take on actual jobs, brass dragon anthrodraconi are apt to contribute to their communities in other ways. Some become advisors, diplomats, or heralds for the human rulers under whom they live, while others take a more active role in their communities as town guards, military leaders, or information brokers. A few—and unfortunately for brass dragons as a whole, the best-known—become town drunks and rabble-rousers, pouring their vast hoards into taverns and inns. These minor celebrities can attract spectators to their favorite watering holes, bringing in even more outside wealth and increasing the dragon's popularity in the city.

Among the least pragmatic of all dragon breeds, brass dragon sentimentality is strongly reflected in their hoards. Such collections are mixtures of vast counts of coins and other mind-boggling treasures, stacks of well-read books, shelves of scrolls, and scores of worthless items the soft-hearted brasses consider priceless heirlooms.

Because of their relatively mobile natures, brass dragons favor magic containers that hold more than their size would indicate. For this reason, brass dragons occasionally make

ill-advised trades of far-more-powerful items for *bags of holding, handy haversacks, portable holes*, and the like. These items allow the brasses to carry their hoards with them, which only encourages their semi-nomadic ways.

Thanks to their arid, often lifeless homes and hunting grounds, brass dragons also favor living, growing things. Many grow (or fail at attempting to grow) small plants or keep tiny animals as pets. Their best successes in these endeavors occur, not surprisingly, when they attempt to grow cacti. They also favor items made from organic materials, particularly woodcarvings, paper prints, books, and paintings made on canvas or wood blocks. Most of these items fall under the category of worthless but sentimentally important.

A typical brass dragon's hoard consists of coins and art objects (usually about two-fifths of the hoard's overall worth); dozens of nonmagical scrolls and books, generally notes about important people or guidebooks to the nations in which they live (roughly a quarter of the total worth); various magic items, including books, scrolls, and magical carrying devices (another quarter); and hundreds or thousands of various trinkets, knick-knacks, souvenirs, sticks, shiny rocks, pretty feathers, and other items of limited or no monetary or aesthetic value.

Campaign Role

Brass dragons make for among the most varied of draconic breeds in terms of use in a campaign. They can serve as comedic relief, although they should not be played as incompetent buffoons—rather, they should be presented as useful contacts with one or two humorous traits. On the other hand, an incredibly rare tarnished brass can make for a pitiable and unexpected foe.

Brass dragons excel as patrons for characters of all levels. Their extensive networks of contacts allow them to enlist the aid of up-and-coming adventurers through proxies. As their pet projects gain in power, the brasses can manipulate events to bring the characters within ever-tightening circles of more trusted and powerful advisors until the dragons and their adventurous clients finally meet in person. Of course, some brasses prefer to never meet such groups of freelance adventurers in person.

As might be expected, many brass dragons cannot muster the attention span or intellect to set up and maintain such elaborate chains of servants, and their networks of contacts are little more than scores of beings they can invite to parties and feasts. In these cases, brass dragons still make excellent patrons, but their involvement becomes more direct and completely unsubtle.

On Golarion

Brass dragons enjoy the heat of the Garundi and Casmar deserts, particularly those of Osirion, Qadira, and Thuvia. Prior to its infernal conversion, southwestern Cheliax housed a large number of brass dragons, particularly in the province of Kharijite. With the rise to power of House Thrune, the brass dragons—many of whom fought against Thrune and its allies during the decades of civil war—wisely fled to Thuvia, Osirion, and Qadira, leading to conflicts with blue dragons already carefully emplaced within those areas. Other brass dragons fled east into southern Andoran and Taldor, but for reasons none mention, the breed seems to avoid Absalom and its holdings.

As mentioned earlier, an extensive population of scattered brass dragons lives in Thuvia, which possesses the largest collection of them on Golarion. Thuvian brasses tend to work for certain Water Lords who have proven their virtue and struggle against those who haven't. Those brass dragons with pools in their lairs allow the Water Lords nearly unlimited access to their water in exchange for trustworthy guards to watch over both the water and their homes. Many of these guards become members of the dragons' vast networks.

Just outside of the city of Manaket in Rahadoum, an enormous public works project has the lofty goal of pushing back the desert and bringing life to the surrounding area. A half-dozen brass dragons openly support this project, although their tendency to avoid one another means all but one of them simply provide advice (via proxy) and money to the project. The only brass dragon who directly aids the effort in more direct ways is Sarithil, the eldest of the six. Despite their desires to avoid each other, on at least three occasions several of the brass dragons took to the air to personally defend the project and its workers from rampaging desert monsters or human raiders.

Names

Brass dragons favor names realtively easy for humanoids to pronounce. As far as draconic names go, brass names are typically simple and short. Like all dragons, they make extensive use of the sounds represented by the Common letters "k" and "i," although they tend to avoid the compounds "ik" and "zil," with the notable exception of clan Listrizil, whose members indulge in the usual amount of draconic complexity. Brass dragon names seldom begin with vowels.

Brass Dragon Names: Jakthil, Rixatim, Warthalan

Sarithil

With her water-storing lair less than 4 miles from Manaket, Sarithil was the first brass dragon to lend her aid to the reclamation project. She contributes her time, knowledge, and gold to what she considers the most worthy project ever performed by humankind.

Although a mature adult, Sarithil is still inclined toward the gregarious indulgence commonly found in

younger members of the breed. Whenever the project achieves a milestone, a section of the works is completed, or the calendar simply rolls over to a new month, Sarithil supplies wine and (her personal favorite) goat cheeses in great parties that can last into the early morning hours and without fail result in the hostess passing out in a wine-soaked stupor. Although Sarithil claims to hold these parties to celebrate, the other brasses know she also partially hosts them to forget her past.

Sarithil began her life in Cheliax, long before the death of Aroden and the once-fabulous empire's fall into infernal tyranny. She joined one of the now-extinct noble houses that fought against House Thrune and continued her fight until only she and one human noble of that house survived. Although Tyraxylan attempted to recruit Sarithil to aid in the resistance movement, the brass had her fill of war and fled into Kharijite, then through Rahadoum and into Thuvia. Sarithil has lived in Thuvia for the past 70 years, and her current lair is the second she has claimed since moving into that country (her first was larger, but lacked water).

A vast web of contacts, allies, and friends—including two other brass dragons she subtly influences—spreads across Thuvia and into Osirion, Rahadoum, Qadira, and even Absalom. At the center of this network sits Sarithil, who only began to acquire contacts haphazardly and mostly by accident, but who, over time, grew to understand their importance. Although she rarely actively works to maintain her vast network, it nonetheless holds together thanks mostly to her close friend, the djinni known as Al-Akzaan. Sarithil's network helps her in her pet projects (predominately the public works project in Manaket) and keeps her informed of the doings in Thuvia and Cheliax.

Sarithil **CR 15**

Female mature adult brass dragon
CG Huge dragon (fire)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +30, Spot +30
Aura frightful presence (210 ft., DC 24)

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 8, flat-footed 29 (+21 natural, –2 size)
hp 297 (22d12+154)
Fort +20, **Ref** +13, **Will** +16
DR 10/magic; **Immune** fire, paralysis, sleep; **SR** 22; **Weaknesses** vulnerability to cold

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 200 ft. (poor)
Melee bite +32 (2d8+10) and
2 claws +30 (3d6+15) and
2 wings +30 (1d8+5) and
tail slap +30 (2d6+15)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapons (100-ft. line of fire, 7d6, Reflex half DC 28) and 50-ft. cone of sleep gas (1d6+7 rounds, Will DC 28), crush 2d8+16 (Reflex DC 28 or be pinned)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th):
At will—*speak with animals*
3/day—*endure elements* (70-ft. radius)
1/day—*suggestion* (DC 16)
Spells Known (CL 9th):
4th (4/day)—*polymorph, stone shape*
3rd (7/day)—*blink, gaseous form, haste*
2nd (7/day)—*bear's endurance, bull's strength, pyrotechnics, spider climb*
1st (7/day)—*alarm, erase, hold portal, magic missile, reduce person* (DC 14)
0 (6/day)—*create water, detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation*

TACTICS

Before Combat Sarithil hates conflict and attempts to defuse tense situations before they erupt into battle. If she cannot, she attempts to cast the following spells on herself, in order, before combat ensues: *haste*, *bear's endurance*, *blink*, *bull's strength*, *gaseous form*.
During Combat If alone and not in her lair, Sarithil tries to flee combat. If prevented from doing so, she uses *suggestion* and *reduce person* to disable her foes. When backed into a corner, she alternates using her breath weapon with full attacks, casting an occasional *magic missile* if it seems prudent.
Morale Sarithil abhors combat and only fights if absolutely pressed, but when defending something she cares about, she fights to the death.
Base Statistics When Sarithil has none of her spells active, her base statistics are as follows: **hp** 253 (22d12+110), **Fort** +18, **Melee** bite +28 (2d8+8), 2 claws +26 (3d6+12), 2 wings +26 (1d8+4), tail slap +26 (2d6+12), **Str** 27, **Con** 21, **Grp** +38, **Breath weapon** DC 26

STATISTICS

Str 31, **Dex** 10, **Con** 25, **Int** 16, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 16
Base Atk +22; **Grp** +40
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claws), Multiattack, Snatch, Wingover
Skills Bluff +28, Diplomacy +32, Gather Information +30, Knowledge (local) +28, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +28, Listen +30, Search +28, Spot +30, Survival +28
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Qadiran

Bronze Dragons

You can trust a bronze dragon with your secrets, your gold, your dearest treasures. A bronze would rather die than betray that trust. You can trust he will not try to take these things from you, and you can even trust him to guard them for you in your absence—and to give it back to you upon your return. This unerring desire to protect and steward makes bronze dragons uniquely suited to the roles of guardians, bodyguards, and keepers of knowledge. Much of the history we know of our world exists thanks to the bronze love of lost lore.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 14

Contemplative, thoughtful, and curious, bronze dragons make for natural scholars, seers, and sages. They seek all chances to learn, to expand their intellectual horizons and satisfy their strongly inquisitive natures. While silver and gold dragons possess greater raw mental power, bronzes are the great thinkers of metallic dragons. Bronze dragons excel as numerologists, astrologers, researchers, sages, and scribes, as well as in all other contemplative roles suited to their calm, meticulous, and endlessly patient natures. It was a bronze dragon—Svannost, according to the Obelisks of Destiny—who first put claw to clay and recorded what was, to him, recent history: the retreat of Apsu and his metallic children from their chromatic kin and the nameless world turned to slag by their war.

In that first great battle against the chromatic threat and in the countless thousands of millennia since, bronze dragons protected their kin and stood as living shields against relentless, rending claws, for although calm and thoughtful, bronze dragons are neither meek

nor feeble. While many bronzes play out their long lives collecting immense libraries, many others spend their centuries of life guarding living treasures and protecting those they hold dear. Bronze dragons make exceptional guardians, protectors, and bodyguards, willing to spend vast gulfs of time simply waiting, watching, and—when the mood strikes them and assuming they have the proper accoutrements—reading.

Bronze dragons lack the massive racks of horns and bony protrusions of their brass and copper cousins, possessing instead sleek heads and bodies bearing membranous frills that belie their amphibious natures. These frills serve a dual purpose: on land, they help cool the dragons by circulating blood through their thin membranes, while in the water they help protect the bronzes' delicate and primitive gills. Membranes do not end at their heads, and the majority of bronze dragon bloodlines possess webbed toes, flaps of skin at the crooks of their forelimbs, and paddle-like fins along the ends of their tails they can use as rudders in water and that fold flat on land. Bronze dragons have the smallest wing-to-body ratio of any true dragons, forcing them to exert themselves more than their kin in order to fly.

Ecology and Society

Physically powerful yet precise and careful in their movements, bronze dragons exceed in strength what they possess in intellect. Their sleek, muscular bodies are perfectly suited for cutting through water, and their many membranes, frills, and flaps of skin help propel them tirelessly through any liquid. Thanks to their relatively small wings, bronze dragons must work harder than other flying creatures to bring themselves airborne, and thus most of them prefer to remain on the ground or in the water.

Below and behind the large fan-like head frills that extend just back from their jaws, bronzes possess a number of wide gills that allow them to breathe water as easily as air. When surfaced, they keep these gills closed with strong muscles, but in the water they use their frills to create small jetties of water that sweep into their gills and provide them with oxygen. Bronze dragons live as comfortably in water as on land, and most attempt to live within a day's flight of some ocean or vast lake. Because most of their prized possessions do not survive well in water, bronze dragons more often remain on land or underground, although they frequently visit large bodies of water in order to harvest fish, clams, crabs, and other seafood—by far their favorite meals.

Because they tend to keep to themselves and—thanks to their hyper-efficient draconic metabolisms—can survive for a year on a single day's haul of fish (which they dry and store for eating after long naps), bronze dragons have minimal effects on their surroundings. They do occasionally emerge from their lairs to gather food, which can temporarily deplete an area's supply of seaborne creatures and plants, fruits, root tubers, and tree nuts (particularly chestnuts). Herders and ranchers never fear the proximity of reclusive bronzes, as they do not enjoy and only reluctantly consume the meat of land and air animals.

Bronze dragons do not quickly acquire friends, but those they do make gain loyal—if somewhat aloof—allies and companions. Most bronzes keep to themselves, prefering the quiet solitude of vast libraries and isolated forest clearings. They are the least social of all metallic dragons, and many disappear for years or decades at a time before suddenly returning to favorite booksellers or libraries in order to acquire more reading material. Some bronzes combine their vast intellects with their voracious reading habits and write epic-length treatises on some minutiae or another.

The bronzes' patience and curiosity make them natural mathematicians. Although bronze dragons try to take credit for all sorts of mathematical inventions, documentation laid down by their own ancestors tends to counter their claims. What the legitimate histories of dragons do record, however, are great contributions to advanced mathematics by the bronze numerologists.

Thanks to bronzes' patient natures and comfort with passing time idly, many creatures (including the other metallic dragon kinds) beg, petition, coerce, or hire bronze dragons to act as guardians. Those wise enough to learn about bronzes before petitioning them know to offer up interesting books with which the dragons might pass their time, but on occasion bronze dragons take up guardianship out of a sense of goodly duty. These bronzes frequently spend their time in contemplation or meditation, if not outright sleep. Others take on charges to protect interesting locations or people, studying the former in great detail (later writing exhaustive and exhausting guides to these places) and observing the latter with sometimes-uncomfortably intense scrutiny (occasionally writing revealing biographies).

Bronze dragons make perfect bodyguards and protectors, as they do not easily give in to jealousy or greed. When tasked with guarding treasures not theirs, they do not wile away the hours contemplating schemes to acquire what they watch; most turn their minds to some other distractions, while others study the objects they guard with precise scrutiny. Even if disinterested in the items they guard, bronze dragons willingly sacrifice anything short of their own lives to protect the objects.

In addition to scholarly and protective pursuits, a rare few bronze dragons seek enlightenment and become ascetics and the draconic equivalents of monks. These contemplatives spend centuries in temples and monasteries, often in human guise, acting as advisors to the monastic leaders (although almost never becoming

leaders themselves), teachers of acolytes, or guardians of the monastery's surroundings. This practice seems more common in Tian Xia and on the island of Jalmeray, but at least two monasteries on Avistan house bronze dragons: the Vythded Monastery in Lastwall and the Palace of Virtue in Molthune.

Ever curious and hungry for knowledge, bronze dragons frequently excel as diviners, soothsayers, seers, and fortune-tellers. They favor divination magic over all other schools, a fact that lends well to their successes as guardians and bodyguards. Although bronze dragon lairs rarely possess many magical or physical defenses, the protections that do exist prove very effective against intruders, thanks largely to the watchful nature of the dragons themselves.

HOARD AND HOME

Bronze dragons prefer to live in hilly lands with temperate, mild climates. They enjoy both warm, sunny days and cool, rainy ones, but they hate snow, strong storms, wet heat, and other forms of extreme climate and weather. When they do not live among the lesser races in grand libraries or vast and ancient monasteries, bronze dragons live alone in large, dry caverns. The most common modification bronzes make to their lairs is the addition of vast rows of shelves upon which to store their accumulated libraries.

Bronze dragons only live in places where their actual living chambers remain dry and warm, but they prefer lairs with underground water supplies. Most bronze dragons modify their lairs (often with the help of creatures better suited to the alteration of stone) so the entrance tunnels are fully submerged at some point, and bronzes often judge the lairs of their brethren by how much of the entrance tunnels are flooded—if the submerged section extends farther than humans can hold their breath, so much the better. Flooded entrance tunnels containing fish, shellfish, water plants, and other edibles give the bronzes added prestige in the eyes of their kin.

Beyond the flooded entrance tunnels (and there are almost always more than one), a bronze dragon's lair typically contains drying rooms, where the dragon and its guests can lie down and rest while they dry. Some bronzes keep large collections of copper items in these chambers, where they use their lightning breath to flash-heat the metal to aid in drying. Others light bonfires, but only if the chambers are well ventilated. Most, however, simply allow the passage of time to dry them.

Because bronze dragons love both water and things easily destroyed by it, they are careful to keep their two loves strictly separated. Many invest in waterproof containers or extradimensional spaces with which they can haul new fragile treasures through their flooded entrances. Beyond their drying rooms, bronze dragon lairs are always completely dry and warm. Many contain vast chambers lined with bookshelves of some manner. Most of these rooms are kept dry with rocks heated elsewhere in the lair and brought into the libraries, or large strands of copper cable warmed with electric dragonbreath.

Bronze dragons rarely keep guardian creatures, although they certainly welcome the company of like-minded creatures of high intellect and some ability to aid in the defense of their libraries. For this reason, the lairs of old and powerful bronze dragons occasionally double as the homes of powerful

human or elven wizards. While most of these wizards are diviners, bronzes welcome any goodly wizards who act respectfully and politely toward their draconic hosts.

No creature larger or more threatening than a snail enters a bronze dragon's lair without its knowledge, and when intelligent invaders push their way into its home, the dragon monitors and studies them intently for a few minutes. Once it has acquired as much information as it thinks it needs, it launches its swift and deadly counterattack. Bronze dragons like to keep a number of divination spells active within their lairs at all times, and most have several others handy with which they can glean information about potential threats.

A few wealthier bronze dragons create more active defenses, embedding thick copper wires or cables in the walls of their lairs. These wires form vast conducting loops that pass through submerged tunnels and other sections of standing water. Bronzes with these kinds of defenses in their lairs use their lightning breath, electrifying these conductors and shocking those who dare to invade their homes.

Bronze dragons who live more socially, dwelling among humans and other lesser races, call libraries, temples, and monasteries their homes. These places typically cannot house the dragons' impressive natural bodies, so most must live as humans within these places. Of course, their true natures usually become known, and legends grow up around them and the places they call home. These legends alone are often enough to forestall intruders into their homes, but occasionally the tales of their existence actually draw evil dragon-hunters.

Even more so than brass dragons, bronzes crave knowledge, usually for the sake of simply knowing. They rarely use their knowledge for anything other than the most academic and scholarly of pursuits, although many study areas of knowledge that prove useful in a practical sense (such as magical theory or alchemy). Bronze dragons by and large know a great deal of the world as it once was, and generally have little interest in the world as it currently exists. Thus, seekers of knowledge do best to contact brass or gold dragons when they need modern information (such as secrets regarding a kingdom's current ruler) and bronze dragons when researching history (such as the lost tomb of that kingdom's first ruler).

Bronze dragon hoards contain vast libraries of books, scrolls, and other recorded material, most of which focuses on a single topic. Bronze dragons who are more interested in pursuits that require additional materials (such as alchemy or magic item creation) also hoard those supplies. A bronze studying alchemy, for example, might own four or five complete or partial alchemy labs, while one more interested in numerology might keep several dozen abacuses on hand.

Bronze Bryemirites

When Bryemir, a dragon of an unknown kind, appeared roughly 2,000 years ago and proclaimed that only by calculating the so-called perfect number could dragons forestall some terrible but unnamed fate, draconic numerologists across the world took note. Since then, a small number of extremists, derisively dubbed Bryemirites by critics, have dedicated their lives to pursuing various equations to arrive at the perfect number. Most Bryemirites are bronzes who work (sometimes begrudgingly) with a large minority of greens. Thanks to their efforts, many bronze dragon numerologists obsessed with finding the perfect number have contributed extensively to the advancement of numerology and mathematics.

While proponents point to the successes of these supremely accomplished mathematicians and numerologists, detractors loudly wonder how much more the Bryemirites could create, discover, or do, were they not distracted by folly. Thanks to the relentless passage of time and the draconic obsession with power, interest in Bryemir and the perfect number increases with each passing century, such that there are more bronze dragons working on discovering the perfect number today than in all of history combined.

Like all dragons, bronzes also love the feel and sound of coins rubbing against their bodies. Their coin beds are typically covered or surrounded by books, scrolls, and stacks of loose papers, but the bronzes are careful to keep the papers from falling onto the actual coins. Although the least tidy of lawful dragons, bronze dragons nonetheless keep a very careful counting of the coins in their hoards and are instinctively aware of the loss of even a single one. Of course, thanks to their untidy natures, bronze dragons frequently lose a few coins, particularly when they sleep for long periods. For this reason, most guests leave their lairs before the dragons fall asleep, lest they be blamed for misplaced coins.

Bronzes also favor beautiful items from nature, particularly those that grow in the sea. Many bronze dragon hoards contain impressive collections of colorful seashells, coral, strangely shaped pieces of driftwood, and rocks with holes carved in them through centuries of tidal action. Their hoards might also contain pressed flowers or colored leaves of past autumns, pinned insects with particularly colorful carapaces, or cut wildflowers in glass vases. On rare occasions, bronze dragons bring beautifully plumaged birds into their lairs, which they allow to flit about at will, although they generally only do this if narrow vents or other fissures allow the birds egress if they so desire it.

For magic, bronze dragons prefer items that allow them to move new additions to their hoards safely into their lairs. They also favor items that aid their own

divination, such as *crystal balls*, or items that aid in their academic pursuits, such as animated quills that dictate whatever the dragons say. Those bronze dragons more interested in protection than scholarship prefer items that magically bolster their ability to avoid or survive attacks. They also like items that heal their wounds when their protections fail.

Campaign Role

Bronze dragons rarely become patrons for lesser beings. They prefer solitude and quiet study to the administration of others. Those few bronzes who do take an interest in other creatures make for inattentive, forgetful, and negligent benefactors. A bronze dragon might elicit the aid of characters once, drop all contact with them at the conclusion of their quest, and then suddenly call upon them again several decades later—only to find, at least in the case of humans and other shorter-lived creatures, that time has diminished its one-time allies.

Rather than assuming the roles of patrons, proactively sending adventurers on quests in order to further the greater good, bronze dragons make better fonts of knowledge that can help point lost characters in the right direction. Unlike brass dragons, though, bronzes do not act as information brokers. They rarely ask anything of significance from those they aid (indeed, usually their only request is for visitors to not touch their books) and gladly share their knowledge. As scholars, academicians, and thinkers, bronze dragons rarely possess information pertaining to the current state of the world around them, but instead prove invaluable as resources with regard to ancient history and arcane subjects. The only true danger visitors face from bronze dragons is their tendency to answer not only the questions posed to them, but a half-dozen other unasked and unnecessary questions as well. Those seeking knowledge from bronze dragons are advised to allow for at least half a day when doing so—and that is only if the question asked is relatively straightforward. As bronze dragons consider it exceedingly rude for guests to interrupt them, attempts to depart early can be met—in the most extreme cases—with suddenly angry hosts.

The more social members of the bronze dragon species become guardians and protectors. Characters might interact with these bronzes as charges to be kept safe, employers hiring the dragons, or opponents who must defeat or otherwise circumvent them. Although bronze dragons do not frequently use their innate shapeshifting ability to take on humanoid forms, only fools ignore rumors of disguised dragons living somewhere. For this reason, meeting a legendary bronze dragon can actually be the goal of a quest or—more likely—the logical information-gathering step during a greater adventure.

On Golarion

Bronze dragons live all over Golarion, from the unsettled lands of Varisia to the breathtaking cities of Vudra, the cosmopolitan streets of Absalom to the bamboo forests of Tian Xia. The most significant exceptions to bronze ubiquity are Cheliax and Geb, the former because of its recent fall from grace into infernalism and the latter due to its unholy reliance on undead labors. Other nations of obviously evil bent provide homes to small populations of bronze dragons, often doing their best to stem the tides of evil in those lands, but most bronzes seem to universally shun Cheliax and Geb.

Cheliax's former masters in Taldor can claim a great many bronze dragons—indeed, the decadent nation possesses what many suspect is the largest population of bronzes in the Inner Sea region, if not the entire world. Many speculate that the bronzes enjoy the climate of Taldor or its people, but the truth of the matter lies with Royal Proclamation of the Draconic Banking, made by King Dahalvian in 1941 AR. This proclamation allows bronze dragons to establish banks and charge interest within the four cities of Cassomir, Maheto, Oppara, and Zimar without paying taxes to the crown. Bronze dragons call Taldor the Generous Land, and the descendants of the original bronzes to flock to the four cities continue to live and thrive nearby. Although they pay no taxes on the gold gained through their banking interests, the bronzes continue to inject gold into the local economies, further adding to what many call the self-destructive decadence of Taldor.

At the other end of draconic greed, the Monastery of Shung-Li in the Tian nation of Dtang Ma houses the venerable bronze dragon known as He Fa Chu (though that is not his draconic name). He Fa Chu serves as a guardian of the monastery, as well as a wellspring of wisdom that transcends the short generations of humans. In the 1,500 years that have passed since his arrival at the monastery, Master He Fa Chu has helped repel more than five dozen attacks and attempted thefts, convinced 17 kings to pray at the monastery's temple, trained and counseled thousands of devoted monks, compiled and obsessively organized the largest library in Dtang Ma (some say one of the three largest in Tian Xia), and mediated several disputes—most recently between the local *kami* and a population of nomadic kitsune.

Names

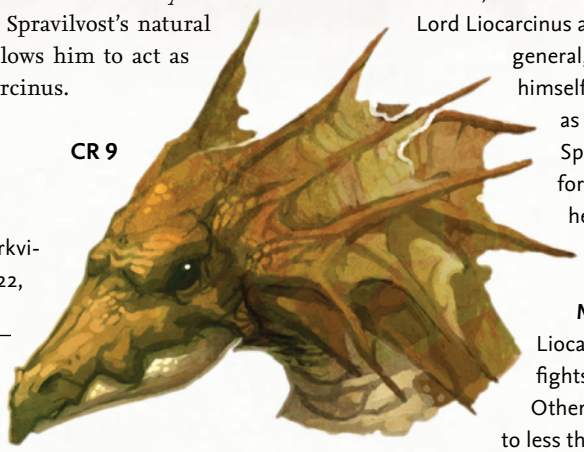
Unlike all other metallic and chromatic dragons, bronzes occasionally give their offspring names from languages other than Draconic. Names incorporating Dwarven and Elven words are not unheard of among bronze dragons, although the parents tend to create names that sound pleasing to their ears, even if the names make no sense

in the languages from which they are borrowed. Bronzes consider names in Common to be gauche, unless the words they utilize originated elsewhere (thus, many bronze dragon names that sound like Common are actually meant to be in Dwarven).

Sample Names: Akerlinis, Naprygonor, Svannost, Erthidrix

Spravilvost

Although relatively young for a dragon, the adventurous Spravilvost nonetheless has experienced a great deal of what Avistan has to offer. Joined by his loyal friends Rin the gnomish lady adventurer (i.e., rogue) and the implacable dwarven paladin Sir Lothar, Spravilvost currently lives as a human in Molthune. There, Spravilvost's natural tendency to guard and protect allows him to act as bodyguard for General Lord Liocarcinus.



Spravilvost **CR 9**

Male juvenile bronze dragon
LG Large dragon (water)
Init +0; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +22, Spot +22

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 9, flat-footed 23 (+14 natural, –1 size)
hp 145 (15d12+48)
Fort +12, **Ref** +9, **Will** +13
Immune electricity, sleep, paralysis

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor), swim 60 ft.
Melee bite +18 (2d6+4) and
2 claws +13 (1d8+2) and
2 wings +13 (1d6+2) and
tail slap +13 (1d8+6)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (80-ft. line of electricity, 8d6, Reflex half DC 20, or 40-ft. cone of repulsion gas, 1d6+4 rounds, DC 20 Will negates)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd):
At will—*speak with animals*
Spells Known (CL 3rd):
1st (6/day)—*cure light wounds, comprehend languages, magic missile*
0 (6/day)—*detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, open/close, prestidigitation*

TACTICS

Before Combat Still young and impetuous, Spravilvost seldom thinks before he acts. If a fight looks like it is about to break out, he feels little remorse in throwing the first punch.
During Combat Only if his friends or his employer are threatened with death does Spravilvost reveal his natural form. Otherwise, he is content to stand between General Lord Liocarcinus and whatever threatens the general, casting *cure light wounds* on himself and his friends or employer as need dictates. If pressed, Spravilvost reverts to his natural form and uses his breath weapon if he can (without putting any allies in danger) or enters melee with full attacks.
Morale When Rin, Lothar, or Liocarcinus are nearby, Spravilvost fights to the death to protect them. Otherwise, he withdraws if reduced to less than 50 hp.

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 10, **Con** 17, **Int** 18, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +15; **Grp** +23
Feats Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Draconic Defender, Hover, Improved Initiative, Toughness
Skills Concentration +12, Disguise +22, Knowledge (geography) +17, Knowledge (history) +24, Knowledge (nature) +22, Knowledge (religion) +22, Listen +22, Search +22, Spot +22, Swim +22, Survival +22
Languages Aquan, Azlanti, Common, Draconic, Sylvan
SQ alternate form, water breathing

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Alternate Form (Su) Spravilvost can assume any animal or humanoid form of Medium size or smaller as a standard action three times per day. He can remain in his animal or humanoid form until he chooses to assume a new one or return to his natural form.
Breath Weapon (Su) Spravilvost has two types of breath weapon, a line of lightning and a cone of repulsion gas. Creatures within the cone must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or be compelled to do nothing but move away from him for 1d6+4 rounds. This is a mind-affecting compulsion enchantment effect.
Water Breathing (Ex) Spravilvost can breathe underwater indefinitely and can use his abilities while submerged.

Draconic Defender

You have a knack for placing yourself between your enemies and those they wish to harm.

Prerequisite: Con 17, Toughness.

Benefit: During your action, designate an ally within your reach. When you fight defensively or use Combat Expertise, your ally gains a natural armor bonus to AC equal to the dodge bonus you gain from fighting defensively or Combat Expertise. You can select a new ally on any action. Allies who move out of your reach lose this natural armor bonus.

Copper Dragons

Those with a mission of mercy to perform, a tyrant to overthrow, or a wrong to right cannot hope to find a more enthusiastic supporter than a copper dragon—for a time. Possessing remarkably short attention spans, even in comparison to humans, contrasted with boundless energy when concentrating upon a singular task, copper dragons push their allies and companions to wondrous heights of courage and glory before growing bored with the whole mess and returning to the tavern for another drink. Or ten.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 15

Copper dragons enjoy personal freedom, and many are willing to kill or die to protect their right to choose how and where they live. This love for freedom makes them popular with the republic of Andoran, and the highest concentration of coppers in Avistan lives in that democratic nation. Most coppers, though, choose not to live in the only nation-state that already allows for a great deal of personal freedom, but rather in those places most in need of freedom fighters—a role many relish.

Idealistic but easily distracted and even more easily bored, copper dragons make for intense but short-lived allies. Those in search of aid from a copper dragon can muster more and better support if their tasks can be completed relatively quickly. No such quest should last more than a couple weeks, and any endeavors taking more than a few days run the risk of losing the coppers' interest. Draconic scholars can relate with knowing smiles numerous tales of lofty quests enjoined by copper dragons at the outset, only to have the draconic heroes depart on the eve of the (usually thereafter doomed) climax. Coppers

also make decent intermediaries between more powerful dragons and human allies, although once again their reliability can quickly become an issue. A message too difficult to deliver can easily be erased from a copper's mind in a celebration of wine, beer, and stronger spirits.

Coppers possess the largest number of head horns among the metallic dragon breeds. The magnificent crowns of horns that they bear grow up out of thick bony plates that form the backs of their skulls. These solid collections of horns can weigh hundreds of pounds on the largest copper dragons, and as a result the breed tends to have relatively short but thick necks. Aside from that very iconic head feature, copper dragon appearance varies widely, although the breed is the most likely of the metallics to be snaggletoothed.

Ecology and Society

Coppers exhibit their love of personal freedom via a penchant for extreme hedonism. Although fantastically long-lived by human standards, copper dragons rarely plan for their millennial futures, spending their hoards on frivolities and easily making friends among the shorter-lived races who they both forget and outlive. Those who consider copper dragons their enemies are sometimes surprised to find that their erstwhile foes do not share such opinions. Copper dragons are remarkably forgiving of all creatures, even their chromatic cousins, and do not hold grudges. Indeed, copper dragons would make excellent diplomats and judges, thanks to their desire to see situations from multiple perspectives, but their excitable and undisciplined natures prevent them from being effective in those roles.

Instead, copper dragons are the freedom fighters of dragons, working alone or in small groups to break the chains of oppression—either literal, physical chains holding the unjustly imprisoned or else the figurative, metaphysical chains of oppression and tyranny. Copper dragons become the greatest champions of whatever causes stir their imaginations and rally them to battle, and frequently ally with worshipers of Cayden Cailean due to their shared passions. Like shooting stars, though, the zeal of copper dragons shines brightly for a brief time before quickly burning away. On the other hand, coppers are easily manipulated into renewed vigor by presenting them with previously championed situations they have since lost interest in and portraying them as new but similar circumstances. In this way, wise humans allied with coppers can bring their draconic friends back into long-term struggles by suggesting unique positions on the situations at hand.

Copper dragons bore easily and are easily convinced of one argument over another—sometimes changing their minds on a particular topic every time they speak with someone invested in it. Of all metallics, they are the most likely to tarnish into neutrality (though they never lose their chaotic love of change and freedom) and the most likely to rampage, usually after they tarnish but often because a smooth tongue or fair-faced elven maiden convinced them that doing so would gain them or their cause some sort of advantage.

When they err, and later realize what their poor decisions have wrought, copper dragons are genuinely remorseful and prone to sink into depressed lethargy for several weeks or exhibit a manic enthusiasm to undo their destruction (usually lasting until the job is completed or for several months, depending on the situation). As a result of this particular proclivity, most of the other good dragons try to remain politely aloof from their copper kin. This tendency to lash out makes them the only metallic breed not universally hated by the chromatic dragons, who sometimes achieve remarkable success at coercing coppers, or at least playing upon their mercurial emotions. Because of their own destructive and weak-willed tendencies, copper dragons remain endlessly forgiving of the foibles and vices of other creatures, especially other copper dragons but also including the chromatics.

Thanks to their tendencies to launch into unprovoked rages, scholars consider copper dragons the most dangerous and unpredictable of the metallic dragons. Others call this assessment partially unfair: while brass dragons are unpredictable, coppers simply enjoy the freedom to do as they will. No one debates their danger to lesser races, though. Not counting tarnished metallics, copper dragons exhibit the greatest tendency to attack lesser races without discernible provocation.

Copper dragons defend themselves from these accusations by noting that they never attack creatures unprovoked. They justify their actions by turning around the accusations and claiming that the beings deserved the attacks for some reason. The reasons given typically include attempts by the attacked creatures to limit some other creature's freedom in some way (telling a copper it is not allowed to do something is a grave offense), attacks against the dragons (either against themselves personally or against their beliefs), or insults against the dragons or their hoards (these slights might be intentional or not, and some are completely in the heads of the coppers). What many coppers and scholars point out as well is that these attacks rarely result in fatalities for those attacked. Unwise scholars sometimes compare the attacks to otherwise passive dogs snapping at annoyances, but copper dragons dislike the comparison and may attack those who make it.

Copper dragons enjoy dry, warm climates that do not truly count as deserts. Their preferred homes are dry pine forests in the arid foothills of tall mountains, although they (sometimes begrudgingly) live wherever their latest

interests take them. Even more transitory than their brass kin, copper dragons rarely hold their lairs for more than a few years before moving on.

For the most part, copper dragons cause little more impact on their surroundings than any other large omnivores, although a single adult copper dragon can consume as much food as several bears. Only when a copper dragon goes to a place in order to right some perceived ecological wrong (usually at the behest of a druid, elf, or other creature intimately connected with the natural order) does it actively engage in changing its surroundings. Otherwise, copper dragons live by the philosophy of "live and let live," and are the dragons most likely to adopt herbivorous diets. Alone among all true dragon breeds, copper dragons adore sweet foods. When living in or near towns, copper dragons frequent bakeries, while those living away from civilization favor berries, juice-rich fruits, honey, and sugarcane stalks.

Many copper dragons attempt to alleviate their boredom with magic, and nearly all copper dragons learn or manifest some kind of illusion magic. They use this power both to entertain themselves and in more useful pursuits when engaged in their latest championed causes. Of course, many copper dragons are tricksters and pranksters, and their mastery of illusions only aids them in the performance of mischief.

Hoard and Home

Copper dragons like to live in caves that open out of the sides of sheer cliffs, but when such geologic features are unavailable they turn to whatever dry caves they can find. Perhaps the only condition for a lair universally set by coppers is the uncompromising need for an absolutely dry home. Coppers feel this point so strongly that they even use their fiery breaths to evaporate standing pools or their rock-shaping abilities to plug water moving into or through their new homes, from mere trickles to underground streams. When plugged waterways burst their seams and flood, the copper dragons hastily move on, pretending (if any witnesses are present) that they had nothing to do with the suddenly rushing water.

Despite their love of warm, dry places, copper dragons love freedom even more, and they are willing to live in nearly any environment (though they complain bitterly if forced to endure cold climates) if the chance for freeing other beings from real or political shackles presents itself. Not coincidentally, though, the more unpleasant the environment, the more quickly coppers seem to grow bored by prolonged battles or a perceived lack of success. That said, if given dry, warm places to sleep, coppers willingly stay in otherwise unpleasant conditions for as long as they are needed—at least until they legitimately grow restless.

In these situations, copper dragons rely on their shorter-lived friends and comrades to provide them with some form of comfortable living space. In the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, for example, a number of copper dragons live on the eastern outskirts of Trollheim, where they once patrolled in order to repel ice trolls and protect Irrisen. Today, the coppers live as tolerated guests of Freyr Darkwine, who houses them within massive longhouses kept constantly warm with large fires. This is an extreme example, however, and most coppers refuse to live farther north than Nirmathas, Kyonin, or Galt. Coppers prefer the company of dwarves over elves or humans, as the stout folk tend to create large underground complexes that are both warm and dry. Several dwarven Sky Citadels, including Highhelm, intermittently house one or two copper dragons. The coppers find warmth and safety in these dwarven cities and repay their hosts by exploring places fatal to dwarves (such as areas of molten magma).

When laired in their more traditional homes inside arid caves, copper dragons rely on trickery, subterfuge, and illusions to keep themselves and their relatively modest hoards safe from interlopers. Many create pit traps that they then conceal with both magical and mundane coverings, while more creative coppers hide their pits with mundane means and place illusions across solid flooring—thus luring those who can see magical auras into probing the incorrect sections of ground. Other illusions frequently used by copper dragons include false walls, faux treasures, and shadowy traps more imaginary than real. Coppers of at least adult age use their inherent magical control over stone to seal doorways and passages, often leaving narrow gaps just large enough for would-be thieves to catch tantalizing glimpses of hoards just beyond their reach.

Copper dragons rarely employ guardians unless they reside among the shorter-lived races. Draconic scholars versed in their ways sometimes say coppers refuse guardians because they see guardianship as a form of indentured imprisonment that reduces the freedom of both the guardian (who must stand idly by and protect some item or collection of inanimate objects) and the employer (who must periodically return to pay the guardian for his service).

Because they move around so often and prefer expending wealth to hoarding it, copper dragons gravitate toward small treasures they can easily carry or hastily consume. Gems and jewelry are common, but they just as gladly acquire rare bottles of wine, aged cheeses, imported chocolates, or other expensive or rare consumables they can use to impress guests. Guests can guess the relative length of time a copper dragon has lived in a particular lair by its accumulations. While a lair the copper has only just settled in seems to contain no treasures at all (all of

which the dragon keeps on its own body), a lair housing the same copper for more than a few years contains dozens of bottles of wine and other spirits, hundreds of pounds of dried foods, and stacks of coins (they keep their gems and jewelry with them even after years of relative stability).

Copper dragons love wine more than any other treasure. As mentioned earlier, they alone among dragons crave sweetness, and so favor wines made with the heavy inclusion of various fruits. They therefore prefer elven wines, which they procure at great expense and effort (including going so far as to hire freelance adventurers for such missions). Attempts to possess a particularly excellent vintage of elven wine can cause a copper dragon to forsake his goodly ways, at least temporarily, and indulge in theft, brigandry, or treachery to acquire it. The tale of Thelaxyl and Dyr, often told in lands hosting several copper dragons, warns of such dangers, with dragons battling each other for the prizes. Perhaps because of the tale or simply because it is one of the finest wines ever made (according to copper dragons, most of whom have never tasted it), a bottle of Kasselariel 4130 remains the ultimate prize for a copper dragon's hoard. Thanks to the drive of coppers to own it, a bottle of the wine is worth thousands of gold coins. As of this writing, only 13 bottles are known to exist in the world, down from 14 bottles a year ago, owing to a debauched and riotous party put on by the copper dragon Merksistil with no less than a half-dozen other copper dragons in attendance as witnesses.

Next to wine, coppers love other forms of alcohol (although they are apt to turn up their noses at distilled spirits), fresh sweet foods (such as baked goods and berries), and all the traditional forms of treasure for which dragons are known. Copper dragons care little for items they cannot themselves use or easily trade, and thanks to their tendency to emit great gouts of fire during their drunken stupors, they often sell or trade away books, scrolls, and other easily combustible goods.

Campaign Role

As with all metallic dragons, coppers make good mentors, patrons, or employers for adventurers. Copper dragons tend to be up-front about their true identities and rarely use intermediaries. They speak plainly to those they hire or guide and rarely withhold the rationale behind a particular quest, happily declaring upon questioning what they hope to gain both in the short term and in the future. Many of the assignments copper dragons hand out deal with freedom—physical or political.

A copper dragon can also act as a matchmaker of sorts, bringing together a wide variety of like-minded and sociable beings of various abilities and powers and providing them copious amounts of alcohol. In this setting, business deals close, quests begin, romances flourish, and friendships are forged. An invitation to a copper dragon's wine-fueled party is seen by many as an opportunity not to be taken lightly, and for this reason alone coppers hold a reputation for being able to introduce important people to powerful individuals who can perform any task, no matter how difficult. How much of that reputation the coppers actually deserve—as they rarely make introductions at their own parties—remains a matter of debate. Most coppers use their reputation to further their own interests, of course, and few resist the urge to mention it when inviting guests.

Those fighting for a worthy cause, such as the freedom-loving Eagle Knights of Andoran and the crusaders of Mendev and Lastwall, can generally expect to receive some aid from copper dragons, even if only in the form of arms, equipment, and coins. Most long-standing wars in Avistan and Garund involve copper dragons to some degree, fighting on the side of goodness or—in the case of wars similar to that between Nirmathas and Molthune, where nobody

is right or wrong—whichever side appeals best to their revolutionary sensibilities.

Among the easiest of metallics to tarnish, copper dragons are the most likely of their goodly brethren to slip into neutrality—either from lethargy or in an attempt to reach compromise or arbitration between two parties. A large number of good dragons who turn to evil are coppers, much to the chagrin of their untarnished kin. Only the lofty but troubled silvers give in to dark thoughts more often. Even those coppers who remain good continue to live in the moment, and thus, regardless of their alignments, coppers remain the metallic kind most likely to battle against creatures who should be their allies.

Most rampaging metallic dragons bear coppers scales. The majority of rampaging coppers lash out only when their frustrated attempts at overcoming some tyrant grow too numerous (how many times a copper can fail in a task before rampaging varies by the individual). Many scholars believe some deep-seated flaw in the way coppers think tells them that destroying an entire town—innocents and all—is somehow preferable to allowing it to continue under the sway of an oppressive power. A rampaging copper dragon can present an unusual challenge for good-aligned PCs: how to stop a supposedly good creature from killing innocents without simply slaying the dragon? Few copper dragons tarnish irrevocably, after all, and attempts to redeem those coppers who fall under the sway of temptation and sin are liable to prove quite successful.

On Golarion

With the rise of infernal power in Cheliax, coppers dragons found themselves with a new rallying cry: "Free Cheliax!" In droves they flocked into the empire, only to be repulsed, slaughtered, and driven back by the powerful denizens of Hell serving there. Licking their wounds, the coppers fled from the Chelish heartland into Andoran, where they helped their like-minded human friends break away from House Thrune's rulership.

As a result, Andoran became the rallying point for copper dragons from across Avistan to show their support for freedom and their resistance to devil-blighted Cheliax. The initial rush of copper dragons nearly broke the Andoran economy and threatened ecosystems throughout the republic, which led the coppers to spread out across southwestern Avistan and into northwestern Garund. Large populations live in every nation bordering Cheliax, including Isger, where a number of copper dragons attempt to dislodge the Cheliax-loyal government in a proxy war against Egorian itself.

Farther east, the rebellious nation of Galt draws copper dragons, albeit with decreasing frequency. When Galt first declared its independence, a dozen coppers quickly established themselves in the territory in order to aid in the resulting struggle against infernal Cheliax. Once the country succeeded in its secession, most of the original 12 left in pursuit of other interests. Of the four who remained, one lost his life in the first round of political cleansing and the other three went into hiding. Rumors of their continued but hidden involvement continues to this day in Galt and the neighboring lands, but the trio of Galtan coppers has not been seen in nearly 80 years.

Famous throughout Andoran for his frivolous spending habits, ribald humor, and well-documented cowardice, the young copper dragon Wataxshyl remains arguably the city of Olfden's main attraction. Whenever Daralathyxl visits his wrath upon Olfden, Wataxshyl historically hides away in a local inn and helps the townfolk pay whatever coins or treasures the king demands. This copper's appearance helped push the balance in the town's favor during a werewolf raid 50 years ago, and the townsfolk were so pleased they failed to inquire as to why he suddenly appeared. With the passing of years, though, some citizens of Olfden are beginning to question why the drunkard dragon mysteriously appeared and why he seems uninterested in leaving.

History records the great deeds of a handful of copper dragons, including those of the legendary friends-turned-rivals Thelaxyl and Dyr. Many stories also surround Merithyl, a tireless opponent of Taldan slave barons several millennia ago, who infamously drowned herself and an entire ship full of slaves and their slavers when the latter grievously wounded and captured her. One of the most notorious coppers of history is not known for her freedom-fighting or debating over spilt wine, though. Ekishil, among the largest and most powerful coppers ever seen on Golarion, was tempted by dark whispers late in life and eventually succumbed. Over the course of the next 300 years, more than three dozen metallic dragons of various kinds hunted, cornered, or ambushed her at various times, and most died. As a new band of draconic heroes banded together to bring her down, though, Ekishil inexplicably vanished from her hunting ground. Some speculate another band of dragon hunters reached her first, but most draconic scholars deny this possibility. The most compelling theories argue that Ekishil either went into deep hibernation and yet lives somewhere deep beneath the planet's surface or that she left Golarion and traveled into the spheres, where she plots her triumphant and terrible revenge.

Names

Copper dragons prefer names that are easy to pronounce. In general, these names lack the long-winded, tongue-

twisting grandeur of the reds and golds, as coppers prefer to expend their energies in pursuits other than creating convoluted names.

Copper dragon names: Apothyl, Delaxyn, Ith, Motlintil, Shiksinil, Yixel.

Tyraxalan

When Cheliax fell to the House of Thrune and its infernal allies, copper dragons flocked to the nation from across the globe in a failed and costly attempt to undo Thrune's success. Nearly a dozen copper dragons gave their lives in the month following House Thrune's victory before the rest withdrew and fled into Andoran, Rahadoum, and even Isger. One of the coppers who stayed behind became the leader of a resistance cell based in Westcrown.

Tyraxalan's ragged and harried group of loyalists continues the civil war that officially ended 7 decades ago. Although they garner some minor sympathy and support among the people of Westcrown, the lives of most Chelaxians have improved in the past several decades, and those who do help Tyraxalan and his freedom fighters do so more out of pity than any belief in their cause. Tyraxalan keeps himself hidden in the form of a human scribe known as Tyrax. In this guise, Tyraxalan occasionally sends messages to his friend and infrequent supplier Sarithil, a particularly famous brass dragon expatriate living in distant Manaket.

Tyraxalan **CR 19**

Male old copper dragon
CG Huge dragon (earth)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses, *see invisibility*; Listen +35, Spot +35
Aura frightful presence (240 ft., DC 27)

DEFENSE

AC 37, touch 12, flat-footed 37
(+4 armor, +25 natural, –2 size)
hp 299 (26d12+130)
Fort +20, **Ref** +15, **Will** +21
DR 10/magic and 10/adamantine (first 110 damage); **Immune** acid, sleep, paralysis; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor)
Melee bite +33 (2d8+9) and
2 claws +33 (2d6+4) and
2 wings +28 (1d8+4) and
tail slap +28 (2d6+13)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (100-ft. line of acid, 16d4, Reflex half DC 28, or 50-ft. cone of *slow*, 1d6+8 rounds, Will negates DC 28), crush 2d8+19 (Reflex DC 28 or be pinned)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 11th):
2/day—*stone shape*
1/day—*transmute rock to mud/mud to rock*
Spells Known (CL 11th):
5th (4/day)—*atonement, hallow*
4th (7/day; 1 already cast)—*polymorph, scrying, stoneskin*
3rd (7/day)—*cure serious wounds, haste, remove disease, tongues*
2nd (7/day)—*cure moderate wounds, calm emotions* (DC 20), *invisibility, see invisibility*
1st (7/day; 1 already cast)—*bless, bless water, mage armor, magic missile, sleep* (DC 19)
0 (6/day)—*arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic*

TACTICS

Before Combat Thanks to his loyal band, Tyraxalan is rarely surprised, and so he generally has time to cast *stoneskin*, *invisibility*, *see invisibility*, and *mage armor* before a fight breaks out. He tries to prevent combat by using *calm emotions* and *sleep*.

During Combat In the first round of combat, Tyraxalan usually casts *haste* on himself and his allies, following it with *sleep* on the next round. He tends to fight defensively, curing and aiding his allies and diminishing the fighting strength of groups of foes with his breath weapons. Tyraxalan and his allies prefer hit-and-run tactics, and they might withdraw for hours before returning to harry their enemies.

Morale If in his lair or defending his companions, Tyraxalan fights to the bitter end. Otherwise, he attempts to hamper his enemy's ability to pursue him before slipping away.

Base Statistics Without his spells cast, Tyraxalan has the following base statistics: **AC** 33, touch 8, flat-footed 33

STATISTICS

Str 29, **Dex** 10, **Con** 21, **Int** 18, **Wis** 19, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +26; **Grp** +43
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Power Attack, Snatch
Skills Bluff +33, Concentration +34, Hide +29, Jump +38, Knowledge (arcana) +33, Listen +35, Search +33, Sense Motive +33, Spellcraft +35, Spot +35
Languages Common, Draconic, Sylvan, Terran, Varisian
SQ spider climb

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Spider Climb (Ex) Tyraxalan can climb on stone surfaces as though using the *spider climb* spell.

Gold Dragons

Majestic and wise, gold dragons seem less like truly living creatures than minor godlings performing good deeds directly upon the world. Some live for centuries cloistered within human monasteries or temples, granting advice to those who ask. Others rally their cousins to battle against some great evil. Most watch the slow passage of time move across the world, bringing with it constant change. In a world ever in flux, it is the unmistakably powerful golds who seem to remain unchanging fixtures within it. Constant. Trusted. Comforting.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 16

The greatest of all dragons by nearly any metric, gold dragons benevolently reign over their metallic kin and command respect and awe from their chromatic cousins. Even the most powerful red dragons bear grudging respect for gold dragons—and hate them all the more for it. Gold dragons epitomize all that is good, orderly, and draconic. When poets and dreamers think of benign dragons, they think of the patient and kind golds.

By far the wisest and most intelligent of the metallic and chromatic dragons, gold dragons spend a great deal of time contemplating various considerations or problems that interest or vex them. Gold dragons do not mind providing their insights to those who ask, particularly if the inquired topic mirrors one of their own interests. As such, many creatures seek out gold dragons for advice, insight, and information. Golds make for careful and unhurried advisors, and they sometimes ponder a situation brought to their attention for several days, lapsing into deep thought and ignoring their visitors. Golds speak with an economy

of words, and expect others to lend greater heed to their carefully considered remarks.

When dealing with other creatures, gold dragons prefer to guide and advise. When coerced to act they become terrible to behold in their righteous fury. Even when pitted against chromatic foes (directly or otherwise), gold dragons choose words over violence, and many chromatics who are redeemed can thank patient but forceful golds for their enlightenment.

Gold dragons possess two large sweeping horns that extend back and up from their skulls, and most bear a few hornlets at the ends of their chins, which appear from the distance like small beards. Other than these features, the faces of gold dragons vary widely. Many possess dozens of hornlets projecting from their jaws, cheekbones, and eye ridges, while others bear only the two main horns and no other facial projections. Regardless of horn numbers, all golds reflect light to shine like the sun.

Ecology and Society

Whereas most other dragons prefer enclosures and defensive structures, living within caves under engulfing forests or thick mountains, gold dragons favor the wide-open expanses of grasslands and plains. Many speculate that gold dragons happily live in the open because they have nothing to fear. They are the most powerful of dragons, so their cousins rarely ever challenge them, and their unbreakable goodness means that would-be dragonslayers generally have no reason to hunt them. Regardless of their reasons, gold dragons do live exposed lives. Their lairs, such as they are, are often wherever the dragons bed down for the night, although like all other dragons they do prefer to sleep upon beds of coins. For this reason, gold dragons sometimes carry their hoards with them, though they commonly conceal their treasures or make them magically inaccessible.

As plains dwellers, gold dragons live off the many herd animals that roam across their preferred environment. Gold dragons are careful hunters, and never take more game than herds can replace. Like other predators, they routinely prey on the slow, the old, and the infirm, thinning the weakest members from the herds. Ever mindful of their impact on their surroundings, gold dragons also sate their hunger by grazing on the grains of various grasses and the high leaves of what few trees live in their domains. Thanks to the culinary advancement of humans over the past several millennia, gold dragons have grown a liking for carefully spiced foods. When they live among humans in cities or elsewhere, gold dragons often find one particular inn, restaurant, or tavern that spices its food exactly to their liking. They then support their favored establishments for as long the food remains constant and consistent, and in some cases more humanized golds even purchase their favorite eateries.

Of all dragons across all the many spheres, golds are the least likely to tarnish, rampage, or otherwise act in a manner unbefitting their legendary dedication to the goodly concerns of law and order. What gold dragons consider benign assistance and benevolent leadership can sometimes clash with the ideals of other creatures, and in this way gold dragons do very occasionally enter into well-reasoned and passionless arguments. Their ability to divorce their emotions from their decisions makes them invaluable if frustrating advisors and confidants, and because of their inviolacy gold dragons are almost universally valued by all creatures who respect wisdom, temperance, and knowledge—including some chromatic dragons.

Serene and good-natured, gold dragons listen more than they speak and consider more than they act. Their unmatched wisdom and unequalled dedication to goodness place them in a position to be valued advisors to mortals and celestials alike, and their endless capacity to care for and about other creatures makes them consummate advisors and patrons of goodly beings.

Gold dragons enjoy the company of all good creatures, although they prefer those who adhere to order and predictability. Occasionally, gold dragons meet with angels and other divine good beings to discuss matters of concern on Golarion. The Worldwound continues to vex gold dragons and their celestial allies, and despite their best efforts (which generally involve sending more silver dragons into the fray) the Abyss's encroachment onto Golarion continues unabated.

Although they prefer the company of their own kind, gold dragons happily meet and converse with all their metallic kin. Gold dragons who live within a few days' flight of one another meet several times a year, ostensibly to discuss their continued attempts to spread their philosophies among their neighbors, but usually to simply chat and drink wine. In addition to these meetings, once or twice a year a gold dragon hosts a number of metallic dragons—usually only bronzes, silvers, and other golds, but occasionally also brasses and coppers. These gatherings are inclined to be more serious and sedate, with long discussions about the state of the world and what the dragons can do to improve it. Very rarely, certainly not more than once or twice a century, a particularly powerful gold dragon might call for a full convocation of dragons (see the Convocation of Dragons sidebar on page 14).

Many gold dragons also serve as mentors to their silver cousins. Those who accept such an honor take their roles very seriously, working hard to keep their dedicated charges to the hard path of justice and righteousness. Gold mentors to silver dragons make themselves available

to their cousins several times a month (or even more often, in times of great need), and the golds know to seriously consider everything their charges tell them. Experience has taught gold dragons that what might seem trivial and pointless to them can tip their silver charges to the point of tarnishing. Fortunately for the silver dragons lucky enough to acquire gold mentors, gold dragons are nothing if not patient, and their desire to aid their lesser cousins exceeds even the neediest silver dragon. Not every gold dragon mentors one of his silver kin and those who do never take on more than one silver dragon charge at a time—experience has taught the golds that having too many charges can be trouble for all involved.

Like many of their kin, gold dragons increasingly live among Golarion's humans, either in the guise of wizened humans themselves or else in their natural forms. In general, when they live within human settlements, gold dragons prefer the former approach, blending in with their neighbors and representing over the course of centuries an array of different human covers. Some golds become so attached to their false personas that the dragons then also portray their descendants, creating whole families represented in society by one member at a time. Eventually, after a few generations of otherwise single humans suddenly producing grown children, a few neighbors may catch on. Even when their covers are blown, though, the golds are apt to simply remain in the forms known to the townsfolk, and then live as either their exposed covers or other favored personalities for hundreds of years. Although gold dragons greatly prefer to live in cities where law and order prevail and serve the greater good, they recognize that they are needed far more elsewhere. For this reason, gold dragons are rumored to live in numerous cities of questionable morality throughout Avistan and Garund, including Ardis, Egorian, Korvosa, Pangolais, and Sothis. When they live in monasteries or other places of learning or contemplation not publicly open to visitors, gold dragons are prone to exhibit their true forms—except when their size becomes an inconvenience. This practice is far more common on the other continents, especially Tian Xia.

Like all dragons, golds know exactly the origin of dragonkind, who their god is, and what he represents. As the eldest of all dragons, if only by a matter of hours or days, gold dragons take upon themselves the responsibility of acting as older siblings for all other dragons, speaking with Apsu on behalf of their kin and reporting to their cousins his declarations. In this way, many consider gold dragons the clerics and priests of Apsu, but they gently correct such suppositions and explain the relationship is more aptly described as father and eldest child. Semantics aside, golds communicate directly with Apsu more than any other kinds of dragons, and Apsu seems to favor contacting gold dragons when he needs to communicate with his children. This connection with their living god-king feeds into their draconic arrogance and causes many younger gold dragons to take on an air of smugness around their cousins, which their kin understandably do not appreciate. Older gold dragons suppress these feelings, as they realize that Apsu does not tolerate such a boastful show of pride between his children (although he encourages dragons to act with dignity and pride among the lesser races).

Hoard and Home

Gold dragons live, when allowed their choice, upon vast, open stretches of warm grassy plains and prairies. These grasslands offer them an abundance of foods, from the hard seeds of tall grasses to the skittish herd animals that graze upon them. In the early morning hours, gold dragons rise and watch the sun spread its warming light upon the land. They sit in quiet contemplation or meditation, allowing their magnificent bodies to soak in the warmth of the brightening sun. As they fear no creatures, even the hate-filled reds who constantly vex them, gold dragons alone among their kin feel no anxiety in sleeping in the open, under the bright stars of the dark night.

Despite their fearlessness, though, gold dragons do maintain protected lairs near their favored nesting spots. Often, these underground homes open onto narrow but sharp breaks in the landscape, where fissures or short cliffs form from geologic action or the slow erosion of topsoil. Even the flattest prairies offer the occasional breaks in their monotony, and those rare few that do not are not suitable homes to gold dragons.

Golds do not mind engaging in physical labor, so when natural caves do not appear in fissures and breaks, the dragons dig. Thanks to their extreme intelligence and good instincts, gold dragons can identify areas where natural underground open spaces are likely to occur. The golds, therefore, do not mind digging through rock and clay for several hundred feet in order to stumble across one of these cave systems. If, after a few hundred feet, the gold dragons do not uncover such caverns, they give up and search again elsewhere. In some parts of Avistan, plains and grasslands are erratically marked with dozens of these dead ends—many of which serve as the homes of creatures far less picky than gold dragons.

Once they establish their lairs, gold dragons work to set up defenses and form mutual aid pacts with their neighbors. Occasionally, gold dragons put out calls to their human allies to relocate, at least temporarily, in order to aid the dragons in protecting their lairs (and thus, their hoards). In addition to trustworthy human allies (who the golds carefully and subtly screen long before they petition for aid), gold dragons also invite celestials,

the occasional blink dog, and other creatures that prove themselves dedicated to justice, morality, mercy, and the greater good.

Gold dragons do not like to set traps, as the devices sometimes go off on creatures that belong within their lairs or fail to trigger on intruders, but instead prefer living, thinking defenders who can employ judgment and restraint—two qualities mechanical and magical traps always lack. That said, golds do favor impediments in their lairs that can slow and frustrate trespassers, such as short walls, flooded areas, twisting mazes, and other non-harmful features. Those in the know can navigate or bypass these annoyances with carefully hidden shortcuts or other tricks.

At the heart of a gold dragon's large cave complex spreads his hoard chamber, possessing several sections usually separated by shelves of different heights. A gold dragon keeps his coin bed in a depression on the highest shelf, with the rest of his hoard divided by form and function on progressively lower levels of the chamber. In general, the second-highest shelf goes to the dragon's library, the third to his collections of magic and art pieces, and the lower sections to his mundane and natural collections.

The heart of a dragon's hoard is its vast coin beds. Unlike their cousins, though, gold dragons prefer sprawling, shallow coin beds rather than more compact and deeper ones. Their coin beds commonly contain solid gold and silver objects of questionable artistic merit, such as bars, rods, undecorated candelabras, and worn or broken statuary. The dragons carefully remove any surviving gems, jewels, pieces of glass, or other ornamentation not made of precious metals before adding these pieces to their coin beds, and only if doing so does not significantly reduce their value.

Like bronze and brass dragons, golds collect a wide array of books, scrolls, clay tablets, and items representing all other forms of written communication. Whereas brass dragons tend to collect information about the people in their networks of contacts or guidebooks to where they live, and bronzes fill their hoards with ancient and dusty histories and other research materials, gold dragons collect books, scrolls, and such for the sheer joy of owning them. Voracious readers, gold dragons consume new acquisitions with true zeal, putting aside a few days to quickly read through their newest additions. Thanks to their incredible intellects, these quick read-throughs allow them to comprehend most of the knowledge presented in the works, but despite these quick perusals, they almost always go back later for less hurried, more mindful readings.

Gold dragons place items of magic and pieces of art below their coins and books in relative importance. This should not suggest the dragons do not care for such things and might forgive thieves who remove art or magic from their hoards, but simply that the golds place greater emphasis on the care and protection of their coin beds and libraries. In the area of art, gold dragons do not maintain any sort of species-wide specific preferences, although individuals regularly favor one or two kinds over all others. The gold dragon Teslaw collected crystal wine glasses, for example, and at his death his heir counted more than 2,400 of the delicate items in velvet-lined display cases.

Campaign Role

Gold dragons lead by example and by offering sometimes-cryptic advice. Through their connections with Apsu and other powerful extraplanar champions of good and forthrightness, gold dragons frequently know or hear hints of great evils plaguing the world. As architects of actions and strategists of almost unparalleled skill, gold dragons rarely confront these threats directly (the major exception being the rise or rampage of some powerful red dragon). Instead, gold dragons delegate the responsibilities of heroic actions to other beings—almost always those who

would be most affected by the looming threat. In this way, gold dragons orchestrate or influence important quests that advance the cause of good and bring glory to the people who perform them.

Like most draconic manipulators, gold dragons prefer to work behind the scenes, out of the limelight, and preferably with their meddling undetected by those they empower. More conniving than even the most ambitious blues, gold dragons keep track of hundreds of threads of possible outcomes. They create contingencies and develop sleeper agents of such sublime subtlety that other dragons and masterminds cannot hope to identify them until the need for such redundancies occurs—and sometimes not even then.

Unlike blue dragons, gold dragons do not mind speaking directly with lesser beings, even those not connected to dragonkind in any way. Gold dragons recognize that, despite their incredible intellects and superior wisdom, they do not and cannot see and know everything. At times, beings approach them for advice or knowledge in order to advance some goodly quest whose purpose is completely unknown to the golds. With their massive libraries and vast memories, gold dragons are living repositories for information other creatures might find useful, and of this they remain quite aware. Thus, when beseeched for their wise council or knowledge, gold dragons acquiesce and share what they know or suspect (but only after the petitioning creatures prove themselves worthy of such aid).

On Golarion

So incorruptible are gold dragons that the Obelisks of Destiny record only one of their kind who forsook his species' righteous ways and fell into darkness and insanity. For nearly 150 years, Kwislingyr of the still-shamed Aleirt bloodline terrorized western Taldor and its colonies in Andoran. Although several gold dragons attempted to redeem him and a number of dragon-slaying expeditions set out to hunt him down, his months-dead corpse was discovered by a group of dwarven ore-hunters quite by accident. When they saw his corpse, the dull yellow of his scales and his emaciated body twisted in madness led them to believe they had discovered a new species of dragon (see The Yellow Dragon sidebar on page 43). After numerous experts refuted their claim and most of the rumors died down, the dwarves took Kwislingyr's corpse on a tour of several dwarven Sky Citadels before the gold dragon Winsilax gently asked them to inter it.

Probably the most famous gold dragon on Golarion is Mengkare, the founder and benevolent dictator of the island nation of Hermea. Many speculate that the Nirvana dragon also is, or was, a gold dragon of some unequalled power and majesty. Gold dragons, for their part, politely deny such suppositions. The Nirvana dragon never quite seems to hear the question correctly and answers some random and unasked question instead.

Names

Gold dragon names can be longer, more complex, or harder to pronounce than those of most of their metallic kin, but golds often use shortened forms for casual conversation or when dealing with non-dragons. Many golds from the Aurixia clan (the pure bloodline) bear a portion of their foremother's name in theirs, as the word for "gold" in Draconic is itself "aurux."

Gold Dragon Names: Aurexiar, Dararthurian, Edvarthixian, Marathaliax, Raurix.

Astarathian

In the darkest corners of the world, gold dragons sometimes dwell. There, they act as shaded beacons of light, revealing their true forms only to those they learn to trust implicitly. Thus it is that Astarathian, one of the most powerful dragons in Avistan, lives in a place least open to the ideals of goodness. Within the Nidalese capital of Pangolais, Astarathian lives in the human guise of a simple greengrocer, providing the people of the city with staple foods at lower costs than anyone else. Indeed, local legends hold that those who say the right things to him receive their food for free.

Although he has lived in Pangolais for nearly 450 years, Astarathian has never kept the same disguise for more than a few decades, and he never portrays family members of his previous false selves. In his years within Nidal's capital, Astarathian has provided hundreds of frightened, starving people with food and shelter and has given hope and encouragement to those who seek to release Nidal from its long, dark curse. Only once has Astarathian taken to the sky over the city in his true form, in the year 4519. The people still speak of the shining golden dragon to this day, referring to the event as the Night of the Golden Moon.

Astarathian **CR 27**

Male great wyrm gold dragon
LG Colossal dragon (fire)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +57, Spot +57
Aura frightful presence (360 ft., DC 41)

DEFENSE

AC 54, touch 10, flat-footed 54; +2 vs. evil (+4 armor, +40 natural, +4 shield, –8 size)
hp 717 (41d12+451)
Fort +33, **Ref** +22, **Will** +35; +1 luck bonus, +2 vs. evil
DR 20/magic; **Immune** acid (first 120 points), cold (first 120 points), electricity (first 120 points), fire, sonic (first 120 points), sleep, paralysis, *magic missile* (while *shield* spell is active), mind-affecting effects, information-gathering divinations; **SR** 33; **Weaknesses** vulnerability to cold

Offense

Spd 60 ft., fly 250 ft. (clumsy), swim 60 ft.

Melee bite +52 (4d8+18) and
2 claws +47 (4d6+9) and
2 wings +46 (2d8+9) and
tail slap +46 (4d6+27)

Space 30 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft. (30 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks breath weapons (70-ft. cone of fire, 24d10, Reflex half DC 41, or 70-ft. cone of weakening gas, 12 Str damage, Fort negates DC 41), crush 4d8+27 (Reflex DC 41 or be pinned), tail sweep 2d8+27 (Reflex half DC 34)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):
3/day—*bless*
1/day—*geas/quest* (DC 29), *sunburst* (DC 29), *foresight*

Spells Known (CL 19th):
9th (5/day)—*prismatic sphere* (DC 30), *time stop*, *wish*
8th (7/day; 1 already cast)—*mind blank*, *prismatic wall* (DC 29), *protection from spells*
7th (8/day)—*greater arcane sight*, *greater teleport*, *prismatic spray* (DC 28)
6th (8/day)—*antimagic field*, *greater dispel magic*, *wall of iron*
5th (8/day)—*break enchantment*, *flame strike* (DC 26), *heal*, *prying eyes*, *summon monster V*
4th (8/day; 1 already cast)—*cure critical wounds*, *detect scrying*, *spell immunity*, *stoneskin*
3rd (9/day; 4 already cast)—*haste*, *create food and water*, *cure serious wounds*, *protection from energy*
2nd (9/day, 1 already cast)—*consecrate*, *cure moderate wounds*, *glitterdust* (DC 23), *owl's wisdom*, *see invisibility*
1st (9/day; 2 already cast)—*cure light wounds*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *protection from evil*, *shield*
0 (6/day)—*dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *resistance*

Tactics

Before Combat Astarathian prepares for battle by casting *mage armor*, *owl's wisdom*, *protection from evil*, and *shield*. He always has *mind blank* and *detect scrying* active, and if he anticipates battle in the near future he enhances himself with *protection from energy* (acid, cold, and electricity).

During Combat In the first round, Astarathian uses *time stop* to gain rounds so he can encase his foe with *wall of iron*. If that proves unsuccessful, he casts *haste* on himself and uses *time stop* and *wish* to their maximum potential. Against obviously evil foes, Astarathian is ruthless, but even against such beings he stops if they ask for mercy. When facing foes of uncertain morality he is more reserved and attempts to incapacitate rather than destroy.

Morale Astarathian only fights to the death in order to protect his lair or the lives of innocents. Otherwise, he withdraws carefully if reduced below 350 hit points.

Base Statistics Without his spells, Astarathian has the following statistics: **AC** 42, touch 2, flat-footed 42; **Fort** +33, **Ref** +22, **Will** +33; **Wis** 33.

Statistics

Str 47, **Dex** 10, **Con** 33, **Int** 32, **Wis** 37, **Cha** 32

Base Atk +41; **Grp** +75

Feats Alertness, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Knowledge [history]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [the planes]), Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw), Wingover

Skills Concentration +55, Diplomacy +60, Disguise +55, Escape Artist +44, Heal +55, Knowledge (arcana) +55, Knowledge (geography) +55, Knowledge (history) +58, Knowledge (religion) +55, Knowledge (the planes) +58, Listen +57, Search +55, Sense Motive +55, Spellcraft +57, Spot +57, Swim +62, Use Magic Device +55

Languages Azlanti, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Ignan, Shadowtongue, Varisian

SQ alternate form, detect gems, luck bonus, water breathing

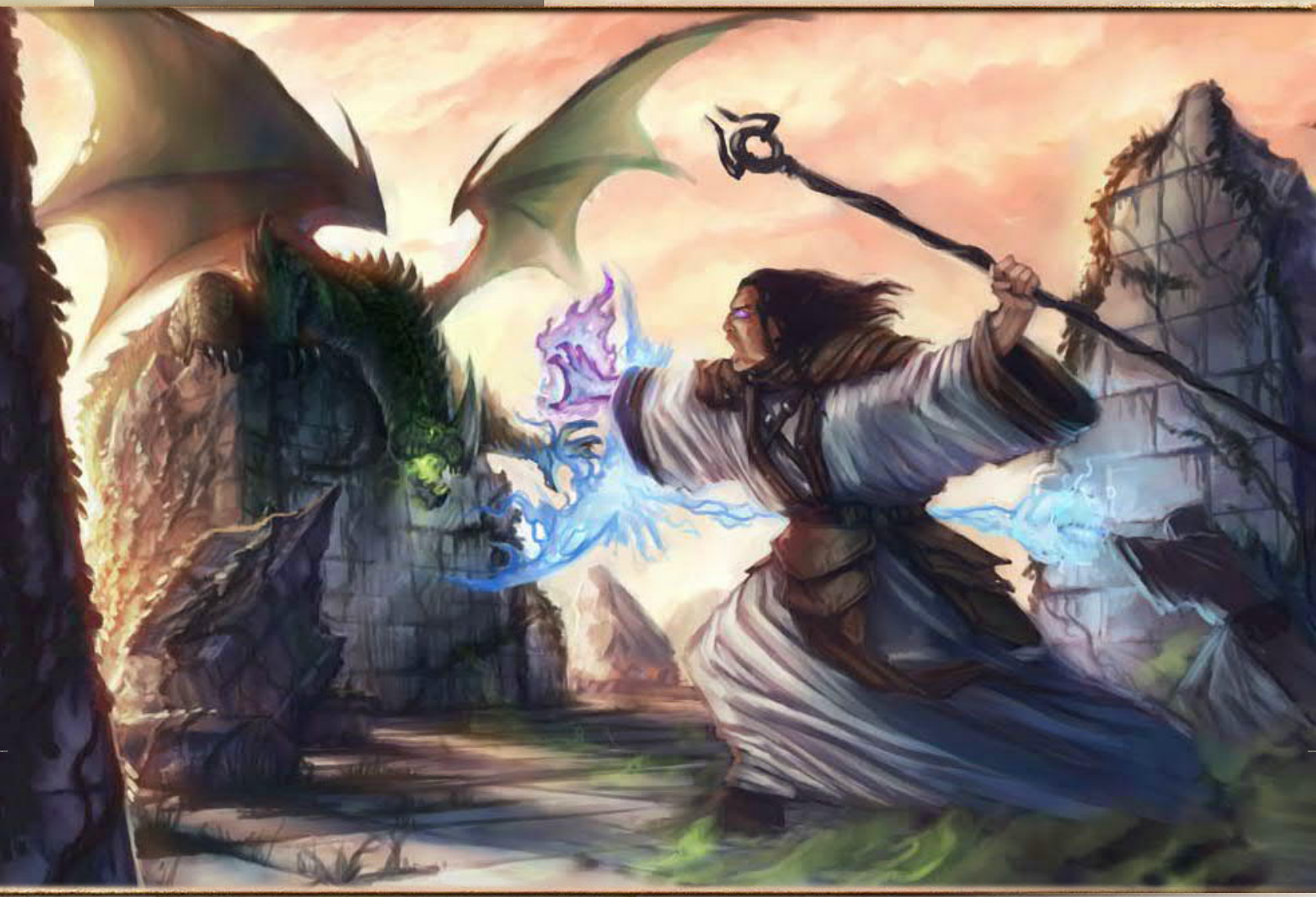
Special Abilities

Alternate Form (Su) Astarathian can assume any animal or humanoid form of Medium size or smaller as a standard action three times per day. He can remain in his animal or humanoid form until he chooses to assume a new one or return to his natural form.

Detect Gems (Sp) This is a divination effect similar to a *detect magic* spell, except that it finds only gems. Astarathian can scan a 60-degree arc each round: by concentrating for 1 round he knows if there are any gems within the arc; 2 rounds of concentration reveals the exact number of gems; and 3 rounds reveals their exact location, type, and value. This ability is the equivalent of a 2nd-level spell, and he can use it 3 times per day.

Luck Bonus (Sp) Once per day, Astarathian can touch a gem and enspell it to bring good luck. As long as he carries the gem, Astarathian and every good creature in a 120-foot radius receives a +1 luck bonus on all saving throws and similar rolls (as a *stone of good luck*). If Astarathian gives the gem to another creature, only that bearer gets the bonus. The effect lasts 1d3+36 hours but ends if the gem is destroyed. This ability is the equivalent of a 2nd-level spell.

Water Breathing (Ex) Astarathian can breathe underwater indefinitely and can freely use his abilities while submerged (the cone of fire becomes a cone of superheated steam underwater).



Green Dragons

Greens are obsessed with perfecting their minds and bodies, and exceed even the learned bronzes in scholarship and study. Many chromatic dragons consider the greens traitors, for they seem more interested in learning than rampaging. Indeed, several attempts by metallic dragons over the past few millennia to redeem chromatic dragons en masse began by targeting the greens; of course, all such grand attempts failed miserably, and it is doubtful that dragons as a race will entertain such an idea again for at least a millennium.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 17

Green dragons strive for self-perfection and constantly work to improve themselves. This applies to both body and mind, though more so to the latter. Many who deal with dragons consider greens the most reasonable and pragmatic of the chromatic dragons, and most attempts to reach some form of agreement between the two draconic septs involve green dragons—particularly those attempts with any actual chance of success. When approached correctly—which generally means not when they are in meditation or asleep—green dragons are the chromatics most often willing to converse with uninvited guests. Despite their reasonable personalities and openness to visitation, however, green dragons remain undeniably evil, selfish creatures, and those fools who forget this tend to wind up as snacks.

In every aspect of their lives, green dragons seek mastery. Their unending and unrealistic push for achievement often focuses strongly upon their own persons, and green dragons practice moderation and self-control on levels approaching that of golds. As a result, green dragons are the

least likely of chromatics to rampage and the most likely to shed their evil ways. Few become truly good, but more green dragons slip into hard-edged neutrality than all other chromatics combined. Some scholars estimate that as many as one green in 10 finds sufficient enlightenment to embrace academic neutrality, but most draconic sages agree the number is much lower.

Of the chromatic dragons, greens are the only type who consider academia a worthy pursuit. They fill their lairs with books and scrolls, and despite their hatred of the lesser races they give begrudging thanks to the industrious humans who record knowledge in such a convenient and portable format. Green dragons serve as the scholars and wizards of the chromatics, and their contributions to mathematics, astronomy, and the understanding of Golarion's calendar are numerous but often woefully undervalued or miscredited.

The single massive horn projecting from a green dragon's snout gives it the most striking and easily recognizable head shape of all true dragons. Every green dragon's iconic nose horn bears a unique shape, though it continues to grow all throughout the dragon's life. Some great wyrms have a horn so massive that they gain a blind spot in their vision, and to correct this they sometimes carve the horn into a smaller, more suitable shape.

Ecology and Society

Green dragons constantly seek to become stronger, faster, smarter, wiser, and calmer. Already among the most socially adjusted of the chromatics (exceeded only by the manipulative blues), green dragons occasionally introduce themselves into situations they find frustrating or annoying simply so they can practice remaining calm and patient. These attempts usually work, but when they don't, someone generally loses a limb.

In order to keep their bodies in peak physical condition, green dragons perform some form of rigorous exercise nearly every day (like all dragons, they enjoy long slumbers, but try to limit their naps to a few days at a time). These exercises typically include flying, running, or swimming at their maximum pace for at least an hour. Other days, greens derive their exercise from combat, either sparring non-lethally with other greens and the occasional blue or else attacking creatures they perceive as challenging but not especially dangerous.

The sparring and battling they do also help keep greens mentally strong, but most prefer other forms of intellectual exercise to accumulating tactical know-how. Green dragons naturally excel at mathematics and frequently become experts in magical theory (although their talents in the practical application of magic tend to lag), astronomy (they consider astrology charlatanry), and intricate measurements (such as of time or items very large and very small).

Although their intellectual curiosity rarely leads them to an interest in horticulture, green dragons possess natural abilities that make them excellent cultivators and caretakers. They feel they must constantly improve upon their forest homes (at least the sections they can see directly from their lairs). Green dragons rarely care for their forests directly, but they frequently coerce or otherwise force lesser creatures into aiding them as caretakers and groundskeepers. Over time, thanks to the efforts of the dragons, the areas around their lairs tend to become healthier and more vibrant, a sharp contrast to other chromatics. Welcome plants grow quick and healthy, while parasitic vines and other unwanted vegetation are either much reduced or eliminated entirely. As flexible omnivores, green dragons can and do eat almost anything, from fresh meat to berries to leafy plants. They refuse carrion and only eat creatures they kill themselves.

Whereas blue dragons tend to socialize in order to establish control over or contact with different creatures, green dragons speak with lesser beings in order to gain knowledge. This sharing of information is not altruistic, but rather to gain prestige for their discoveries and breakthroughs and to learn from those of others. When green dragons present newfound information to colleagues, they do so with written proofs and journals that clearly spell out their findings and establish them as the original discoverers of the knowledge they pass on. In this way, green dragons contribute to the draconic body of knowledge without fear of their findings becoming misappropriated, lost, or claimed by another dragon—or worse, by a lesser creature.

Green dragons tend to stay away from other kinds of dragons, whom they see either as unpredictable hooligans or insufferably stuffy killjoys; the exceptions are bronzes, whom greens respect as scholars. Greens tend to work together with bronzes more than with any other dragon kind, losing themselves in deep, intellectual conversations. When confronted with their own kind, green dragons become standoffish and competitive. As perfectionists, they cannot help but compare themselves to their kin, and meetings of two greens almost always turn into bouts of one-upmanship that result in physical brawls or magical duels. Only when greens come together to mate can they temporarily repress these competitive tendencies. Even then, however, the dragons cannot help but feel themselves smugly superior to their partners, and on occasion these trysts end violently when one partner points out a flaw in the other.

The scholarly and rational greens rarely develop any great amount of piety or religious fervor. They intellectually understand and occasionally study the creation of dragons and the betrayal of Dahak, but they do not revere Apsu in any capacity other than as the greatest

of all dragons and—ultimately—the king of the metallics. Strangely, even as they reject their own draconic deities, some greens actively worship a human god: Irori, god of self-perfection. These greens see in Irori the ultimate in personal potential, and they judge themselves against his pursuit of perfection, wisdom, and calm, believing that the reward for ultimate self-improvement is ascension to godhood. Other greens deride this faith as the "Cult of the Man God."

More often than any other chromatic kind, green dragons explore the theoretical mysteries of arcane magic as archmages and wizards of great repute. Their experiments and studies frequently lead to new and dangerous discoveries, though just as often these investigations into things best left alone result only in insanity or death. Green dragons take these risks to push the boundaries of theoretical knowledge in the hopes of being remembered throughout history for their achievements. In order to conduct these experiments, green dragons happily sacrifice as many lesser creatures as they need to, gleefully sending dozens of humans or even other dragons to gruesome and unspeakable deaths. Green dragon wizards do not collectively favor any one school of magic over the others, but individuals almost always specialize. This tendency carries over into non-wizard greens as well, who do not focus on any one school or type of magic.

Hoard and Home

Green dragons favor knowledge and collected wisdom over other treasures, although they also enjoy the shape and feel of items made from darkwood and certain other materials. Like all dragons, greens love coins, and tend to prefer copper and silver over gold or platinum. As scholars, green dragons also favor older coins from extinct nations, and in many cases the coins of their hoards are worth more to collectors than their face values indicate. Green dragons enjoy verdant gemstones such as emeralds and peridot which reflect the color of their own scales.

The hoards of green dragons always contain large libraries of books and scrolls, typically of advanced mathematics or numerology and at least one other subject that strikes the particular dragon's fancy. A number of these tomes and manuscripts are unique, having come down to their owners through successions of masters and apprentices or else penned by the hoard owners themselves. Unscrupulous scholars, mathematicians, and arcane researchers frequently put out bounties for the deaths of green dragons solely for the purpose of gaining access to these documents. These vendettas usually end in the deaths of those who propose them and their would-be dragonslayers.

As the chromatic dragons of forests and growing places, green dragons enjoy wooden carvings and elaborately decorated wooden furniture. Many greens collect wooden canes, cudgels, and walking staves made from oak and other beautiful woods, giving their hoards high percentages of magical examples of such items. Green dragons do not exclusively appreciate the beauty of worked or magical woods, however, and those who live relatively near coastlines frequently collect driftwood of unusual shapes and colors—something that never fails to confuse thieves expecting only valuable items.

Regardless of the exact makeup, all green dragon hoards are carefully and exactingly organized. Books always end up back on their shelves, usually ordered

alphabetically by subject. Art objects, weapons, and suits of armor have their specific places, usually under glass to protect them from dust and grime. Even the wide, shallow beds of coins on which green dragons sleep are kept within very specific boundaries, typically with the help of perfectly circular indentations in the floor. Woodcarvings and the like are always carefully arranged around the coin beds. Green dragons keep their hoards meticulously clean and organized, and as such they can tell at a glance if something is out of place or missing, making their hoards among the most difficult to subtly pilfer.

Green dragons live in forests, preferably at the hearts of old woods near groves of ancient trees. They like to live in caves, but many settle for natural cairns, the burial mounds of lesser creatures, or simple stone-lined and covered pits dug for them by unwilling neighbors. When they live in caves or caverns, green dragons like to conceal the entrances to their homes with thick bushes, vines, and other greenery.

With their corrosive breath, green dragons can slowly melt their way through solid stone in order to delve into the sides of hills or create hollows within mounds of stones. They rarely use their acidic exhalations on trees or other plant matter, instead trusting to magic or their own physical labor to produce lairs high in the trees.

When not living within caves or burial mounds, greens prefer to make their homes on the sides of hills or at the tops of cliffs. Some, particularly younger and smaller ones, live within the high boughs of massive and ancient trees. Some treetop lairs of the oldest green dragons can rely upon the collective strength of more than two dozen massive trees, their upper reaches bowing under the draconic weight. These immense lairs (created by carefully meshed ropes, chains, cables, and vines) are engineered by the dragons to support weights far exceeding their own. This allows the greens to keep at least portions of their hoards within their tree-borne bowers.

Whether aboveground or below, green dragon lairs are generally built near at least one tree with a bough large enough to support the dragon's bulk, from which it can survey its demesnes. (Of course, this becomes extremely difficult to find for the largest dragons). Green dragon lairs rarely contain standing or running water. In caves, green dragons keep their books and the rest of their hoards organized on large wooden shelves or in glass-enclosed displays (preferably of exquisite quality and made from darkwood or hardwoods). In tree lairs, they carefully and patiently guide the boughs and trunks of the trees into particular shapes to make them useful for storage. The oldest green dragons living within trees occasionally even have safes and strongboxes grown into the trunks of their tree homes—a process that takes hundreds of years to complete.

The Yellow Dragon

Amateur scholars of draconic lore are quick to point out that as there are blue and green dragons, and mixing blue and yellow pigment creates green, there must be yellow dragons, forebears of the green dragonkind. Though there are no known chromatic dragons that were actually yellow, there is one famous metallic who helped perpetuate the myth.

With each appearance, the fallen gold dragon Kwislingyr's scales lost more luster until—upon the discovery of his corpse—they were reduced to a sickly yellowish hue. His pallid skin and the subsequent discovery of his emaciated corpse led to wild speculations of the arrival of a new species of yellow dragon. Draconic scholars and representatives of the Aleirt bloodline quickly hushed those rumors when they confirmed that the so-called "yellow dragon" was actually the fallen gold, Kwislingyr. Despite their refutations, however, rumors of yellow dragon sightings still infrequently crop up all across Avistan, and even more so in Garund.

Campaign Role

Green dragons can play a wide array of roles depending on their individual interests. Although almost universally and unrepentantly evil, green dragons are never mindless marauders or senseless slayers, and are all the more terrifying as opponents because they always have purpose behind their actions and more than one means by which to accomplish their goals.

The most basic manner in which green dragons antagonize humans is simply as defenders of their territory: greens do not suffer humans stumbling around on their land. Unlike most other chromatic dragons, though, green dragons do not automatically attempt to kill trespassers. Indeed, doing so frequently just results in the arrival of even more humans. Instead, greens try to drive off unwanted guests, often using methods that do not reveal the dragons themselves.

Many green dragons seek knowledge, either magical or mundane, that other academic or intellectual dragons (such as their bronze rivals) do not dare or care to find. In the name of science and understanding, green dragons occasionally perform experiments on live subjects. These particular forms of research require steady supplies of test subjects, leading the dragons to frequently seek out new victims, dragging their uncooperative test subjects back to their lairs for vivisection. Clever greens create nonlethal traps to more easily acquire such "volunteers."

As seekers of knowledge, green dragons also occasionally explore ancient tombs or other places of historic or magical interest. If a site is newly discovered, a particularly adventurous green might attempt to delve into it before its fame draws too many other explorers. Thus it is possible

for human adventurers and green dragon explorers to simply stumble into each other, particularly if they are both in a location only recently revealed.

As they are among the most thoughtful and least violent of chromatic dragons, green dragons do not mind sharing what information they possess with lesser beings. These lessons never come freely, of course, and those petitioning greens for intellectual aid should bring their own secret knowledge to share. Some green dragons accept books, scrolls, coins, and other physical treasures as payment for the information they provide, but most require the human knowledge-seekers to perform tasks for them in exchange.

On Golarion

Nearly every significant forest on Golarion is home to at least one green dragon, from the boreal forests in Irrisen to the steaming jungles of the Sodden Lands and all major woodlands in between. For the most part, green dragons dwell in quiet isolation, keeping to themselves, emerging from their homes only to hunt or seek out some new fact or resource. For this reason, few notable green dragons are spoken of in human histories.

Perhaps the best-known green dragon, the famed and strangely popular Tasathyl, continues to live within the vast territory claimed by Daralathyxl without bowing to his rulership. Although much smaller and obviously weaker than Daralathyxl, Tasathyl openly defies the king of dragons and continues to live to tell of it. Since her arrival in Arthfell Forest sometime shortly before 3300 AR, Tasathyl has faced off against King Daralathyxl on at least nine known occasions. Every battle begins in the air, but eventually the two tumble to the ground, crushing everything beneath them. Twice these battles have fallen into an occupied area, with the resulting combat destroying homes and killing numerous unfortunate onlookers. When she isn't busy seeking new ways to kill her most hated opponent, Tasathyl possesses a voracious appetite for knowledge and information. She frequently hires explorers and adventurers to comb the dwarven ruins near her home.

More famous for his accomplishments than for his politics, the late Gartheris discovered within his small woodland observatory two of the known planets of Golarion's solar system, as well as numerous comets and other celestial bodies. Those dragons who cared about such things hailed his discoveries and claimed draconic superiority in the field of astronomy. However, a team of unscrupulous human astronomers managed to disseminate this information about the discoveries before the dragon could, naming them Triaxus and Apostae, much to the anger of green dragons and the chagrin of bronzes. Gartheris and his colleagues seethed at this for nearly a decade before putting the final touches on their master plan of vengeance, wiping away the human usurpers, their publishers, and their families with veritable storm clouds of acidic breath. Since then, human researchers wisely grant credit where it is due, at least when dealing with green dragons.

Names

Green dragon names fall somewhere in the middle of the draconic spectrum for length and complexity. They tend to be relatively easy to pronounce (if not to spell) and they generally eschew the use of titles and other epithets. Female green dragons frequently have names ending in the syllable of "vox." Beyond these generalities, green dragons do not practice any particular naming conventions, although fathers tend to grant their offspring names that incorporate one or two syllables of their own names. For example, the famed astronomer Gartheris fathered Athervox, Gardras, and Theristix.

Green dragon names: Arithalion, Dastrivox, Karsitran, Saevox.

Athervox

Daughter of the famed astronomer Gartheris, Athervox spent many of her younger years toiling in earnest beneath the impressive shadow of her sire's previous discoveries. Upon his death almost 7 centuries ago, Athervox gained possession of his mundane and magical astronomical equipment, and with this windfall of information and tools she set up an observatory near Senara in the Whisper Woods of Cheliax.

With the rise of the Hell-backed House of Thrune, Athervox saw her chance to gain some level of assurance from the governing humans that she could conduct her studies in peace. In exchange for privacy, however, the government in Egorian required Athervox to train a handful of human astronomers loyal to House Thrune. Athervox assumed her "apprentices" were merely spies sent by the crown to see the manner of her research, but kept up the pretense of teaching. After a few years of training, the humans abruptly left one night, taking with them several volumes of Athervox's notes on astronomical connections to the spheres of existence.

Several decades have passed since the Thrune agents ran off with her notes, and in that time no humans have bothered Athervox who she did not herself invite. Despite Cheliax's apparent upholding of its end of the deal, Athervox cannot bring herself to trust humans, even though she frequently needs them to perform menial or dangerous tasks for her. The House of Thrune, for its part, would do well to remember that just because the dragon hasn't punished them yet for their insolence doesn't mean she's forgotten.

Athervox **CR 19**

Female very old green dragon
LE Huge dragon (air)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +40, Spot +40
Aura frightful presence (270 ft., DC 28)

DEFENSE

AC 36, touch 8, flat-footed 36 (+28 natural, –2 size)
hp 420 (29d12+232)
Fort +24, **Ref** +16, **Will** +22; Draconic Discipline
DR 15/magic and 10/adamantine (first 110 damage); **Immune** acid, sleep, paralysis; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor), swim 40 ft.
Melee bite +40 (2d8+13) and 2 claws +38 (2d6+6) and 2 wings +38 (1d8+6) and tail slap +38 (2d6+19)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapons (50-ft. cone of acid, 18d6, Reflex half DC 32), crush 2d8+19 (Reflex DC 32 or be pinned)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 11th):
3/day—*suggestion* (DC 16), *dominate person* (DC 19)
1/day—*plant growth*
Spells Known (CL 11th):
5th (4/day)—*animal growth* (DC 19), *telekinesis* (DC 19)
4th (7/day; 1 already cast)—*polymorph, scrying, stoneskin*
3rd (7/day)—*clairaudience/clairvoyance, haste, tongues, wind wall*
2nd (7/day; 4 already cast)—*bear's endurance, bull's strength, fox's cunning, owl's wisdom, see invisibility*
1st (7/day)—*charm person* (DC 15), *hypnotism* (DC 15), *mage armor, magic missile, sleep* (DC 15)
0 (6/day)—*arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic*

TACTICS

Before Combat Athervox avoids combat whenever she can, preferring discourse to violence. When riled up she is a terrible and careful foe. If she knows an inescapable battle approaches, she seeks out a place of her choosing to hold the fight. She prefers locations that allow her to fly freely and avoid melee battle with her foes. Just before combat, she casts *bear's endurance, bull's strength, fox's cunning, owl's wisdom,* and *stoneskin* on herself (included in the above statistics).

During Combat Athervox avoids engaging in melee at all costs, relying on her flight to keep her away from most foes. She attempts to use *dominate person* and *suggestion* (her favorite is to suggest the target leave, gather more allies, and return the next day better prepared to fight her, which gives her plenty of time to get far away) to end the combat or at least remove some of her foes from the battle. She uses her breath weapon and damaging spells to good effect, hitting as many foes as possible. Her hope is to deliver so much damage in so little time that her foes see the logic in breaking off the fight and switching to discussion. If Athervox can end a battle quickly, she tries to learn the names of her opponents so she can plan for her vengeance later.

Morale Athervox does not fight to the death outside of her lair unless she is somehow trapped and cannot escape. Once reduced to 200 hp or less, she flees. When defending her home, she fights until slain.

Base Statistics Without her protective spells on her, Athervox has the following statistics: **hp** 362; **Fort** +22, **Will** +20; **DR** 15/magic; Melee bite +38 (2d8+11), 2 claws +36 (2d6+16), 2 wings +36 (1d8+5), tail slap +36 (2d6+16); **Special Attacks** breath weapon (DC 30), crush (DC 30); **Str** 33, **Con** 23, **Int** 18, **Wis** 19

Skills Concentration +36, Knowledge (nature) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +36, Listen +38, Search +36, Spot +38

STATISTICS

Str 37, **Dex** 10, **Con** 27, **Int** 22, **Wis** 23, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +29; **Grp** +50
Feats Alertness, Draconic Discipline, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Escape Artist), Snatch, Still Spell, Wingover
Skills Bluff +36, Concentration +40, Escape Artist +35, Hide +32, Knowledge (nature) +38, Knowledge (the planes) +38, Listen +40, Move Silently +32, Search +38, Spot +40
Languages Auran, Common, Draconic, Sylvan
SQ water breathing

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Water Breathing (Ex) A green dragon can breathe underwater indefinitely and can freely use its abilities while submerged.

Draconic Discipline

You are a dragon, powerful and feared. Not even magic can sway your thoughts or weaken your resolve.

Prerequisites: Wis 17, base Will save +10, any lawful alignment, dragon type.

Benefit: If you are affected by a mind-affecting enchantment or necromancy effect and fail your saving throw, you can attempt it again 1 round later at the same DC. You get only this one extra chance to succeed on your saving throw.

Ecology of the Mithral Dragon

By Logan Bonner

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"The Mithral King came into our domain, telling us of the cataclysmic visions that filled his mind. The other angels and I saw our god die, and watched our domain slowly crumble around us as we wandered listlessly. Tashkax gave us purpose, and we saw in him the knowledge, foresight, and strength of a god. We had hope once more that we had found a worthy master."

–Tirlunel, servitor of Tashkax

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History

With wide-reaching goals and the power to achieve them, mithral dragons have played a major part in shaping the history of the world and planes despite their relatively small numbers. Since mithrals care primarily about pursuing their own goals, they derive far more satisfaction in completing them than in receiving praise or fame for their deeds. Mithral dragons have been involved in major swings of power throughout history, but few know of their involvement. Even fewer know how, specifically, the dragons shaped these events. Except for scholars with knowledge of religion or the planes, few people in the world even know that mithral dragons exist.

Origins of Mithral Dragons

No one knows for sure which legend of the creation of dragons is true. To mithrals, the details aren't particularly important. The only part of draconic history that really matters to mithral dragons is that they were intended to be Io's chosen. The god's spirit speaks to them still, and they follow Io's charge with greater commitment than any other type of dragon.

Though they have an association with the Astral Sea, it's clear that mithrals haven't always lived there. During the early days of the War of Dragons, mithrals fought against the chromatic dragons and helped decide the course of many battles. Over the course of that war, the mithral dragons grew more and more dissatisfied, and their numbers in the world slowly dwindled. Many mithrals claim that they weren't truly mithral dragons until they had left worldly matters behind and begun to consider more important concepts.

Crusading Mithral Dragons

Since the world fell into darkness and the great bastions of civilization crumbled, mithral dragons have grown more obsessive. They seek to radically change the world. Most of them want to transform it into a place of law and order, but their ideals can blind them to the consequences of their plans.

Mithrals have raised armies or instigated conflicts in attempts to set things right. Most influence affairs from behind the scenes, although a rare few have made their presence more openly known. Mithrals mostly find that they can inspire greater faith and camaraderie in their armies through the use of charismatic servants and allies.

Avatars of Prophecy

The visions mithral dragons receive make them superlative prophets. These visions of the future come (the mithral dragons believe) from the spirit of Io. Though the dragons might struggle to understand these sometimes-cryptic bursts of foresight, they never doubt their veracity. However, they also know that the actions of free-willed individuals—for good or ill—can affect the results of any vision, no matter how sure it might seem. This contradiction worries those who dare question the motives and wisdom of these powerful creatures.

Still, great prophets keep a close eye on mithral dragons. Some attempt to tell the future by watching the actions of mithrals, believing that anything one of these dragons considers important will be significant. Mithrals largely resent their role as harbingers for lesser prophets. They prefer to keep their secrets, but they don't want to waste time covering their tracks. When necessary, a devious mithral dragon intention-

The King of Khouradan

One of the most famous mithral dragons in the history of the natural world, Aelmedrion hatched while the edifices of the empire of Nerath crumbled. He grew up regretting that he hadn't lived to see an empire of the world in its full glory, and full of disdain for the evils that plagued the land afterward.

Impetuous as a youth, Aelmedrion hunted down necromantic rituals in libraries throughout the Astral Sea. As the dragon and his followers enacted these rituals, the graves of Nerathi soldiers opened up, and their occupants walked the land. The dragon declared the foundation of a new empire: Khouradan. To prove his beneficence, he set the undead soldiers to work slaying bandits, dangerous beasts, and other fiends that had overrun the world, but he did not prepare for his enemies' reactions. The dragon's evil adversaries had no idea who was attacking them and struck back indiscriminately against innocent people, either out of anger or while attempting to evade the undead armies by any means necessary.

After years of chaos, Aelmedrion appeared and admitted his failure. He returned the dead to their graves and personally dealt with the few prominent evildoers he was aware of. The rest went into hiding, and Aelmedrion fled to the Astral Sea in shame. As one of the few mithral dragons to reveal itself, most people who are aware of mithral dragons know about them because of this rogue necromancer.

Mithral dragons are immortal, and no news of Aelmedrion's death has reached the world. As far as anyone knows, the dragon is still out there, plotting a way to accomplish his goals more successfully.

ally misleads prophets by taking actions unrelated to its true goal. Some mithrals seem to pursue this sort of game with almost as much fervor as they do their true goals and passions.

Physiology

Though exceptional among their kindred, mithral dragons share most of the same physical traits. They are more nimble, though, exhibiting the suppleness of their namesake metal.

The Inner Light

Mithral dragon blood, like that of other dragons, contains stores of elemental magic. However, these creatures also command the radiance of the Astral Sea. They have dwelled primarily in that realm since their birth as a species, and their connection to the energy of the plane has increased over the millennia. When young, a mithral's scales are highly reflective. In later years, light glows from between their scales at all times.

Astral light has become so ingrained in mithral dragons that it has altered their breath weapons. As elemental energy passes from the fundamentum to the upper stomach, much of it transforms into radiant energy. As more energy collects, a mithral dragon's chest and throat begin to glow. This glow fades when the dragon unleashes its scintillating breath weapon.

When a mithral dragon becomes enraged, the light glows more fiercely. Even the dragon's claws and eyes flash with light during combat.

Teleportation

Born with an ability to briefly cross between planes, a mithral dragon confounds its enemies with evasive teleportation. When a mithral dragon prepares to teleport, its wings transmute into curtains of radiant energy. With a flash of light, the dragon crosses between planes and reappears nearby. Typically, the dragon crosses through the Astral Sea and reappears surrounded by motes of astral light. If it's already in the Astral Sea, the dragon usually teleports through the Elemental Chaos, and re-emerges accompanied by a tide of flame, cascade of dust, or gust of wind.

Psychology

Since mithral dragons are powerful, incredibly intelligent, and often fight for good causes, few realize how thoroughly consumed with their own goals these dragons become. Mithral dragons can become obsessive and domineering. Though they're typically on the side of the just, they can be misled into doing evil. With their prophetic insights, they might also seem to be pursuing an evil agenda for a goal they believe is for the greater good (or their own good, which to many mithrals, is one and the same). Even when devoted to a good cause, mithral dragons disregard the destruction and danger innocent people might face due to their actions in pursuit of their goals.

The type of goals a mithral dragon seeks to achieve varies widely. The only constant is scope—mithral dragons think big, and they choose to take on tasks that will influence entire continents or planes. A mithral dragon's goal might lead to the destruction of a barony, the disappearance of an entire landmass, the death of a powerful deity or demon lord, or the start of a great war.

Superiority

Mithral dragons know they are more powerful than other dragons, and act accordingly. They carry dragonkind's reputation for arrogance to extremes, and

they admit inferiority to no one, save perhaps deities or the most powerful primordials. Some mithrals consider themselves infallible, and even those who will admit to a mistake must be presented with overwhelming evidence to do so. Consequently, it's nearly impossible to dissuade a mithral dragon from following a course of action on which it has decided. Its prescience, in this case, is often a liability. Mithral dragons often come to believe that because of their gift of prophecy, they know more than anyone else—and they are thus often shocked beyond belief when events do not transpire as they expect.

Reproduction and Parenting

Since mithral dragons don't die naturally and have few enemies capable of killing them, reproduction isn't a priority. Most mithrals are too consumed with their goals to find mates or rear children, and only do so if they're certain the time spent will further their agendas.

Mithrals rarely spend time with other dragons, even their own kind, so finding a mate is often difficult. A mithral dragon that wants offspring needs to either convince a potential mate that the offspring will contribute to both dragons' goals or arrange some type of exchange, usually by helping that mate further its own plans in some fashion. Sometimes two mithrals come together to raise hatchlings out of some deeper connection, but such relationships are even more rare among these dragons than among other species of dragonkind.

A parent that trains its offspring to further its goals uses harsh demands and instills in its hatchlings a sense of purpose. The dragon does everything it can to ensure that its child shares its goals, but inevitably, the parent grows distracted and neglects its children, leaving the hatchlings to their own devices. When a mithral wyrmling leaves the nest, many times a parent won't notice for weeks or months. In many ways, this preserves a balance among the mithral dragons, as few of those dragons related by blood end up pursuing identical agendas because of this distance that begins at such an early age.

Mithral Dragon Plot Threads

You might want to use a mithral dragon to reinforce a theme in your campaign. These creatures loom so large that introducing one nearly demands that it will have a major role in the story arc of your game. Some interesting plot threads involving mithral dragons include:

Tyranny: Even a dragon working toward a good cause can impose stifling oppression over regions it claims to safeguard. The PCs might be fighting to free people from a mithral dragon's rules and restrictions.

Mysterious Prophecy: If the heart of your campaign's story is shrouded in secrecy, the PCs might enlist the aid of a mithral dragon. They could seek foresight from the dragon's visions, or try to prevent the dragon from finding out parts of a prophecy that would bring it into conflict with them.

Protect the Bystanders: The broad, intricate plots of mithral dragons ripple through the planes. The repercussions of a mithral's actions might harm ordinary people or fracture the land. Even at low level, PCs can protect people from the fallout of a mithral's actions.

Culture

Solitary beings, mithral dragons usually speak only with creatures who are their peers in power, and only when they must. Mithrals need to amass influence and knowledge to accomplish their goals, so they seek out only those allies who can offer them something that will further their own plans. The common person is useless to a mithral dragon, and is of no consequence to the dragon.

Religion

As residents of the Astral Sea, all mithral dragons acknowledge the power of deities, and most revere deities, or at least take their influence into account. Mithral dragons don't really worship gods in the same way most people do. They're simply too proud to submit to anyone else's will. They treat the gods with respect—at least those deities who share the same philosophies as the mithrals—and sometimes seek their guidance. Even this level of submission is galling to most mithrals, and they're more likely to treat such an interaction as one peer seeking advice from another, not as a lesser being seeking guidance from a "higher power."

It's not uncommon for a mithral dragon to realize that its goals align with a deity's. A mithral dragon that becomes deeply involved with a religion is a powerful symbol of that deity's influence, and few deities turn away such an ally. If the dragon is confident in the god's trustworthiness, it will present itself as a representative of the deity, using the combined cachet of the god's name and its own to fulfill the desires and goals the two share.

Whether in service to a deity or not, all mithral dragons pay attention to those deities whose tenets fit their goals or those who directly oppose them. The knowledge gathered by followers of Ioun can be useful to mithral dragons, so many of them maintain a connection to that god. Evil or immoral mithral dragons might follow the tenets of Zehir, who can help them with schemes that involve assassination. Vecna appeals to mithrals that want to scheme in secrecy.

The draconic gods and mithral dragons share an especially complicated relationship. Visions flow into mithral dragons' minds from the fragmented will of the dead dragon progenitor god Io. Therefore, the dragons follow this distant ancestor more closely than either of the living deities who commonly attract draconic followers. Bahamut and Tiamat simply can't live up to the majestic power of their father, in the minds of mithral dragons. To most mithrals, Bahamut isn't fulfilling Io's will, and Tiamat has turned her back on everything noble or worthwhile among dragonkind to pursue material things.

Mithral Patrons

Always looking for competent allies, mithral dragons frequently serve as patrons for powerful adventurers. The dragon might seek them out because they share similar views, or simply because the adventurers will do what the dragon wants as long as they're paid well. Mithral dragons prefer to give direct orders, so characters who serve them might not have as much autonomy as they'd like. The only problem with a mithral dragon's orders is that they're sometimes based on vague visions. This means the characters might be expected to get results, but without a clear direction on how to achieve them or a good picture of the external factors that affect their quest.

Underlings

Mithral dragons attract numerous followers, either because they share similar goals, the dragon offers payment, or simply due to the lure of associating with a creature of such immense power. Because of a mithral dragon's wisdom and presence, it typically expects obedience from its followers. Debate and dissent waste valuable time that could be spent furthering the dragon's goals.

A mithral dragon intimidates its followers, at a minimum, and some mithrals treat their underlings essentially like slaves. The distinction depends on the dragon's options. If it can find like-minded followers who will work gladly, it recruits them. If not, the mithral is not below using whatever methods of motivation will achieve results.

Relations with Other Dragons

Only a hundred or so mithral dragons are known to live at any given time, and it's hard to find any ties that bind them to one another. Even those who are closely related don't feel any great connection.

Mithral dragons look down on other dragons, especially chromatics and those varieties of metallics that focus most of their time on the collection of treasure. To earn a mithral dragon's respect, a metallic dragon must align its behavior and goals as closely to those of the mithral as possible. A mithral understands the pursuit of an agenda, and respects other metallic dragons that devote their time and resources to a purpose.

Knowledge of Mithral Dragons

Arcana

DC 16: Mithral dragons receive visions of the future, which they claim come directly from the spirit of the long-dead dragon god Io.

DC 21: Many metallic dragons follow "Io's charge," believing that the dragon god created the dragons to serve as protectors and leaders of weaker creatures. Mithral dragons believe their power of prescience makes them uniquely suited to carry out Io's charge.

History

DC 16: Events that cause great upheaval sometimes stem from the actions of mithral dragons. Many legends tell of mithral dragons that pursued immense goals and achieved them against all odds. Usually, completing these goals made the world better and more orderly. But sometimes, death and war resulted as side effects of their actions.

Religion

DC 16: Mithral dragons frequently join forces with a deity and take on quests with a religious significance. They only do so if they find deities whose goals truly match their own.

DC 21: Any deity might draw mithral dragons as allies, but a few—such as Ioun and Zehir—attract more mithral dragons than others. Mithral dragons hate Tiamat, and many believe Bahamut has failed to live up to Io's legacy.

Mithral Disciple Monster Theme

A monster theme (introduced in *Dungeon Master's Guide* 2) allows you to modify any monster to reflect the powerful creature it serves. Mithral dragon followers learn to invoke powers of foresight and teleportation similar to those exhibited by their patrons. Add one of the following powers to thematically tie your monsters to mithral dragons. A sample mithral disciple is provided for your use.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Insight and Religion checks.

Dimension Strike

This power allows a skirmisher to become more potent or gives extra movement and devastating attacks to a soldier or brute.

Dimension Strike (standard; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
This creature teleports 5 squares, makes a melee basic attack, teleports 5 squares, and makes a melee basic attack against a different target.

Blinding Light

This flash of radiance works best for monsters that want to hide, or that deal more damage with combat advantage. Other monsters, especially soldiers, can use the power to strike awe in their foes.

Blinding Light (minor; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Close burst 3; level + 3 vs. Reflex; the target is blinded until the end of this creature's next turn. *Effect:* This creature teleports 5 squares.

Prophetic Defense

Any monster can make good use of this ability, but it works best for artillery and lurkers that don't already have good escape maneuvers.

Prophetic Defense (immediate interrupt, when this creature is hit by an attack; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
This creature gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against the triggering attack. If the attack misses, this creature teleports 3 squares.

Domains

To keep their privacy and peace, mithral dragons build or inhabit lairs in distant areas, primarily in the Astral Sea. They prefer places tied to prophecy or divine magic, and many of the most powerful mithrals dwell in the former realms of dead gods.

Sample Domain: Otrior's Beacon

The adult mithral dragon Otrior maintains a lair within an earthberg in the Astral Sea. Tunnels wind through the massive rock and connect at vast, hollowed-out chambers.

Orrery

Otrior's Beacon draws its name from the immense orrery that hangs in space over the earthberg on which Otrior's lair is built. The device glows brightly, collecting the ambient light of the Astral Sea and sending it out in intense beams. Otrior's followers created the fantastic device at her bequest. The orrery doesn't represent any physical place, but the motion of time and the interplay of events. Otrior stares at the

Mithral Disciple **Level 11 Soldier (Leader)**
Deva Knight-Errant
Medium immortal humanoid XP 600

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +8
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55
AC 27; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22 (+1 to all defenses against bloodied enemies)
Resist 10 necrotic, 10 radiant
Speed 5

Broadsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 2d10 + 2 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the deva knight-errant's next turn.

Rejuvenating Smite (standard; recharges after hitting with a broadsword attack) ✦ **Healing, Weapon**
+18 vs. AC; 2d10 + 2 damage, and the deva knight-errant regains hit points equal to half the damage dealt.

Blinding Light (minor; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Close burst 3; +14 vs. Reflex; the target is blinded until the end of the deva knight errant's next turn. *Effect:* This creature teleports 5 squares.

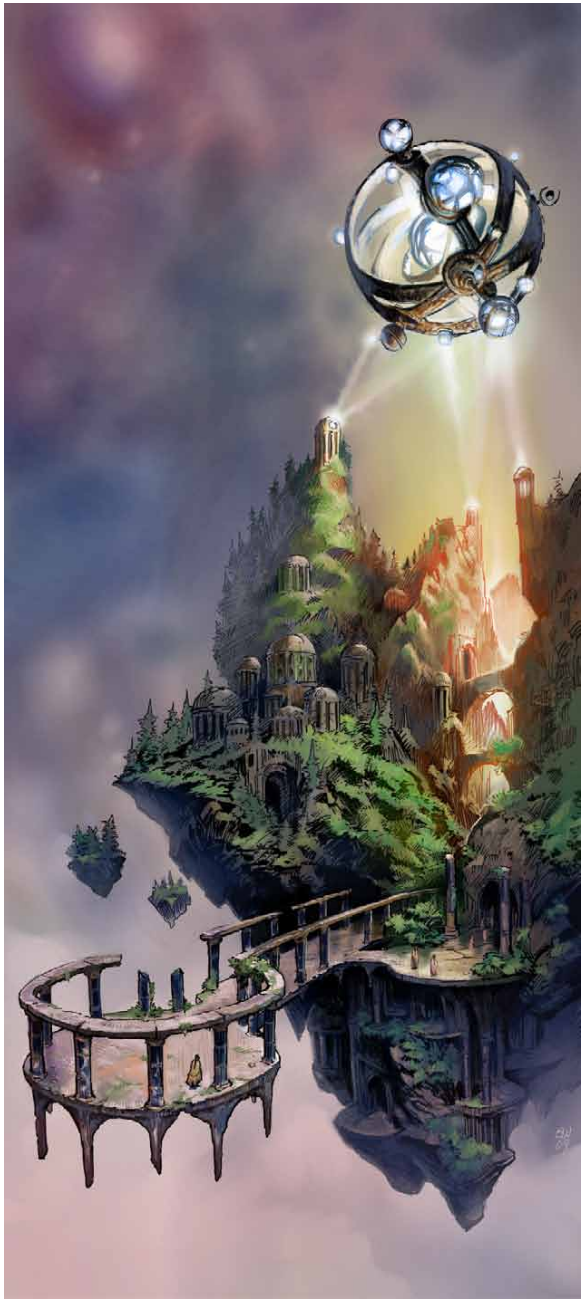
Martyr's Cry (standard; recharge ⁞⁞) ✦ **Implement, Psychic**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; 2d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is marked (save ends).

Inner Radiance ✦ **Radiant**
Any attack a deva knight-errant makes can instead deal radiant damage. In addition, a knight-errant can take a -2 penalty to an attack roll to deal 4 extra radiant damage on the attack.

Health Transfer (minor; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The deva knight-errant takes up to 25 damage, and one ally within 10 squares of it regains the same number of hit points. The knight-errant can then transfer one condition from the ally to itself.

Memory of a Thousand Lifetimes (free, when the deva knight-errant makes an attack roll, a skill check, or an ability check and dislikes the result; encounter)
The knight-errant adds 1d6 to the triggering roll.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common
Skills History +16, Insight +16, Religion +18
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 10 (+5) **Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 18 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+9)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, broadsword, holy symbol



orrery while meditating to enhance her visions. The beams reflecting from its surface point toward places of importance, but only Otrior can determine where the beams lead.

Meditation Tower

One jutting spire serves as Otrior's place of peace and meditation. Only she or other fliers can reach the summit, so she regards it as a safe outlook. One of the orrery's light beams always shines on this point.

Lair

Though Otrior spends most of her time within her meditation tower or giving orders and guidance to her followers, she retreats to her lair when she needs to contemplate a matter with no disturbances. This period is usually short—usually only a few days and never more than a couple of weeks—but vital to her decision-making process.

Gardens

Verdant hanging gardens provide food for Otrior and all of her followers who live on the earthberg. The dragon has a unique diet consisting mostly of vegetables. Like any dragon, she occasionally craves meat. Those who anger her by interfering in her plans might find themselves brought to her domain and served up as a meal.

Tunnels

The winding tunnels in the earthberg can easily accommodate a creature of Otrior's size, and any that had been too small were widened long ago. Hundreds of caverns, both small and large, branch off from the complex of tunnels. Otrior's servants have created a sustainable society within the earthberg.

Campaign Roles for Otrior

Otrior rarely leaves her ivory tower, so the PCs will need to access the Astral Sea either through their own means or thanks to transport provided by the mithral dragon's servants. The PCs could encounter Otrior on friendly or unfriendly terms. This sidebar refers to the "Dragons in the World" section of *Draconomicon: Metallic Dragons* (pages 42–47).

Patron: Otrior might become a patron as the PCs adventure at higher levels. She's a guiding patron, giving advice while still keeping the full extent of her plans hidden.

Occasional Ally: This campaign role has Otrior popping up from time to time when the beams of astral light shine across the PCs' path.

Scenery: Otrior's Beacon might also work as an interesting locale in your game without having the dragon play much of a role in the events. The PCs might attend a summit of powerful planar leaders at this location, or they might come upon it after Otrior and her followers have abandoned it or been slaughtered by unknown forces.

Otrior's Plans

Dangerous artifacts and magical effects can wreak havoc with time and endanger the stability of the planes. Otrior's work has given her a deeper understanding of the forces that affect time and the future, and she takes it upon herself to guard what she sees as the correct course of the future. Most of her plans involve gathering lore about time manipulation or attempting to stop others from using magic that might bend the course of time.

The Time Wells: Each plane has a few time wells: places where the normal flow of time doesn't apply and hundreds of possible realities converge. Otrior seeks to find the location of these time wells and hide them from others. This plot can affect PCs of all tiers, depending on where the time wells are located and who searches for them. The PCs might end up playing alternate versions of themselves from other realities or times as the chronological stream warps around them.

The Lost Light: One of the lights from Otrior's orrery shines into an unexplored region she knows nothing about. Paragon or epic characters might sail off on an astral skill to follow the light to its destination. They might find a long-forgotten astral domain, hibernating primordial, immensely powerful artifact, or gateway to the Far Realm. The PCs might wonder if they've just finished a literal self-fulfilling prophecy. Would this place or object have been important in the course of the future if they'd never come to find it?

Worship Halls

Otrior draws followers from many walks of life. All of them pursue scholarly endeavors, and many are religious. Halls throughout the earthberg allow Otrior's followers to worship almost any god. Gruumsh is a notable exception: Otrior harbors resentment against the destructive deity for reasons unknown.

Libraries

One common element in every mithral dragon lair is some sort of library. These creatures always find use for tomes and scrolls, especially those with prophetic implications. Otrior's Beacon houses eight libraries, each with a tiny window tunnel that runs all the way to the surface of the earthberg. Light from the orrery shines into each library at different times, guiding the mithral dragon's decisions.

About the Author

Logan Bonner has worked on *D&D Miniatures*, *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*, *Adventurer's Vault™*, *Player's Handbook® 2*, and *Arcane Power™*. He has designed both familiars and alchemy, encouraging people to be both social and anti-social.

Red Dragons

The iconic image of the rampaging dragon always breathes fire, and it is not surprising that most creatures associate the color red with danger and warning. Little wonder, then, that when describing these wondrous but undeniably evil beings we often slip into the most flowery and grandiose of language, overusing superlatives that, for lesser creatures, would seem like hyperbole. Be assured that no known language contains a singular word to describe the awesome and terrible power of red dragons.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 18

Most famous dragons across all the countless inhabited worlds bear red scales, and rightfully so. Although a few individual dragons of other breeds might rise to terrifying or benign prominence in a localized manner or for a few years, no beasts on Golarion or any other world inspire such dread as the magnificently wrathful red dragons. They are, as mentioned in the *Drakanav Codex*, the embodiments of destruction, hate, and supremely justified draconic arrogance. Red dragons frequently suffer from hubris, but while their own narcissistic feelings of arrogant self-assuredness might exceed their obvious draconic majesty, they can actually back up their remarkable claims with claw and flame.

As the most terrifyingly magnificent of all dragons, reds consider all other creatures—with the begrudging exception of the powerful golds—inferiors. When reds hear of their brethren laid low by lesser beings, such as self-proclaimed "dragonslayers," they offer no sympathies or regrets. Indeed, red dragons scorn their kin for suffering defeat (even if not death) at the hands of their lessers. Some

might mistake this scorn as apathy for the deaths of their fellow reds, if not simply an exploitable disregard for other members of their species. Such suppositions prove remarkably foolish, however, for while red dragons firmly believe that the strong must survive and the weak fall or serve, they recognize that at times luck might allow even the weakest, stupidest, and least-deserving creatures to overcome their betters. That truly exceptional humans might exceed *their own* power simply does not occur to your typical red dragon. Thus, reds shed no tears when their kin fall, but they instead seek out those who exhibited such fortune and ensure that such a thing does not occur a second time. They mock, but then they avenge. Many are the stories of brave dragonslayers who return home bearing the trophies of their kills, only to find their villages, towns, or (in a few rare but notable cases, such as the Razing of Parnthford in 2351 AR) cities brought down around them in a flight of frothing, flaming fury. Cautionary fables insist that mortals leave alone the reds who torment them, but for those foolish enough to risk death and somehow escape with their lives, the tales further beseech such "successful" dragon hunters to go into hiding rather than draw their loved ones into a revenge-fueled bloodbath. Still, dragon hunters continue to seek the hides of red dragons. The Call of the Crimson, as it is known, results in the deaths of at least a score of would-be slayers every year.

Red dragons are magnificent and utterly frightening to behold. Second in size only to golds, and occasionally surpassing even those wonderfully powerful beings, even their scaly eggs are at minimum the size of horses. Terrible and frightening in every describable way, red dragons possess a fierce beauty that exceeds all other dragons. From their powerful jaws, capable of snapping iron bars and the masts of ships, to their muscular tails, which can crash through stone walls as easily as whips can break skin, red dragons reflect murderous perfection and predatory superiority. Superlatives aside, red dragons tend to possess relatively blunt muzzles with strong, thick jaws filled with dagger-like teeth so large they extend beyond the gums, giving red dragons a snaggletooth look that only adds to their fierce splendor. Small nose horns extend up from just behind the tips of their muzzles, and sharp ridges of steel-hard scales follow back along their faces, eventually giving way to numerous scales that grow longer and thicker than the rest, providing red dragons with a characteristic spiky look many intelligent beings find disturbing and fearsome. The bodies of red dragons possess cord-like muscles that allow them to move more quickly and gracefully than creatures of their size should be able to.

Ecology and Society

Many tales speak of fearsome dragons haunting mountains (usually volcanoes) and demanding tribute from the surrounding human lands, and such accounts that speak of red dragons do not paint them in a positive light. Reds are the consummate evil dragons. None of their chromatic kin covet, hate, or lust more than reds, and few prove more challenging to redeem. Villains of the worst kind, red dragons are unflinchingly evil in ways unmatched by any other mortal creatures. Their destructive impulses and hate-filled fiery rampages surprise and delight the most heinous demons and give pause even to the greatest of their gold-scaled rivals. They rampage without concern, completely disregarding the abilities of humanoids who might oppose them and the tales of dragonslayers who somehow stop such magnificent examples of furious destruction.

As the stories surrounding them indicate, red dragons live in massive chambers under mountains. They prefer volcanoes (especially active ones), as such mountains generally stand alone and apart from other high places and dominate the lands around them, but they are satisfied with volcanic lairs in mountain chains. Indeed, King Daralathyxl lives within one of the southwestern peaks of the Five Kings Mountains (the exact one is still unknown) rather than the more prominent Droskar's Crag, for reasons no other being will likely ever know.

In general, younger red dragons damage the ecological webs of their territories more extensively than their older kin. Although they habitually eat less than their larger and older brethren (except when undergoing growth spurts), younger reds patrol their domains more frequently, hunting and killing and destroying as whim strikes them. Older dragons spend less time out of their lairs, and even when they do emerge they rarely concentrate their destructive impulses on their immediate surroundings. Instead, they seem to delight in tormenting more distant human settlements, burning down buildings, dropping peasants from great heights, and demanding coins and other treasures. The lands immediately around lairs of younger red dragons frequently bear obvious scars of fiery destruction, while dragon hunters find difficulty in locating clues pointing to the lairs of older dragons.

Of all dragons, reds possess the greatest appetites—for treasure, food, and destruction. Fortunately for living creatures residing within the territories of red dragons, the powerful fires within their stomachs allow red dragons to consume and digest nearly every non-poisonous substance. These internal supernatural fires are snuffed only when the dragons die, and allow reds to eat nearly any animal, plant, or mineral to gain sustenance.

Every culture bears some variation of the Dragon and the Princess story, wherein a foul dragon demands a beautiful maiden princess as payment to cease his systematic destruction of the kingdom. In various cultures the princess's part is recast, but she is always a maiden

and always offered as a payment to appease a terrible and frightening dragon. This most iconic of evil draconic traits belongs specifically to red dragons, who frequently exert their dominance over their territories via terrible rampages that can last on and off for entire months but who suddenly stop if offered something of exquisite and irreplaceable value to the suffering people, whether or not the dragons have any use for such a thing—red dragons view their slaves as easily replaceable items of their hoards, and not as thinking, feeling creatures.

While dragons consider humans and elves playthings or replaceable treasures (at best), they do not think so highly of any other non-draconic creatures. They actively despise dwarves (with whom they frequently share their home mountains) and usually attack them on sight and without provocation. Mortals other than humans, elves, and dwarves seem beneath their notice. Red dragons occasionally treat with efreet, but any agreements or deals made with such creatures seldom last longer than a few years. Red dragons are the greatest of all chromatics, and they never fail to remind lesser beings of that fact. Their incredible draconic hubris exerts itself in their every dealing, and reds find utterly preposterous the notion that a creature who is not a gold dragon might be, in even an insignificant way, somehow superior to their own prowess. The mindset of red dragons simply does not allow them to fathom what they consider such a ludicrous idea. In general, they are absolutely correct in this regard, but enough exceptions exist that overconfident reds do occasionally fall to dragonslayers.

With the exception of the ever-more-powerful golds, red dragons also consider all other dragons beneath themselves. They seldom practice much patience for their lesser kin, and many celebrate whenever metallics die, but red dragons nonetheless extend their blanket of draconic pride to encompass all dragons—dragons are godlike compared to mortal insects, and reds are merely the top of the hierarchy. This pride does not prevent red dragons from mistreating or outright killing other dragons, but it does grant them offense whenever non-dragons take down one of their kin—regardless of age or scale color. Of course, the extent to which they pursue draconic vengeance depends greatly on the type of dragon slain and distance the reds must go in order to exact their revenge—they do not see themselves as the avengers of their race, but they may take action if a known dragonslayer enters their territory.

When dealing alone with gold dragons—even those younger or otherwise weaker than themselves—red dragons put aside their arrogance and act respectfully, at least to a point. Red dragons both hate and admire their gold brethren, as gold dragons alone are, in many cases, more powerful than themselves. The admiration of reds for the power of golds sometimes leads the latter to attempt redemption of the former, usually with poor results. Many creatures, including lesser dragons, fail to understand the significance of the love/hate relationship between golds and reds, and except for draconic historians, few know of the ancient ties between these greatest of all dragon kinds.

The connection between golds and reds began thousands of millennia ago, when the first mortal dragons (all of whom bore metallic scales) hatched under the watchful eyes of Apsu and Tiamat (who at the time bore no names). Then came the dragon-god Dahak, and with him was birthed treachery. Apsu and his children battled Dahak, but at the moment of their victory Dahak the False Wyrm called out to his mother for aid, and Tiamat promised to those grievously hurt by Dahak to relieve them of their pain if they would rise up against their father and brothers and fight on Dahak's behalf. Most of the dragons flatly refused. The first dragon to acquiesce, a mortally wounded gold whose original name

time has forgotten, later became the first red dragon, who took the name Nerothroc and founded the pure red bloodline. Corrupted by Dahak's betrayal and Tiamat's gift of unholy power, the traitorous golds lost their sheen and became the covetous, hate-filled reds. And in the many long millennia since, they have not yet forgotten nor forgiven Dahak for his treachery, and as a result of what they see as a divine conspiracy, reds remain the least religious of all dragons.

Some red dragons grow so large and powerful, so unbelievably aged and bedecked in breathtaking splendor, that they exceed even the greatest of gold dragons in size and raw destructive strength. These monumentally rare few are truly epic in size and prowess, and the entire history of the world records only a handful of these splendid examples of draconic fury and power. The ability to grow beyond their kind's physical limitations seems to exist only within the pure-blooded clan of Nerothroc. Of the half-dozen reds of this magnificent size known to history, King Daralathyxl is one of the greater, but perhaps not the greatest.

Hoard and Home

Red dragons covet like no others, and as a result of their greed and their ability to acquire what they seek, red dragons are typically among the wealthiest of dragons. Their immense coin beds can sometimes fill vast chambers larger than most human buildings, and the other treasures they keep put to shame some of the lesser human museums of the world. Red dragons love all forms of treasure, from coins and gems to jewelry and art objects, from masterfully crafted weapons and armor to fantastically powerful magic items and even lesser artifacts.

More than all the shiny trinkets and beds of coins they keep, however, red dragons covet most those treasures that live. Like black dragons, red dragons keep slaves—usually elven or human maidens. Unlike their cousins, however, red dragons do not subject their slaves to intentional torture, disfigurement, and torment. Red dragons prefer their slaves alive and physically (if not emotionally) sound. They consider their slaves delicate treasures to be admired and enjoyed, and when one breaks or loses its beauty, it is discarded (or eaten) and replaced.

As dangerous as red dragons are personally, their lairs often prove at least as lethal to would-be dragonslayers and other foolish trespassers. When they can, most red dragons prefer to live within volcanoes, the intense heat of which provides them comfort. Unfortunately, the maidens red dragons so prize cannot survive within volcanic heat, and thus the dragons must delve, find, or force slaves to excavate comfortable chambers far enough away from the magma cores to allow their slaves to survive in comfort. The lairs of red dragons therefore tend to consist of numerous chambers connected by long tunnels of lesser size (but always large enough for the dragons to squeeze through, unless they possess other means by which they can reduce their size). When volcanoes are not available or do not suit their needs, for whatever reasons, red dragons live under other mountains. These lairs are characteristcially more compact than volcanic homes, but they prove no less dangerous to uninvited guests.

Red dragons protect their lairs with a variety of defensive magics as well as mundane traps and environmental hazards. Those lairs found within active volcanoes always incorporate magma in their defenses. Even those lairs that do not possess molten rock as a natural hazard contain enough traps and magical dissuasions that most aspiring dragonslayers never make it far enough into a red dragon's lair to actually meet the dragon. Concealed pits, deadfalls, entire hallways filled with a succession of various traps and warded with *antimagic fields*, secret doors, mindless guardians (especially gelatinous cubes), magical *symbols*, *alarm*, and *guards and wards* all make red dragon lairs unpleasant places to invade. Worst of all, though, is that those trespassers who penetrate far enough into a red dragon's lair must face the most lethal defensive measure of all—the dragon itself.

The dragons keep their slaves in side chambers with doors operable only from the outside (and usually possessing impressive arrays of concealment magic, mundane traps, and other forms of dissuasion). The rooms in which red dragons keep their harems are filled with comforts the young women cannot hope to find outside, but they remain nothing more than luxurious prisons. Red dragons hide their slaves so well that many dragonslayers never suspect such hidden chambers even exist, leaving behind sometimes dozens of forgotten young men and women who slowly starve to death within their comfortable prisons.

Campaign Role

Red dragons epitomize evil dragonkind. They are furious destroyers and immoral deceivers. They lie, they cheat, and they kill. Depending on the needs they fill, red dragons can act as near-mindless rampaging destroyers, leveling small towns or whole districts of cities with fire and claw and magic, or they can serve as careful masterminds, hatching terrible plots of vengeance and greed.

As mentioned elsewhere, red dragons are what people think of when they hear the term "dragon." They breathe fire, kidnap maidens, and raze human settlements. Despite their undeniably glorious power and destructive potentials, red dragons are not all-powerful. They make mistakes. On rare occasions, they even lose battles against mortal beings. These failures remain extremely rare, however, and most aspiring dragonslayers will face

the same red dragon multiple times before any sort of climactic, final battle occurs. Although red dragons are not cowards, they do possess an extremely developed sense of survival, and they only battle to the death in their homes (and not always then). In other words, even if they for some reason do not present much of a challenge to defeat, red dragons should prove frustratingly difficult to kill.

On Golarion

Red dragons garner a great deal of attention. Their brilliant scales and powerful tempers make them easy to spot, and the destruction wrought by younger reds while hunting or exerting their control over their territories gives those who hate and hunt dragons ample opportunity to locate them. Providing proper due to the fame of red dragons throughout the years would fill a hundred pages, but several of the notable red dragons considered active on Golarion are summarized below.

On the Isle of Kortos, in areas not entirely controlled by Absalom, a few young red dragons (as well as a handful of blues) vie for control. Although Absalom has considered sending dragon hunters to the area, for the most part its leaders remain content to wait and allow the dragons to kill off one another. For more information, see *Guide to Absalom*.

Since 4569 AR, the mysterious Glarataxus has plagued Korvosa and her holdings, appearing for several months at a time to torment and destroy before retiring to his still-unknown lair to rest for several decades. Attempts to appease Glarataxus continue to fail, as calls for him to negotiate continue to fail. It was recently revealed by the brass dragon Thehydrax that Glarataxus is likely deaf, so Korvosa readies for his next return with large slate tablets and oversized sticks of chalk. For more information, see *Guide to Korvosa*.

The dragon Asuulek torments Osirion from his volcanic home. Attempts to infiltrate his known lair so far have all met with failure, with only one survivor among the dozens of glory-seeking dragon hunters returning to report on the lair's seemingly impassable defenses. For more information, seen *Pathfinder Companion: Osirion, Land of the Pharaohs*.

Of course, no description of red dragons on Golarion would be complete without mention of the magnificent King Daralathyxl, who ostensibly rules the Five Kings Mountains. His majestic and near-unfathomable power requires its own tome to give him just dues.

Names

Many red dragon names incorporate the phrases "dara" or "thys," which mean "terrible" and "great," respectively. Other than this simple convention, red dragon names vary greatly but many of them are overly long, complicated, and difficult to pronounce. As reds age, they tend to add to their names, dropping off syllables to add new ones, and slowly growing out their monikers to ridiculous lengths. Truly powerful and magnificent reds, such as the King, sometimes reverse this tendency in their later years, reducing the complexity of their names to something easily remembered and feared for centuries to come.

Red dragon names: Akdarathys, Drathyskith, Kratharak, Sykaralyn, Varantulian

Daralathyxl

Lairing in the northwest corner of Andoran, somewhere northeast of Droskar's Crag, is one of the largest, oldest, and most powerful dragons in all of Golarion. Many call Daralathyxl the Sixth King of the Five Kings Mountains, and those who meet him are advised to address him at least as "king," although he seems to prefer "emperor" or "god." His influence extends for hundreds of miles, and at least a dozen other powerful chromatic dragons live within his vast territory.

Scholars both draconic and mortal estimate his age in excess of 2 millennia, and although the frequency of his appearances decreases with each passing century, only fools openly speculate that he is weakening in his advancing age. Indeed, too many whispers of his death, departure, or infirmity seem to summon his wrath, and thus the long-suffering people of Darkmoon Vale and other areas near Droskar's Crag speak of the king only in quietly reverent terms, hoping their respect continues to hold him at bay.

When he does stir, Daralathyxl spreads terror across northwestern Andoran, southern Isger, and southwestern Druma. He demands supplication in the form of coin, treasure, and maidens (elves are his preference). Those communities that do not placate his rage quickly enough find themselves engulfed in flame, their towns set to ruins, and their cities weakened. When Daralathyxl stirs, death follows.

For more information, see *Guide to Darkmoon Vale*.

Daralathyxl **CR 26**

Male great wyrm red dragon
CE Colossal dragon (fire)
Init +6; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., *detect scrying, greater arcane sight,* keen senses; Listen +55, Spot +55
Aura frightful presence (360 ft., DC 40)

DEFENSE

AC 53, touch 10, flat-footed 49; +2 deflection against good or lawful creatures; can't be surprised or flat-footed (from *foresight*)
(+4 armor, +2 Dex, +2 insight, +39 natural, +4 shield, –8 size)
hp 740 (40d12+480)
Fort +32, **Ref** +26, **Will** +32; *spell turning* (1d4+6 spell levels); +7 resistance vs. spells and spell-like abilities, +2 resistance against good or lawful creatures
DR 20/magic and 10/adamantine (first 150 damage); **Immune**

acid (first 120 damage), cold (first 120 damage), electricity (first 120 damage), fire, sonic (first 120 damage), sleep, paralysis, mind-affecting effects, information-gathering divination spells; **SR** 32; **Weaknesses** vulnerability to cold

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 200 ft. (clumsy)

Melee bite +52 (6d8+19) and
2 claws +50 (6d6+9) and
2 wings +49 (4d6+9) and
tail slap +49 (4d8+28)

Space 30 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft. (30 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks breath weapon (70-ft. cone of fire, 24d10, Reflex half DC 42), crush 4d8+28 (Reflex DC 42 or be pinned), tail sweep 2d8+28 (Reflex half DC 42)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):
13/day—*locate object*
3/day—*suggestion* (DC 25)
1/day—*find the path, discern location*

Spells Known (CL 19th):
9th (4/day; 1 cast)—*foresight, time stop*
8th (7/day; 3 cast)—*mind blank, moment of prescience* (+19), *protection from spells*
7th (7/day; 1 cast)—*greater arcane sight, greater teleport, limited wish*
6th (7/day; 1 cast)—*antimagic field, greater dispel magic, mass bear's endurance*
5th (7/day)—*break enchantment, heal, prying eyes, symbol of pain* (DC 25)
4th (8/day; 2 cast)—*detect scrying, polymorph, spell immunity, stoneskin*
3rd (8/day; 4 cast)—*magic circle against good, protection from energy, reduce dragon, summon monster III*
2nd (8/day; 5 cast)—*bull's strength, cat's grace, eagle's splendor, fox's cunning, owl's wisdom*
1st (8/day)—*mage armor, magic missile, protection from good, protection from law, shield*
0 (6/day)—*dancing lights, detect magic, detect poison, mage hand, mending, message, open/close, prestidigitation, resistance*

TACTICS

Before Combat Daralathyxl seldom faces a creature foolish enough to willingly fight him, but nonetheless the king remains a careful combatant. Every day he casts *detect scrying* and *moment of prescience*. If he suspects a battle is imminent, he casts *bull's strength, cat's grace, eagle's splendor, foresight, fox's cunning, greater arcane sight, mass bear's endurance, owl's wisdom, protection from energy* (acid, cold, electricity, and sonic), *protection from good, protection from law, protection from spells, spell turning*, and *stoneskin*.

During Combat Daralathyxl attempts to end battles quickly and decisively. He casts *time stop* to give himself extra actions. When even these tactics cannot dissuade would-be dragonslayers from leaving him be, he alternates using his breath weapon with making full attacks. Once he views his foes and sees what kinds of spells they prefer, he casts *spell immunity* on himself at his first opportunity.

Morale Outside of his lair, Daralathyxl takes no risks with his own life. If reduced to below 700 hit points, he casts *time stop* and then usually two *heal* spells and whatever other defensive spells he has time for. Once he returns to combat, he battles again until reduced to 700 hit points, continuing this cycle until he has only one 9th-level or one 5th-level spell remaining, at which time he casts *greater teleport* and returns to his lair. Inside his lair, itself a deadly maze impervious to scrying, he waits and licks his wounds.

Base Statistics Without his defensive and divination spells, Daralathyxl's stats are as follows: **Init** +4, **Aura** frightful presence DC 38; **AC** 41, touch 2, flat-footed 41; **hp** 660 (40d12+400); **Fort** +32, **Ref** +22, **Will** +30; **Melee** bite +50 (6d8+17) and 2 claws +48 (6d6+8) and 2 wings +47 (4d6+8) and tail slap +47 (4d8+25); Special Attacks breath weapon DC 40, crush 4d8+25 (Reflex half DC 40 or be pinned), tail sweep 2d8+25 (Reflex half DC 40); Grp +73; **Str** 45, **Dex** 10, **Con** 31, **Int** 26, **Wis** 27, **Cha** 26 **Skills** Appraise +39, Bluff +48, Concentration +40, Diplomacy +38, Escape Artist +30, Intimidate +48, Jump +47, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (geography) +41, Knowledge (history) +36, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +26, Knowledge (religion) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +26, Listen +53, Search +49, Sense Motive +38, Spellcraft +36, Spot +53, Use Magic Device +23

STATISTICS

Str 49, **Dex** 14, **Con** 35, **Int** 30, **Wis** 31, **Cha** 30

Base Atk +40; **Grp** +75

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw), Wingover

Skills Appraise +41, Bluff +50, Concentration +42, Diplomacy +40, Escape Artist +32, Intimidate +50, Jump +49, Knowledge (arcana) +38, Knowledge (geography) +43, Knowledge (history) +38, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +28, Knowledge (religion) +38, Knowledge (the planes) +28, Listen +55, Search +51, Sense Motive +40, Spellcraft +38, Spot +55, Use Magic Device +25

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Ignan, Infernal

by Gregg Sharp

The Ecology of the Red Dragon

The color of blood and fire

The slender, middle-aged man considered the question for a moment, then pulled a map from a drawer and unfolded it on top of his desk. Placing bric-a-brac on the corners, he glanced from it to the young men who faced him in his study.

"You're sure that you want to hunt down a dragon?" he asked quietly. "Isn't there something smaller and less offensive you could go after, then work your way up?" He jabbed a finger down at a wooded area on the map. "Now, here is reputed to be the lair of a wondrous sort of being known as a cyclopskin. Much less impressive than a dragon, to be sure, but not as deadly. This cyclopskin—"

The brawny youth who seemed to be the leader placed a hand on his sword. "You calling me a coward, Nimodes?" he asked.

The sage hesitated and sighed, but he never looked up. He adjusted his spectacles. "Well, if it must be a dragon. . ." He bent over the map. "Now, there are three dragons known to have lairs within two months' march of here. . ."

A gangling youth moaned. "Two months! Haven't you got anything closer?"

"Sorry," Nimodes said, though truly he didn't sound sorry. "You take a dragon where it lies. Dragons are so voracious that they cover wide areas for their hunting grounds. When you're dealing with the big dragons, this range encompasses entire kingdoms as their own territories, so they never run out of food or loot. A wizard I know who lectures on the ecologies of various monsters says that dragons have no ecology: They ravage it. Now, if you want to meet some great wizard and have him bring a dragon to you, I can arrange for that. I'm merely a hedge wizard and a scholar, but I have some friends who could do this. Of course, it will cost you much. . . ."

After a short silence, the sage coughed and pointed to the map, to a range of mountains surrounded by forest. "Here is the nearest true dragon, in an ice cave atop the highest summit around. His human name is Frostbite, a friend to elf and dwarf. He is huge and of the silver breed. He hoards only knowledge, and this is the treasure that most seek from him."

"I think that one would not be worth the trouble." The brawny leader said casually. He had lost interest after hearing the words "hoards only knowledge." The sage noted this and dropped his gaze back to the map. It was as he'd expected.

"The second dragon is probably not worth it, either;' he said, "as she is employed by the City-State of Helsford as a guardian, and even has a rank in the army there. She is Frostbite's daughter. Here, then. Look over on the other end of this range, where another sort of dragon makes his lair. Pyre is his name, a red dragon. If I recall the passage correctly, *The Lorebook of Aramar* writes of him:

> "Red blood his color and delight,
> Red flame his breath that burns the night,
> Long scimitars he has for claws,
> A fang-ringed cavern 'twixt his jaws,
> Red armored is this deadly Pyre,
> Who stole our gold to stoke his fire;
> A hundred men sought out his lair —
> Not one did Pyre the dragon spare."

At the mention of gold, the youths smiled and nudged one another. They didn't seem at all bothered by the last two lines — except, noted Nimodes, for one youth in the rear, who had an intense, bookish look about him. The sage briefly wondered if the youths had some powerful talisman or magical weapon that gave them such confidence. He immediately rejected the idea. They had nothing but youth and enthusiasm — and a fatal naivete. Nimodes vaguely recognized most of them as being of farming families. Nothing wrong with that, but challenging a red dragon wasn't in their league. Damn those lying adventurers, he thought, who had passed through the region last month. Loose talk about mounds of gold and easy victories had obviously borne results that he should have foreseen. These boys were going to die.

The brawny youth grinned widely. "Pyre. That sounds like the dragon for us. What can you tell us of it?"

"Him. A point in your favor." A worthless one, Nimodes added mentally. "Of the red dragons, it is the female which is the most dangerous, for she is less likely to bargain or surrender under duress.' This does not mean that males are weak. The city that sent the small army after the gold was burned to the ground shortly thereafter. Only a handful of the residents survived the firestorm. That was two hundred years ago; since dragons grow throughout their lifespans, Pyre is all the mightier now — though perhaps weaker, too, as he is at least six centuries old.[2] He may be even older."

Much of the grinning ceased, but the youths did their best to look only mildly concerned at the news. The one youth in the rear who seemed to have doubts before now appeared concerned but very thoughtful. For some reason, Nimodes was pleased to see it.

"Oh, to be sure," Nimodes said smoothly, "the red dragon has its weaknesses. Pyre is old and getting to be slow, despite his incredible power. Sadly, his age has not diminished his might once he brings it to bear. He may yet have other vulnerabilities peculiar to him, if legends are to be believed."

"What sort of vulnerabilities?" It was the

Illustration by Ken Widing

youth in the back of the group. Nimodes noted from the boy's clothing that he was probably from one of the towns near the Greenwitch River. The sage smiled. He had hated to think that the brawny lad was the brains of the group. Maybe the boys had a chance of surviving an encounter with Pyre, if not being talked out of it altogether in time. He certainly had no hope that they'd defeat the monster itself.

"Dragons, particularly the older ones, sleep a great deal — rather like house cats, I suppose." Nimodes sat back, looking past the group as he thought. "It is during sleep that older dragons are especially vulnerable, but only if their senses are on the wane. Their sleep is very deep, and they dream a tremendous amount, but dragons rarely speak of their dreams. Some say that dragons do not dream so much as they remember in full detail earlier experiences in their lives, rather like elves. Some texts say that they experience past lives in these slumbers, which accounts for a slight disorientation when they awaken." A dragon may sleep for extremely long periods of time, even hundreds of days. Sadly, awakening from such a long sleep leaves a dragon in a great hunger. When it awakens, it yearns to lay waste to its surroundings."

"You said something about vulnerabilities that were Pyre's alone," reminded the youth in the back.

Nimodes blinked. "Hmm. Yes. Well, during Pyre's attack upon Valesburgh two hundred years past, he was said to have lost an eye to a machine-hurled bolt. A survivor of the battle saw the dragon bleeding from his head, roaring as he clutched his right eye with a foreclaw. Pyre is now many hundreds of years old, and even a dragon's senses won't improve forever. He might be blind now."

The youths grinned at the news. "Another weakness of the red dragon is its greed," Nimodes continued. "A red dragon seeks gold above all other things in life, for gold gives it status among other red dragons. The male red dragon's second great love is to eat, the third is to sleep.' But a love of gold will drive a male red dragon to any lengths. That focus has been used to their disadvantage in traps and trickery against them on a few occasions, though a vengeful red dragon is the worst of enemies. It is best to kill them swiftly rather than to tease or bargain with them; they are too dangerous."

The scholarly looking youth spoke up again. "I have heard that some dragons somehow resist spells."

Nimodes instantly placed the boy. Rumor said a river-town wizard had recently turned his apprentice loose. "True enough. Some are indeed able to throw off spells, but they cannot negate the existence of magic itself. They are merely tougher than we are, and they are partly magical in nature. Speaking of which, you should know that some dragons have gained from their parents knowledge of spell-casting. Dragons that were abandoned at birth cannot even speak, much less cast spells, but they are rare ones in these lands. Pyre is the hatchling of Infernalle, a female dragon who would not accept that any offspring of hers would be anything less than a menace to civilization. It is known that Pyre favors fire-based spells — ah, I had forgotten to say, yes, Pyre is a spell-caster, and he was very good at it, too. I cannot say how good he is at present; he has not been seen in some time. Pyre is said in legend to rejoice in the casting of fiery spells, always in the service of destruction."

"Magic is of little consequence to cold steel," sneered the brawny youth as he drew his blade to brandish it. Nimodes noticed that he held his blade in the manner of a club. A few rust splotches marred the steel, and there were notches along its length. Not a magical sword, though one that had seen quite a bit of use in its long-ago day. Nimodes resolved to talk to the apprentice later, privately if possible; it was a shame to throw away talent.

"Pyre uses magic, yes, and he breathes a cone of flame. His senses are exceptionally acute. Should he taste your blood, he can track you by scent to the ends of the world.[5] His bite is powerful, his claws can hold a target fast, and his cone of fire can cleanse all remains away. Pyre is quite capable of melting away even . . . ah, nevermind. I know — fire is of little consequence to cold steel." Nimodes wished he could smile, but it was too painful.

The apprentice spoke up again. "Do your books mention any of Pyre's habits or traits that could be exploited?" At a bored look from the leader, he added, "No point in spending more time than we have to."

Nimodes nodded, pleased. "All red dragons share certain traits with the common house cat. They play with their food, like to sleep near a heat source, bury their wastes, and hate getting wet. Pyre, as with some of his kind, likes to talk with his food, meaning those who are unfortunate enough to be captured by him. One text of mine claims that Pyre is fond of riddles and jokes. To win a riddling contest with Pyre, he must be unable to guess the answer of one of yours while you must answer all three of his. It is unlikely, should Pyre gain the upper hand, that all his prisoners would escape. Perhaps one in ten could bargain his way out. Indeed, Pyre has a unique single trait which irritates others of his own kind: a fondness for puns. The worse the pun, the better Pyre likes it. A jester named Fered the Moor once managed to get three adventurers out with a single pun. Of course, Fered was legendary among jesters across this whole-"

"This is getting boring," interrupted the brawny youth. "We don't plan to let the dragon get the upper hand. Since you've been paid for information, make it useful. Where can we strike the most telling damage?"

The sage looked up into the leader's eyes, stared hard at him, then turned away. "As you wish. If you have the chance and can strike there, hit the eyes. A direct hit upon the eyes will cause any dragon to draw back. If the blow doesn't go deep, the dragon will go berserk and scour the area with flames and claw. It is told that the red dragon Firetongue was struck so, and only one returned to tell the tale. That one escaped when the enraged dragon brought the cavern down on her attackers and herself. Any dragon fears the loss of its senses. Blindness is the worst fate that a dragon could imagine, worse even than the loss of its wings and limbs. A blind dragon is at the mercy of all other creatures, vulnerable when it was once all-powerful; it cannot bear it."

"As for exploitable fears, Pyre has none that anyone knows about. Perhaps he has only the one common to all dragons — fear for his own life. Dragons are cowards at heart . . . but you must be very strong to bring this fear out." I musn't encourage them, Nimodes thought. "Fear, however, will certainly be your problem."

"And why is that, mighty wizard?" sneered the leader.

Nimodes just looked back, refusing to be baited. "Most dragons project fear itself as an effect of having a magical metabolism. This is the dragonaura, a literal cloud of terror which surrounds the dragon when it wants to show itself in its glory. Some with special training, such as knights and paladins, can throw off this effect, and certain magical protections can also negate this terror-cloud.

"Yet even the dragonaura is pathetic compared to the most valuable and critical trait of dragons like Pyre — their cleverness, pure and simple. Pyre has lived a long and full life, and has learned every trick in the book. His lair will be filled with traps and perils, ready to be unleashed at a moment's notice.' A red dragon on the southern coast once located casks of alcohol so that they could be shattered with a swipe of his tail, sending alcohol down onto his cavern floor. One breath would have ignited the whole cavern in a fiery blast that would not have harmed the dragon greatly. He was a clever dragon."

"What happened to him?" asked the youth in the back.

Nimodes smiled and glanced at something on his wall. "Oh, the dragon ran into adventurers more clever than he."

The apprentice cleared his throat. "What can you tell us about what a red dragon eats and drinks?"

"Nothing that can be poisoned in a way that will affect the dragon, except perhaps in centuries. The red eats what it can catch and kill." As for drink, alcohol is its preference, though it will never become drunk. Water is taken in small doses, as living prey is moist enough for its needs. A dragon need not eat or drink during the time its sleeps, regardless of the time

involved, and it suffers little even from a loss of fresh air while asleep. One red dragon was buried by a rock and mud slide while asleep, only to awaken and dig its way out later in the year. When it does eat, the red dragon can consume twice its body weight before dragging itself off to digest the meal."

"And where will its greatest treasures be?" asked the brawny youth loudly, not liking to be left out of the conversation.

"Now, that depends on what you mean by treasures," said the sage. "Coins, of course, make up a red dragon's bed. Gems and other precious materials will be placed around its lair in highly visible locations, pleasing to the eye. Unlike the silver, the red dragon collects little art. Unlike the gold, it rarely shows a preference for gems, which the gold dragon eats. Unlike the vain brass, the red does not usually surround itself with reflective surfaces. Items used only by men, such as magical armor, are often placed at the back of the lair, to draw attackers in with their own greed. Knowing greed as well as a dragon does, it is no wonder it can use the same to trap its prey.

"Magical items are separated from their owners before the latter are devoured, and these items will most likely be in a side cave. These are trophies of the kill, and they are watched over and counted almost continuously. With red dragons, one faces the possibility that a hollow has been dug into the rock, the treasures placed within, and other rocks forced into place with the dragon's massive strength."

Nimodes sighed. "And that is all I know to tell you. If you have more money, I could research the topic in the library at the Castle Mardelaine, where-"

The leader cut him off. "That's enough, old man," he said with a wave of his hand. "We have what we need. Good day." He turned and forced his way through the group of youths around him, and they followed after him, muttering strategies among themselves. Nimodes watched them go, wondering if he should stop them. They were fools who had as much chance of killing Pyre with those swords and farm implements as they would with snowballs. He thought, then slowly released his grip on the arms of his chair. No, they would never listen. So be it. It was a waste.

Then he noticed the apprentice, who had stayed behind. The boy was staring at the object on the wall at which Nimodes had glanced earlier. "A trophy of sorts?" said the youth with interest.

A jagged yellow tooth was in a bottle on the shelf. A full five hands long, it came to a sharp carnivore's point. Nimodes looked at it and smiled faintly. "A relic of my adventuresome youth."

The apprentice laughed then. "Perhaps I'll bring you another — not now, but in time. I sense that I should study this adventure before us a while longer before we set out. If the others leave without me –well . . ." The boy sighed and shrugged. "I wish them well, and they will be missed. But I want to do this right the first time. Good day, Nimodes, and my thanks."

Staring at the closed door a moment later, Nimodes was lost in thought. He had a feeling he would indeed see the apprentice again. He knew it in his bones.

Footnotes

1. Female red dragons, at the DM's option, may be harder to subdue than male ones. When attacking to subdue, take one and a half times the female dragon's hit-point total to calculate her effective hit-point value for subdual purposes. Thus, a 44-hp female red dragon effectively has 66 hp for purposes of subdual combat; if 33 hp subdual damage is inflicted on her, there is only a 50% chance that she will be subdued. Double her hit-point total for subdual purposes if the female red dragon is defending her young or eggs. Female red dragons will not listen to bribery, though flattery may impress them.

2. Like many dragons, red dragons shed their skins as they pass into each new life stage. Red dragons eat their old scaled skins, so as to gain certain nutrients from them. A very young red dragon is about 6′ long; between its fifth and sixth years, it grows to 12′, then gains another 12′ in length for every stage of life thereafter. Thus, an adult red dragon is 48′ long. The size differences of "small," "average," and "huge" refer to the dragon's body mass; a small dragon is thin and wirey, and a huge dragon is thick-bodied, muscular, or fat, with length remaining constant for all body types.

Red dragons of particularly advanced age (600 years old or more) suffer debilitating effects from their age. Their chances of sleeping increase by 10% per decade thereafter, with additional reductions of ½" per decade in the range of their ability to *detect hidden or invisible creatures,* and of 5′ per decade in the range of their infravision. Dragons that are 700 years old or more have a 95% chance to be found sleeping, and have infravision to a range of 10′; they cannot *detect hidden or invisible creatures* except within a range of 3". Their chances of death per decade after their 700th year are 5% per decade, cumulatively. Dragons that can cast spells suffer a 5% spell-failure penalty for every decade of age past their 600th year, to a 95% spell-failure maximum. For a few weeks prior to its death, a red dragon may become senile and insane, and is especially dangerous as it becomes so unpredictable.

3. Dragons of ancient age are disoriented when awakened from sleep. Allow a loss of initiative when appropriate for their response to an attack or confrontation if suddenly awakened. A dragon older than 600 years loses intiative for the round following its awakening and makes no attacks in the round it was awakened.

4. Female red dragons differ from males in their preferences. Females like to fight, first and foremost, and especially love to fight females of their own kind. They are even more territorial than males and less tolerant of other species. A male might be bribed to look the other way while a "morsel" escapes, while a female will take bribe and briber both. The female is also the aggressor in mating. It has happened that when young dragons leave their nest, the female becomes temporarily insane and slays the male. She then devours her former mate and any of the hatchlings which return. After fighting comes an interest in food, then in gold and treasures, the female liking reflective surfaces. Female red dragons have only a 15% chance to be caught sleeping.

5. A red dragon that has tasted someone's blood can track that person as can a ranger of a level equal to the dragon's age stage, using the information in *Unearthed Arcana,* page 21. Thus an adult red dragon has a 60% chance of tracking a wounded victim. Using smell, sight, and hearing alone, the dragon has one-half this chance of tracking someone that it has previously detected but not wounded.

6. Dragons value their sense of sight highly, even above their senses of smell and hearing. A blind dragon makes all attacks at -4 to hit and will retreat whenever possible from determined opposition.

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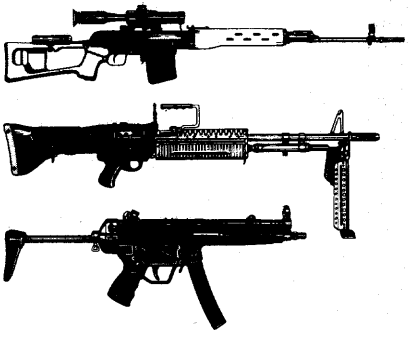

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If cornered, the dragon snaps at every sound and scent, but may be more than willing to bargain or plead for its life. Dragons without senses of smell or hearing are not affected in this manner. Dragons may be struck in their eyes only if attacked while sleeping. There is a 10% chance per level of the attacker that a blow aimed at a dragon's eyes will drive into the most sensitive part and not be turned aside by the tough eyelids (this chance rises to 20% per level of the attacker if he is a fighter or cavalier, or one of the subclasses thereof). At least 8 hp damage must be done to permanently blind the dragon in one eye; otherwise, the dragon is blinded for only 2-5 rounds, then has a -2 to hit for 5-10 days thereafter, then sees and fights normally.

7. Some dragons, notably the green, red, bronze, and white, swallow small stones and bits of metal which go into a small second stomach. This is similar to the gizzard of a bird, needed because these dragons are unable to chew food. These coins and other bric-a-brac aid digestion and are eventually left in waste products. Many dragon breeds, particularly the fastidious red, bury these wastes outside their lairs. Red dragon wastes, in addition to including small bits of metal, contain large amounts of sulfur and potassium nitrate. Thus, a sharp odor is a clue to the location of such a burial spot. To the surprise of many, the presence of sparks or fire, whether from a shovel striking a rock or from a dragon's fiery breath, causes these sites to suddenly explode with tremendous violence. Red dragons have used this physical property of their wastes as a secret weapon; they lure a group of attackers to either dig into a waste-pit or stand over it as the dragon breathes upon the ground. The explosion produced, as a rule of thumb, does half as many hit points of damage as the dragon's own normal hit points, or one-quarter of this amount if a saving throw vs. breath weapon is made. The radius of effect equals the dragon's hit points expressed in feet. Red dragons, given their tough hides and resistance to fire, take only one-quarter or one-eighth damage, depending on their saving throws if they are within the area of effect.

8. Since dragons are reluctant to discuss their dietary habits (beyond their threats to eat those who inquire into such matters), little information is available to PCs on this topic. Red dragons are, as everyone knows, carnivorous. Also, thanks to their magical metabolism, red dragons can go for prolonged periods without actually eating (this is how they can sleep for durations of 5-500 days). If awakened after a sleep lasting at least 30 days, a red dragon will do anything to get food before performing most other actions. Red dragons have a +4 bonus to their saving throws vs. poison and take only half damage from it (or lose half their normal hit-point maximum if a failure to save means death). Ω

SAGE ADVICE

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., write to:

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We return to the D&D® game system in this column, with bits of advice for D&D® game players and Dungeon Masters. Page references are for the most recent editions of the various rule books — 1983 and later unless specified otherwise.

Campaigns

What do you think of house rules?

House rules are fine — sometimes. House rules are rotten at other times. Here are some of the key rules about house rules:

1. Make sure they are really necessary.
2. Make sure everybody knows about them ahead of time.
3. Enforce them consistently. They should be written down and used just like the published rules.
4. Change them promptly when they don't work out.
5. Remember that your house rules go only with your "house." Don't assume that they are in effect when you play in another game, and never give another DM a hard time about not using them. No set of house rules is better than the published rules or another DM's house rules — they're just different.

My friends and I are starting in a new D&D® game campaign, but the only characters we have are from an old AD&D® game campaign. Can we just transfer these characters to the new campaign?

We don't recommend transferring AD&D® game characters to the D&D® game; create new D&D® game characters instead. The two game systems involved are only superficially alike.

Is it okay for a player to have more than one character in a campaign?

Many players have more than one character in a given campaign. This allows a choice of characters for any particular adventure, and it insures that the player has a character to play if one of his characters gets involved in a prolonged adventure or project. Some DMs allow players to play more than one character at a time, but we recommend this when only a few people are playing; otherwise, it becomes too complicated to manage.

Characters

Is it possible for demi-humans to follow other classes after they have reached their maximum level? The notes in the demi-human section of the Companion Set *Players Companion* (page 29) seem to indicate that this is so.

Demi-humans never follow other classes. The notes that have you confused refer to the increased fighting abilities that demi-humans can gain after they have reached maximum level.

What are the "attack ranks" (A-M) noted in the *Players Companion*, pages 30-31?

"Attack Rank" refers to the column of the combat chart that the character may use. This allows demi-humans with extra experience to fight almost as well as fighters. The small letters (a-d) refer to other special abilities that demi-humans can get after reaching maximum level. These special abilities include multiple attacks per melee round and the other fighter combat options *(Players Companion,* page 18), and resistance to various attack forms. A careful rereading of the demi-humans section *(Players Companion,* pages 29-31) should clear up your confusion.

How long does lycanthropy take to set in? Can it be cured? Can a player character who is turned into a lycanthrope continue play?

Lycanthropy has an onset time of 2-24 (2d12) days, and until that time this magical disease is curable by a cleric of 11th or higher level. Once the change occurs, however, the afflicted character becomes a DM-controlled monster.

What happens when a cleric turns undead? Does the turning have a duration?

The undead run away from the cleric for one turn, then avoid the cleric for a full day, unless the cleric attacks them.

Other than for weapon mastery, what good are experience points

Silver Dragons

Silver dragons epitomize all that is good and holy in the spheres. Even more than treasure, they crave guidance and law. They live by rules placed upon them by trusted allies because they hunger for absolutes. Some humans mistakenly call silver dragons the paladins of dragons, but doing so ignores the very fact that silver dragons existed long before paladins and follow codes more limiting than humans can fathom. Silver dragons are not the paladins of their race; paladins are the pale imitators of silver dragons.

—*Drakanav Codex*, Chapter 19

Often called the paladins of dragons, silvers embody the loftiest ideals, such as justice, honor, valor, and mercy. Silver dragons do not hesitate to strike down irredeemable evil, nor do they fail to stay their magnificently lethal claws when foes beg for clemency. As beacons of virtue and gifted with the courage of righteousness, silver dragons draw others around them in times of war. In the long history of conflict between the metallics and chromatics, silvers form the vanguard and backbone of the metallic armies. Silver dragons fight with honor and grace, never reluctant to enter battle to uphold the tenets of goodliness or law.

From the moment of their hatching, silver dragons are keenly aware of what the world expects of them. They must remain ever courageous, even in the face of death. They cannot act dishonorably, for doing so shames not only them but their entire kind. At every opportunity they must obey draconic law and that of the lands in which they find themselves, and strive to ensure that others do so as well. The Powers That Be expect them to punish those who

willfully break laws or otherwise act against the common good, but in a way both merciful and just. All this they know instinctively, and it is a testament to the supreme power of their convictions that they not only accept the heavy weight of responsibility placed upon them by Apsu and the universal concepts of Good and Law, but frequently push for even loftier duties.

Sleek and beautiful, silver dragons shine like mirrors, reflecting the sun from their silvery white scales and acting as actual beacons of light when all else is dark. This minor glow makes them easy to find on a battlefield and gives their allies a landmark around which they can rally. That it tends to draw the strongest foes also plays into the honorable nobility of silvers, as they prefer to battle the foulest evils personally. Like the metal with which they are frequently compared, however, the shining scales of silver dragons dull easily, losing their luster and turning a pallid gray. This dulling typically reflects the state of the silver's soul, and thus those who begin to lose their sheen are gently advised by their comrades to "polish their scales" (a polite way of suggesting they speak with someone in order to refresh and refocus their minds and spirits).

Ecology and Society

Silver dragons are an anomaly among dragons and unusual even among the varied creatures of the wide multiverse. Unlike their draconic kin (even their esteemed gold cousins), silver dragons rarely demonstrate selfishness, envy, or greed. As true paragons of virtue and natural proponents of goodness, justice, and honor, silver dragons act in accordance with the loftiest chivalric codes. Their altruism occurs naturally, and their sense of duty comes to them as a divine spark while still within their eggs.

Upon hatching, silver dragons are presented with numerous codes of conduct, regulations, and oaths of service, only some of which they must agree to in their youth. As they age, silvers adopt ever-more-restrictive codes that increasingly limit their behaviors. By the time they grow into great wyrms, the lives of silver dragons are excruciatingly regulated and controlled by external agreements with powers greater than themselves, such as Apsu himself, councils of gold dragons, or other committees or divine agents that silver dragons as a race acknowledge. These agreements extend into every aspect of silver dragon life, such that certain natural acts (procreation being the major example) become so carefully ritualized that the oldest silver dragons do not bother with such things (and thus most silver dragons mate several times before they advance into their older years). The copper dragon Hylyax famously joked that the greatest of silver dragons must conduct rituals in order to eliminate wastes properly, but when he later found out the truth of his words, he successfully petitioned a council of gold dragons to remove such preposterous limitations.

While most creatures balk at such control, even those that typically favor order and regulation, silver dragons seem not only to enjoy it, but to require it. The controls laid upon silver dragon behavior by the divine agents of good and their own natural instincts are designed to increasingly regulate them as they age, but many young silver dragons gladly adopt codes of conducts meant for older dragons.

Many creatures, especially brass and copper dragons, do not understand the mindset of silver dragons and cannot fathom why they willingly agree to such strictures. Conspiracy theorists whisper that silver dragons must be the most weak-willed of all dragons, and that the goodly powers place these constantly upgraded restrictions in order for the silvers to retain their veneers of goodness. What few creatures understand is that silver dragons actively ask for such codes of conduct, and the many restrictions placed on silver dragons by their betters originate in the minds of silver dragons themselves. They find regulation comforting and ritualized behavior pleases them. Beginning with Argix, the first of her kind, silver dragons have long petitioned Apsu and the other gods of goodness and law to create increasingly stringent rules for silver dragons to follow.

Obeying these many rules and regulations, pressed upon them by divine agents but requested by the dragons themselves, grants silver dragons their one and greatest nod to their draconic heritage. Following the rules fills silver dragons with a dominating pride best described as draconic hubris. Not even self-loving red dragons exhibit the levels of pride shown by silver dragons. This exacting living and unequaled righteousness has its darker side, of course, but the best mentors know to carefully humble silver dragons and expunge such behaviors from their charges.

Not surprisingly, given their title as paladins of dragons, silvers are among the most religiously inclined of all true dragons. Those who do live piously almost universally worship Apsu, the father dragon, although an increasing number bend their powerful knees to the human deity Iomedae, goddess of paladins. Draconic paladins of Apsu go where their god-king sends them, and most communicate directly with Apsu several times in their lives. These silver dragons travel not only across Golarion but throughout the entirety of the spheres, supporting angels, celestials, and other eternal champions of righteousness and holiness. In their battles against evil, these draconic paladins give hope to those who might otherwise fail in the face of relentless malevolence. The long annals of history recording battles between celestials and fiends occasionally mention the turning of battle with the arrival of a silver dragon "gleaming like the sun in the darkest pits and casting

light across those who fear its cleansing nature." Draconic servants of Iomedae concern themselves more with the threats immediately facing Golarion and its people, and as a result most Iomedaean silver dragons live in Mendev, where they frequently clash with the demons spawned in the Worldwound. Mendevian silvers meet almost monthly, always with a human paladin they all consider an ally who serves as leader of the gathering. During these meetings, the silvers coordinate their efforts (usually in terms of delegating duties and responsibilities so there is no overlap) and report to the meeting's leader their previous successes and setbacks. Sadly, with nearly every meeting, the number of dragons in attendance continues to shrink—and not from desertion or lack of interest.

Silver dragons prefer magic that bolsters themselves and their allies. Once they boost their side in this way, the silvers focus on magics that weaken or otherwise inconvenience their foes. While the school of abjuration encompasses most of these kinds of spells, silvers rarely focus their learning specifically on that school, instead incorporating transmutation, conjuration, and even divination spells into their repertoire—whatever can increase their effectiveness in battle.

Many draconic scholars consider silver dragons the least sane and mentally stable of the metallics, pointing to their insufferable pride and reliance on their mentors as weaknesses. Silver dragons, and even most other metallic dragons, counter this argument by pointing out the responsibilities placed upon silvers from their very hatchings. Not even the sagely and powerful gold dragons shoulder such weighty duties, and in tones of admiration the golds often point out that their silver kin not only willfully accept such responsibilities but actually seek out ever-greater challenges. Thus, silver dragons who can rely upon the careful and concerned guidance of gold dragons or other powerful goodly creatures remain among the most virtuous and unwavering proponents of morality, justice, and mercy. Only those cast adrift in the world are liable lose their way over time.

Silver dragons rarely live alone. They seem to prefer the company of gold dragons, celestials, and other creatures dedicated to the fight for justice, fairness, and order. As a mark of their draconic selfishness, though, silver dragons see other silvers more as rivals than allies, and they tend only to come together in order to breed or when the call to arms is too great for only one of them. In this situation, the silvers insist that a neutral arbiter becomes their leader, at least for as long as they must work together. Despite this tendency, or maybe because of it, silver dragons in an area gather once a year or so to discuss the conditions of the land or whatever crusade or quest occupies their time.

A silver dragon classifies each creature it meets as a mentor, ally, charge, rival, or enemy. Nearly every silver dragon considers one creature—usually a gold dragon—as its mentor and advisor. This relationship is almost always the most important in a silver dragon's life, as a good mentor helps the silver remain true to its ideals and the expectations placed upon it. Allies take a number of shapes, but nearly all of them are good creatures who respect, uphold, and enforce order and lawfulness. A silver's mate usually falls in this category, although two very strong silver mates might actually see one another as rivals instead. To a silver dragon, its charges are those creatures not able or willing to protect themselves, which includes nearly every creature a silver dragon meets. Although they never act against one another (for doing so harms the advancement of their own ideals), silver dragons rarely directly support each other except in dire circumstances. Enemies of silver dragons are

all creatures that support or practice evil or who break laws and receive no punishment.

Despite their physical power and unquestionable bravery in battle, silver dragons do not relish warfare. They do not seek to test themselves against strong foes. When they enter combat, it is not from bloodlust or the desire for glory. Silver dragons physically battle their enemies because some creatures only respond to violence. Silver dragons end battles as quickly as they can, avoiding as much bloodshed, injury, or suffering as possible. When an enemy begs for mercy or falls unconscious, silver dragons stop. They do not fight longer than necessary and prefer to redeem evil with words and kindness rather than punish it with violence and pain. Unfortunately for silvers, those they most often fight against cannot be easily redeemed. Silver dragons also know they cannot battle evil without a little of it rubbing off on them. Most silvers can cleanse their souls of these minor touches, but some find it more difficult to cope—particularly if they have poor mentors or their beloved advisors are somehow also affected by the evil.

Just as darkness feels most intense when stepping out of a lighted room, no creature's descent into cruelty and evil can match the depravity of tarnished silvers. Fortunately, these blackguard dragons remain almost legends, and no more than a handful exist in any given millennium. Just as fallen angels frequently become something else, losing any connection to the celestial existences they previously led, silver dragons who tarnish fully cease in many ways to be silver dragons. They are not simply dirty, but become fundamentally different, degenerating into strange creatures resembling draconic crossbreeds. The greatest mercy available to these fallen silvers is death, and other creatures relentlessly hunt these lost beings, helping them find redemption in death that they could not acquire in life.

Fortunately, most silver dragons tarnish into neutrality, taking on either a lethargic disregard for that which they once so strongly felt or else pushing so hard for law and order that they forget the purpose of community in the first place. Silver dragons tarnish most easily of the metallics, and their redemption is a long, difficult process that fails more often than not. Many such tarnished creatures forsake their mentors and ignore the advice and pleas of their allies, slipping ever further into whatever malaise gripped them in the first place.

Even among untarnished silver dragons, the tendency to become too stringent and unwavering runs in their blood. Especially among their younger members, the greater good and the need for mercy sometimes get lost in the push for order. These over-achieving paragons of virtue might begin to punish all transgressors of the law with equal severity or else focus on the eradication of one kind of crime and ignore other lawbreaking directly before them. In the former case, the overzealous silvers punish those guilty of minor crimes almost as harshly as murderers and traitors. Misguided silvers of the latter variety become so appalled by one particular transgression that they develop tunnel vision that blinds them to greater crimes. Humans who must live with silver dragons do not understand or deal well with either form of neurosis, and in such cases a silver's mentor must usually intervene to help him recognize his errors.

Hoard and Home

Like all dragons, silvers keep lairs that they consider their safe havens and places of refuge in their most trying times. They also store their hoards in their lairs, often protected by various guardians and the occasional trap. Unlike almost all other dragons, silvers typically make their lairs in the homes of other creatures.

Silver dragons live on the sides of mountains, generally below the snow line in the warmer parts of the world. This occasionally brings them into conflict with reds and whites, as the former tend to claim all manners of mountains while the latter sometimes live in the glacial caps of the highest mountains. These conflicts quickly become violent and always result in the retreat or death of one of the dragons, as compromise is never an option. Usually, when a white dragon sees a silver move onto the same mountain it calls home, it quickly packs up its hoard and flees—hopefully before the silver spots it.

Dark, dank, lonely caves seldom appeal to silver dragons, and most of them prefer to live within or under human or dwarf-built fortresses on the sides of mountains. These dragons do not mind caves as much if they open out into some nigh-impregnable fortress or castle precariously perched upon a mountain. Living in or under such a castle (which must always be controlled by a leader with a proven history of good deeds and generous works, preferably one who also believes strongly in law and order) affords the best scenario for both dragon and landlord. The dragon has a ready-built and heavily defended lair in which he can hide his hoard and the castle gains a powerful defender.

Silver dragons prefer coins and items made from silver, platinum, steel, and other "white" metals (including white gold). They exchange copper and gold coins for silver or platinum whenever they can, and otherwise keep them out of sight in metal chests near, but never part of, their coin beds. This love of silver and platinum extends to the treasures they collect: silver utensils and flatware, platinum jewelry, and other decorations and artworks.

The gems displayed by silver dragons are always diamonds and other white or clear stones. Silvers greatly appreciate uncolored glass and are inclined to collect

ornately decorated (preferably in silver or platinum) crystal and glass drinking vessels, spheres, and even mirrors. Not surprisingly, the magic items they collect most often are made of glass, and they seem to enjoy *crystal balls*, even though they rarely make use of such items.

After defeating powerful foes bearing coats of arms or other markers, silvers take such souvenirs back with them to their lairs, and incorporate them into their hoards. Among their mundane treasures, silver dragons collect many military banners, shields, heraldic devices, signature weapons or armors, and other tokens of remembrance. When these items bear magical auras or were obviously worked by master craftsmen, so much the better.

Silver dragons also enjoy collecting weapons and armors from battles and armies with whom they have no personal involvement. Some of the greatest collections of such military paraphernalia belong to silver dragons, who are occasionally willing to lend out the items they own if doing so serves the greater good. Although silvers are the least greedy of dragons, they still expect collateral of equal or greater value for any items on loan.

Campaign Role

Silver dragons generally appear in a campaign as helpers and guides. They might provide direct physical assistance or merely offer advice. When times are most desperate or dire they might lend material aid to good adventurers who prove themselves trustworthy and forthright. In general, silvers do not make very good patrons, as they busy themselves with tasks they themselves can perform, rather than plans requiring the aid of others. They are known to follow more than lead, and a particularly powerful and virtuous human might gain a silver dragon cohort if he continues to prove himself on the field of battle.

On the other hand, silver dragons are the metallics most likely to go bad. Such practically irredeemable creatures do not lightly cross to darkness, and doing so often costs them their sanity, making battles against them unpredictable and dangerous. Adventurers might on rare occasion be called upon to hunt down these tarnished heroes and put them to rest, lest their insanity undo the long years of good works they performed beforehand.

On Golarion

Silver dragons tend to congregate where evil and chaos reign and good and order struggle to gain dominance. In Golarion, such places as the Worldwound and Galt attract the attention of silver dragons, who set up strong points in neighboring nation-states.

To the north, a collection of silver dragons resides in Mendev, where they work with human allies to staunch the unending flow of demonic energy pulsing from the Worldwound. These silver dragons follow the human leaders of Mendev and serve as heavy shock troops when raids are made across the border.

In eastern Avistan, the murderous nation of Galt has also gained the attention of handfuls of silver dragons, some residing within the country and some living in neighboring Taldor. All attempts so far at restoring peace and order within the revolution-torn land have failed, but where silver dragons openly live, pockets of sanity seem to prevail. The bloodthirsty people of Galt seem somehow less inclined to behead one another under the disapproving gaze of a silver dragon.

A number of silver dragons live on the Elemental Plane of Air, where they frequently do battle against a much larger force of whites. Although these draconic clashes seem random to non-dragons who witness them, the silvers actively oppose any attempt by the whites to gain entry into a number of large, drifting icebergs bobbing along on icy currents of the plane. The white dragons seek legendary artifacts said to hold powers of control and domination only they can use. Understandably, the silver dragons seek to prevent them from gaining such items.

Names

Silver dragon names of the pure bloodline often incorporate some variation on the name Argix, the original silver dragon and founder of the bloodline (also, "argix" is Draconic for "silver"). Otherwise, silver dragon names, unlike almost every other aspect of the breed, follow no real patterns or regulations. They tend to be relatively easy to pronounce, but their length and general majesty vary wildly.

Silver Dragon Names: Argithix, Drakstherian, Lastargix, Shargarius, Yarthadrix

Terendelev

As one of the Mendevian silvers, Terendelev serves the Iomedaean leadership in the border town of Kenabres. There she acts as an enforcer, patrolling the city in the company of a half-dozen human paladins. Terendelev was recently part of a strike team that moved across the border to approach the Worldwound itself. She returned badly scarred and horrifically wounded, bearing three of her human companions with her. Two of the humans she brought back later died from some mysterious ailment or curse they contracted near the Worldwound. The third corroborated Terendelev's report of a demonic ambush against which she seemed ready to die fighting. By the account of her surviving comrade, she very nearly did succumb to the many grievous wounds she received, but the strike team's doomed commander ordered her to gather what survivors she could and escape.

Afterward, Terendelev became moody and dark-spirited. The high cleric of Iomedae in Kenabres noticed a troubling

dark edge to her scales—a physical manifestation of tarnishing—and immediately summoned Terendelev's mentor, the gold dragon Halaseliax. After a days-long discussion that resulted in raised voices and an ineffective attack by Terendelev against her mentor, she agreed to his recommendations. Although her physical wounds have long since healed, Terendelev remains moody and relatively unstable emotionally, but it seems that her friends and allies intervened in time, as the tarnish on Terendelev's scales has noticeably decreased over time.

Terendelev **CR 23**

Female ancient silver dragon
LG Gargantuan dragon (cold)

Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses, *greater arcane sight*, *see invisibility*; Listen +47, Spot +47

Aura frightful presence 300 ft. (DC 37)

DEFENSE

AC 43, touch 10, flat-footed 43; +2 vs. evil
(+33 natural, +4 shield, –4 size)

hp 459 (34d12+238)

Fort +26, **Ref** +19, **Will** +27; +2 vs. evil

DR 15/magic and 10/adamantine (first 120 points); **Immune** cold, electricity (first 120 damage), fire (first 120 damage), *magic missile* (while *shield* spell is active), sonic (first 120 damage), sleep, paralysis; **SR** 29; **Weaknesses** vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., fly 200 ft. (clumsy)

Melee bite +43 (4d6+12) and
2 claws +38 (3d8+6) and
2 wings +37 (2d6+6) and
tail slap +37 (2d8+18)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft. (20 ft. with bite)

Special Attacks breath weapons (60-ft. cone of cold, 20d8, Reflex half DC 34, or 60-ft. cone of paralyzing gas, 1d6+10 rounds, Will negates DC 34), crush 4d6+28 (Reflex DC 34 or be pinned), tail sweep 2d6 (Reflex half DC 34)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 15th):
At will—*speak with animals*
3/day—*control winds*, *create food and water*, *fog cloud*, *detect thoughts*
2/day—*feather fall*
1/day—*control weather*

Spells Known (CL 15th):
7th (4/day; 1 already cast)—*greater arcane sight*, *greater teleport*, *holy word* (DC 27)
6th (6/day)—*antimagic field*, *greater dispel magic*, *heal*
5th (7/day)—*break enchantment*, *dispel evil* (DC 25), *flame strike* (DC 25), *mark of justice* (DC 25), *prying eyes*
4th (8/day; 1 already cast)—*cure critical wounds*, *detect scrying*, *spell immunity*, *stoneskin*
3rd (8/day; 3 already cast)—*haste*, *create food and water*, *cure serious wounds*, *protection from energy*
2nd (8/day)—*consecrate*, *cure moderate wounds*, *eagle's splendor*, *glitterdust* (DC 22), *see invisibility*
1st (8/day; 3 already cast)—*cure light wounds*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *protection from evil*, *shield*
0 (6/day)—*dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *resistance*

TACTICS

Before Combat Terendelev prepares for a known battle by casting *stoneskin*, *protection from energy* (electricity, fire, and sonic), *mage armor*, *protection from evil*, *shield*, *greater arcane sight*, *eagle's splendor*, and *see invisibility*. She also bolsters her allies with spells, leaving two slots open for each spell level.

During Combat Against evil foes, Terendelev opens her attack with *holy word* and *dispel evil*, then uses her breath weapon before entering melee.

Morale Terendelev never retreats or surrenders unless ordered to by a superior.

Base Statistics Without her spells in place, Terendelev has the following base statistics: **AC** 39, touch 6, flat-footed 39; **DR** 15/magic; **Cha** 26; **Special Qualities** frightful presence DC 35

STATISTICS

Str 35, **Dex** 10, **Con** 25, **Int** 26, **Wis** 27, **Cha** 30

Base Atk +34; **Grp** +58

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw), Wingover

Skills Bluff +45, Concentration +44, Diplomacy +51, Disguise +45, Escape Artist +37, Jump +49, Knowledge (history) +45, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +45, Knowledge (religion) +45, Knowledge (the planes) +45, Listen +47, Search +45, Sense Motive +45, Spot +47

Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Auran, Celestial, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Infernal, Osiriani

SQ alternate form, cloudwalking

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Alternate Form (Su) Terendelev can assume any animal or humanoid form of Medium size or smaller as a standard action three times per day. She remains in this form until she chooses a new one or returns to her natural form.

Cloudwalking (Su) Terendelev can tread on clouds or fog as though on solid ground. The ability functions continuously but can be negated or resumed at will.

White Dragons

White dragons are stupid, weak, savage, and pathetic—as dragons go. In reality, many of them still exceed humans in mental prowess, but among their draconic kin such a thing is hardly considered a bragging right. And yet, they remain true dragons, and their potential for glorious splendor remains unequalled by all but the very pinnacles of humanity. Pathetic and stupid, yes, but history does not forget those few white dragons who rose above the limitations of their breed and became truly remarkable.

—*Drakanav Codex,* Chapter 20

Described with great disdain by all other true dragons as nasty, brutish, and short-tempered, white dragons in many ways act more like feral predators than representatives of dragonkind. While all chromatic dragons share a particularly powerful instinct of self-preservation bordering on cowardice, white dragons are unrepentantly craven. They lack the intelligence to make well-considered decisions and the wisdom to realize the depths of their own ignorance. Inbred for millennia, white dragons revel in cruel, crude humor and hold no appreciation for the arts or higher learning. White dragons represent all the things their loftiest blue or red cousins hate of the lesser creatures, but are made worse in draconic eyes by their distant relation. Yet despite their relative weakness, stupidity, and repulsive behavior, older white dragons are still superior to average humans in nearly every way.

Fresh from the egg, white dragons psychologically resemble alligators or other simple-minded yet powerful predators rather than the magnificently powerful creatures whose culture predates elven civilization. Driven

by instinct and their ever-gnawing stomachs, immature white dragons rarely attempt communication with other creatures except to form crude bargains that bring them more prey or treasure. Few of these poorly considered bargains benefit the white dragons in the long run, and many of the deals place the foolish simpletons in greater danger than they can foresee. Those who strike such questionable bargains must be careful, however, not to allow their duped partners to grow too old, for despite their disadvantaged beginnings, white dragons eventually age into cunning, careful schemers. While their most careful plans might seem ludicrously simple to their more intelligent cousins, the schemes of the cleverest white dragons can nonetheless require months to come to fruition and involve not only the deaths of those who tricked them in their youths, but also the destruction of all their erstwhile tormentors hold dear. The cold, long-smoldering fury of white dragons drives many of them into lives filled with vengeance-seeking and complicated arrangements that lead to the ruin of their targets—or else to mounting frustrations as their own impatience undermines their careful plans. Some whites—those who by fortune or unusual guile lead relatively peaceful lives of predation and hunting—grow older and scheme not of revenge, but of advancement. Unfortunately, even these white dragons cannot escape their instinctual savagery and impatience, and the greatest among them always seem to remain one or two steps away from their goals.

Characterized by the large webbed horns radiating out from the backs of their skulls and connected by tough, fibrous membranes, the distinctive heads of white dragons also possess crag-like hornlets on their chins and lower jaws. The rough texture of their faces extends over much of their bodies, allowing them to break up their silhouettes and granting them additional camouflage in their snowy homes. White dragon scales are thick and rough to the touch, and the tiny ridges that give them their rough feel trap in heat, keeping the whites warm even in the coldest of climes. Lithe and muscular, white dragons look every bit the part of efficient predators, with long, scimitar-like claws and powerful jaws holding razor-sharp teeth.

Ecology and Society

The scales of whites help them blend in with their surroundings, making them natural ambushers. Across the windswept fields of snow that form the Crown of the World, white dragons live as the top predators. They dominate the tundra and arctic wastelands of the far north, proclaiming themselves kings of unwanted and scantily inhabited kingdoms. Their vast territories cover hundreds or thousands of square miles but contain fewer intelligent beings than most towns. White dragons care little for exerting control over those resdiding within their territories, as they view all other living creatures either as potential food or potential enemies. Those they cannot eat they swiftly grow to hate.

Some few whites eschew their bitter northern climes and instead live on mountain glaciers within the more temperate parts of Avistan. These whites gain notoriety more often than their northern siblings, as they have more frequent interactions with intelligent beings. Most of the white dragons known to humans come from the high mountains of northern and central Avistan. History records a handful of white dragons who lived around the Inner Sea and south into Garund, but the majority of these dragons are famous only for where they chose to live and not for any accomplishments they performed in life.

White dragons tend to stand at the top of the local food webs, usually supplanted only by more powerful dragons of other colors, and then only when they live farther south. None of the other chromatic dragons, even the covetous and wide-ranging reds, care enough for the cold lands to bother evicting the white dragons who live as masters there.

Although they are consummate hunters and predators without equal in their home climate, white dragons remain shameless opportunists. The unforgiving wastes of the frigid north do not allow even the fearsome whites to be picky about what they eat or when. White dragons prefer warm meat, preferably ripped from still-living creatures, but they eat anything that remotely resembles food, including even rotting meat and plant matter.

White dragons rampage more than any other dragons, even the mighty reds. As even non-dragons rarely afford them the respect and fear they deserve, white dragons frequently lash out at their humanoid neighbors out of frustration, retaliation for insults, or vengeance. These rampages usually garner the whites the attention, respect, and fear they crave, but those dragons who grow too careless sometimes lose their lives instead.

White dragons only rarely engage in draconic society at any sort of useful level. They usually avoid contact with all other kinds of dragons, as many of their cousins simply attempt to kill them on sight. Among their own kind, however, whites occasionally prove strangely social and outgoing. White dragon mating rituals are like young cats play-fighting—teeth and claws displayed but not used, much hissing and rolling around, frequent dominance shifts, and no clear winner. Females usually mate with several males, and clutches usually have multiple fathers.

White dragons work together at times to bring down particularly large prey or entire herds of lesser game. This camaraderie is far more common among young whites, who lack the strength and power to bring down extremely large creatures on their own. Such hunting groups can

last for a single hunt or several years, depending on the personalities involved and the availability of large game. Like their black dragon cousins, white dragons are liable to depopulate their hunting territories to the point where the dragons can only barely sustain themselves. Unlike black dragons, though, white dragons stubbornly refuse to abandon their home territories, choosing to enter periods of long hibernation to allow prey to repopulate rather than moving on to new hunting grounds. Tragic stories abound of lost travelers on the Crown of the World stumbling across a deeply hibernating white dragon they at first believed to be dead. When food grows scarce, packs of hunting whites may turn on each other and devour the weakest members.

White dragons prove notoriously difficult to redeem. Among the chromatics, only the reds resist the call for temperance and benevolence more than the foul-tempered whites. Draconic sages with a sense of humor note quite the opposite, and point out that white dragons are frequently redeemed—some are redeemed on a weekly basis. Weak-willed and easily cowed, white dragons generally do whatever a stronger personality tells them, including proclaiming themselves converted to the way of goodness. Once out of the direct control of whatever force converted them by the sword, however, whites quickly resume their old ways. Truly redeemed whites remain mere legends, and most creatures capable of subduing and redeeming white dragons simply slay the beasts instead.

By the time they reach adulthood, white dragons possess mental capacities at least equal to average humans. Unfortunately, by that time, most white dragons wallow in the same savage habits and limited thoughtfulness that cursed them throughout their immature years. Although physiology no longer limits them, adult white dragons nonetheless cannot imagine living their lives any differently than they already have for decades. Thus, most great wyrm whites, who in theory can reason and contemplate better than almost any human in the world, cannot escape the short-sighted and savage brutality of their younger years. Of course, white dragon great wyrms remain so incredibly rare that the few who have lived so long prove far more wily and careful than their kin.

A few white dragons yearn for something more than the brutal savagery of their ancestral homes and instinctual natures. Although most of these whites possess the same limited intellect of their fellows, they try to pursue academic, philosophical, or sociological achievements. Other white dragons despise these specimens, calling them *lazakh*, which roughly translates as "big heads," a term typical white dragons use in derision but that other dragons adopt as a term of endearment. Those *lazakh* who declare their intentions to their common fellows are usually met with aggression. The one or two *lazakh* every generation who avoid fratricide and humanoid dragonslayers are occasionally taken in under the wing of a benevolent or manipulative cousin—usually a caring brass, academic bronze, controlling blue, or patient green.

When they serve bronze or green mentors, these white dragon *lazakh* can meaningfully contribute to the collective knowledge of dragons and all other intelligent species, performing simple tasks suited to their inbred impatience and relative stupidity (such as recording notes on slabs of slate, finding particular passages in tomes, or other duties quickly and easily performed). Most of these mentors find that their white dragon charges do not decrease the time or effort they must themselves contribute to their studies and research, and in some cases taking on white dragon apprentices slows their progress. Nonetheless, stories exist of seemingly average white dragon apprentices providing sudden insights or leaps of logic that grant their mentors solutions to vexing conundrums, and

thus bronze and green dragons continue to take on white dragons in the hopes of finding the next such idiot savant.

Brass and blue dragons are inclined to guide their white dragon charges in more social ways. Brass dragons attempt to bring out the creative side of the *lazakh* they mentor, thereafter promoting the often-violent but always memorable imagery of their understudies in small showings and members-only galleries. Most famously, the white dragon Tryka wrote the popular play *Red Snow Falling* under the watchful tutelage of the brass dragon Varilan (see sidebar). Blue dragons care little for the goals and desires of their white dragon charges, instead carefully manipulating them to act as contacts, spies, or muscle in the blue dragons' own immense webs of minions. Most of these unfortunate *lazakh* never realize their blue masters are using them and spend decades or centuries working hard for goals not their own. When called out for this treatment of their kin by meddlesome brasses or controlling golds, blue dragons defend themselves by pointing out how much better off these white dragons are than their arctic-dwelling kin. Indeed, despite their stunted advancement in their own goals, whites who serve blues can become exceedingly wealthy (often much more so than those serving brass, bronze, or green mentors).

Red Snow Falling

In 4374 AR, the white dragon *lazakh* named Tryka fled her unforgiving homeland and traveled into the heart of Avistan. Her arrival at the Five Kings Mountains roused Daralathyxl, and she only barely survived the encounter. Terribly scarred by the king's wrath, Tryka fled southwest into Cheliax, where blood loss and fatigue felled her from the sky. By her great fortune, a dragon named Varilan discovered her and took her back to his lair to recover. Varilan (in human form) lived the life of a Chelish playboy and socialite in the baronial courts, and after nursing Tryka back to health, he offered to mentor her in the arts as long as he could keep the greater part of the profits. Tryka accepted, and the two collaborated on a variety of creative endeavors (mostly of questionable artistic quality).

In 4413, Tryka lost her patience with their lack of success and threw a terrible fit that ruined years of work. Varilan stopped her in mid-rampage, though, telling her to channel that furious energy into something creative. Taking the admonition as a challenge, she poured her frustrations and anger into writing *Red Snow Falling*, a play about her narrow escape from Daralathyxl. With her permission, Varilan edited the story to make the characters humans and promoted it in the smaller theatres of the Chelish empire. The play was an instant success, and at the height of its popularity in the next century, it played in some of the largest theatres in the Inner Sea region. Although not as popular today as a couple centuries ago, the play remains in constant circulation among the continent's theatres and seems a perennial favorite in Cheliax, Korvosa, and Ustalav.

Hoard and Home

White dragons are pack rats that never throw out anything, and thus their hoards are as varied and individualistic as the dragons who form them. Unlike all other kinds of true dragons, whites do not possess any preference for one kind of treasure or another. They take what they can get, which in the coldest extremes of the far north and mountain summits is not much, and they never turn down anything they figure might be worth even a few coins to some other creature. White dragons' hoards vary wildly from one individual to the next.

Although most white dragons remain unapologetic opportunists and do not actually favor any kind of item over any other, their hoards do share a few similarities based on the typical locations in which they live. In general, white dragon hoards contain more goods and equipment than coins, gems, or jewelry—typically equipment used to survive the harsh conditions, including cold-weather outfits, winter blankets, ropes and grappling hooks, and so on. White dragons jealously guard their rare magical items and go to oft-bizarre lengths to protect such treasures.

White dragon coin beds run significantly smaller on average than those of their cousins, and most supplement this lack of size with items made of non-precious metals, such as steel hammer heads or iron pitons. Many white dragons keep their coin beds above the surface of the ground, not in shallow depressions like their kin, and prevent the coins from scattering by shaping low ice walls that help contain their collections.

White dragons live in ice caves or in stone caverns adorned with ice. They typically occupy lairs much larger than their size or overall prowess would otherwise suggest. Scholars attribute this particular phenomenon to a lack of competition, as white dragons have few rivals for living space in their native environment. No other dragons are fond of cohabiting their chosen regions, although silvers and reds do occasionally take up homes on the same or adjacent mountains as warmer-living whites.

Whites do not mind taking or sharing the lairs of other creatures or forcing other beings to expand their lairs for them. Many white dragon lairs open onto deep vertical shafts in the ice generally accessible only to those creatures that can fly or otherwise easily navigate ice cliffs. Their caves stretch back and down from the entrances, utilizing the slippery nature of ice to deposit land-borne creatures into dark, forgotten crevasses filled with salted water or inhabited by beings otherwise too terrible to consider.

Because they lack the great strength and terrible resolve of their kin, white dragons must frequently share their

homes with more powerful creatures that dwelled within them first. When these creatures possess any kind of intelligence, the white dragons gladly work out lines of demarcation to divide the lair between them. Otherwise, the whites lure their lairmates to out-of-the-way portions of their homes, where they then shape the ice to send would-be dragonslayers and other trespassers. In this way, the greatest dangers in white dragon lairs are sometimes not the dragons themselves, but the original inhabitants of their lairs that dwell in dark recesses.

Since most dragon-hunting creatures cannot survive the extreme iciness of their prey's environment for long periods of time, white dragons set up traps in their lairs that utilize the unrelenting cold. Pools of frigid salt water concealed under or held behind thin ice are designed to douse trespassers and their equipment in sub-freezing water. A favorite trick of white dragons is to watch from a safe distance and wait for their water traps to soak trespassers before swooping in with their icy breath. This crude technique proves surprisingly effective.

Campaign Role

Unlike most of the other kinds of dragons, whites really serve only one purpose in a campaign: to antagonize the PCs. They make excellent ambushers, dropping down out of foggy or snow-blown skies to shred horses and other beasts of burden before disappearing again into the weather. Some whites also set up ambushes along the few trade routes and traveled paths across the Crown of the World. Those who live farther south lurk in frigid mountain passes or upon snow-capped peaks.

White dragons also make good direct opponents. Most white dragons are driven by hunger and instinct, and they do not take the time to set up ambushes (or in some cases even imagine the possibility of doing so). Instead, these up-front whites charge into battle, blasting their foes with their icy breaths before lashing out with claws, fangs, and tails. If these charging whites can gain some kind of surprise, all the better, but it is not a factor in their decision to attack or not.

On the other hand, white dragons remain dragons, the most feared and powerful creatures known. The most dangerous asset they possess is their greater-than-human intelligence when they grow older. Although no less savage than their younger kin, older white dragons use more sophisticated tactics and like to observe potential prey before attacking—particularly if that potential prey walks on two legs and carries weaponry, and even more so if it carries nothing at all. These older white dragons might spend several days tormenting those creatures they intend to attack, driving off or slaughtering pack animals at night, causing minor avalanches, luring lesser predators near their targets, or otherwise hampering the hapless humans. Once the morale of their victims sinks low enough, or one of them succumbs to the cold, the dragons attack.

Those white dragons who dare to seek more from life than mindless slaughter and become *lazakh* can make for memorable contacts. Although they seek personal advancement and hope to somehow contribute notably to the vast stores of draconic knowledge, they remain unapologetically selfish, impatient, and cruel. Humans and weaker dragons dealing with *lazakh* must remain conscious of the unpredictable nature of white dragons and treat with them very carefully.

Due to a white dragon's innate cowardice and weak will, it is possible for a strong and dominating group of PCs to subdue one and force it into servitude, perhaps in the hopes of eventually redeeming it. In these cases the dragon is a powerful minion (or slave, in the case of a cruel or evil party), but one that should be kept on a short leash. Even a "tamed" white feels cold, seething hatred for those who bested it, and is likely to take advantage of a momentary weakness to slaughter its "friends" and escape to a place where it can resume its old habits.

On Golarion

Most white dragons—by some estimates more than three-quarters—live on the Crown of the World or in the portions of Avistan, Casmaron, and Tian Xia within a hundred miles of that region. Creatures wanting to cross the northern passes usually see or encounter at least one white dragon along the way, and the least fortunate expeditions face several. Every square mile of the icy continent lies within at least one white dragon's hunting territory, and terrible border disputes can sometimes spill onto the trade routes over the continent as the dragons tear apart a caravan to stake their claims.

Other white dragons live under the greatest glaciers of high, snow-clad mountains, such as the Kodar, Menador, and Mindspin ranges. Dwarven histories record that at least two white dragons lived on the glaciers of Droskar's Crag before the arrival of Daralathyxl more than 1,700 years ago. These dragons each controlled one half of the immense mountain and endlessly tormented the dwarves and other creatures of the area.

Ostracized by their fellow dragons and hunted like common pests by the lesser creatures of Golarion, a small number of white dragons live on the Elemental Plane of Air. These dragons are drawn to clusters of floating icebergs that follow gentle currents through the plane, though silver dragons defend these icebergs from the intrusions of the whites. Sages speculate the white dragons seek the legendary artifacts known collectively as the *Shastiled*, which are said to hold the keys to the white dragon breed gaining some level of dominance over other dragons.

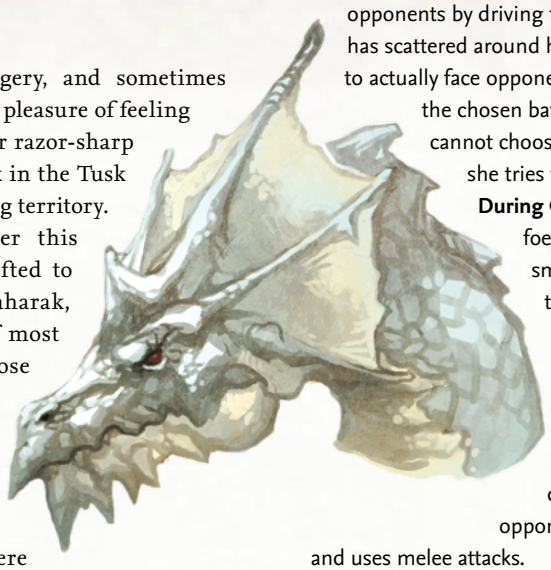
Names

White dragon names are generally either short and simple or overly complicated and difficult to pronounce. When hatched, white dragons receive simple, easy names, as their mothers hardly care enough about them to grant them lofty or impressive titles. As they grow older, though, some whites add syllables to create longer names in the hopes of sounding more impressive than they really are, though never so long that the dull-witted whites can't pronounce their own names.

White dragon names: Aostala, Grathalax, Horrakis, Oreptonthas, Tix

Lydek

Lydek delights in her own savagery, and sometimes pursues human prey simply for the pleasure of feeling the warmth of their innards on her razor-sharp claws. She claims Mount Thaharak in the Tusk Mountains as her home and hunting territory.



Such is Lydek's influence over this area that several trade routes shifted to avoid passing near Mount Thaharak, despite the successful crossing of most caravans through her lands. Those who brave the wrath of the dragon and attempt to climb the peak face carefully hidden pitfalls, washed-out or blocked trails, and frequent avalanches. Despite being a relative pushover where draconic threats are concerned, Lydek escapes the notice of dragonslayers powerful enough to overcome her by controlling unimportant territory with only a few trade routes passing through it.

Lydek **CR 10**

Female adult white dragon
CE Large dragon (cold)
Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +23, Spot +23
Aura frightful presence (180 ft., DC 20)

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 9, flat-footed 26 (+17 natural, –1 size)
hp 189 (18d12+72)
Fort +15, **Ref** +11, **Will** +11
DR 5/magic; **Immune** cold, sleep, paralysis; **SR** 18; **Weaknesses** vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Spd 60 ft., burrow 30 ft., fly 200 ft. (poor), swim 60 ft.
Melee bite +23 (2d6+6) and
2 claws +18 (1d8+3) and
2 wings +18 (1d6+3) and
tail slap +18 (1d8+9)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (40-ft. cone of cold, 6d6, Reflex half DC 23)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st):
3/day—*fog cloud*, *freezing fog* (DC 12), *gust of wind* (DC 12)
Spells Known (CL 1st):
1st (4/day)—*color spray* (DC 12), *magic missile*
0 (5/day)—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mage hand*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*

TACTICS

Before Combat Lydek attempts to weaken or demoralize opponents by driving them into the dozens of traps she has scattered around her mountain home. When ready to actually face opponents in combat, she first engulfs the chosen battlefield in a *freezing fog*. If Lydek cannot choose the time and place of a battle, she tries to flee.

During Combat Lydek tries to keep her foes contained within a relatively small battlefield, both to maximize the effectiveness of her breath weapon and also to prevent them from escaping her *freezing fog*. If a trap is nearby, she attempts to drive or lure her foes into it. Once she has weakened, confused, and demoralized her opponents, Lydek drops into their midst and uses melee attacks.

Morale Outside of her lair, Lydek flees once she takes 30 points of damage. She then resumes harrying her opponents with traps and other trickeries before luring or herding them toward a second battlefield, where she resumes her strategy.

STATISTICS

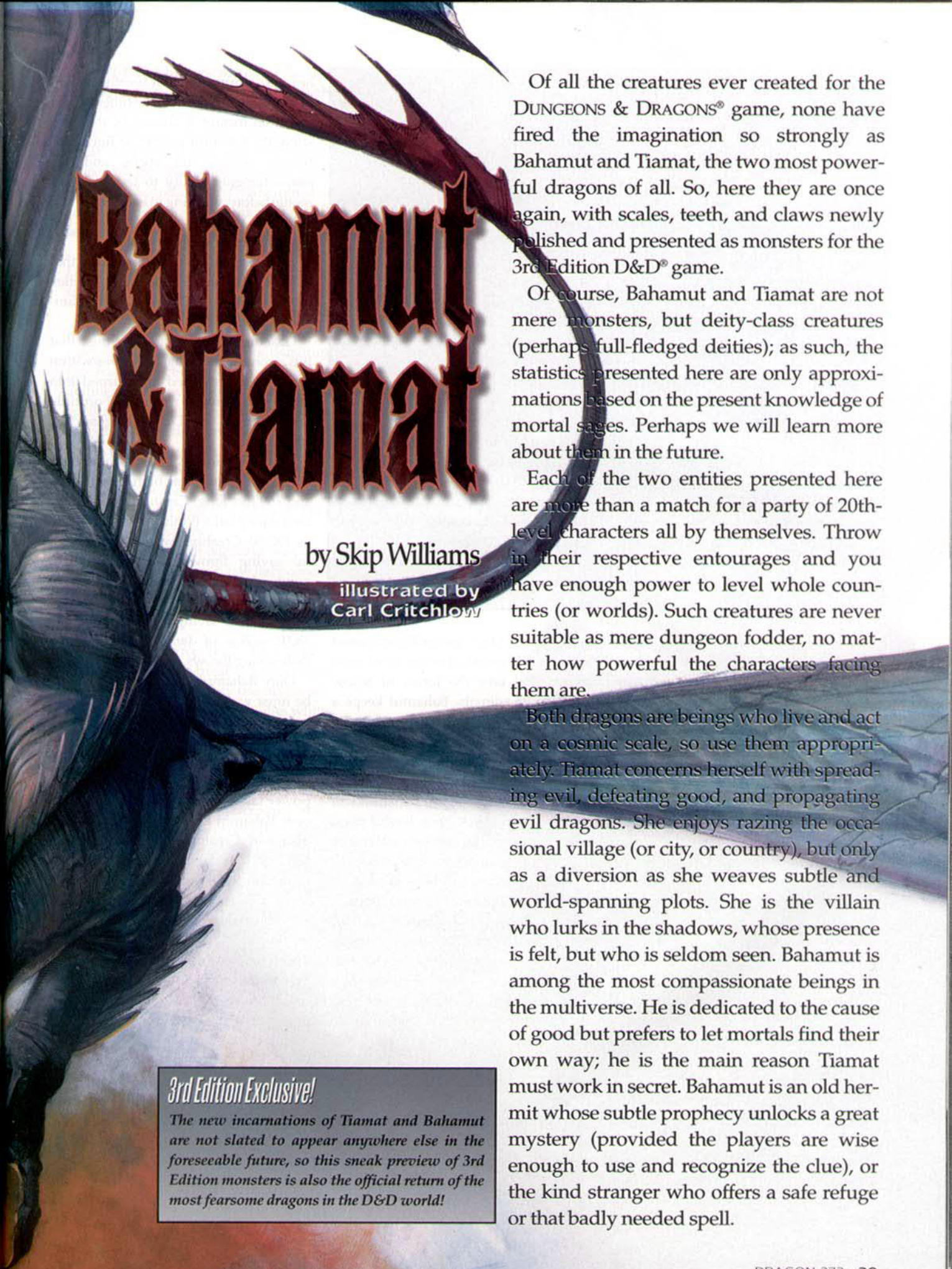
Str 23, **Dex** 10, **Con** 19, **Int** 10, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +18; **Grp** +28
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Stealthy, Wingover
Skills Hide +23, Listen +23, Move Silently +23, Search +21, Swim +27, Spot +23
Languages Draconic
SQ icewalking

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Freezing Fog (Sp) Similar to *solid fog*, this also causes a rime of slippery ice to form on any surface the fog touches, creating the effect of a *grease* spell. Lydek is immune to the *grease* effect because of her icewalking ability. This is the equivalent of a 5th-level spell and is useable three times per day.

Icewalking (Ex) This works like the *spider climb* spell, but the surfaces Lydek climbs must be icy. It is always in effect.

The King & Queen of Dragons



Bahamut & Tiamat

by Skip Williams

illustrated by Carl Critchlow

Of all the creatures ever created for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, none have fired the imagination so strongly as Bahamut and Tiamat, the two most powerful dragons of all. So, here they are once again, with scales, teeth, and claws newly polished and presented as monsters for the 3rd Edition D&D® game.

Of course, Bahamut and Tiamat are not mere monsters, but deity-class creatures (perhaps full-fledged deities); as such, the statistics presented here are only approximations based on the present knowledge of mortal sages. Perhaps we will learn more about them in the future.

Each of the two entities presented here are more than a match for a party of 20th-level characters all by themselves. Throw in their respective entourages and you have enough power to level whole countries (or worlds). Such creatures are never suitable as mere dungeon fodder, no matter how powerful the characters facing them are.

Both dragons are beings who live and act on a cosmic scale, so use them appropriately. Tiamat concerns herself with spreading evil, defeating good, and propagating evil dragons. She enjoys razing the occasional village (or city, or country), but only as a diversion as she weaves subtle and world-spanning plots. She is the villain who lurks in the shadows, whose presence is felt, but who is seldom seen. Bahamut is among the most compassionate beings in the multiverse. He is dedicated to the cause of good but prefers to let mortals find their own way; he is the main reason Tiamat must work in secret. Bahamut is an old hermit whose subtle prophecy unlocks a great mystery (provided the players are wise enough to use and recognize the clue), or the kind stranger who offers a safe refuge or that badly needed spell.

3rd Edition Exclusive!

The new incarnations of Tiamat and Bahamut are not slated to appear anywhere else in the foreseeable future, so this sneak preview of 3rd Edition monsters is also the official return of the most fearsome dragons in the D&D world!

Bahamut

Colossal Dragon
Hit Dice: 53d12+742 (1,086 hp)
Initiative: +4 (Improved Initiative)
Speed: 60 ft., Fly 300 ft. (poor), Sw 60 ft.
AC: 54 (–8 size, +52 natural)
Attacks: Bite, +66 melee; 2 claws, +61 melee; 2 wings, +61 melee; tail slap, +61 melee
Damage: Bite, 4d8+21; claw, 4d6+10; wing, 2d8+10; tail slap, 4d6+10
Face/Reach: 10 ft. by 50 ft./20 ft.
Special Attacks: Breath weapons, frightful presence, spells, spell-like abilities
Special Defenses: Scent, spell resistance 30, damage reduction (25/+4), immunities, *see invisibility*, keen senses, *water breathing*
Saves: Fort +43, Ref +29, Will +42
Abilities: Str 53, Dex 10, Con 39, Int 35, Wis 36, Cha 35
Skills: Alchemy +40, Animal Empathy +40, Bluff +65, Concentration +72, Diplomacy +65, Disguise +34, Escape Artist +56, Gather Information +65, Heal +41, Intimidate +65, Intuit Direction +41, Knowledge (arcana) +34, Knowledge (dragonkind) +37, Knowledge (history) +34, Knowledge (nature) +34, Knowledge (the planes) +34, Knowledge (religion) +34, Listen +71, Scry +68, Search +65, Sense Motive +69, Spellcraft +68, Spot +71, Wilderness Lore +41
Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Hover, Improved Critical (Bite), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Expertise, Fly-By Attack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (*sunburst*), Snatch, Wingover
Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground
Organization: Solitary (1), Troupe (Bahamut and seven great gold wyrms).
Challenge Level: 25 (solitary)
Treasure: When traveling, Bahamut carries his magic items and 1d8+4 gems of various sizes. Bahamut's palace contains 2d4 level 20 treasures.
Alignment: Always lawful good
Advancement Range: N/A

Also known as the Platinum Dragon and the King of the Good Dragons, Bahamut is revered as a deity in many locales. Although all good dragons pay homage to Bahamut, gold, silver, and brass dragons hold him in particularly high regard. Other dragons, even evil ones (save perhaps, his arch-rival Tiamat), respect Bahamut for his wisdom and power.

In his natural form, Bahamut is a long, sinuous dragon covered in silver-white scales that sparkle and gleam even in the dimmest light. Bahamut's catlike eyes are a deep blue, as azure as a midsummer sky, some say. Others insist that Bahamut's eyes are a frosty indigo, like the heart of a glacier. Perhaps the two accounts merely reflect the Platinum Dragon's shifting moods.

The location of Bahamut's home seems to breed disagreement among sages. Some insist that he dwells in a great palace behind the north wind and add Master of the North Wind to his list of titles; other, older tales say Bahamut dwells behind the east wind, in a fabulous palace of the same name. In any case, Bahamut visits the world often, usually in the guise of an old man or a callow youth. He is always accompanied by an honor guard of seven great gold wyrms that take the forms of fellow travelers or animals. Bahamut keeps a wary eye out for the machinations of Tiamat, taking whatever actions he deems necessary to check the spread of her influence and to undo whatever damage she has wrought. Bahamut will never turn his back on a lawful good creature in peril, but seldom intervenes directly if Tiamat is not involved. Instead, he offers healing, advice, or information. Bahamut's wanderings have given rise to many bard's tales, the best known of which relates a roadside meeting with an unassuming old man and his flock of seven trained canaries. None would have been the wiser, says the tale, had a band of ogres led by an ogre mage not chosen to sweep down upon the crowd.

Bahamut speaks many languages, including Draconic, Celestial, Auran, and Common, though he can converse with any intelligent creature.

Combat

Bahamut is a dangerous adversary. If the opposition is both evil and fairly weak, he might simply loose his breath weapon or a high-level spell and obliterate the foe in an instant. If unsure of the foe's strength, Bahamut prefers to fight cautiously, relying on spells and his shapechanging ability to test the foe's mettle before attacking in earnest.

Breath Weapons (Su): Bahamut has three different breath weapons:

Cold: A cone of cold 80 feet long that inflicts 36d10 points of damage. A Reflex saving throw vs. DC 50 reduces the damage by half.

Gaseous Form: A swirling mist that fills a cone 80 feet long. Creatures within the cone are stunned and turned into gaseous form for 32 rounds. A Fortitude saving throw vs. DC 50 negates the effect.

Disintegration: A beam of blue light that fills an area 5 feet high, 5 feet wide, and 160 feet long. Creatures are obliterated if they fail a Fortitude saving throw vs. DC 50. Creatures who make successful saving throws still suffer 18d10 points of damage. The beam blows a 5-foot × 5-foot × 160-foot hole in objects if they fail their saving throws and inflicts 18d10 points of damage if they make their saving throws.

Once Bahamut uses a breath weapon, he must wait 1d4 rounds before he can breathe again, no matter which breath weapon he has used.

Frightful Presence (Ex): Bahamut can unsettle foes with his mere presence. The power takes effect automatically whenever Bahamut attacks, charges, or flies overhead. Creatures within a radius of 480 feet are subject to the effect if they have 52 or fewer Hit Dice.

An affected creature can resist the effect by making a successful Will saving throw vs. DC 48. A successful saving throw makes a creature immune to Bahamut's frightful presence for one day. Creatures with 4 Hit Dice or fewer become panicked for 4d6 rounds if they fail their saving throw. Creatures with 5 or more Hit Dice become shaken for 4d6 rounds if they fail their saving throw. Good dragons (and Tiamat) ignore the effects of Bahamut's frightful presence.

Spells: Bahamut is a 20th-level sorcerer and a 20th-level cleric with access to the Good and Air domains. In his natural form, Bahamut can cast his spells with but a word.

Spell-like Abilities: Bahamut can use the following spell-like abilities each three times a day as a 20th-level caster: *control water, control winds, control weather, create food and water, detect thoughts, feather fall, fog cloud, foresight, quest, speak with animals*, and *sunburst*. Bahamut also can use *shapechange* at will as a 20th-level sorcerer.

Where applicable, the saving throw DCs against these abilities are 14 plus the spell level.

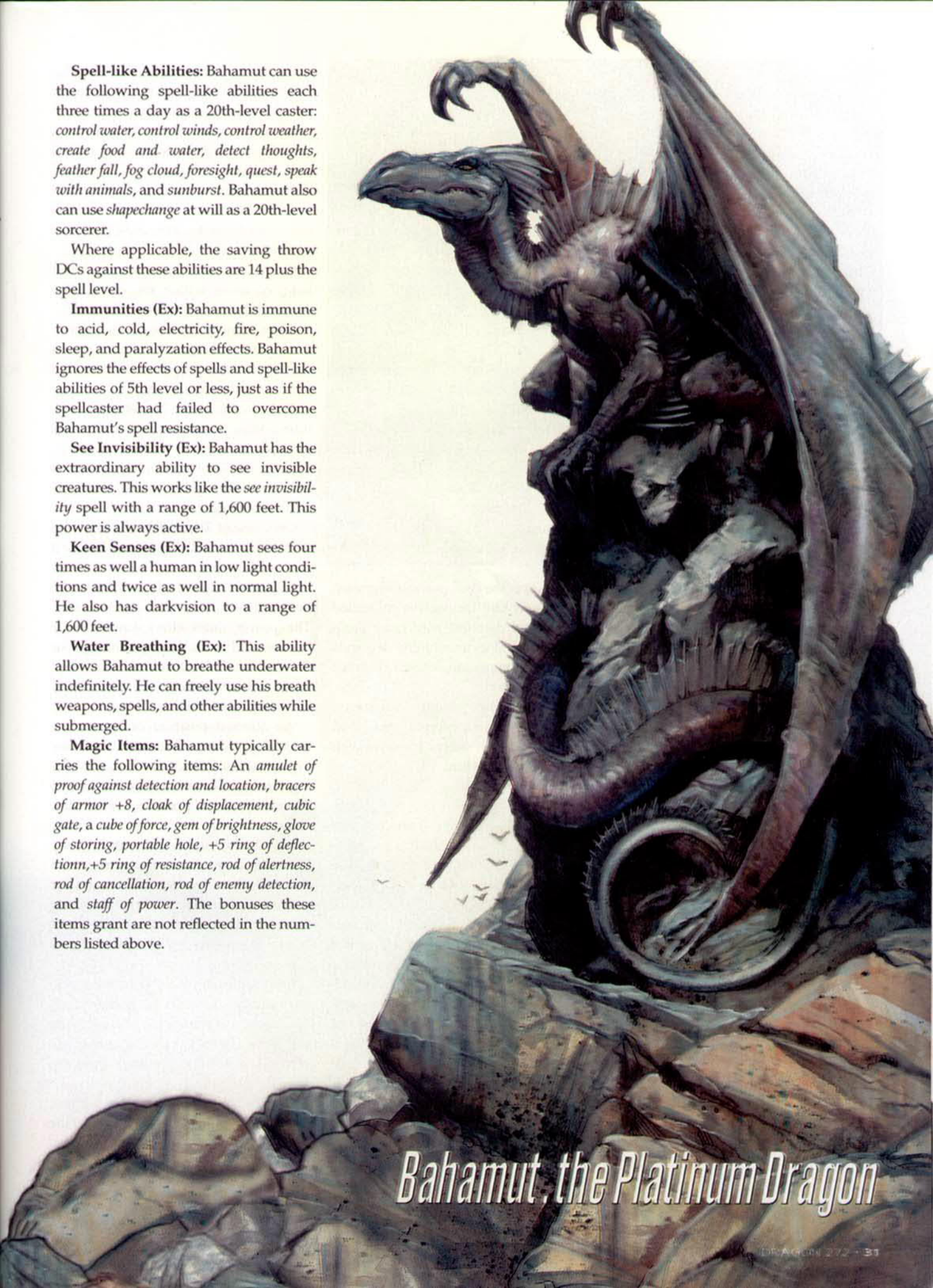
Immunities (Ex): Bahamut is immune to acid, cold, electricity, fire, poison, sleep, and paralyzation effects. Bahamut ignores the effects of spells and spell-like abilities of 5th level or less, just as if the spellcaster had failed to overcome Bahamut's spell resistance.

See Invisibility (Ex): Bahamut has the extraordinary ability to see invisible creatures. This works like the *see invisibility* spell with a range of 1,600 feet. This power is always active.

Keen Senses (Ex): Bahamut sees four times as well a human in low light conditions and twice as well in normal light. He also has darkvision to a range of 1,600 feet.

Water Breathing (Ex): This ability allows Bahamut to breathe underwater indefinitely. He can freely use his breath weapons, spells, and other abilities while submerged.

Magic Items: Bahamut typically carries the following items: An *amulet of proof against detection and location, bracers of armor +8, cloak of displacement, cubic gate*, a *cube of force, gem of brightness, glove of storing, portable hole, +5 ring of deflectionn,+5 ring of resistance, rod of alertness, rod of cancellation, rod of enemy detection*, and *staff of power*. The bonuses these items grant are not reflected in the numbers listed above.



Bahamut, the Platinum Dragon

Tiamat

Colossal Dragon

Hit Dice: 49d12+588 (906 hp)
Initiative: +4 (Improved Initiative)
Speed: 40 ft., Fl 150 ft. (clumsy), Sw 40 ft.
AC: 50 (–8 size, +48 natural)
Attacks: 5 bites, +60 melee; 2 wings, +55 melee; sting, +55 melee
Damage: Bite, 4d6+19; wing, 2d8+9; sting, 4d6+9 plus poison
Face/Reach: 15 ft. by 40 ft./15 ft
Special Attacks: Breath weapons, frightful presence, sound imitation, spells, spell-like abilities
Special Defenses: Scent, spell resistance 30, damage reduction (25/+4), immunities, *see invisibility*, keen senses, *water breathing*
Saves: Fort +39, Ref +27, Will +34
Abilities: Str 49, Dex 10, Con 35, Int 28, Wis 25, Cha 28
Skills: Alchemy +35, Bluff +61, Concentration +63, Diplomacy +61, Gather Information +59, Intimidate +61, Knowledge (arcana) +31, Knowledge (dragonkind) +34, Knowledge (history) +31, Knowledge (the planes) +31, Knowledge (religion) +31, Listen +61, Scry +61, Search +61, Sense Motive +59, Spellcraft +61, Spot +61, Wilderness Lore +33
Feats: Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Hover, Improved Critical (Bite), Improved Initiative, Expertise, Fly-By Attack, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (*domination*), Snatch, Wingover
Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground
Organization: Solitary (1), Troupe (Tiamat and 1d6 chromatic dragons, of age categories 1d8+4)
Challenge Level: 25 (solitary)
Treasure: When traveling, Tiamat carries her magic items and 2d12+2 gems of various sizes. Tiamat's lair contains 2d4 level 20 treasures.
Alignment: Always lawful evil
Advancement Range: N/A

Tiamat is also known as the Chromatic Dragon and the Queen of the Evil Dragons. Like her arch-rival, Bahamut, she is revered as a deity in many locales. All evil dragons pay homage to Tiamat; green and blue dragons acknowledge her sovereignty the most readily. Good dragons have a healthy respect for Tiamat, though they usually take care not to mention her or even think about her at all.

In her natural form, Tiamat is a thick-bodied dragon with five heads and a wyvern's tail. Each head is a different color: white, black, green, blue, and red. Her massive body is striped in those colors.

Tiamat dwells in the upper reaches of Baator, where she rules a realm populated mainly by dragons, other scaly creatures of diverse types, and an assortment of devils (particularly the abishai devils, who resemble evil dragons). Tiamat's consorts include great wyrm dragons of the white, black, green, blue, and red types.

Tiamat is very active in the world. She usually travels in the guise of a bewitching human or elven female. Several evil dragons of various types either accompany her in disguise or lurk out of sight nearby. Tiamat constantly seeks to extend the power and dominion of evil dragons over the land, particularly when her subjects find themselves embroiled in territorial disputes with good dragons. Tiamat also unfailingly demands reverence, homage, and tribute from her subjects.

Tiamat speaks many languages, including Draconic, Infernal, Ignan, and Common, though she can converse with any intelligent creature.

Combat

Tiamat can literally lay waste to large tracts of countryside if she has a mind to do so. She is shrewd enough to capture foes when she can, holding them for ransom, interrogation, or both. Tiamat loves physical combat and assumes her natural form to close to melee if possible. She can bite with all her heads, even if she moves or charges during a round. Instead of biting, each head can use a breath weapon or a spell-like ability as a standard action. Tiamat can cast one spell each round, which counts as a standard action for one of her heads.

It is possible, though not easy, to sever Tiamat's heads in much the same way one can sever a hydra's head. Severing a head requires a slashing weapon. If the blow inflicts at least 185 points of damage, the head is severed.

Breath Weapons (Su): Each of Tiamat's five heads produces a different breath weapon, as follows:

White: A cone of cold 70 feet long; creatures within the cone suffer 12d6 points of cold damage.

Black: A line of acid 5 feet high, 5 feet wide, and 140 feet long; creatures within the area of effect suffer 24d4 points of acid damage.

Green: A cone of corrosive gas 70 feet long; creatures within the cone suffer 24d6 points of acid damage.

Blue: A line of lightning 5 feet high, 5 feet wide, and 140 feet long; creatures within the area of effect suffer 24d8 points of electrical damage.

Red: A cone of fire 70 feet long; creatures within the cone suffer 24d10 points of fire damage.

Each of Tiamat's breath weapons allow a Reflex saving throw vs. DC 46 for half damage.

Once one of Tiamat's heads breathes, the head must wait 1d4 rounds before it can breathe again.

Frightful Presence (Ex): Tiamat can unsettle foes with her mere presence. The power takes effect automatically whenever Tiamat attacks, charges, or flies overhead. Creatures within a radius of 450 feet are subject to the effect if they have 48 or fewer Hit Dice.

An affected creature can resist the effects by making a successful Will saving throw vs. DC 43. A successful saving throw makes a creature immune to Tiamat's frightful presence for one day. Creatures with 4 Hit Dice or fewer become panicked for 4d6 rounds if they fail their saving throw. Creatures with 5 or more Hit Dice become shaken for 4d6 rounds if they fail their saving throw. Evil dragons (and Bahamut) ignore the effects of Tiamat's frightful presence.

Sound Imitation (Ex): This extraordinary ability allows Tiamat to mimic any voice or sound she has heard at any time she likes. Listeners can detect the ruse with a successful Will saving throw vs. DC 43.

Spells: Tiamat is a 20th-level sorcerer and a 20th-level cleric with access to the Evil and Law domains. (Tiamat also gains the granted powers associated with those domains.) In her natural form, Tiamat can cast her spells with but a word.

Spell-like Abilities: Tiamat can use the following spell-like abilities each three times a day as a 20th-level caster: *command plants, control weather, darkness, domination, fog cloud, gust of wind, mirage arcana, plant growth, suggestion, summon swarm, veil*, and *ventriloquism*. She can use the following powers once a day as a 20th-level caster: *eyebite* and *discern location*.

The saving throw DCs for these abilities are 19 plus the spell level.

Tiamat has the ability to *corrupt water* once a day. This ability causes up to 10 cubic feet of water to become stagnant, foul, inert, and unable to support animal life. The ability can spoil magical potions and any other liquid containing water; unattended items are automatically fouled. Items in a creature's possession remain unaffected if the bearer makes a successful Will saving throw vs. DC 43.

Tiamat can *charm* reptiles three times per day. The power operates as a *mass charm* spell (Will saving throw vs. DC 27 negates), but the ability works only on reptilian animals. Tiamat can communicate with any reptiles she has *charmed* as though using a *speak with animals* spell.

Poison (Ex): Creatures Tiamat stings with her tail suffer 3d6 points of temporary Constitution damage unless they make a Fortitude saving throw vs. DC 46. After 1 minute, poisoned creatures must make an additional Fortitude saving throw vs. DC 46 or suffer an additional 3d6 points of Constitution damage.

Water Breathing (Ex): This extraordinary ability allows Tiamat to breathe underwater indefinitely. She can freely use her breath weapons, spells, and other abilities while submerged.

Magic Items: Tiamat typically carries the following items: an *amulet of the planes, +8 bracers of armor, carpet of flying* (6 ft. by 9 ft.), *cloak of displacement, crystal ball* with *detect thoughts, darkskull, iron bands of Bilarro, iron flask* (empty), *orb of storms, portable hole +5, ring of deflection, +5 ring of resistance, rod of rulership*, and *rod of splendor*. The bonuses these items grant are not reflected in the numbers listed above.

Tiamat, The Chromatic Dragon

As you can see, the new D&D game offers a wealth of detail. Most of it will be familiar to veteran players, but here are brief explanations of selected terms:

Size and Type: This line begins with the creature's size category—"Colossal" is the top category, used for creatures more than 64 feet long and weighing more than 250,000 pounds. A creature's size affects its combat abilities.

Type determines how magic affects the creature; for example, the *hold animal* spell affects only Animal type creatures. Type also determines many characteristics, including Hit Dice, attack modifiers, saving throws, and skills.

Hit Dice: A parenthetical listing of the creature's average hit points follows the Hit Dice listing.

Initiative: A parenthetical note shows where the bonuses come from.

Speed: This line replaces the old movement entry. It gives the creature's land speed (the distance it can cover in one move).

Fly: All flying speeds include a maneuverability rating, as follows:

Perfect: The creature can perform almost any aerial maneuver.

Good: The creature is very agile in the air (like a housefly or hummingbird).

Average: The creature can fly as adroitly as small bird.

Poor: The creature flies as well as a very large bird.

Clumsy: The creature can barely fly at all.

Armor Class: This line gives the creature's Armor Class for normal combat. To compare the Armor Classes listed to the AD&D® rules, subtract 20 and change the sign. So Tiamat would have an AC of –30 in the old game.

Attacks: This line gives all the creature's physical attacks. The number of attacks is given along with the weapon used along with the attack bonus and the type of attack (melee or ranged). Creatures attack by rolling 1d20. If the attack roll plus the attack bonus equals or exceeds the Armor Class, the attack hits. The attack bonus includes adjustments for size, Strength, and other factors.

Damage: The listing includes adjustments for Strength.

Face/Reach: The numbers before the slash show how much space the creature needs to fight, width first, length second. The number after the slash is the creature's reach.

Special Attacks: This line lists all the creature's special attacks in the order they are most likely to be used.

Special attacks are Extraordinary (Ex), Spell-like (Sp), or Supernatural (Su).

Extraordinary abilities are nonmagical, don't go away in an antimagic field, and are not subject to anything that disrupts magic; using an extraordinary attack is a free action unless noted otherwise.

Spell-like abilities are magical and work just like spells (though they are not spells and have no verbal, somatic, or material components). They go away in an antimagic field and are subject to spell resistance.

Supernatural abilities are magical and go away in an antimagic field but are not subject to spell resistance. Using a supernatural ability is standard action unless noted otherwise. Supernatural abilities will have a daily use limit or can be used at will, just as spell-like abilities are.

Breath Weapon (Su): A dragon's breath weapon is usable once every 1d4 rounds. Cone shaped breath weapons are as high and wide as the distance from the dragon's mouth.

Frightful Presence (Ex): This power makes the creature's presence unsettling to foes. Shaken creatures suffer a –2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and checks.

Panicked creatures run away from the source of their fear as quickly as they can. Other than running away from the source, their path is random. They have a 50% chance to drop what they are holding, and they flee from all other dangers that confront them rather than facing them. Panicked characters who are prevented from fleeing cower instead.

Poison (Ex): Creatures subjected to poison must make an immediate saving throw or suffer the venom's effects. Sometime later (usually 1 minute), a poisoned creature must make a second saving throw (even if the first one was successful) or suffer an additional effect.

Most poisons inflict temporary ability score damage. Temporary ability score damage returns at the rate of 1 point per day.

Special Defenses: This line lists all the creature's special defenses in the order they are most likely to be used.

Special defenses are Extraordinary (Ex), Spell-like (Sp), or Supernatural (Su), just as special attacks are.

Scent (Ex): The creature can detect other creatures by smell within a 30 foot radius.

Spell Resistance (Ex): Replaces magic resistance from earlier versions of the game. A spell or spell-like ability cannot affect the creature unless the caster rolls the spell resistance number on 1d20 plus the caster's level.

Damage Reduction: Damage from any physical attack (not a magical or energy attack) is reduced by the number before the slash. So if a fire giant smacks Bahamut for 35 points of damage, Bahamut suffers only 10 points of damage. The number after the slash shows the type of weapon that negates the damage reduction. If the giant in our example were using a +4 weapon, Bahamut would have suffered all 35 points from the blow. Creatures that have damage reduction inflict full damage on other creatures that are vulnerable to the same or weaker type of weapon, so Bahamut and Tiamat inflict full damage on each other.

Saves: Creatures have a bonus or penalty that applies to their saving throw rolls. To succeed, a saving throw result has to equal or exceed the saving throw's Difficulty Class, which starts at 10 and goes up, just as Armor Classes do.

There are now only three categories of saving throws: Fortitude (for things that affect the body or the life force), Reflex (for blasts and other area effects), and Will (for assaults on the mind).

Abilities: Creatures now have the same six ability scores that characters do.

Skills: Similar to proficiencies in the AD&D 2nd Edition game. Skill checks use a difficulty class system similar to the one described for saving throws.

Feats: Special powers, somewhat like skills. Note that certain feats presented here (Hover, Flyby Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability, Snatch, and Wingover) are specific to monsters. These feats are not found in the *Player's Handbook*, but they are described in the new *Monster Manual*.

Skip's primary contribution to the new D&D game has been designing the new versions of the monsters, so don't expect any mercy.

by Jean Rabe and Skip Williams

The New Ecology of the Dragons

They're back—and more dangerous than ever!

The inn stood at a crossroads. It fronted on a broad track whose sturdy pavement, carefully laid by hands long since turned to dust, was beginning to surrender to too many years of wear, frost, and invasions from the surrounding forest. A narrow, muddy logging track crossed the road nearby, and a thin stripe of clay and forest debris marked the pavement where the loggers and other two-legged denizens of the forest traveled.

As dusk began to creep over the trees, a ragged foursome trudged up the trail and paused to stare gratefully at the inn. They had the frayed and gritty look of men and women who made their livings by spell and sword. This group was more frayed than most. Under the trail dirt, their tunics and cloaks were mottled with pale splotches where the color had been burned away. Their armor and metal accouterments were tarnished and pitted; whatever had scarred their metal had also left their faces scaly and blistered.

The group was loaded with sacks and bundles. The patrons at the roadside inn had seen their share of rogues, vagabonds, and sell-swords burdened with loot. Overstrained leather bags crammed with who-knew-what were common enough, and even the limp, shrouded form of a carefully wrapped corpse was not out of the ordinary for a group such as this—and indeed, such a burden was among those the group carried. A thin man with a pale scholar's complexion staggered as he bore the wrapped body. A tall fighter followed close behind, toting a pair of oblong bundles over his broad shoulders. The hidden items had been wrapped in blankets and carefully tied. Flies swarmed around the bundles' drooping ends, where the blankets were bloodsoaked and stiff. Two other armor-clad and pack-laden figures, a man and a woman, completed the group.

The innkeeper scrutinized the group and their burdens from a window, bolted to the doorway, and planted himself on the threshold. Wringing his hands on his apron, he forced himself to smile broadly. "Greetings, milady and gentlemen. Welcome to the Crossroads Inn!" His smile weakened as the group drew nearer and he caught scent of them. "Nobb! Hartcourt!" he screeched over his shoulder. "You lazybones, come help these good people with their packages." Rebuilding his smile with an effort, he turned to the newcomers. "You've obviously come a long way and must be very tired. In two shakes, we'll have your bundles safely put away in the stable. No need to carry them any farther." He fervently hoped there wouldn't be trouble. Some of the patrons inside moved to tables closer to the door, secretly hoping there would be.

There was a brief argument when the foursome refused to give up their bundles and dead comrade. In the end, the innkeeper agreed to tuck the body away in a private room upstairs, and the party reluctantly allowed the bundles to be carried to the stables and stored there under Nobb's watchful eye—once Nobb understood the penalty for disturbing the bundles himself.

The group strode purposefully into the inn to see a dozen patrons at tables near the door, all pretending not to notice the newcomers. A young woman and an elderly man who were finishing dinner at the bar nodded a greeting. The newcomers selected a cluttered table near the fire. Out of habit, they turned their backs to the fire and sat so they could watch the windows and door—and the other patrons.

"Now, what can I get for you?" the innkeeper queried.

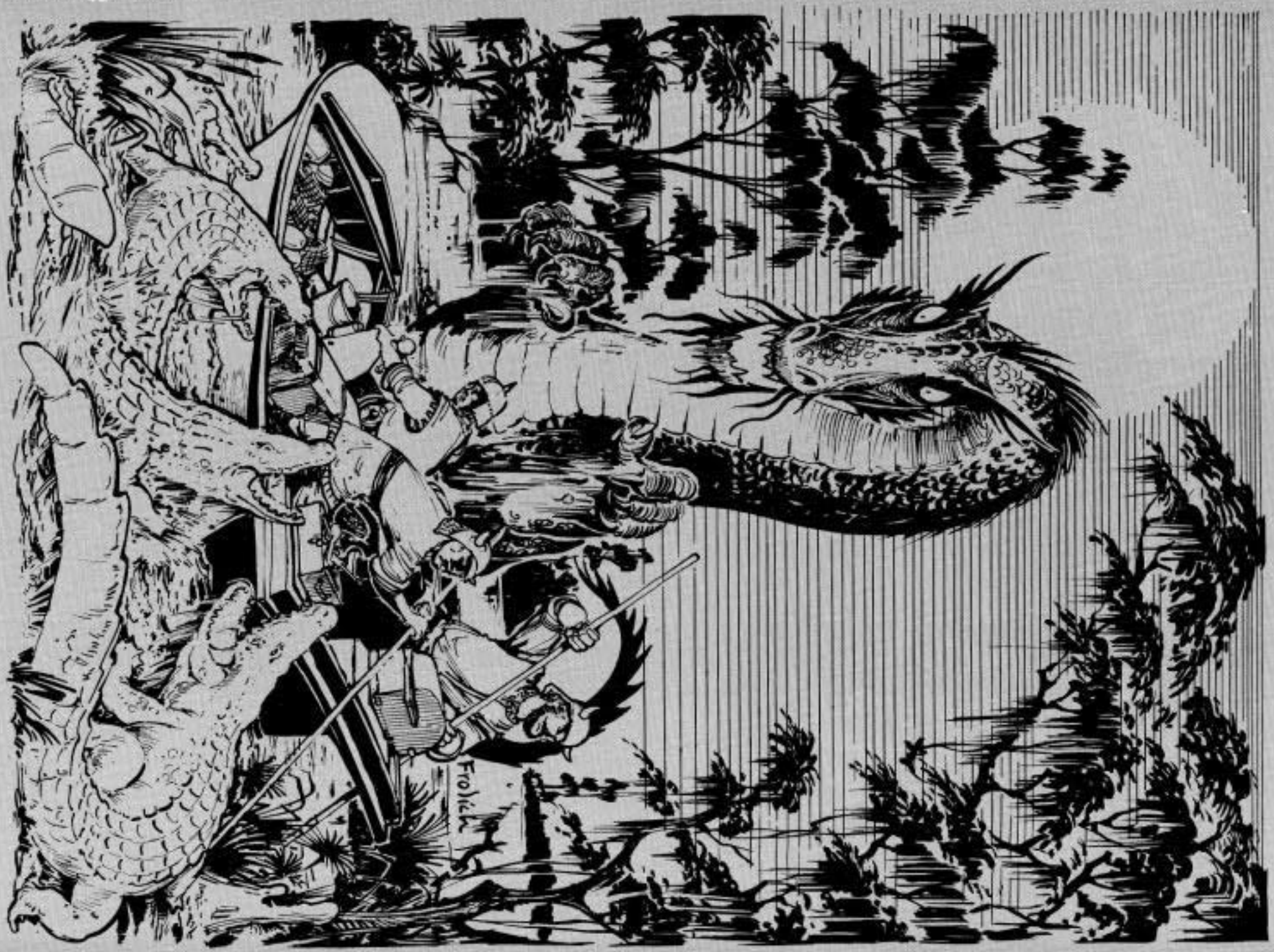
"Wine for four, and silence," the fighter replied.

The innkeeper retreated. The tall fighter's eyes swept the room again, chasing away the inquisitive gaze of the bar's patrons. The old man and young woman smiled benignly, even compassionately, when he glanced at them. Definitely not locals, the fighter thought; they made a handsome couple—father and daughter, perhaps. The fighter immediately decided he liked them. A nudge and a nod from the fighter's scholarly companion drew his attention to the only other obvious traveler in the room: a tall, weather-beaten man sitting alone at a corner table. Although his face was hidden by a hood, the fighter could feel the stranger's eyes boring into him. Now it was his turn to look away.

"Shall we strangers all sit together?" The young woman had arisen and now approached the adventurers' table with the old man in tow. "It would better accommodate the locals. They won't have to strain their necks looking from place to place."

The fighter acquiesced, gesturing to two empty chairs. The innkeeper brought the

Illustration by Dan Frolich



wine and glasses, then retreated but stayed within earshot.

"I'm Jonnel," the fighter said. He pointed to his thin friend. "This is Tehm, and this is Katarine of Sune," he continued, indicating the plain-looking woman in chain mail, who was favoring her right arm. "Over there is my brother, Jubal." The other fighter coolly regarded the man and woman, then resumed watching the other patrons and the stranger in the corner. "Melody's upstairs. . . indisposed. Temporarily, we hope." Tehm glared at Jonnel, then lost himself in a glass of wine. Jonnel did not seem bothered.

The pair sat. "I'm Hypatia," said the woman, "and my good companion is Sterling. We're from the mountains north of here. By the look of you, you've got quite a story to tell. Tell us about it, won't you?"

Another silence fell over the room. The party members exchanged glances briefly. Katarine rolled her eyes. Jonnel glanced around the table, but no one made an effort to speak. Still, custom was custom; an invitation to a tale was not to be refused. Reluctantly, he took a deep breath and cleared his throat. Best to skip over the last few weeks and just pick up with yesterday. "As fortune had it," he began, "we found ourselves in the woods but a day's march from here with the, um, fruits of our recent labors. The woods had been quiet for several days, and we were edgy."

"We were at each others' throats about it, you mean," Katarine said quietly. "We knew something was wrong, but we had no idea what. We were having an argument when it came upon us. It must have been following us."

"It was a dragon," Jonnel clarified, warming to the tale. "It was immense, ninety feet from nose to tail, if an inch. It had a neck like a tree trunk. I turned when it came on, and all I could see were its teeth, like scimitars." There were gasps from the patrons at the magical word "dragon." The stranger in the corner leaned forward and cupped his chin in his hand, saying nothing at all. Hypatia and Sterling waited expectantly.

"It was damned clever," Jonnel said. "We didn't know what it was at first. We were breaking camp one morning with the usual grumbling about who was going to carry what, when we heard a deep, rumbling voice like thunder. It said something like, 'I'll take care of your belongings. In exchange, I'll let you live.'"

"We were hardly in the mood for talk," Tehm said into his wineglass. "And we weren't about to hand our belongings over to something hidden in the trees. Would that we had known better."

"I prepared a hold person spell, and Jonnel and Jubal drew steel," Katarine added. "Then the dragon showed itself, rising up and snapping a tree beneath its weight. It was barely a dagger's throw from us. We'd never even heard it."

"It was a green dragon, wasn't it?" Sterling interrupted. "There's been word of one in this region for years, a greedy bully with a dark splash beneath one eye."

"That it was, the same one," Jubal replied, surprised. "We immediately covered our faces and stopped breathing, to save ourselves from its breath."

"And little help it was, too," Jonnel said. "It laughed and blew a cloud at us, thick green stuff that writhed as if it were solid. When it touched us, it stuck; the gas coated our armor and corroded it." He indicated his once-fine chain mail. "The gas seeped into our skins, and we became feverish and nauseated. It burned our eyes, making it difficult to see. When it got in our throats, we could barely talk. By some miracle, we all survived that first onslaught."[1]

Tehm set his glass on the table but didn't look up. "Before we could act, the thing leapt into the air. For all its size, it was as graceful as a hawk. Beating its great wings to stay aloft, it demanded that we lay down our wealth, or it would breathe again. This time, we complied. We put our bags and backpacks in the clearing and backed away, seeking shelter in the foliage. Still, we did not want to lose our wealth, foolishly valuing it more than our lives. We circled the beast as it descended to inspect what we'd left. Katarine and I prepared spells; Jonnel and Jubal readied their weapons; and dear Melody climbed a tree to gain the best angle for her bow—she trusted luck and her skill."

Tehm's voice became inflectionless and distant. "The dragon was so engrossed in its gains that it wasn't paying attention to us. Melody planted an arrow deep in the dragon's side, and we gave it all we had. My magic missiles caused it to shriek in pain before Katarine magically silenced the beast so it would not be able to cast spells.[2] Jonnel and Jubal tried to close with it, but the thing arose from the forest floor; I was amazed that something so large could move so fast. I thought it was going to fly straight up so it could breathe on us again. Instead, it flew to the tree that Melody was in, snatched her from the branches with one great claw, and carried her aloft. In a moment, it was above the trees. . . ." He stopped, looking into the distance. When he spoke again, his voice was barely audible. "I ran into the clearing, trying to get it to come back."[3]

Jonnel laid a blistered but steady hand over the mage's trembling fist. "We all went a little crazy then," he said. "It sped away from us for a few moments, climbing higher and higher. As we watched, the dragon slowed and turned.[4] And soon it was back over the clearing; it looked like a bird, it was so far away. We scattered, spreading out so its breath weapon wouldn't catch us all. We watched from hiding, waiting for anything but what happened next." The fighter's voice faded now, too. "The dragon dropped Melody. She landed in the center of the clearing. Then the dragon flew away."

"We rushed out to her, Tehm and I," Katarine said after a pause. "It was no use. She was beyond aid. Jonnel and Jubal began to gather our possessions while keeping an eye out for the dragon. We picked Melody up and started to carry her to the cover of the trees when we heard Jonnel yell. The dragon was back; we hadn't thought it would return so quickly."[5]

Jonnel picked up the story. "I hollered a warning as the dragon plummeted to the clearing, landing on top of Katarine, Tehm, and Melody." Then it got up, turned toward us, and breathed again. We survived the attack and charged forward. We knew it could not breathe again so soon. We then charged—"

The stranger in the corner snorted, a big puff of smoke rising from his pipe. "Some fools say dragons must rest each time they breathe their poisons before unleashing another breath. But this is only what the survivors have reported. Those who failed to survive might have told a different story—that dragons can breathe more quickly than anyone would suppose."[7]

There was a brittle silence. The adventurers stared at the stranger as they fingered their wineglasses.

"At any rate," continued Jubal, "we knew it had but one more breath left within it, so it could not—"

"And some fools," the stranger snorted again, his head wreathed in a gray-blue ring of pipe smoke, "think dragons can breathe only three times a day."

The stares that were given this time were long and cold.

"There is truth to what he says." Every-

"Then the dragon showed itself, rising up and snapping a tree beneath its weight. It was barely a dagger's throw from us. We'd never even heard it."

"It flew to the tree that Melody was in, snatched her from the branches with one great claw, and carried her aloft."

one turned to Hypatia. "It sometimes happens that dragons can breathe again more quickly than their opponents believe possible. I have seen it happen. And some can, by resting, restore their breath weapons again in less than a day's time."

"In any event," Jubal said at last, "we charged the dragon, drawing it away from our two living comrades, who only had the wind knocked from them to go with their bruises. I decided to meet the dragon head on, while Jonnel went for its side. We figured this tactic would keep one of us safe from its bite. But the dragon lashed out with a wing, sending Jonnel spinning. I rushed to his aid without thinking, and I could almost feel the fiend's teeth as they snapped at my back. But Jonnel regained his footing unhindered, and we turned back to the fray, taking it from behind as it prepared to chew on our comrades."

The stranger peevishly tapped the ashes from his pipe. "Here comes another lesson in dragon fighting," he muttered.

Jubal's hand dropped to the pommel of his sword.

"Gods!" shouted Tehm, slamming down his glass in a spray of wine. His eyes burned as they fixed on the stranger. "Dare you mock us and our grief? Is your life so dull that you find comfort in courting your death?"

The patrons who had hoped for trouble now found they had been too hasty in

their wishes. They now sat with bloodless faces, not even daring to breathe.

"Hardly," returned the stranger, packing his pipe anew. "I've merely had the fortune, good or bad, to have gone on before you. So tell me, valiant fighter," he continued, gesturing to Jubal with his unlit pipe, "did it lash with its tail, or did you just get kicked?"

Tehm scowled silently and gulped the rest of his wine. He reached for the pitcher, but Katarine stopped him.

The color arose in Jubal's cheeks. "It kicked us," he said evenly.

"No insult intended," replied the stranger, "but you were fortunate. A dragon's tail can lash at anyone who isn't standing right at its root. A kick is preferable to that, at least."

"I would not trade for a worse blow than the one it gave us," Jubal said slowly. "I thought I had been struck by a battering ram,"

"Your analogy is appropriate," Hypatia said suddenly. "But again, he is correct. A dragon's tail weighs many hundreds of pounds. A single slap from it can kill far more easily than could a kick. A few strokes of a tail, and this inn would be around our ears."[8]

"Forgive me," said the stranger, in a matter-of-fact tone, "but I'll wager that after you were kicked, you fought the dragon and slew it before it could breathe again. You skinned it, wrapped the hide in bundles, then came directly here."

"You are either a seer," said Tehm in a dangerously calm voice, "or you've been spying upon us."

"Not spying at all," replied the stranger. "We saw your friend Jonnel carrying the bundles, stiff with blood. Also, you were loaded with treasure; you admitted as much, and the sad burden you carried was obvious when you came up the road. With such a load as that, I doubt you would have gone anywhere else before you came here. I guessed the dragon did not breathe again because a dragon's foes do not usually survive if it can breathe more than once. Your courage and skill are not at question. You have merely discovered what many others have died learning—that dragons are terrible and versatile foes. I have shown it poorly, but you have my sincere respect. Please forgive my intrusions."

The adventurers seemed only slightly mollified by this, but appeared willing to let the stranger's rudeness drop. Several chairs scraped loudly across the floor as many of the tavern's patrons shoved themselves away from their tables and left the inn. Some were disappointed at the spoiling of the tale. Most were grateful to be alive. The innkeeper's face fell as he watched his customers go. The stranger only smiled. He then spoke a word, a tiny 'flame appeared on his forefinger, and he relit his pipe.

"I was not surprised to hear that you missed the dragon when it was lying in wait for you," continued the stranger. "Green dragons are bred for the forest. Their color blends in with the foliage well, and they know it the forest as well as most elves. It's their territory, for which—as you saw—they will die defending,"

Sterling nodded. "Some will die defending it. The dragon you fought was said to be young, and the battle you describe with it confirms this. I presume it picked the particular clearing you were in for its attack because there were small trees nearby—trees it could snap dramatically to make itself seem much bigger and more terrifying."

"But it was so large!" Tehm exclaimed. "Melody was like a tiny doll in its claws. And you call it young?"

"All dragons are large," Sterling said. "You were just lucky you fought one of the smaller ones. Based on the size of the bundles of skin you carried, and your estimate of its length, I would speculate that the dragon was probably a mere child. It stayed and fought to the end, indicating the foolishness of youth: It valued your treasure more than its life—a misconception that you said once belonged to you and your friends. Older and wiser dragons, although they covet treasure, understand the value of their their enormous lifespans. They will flee from risky conflicts to seek less costly struggles later.

"And if you have considered going back to get the young wyrm's treasure," the old man added, "I wouldn't bother. Juvenile dragons usually don't have treasure—they're just starting out on their own. What treasure you carried might have made a nice start for it. On the other hand, the dragon might still have been living with one or both parents, and perhaps had other siblings. If that was the case, tracking it to its lair would only prove fatal for all of you.

"Yes," the stranger said, setting his pipe on the table. "Accept your loss and lick your wounds."

Tehm steepled his fingers and glanced at the stranger, whose face still remained hidden by the cloak. He then turned to the couple. "How is it that you know so much about dragons?"

Sterling laid his left arm on the table and rolled up the sleeve of his robe. "This," he said, as he indicated a long scar, "comes from an encounter with a blue dragon" He rolled the arm over, revealing a deeper, curved scar. "And this is a souvenir from a red dragon. Hypatia and I are . . . multitalented, and we have a special interest in the doings of the evil serpents-"

"How did you cross paths with the blue one?" Katarine queried.

"The tale is too long to tell. Let it suffice to say that a friend of mine had dragon trouble, and my young companion and I went to investigate it. It was in the desert many leagues to the west of here. We were forced to meet the fearsome beast in the open, as it is next to impossible to sneak up on a blue dragon. The tale of the

"You see, blue dragons—indeed, all dragons—leave little indication of their presence, hiding their passage by flying over the land or by manipulating the environment."

battle is irrelevant. We killed it, of course; otherwise we would not be here. Blue dragons are loathe to let anything get away from them."

"Please go on," pressed Katarine. "We would do well to learn more of the tricks involved in dragon slaying."

Hypatia and Sterling exchanged looks that no one could interpret.

"I would like to know more about dragon slaying myself," said the stranger. "Such knowledge could only be of help."

"Really?" the young woman said, turning to look at the stranger. Their eyes locked.

"Of help against evil dragons, of course," the stranger said. "Share with us what you know."

"It's a bagatelle," the old man said, moving his chair so his back was to the stranger. Hypatia didn't move; her eyes bored into the stranger's hood. The stranger returned the gaze and blew a lazy smoke ring, gold in color, that drifted to the adventurers' table. The young woman broke it with an outstretched finger.

The old man scowled in disapproval at his companion. "Anyway," he continued. "blue dragons are masters of ambush. Where green dragons scheme to bring all the creatures of the forest under their dominion, blue dragons seek to trap the unwary. They crave fresh meat and sudden victory. They use the arid deserts where they live to build their traps. Young dragons merely bury themselves in the sand, wait for something to get close enough, and strike as quickly as the lightning they breathe."

"Dragons can dig?" Jubal queried.

"Oh, yes," Sterling replied. "Several kinds of dragons can burrow, but only the young prefer it." Older and craftier blue dragons soar over the desert for hours. When they spot prey, they watch it from a great height, being careful to stay hidden against the blinding sun. When the time is right, usually during the hottest part of the day, they strike. Many travelers have lost their pack animals and supplies to attacks like this. Afterward, the dragon continues to shadow any remaining victims, attacking again and again, sometimes charging from behind a dune in the dark of night, or lying in wait near water. You never know where you'll find the dragon. It could be right in front of you."

The stranger snorted as he puffed on his pipe, but he was smiling.

The young woman's eyes slowly narrowed to slivers as she stared at the stranger. "What do you want from us?" she asked.

"Nothing whatsoever beyond your good will," answered the stranger gallantly, almost cheerfully. "Pray, tell us more."

The old man resumed, "Blue dragons use their environment, and the older ones can manipulate it. Some whip up great winds that cause sandstorms to blind travelers. The oldest of the dragons use illusions to change the appearance of the terrain. I once heard of a blue dragon who would burrow into the sand up to its eyes, then create an illusion of an oasis over it, complete with a glistening pool. As parched, unwary travelers approached, it rose up and breathed its lightning on them. These old dragons can also mask the terrain to cause travelers to lose their way. In some deserts where blue dragons are known to lair, maps are as valuable as water."

"But what about the one you fought? Was it hard to find its lair?" Jonnel asked. "And is its skin worth anything?"

"I would think," Katarine said, "that it would be pretty easy to tell where a dragon travels. All you have to do is follow its tracks and droppings."

Hypatia started to speak, then stopped herself. A blush spread over her face.

Sterling sipped his wine and slowly shook his head. "Taking skins is barbaric—forgive me. But yes, we found its lair, and two younger dragons, which we quickly dispatched. We weren't in the mood to subdue them.[10] The lair was a horrid, evil place—not filled with droppings as most would think. Dragons are incredibly efficient creatures; nearly everything they eat is converted to raw energy. It was located amid grotesque rock formations, and ugly, pale desert fungus clung to the walls. There were small bits of bone and a few polished skulls, probably set about as macabre decoration. We stayed there only a short while, as long as was necessary to gather the gems, jewelry, trinkets, and gold. We left behind the copper, as it was not as valuable as the other items and was too voluminous to carry."

"There was a big collection of marvelous blue sapphires," Hypatia broke in. "There were too many of the exquisite gems for them to have been there by chance. The dragon must have been deliberately collecting them, sending agents to purchase or steal them, or demanding them as tribute. Perhaps all blue dragons covet them because of the similarity to their own color. Evil dragons are such vain and selfish creatures."

The old man continued his tale. "We left the lair and returned home. The lair had been so difficult to find that I am certain no others stumbled upon it. You see, blue dragons—indeed, all dragons—leave little indication of their presence, hiding their passage by flying over the land or by manipulating the environment. In most deserts, the sands are evershifting, quickly hiding a blue dragon's tracks.

"All dragons' lairs are virtually inaccessible to all but their inhabitants. Red dragons live on lonely mountain tops; black dragons make their lairs in dismal bogs; white dragons choose forbidding, icy wastes."

"But no matter where the lairs are hidden, men will always search them out," said the stranger. "Dragons aren't the only creatures who are greedy and covetous. Every being on two legs looks forward to the day he can come to a place like this, stand tall, and say 'I killed a dragon.' Wealth and glory are powerful lures for any adventurer. Wouldn't you agree?"

The stranger was looking at the adventurers, whose faces hardened as they guessed they were being mocked again.

"Enough is enough," said Hypatia quietly.

The stranger nodded. "Still, on the subject of lairs, there are a few common factors they all share. All dragon lairs are isolated, as dragons like their privacy. Evil dragons look to the wealth they've accumulated for companionship. And as efficient as they are, they are voracious eaters. All natural creatures nearby quickly learn to avoid the dragon's lair; those that don't are just as quickly eaten.

"The area around an evil dragon's lair exists in a state of arrested decay, while a good dragon's abode is surrounded by a country that is both serene and beautiful. The entrances to the lair are always hard to find. The dragon will use all of its natural and magical abilities to hide them, and will use its intelligence and strength to create obstacles within the lair to trap trespassers. A well-concealed dragon's lair cannot be seen until one treads upon the very threshold or wanders blindly into it. And a dragon is so linked to its lair that it can detect the presence of life within it; an older dragon can sense life beyond its lair."

"Too true," said Sterling. "A black dragon lying in its boggy lair can sense lizards scampering by on fallen trees. One such dragon sensed my companions and I paddling our boat through a reedy cypress swamp. When the noon sun beat down, a miasma rose and made it difficult to navigate or even breathe. We noticed a dark, clear spot to our right, where the cypresses, festooned with clinging vines, leaned over the water and formed a shady grotto. We paddled toward the grotto. It was quiet and calm, and without mist. We planned to rest awhile and perhaps fish. However, we had little time even for thinking. Crocodiles from the bank swam at us like a wave of soldiers going into battle. Spells were cast and arrows fired, but the crocodiles continued to close. Had we been less energetic in our defense, I daresay they would have upset the boat, or at least climbed into it. Yet, at the height of the attack, they were gone as suddenly as

they came. We were puzzled, as we did not believe our efforts would drive them away so quickly. We scanned the bank to make sure the crocodiles were not returning—but we were looking in the wrong direction. The boat surged, nearly pitching us into the water. We cast about wildly and found a massive, ink-black head towering above us. For a moment, it simply stared and looked amused. Before we could collect our scattered wits, it spat."

"Spat?" said Katarine.

"A black dragon's breath is a gout of caustic acid. This particular dragon's acid dissolved just about everything it touched. My skin burned horribly. Needless to say, panic ensued. The majority of my companions stiffened with fear, staring at the beast as it raised a great claw and struck the boat, capsizing it and sending us all into the water. The few of us who could took to the air to combat it; the rest were forced to fight the wyrm in its own element. As the unfortunate few floundered in the fetid water, the dragon called back the crocodiles to join in the fray. Those of us in the air hurled missile weapons and spells—with little effect. Because the thing was so old and its hide so thick, normal missiles bounced off and fell into the dank water. Only some of our spells affected it. Mature dragons are resistant to magic, and this specimen's magic resistance was very powerful. As we continued to fight it, the dragon summoned a swarm of insects that attacked our mage. Next, the venerable beast covered itself in absolute darkness. This caused our party much distress—at least until we dispelled the dweomer. The dragon, of course, was not hindered by the darkness in the least. It fouled our potions, cast spells at us, and dealt our party several fatalities. In the end, the dragon and its servants were killed. It cost us dearly, and we gained little pleasure from the beast's passing."

The old man sighed heavily. "It took us a few hours to find its lair—a cavern with a submerged entrance not far from where we fought it. The water around the lair was foul, black, and stagnant; it mirrored the dragon's dark soul perfectly. Slimy moss clung to the sides of the cavern and coated the treasure. The treasure hoard was immense and comprised gold, silver, and copper coins. But the years and the sodden air had taken their toll on the wealth: The silver and copper coins were heavily tarnished."

"Are all evil dragon lairs conspicuous by their gloom and ugliness?" Katarine asked.

The old man shrugged. "I have always found them so." His companion nodded in agreement.

"On the other hand," added the stranger in the corner, "ugliness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. An overgrown thicket or weedy quagmire has its own kind of beauty, if you see it when you aren't afraid for your life. To a closed mind, anything can be ugly."

"I suppose so," snapped Hypatia. "But I doubt you have ever found true beauty in or around an evil dragon's lair."

"Well," the stranger returned. "That isn't quite what I meant. You can't find an evil dragon's lair just by looking for the ugliest spot for miles. And even an evil dragon's lair can be beautiful in the right circumstances. I remember seeing a white dragon's lair in moonlight. The pale rays streamed into the cave's mouth, making the icy walls look like sheets of diamonds. The blue light danced and scintillated on the heaped treasure like a great and chilly bonfire."

"So you've fought a dragon, too?" Katarine asked.

"As I said earlier, I've been there before." The stranger laid down his pipe, folded his arms, and continued. "A few companions and I were walking across an ice floe tracking a large polar bear. A flock of raucous sea birds accompanied us on the chase. I knew things had gone bad when the sky turned silent. The birds had vanished as if by magic. My companions were pleased, certain that we were coming close to the bear. I looked around, scanning the sky for trouble as my companions spread out over the ice to look for our prey. Trouble came from beneath us.

"The dragon burst from the water like a bolt from a crossbow, breaking the surface in a spray of frigid droplets and slivers of ice. One edge of the floe was heaved into the air, and we tumbled toward the water as clumsily as children sliding down a snow-covered hill. Ice and dragon fell thunderously back into the water. As we scrambled on the slippery ice, the dragon lurched toward us. The ice teetered the other way, and we slid and tumbled toward the monster's jaws. As we fought, the dragon's thrashing tail smashed the ice beneath us to flinders, and we had to retreat to a larger floe or swim.

"It was like a game to the dragon. It gave us a taste of its breath, a blast of frost that chilled our blood and froze our sodden garments. Then it took to the air. This gave us a chance to ready a few spells and missile weapons, but it gave the dragon a chance to give us another ride. We had scattered in case of another breath attack, and it replied by plummeting onto me. I had been the last to flee from the melee and was thus closest to the water's edge. When the impact came, it pulverized the ice around me and drove me into the water like a nail under a hammer. The blow flipped the floe like a coin." I was stunned and battered, but I managed to survive the assault and escape to land again. My magic saw me through." The stranger picked up his pipe and examined it. "My companions were delayed from helping me, as a cloud of icy frost rose around them and blinded them." Obviously, we won, but only after a long and dreadful battle."

Jonnel looked at the stranger in disbelief. "How could you have survived such a thing?"

"Let's say that, like these two—" he indicated Hypatia and Sterling "—I am multitalented."

Both Hypatia and Sterling stared at the stranger with new interest—and considerable doubt.

"I can't think of anything worse than meeting some of the dragons that we've met," said Katarine. "Nothing at all."

"I can," Sterling interjected. "Red dragons."

The stranger gave a long nod, leaned back in his chair, and gestured for the old man to continue.

"All the dragons we have been discussing are evil. But there exists nothing more malicious, more basely malevolent than a red dragon," Sterling said. "The dragon's hatred burns hotter and brighter than its fiery breath, and its greed is perfect and complete. To a red dragon, wealth is as essential as air, and nearly as important as its vengeance.

"It was many years ago that I encountered my first rid dragon. I did not yet fully realize the blackness of their souls, and I almost perished in the confrontation. I had grown fond of a small mountain village. I had friends there and often visited them. However, I grew restless and traveled far from the place, spending years roaming and exploring. When I returned, I found my quaint, idyllic village soiled with blood. A red dragon had moved into the area during my absence, and the villagers were giving young women to it so it would leave the village alone. In youthful outrage, I vowed to use all my magic and power to deal with the vile creature. A villager, one of my closest friends, said he had seen the dragon and would guide me there. He offered to disguise me as another villager so I could find its strengths and weaknesses.

"Unfortunately, the red dragon had found mine. It had *charmed* my friend and compelled him to lead me right up the mountain and into a trap." He paused, leveled his gaze at the stranger, and continued. "The dragon was old and wise. It had several spells and years worth of cunningly crafted battle plans. As we climbed the mountainside, the dragon

"The boat surged, nearly pitching us into the water. We cast about wildly and found a massive, ink-black head towering above us."

"The mountain shook as we fought. The red dragon was large, and in its thrashing, it was bringing its own lair crashing down around us."

turned a portion of the rock beneath our feet to mud. Then it showed itself and threatened my companion. I rushed to my companion's side to protect him. The dragon breathed its blistering fire at us both. Only I remained standing. I struggled a long time to get free of the mud, and began climbing to the outcropping where the dragon had shown itself. It was waiting for me. The foul beast breathed twice more as I moved forward and fought it. It spoke, gloating about the village it held in thrall and the succulent villagers on which it fed. It considered everything in its sight its domain, and all living things in its domain its subjects.

"Although I was severely wounded, I began to get the best of the dragon. It retreated into its lair, and I followed, casting spells. It had a considerable resistance to magic, but some of my spells got through. Its anger grew a thousandfold as its prey became its hunter. I believe it was the dragon's anger that proved its undoing. In its blood-red rage, it grew sloppy. The mountain shook as we fought. The red dragon was large, and in its thrashing, it was bringing its own lair crashing down around us. When an opening in the rocks appeared, it pushed the fight outside again and into the air over the village. It was trying to escape me, but I wouldn't let it. As I struck the dragon with a killing blow, I saw the villagers below watching the terrifying spectacle. Then I watched a spectacle, too. With its dying, vengeful breath, the red dragon breathed on the crowd, then fell lifeless onto the roofs of several homes.

"Despite all the treasure that I knew it must have accumulated, I didn't return to its lair. I was so repulsed by the dragon that I left the treasure to the villagers. My friends were all dead. I never went back."

The old man pushed himself away from the table and glanced at Hypatia and the stranger. "There's no more to tell," he said. "I've fought no other species of dragons."

"It's late," the young woman said. "We should be going."

Sterling nodded and got to his feet. The adventurers bid the couple their goodbyes and best wishes, then watched as the two walked to the door. The stranger got up and walked with them, having said nothing since Sterling's last story.

"What did you think?" Tehm asked under his breath.

"Didn't believe much of that Sterling's tale," said Jonnel. "Even an old wizard-warrior isn't going to best a red dragon one on one. I've heard about those dragons, too."

Outside the inn's door, the couple and the stranger looked at the quiet landscape as they walked a short distance from the inn. Crickets chirped around them, and night birds called.

"So you know us, then," said Hypatia suddenly. "What kept you from telling everyone?"

The stranger chuckled. "It would have served no purpose but to have frightened the people. And you were in the presence of real, live, vengeful dragon slayers, who might have felt the need to have defended themselves. Better to let the matter drop."

"How did you know?" asked Sterling.

The stranger smiled at him. "The way you spoke. Only a dragon would call the taking of dragon hides barbaric. Only a dragon—a silver one, I might add—could fight a red dragon down, as its frigid breath would harm the red one more terribly than any other dragon's breath. Things like that. And your human name, Sterling, was a cute pun. Sterling silver, after the coin some humans use. Your companion was more practical."

Sterling smiled ruefully. "An old dragon must have his joke. Makes the world a brighter place."

"Indeed," agreed the stranger. "An old dragon must have his joke. And I have had mine as well."

Hypatia stared hard at the stranger. "No,' she said.

"Yes," said the stranger. "I believe the human children have a saying that goes, 'It takes one to know one.' They also say, 'Where you find silver . . . you also find gold .' "

Hypatia gasped. Sterling merely stared, open mouthed. Then they both broke into smiles as broad as the stranger's, and the laughter of the three echoed across the valley and into the night.

Footnotes

All of the following notes apply to the AD&D® 2nd Edition game rules and are designed to mesh with the descriptions of the dragons given in the first *Monstrous Compendium*. Though some of this material is official, much of it is unofficial but supplemental, useful for making your dragons even tougher.

1. Cloudlike breath weapons, such as the green dragon's chlorine gas, cannot be negated by a victim who takes the naive precaution of covering his nose and mouth. The damage is not accrued solely by inhaling the gas; the gas is absorbed into the victim's system through the skin. Clothing and armor afford no extra protection, as the gas can seep through these. Even a *necklace of adaptation* is ineffective, since the gas works on contact.

2. Dragons do not need verbal or somatic components to cast spells. Such spells are cast at will. *Silencing* a dragon will not prevent it from casting spells.

3. This was a *snatch attack*. A dragon can only snatch a creature that is two size classes smaller than it is, so the dragon in the story would have been a huge creature at least (over 12' long). A snatch attack can only be made against one being per round while the dragon is in flight.

4. Because dragons are graceful and competent fliers, they can each fly at three different speeds. The slower they fly, the better their maneuverability classes. The flying speeds and maneuverability classes of black, blue, green, and red dragons are: 18 (C), 24 (D), and 30 (E). White dragons have greater flying speeds: 20 (C), 30 (D), and 40 (E).

5. The dragon undoubtedly performed a *wingover* A dragon carrying a rider or snatched victim cannot perform a *wingover* unless the creature or creatures carried are at least three size classes smaller than it is.

6. A dragon which is airborne or is at least 30' above a target can *plummet*, inflicting crushing damage equivalent to its bite when it strikes. Using this method of combat, the dragon can crush as many creatures as its 2nd Edition combat modifier indicates. The dragon rolls a separate attack against each intended victim; creatures that are missed are assumed to have escaped. Creatures that are crushed must save vs. petrification or be pinned under the dragon, automatically suffering crushing damage the following melee round. If the dragon chooses to maintain the pin, the victim must save vs. petrification to get free. Pinned creatures take crushing damage each minute until they get free. The dragon's combat modifier applies as a bonus or penalty to all saving throws vs. the crush. A dragon cannot take any other actions while plummeting or pinning, except to bite at pinned victims (at a +2 bonus to hit, biting at one victim per round) or to breathe. If the dragon does anything else, all victims of its crushing attack are set free.

7. When a dragon breathes, it cannot send out its breath weapon again for 1-3 minutes. Roll 1d6: A roll of 1-2 indicates that the dragon can breathe in the next melee round; 3-4 indicates that the dragon can breathe again on the second round following the breath; and 5-6 indicates that the dragon can breathe on the third round following the breath. Allowing a delay will allow PCs a better survival chance against dragons, but it is optional.

All dragons can use their breath weapons three times before they must rest to regenerate the energy for further breaths. Sleeping 1-4 hours restores the energy to

generate one breath weapon, and an additional 1-4 hours restores both of the remaining breath attacks simultaneously. However, most dragons do not automatically wake up after after regaining their three breath weapons. After the minimum 2-8 hours, a dragon will always sleep an additional 1-20 hours minus its intelligence score (treat negative results as zero additional hours). If the dragon is awakened during the extended sleep period, it suffers no ill effects. If a dragon tries to sleep and regain breath weapons more than once during any 24-hour period, the time required is doubled (2-8 hours for the first breath weapon, an additional 2-8 hours for the two remaining breaths, and 2-40 hours minus the dragon's intelligence score for extended sleep).

8. A dragon's tail is an awesome weapon. A number of creatures equal to one-half the dragon's age category may be struck by the tail (round fractions down to a minimum of one creature). For example, a juvenile dragon can strike two creatures with its tail; a great wyrm can strike six. The tail can strike creatures standing behind the dragon or to the side of the dragon as far toward the head as the dragon's wings. Creatures standing within 5' of the tail's root (the point where the tail joins the dragon's body) cannot be lashed with the tail. In one combat round, the dragon can sweep its tail from right to left or left to right; it cannot do both. (Thus, all the targets must be on the same side of the dragon.)

9. Dragons which can burrow are limited to burrowing in their preferred environment. For example, only blue dragons can burrow in sand, and only white dragons can burrow in snow or ice.

10. Dragons can be attacked with the intent of killing or subduing them. All dragons except silver and gold can be subdued. (Brass dragons also are immune under certain circumstances.) The attack form must be announced prior to melee; otherwise, the attack is assumed to be with intent to kill. Only creatures with an average intelligence (8-10) or greater can attack to subdue. In subdual combat, all damage is of a battering or bruising nature. However, the dragon can die if the subdual damage inflicted is equal to two times its hit points. Attackers must do more subdual damage than the dragon has hit points before there is a chance to subdue. For every 1% of subdual damage inflicted over the dragon's hit points, there is a 1% chance to subdue. DMs should check for subdual at the end of every minute of combat. (Subdual damage is not mentioned in the 2nd Edition rules.)

If a dragon is subdued in melee, the dragon will not necessarily remain subdued for an extended period. A dragon will attempt to get away from its master when it believes it can do so without endangering its life. How soon a dragon attempts to escape depends on how it is treated. Evil dragons will never serve a good master for long; neither will good dragons serve evil masters for long.

Subdued dragons are valuable and can be used as mounts. Such dragons can usually be sold for 100-800 gp per hit point.

11. This is an unusual attack method for white dragons. Because white dragons are limited in intelligence, only the oldest of these dragons will have developed such ruthless and cunning tactics, or have the ability to pick out ice floes that can be flipped over.

12. The duration of a white dragon's *freezing fog* is based on its age. A wyrm's *freezing fog* lasts for 16 rounds, while a great wyrm's lasts for 17 rounds. See details as given in the 2nd Edition *Monstrous Compendium.* Ω

Volunteer.

American Heart Association

Editorial

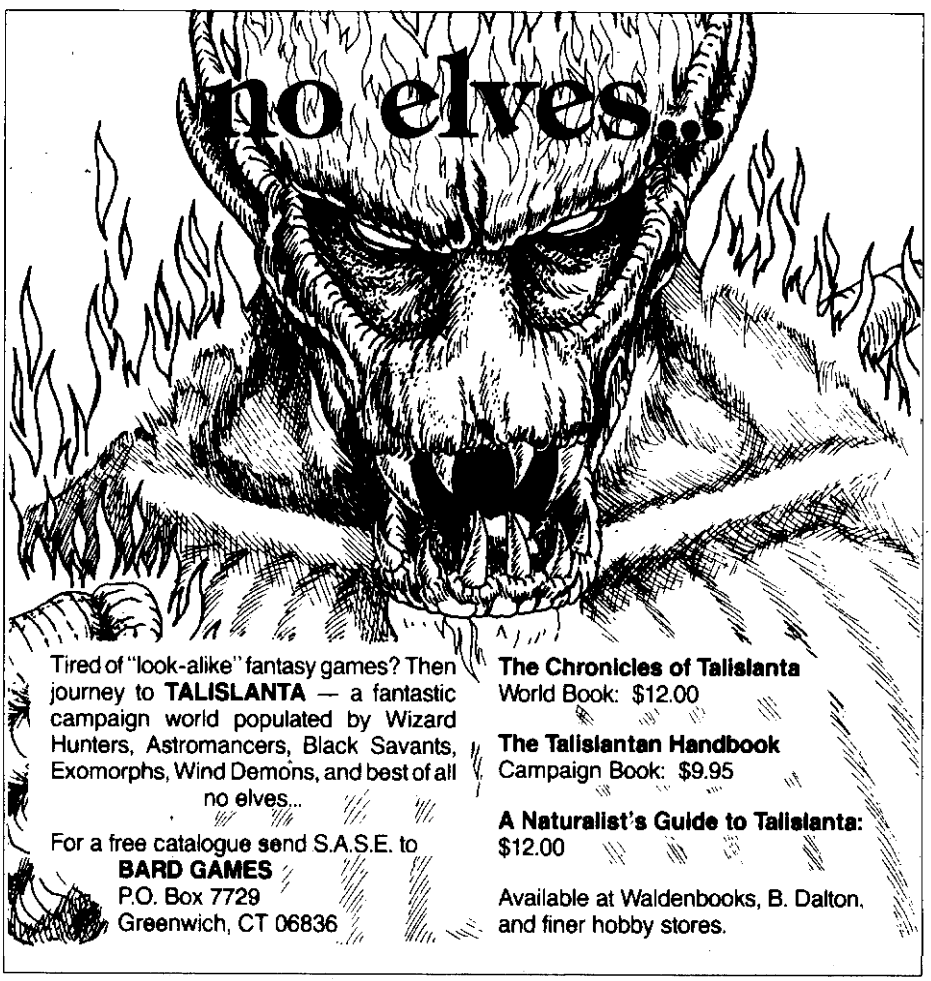
Continued from page 5

"illusion of interaction." And you have a DM who never forgets your saving-throw bonuses or loses his place in the rule books. What more could you ask for?

The growth of computer RPGs is worth any gamer's time to watch. Certainly, carrying around a few floppy disks beats hauling a dozen hardbound books any time. And even if you like having your friends around when you play, computers can make your job as a DM many times easier.

Will computer RPGs eventually replace "paper" RPGs? The future will tell. And DRAGON Magazine will be around to find out.

Roger E. Moore



The dragon lives in the sky, ocean, marshes, and mountains; and the mountains are also its cranium. Its voice thunders and jingles like copper pans. It breathes fire and water; and sometimes the dragon is one, sometimes many.

–The Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston

Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.

–G. K. Chesterton

by Chris Sims

Ecology of the Dragonborn

illustrations by Brian Hagan and William O'Connor

History

Myths speak of the birth of the dragonborn, though they differ in the telling. Tales, awe-inspiring and terrifying, tell of the rise and fall of dragonborn empires, the greatest among them lost to a war that is still remembered. And modern dragonborn live according to their heritage, more than one aiming to carve an eternal story into the world's chronicles.

Several legends say that Io, the greatest dragon god, shaped the dragonborn as servants to dragons at the same time he created the first dragons. Elemental essence and astral spirit went into the making, as with all worldly creatures, but like their greater kin, dragonborn were given a balance favoring the elemental.

Other tales claim that Io died in the clashes between the gods and the primordials. The draconic gods Tiamat and Bahamut emerged from the halves of Io's sundered corpse. Dragonborn sprang, ready to serve dragons, from Io's spilled blood.

Timing of dragonborn genesis aside, Tiamat and Bahamut were instantly at odds. As soon as the war against the primordials ended in the gods' favor, these siblings began a struggle for dominance over dragonkind that has lasted into the present age. Many dragons and dragonborn took sides. Some turned to Tiamat's ways, others to Bahamut's, but a plurality walked a path between the two extremes.

Dragonborn families formed clans, extended groups unified by geographic proximity and similar temperaments. A large number of clans dedicated themselves to serving dragons. Many of these dragons belonged to bloodlines on one side or the other of the war between Bahamut and Tiamat. Others were autonomous wyrms who guided and nurtured their dragonborn followers. And still other dragonborn families, sometimes after the loss of a dragon patron, formed clan ties independent of dragons. These unified clans had military discipline in common, which was a trait needed in ongoing war or for mere defense in the elder world.

From within this clan structure, the dragonborn and their dragon lords formed centralized, cooperative states. They developed codified laws, as well as civic and religious institutions. War and diplomacy further unified realms. Dragonborn nations waxed and waned. All along, the conflict between the dragon gods did the same.

Historians, dragonborn and otherwise, differ on the subject of the outcome of the draconic conflict. A few claim that Bahamut's forces won in that early age. More say that moderate dragonborn came to the fore, forcing divine agendas into a secondary position related to worldly matters. The likeliest scenario is that the unaligned among the dragonborn showed a preference for heroic and kindly values, as common folk often do. This esteem placed Bahamut's followers in an advantageous position, allowing them to persevere over their adversaries. At the same time, the needs of mortal creatures took precedence over the machinations of immortals.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, after numerous dragonborn kingdoms had passed into forgotten history, a unified array of dragonborn city-states formed the storied empire of Arkhosia. Dragon nobles integrated under a dragon emperor, mythically dubbed the Golden One. A dragonborn bureaucracy supported the nobles, protected by a military headed at first by the general Surina Moonscale. The Golden One and mighty Moonscale held Bahamut in highest regard among the gods, and this faith helped establish central principles for the empire.

Imperial priests also held strongly to the tenets of Erathis, Ioun, and Kord. The empire expanded its territory with a goal of bringing civilization, knowledge, and safety to untamed places and ignorant peoples. It gained land as much through word, trade, and decency as it did through battle. Within mere centuries, Arkhosia ruled large portions of the known realms.

Arkhosia seemed to be an unstoppable taming force that would eventually span the world, bringing progress and a measure of uprightness with it. Even Tiamat's worship was outlawed and forced into secrecy. But evil other than Tiamat's had risen to power in lands distant from Arkhosia's central regions. Eventually, the expanding borders of the fiendish kingdom of Bael Turath, ruled by tieflings and devils, collided with those of Arkhosia.

Ideology, culture, and ambition smashed together as well. No common ground could be found between the two empires. For one to succeed, the other had to fall. War was inescapable. It came swiftly and brutally, and it spanned hundreds of years.

Both sides suffered internal strife, mirroring the surface conflict. Tiamat's cult wormed away inside Arkhosia, weakening it. The desire of common folk to be free of infernal shackles poisoned Bael Turath's well of power. Bane's cult worked both sides, stoking the war hotter, while extremists loyal to Melora aimed to bring both empires down. Bitterness strengthened the utter incompatibility of ethos between the two nations.

Ever worse exchanges led the warring empires toward ruin. Bael Turath's forces heaped atrocities upon Arkhosia, corrupting some lands to the point that neither side could hope to reclaim. Many of Arkhosia's stalwarts of Bahamut began to thirst for retribution more than justice, to look to vengeance more than protecting the defenseless. Bloody Arkhosian campaigns against Bael Turath led some idealistic Arkhosians to doubt, and the empire's foundational beliefs faltered, causing political turmoil. Overextension of resources made it difficult for ironhanded Bael Turath to keep order in its core provinces.

Neither relented, eventually costing both everything. The Golden One and many dragon lords perished, some fleeing with their lives but without honor after the death of the dragon emperor. Lesser lords of the Nine Hells strode across battlefields, only to fall to draconic claws or the assaults of Arkhosia's legions. That which didn't disintegrate in direct combat crumbled under the stress inflicted by the seemingly endless and vicious war. But end that war did, when neither empire had the resources or the will left to fight. When the dust settled and the smoke cleared, Bael Turath and Arkhosia were no more.

Knowledge of the Dragonborn

Arcana

DC 25: Legend tells that dragonborn are a balance of astral and elemental essences, weighted more heavily toward the elemental like the great dragons are.

Dungeoneering

DC 20: The end came so fast for parts of Arkhosia, such as Serpentis Rift, that valuable draconic and dragonborn relics are buried there to this day. In other places, such as the fortress Razortear, fiendish and draconic remains mix as a testament to the fortunes of bygone wars. In any such place, one can expect creatures of the wilderness, dangerous old magic, and trapped or hidden fiends.

History

DC 15: Dragonborn once possessed a massive empire named Arkhosia. War against the tiefling realm of Bael Turath led to the ruin of both kingdoms. Now, the dragonborn consider no civilized place their native soil.

DC 20: Dragons ruled Arkhosia. The dragonborn served them. Theirs was a sophisticated realm, and the clash with Bael Turath was a war of progressive civilization against oppressive tyranny.

DC 25+: Fine details of the Arkhosia and its war against Bael Turath are master-level pieces of knowledge.

Nature

For nondragonborn, the general traits of the dragonborn are common knowledge. Details of their life cycle, inner physiology, and development, as well as the intricacies of their society are expert knowledge.

Religion

DC 15: Dragonborn have strong ties to the draconic gods, Bahamut and Tiamat. Bahamut's worshipers are more numerous and bold, but Tiamat's followers still thrive in the shadows.

DC 20: The dragonborn of Arkhosia also venerated Erathis, Ioun, and Kord—civilization, knowledge and prophecy, and battle.

DC 25+: Dragonborn creation myths and the ongoing conflict between Bahamut and Tiamat are master-level pieces of knowledge.

Fiends of Bael Turath that weren't hurled back into the Hells hid among the ruins, and Arkhosia's few remaining dragon lords abandoned the wreckage or squabbled over the remains. Tieflings and dragonborn alike were left with no choice but to largely abandon their lands in search of refuge elsewhere in the world.

Most present-day dragonborn are integrated into mixed societies and are living in lands they cannot claim as their own. A few clans, as well as many individuals, roam in search of worthy causes, or simple wealth and personal glory. All continue to venerate the dragonborn model set forth in centuries-gone Arkhosia, making their way according to a high personal standard.

Physiology

Imposing, strong, and draconic, dragonborn cut an impressive figure among other humanoids. An average dragonborn is tall and strapping compared to the normal human, although the basic shape is the same. Also distinctive from human counterparts is a dragonborn's dragonlike head, scales, fangs, and claws.

Despite a passing resemblance to reptilian creatures, dragonborn are warm-blooded beings rather than cold-blooded reptiles. Their bodies are hot enough to seem feverish to human sensibilities. This keeps a dragonborn more comfortable in cold temperatures. A lack of body hair coupled with a large mouth that can be opened to release body heat means that a dragonborn is no more vulnerable to hot temperatures than a human.

The scales that cover a dragonborn are tougher than human skin. Although these scales make a dragonborn less susceptible to small, incidental wounds, they don't protect against damage dealt by weapons and similar purposeful attack. Dragonborn

also typically lack the inborn elemental resistances true dragons might possess.

Like true dragons, however, dragonborn hatch from eggs, usually laid singly or, more rarely, in a pair. Hatchlings are quickly capable of standing and walking, but their teeth take a few months to come in. During this time, the mother nurses her offspring. She slowly weans the child to soft and then normal food, which for dragonborn is usually more meat than other edibles.

By the end of the first year, a dragonborn hatchling has the mental and physical development of a 3-year-old human child. A dragonborn matures quickly throughout his or her youthful development. At about 12 years of age, the dragonborn is a lanky version of his or her adult self. Over the next 3 years, he or she fills out into an imposing adult form.

A likeness to dragons gives dragonborn physical might. Dragonborn also carry an almost supernatural bodily potential to tap into and develop draconic traits. Most develop a breath weapon, which is dangerous by the time a dragonborn reaches adulthood. Still, an individual dragonborn might manifest more draconic traits than another. One might do so at birth. Such a change could instead come as the dragonborn's soul quickens in the crucible of a spiritual path or as the body adapts in the wake of mighty deeds.

New Dragonborn Feats

The feats in this section are divided into heroic tier and paragon tier sections.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a dragonborn character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Adaptable Breath [Dragonborn]

Prerequisites: Dragonborn, *dragon breath* racial power

Benefit: Choose a damage type your breath weapon doesn't already have from among acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison. When you use your *dragon breath* racial power, you choose which damage type applies to the attack. Only one damage type applies for a given *dragon breath* attack.

Special: You can take this feat more than once. Each time you select this feat, choose another damage type for your dragon breath power that you don't already have for it.

Hurl Breath [Dragonborn]

Prerequisites: Dragonborn, *dragon breath* racial power

Benefit: When you use your *dragon breath* power, you can hurl it as an area attack instead of using it as a close blast. You create an orb of energy that explodes in a burst 2 with a range of 10 squares.

Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a dragonborn character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Admixture Breath [Dragonborn]

Prerequisites: Dragonborn, *dragon breath* racial power, Adaptable Breath

Benefit: When you use your *dragon breath* power, you can mix any two of the damage types to which you have access. Your *dragon breath* deals both types of damage. This doesn't increase the amount of damage you deal, but a creature must be able to resist or be immune to both damage types to reduce or ignore the damage. If a creature is vulnerable to either damage type, it is considered to be vulnerable to damage from your *dragon breath*.

For instance, if you chose the fire damage type at character creation and chose lightning when you took the Adaptable Breath feat, your dragon breath deals fire damage and lightning damage. A creature immune to fire but vulnerable to lightning is considered to be vulnerable to your *dragon breath*.

Dragonborn Zeal [Dragonborn]

Prerequisites: Dragonborn, Dragonborn Frenzy, Great Fortitude, Toughness

Benefit: The *dragonborn zeal* racial utility power replaces one of your utility powers. The power it replaces must be 12th level or higher. If you do not yet have a power of 12th level or higher, you can replace the appropriate power when you gain it.

Also, when you use your second wind, you can choose to gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls until the end of your next turn in addition to the defense bonus typically granted for a second wind.

Dragonborn Zeal **Paragon Dragonborn Racial Utility**

Your wounds sometimes make you relentless.

Daily ✦ Healing
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: Your hit points drop to 0 or fewer
Effect: You regain hit points equal to your healing surge value plus your Charisma modifier. Add your Charisma modifier as a power bonus to your attack rolls and damage rolls against the enemy that reduced you to 0 hit points or fewer until the end of your next turn.

Psychology

Dragonborn psychology centers on a draconic nature tempered by strong cultural ideals. The inner draconic spark is expressed as intensity coupled with a well-developed sense of self. From this sprouts a resolve born of an honest desire to be the best one can be and to be worthy of one's heritage. Tradition

focuses the dragonborn ego with principles of personal excellence, accountability, honor, and wisdom.

Strongly emotional, dragonborn approach life with a natural enthusiasm. Passion comes easily, and dragonborn readily invest themselves in the tasks set before them. At its simplest and perhaps basest level, this fervor expresses itself in extremes of feeling—dragonborn don't hide anger or joy. Such emotion also surfaces as ferocity in battle, especially when dragonborn feel their resolve faltering. When failure comes into view as a possibility, dragonborn become more tenacious.

This is partly because a healthy self-image is common among dragonborn. Few dragonborn are timid or reserved, except as a matter of showing proper respect to others. Guided by personal morals, dragonborn look out for themselves, along with those creatures and items they value. They have no trouble asking for what they need or taking time to improve their abilities. And they expect others to do the same. How else can associates and friends rely on one another? In what other way can society be expected to function?

The paradox in the dragonborn belief in a strong group dynamic is that, like dragons, all dragonborn are fiercely independent. They learn to be so in their upbringing, focused as it is on individuality. So this conviction is an outgrowth of personal pride. Dragonborn see the strengths of a group they are part of as an expression of their own strengths. The group's failures and successes become those of the dragonborn members within it, reflecting on them and their choice to be a part of the group.

Coupled with such pride, dragonborn carry a high personal standard. When a challenge comes, dragonborn rise to it. They set their sights on success and keep going until no options remain to prevent failure. This trait isn't as simple as a disdain for flaws and lack of success. Dragonborn want to contribute and to be seen as valuable by those they value. They consistently want to show that their confidence in themselves and the reliance others have on them isn't misplaced. Consideration of how they can become better at whatever they do, whether by further fortifying assets or shoring up weaknesses, is part of dragonborn thinking.

Responsibility is also a piece of the dragonborn mindset. This can be an expression of their attachment to others involved in a situation. It's also attributable to the cultural value placed on respect, for self and others, and good judgment. No dragonborn gives his or her word lightly. In fact, dragonborn often value honoring their promises and fulfilling their obligations more than their lives.

Good judgment is, therefore, required of dragonborn. They must assess the options before them and make the best choice. A failure to do so is just that—failure.

As an expression of all these personality aspects, any dragonborn aware of his or her abilities might realize he or she can't hope to succeed in certain circumstances. Dragonborn show wisdom by not giving their oaths to accomplish what they know they can't. They show virtue by admitting their sense of the state of affairs and offering to help as best they can. They show courage by trying to accomplish the impossible anyway, when the cost of inaction would otherwise be too great.

Such positive expressions of dragonborn nature are common especially among heroic dragonborn. But, as with all fallible creatures, negative expressions also abound. Passion can lead dragonborn to brutality, hasty decisions, and unrighteous vengeance. Greed and worse forms of selfishness can grow from a misguided ego. Blind ambition can follow a commitment to excellence, as can a willingness to evaluate others severely or to undertake foolhardy deeds.

Although such twisting of virtue can be a seed of wickedness, most of the time it never goes so far. An individual dragonborn might not see some of his or her failings, but such negative behavior never truly descends into evil. And a lot of dragonborn villains display a subset of dragonborn scruples, especially courtesy and respect to enemies.

CULTURE

Dragonborn trace their modern cultural leanings to the hale days of Arkhosia, when the precepts of dignity and progress were paramount in the dragonborn mindset. In Arkhosia, strong clans arose and formed ties that yet endure among dragonborn bloodlines. Within that lost empire, dragonborn knew their greatest glory and became instilled with an everlasting sense of their place in the world. War with Bael Turath and the loss of Arkhosia served to hone dragonborn into what they are today.

Clan

Clans and family bloodlines are still preserved among the dragonborn, and both are important. The difference between the two is subtle. Family is defined by one's actual blood relatives as far back as records go. Clan is a federation of families, unified in the annals of time, often for forgotten ends.

All dragonborn revere their honored ancestors, family, and clan. They perform their work with an eye toward what their deeds say about their lineage. Such ties can define peace and enmity, as well as cooperation or antagonism, among individual dragonborn. Families and clans have reputations, good or ill, that can have little to do with the living scions of the bloodline.

The desire to live up to a laudable legacy or overcome a besmirched birthright can define a dragonborn's life. Some dragonborn instead embrace infamy or flee from the responsibility imposed by the past. Others make their way according to personal values, perhaps aiming at becoming the most capable and admired dragonborn among the elders of a clan, thereby becoming the clanmaster.

When doing so is possible, all dragonborn of a particular clan look to their clanmaster for guidance. Clan elders have ways to contact a distant clanmaster. The clanmaster also has loyal dragonborn agents to act in his or her stead, and to serve as messengers.

Keeping contact can be difficult, but dragonborn of the same clan more easily form cohesive coalitions and enclaves. Marriages are defined by age-old pacts among clans. Dragonborn parents with weighty responsibilities look to such relations for help fostering children. A whole ward in a large settlement might be filled with dragonborn from allied clans, and each clan could have its own hall like in the old days of Arkhosia.

DRAGONBORN NAMES

Dragonborn have personal names, given at birth, as described in the *Player's Handbook*. They can also have childhood names, family names, and clan names. All these come according to a dragonborn's heritage and place in dragonborn society.

A childhood name or nickname is common. Such a name is usually descriptive, and it serves as a term of endearment or encouragement for a young dragonborn. The name might recall an event or center on a habit. It could derive from an ancestor that acted similarly to a child, or a favored toy or item might be the inspiration. Such names are seldom appropriate for adults. For anyone to use such a name without proper authority, such as that of a parent or elder, or without permission is a sign of disrespect. A dragonborn's elders use a childhood name after that dragonborn becomes an adult only to indicate disapproval.

Childhood Names: Climber, Earbender, Leaper, Pious, Little Kriv, Shieldbiter, Zealous.

Family names are Draconic words, much like given names, carried by a specific bloodline. They often come from the deeds of an ancient scion of the family line or an amalgamation of the names of notable ancient ancestors. A dragonborn seldom identifies itself by family name, unless specificity is required. Dragonborn keep their family names private except among close friends, and instead go by clan name.

Family Names: Alreja, Bhergav, Duggal, Garodya, Iyotar, Letrah, Mulhotra, Odeyar, Pradhu, Reddyar, Samanga, Tyagi, Ulharej, Vadula, Yadav, Zaveri.

Clan names are ancient titles that are frequently taken from the names of dragon lords of Arkhosia. Those that aren't dragon names are names of trade associations or martial cadres, much like modern guilds, arcane societies, or knightly orders. A dragonborn goes by his clan name, so his deeds are known to reflect on that clan. Members of a clan fiercely defend their clan name against misuse, and some dragonborn outlaws are stripped of the privilege of using the clan name.

Clan Names: Bloodbane, Drakerider, Flamebrow, Hammerwing, Loremark, Moonscale, Peaceblade, Redmark, Silverspear, Spellscale, Warbringer.

Family

All this focus on clan comes from the fact that, while family bloodlines can be extensive, the dragonborn family unit is very small. The typical one contains only two dragonborn: a mated pair, or a parent and child.

Dragonborn wed to procreate. Although notable exceptions exist to this generality, wedlock ends as soon as the offspring from a union is 3 years old. If the parents have no reason to maintain proximity, one of them, usually of the same gender as the child,

raises and trains that youngster in the ways of people, family, and clan.

Honor demands that a parent teach a child well, and that adults care for the young. Through storytelling, tutoring, and demonstration, the parent instills virtues and skills in the child. Although this process serves to educate, it also gives the youngster's fiery spirit a focus. Without such direction, the fierce nature of a dragonborn comes to the fore, resulting in feral savagery.

When rightly trained in dragonborn ways, however, a juvenile learns that honor requires respect for elders and other worthies, focused and sincere effort, reliability and fulfillment of oaths, and integrity. At an early age, he or she understands that chosen actions can bring credit or disgrace to self, family and clan, and even all dragonborn. Even dragonborn crafters and laborers grow up with discipline, play inspired by lessons and tales of derring-do, and an admiration for brave and principled deeds. All learn a thing or two about fighting and soldierly ways. They learn to be bold so that they can challenge themselves and those who misuse authority.

Where dragonborn are a small portion of the local population, which is the norm, such tiny families are common. But where an integrated enclave exists, the process is different, and some dragonborn claim, resembles what life was like in Arkhosia. In such a community, dragonborn foster children communally. Adults watch out for and teach the young, and the young enjoy a broader exposure to an array of dragonborn role models. A single parent still maintains authority and responsibility for a youngster, but in these situations, the other parent is often close at hand and has some influence as well.

Adulthood

Independence is nurtured in dragonborn youth at every turn. When, at 15 years old, dragonborn adolescents transition into adulthood, they are expected to have integrated the teachings of their childhood into their conduct. They have a healthy respect for capable individuals of all races, even those they oppose. Their esteem for themselves and their forebears guides them in all they do. Responsibility for their actions transitions from them and their parents to each individual alone, even though a dragonborn's deeds reflects on upbringing and heritage.

Principled behavior and instilled daring mean dragonborn adults are different from their counterparts among other peoples. Dragonborn society produces fewer petty criminals, but more outright villains—dragonborn are more likely to be bandit lords than pickpockets. Conversely, dragonborn are numerous among adventurers. They also find places more regularly in the company of those who have unusual or specialized skills, artistic or venturesome.

Regardless of what they do, whether among other dragonborn or not, dragonborn are conscious of how they are responsible for what they do. A dragonborn weaponsmith aims to be the best, to push the boundaries of his craft, to sell weapons in a scrupulous manner, and to honor those who use his armaments by creating implements of worth. The dragonborn soldier, in turn, honors armorer, commander, and clan, by performing his or her duties well. He or she does so by taking initiative in training and on the battlefield, and by helping comrades. Failing to recognize such interconnectivity is a failing of character. This system of honor with awareness and answerability was the strength of the dragonborn when, in Arkhosia, they served dragons.

Dragons

Today's dragonborn serve dragons as an exception rather than a rule. Some clans still remember the last days of Arkhosia, when the selfishness and cowardice of some dragon lords became all too visible. Dragonborn from these bloodlines might despise dragons. Other clans still hold dragons in esteem, weighing a

dragon's worth by its actions. Most clans remain free from draconic influence. Those few dragonborn who serve dragons are often more barbaric than their kin who live among humans and other races.

Magic

Dragonborn have ancient traditions of magic, focusing on war, as well as divine, draconic, and elemental forces. As fierce as a dragonborn's heart, magic among the dragonborn is seldom bent to mundane tasks. It is a weapon of the mighty.

Despite a natural talent for the arts of the warlock, typical dragonborn prefer an arcane path that doesn't tie them to forces outside themselves. Wizards and sorcerers are notorious for their secretive and eccentric ways, which makes the professions attractive to dragonborn. Further, the powers of the wizard and sorcerer are dragonlike in their primordial fury. Many clans have wizardly ways passed down through numerous families among them since the time of Arkhosia. These things said, sometimes the warlock's road is an acceptable expression of individualism or the last resort of an outcast.

Evolution of the Dragonborn

In the earliest days of the D&D game, some dragons could take human form. It was a fascinating idea—a great and terrifying beast in the skin of a mere mortal. Fortunately for many players, it was initially an ability that good dragons had. Later, that ability migrated to neutral and evil dragons, such as the oriental dragons of the first *Fiend Folio* or the deep dragon in Ed Greenwood's *Drow of the Underdark*. *The Council of Wyrms* setting made it possible to play dragons in the D&D game.

Draconic humanoids also showed up in various forms, as did humanoids that could become dragons. Todd Lockwood's krolli appeared very early, in *The Dragon* (#36, April 1980). Draconians came only a little later, appearing in the *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* novel and *Dragons of Despair* adventure. Dragonkin appeared in the Forgotten Realms setting, and the defilers of the Dark Sun setting could become dragons over time. *Monstrous Compendium Annual Volume Three* presented the weredragon, which became the song dragon in Third Edition's *Monsters of Faerûn*. Even the Dragon Dice game had dice that represented dragon kin.

Third Edition pushed the draconic humanoid further, starting with a new look and feel for kobolds, as well as half-dragons. As the edition evolved, draconic creatures and spawn of Tiamat also appeared, along with the dragonblood subtype. One race that fell into that subtype was the dragonborn of Bahamut, humanoids who, to show devotion to Bahamut, willingly took on draconic traits in place of their original biology.

The dragonborn of the 4th Edition D&D game take many cues from the dragonborn of Bahamut, as well as other dragonblood creatures from 3rd Edition. Like their predecessors, the dragonborn bear a mystique and fierceness unique to dragons, and they can be strongly affiliated with draconic deities. In fact, in an earlier iteration of 4th Edition, the dragonborn were called the dragonblood.

In the final analysis, though, the dragonborn name was a better fit. It more aptly describes a race of draconic humanoids that share the legacy of the most important creature in the Dungeons & Dragons game.

Dragonborn truly favor divine powers, especially those of the paladin. Investing oneself in the tenets of a faith gives direction and purpose, something many dragonborn crave. Although doing so ties a dragonborn to a deity or church, it carries little to none of the stigma attached to the eldritch ways of the warlock. And the paladin's obligation is to stand in the vanguard of a church's defenders, which is the perfect place for a being that has a martial spirit.

Religion

Faith is a personal matter for each dragonborn, and it is an issue in which the dragon deities take prominence. Bahamut is most important among the dragonborn people, but Tiamat's cult thrives well in the hearts of avaricious dragonborn. Erathis, Ioun, and Kord also remain important as symbols of advancement and a progressive, fighting spirit.

Bereft of their own temples, most dragonborn practice religion in churches within mixed communities. They participate in few rites, unless duty, such as that placed on a cleric or paladin, or respect, such as that for a devout friend, compels them to do so. Clan elders preside over dragonborn marriages and funeral rites, for instance; absent these, family and close friends participate. Although gods might be invoked at such ceremonies, to call such rites religious would be a mistake.

Art

Dragonborn are practical and meticulous about their crafts. Like dwarves, they create few items for purely artistic reasons, preferring the coupling of functionality and beauty. Strong individuality among dragonborn causes them to focus more on personal items, such as weapons, rather than those that can't be carried, such as architecture or statuary. One exception to this generality of usability and beauty exists in the case of jewelry.

Crafters among the dragonborn take care and time with their work. A finished work is an expression of the nature and capabilities of its maker. Although completed items are seldom as ornate as the work of dwarves, a dragonborn item almost always has a distinctive flare. Elemental, draconic, and scale motifs are most common, as are bold colors and precious metals.

The love of bold colors and precious metals extends to jewelry, gems, armaments, and even coins. Many dragonborn crafters are jewelers, gemcutters, smiths, or minters. Clearly an expression of the draconic tendency to hoard valuables, dragonborn adorn themselves with baubles of all sorts, and dragonborn warriors and adventurers seek out the finest gear. Most dragonborn show reserve and taste in this aspect of personal adornment, rather than garish overindulgence.

Leisure

Improving abilities and competition take precedence in dragonborn leisure activities. When dragonborn aren't honing their skills, they're playing a game or engaging in an activity to prove their grit—mental, physical, or spiritual. Dragonborn don't restrict their activities to familiar skills. Part of developing oneself is expanding one's horizons.

Dragonborn do prefer competitive games. Although team events are fine, contests that have one clear winner are favored. Therefore, a dragonborn hones skill at strategic board games, philosophic riddle contests, improvised storytelling events, and one-on-one sports.

The ferocity of the draconic spirit couples with physical strength and militaristic culture, leading dragonborn to create and participate in sports more violent than many other peoples are used to. In fact, numerous dragonborn—even nonheroic sorts—form fighting or wrestling clubs, as well as regular contests of weapon skill. Intrepid dragonborn try their hands at actual blood sports, such as gladiatorial matches, pit fighting, and dueling.

Enemies and Allies

Dragonborn have few overarching racial enemies or allies. Their history might have provided them with a natural enmity for tieflings, but that doesn't pan out in reality. The same can't be said for devils. It is the nature of dragonborn to form strong ties with trusted friends, however, and a dragonborn's boon companions are often treated more like family or clanmates.

Despite the centuries-gone war between Arkhosia and Bael Turath, few modern dragonborn hate tieflings. Most see the disintegration of the two nations as a mutually shameful episode in history, brought on as much by the eroding of Arkhosia's creed as the depravity of Bael Turath's rulers. Many dragonborn also recognize that those tieflings now alive aren't responsible for the wrongdoing of their forebears. So dragonborn weigh tieflings like they do other people—on individual merit, respecting even the worthy adversary.

Exceptions to this generality exist. Some dragonborn clans, especially those who have descended into barbarism or those who still serve dragons, still bear old grudges. More widespread among dragonborn, however, is ill will toward the true masters of Bael Turath, the devils who led the once-human empire astray. Few dragonborn are willing to put trust in anything or anyone that even seems to be aligned with the Nine Hells.

Dragonborn do rely on allies and friends. In fact, dragonborn are frequently without nearby family or clan members, and comrades are essential in the darkening world. Dragonborn give their all to support those who trust them. When such associates show a similar sense of duty, dragonborn come to see them like relatives. They eventually form clanlike bonds with them, sharing the stories of their lives and people. Nondragonborn do well to realize the honor they're being given when such bonding occurs.

Encounters

Dragonborn employ intense and straightforward tactics, aiming at taking enemies out of an ongoing clash. Their military leaders facilitate efficient butchery. Arcanists pour on damage, their attacks resembling dragon breath weapons.

The dragonborn presented here are intended to supplement those presented in the *Monster Manual.*

Dragonborn Commandant Tactics

The dragonborn commandant leads from the front, wading into adversaries along with the troops. He or she sizes up the opposition, quickly using *designating smite* to direct followers' attacks. When the chosen target becomes bloodied, the commandant gives a *termination order.* The commandant then uses *designating smite* again on the next turn to focus damage on another enemy. In between giving tactical directions, the dragonborn attacks using *arcing slice,* breathing *dragon breath* when more than one enemy can be caught in the blast.

Dragonborn Elementalist Tactics

This dragonborn hangs back and opens the battle with *acid rain* on clustered opponents. He or she then uses *lightning blast,* supplementing with *dragon breath* when an opportunity presents itself. *Icicle spray* is the elementalist's preferred attack against foes that seem likely to approach and make melee attacks, and the dragonborn often uses this power just after resorting to *winging wind.*

Dragonborn Commandant **Level 7 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 600

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 158; **Bloodied** 79; see also *dragonborn frenzy*
AC 24; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 21
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1

Fullblade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage and marked until the end of the commandant's next turn.

Arcing Slice (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The dragonborn commandant makes two fullblade attacks, each against a different target within reach.

Designating Smite (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+14 vs. AC; 1d12 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the commandant's next turn and slowed (save ends). In addition, while the creature is slowed due to this attack, the dragonborn commandant and all his allies gain a +1 power bonus to attack rolls and a +4 power bonus to damage rolls against that target.

Termination Order (immediate reaction, when an adjacent enemy becomes bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
The dragonborn commandant immediately recharges *designating smite* (if necessary), and uses that power against the triggering enemy.

Dragon Breath (minor; encounter) ✦ **Acid**
Close blast 3; +12 vs. Reflex (+13 while bloodied); 1d6 + 5 acid damage.

Dragonborn Frenzy (only while bloodied)
A dragonborn gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls and a +2 bonus to damage rolls.

Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills History +13, Intimidate +14
Str 20 (+8) **Dex** 11 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 15 (+5) **Int** 16 (+6) **Cha** 18 (+7)
Equipment plate armor, fullblade

Dragonborn Elementalist **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid XP 350

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +4
HP 67; **Bloodied** 33; see also *dragonborn fury*
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20
Speed 6

Quarterstaff (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC (+13 while bloodied); 1d8 + 2 damage.

Lightning Blast (standard; at-will) ✦ **Arcane, Lightning**
Area burst 1 within 10; +13 vs. Reflex (+14 while bloodied); 2d6 + 4 lightning damage.

Dragon Breath (minor; encounter) ✦ **Cold** or **Fire**
Close blast 5; +11 vs. Reflex (+12 while bloodied); 1d6 + 4 cold damage or fire damage; choose when using the power.

Acid Rain (standard; encounter) ✦ **Arcane, Acid**
Area burst 2 within 10; +13 vs. Fortitude (+14 while bloodied); 1d8 + 4 acid damage. The acid rain persists until the end of the elementalist's next turn, dealing 10 acid damage to any creature that starts or ends its turn in the area, though a creature can take this damage only once on a given turn.

Icicle Spray (standard; encounter) ✦ **Arcane, Cold**
Close blast 5; +13 vs. Reflex (+14 while bloodied); 2d6 + 6 cold damage. Blast becomes difficult terrain until the end of the elementalist's next turn.

Dragonborn Fury (only while bloodied)
A dragonborn gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls.

Winging Wind (immediate interrupt, when the elementalist would be hit by a melee or ranged attack; encounter)
Winds whip up, granting the elementalist a +2 bonus to the defense targeted by the attack. The elementalist can shift 2 squares, ignoring difficult terrain, and the attacker is pushed 2 squares.

Alignment Any **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Arcana +13, History +15
Str 15 (+6) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 13 (+5) **Int** 19 (+8) **Cha** 17 (+7)
Equipment robes, quarterstaff

Encounter Group

The following is a sample central cadre in a dragonborn mercenary company. It represents the unit's commander and that commander's pet, the magical center of the unit, and the commander's trusted soldiers.

Level 7 Encounter (XP 1,550)
- ✦ 1 dragonborn commandant (level 7 elite soldier [leader])
- ✦ 2 dragonborn soldiers (level 5 soldier)
- ✦ 1 dragonborn elementalist (level 8 artillery)
- ✦ 1 rage drake (level 5 brute)

About the Author

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

THE ECOLOGY OF THE DRIDER

by Paul Leach · Illustrated by Howard Lyon

Even the drow have outcasts they can look down upon—the driders. Half dark elf, half giant spider, every drider is a twisted abomination and a mockery of the centaurs that roam the forests. Cursed by Lolth, the very goddess who once favored them, driders burn with shame and bloodlust to match the evil and depravity of their former lives. Although they have been driven from their communities, they often prowl the fringes of drow territory, longing to reclaim their rightful positions. They are feared, but they are also hunted.

Every drider is said to have once been among Lolth's Chosen, powerful spellcasters with the ability to lead her dark children to victory against their many enemies. Many Chosen remain unknown, but drow assume that the greatest priests, warlords, and heroes rank among them. The goddess promotes strength by overcoming opposition, and so puts her Chosen through a secret, diabolical test. The exact nature of the test may vary from one candidate to the next, but no one ever speaks of it—pass or fail.

Those who please the goddess continue in their ruthless acquisition of power, glorifying Lolth, while those found wanting are transformed into bloodthirsty monstrosities. Although it is heresy to speak it, some believe Lolth creates driders capriciously.

ECOLOGICAL NOTES

Driders are made, not born. Few beings have witnessed their infernal transformation, not that many drow spellcasters merit the double-edged attention of their goddess and risk such consequences for failure. The change may take hours or days. A cursed drow typically enters seclusion or leaves her home when it begins, for if she is trapped in a drow city in drider form, she will be slain by her erstwhile fellows.

Once the new drider recovers from the physical trauma of metamorphosis, it is filled with a craving for warm-blooded prey. Its arachnid hunger is guided by a malevolent soul and an intellect darkened by self-loathing and a hatred for all drow. In some ways, though, the drider tries to continue its previous life by acquiring more spellcasting power. Even if the monster does not advance further in its former class, it retains some of its old abilities and can use them as well as any creature whose mind tinkers with madness. Spells are a great way to subdue prey and protect oneself from hated former kin.

Despite the Spider Queen's obvious dissatisfaction with her fallen Chosen, she still allows drider clerics access to her domains. Perhaps she wishes them to test her other servants, who will either become stronger or perish to the outcasts' poisoned fangs. This is no different from the internecine fighting she encourages already. The goddess even allows a drider to serve in her fiendish Hand of Vengeance (see "Revenge of the Spider Queen" in *Dragon* #279).

Drider Lairs

Driders prefer seclusion, where they can indulge their bitterness and plan grand, mad schemes of vengeance against Lolth's faithful. They might maintain the same dens for decades, living like murderous hermits. They generally seek intelligent creatures only to consume them. Driders often haunt fungal forests and subterranean lakes, places that attract humanoids seeking food and water. They even linger near drow communities, preying on the irregular patrol,

merchant caravan, or goblinoid slave gang.

Driders typically operate within a few miles of their lairs.

When selecting a lair, driders prefer caverns that are not dead ends and try to prevent enemies and prey from entering undetected. They don't like to be surprised, and they always prepare an escape route in case things go badly. This is often a winding vertical shaft, which limits pursuers' line of sight and is hard to climb. They favor terrain that helps them spot invisible intruders, such as mud patches, lakes and pools, and beds of mold. Driders often use shriekers, natural warning systems that do not necessarily arouse suspicion, and sometimes protect their lair with warding spells such as *alarm* (usually set to produce a mental tone) and *glyph of warding*.

As they did in their previous lives, driders amass treasure. Their hoards consist of whatever they took with them when they fled drow society, as well as the possessions of their victims. Driders especially prize magic items that help them avoid detection. However, driders never search for powerful magic, such as *wish*, with the intent of transforming back into drow—they know that Lolth would only curse them again.

SAMPLE TREASURE

A drider has double standard treasure. A typical hoard has a total value of 2,600 gp. The drider might not have any magic items, but usually it has three or four minor items or a couple of minor items and a medium item. Assigning treasure randomly favors potions, rings, and scrolls, but a DM could choose to give the creature anything within range that it might find useful. The following useful magic items provide a sampling of treasure that suits a drider's abilities and general personality traits.

Potions: *cure light wounds, cure moderate wounds, nondetection.*

Minor Wondrous Items: *elixir of hiding, elixir of sneaking.*

Minor Rings: *counterspells, feather falling, protection +1, sustenance.*

Medium Rings: *invisibility, protection +2, wizardry (I).*

Scrolls: Any of the spells mentioned in the discussion of drider tactics.

SOCIETY NOTES

Driders don't really have a culture of their own, nor do they form long-lasting communities. The only thing they have in common is their drow origin, a shared affliction, and a burning desire to avenge themselves on uncursed drow. Some of them turn to the worship of other gods, such as Ghaunadaur and Vhaeraun from the FORGOTTEN REALMS *Campaign Setting*, drow deities of oozes and ropers, and of thieves and male drow, respectively. Even these cults are scarcely unified, though, and they are still despised by normal dark elven worshipers.

If they share their existence with other creatures at all, driders prefer mindless beings—especially monstrous spiders, although they might have *charmed* servants. A drider cleric may have a gang of undead at its command, while a cleric of Ghaunadaur might protect its den with several slimy guards. Bugbears, troglodytes, and trolls can serve driders, but they usually have to be magically controlled since they fear the drow outcasts.

A drider might form temporary alliances to fight a common enemy or pursue greater spoils in blood and loot. Often a settlement of evil humanoids allows the drider to reside within its territory and harass neighboring enclaves of drow or other foes. Driders sometimes form joint ventures with bandit gangs, and they can be found assisting small groups of duergar and derro.

VS. PCS

Driders surprise and trap their prey, softening it up with ranged spells, then finishing it off in melee. They take care to protect themselves from ranged attacks, which make these tactics less effective.

Preparation

The drider's spellcasting style influences its approach to combat.

No Surprises: Driders know the value of stealth and do all they can to prevent enemies from using it against them. A drider might keep *see invisibility* or *invisibility purge* on hand to deal with those pesky duergar raiders, as well as deep-delving adventurers with access to magical invisibility. Driders already have the advantage of innate *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, but wizards can add this to their spell lists as well.

Extra Protection: Drider wizards and sorcerers focus on defensive spells such as *blur, mage armor, mirror image, protection from arrows,* and *shield.* Clerics use *entropic shield* and *shield of faith;* those with undead minions bolster them with *desecrate. Silence* is the best protection from enemy spellcasters.

Time To Leave: A drider keeps a spell or two in reserve to expedite its retreat or delay pursuers. *Darkness, gaseous form, invisibility,* and *stinking cloud* are good choices.

Tactics

Once engaged, driders can pursue several different options.

Welcome to My Parlor: When they are not hunting, driders lure prey into their lairs. *Dancing lights* and *ghost sound* are good ways to attract curious passersby. Drider clerics sometimes use undead to carry stones imbued with *daylight* spells. From a distance, any of these methods produces the impression of unwary, light-dependent surface dwellers stumbling about, irresistible bait for most denizens of the Underdark.

Surprise!: Driders prefer to get the drop on their opponents. Sometimes they need only hide in the upper reaches of a cave with a high ceiling, using their darkvision and climbing ability to spy on victims from above. A drider might let its servant creatures initiate combat, distracting foes while it moves up using Hide and Move Silently.

Good spell selection never hurts, and drider wizards use their inherent *levitate,* or sometimes *invisibility* paired with *fly. Rope trick* is a great way to watch the next meal from seclusion, then drop a spidersilk rope when the PCs aren't looking up. Clerics can use *meld into stone* and *obscuring mist,* while those with the Trickery domain have even more sneaky choices.

Stand-Off Attacks: Driders try to incapacitate their foes as quickly as possible from a distance. Some clerics pave

the way for magical and poisonous assaults by using *doom* on enemy spellcasters, but otherwise they use direct spells such as *hold person, sound burst,* and *spiritual weapon.*

Drider wizards and sorcerers cast dramatic, flashy spells to flatten the PCs. They usually begin with *web* and *ray of enfeeblement* to trap and weaken the most dangerous opponents. After that they might use *spectral hand* to deliver *chill touch, ghoul touch, shocking grasp,* or *vampiric touch* spells. *Magic missile* is always a good choice, and multiple castings can blast away the hit points of PC spellcasters and keep them off-balance. *Fireball* has its uses, but it is most often a last-ditch tactic since a drider doesn't want to ruin the tasty, warm-blooded meal.

Regardless of spellcasting bent, a drider can simply shoot opponents with a bow. If it has ambushed drow patrols recently, it probably has arrows coated with drow poison. This tactic is tricky if the drider is *levitating,* however, which incurs cumulative negative combat modifiers.

Come And Get It: While the drider peppers the PCs with spells, its arachnid pets move in, as might any undead guards. (Clerics of Ghaunadaur prevent their oozes from destroying prey if they can.) The drider enters melee as soon as the PCs appear weakened. If the enemy is immobile (or won't leave) but still strong, the drider might dart into combat for a round or two to deliver a poisonous bite, especially if it can make a flanking attack. A drider cleric might use this opportunity to cast *bestow curse,* a great way to reduce a PC's chance of saving against its poison, or reduce his Strength to the point that one bite might render him helpless.

VS. DRIDERS

Don't think of driders as just another drow spellcaster who happens to be part spider. Add arachnid abilities (poison and climbing), decent Hit Dice and Constitution, multiple weapon attacks, and spell resistance to its magic talents, and you have a monster that can demolish a party quickly if it surprises them.

Preparation

Don't go blindly into a drider's lair or places where driders might lurk.

Detective Work: If you have a chance to learn about a drider you might encounter, do so. Gather Information can provide some clues if you question enemies of the monster. If you can determine its spellcasting class, you can anticipate its magical tactics and potential allies. A wizard or sorcerer probably has plenty of offensive spells, but might not have companions other than a few monstrous spiders, if any. A cleric is likely to command undead creatures, but if you know its patron deity is Ghaunadaur, expect some oozes as well.

Protection Against Poison and Spells: The poison of driders and spiders deals Strength damage. Get ready for those nasty bites with antitoxin and spells such as *delay poison* and *neutralize poison.* If you don't have either of these, *bull's strength* is a good substitute. Even a simple *protection from evil* spell increases saves against the drider's poison (but not that of the neutral spiders) and magic attacks. Characters who have taken feats that increase saving throws, or who have racial bonuses on saves, also have an advantage.

Good Offense: Driders enjoy spell resistance and good saving throws, so it helps to have one or more of the Spell Penetration, Spell Focus, and Heighten Spell feats (listed in suggested order of preference). Spells that inhibit the drider's own casting, such as *silence* or *hold monster,* are good choices. Since the drider can put itself out of easy reach by climbing or levitating, be sure to use *spider climb, levitate,* or *fly* to improve your mobility and stay within reach.

Tactics

Consider hiring a ranger with aberrations as a favored enemy if the party doesn't already have one. And since driders usually don't enter melee until the party is badly weakened, make sure you have plenty of ranged firepower.

Detection: Don't let the drider and its gang of arachnids, undead, or oozes get the drop on your party. Use Survival to discover if any of those nasty monsters live nearby, and Spot to find those hiding in that giant mushroom patch or mold-encrusted cave. Divination spells can help a lot, especially *detect evil, detect magic, detect undead,* and *see invisibility.*

Stop the Spells: Keep that arrogant drider from wearing you down at range with spells. Responding with your own offensive magic, using one-shot, one-kill spells such as *hold monster* or *fireball* can work—if you can get past the creature's spell resistance, and it fails its saving throws. You need a fallback plan, such as counterspelling if you have a good idea of the drider's spell selection. A more reliable method is to use *silence,* which significantly reduces its choice of spells. You could try to cast the spell directly on the drider, but spell resistance and good saving throws are still a problem. Instead, give a *silenced* stone to a tough fighter who is going to charge the monster, or to a rogue who can skirt around it and set up flanking and sneak attacks. (If the stone carrier needs to engage the drider aerially, make

KILLER COMBOS

Driders combine very well with other subterranean denizens whose abilities complement their own strengths.

Drider Cleric and Shadows: A drider cleric can easily rebuke or control shadows, then use them in its ambushes. A good tactic is to cast *desecrate* on a section of underground passage and position the shadows there to catch the party unawares. Once a few PCs have lost some Strength, the drider moves in with its poisonous bite: The additional Strength damage will likely knock a character out of the fight. The drider rebukes the shadows if they threaten to kill most of the party—it doesn't want to miss the chance to taste warm blood.

A drider and four shadows make an EL 9 encounter.

Drider Wizard and Roper: The drider has one level of wizard, making it a 7th-level caster. It casts *stoneskin* on the roper to decrease the chance of cutting the strands. If it feels generous, the drider might cast other spells on its ally to defend against magic attacks, but it is more likely to protect itself (the roper's spell resistance is much higher than the drider's). The drider's poisonous bite is a devastating follow-up to the massive Strength damage from the roper's strand attacks.

This pair makes a tough EL 12 encounter.

sure to cast *fly* first!)

Engage: Unless you successfully use magical and nonmagical ranged attacks to pummel a drider that cannot return fire and cannot escape, you will need to mix it up in melee. If you have neutralized its spellcasting with *silence*, you might be able to finish it off with only a couple of combat specialists armed with great Fortitude saves and big weapons. Otherwise, all bets are off—a fighter who laughs at poison can be taken out easily by a spell that requires a Will save.

PC DRIDERS

Driders are not easy to develop as player characters, considering their solitary nature and feeding habits. A drider might join a party of adventurers to achieve a mutual objective, such as raiding a drow outpost or dealing with a troublesome mind flayer. Perhaps the drider enlists their aid in retrieving magical possessions left behind in its former homeland. It is possible to expand this limited association, but such a campaign should remain in the Underdark. Hated as driders are in that sunless world, imagine how one would be received at the local tavern, even in the most cosmopolitan surface cities. Even a drider with a neutral or good alignment (a stretch in itself) is disturbing to most folk, with its bizarre, arachnid appearance.

This doesn't mean you can't work out a plausible background for a drider character and fit it into your campaign. One that is neutral or chaotic neutral is most believable, perhaps feeding only on evil humanoids. Such a character could even be a weird vigilante, a few steps below even the maligned half-orc paladin who is mistrusted by those he protects. If the DM allows it, a drider dedicated to Eilistraee (from the FORGOTTEN REALMS *Campaign Setting*) might even aspire to throw off its curse through the divine intervention of the Dark Maiden, perhaps by completing a great quest.

NPC DRIDERS

Driders make good opponents, but they don't get along well with most of the other creatures the PCs are likely to encounter in the Underdark. A drider is typically the main villain in a small adventure or a side encounter in a large dungeon crawl. It sees the PCs as a meal foremost, but it might bargain if both sides are closely matched and the drider thinks it can use the party as pawns in its schemes.

An established drider could provide a different, stronger challenge to your PCs. One with additional cleric levels might have a small horde of undead servants and spider guardians. Such a powerful enemy doesn't send all of its minions into one encounter but stations them throughout its extensive lair. It might enslave a band of kobolds or goblins as a larder of live food, or work out some kind of arrangement with wererats, duergar, or derro to lure prey into its clutches. This kind of foe rarely parleys when faced with defeat but flees or fights to the death.

It is rare to find a drider in the service of another foe. It usually acts only as some kind of guardian or buffer against the outside world. Driders are dangerous to keep around, so only tough monsters, such as beholders or mind flayers, can keep them under control. Even so, if the PCs prove that they cannot be easily eaten, the drider might simply let them pass to fight its master, hoping to weaken all sides for its ultimate gain.

As a random encounter, driders often attack from ambush or track their prey over great distances to strike at an opportune moment. A hunting drider usually stalks alone to maximize surprise, but an ambusher might have some spider allies. Neither is looking to slay everyone it encounters; it would be satisfied with one or two kills.

ADVANCED DRIDERS

When adding character levels to a drider, remember that its favored class is drider, despite its former affinity for cleric (female) or wizard (male). Thus it faces some tough XP penalties when adding more than one class. This may not mean too much when creating an interesting foe, but it can be a problem for players who adopt a drider character. Even if it plans to advance in another class, a drider who casts as a cleric or wizard often takes one level of the associated class to gain access to 4th-level spells. *Air walk*, *giant vermin*, *lesser planar ally*, *poison*, *spell immunity*, and *summon monster IV* are good choices for clerics, while *dimension door*, *greater invisibility*, *polymorph*, and *stoneskin* are some of the best spells for a wizard. Since sorcerous driders have to attain two more levels to get these spells, they are more likely to concentrate on a new class.

Spellcaster Classes: Drider wizards and sorcerers may find it advantageous to take a few levels in cleric, and the reverse is also true. A drider that can choose from all of the spells and tactics listed above is a tougher opponent, but not overwhelming. Clerical driders who take wizard levels are penalized by smaller Hit Dice (d4), but an arcane drider who takes cleric levels continues to add d8s. Clerics taking sorcerer or wizard levels get useful arcane spells, while the arcane casters that take cleric levels gain undead minions and support spells, but additional levels produce diminishing returns. High-level multiclass drider spellcasters might consider the mystic theurge prestige class. Spellcasters should focus on the Concentration and Spellcraft skills; Brew Potion and Silent Spell are useful feats, while Spell Focus and Spell Penetration (as well as their greater forms) are vital for fighting drow.

Rogue: Taking levels in rogue is a popular choice since its class features and skills enhance a drider's existing talent for stealth. It's easy to sneak attack an opponent who is beating off monstrous spiders or is trapped by a *web* spell. Dodge and Mobility are good feats for drider rogues.

Martial Classes: Driders make mean fighters, with increased base attack bonuses and Hit Dice, and quick access to feats. The ranger class complements driders' hatred of drow, allowing them to specialize in hunting that prey. Since driders already have Two-Weapon Fighting, they gain more benefit from this class by choosing archery combat styles. Ranger levels also let a drider maximize its stealthy skills while getting the fighter's base attack progression. Dodge and Mobility are also good choices for fighters and rangers.

FLESH FOR LOLTH
THE SECRET LIFE OF DARK ELVES

by Robin D. Laws · illustrated by Marc Sasso

O Flesh Carver, who wove the world;
Who made us from the darkest clay,
Spinning in it a red web of vein and artery,
We feel thy hunger.
O Lolth, humbly today we feed thee.
We feed you this flesh, this quivering meat.
With a blade like your jaws,
We divide muscle from bone.
Eat of this, the meal we consecrate to thee,
And do not this day devour us.

—adjuration from the Crimson Liturgy of Lolth

Through ancient stone corridors, wet and slick with moss, the drow gentry proceed. Screams and whimpers emanate from the amphitheater ahead. The cries prompt throaty laughter from a lithe, pitch-skinned priestess, her glistening body covered with dozens of gray-furred spiders that crawl across it, each the size of a baby's fist. The priestess's hair, white as an ice field, lays close to her narrow, oblong skull. Studs of polished silver protrude from her brow, cheekbone, and jawline.

Her gnome servant teeters from side to side, bent from the weight of the gilded chest she bears, laden with greenwine and sweetmeats. The servant's hands have been removed at the wrist; her eye sockets are scorched and empty. She cannot stop herself from shuddering.

Abruptly, a red-lipped jester capers up from behind, displaying steel hooks that jut up through his shoulder blades. He seeks a new victim, someone to run his chains of precious metal through. The priestess reaches out to rake the clown with razor-honed nails, casually opening troughs of crimson in the flesh of his back. The jester shimmies and wriggles his tongue out along his rouge-caked lips.

A hiss of anticipation arises in the crowd. Tonight the blood will flow like wine, and if they are lucky, the spider goddess herself will appear and tear off someone's head.

Evil Beneath Your Feet

Many good people of the surface world fear the drow, even though few have ever beheld one. They've heard legends of the night-skinned elves and of their cruel and hungry goddess, Lolth the Spider Queen. Some say that these tales, which attribute every imaginable depravity to the dark elves, cannot possibly be true. Although there is evil in the world, the idealists say, the accounts of adventurers who come back from the Underdark must be exaggerated. No society, not even a completely evil one, could possibly continue if its people were as perverse and unpredictably brutal as their enemies claim.

So much for the prattling of sages! Go to any tavern frequented by explorers and treasure seekers, and they will educate you: If anything, the stories fail to capture the true horror of the dark elven world.

FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN

If your campaign doesn't include drow, or if drow don't play a prevalent role in your campaign, you can still use many elements of this article. Below are some suggestions to help spark your imagination.

- All elves are evil. There is only one subrace of elves (those described in this article), and they dwell on the surface instead of underground.
- Every few generations or so, a dark elf child is born into an elven community. These anomalies are seen as portents and usually signal a change in a major power structure or in the environment and ecosystem. These dark-skinned children posses strange powers and abilities (see the drow description in the *Monster Manual*), and they are gifted (or plagued depending on one's opinion) with visions of the future. Although they are given a special role in their community and treated with a high level of respect, they are often shunned in their childhood by other youngsters and forced to become self-sufficient.
- The drow are outsiders from another realm. Having exhausted their own world of humanoids to enslave and sacrifice to their hungry god, they've begun invading other realms in search of prey.
- As the result of a major environmental catastrophe, a new race (the drow) has been born on the planet's surface, perfectly suited to the planet's post-apocalyptic, hostile environment in which only the strongest and most clever survive. Never having known peace, this new race has no concept of good and is multiplying at an alarming rate.
- There are no dark elves. Instead, there is a cult of evil surface elves who refer to themselves as "drow" and worship a spider god named Lolth. They believe that by sacrificing thousands of humanoids, Lolth will bless the dying elven race, and they'll once again reign supreme over the other races.

FOR YOUR CHARACTER

Don't play a drow? Don't worry! There are still a number of ways you can use the information presented in this article. For example, you can use it to create an interesting background and plot hook for your character. Below are some ideas that you can use as is, or you might use them as a springboard for creating other interesting backgrounds for your character.

- You killed my father; prepare to die. The drow murdered your entire family, leaving you orphaned as a child. Maybe you were captured and tortured by drow, but you managed to escape their clutches. You've studied their ways and learned their weaknesses, and now you are ready to fulfill your promise of revenge. You won't rest until the world is rid of this abominable race.
- Luke, I am your father. You've always looked a little different from the other elves. Your skin is a bit darker than normal, your hair a little more blonde, and your eyesight is a little sharper in the darkness. Your mother, who raised you alone, is soon to leave the world of the living, and she is ready to tell you her terrible secret: Your father is a drow! Torn, you must decide whether to seek out your father and learn this new aspect of your heritage or keep your mother's secret exactly that—a secret.
- Oh brother, wherefore art thou? Your sibling has been kidnapped by the drow for sacrifice, and it is up to you to rescue him before he becomes food for their hungry goddess. Having received training in reconnaissance, your plan is to infiltrate drow territory as a merchant and then glean as much information on the enemy as possible before leading a rescue attempt. Although your mission is dangerous, you have no choice—you are your sibling's last hope.

"We Are All Lolth's Meat"

Drow society survives as it does because a powerful and capricious goddess wills it so. Lolth—known as the Mother of Mandibles, the Flesh Carver, and the Weaver of Webs—rules drow existence. Through her terrible earthly agents, the priestesses, she takes an interest in each individual, from painful birth to wretched death. From early childhood, all drow know that they exist only to provide their goddess with food and pleasure. Those who survive to adulthood learn not to fear this eternal truth, but to embrace it. They face any hazard with steely resolve, knowing that no danger can be remotely as terrifying as the face of Lolth. To worship her is to blot out doubt and hesitation. Her dark and beady eyes contain the only truth: Life is but a fleeting dance between predator and prey. Eventually, everyone is torn apart and digested. Therefore, the only way to grant meaning to existence is to ensure that you make many kills before you die and that you show your taste and style by making your prey suffer exquisitely as they expire. A drow who cannot find delight in agony and destruction is no drow at all, fit only for ritual slaughter. When courage wavers, the true drow need only chant to herself the central credo of her faith: "We are all Lolth's meat."

Although all drow embrace death, each individual naturally prefers to embrace the death of others over her own. The desire to avoid becoming Lolth's next meal drives all interactions in a dark elven community. Even the mightiest priestesses must watch their backs to ensure that ambitious young acolytes don't schedule them for the Flesh Carver's feeding chamber. For every hundred adults in a drow community, its priestesses must make one sacrifice per week. The priestesses satisfy the grinding demand for new sacrifices in various ways. Vigorously they seek blasphemers and lawbreakers to consign to their blood altar. They solicit informants, who report the infractions of others to avoid becoming victims themselves.

Only on rare and glorious occasions can a drow community justify the sacrifice of one of its own adults. Its victims are most often slaves or captives. Still, shortages of captives can occur at any moment, and smart drow always make sure they have at least one patroness among the local priesthood. Each priestess surrounds herself with a network of toadies who do her bidding. Normally, no priestess dares sacrifice the favorites of a higher-ranking colleague. Although a wheedling and servile manner never harms one's chances of success with a priestess, a proud and dignified drow can prove herself indispensable in other ways. Renowned artists, skilled torturers, knowledgeable sages, and accomplished craftsmen can ensure their survival by serving both the priestesses and the community at large. Among all their favorites, the priestesses covet hunters the most. These hunters are drow adventurers who rove the passageways of the Underdark in search of intelligent captives to enslave or sacrifice.

Lolth's priestesses know what she best likes to eat: Drow are better to sacrifice than other races, adults are better than children. She prefers healthy individuals to the sick or feeble, and the more powerful and skilled a character, the better. Among non-drow, the Spider Queen vastly favors humanoids over all other creature types and would rather devour the good and lawful than the evil or chaotic. Unintelligent beings (with an Intelligence less than 3) are beneath her interest, for they cannot understand their suffering. To place a mere animal on her altar is to risk being eaten yourself.

The priestesses determine if their sacrifices lack sufficient quantity and quality to please their goddess. When they must know for certain, a *commune* spell provides the Great Spider's direct answer. Usually, though, experienced priestesses can, by reading omens, tell if Lolth is content with their gifts. One telltale sign of the goddess's displeasure is the success of one's enemies. If, for example, a party of adventurers penetrates the drow community's defenses, it is clear that the Spider Queen has withdrawn her favor. To win it back, the priestesses must increase their regimen of sacrifices—starting with the invaders.

Bloodied From the Birth-Sac

A notable difference between drow and their topside cousins lies in their fertility rate. Most elves have very low fertility rates, in keeping with their long lifespans. Drow mothers, in contrast, give birth as often as the more fertile races, such as humans and orcs. Their greater fertility reflects the crushing mortality rate among drow infants and youngsters. Drow females might give birth to ten times the number of babies than the females from other elven subraces do, but this does not mean that they end up with more adult children.

It is common for pregnant drow to carry twins or even triplets. Even in these cases, multiple births are rare, as the strongest of the fetuses feeds on its siblings in the womb. Pregnant drow can sometimes feel these mortal combats take place in their bellies. Such prenatal battles produce in their mothers a euphoric sensation, referred to in the Undercommon tongue as chad-zak. The feeling is infinitely stronger than that produced in

the bedchamber or by any intoxicant. Without it, it is doubtful that drow women, selfish to the core, would ever deign to suffer the inconveniences of reproduction.

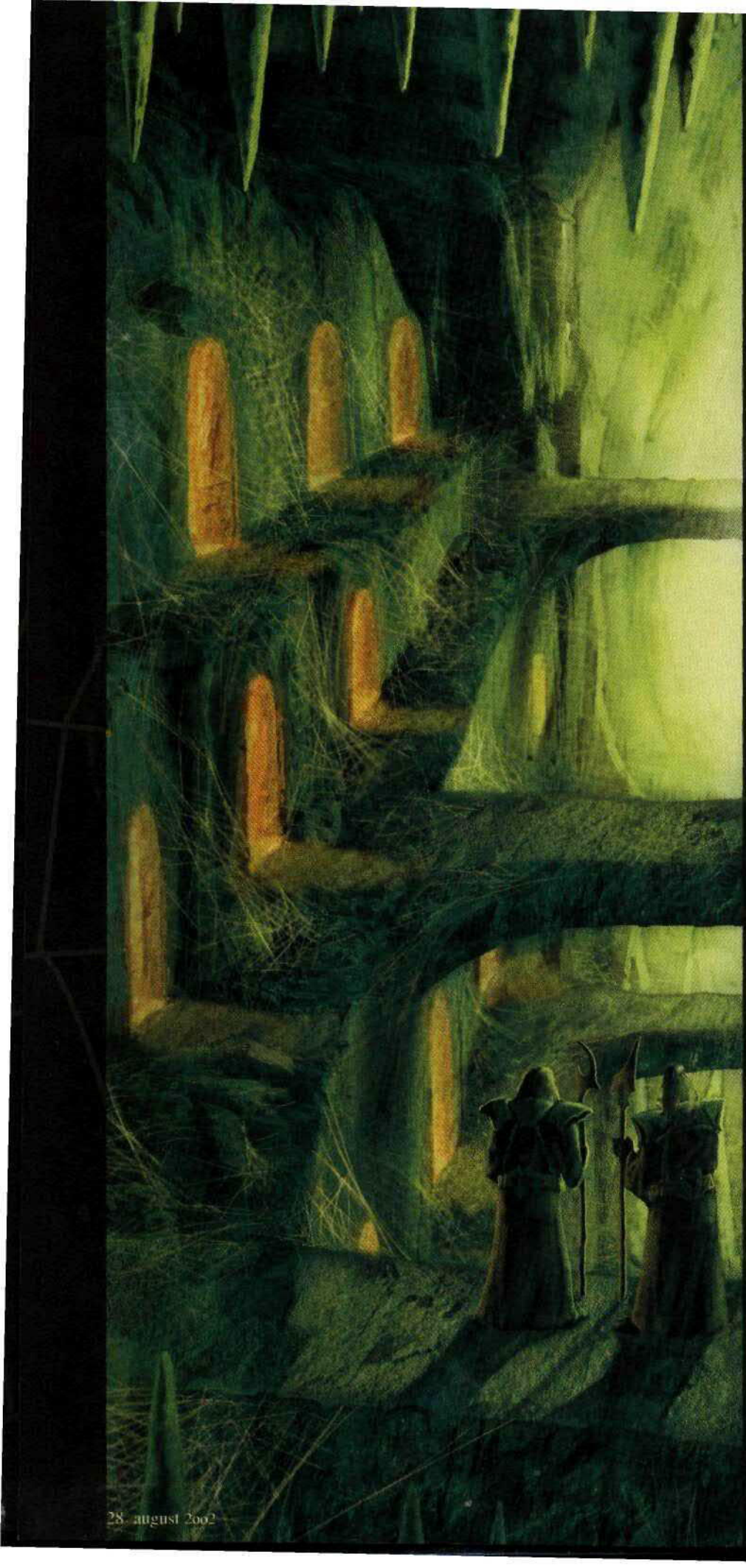
Chad-zak occurs up to four times per multiple pregnancy. It usually happens early in the third trimester. Mothers who experience repeated chad-zaks usually feel them in quick succession, once every one or two days. The final chad-zak indicates one fetus's successful slaying of its rivals. This process does not result in

PRIESTESS WAR

A terrible logic arises from Lolth's taste in sacrifices. If she prefers drow over non-drow, and high-level characters over lowly ones, it stands to reason that her favorite victims are her own top priestesses. Thus, the priestesses have devised a way to avoid winding up on their own altars: They band together. Most of the time, a community's priestesses maintain an attitude of respectful, but mistrustful, distance from one another. If one priestess moves against another, the rest tend to side against the aggressor. The annals of drow history recount several famous incidents in which rebellious priestesses lined up allies against a High Priestess only to be betrayed by their supposed allies. A priestess must be extremely unpopular before her fellows will stand idly by for her sacrifice.

Open conflict within a priesthood is not unknown, however. In almost all such cases, a schism erupts between two sides that are evenly matched with one another. These fights are prone to expand into outright civil wars that engulf entire communities. Each faction of priestesses uses its favored lackeys, soldiers, and hunters to war against the other. Dark elven historians have even documented cases in which warring priestesses recruited outside adventurers from the surface to bolster their forces.

Lolth never intervenes in such struggles, even when it means the demise of entire communities. The success of the predator should never be restrained by sympathy for the prey.



stillbirths; the slain are absorbed back into the mother's body.

Playing For Keeps

The fact that a newborn drow has survived in the womb and made it through birth does not guarantee its further survival. All drow children, even those not yet able to walk, feel an instinctive homicidal impulse toward their siblings. In fact, when opportunity rears its head, most drow youngsters happily kill any playmates. Despite this fact—or, rather, because of it—children are not kept apart in drow nurseries. Their mothers want the strong children to sharpen their predatory inclinations, polishing off their weaker offspring in the process. No drow wants a weak or incompetent child to reach adulthood, where she might bring shame to the family. Note that strength need not be physical; it is better to have a spindly child whose cleverness allows her to engineer the deaths of others than a well-muscled brute who is easily fooled. It goes without saying that any drow bent toward mercy or virtue stands out as glaringly weak. In the unlikely event that his siblings don't gang up on him and crush his windpipe, the mother will surely send such a shameful freak of nature to the priestesses, as fodder for their ceremonial daggers. It is for this reason that good drow are exceedingly rare. To survive without enthusiastically embracing evil is next to impossible.

Drow parents rarely visit their children. Some weak-minded males might enjoy playing with their spawn, but nurses and other servants keep a watchful eye on them.

No doubt because it is such a dangerous time for them, drow children grow up much faster than the children of other elves. By the age of eight, drow children can walk, talk, and speak. They are then carted off to receive schooling. Junior priestesses tutor the young, savagely punishing them for misbehavior. Students might be caged, doused with scalding or freezing water, poked with sharpened sticks, poisoned, burned, or simply pulverized with fists and clubs. Such ill treatments scarcely seem to slow down these untamable children, who have already proven themselves bullies and survivors at home. Priestesses never fatally harm their charges; if they want them dead, it's wasteful not to sacrifice them.

Religious doctrine is the main object of study. Youngsters are also drilled in combat maneuvers, literacy, mathematics, alchemy, natural history, and various artisan skills. Students who demonstrate an affinity for magic are often taken out of classes and apprenticed to wizards and sorcerers.

School continues until the age of twenty, when adolescence officially begins. By this time, one out of every three students will have been murdered by classmates. Another one in ten will have been sent to the temple as food for Lolth.

THE ETHICS OF DROW KILLING

Adventurers who want to maintain their good alignments must always think before they smite. Just because the vast majority of orcs or bugbears, for example, tend to be evil, does not guarantee that any particular orc or bugbear deserves to be mercilessly cut down in the name of truth and virtue.

With drow, such qualms do not apply. Virtually any individual in a drow community has already proven him- or herself a murderer—even small children.

Be warned, though: By the same token, almost all drow, including very young ones, are experienced killers and might boast shockingly high levels as warriors, rogues, or sorcerers. More than one adventurer has died an ignominious death after relaxing his guard with a drow child.

Drow wanderers might, in exceedingly rare circumstances, claim the mantle of goodness. Some individuals exile themselves from their murderous communities in search of a peaceful life out of Lolth's reach. In most cases, they'll be consumed with shame and self-loathing, unable to fully shake the savagery of their formative years. A supposedly good drow might not gut you in the night as you sleep, but he'll still constantly wrestle with powerful impulses toward dishonesty, selfishness, and treachery. The fact that surface-dwellers shun them at all costs makes life even more difficult for the infinitesimally tiny fraction of drow who sincerely seek redemption.

Tests of Treachery

During the years that bridge childhood and adulthood, young drow are expected to choose a role for themselves in society and to set themselves on a path toward achieving it. They typically latch on to mentors, learning their skills and acquainting themselves with their contacts. Once a young adult drow gains enough experience, she waits for something terrible to befall her mentor (or she might engineer it herself if required by one of Lolth's tests) and attempts to step into her mentor's place. Typically this attempt requires conflict with rival apprentices or others with a claim on the mentor's clients, position, and property. It is considered a high crime for drow to mentor their own children, although dispensation from high priestesses can sometimes be had, for a price.

Masters are given the rights of life or death over their protégés, but then, so is everyone else. Adolescents may not ingratiate themselves with priestesses, and are therefore without protection in drow society. They must keep their heads down, while at the same time proving themselves useful to their patrons. To tip the balance either way is risky. A too-humble apprentice is perceived as easy to bully, while overly ambitious ones alarm their masters, who begin to fear assassination.

At the approximate age of eighty, adolescents are expected to complete a task indicating their mastery of their chosen role. A hunter must capture a valuable sacrifice, while a musician must perform a particularly difficult ballad. Not only must the drow perform her task well, she must not show any self-doubt or fear. Doing so means failure in the eyes of Lolth, and it results in horrible punishments. Success indicates that the drow is ready to be recognized as an adult. Adolescents who pass the test without dispatching their mentors must set up shop for themselves, going into business independently.

Murder Ballads

As adults, drow look for protégés to exploit, rivals to destroy, and opportunities for pleasure. Wealth and luxury are seen as outward signals of success, but the true measure of an adult's status lies in the number of people she's murdered (or caused to be murdered), and the creative manner in which her prey were made to suffer as they slowly perished. Just as a slow, torture-filled slaying wins more admiration than a mercifully quick sneak attack, different victims accrue varying amounts of prestige. Killing a victim well known to the community confers more glory than a mere outsider. Credit for sacrificial victims goes to those who capture them. Thus, the hunter class is among the most admired in drow society, second only to the priestesses.

An ingenious evisceration means nothing if others do not know of it. Hence, bards have a crucial role among the drow. Social climbers hire bards to commemorate their slayings in song. If possible, they even invite the balladeers to attend the killings, to more vividly portray the slaughter. A skilled bard with a popular following can greatly enhance a drow's prestige, transforming a run-of-the-mill execution into a celebrated slaughter. Bards patrol the winding passageways of an underground community, yipping out their gore-spattered ballads in the screechy, affected tone expected of a drow singer. The hiring of a famed bard can cost tens of thousands of gold pieces, and the more an individual drow pays, the greater her chances of social elevation. The subject of the song might, for example, attract a more powerful priestess as a patron or gain new, well-heeled customers for her business.

Especially popular murder songs outlast not only the fame of their victims, but of the killers. Along with newly commissioned songs, bards perform timeless classics such as "The Burning of Farza-Lach," "Tornon's Guts," and "Seven Drips from the Gore Cord."

Accompanying a drow bard's keening voice is a complex, lute-like instrument known as vazhan-do. Their tight strings can be plucked furiously, unleashing a violent torrent of notes, or slowly bent, producing slow and disturbing sounds. Any of the sixty-four strings of the standard vazhan-do can be quickly unstrung from the instrument, doubling as a garrote. It is not surprising that bards often double as assassins, as their nightly rounds allow them to travel throughout the community without question. Although their status as hired killers is well-known, it would be unthinkable to restrict their movements.

To refuse to give a bard hospitality is to seem both cowardly and unsporting. However, it is one thing to invite a bard into one's home and quite another to let him out of one's sight for even a moment.

The Tests

Lolth does not make it easy for her minions to please her. All drow feel a sense of creeping unease as they progress in their careers. This is true no matter what roles they've selected in life. All fear the day when they reach a level of achievement that catches the cruel attention of their grim goddess. Even the all-powerful priestesses are not immune to the dreaded Lolthtanchwi—the "Punishments of Lolth." Lolth puts her worshipers through a number of terrifying tests throughout their lives, the first of which occurs in late adolescence (1st level in game terms). The tests continue as the drow progresses in strength and skill, each one more demanding and with more terrifying consequences than the last (for more on the tests and punishments of Lolth, see "Punishments of Loth" in this issue).

Drow perceive when each test is about to descend on them. Their senses become painfully acute, and the world seems both more crisply real and more menacing. In some cases, horrifying visions preclude the start of a test, while in others, a sign, such as the sighting of a particular spider, indicates a new test. Different tasks are required of the drow for each test, and they invariably require the drow to risk both her life and all she has achieved in life to date.

Love Wounds

As is true for many species of spiders, drow mating rituals are unpredictable and fraught with peril—for the male.

Women enjoy an unquestioned upper hand in drow society. The priestesses run all political affairs, and grim-faced matriarchs control families and their business proceedings. According to drow stereotypes, females are smart, cool-headed, and cruel, while males are foolish, impulsive, and emotionally weak. Males kill and maim to defend themselves and to prove they are not cowards. Females kill and maim because they enjoy it.

Females marry for political reasons but are not monogamous. They may dally with their followers, with travelers from other communities, or even with servants and slaves. Husbands are expected to remain faithful to their wives and are usually sacrificed if caught cheating. On the other hand, if a powerful priestess takes a liking to another woman's husband, she can have him consigned to the sacrificial altar for having the temerity to refuse her his favors. Charming, well-muscled males often face such no-win situations. For this reason, handsome men often disfigure themselves or spend long periods away from the community in all-male hunter bands.

Drow custom allows its females to engage in cross-species coupling; if a male engages in such a dalliance, it is considered a capital offense. Any sexual contact between a drow and a drider means instant death, no matter what the status of the drow. Congress with driders remains the mightiest taboo in drow culture.

In the Drip, Drip, Dripping Dark

As fearsome as they are, the drow are beset by many powerful enemies. They must defend their subterranean communities against mind flayers, dwarven warriors, and other humanoid adventuring parties. Drow settlements cannot be cleared out by merely charging from room to room and killing the inhabitants of each chamber. Dark elves react quickly to intrusion. They install sophisticated magical alarms and mount systematic patrols throughout a wide perimeter so that the entire community is mobilized for battle by the time enemies can reach its gates. The drow wear down opponents with waves of conscripted soldiers and common soldiers before sending out high-level hunters and mighty priestesses.

It is possible, though difficult, to gain peaceful admittance to a drow enclave. As lovers of luxury, dark elves hunger for unusual foods, strange intoxicants, fine fabrics, beautiful jewels, and other exotic items they cannot produce themselves. They're also always in the market for slaves; specimens too damaged to work can at least be torture victims.

Drow pay for these items with captured loot from raids or with unique magic items produced by their talented wizards. They ensure premium value for these items by keeping the techniques of their creation secret. Most decent individuals abhor all signs of drow craftsmanship and look askance at those who make open use of drow magic items. Although many sellers of magical curios refuse to handle these items, they fetch high prices in lands that have a tendency for evil.

There are easier ways of making a living than running trade caravans into the Underdark, but a few intrepid individuals have earned fortunes this way. Drow do not easily trust outsiders, even when vouched for by traders they already know. Only after many successful and mutually profitable trade missions are non-drow given free access to a dark elven settlement. Even an ally of long standing can always be hauled off for ritual murder when he commits a major gaffe, or if the drow are desperate enough for sacrifices.

Drow are most likely to admit adventuring parties past their gates as the bound, gagged, and unconscious captives of hunting parties. Most captives are maimed and put to work as slaves, but adventurers are usually treated with extreme care until an auspicious time for sacrifice arrives. Still, it is not unknown for adventurers to escape from captivity and fight their way out of a drow enclave.

Spiders, Spiders, Everywhere

The chambers of any drow settlement crawl with spiders. From mites the size of pinpricks to guardian tarantulas the size of houses, there is no area of a dark elven community devoid of spiders. They skitter in swarms across walls and along floors. They drop from ceilings. Webs, some stronger than rope, hang from every imaginable surface.

Although guests might be unnerved by the spiders' inescapable presence, the locals pay them no heed. Cobwebs are waved or burnt away without comment. The squishing and crunching sound of stepped-on spiders is a constant refrain. Drow do not bother to check for spiders before sitting. A matriarch might idly seize a fist-sized spider while negotiating a trade arrangement and proceed to casually rip its legs off, one by one. Drow breads and puddings are speckled with stray legs, mandibles, and eggs. The overwhelming presence of so many spiders is often disconcerting to non-drow

visitors, but drow themselves hardly take note of the creatures.

Theater of Atrocity

There are no more fervent followers of the arts than dark elves—provided that the works in question revel in demented evil.

Lolth's ritual slayings can be seen as a gruesome form of performance art. Although everyday sacrifices are conducted in small temples or shrines, events featuring notable victims are often held in large amphitheaters in which the entire community can gather. These events provoke a carnival atmosphere, with raucous laughter filling the hall as jesters leap through the stalls. Bards stroll the aisles, singing of murder, and celebrants haul in food and wine to consume throughout the event. Intoxicating vapors waft from censers, making hearts beat faster and hands tremble with bloodlust. Priestesses and other members of the gentry watch from private boxes fixed with blinds that can be drawn for privacy. Everything from conspiracies to trysts might be negotiated in the confines of these boxes.

Most drow bloodsports are horribly brutal and gory. In one popular entertainment, a bound captive is held beneath an apparatus that slowly drips a magical acid onto his forehead, one drop at a time. The solvent opens up a hole in the victim's skull and then melts the brain. During this time, orbs of telepathic power communicate the dying victim's memories to the salivating crowd. Attendees vicariously savor the captive's most traumatic and painful experiences as he slowly succumbs.

Not all bloodletting in the amphitheater is fatal. Torturers often display their supreme skill with their filleting blades by leaving victims just on the brink of death. The most artful torturers become as famous as bards. Even torture victims, left alive to magically heal between performances, can become drow celebrities if they can communicate their suffering artfully enough.

Drow taste in the decorative arts is appalling to non-evil humanoids. One particularly skilled class of drow artisans specializes in incredibly lifelike sculpture that looks as if it's created from living flesh. In truth, the sculptures are carved from blocks of drider silk, elaborately hand-painted and made to move through complex mechanical craftsmanship. Many are life-sized depictions of torture or mayhem. Common motifs include a human paladin impaled on a pike, a spider eating the brains of a halfling, or the good elven god, Corellon Larethian, carved up on the torture table.

In some drow communities, more abstract pieces are popular, such as a tapestry of liquid flesh in which hundreds of oozing eyes continually drift upward and downward in a regular wave pattern.

Predation, Travel, and Warfare

For many male drow, finding peace and autonomy is possible only on the trail, away from their wives, mothers, and sisters. (Although nothing stops female drow from becoming hunters, women tend to stay at home, closer to the levers of power.) Hunters win status for themselves and wealth for their families by capturing slaves and sacrificial victims. They especially seek out adventurers to attack, because such powerful individuals are highly prized sacrificial commodities.

It is a short step for some discontented dark elves to keep wandering and never return home. So-called "good" drow are typically former hunters who have decided to find places for themselves in other societies. Even when fighting for apparently good causes, they find their ingrained predatory habits hard to shake.

Prosperous drow communities might decide to give Lolth her favorite gift of all and launch warfare against a nearby town, village, or underground settlement. The object of such conquests is always the same: mass murder. Victorious drow slaughter entire populations in the name of Lolth. On rare occasions, ambitious priestesses seek alliances with other drow enclaves, hoping to build armies big enough to overrun and slaughter entire nations. Such efforts might be successful in the interim but are generally short-lived, as it does not take much provocation for jealous priestesses from different communities to turn on one another.

Death and Burial

In the bloodthirsty culture of the drow, the words "burial" and "old age" do not exist. It is rare for a drow to survive past 400 years, and sooner or later, a drow powerful enough to have gained so many years will certainly attract the attention of Lolth and end up on the sacrificial altar. Drow who die of natural causes are considered to have shamed Lolth. Their bodies are simply left to rot, their carcasses feeding the insects and vermin. In some cases however, such as when a more prominent drow dies of natural causes, the priestesses might choose to use the death as an example to other drow, imparting on them the shame that comes with never having caught the eye of Lolth and been called to sacrifice. The corpse of such a drow is strung up over the door of her family home, suspended by delicate spider silk, and left until only bones remain. This serves as a symbol of the family's shame, and a reminder to other drow of the benefits of murdering particularly long-lived family members. Drow who fall in battle or who have been killed by another drow receive a "blessing" from Lolth. Rather than being thrown on the garbage heap or left to rot over the doorway of one's ancestral home, the flesh on their bodies is ceremoniously stripped from the bones by a priestess, dried, and used for clothing enhancements or to make czak'ls, special bowls used to collect blood drained from sacrificed victims. Their remaining body parts and bones are soaked in a strong acid, and after a few days, nothing remains.

The drow have no concept of ancestor worship, and they do not grieve for fallen family members. Instead, they are too busy scheming how to use the death to their advantage. This might mean gaining new power and prestige within the family, new business contacts, or new inherited wealth. On the extremely rare occasion that a drow feels loss over the death of a mate or family member, it is advantageous to hide such feelings. A dark elf stupid enough to demonstrate an emotion as useless as grief is considered an abomination, and quickly and painfully sacrificed to Lolth.

The ecology of the dryad

Lesson of the day: Don't catch them, they'll catch you

by Shaun Wilson

Though it was mid-autumn, the air was warm on the day of the class picnic. The sun was bright, the sky clear of all but a few clouds, and a breeze gently stirred the grass and fallen leaves. Everyone agreed that the guest of honor had outdone herself with her weather-controlling spell, and Belzime, druidess of the Eastern Wood, received their praise with a satisfied smile.

Old Malec the Sage had suggested to his students that they bring large lunches when they went out to meet the druidess and her companions at the edge of the wood. In this way he assured there would be enough to share with Belzime and her three attendants, an aged elven woman named Hibiscus and two comely young women.

"Now, isn't this better than listening to my dull speeches in some sage's dingy classroom?" Belzime asked the assembled students. A chorus of cheers came in answer.

Only Malec dissented. "My classroom has its attractions," he said after finishing off his slice of roast boar. "At least there we don't have to resort to 'repel insect' spells to keep the ants in their place."

"A useful spell, nonetheless," said Hibiscus. "As a sorceress and a woodland dweller, I can appreciate the value of having a druid around. Are any of your students interested in druidical magic?"

"I think the boys are more interested in your two followers," Malec observed as he regarded his charges from beneath shaggy white eyebrows. Most of the boys were clustered around one of the young women, a flame-haired beauty named Robinia. "At any rate, now that lunch is over with, we should get on with the lecture. Are you ready, my dear?"

"I think so," said Belzime. "The topic I've selected for today concerns one of our lesser-known forest allies and friends, the wood nymph, also called the dryad."

A few of the boys giggled at this announcement. "Apparently," she continued, "some of you are already familiar with the topic. What do you know about dryads?"

After a pause, one of the older students called out from the front of the class. "Dryads look like women with green hair, and they live in trees. I think some of them can talk to plants and some can teleport themselves."

"Not bad," said Belzime. "That generally sums up what most people know of dryads, though some of what you say is not quite correct. Wood nymphs are quite beautiful, as you have probably also heard, and they do have green hair. As for the rest . . . well, I'll start at the beginning.

"Plants, like animals, humans, elves, and such, have a life force that is much like a soul. This force is much fainter in plants than in animals, but some of them still have fairly powerful auras. The most powerful plant auras are found in oak trees, and sensitive humans, particularly druids, can feel the power of their life force from three paces away. This is one reason why we druids consider the oak tree sacred.

"Certain oak trees in ages past were invested with a special gift, and could form their tree-souls into animate shapes. The dryad is a permanent physical form of an oak tree's soul, and is only found around huge and old oaks of at least fifty years age. The tree must be large enough to have a powerful soul, to support the dryad who will live with it and within it. In some sense you could call the dryad a parasite, but that is not a flattering term and isn't very accurate as well.

"Being an extension of the oak tree's soul, a dryad cannot live if her tree dies or if she

is taken too far from the tree itself. Most dryads will never stray more than a thousand feet from her tree in any direction. They call this area in which they live a ***terel.***

"You may be surprised to know that dryads do not need to eat, though they can consume the same foods that you and I do. They like the taste of nuts and berries, and may dig up certain edible roots as spices or foods. In the wintertime, when most plants become dormant and grow more slowly, the oak tree's life force becomes weaker. Sometimes a dryad must then eat more foods in order to sustain herself, and many store away foods that they gather during the fall for this purpose. It is rare that anyone will see a dryad in winter; like the trees, they also "sleep" for long periods of time to conserve their energy.

"Because of her ties with the oak tree's soul, a dryad gains certain special abilities. She can communicate with all forms of plant life, and especially well with the ancient treants. Since most plants are passive and unintelligent, they will obey anyone they understand. A dryad can cause plants to reach out and entangle pursuers, act as spies to report if anyone has passed by, cause vines to trip people, and so on. So close is the link between dryads and plants that most of them name themselves after trees in their woods, yielding some lovely names indeed.

"As an extension of a tree's soul, a dryad can also merge with her parent tree at will. Many people believe that dryads have built homes inside their trees, and have such furnishings as tables, chairs, beds, and chests full of gold. Nothing could be more wrong; the tiny pile of coins and gems that fascinate the wood nymphs are usually hidden in a hollow of her tree or are buried among its roots. The dryad herself lives *within* the tree, merging fully with its soul and becoming intangible."

"If I may, Belzime," interrupted Hibiscus, "it should be said that the dryad can merge with other trees as well, though she will not remain long within them. If she feels threatened she can cause herself to become fully immaterial and she will be transported instantly to the oak that is her home, merging at once with the tree's soul."

"It is possible that some of you have heard of another power dryads have," Belzime continued. "Dryads like handsome young male humans and elves, and sometimes want to keep them — the same way they keep minor treasures. The dryad can cast a spell that enhances her beauty to a man, enthralling him and enabling her to command the fellow by her thoughts alone. A number of my male druidic students have described this effect to me after being rescued from well-meaning dryads who were taken by their looks." Belzime smiled. "I must be a very familiar face to the dryads of this wood. I've led quite a few rescues."

A dark-haired boy sitting near the druidess spoke up. "Is it hard to get the boys back from the nymphs?"

"Well, it is at first. The young men never want to be rescued. Dryads are especially good at hiding their fellows, and the men are entranced so they will do anything to avoid being rescued. If the dryad wants, she can even cause her fellow to merge with her oak tree's soul by her magic; then it is very hard to bring him home. The dryad who has the lad isn't much help, and will deny having ever seen him. If I come and take the boy away, she will pout and look as if she'd lost a cherished toy. She likes to have the young man cater to her whims and bring her things, and he lives for nothing but the chance to stare blissfully at his 'true love.'

"Sometimes her spell over the young man will wear off, and the dryad will sigh and give the boy something to remember her by — a few coins, a gem or two, something like that. When the fellow reaches home, he usually discovers he's been away for several years."

"Druidess," called another boy. "How do dryads make more dryads?"

Belzime looked questioningly at Malec, who shrugged and said gruffly, "They're old enough to find out. Go ahead and tell them."

"Fine. Well, some of you may have heard about races of creatures that have but one sex. Dryads are one of them, as are sylphs, nymphs, and satyrs. Dryads can have children by human and elven fathers, and if they do then their children will always be dryad girls. Dryads can also have children by satyrs, which as you know are always male. The child of a dryad and a satyr is a dryad girl half the time, a satyr boy the other half. It hardly seems likely that dryads and satyrs descended from a common ancestor, so at best we chalk this all up to the perversity of magic, or the whim of the gods.

"The female child of a dryad," Belzime continued, "will stay with her for about twelve years. If the child is a satyr, the mother will turn the boy over to his father's band for his upbringing. A girl-child will spend the first few years of her life attached to her mother's tree. When the girl comes of age, she will be taken to an oak tree of her own and will become attached to it naturally. The child then becomes a part of that tree's soul, and will live there for the rest of her days. She will rarely see her mother after that, but she will be happy and content with her life."

"Why doesn't she see her mother after that?" a young girl called.

"Oak trees may grow reasonably close together, but dryads by their nature are solitary beings. They are happy by themselves, surrounded by their woods, and they only rarely wish other company. This part of their personality may have developed because oak trees large enough to support dryads are sometimes not easily found. Each dryad's attachment to her own oak tree restricts her travel, too, so each must be satisfied with where she lives — and so she is."

"Um, my pardons," said Belzime's red-haired attendant. Belzime motioned for her to continue. "It is possible for a dryad to leave the *terel* of her oak for a brief period of time, but she will never do so intentionally. To do so brings on *glirgimer,* the wasting away of her soul, and she will wither and die within hours. It is said that powerful magics can separate a dryad from her tree without harm, but" — the girl shivered — "that is a hard thing to imagine!"

One of the more athletic boys in the class, who had listened attentively through the lecture, raised a hand. "Is there some way to get hold of a dryad and not have her charm you?"

The color went out of the red-haired girl's face. "Why?" she asked hotly. "Do you want to catch one for a pet?"

"Robinia . . ." murmured Belzime. "Calm down. Perhaps the young man meant something else." From the tone of the druidess's voice, however, it was obvious that she agreed with her follower's interpretation. She addressed the boy. "To answer your question, no. Unless one uses powerful magical defenses, the charming power of a dryad can overcome almost any man's resistance. And some dryads have kept their men hidden forever.

Many people believe that dryads have built homes inside their trees . . . . Nothing could be more wrong.

"If anyone were to try to lay violent hands upon a dryad, he would find her vanishing before him, on her way back in spirit form to her home tree, where she could alert any of her allies nearby. Mighty treants, remember, care about dryads greatly, and so do satyrs, elves, sprites, and pixies . . . and druids." The emphasis she put on the last word was lost on no one. "It is not a good idea to go hunting dryads for one's own sport," she concluded.

The youth chewed on a blade of grass and considered this. He seemed to lose interest in the remainder of the lecture.

Hibiscus broke the short silence that followed. "This brings up the question of what dryads like to do for fun — without having a fellow around," she said.

"Wood nymphs like their surroundings to be pretty, and themselves as well; they like beauty only for their own sake, not for what others care or think. Dryads will perfume themselves with crushed flower blossoms and style their hair with bits of flowers, leaves, and other woodland growths. Sometimes a dryad will find a way to trade some of her meager treasure for sewn garments, but dryads are just as happy without clothing as they are with it. That's another reason why young men often hunt for them — just to get a peek."

"They'll have to stand in line behind the satyrs," Robinia muttered in the background. Belzime gave her assistant a disapproving glance.

Old Malec stretched himself and stood up from the grass, dusting off his robes. "On that note, I think we should prepare ourselves for the walk home. We still have some things left to see in this forest." A chorus of groans answered him, but he was firm, and the class made ready to depart.

Because dryads are highly intelligent, they don't try to charm morons if they can help it.

"We appreciate your time, Madame Belzime," the sage told her after most of the students had set off for the next stop on their tour. "I think you did a nice job of convincing my boys not to comb your woods for nymphs."

"Don't worry," she said. "It's late enough in the year that they won't find them, or recognize them if they do. Remember what I said about dryads having green hair? That's only true in the spring and summer. It changes color in the fall to gold, red, or reddish brown. In wintertime it turns white."

Malec smiled. "So when the boys go looking for a green-haired girl, they'll only find girls like her." He pointed to Robinia, standing on the edge of the forest talking with Hibiscus.

"How long have you known?" Belzime asked.

"Since I heard her name. Am I correct in recalling that *Robinia pseudoacacia* is a variety of locust tree?"

Appendix

1. A dryad's *terel* cannot be distinguished from any of the terrain surrounding her oak tree; the dryad can roughly pace it out, however, because she becomes increasingly uneasy as she passes from the 33" distance to the 36" radius edge.

2. If a dryad is forcibly taken beyond 36" from her oak, she will rapidly (within five rounds) exhibit symptoms of starvation, depression, and exhaustion, and will die in 6-36 hours if nothing is done. A *heal* spell will negate all the symptoms, but the effect of the spell wears off in four hours, and *glirgimer* sets in again if the dryad is still outside her *terel.* An *exorcism* spell will separate the dryad from the tree's "soul"; in this event, the dryad must find another suitable oak tree within seven days, or the *glirgimer* symptoms begin. A dryad's magic resistance should be checked whenever these or other spells are cast upon her.

3. An average dryad lives for as long as her oak tree does. Damage suffered by the

tree will affect the dryad adversely, perhaps putting her into a temporary coma even if the tree survives the shock. If her tree dies, the dryad will die as well from *glirgimer* unless she is *exorcised* and transported to a new tree.

4. For spell effects, assume a dryad can use the following powers at will: *speak with plants, plant door, commune with nature, detect snares and pits, locate plants, locate animals, entangle,* and *trip* (at the 9th level of druidic ability), and *dimension door* (to anywhere within her *terel).* Some dryads (10%) have the power to use *pass plant* at will instead of the *dimension door* ability, though again it will only function within a dryad's own *terel.*

5. There is a 2% chance of encountering a dryad with a female child under twelve years of age. The child will have reduced statistics for an adult, as determined by the DM. For instance, a young dryad could have 1-4 HP, fight as a creature with less than 1 - 1 HD, and would have none of her "adult" powers except the *speak with plants* ability, performed at 1 1st-level effectiveness. When the child reaches 12 years of age, her mother helps her find a suitable tree, and she takes up residence as a full-fledged dryad with 2 hit dice and all of a dryad's magical abilities. However, it takes time to master those abilities: the effectiveness of a young dryad's magic goes up one level every year (2nd level at age 13, 3rd level at age 14, etc.) until she attains 9th-level effectiveness at age 20.

6. For game purposes, a dryad's *charm* power works much like a powerful version of the druid spell *charm person or mammal.* An intended victim is allowed a saving throw (at -3, as per the Monster Manual) upon first encountering the *charm* power. (Magic resistance, if applicable, is checked before the saving throw.) A failure to save indicates that the *charm* has taken effect; then, on a roll of 1-3 on a d6, the *charm* is permanent. If the *charm* is not permanent, it will last for an indefinite period of time. The victim is allowed subsequent saving throws — each at -3 — at intervals that depend on the victim's intelligence. (See the chart on p. 55 of the Players Handbook.) However, because of the power of the dryad's charm, read the saving-throw chart intervals as years, months, and weeks instead of months, weeks, and days. For instance, a victim with 6 intelligence is allowed a new saving throw every two years; one with 18 intelligence can try to break the *charm* once every two weeks.

From this, it is easy to see why dryads prefer to enchant young (low- to mid-level) men who aren't overly intelligent — the sort who'll be easy to *charm* and easy to keep that way. Elves and half-elves, with their innate resistance to *charm* magic, are rarely the object of a dryad's "affections." She will try to *charm* a character with elven blood only if her life depends on it or if she runs across an elf or half-elf with 18 charisma. Because dryads are highly intelligent, they don't try to *charm* morons if they can help it; a servant of low intelligence would become boring before the influence of the *charm* wore off. But they can't resist trying to *charm* characters with high charisma, whether they're morons or geniuses. If threatened with harm or removal from her *terel,* a dryad will try to *charm* anyone she can.

A dryad can use her *charm* ability three times each day if necessary. She rarely has occasion to use them up since large groups of men don't often travel through her *terel.* Even when her *charm* powers are depleted. she can use her *plant door* and *dimension door* abilities to get home.

7. When a dryad is inside her tree, she can be hurt by any attack form that damages the tree (chopping or burning). But note again that a dryad has quite a few friends in the forest. Anyone who tries to harm her or her tree will have to get in line behind the satyrs, treants, wood elves. pixies, sprites, and druids — and deal with all of them first.

by Amber Scott
illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF DUERGAR

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

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

HISTORY OF DUERGAR

Duergar claim that their god, Laduguer, forged the world. In the time before time, the world was but a chill nothingness, containing neither life nor light. The desire for creation existed, and the empty void of the universe pulsed with the uncontrolled desire to be. From that hunger formed the figure of a dwarf wielding a hammer, and with his hammer he shaped the void into a cold, dark world of eternal twilight. Laduguer beget Laduguer, it is said; he birthed himself out of sheer will and the desire to create.

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

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

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

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

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

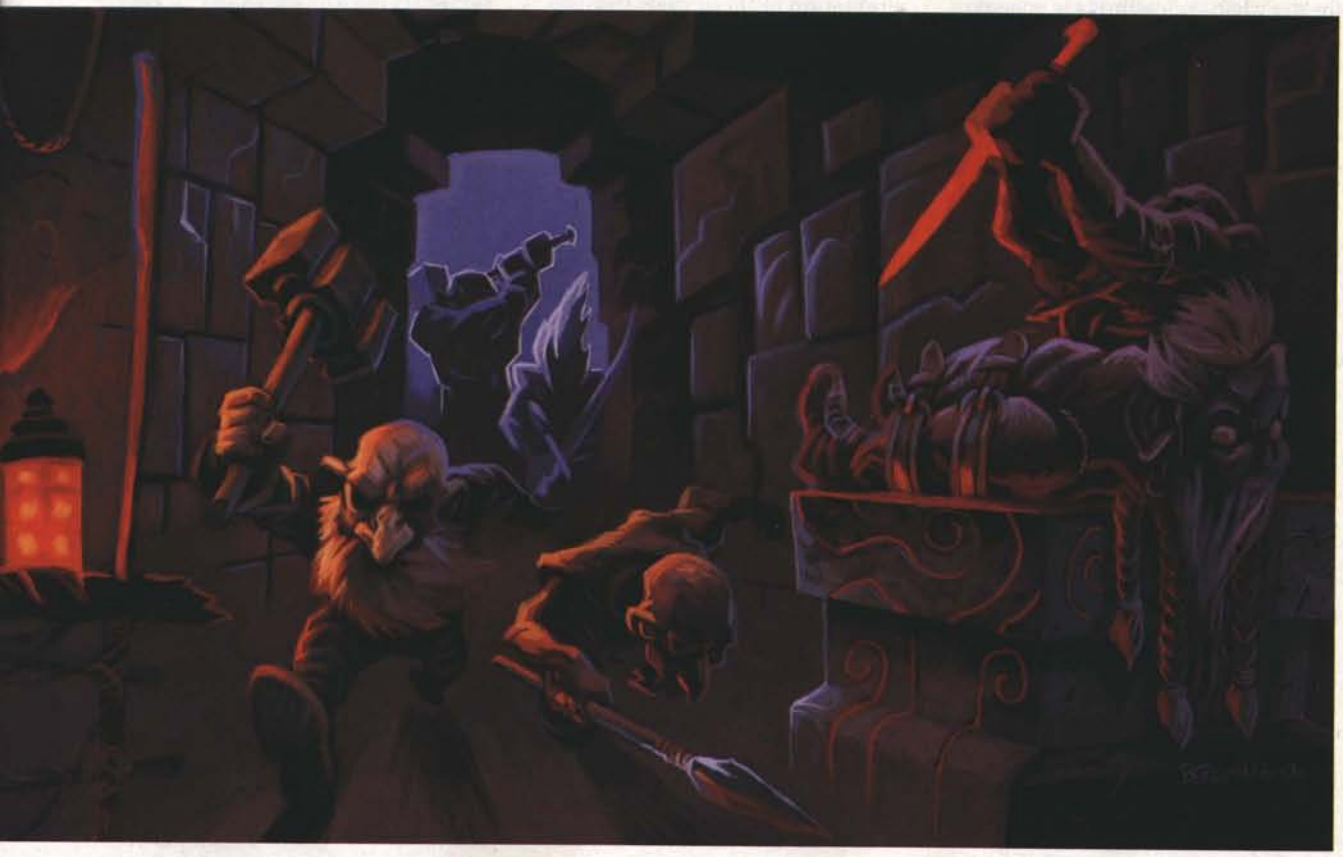
Laduguer roared, "Insolent fool! Do you think you can improve on my work by creating a life greater than your own? You do this for your own glory, not mine!" He struck the Lone Craftsman and turned him into a shrieking, gibbering madman without the skill, patience, or talent to create anything ever again.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

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

DUERGAR KNOWLEDGE

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

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



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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF DUERGAR

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

Duergar eyes are almost uniformly pitch-black and curiously flat, making a duergar's stare incredibly unnerving. Gray dwarves say that Laduguer bestowed incredible sight on his children as a divine blessing so they might hunt their light-dwelling cousins more easily. Thus, duergar who invoke the wrath of their priests usually have their eyes put out as punishment, while the birth of a child with grey or white eyes is considered a terrible omen.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF DUERGAR

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

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

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

Duergar spies, known as darkhafts, often travel among gray dwarf caravans. They gather information about the races they trade with and use that information to further duergar goals. As weapons traders, the duergar profit from conflict, and while the world never lacks in that, darkhafts sometimes give things a push. They enjoy encouraging the rivalry between two opposing factions, coaxing ill will to the surface like an erupting boil and then supplying both sides with weapons and armor. Not only do such underhanded acts open up new markets for their weapons, but they sow bloodshed among the countless races the gray dwarves despise.

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

LADUGUER

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

Symbol: A broken crossbow bolt.

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

Domains: Evil, Law, Magic, Protection.

Favored Weapon: Warhammer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DUERGAR LAIRS

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

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

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

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

VS. DUERGAR

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

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

Magic Both Natural and Divine: With the power to enlarge themselves and a strict religious culture, magic almost always comes into play when facing duergar. Duergar warriors often use their *enlarge person* ability before charging into combat, while clerics make frequent use of *aid*, *bull's strength*, and *deeper darkness* to assist their allies and extinguish magical light. *Dispel magic*, or at least *reduce person*, thus becomes necessary to even the odds. Conversely, grey dwarves are resistant to spells, particularly phantasms (like *nightmare* and *phantasmal killer*), and they are immune to all paralysis effects. Spellcasters planning on facing duergar should focus on spells that don't allow saving throws or that deal damage even on a successful save (such as *Melf's acid arrow* or *fireball*).

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

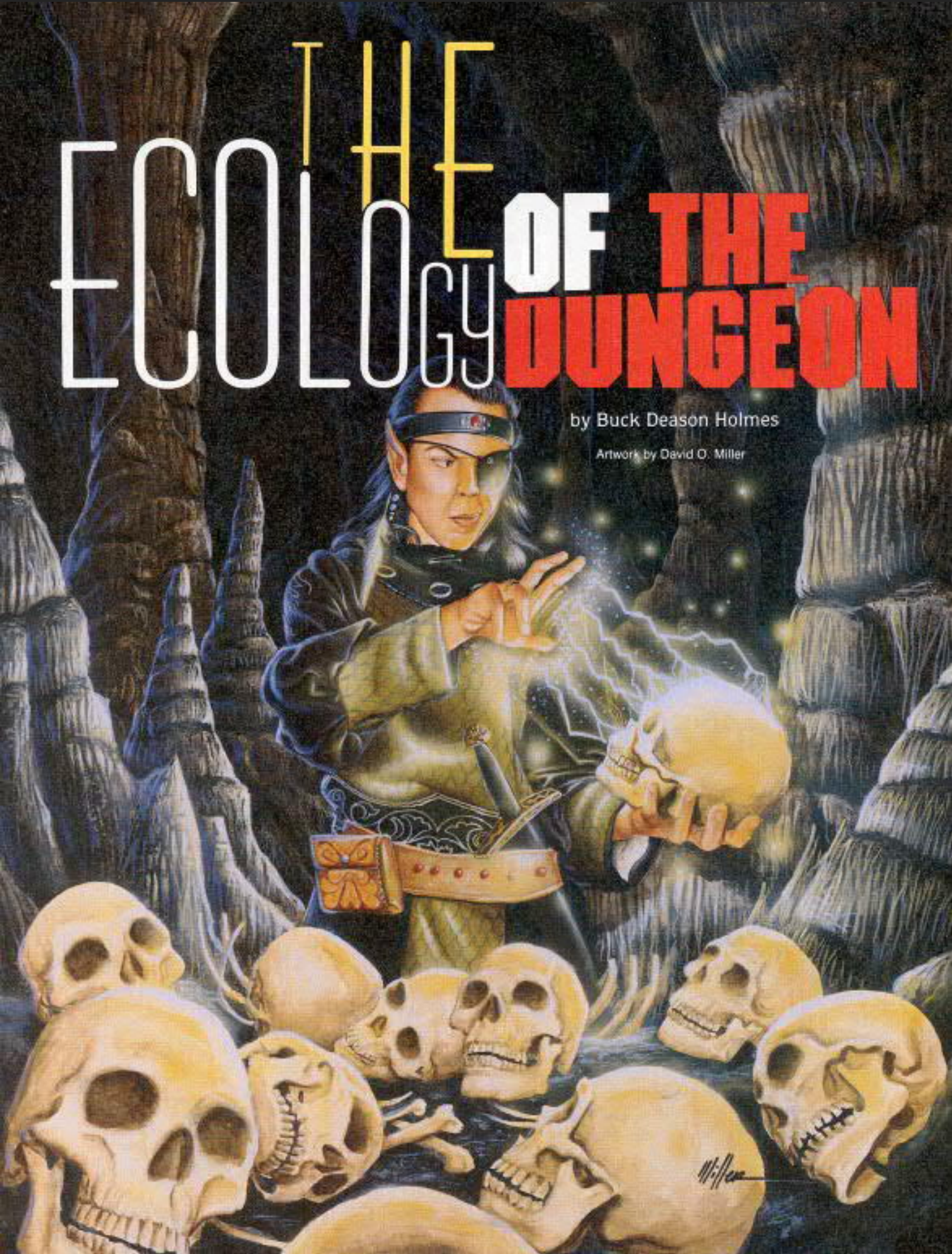
Keep Out of Harm's Way: Duergar gain Strength bonuses from their *enlarge person* spell-like ability and often have bonus hit points from high Constitution scores. Those fighting duergar should stay out of reach and make full use of ranged weapons. Since gray dwarves have a speed of 20 feet, even when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

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

THE ECOLOGY OF THE DUNGEON

by Buck Deason Holmes

Artwork by David O. Miller



Make your underground adventures unique

Every developed PC and NPC has physical and emotional characteristics that make each of them interesting. Cities and villages have atmosphere and unique shops. A magical blade described as *Velinora's Gladius Bellum* is more valued than *+ 1 sword.* While people, towns, and even magical items are thought to have character, players do not generally think about dungeons as being "individuals." However, with a little extra detail, a dungeon can become very interesting and unique—not just because of the monsters, magicks, and traps found within it, but because of the dungeon itself; the way it looks and feels, the way it winds and flows. If one can create a dungeon with character, then one can make adventuring fun and new.

Bored with running the same old dungeon over and over, I thought about how I could make such a place fresh and enjoyable. After some contemplation and research, I came up with the following guidelines. While the basic principles listed below can be used for any setting (from forests to starships), I have focused on fantasy dungeon caverns. Cave-dungeons, I feel, are the settings that are usually the least interesting. If one can make a cave intriguing, one can easily make tombs and castles exciting.

The first thing to remember is that a dungeon is a miniature ecosystem. Life, geology, time, and weather affect and change it. All places populated by living creatures are animated and intricate, not just the places that happen to be above ground. A DM should make any adventuring area have this sort of feel about it. To help do that, one needs to think about the following topics.

How was it made?

Just as a player creates the childhood and ancestry of a character, the DM should figure out (basically) how a place was made and how it developed. What used to be there, and how did what is there now get there?

Caverns on our planet are created either by erosion or magma flow. Erosion caves are old underground rivers and lakes; they wind and flow, with passages forking, turning and changing. Magma caves are tubelike, smoother than erosion caves, and straight; they generally do not split off in more than one direction. However, one need not make a cavern realistic; on another world, caverns could be created by other forces, such as giant monsters and uncontrolled magic.

In any event, interesting caves contain areas of different sizes and shapes. They are filled with small crawlways and huge rooms. These changes in dimension are very useful to a DM. How can a party flee or fight in an area only 3′ in diameter? How can they navigate up and down all the passageways and cliffs while they are looking for treasure and monsters?

Think "treacherous terrain." One can create many encounters like the following: A group of five hobgoblins are on the other side of a 30′ room and are shooting arrows at the PCs. No problem, right? Well, those hobgoblins could have 75% cover from the terrain while the PCs have no cover at all. Also, the floor of the room could be 20′ below the ledge on which the party is standing. Now the PCs must either use up their magic and arrows on some lowly hobgoblins, or they must cross a very dangerous piece of terrain to get to the hobgoblins. The landscape makes this generally minor encounter into a major encounter.

Strange formations can add greatly to a dungeon. Many real caves have more than one opening to the outside. The party might have to travel in and out of the dungeon, fighting their way through a wooded area that separates two entrances. Instead of having a few forest encounters before going to a cave and having cave encounters thereafter, a half-in and half-out dungeon adventure could have both mixed together. This would make most of the PCs equally useful throughout the adventure.

Small holes that can develop between rooms can become natural murder holes

and arrow slits. These holes also could be a safe way to talk with creatures within the cave or spy on them. Natural columns, large stalagmites, crevices, and multiple entrances can fill a room with hiding places and areas to explore. A room with two large rocks in the center, with the path around them forming a figure-eight, would be an excellent place for a chase. (I can see the PCs running around and around looking for a thieving goblin who is hiding on top of a boulder.)

A cave also could be somewhat like a canyon, with parts of the top exposed to the surface. Now the party must decide if they should walk along the top and possibly miss some of the openings, travel the bottom and possibly be ambushed, or split up the group and explore both areas at the same time. Most players know how to have their characters maneuver through a smooth, cylindrical tunnel, so don't make it easy for them by making a dungeon with nothing but 10'-diameter tunnels and 30' rooms.

Combat is not the only activity that can be affected by terrain. Stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones, cave pearls, and other formations can be used to spice up many scenarios for many reasons. A certain rock formation might just happen to look kind of like a priest's holy symbol. Or the characters might be awed by the beauty of certain rooms. Giving a deserving description of such features would be a great task for a DM. If the DM could make the PCs imagine a room filled with gleaming columns and snowlike gypsum flowers, then the cave could become "alive" and memorable. An ingenious PC could make such an area into a temple or, if the character is more materialistic, a tourist attraction.

What is it made of?

As important as how the surrounding area was made is of what material(s) the surrounding area is made. One can quickly understand the importance of knowing what substances are present in a dungeon if one stumbles across a cavern with veins of gold and silver in it. But other substances also are important. Deposits of zinc (needed for brass), iron, coal, and tin would be very useful for the construction of weapons and trade goods. A wise dwarf may notice that all the kobolds' pots and tools are made out of copper, and she might go looking for their copper mine (not as exciting as a platinum mine, but still profitable).

The materials that make up a cavern may be important for other reasons. Limestone caverns would have a tendency to develop (maybe quite suddenly) sink holes. Areas with lead or mercury could be harmful to the creatures that live nearby; a resourceful PC might make friends of those creatures by helping to cure them of their poisoning. ("The spirits wish for you to move to a new location; then the curse on your people will be lifted.") Even more interesting and dangerous, a cave might have uranium or other highly radioactive elements in it, which could cause native creatures to be deformed or changed in some way (attack of the giant mutant killer kobolds?).

This last example brings up another interesting point: A fantasy world does not have to follow the known laws of physics or chemistry. Certain substances found in a dungeon environment could enhance, alter, or nullify magic or psionics. Rocks could be highly magnetic, combustible, explosive, or influenced by other forces. Think up a new substance with strange and challenging properties: For instance, a cave could contain pockets of etherium, an element that becomes ethereal and solid again at random, causing natural secret and shifting doors. A prized metal in my campaign world is "float," a metal that repels gravitons (thus, it is nearly weightless); not only does this metal create weird natural phenomena, such as floating rocks, but also lessens the weight of weapons and armor, making it a prized material indeed.

What stories does it tell?

History, natural and documented, is a great tool for bringing life to a dungeon. While the PCs are exploring a cave, they could find bones, weapons, or equipment that tell a story about the cave. Fossils and ancient tools could indicate who lived in the cave long ago. The walls could be adorned with paintings or carvings from a race long dead. The PCs might make an anthropological discovery that causes sages to argue for decades.

Recorded history, told to the PCs by local villagers or even by the creatures within the cave, could set the tone for the dungeon. Many players like to have their characters look for maps or information about a place: let them look, and give them the information, but tailor it to suit the needs of the scenario or the campaign. The PCs might rush to a dungeon reported to be the location of the treasure of King Sloth but be less eager to enter a cave where Vstin the Great, the hero of Aldwic, was killed by some unknown evil. Such information doesn't have to be important to the plot, it only has to give character to the dungeon. And, of course, any information given to the PCs doesn't have to be true.

How stable is it?

Not every dangerous room has to be a trap that was specially created. Deadfalls, cave-ins, and weak pathways could be the results of natural processes. Unstable caves have caused injuries and drama in the real world; so can they can in a fantasy world.

For example, a group of kobolds (each weighing no more than 80 pounds) might cross a natural bridge as they are fleeing from adventurers. This bridge will collapse if more than 200 pounds is put in one small area. The kobolds might not even realize that the bridge will fall, but the human fighter in full plate armor will learn about it soon enough.

One need not have a floor fall out beneath the party to make the characters paranoid. The PCs could hear the sounds of another part of the cave collapsing and then begin anticipating a cave-in that will never happen. They might start to hurry, trying to make it out before the cavern collapses, and then panic when a few pebbles or some sand falls on them.

Physical changes to the cave also could result from the actions of the PCs. The use of powerful magic *(fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *rock to mud*, *dig)* could cause a local disaster. Pushing a boulder down on an attacking Lernaean hydra might seem like a good idea at the time, but when that boulder causes the floor to collapse, the PCs are going to wish they hadn't done that.

Another thing to remember is that a place changes if someone is around or not. The water level might drop, revealing more caverns. Caves might collapse or open up due to erosion or earthquakes. These changes can make a previously explored cavern into something entirely new. An adventure might center on hunting down a group of orcs that have moved into a previously explored cavern. The party confidently walks into the cave opening, sure in their maps and their knowledge. They know that the orcs would camp in the big room next to the well. They know about the shriekers in the third alcove. But as they move into the cave, they find that the passage to the big room has collapsed and a new passage has opened to the south. Even though the PCs have been through this dungeon before, they don't know what to expect now. Surprised, they might even become shaken and start to panic. The cave is physically different, so the party must stay on their toes.

How's the weather down there?

Weather affects everything, even underground environments. Rainfall and subsequent flooding may cause some caverns to fill with water. Imagine a group of heroes who go adventuring into a cave while a torrential downpour is starting outside. One passage (the only one that leads back outside) is steep, but the party can walk down it. However, when they return, this passage has become a stream, slick and treacherous. Now they have to crawl through the water to get out, and if they fall, they'll be washed back down 30 feet.

Cave temperatures do not change as dramatically as outside temperatures. Caverns isolated from the outside air will generally stay at a constant temperature, about 65° Fahrenheit. But even slight changes in the temperature can cause wind movement or fog. Rivers that are frozen outside the cave might prevent water from reaching a cavern. Areas in the cave but near the outside will be af-

fected by temperature changes; water could freeze, causing areas to become slick or frozen over.

A flood or a heavy rainstorm can change an area quickly. If a cave entrance is positioned in just the right way, hurricane-level winds could boom down the caverns. Mud, avalanches, or timbers thrown by a tornado could cover an exit and trap characters. Animals that do not normally live in caves may seek shelter underground in harsh weather, causing problems for the PCs. And since the party is underground, they might not know about adverse weather conditions until it is too late.

What lives there?

Any lifeform that lives in an area must have access to the following necessities: water, food, air, and some measure of safety. Every elementary-school biology class teaches that, but many DMs forget it. My characters have entered many dungeons populated by enormous numbers of "living" monsters that had no way of getting the necessities of life. I have been guilty of such blunders myself: I remember one goblin cave that I located five miles from the nearest river (now I think of the poor goblins that had to carry water five miles every day to keep the settlement alive).

The first necessity is water. Make sure that a cave has wells, underground rivers, a lake, or some such source for the living creatures to get water from. If water is in short supply, certain smart creatures could control the source and then sell the water for protection or profit. Since most real caverns are made by water erosion, most of them do have water somewhere within.

Just as every lifeform needs water, every lifeform needs food. A "living" dungeon should contain or be located close to edible plant and animal life. Since fungi do not need sunlight, edible mushrooms are probably a staple of most underground humanoids. Smaller creatures, such as burrowing mammals, rats, bats, fish, and large insects, would supplement the diet of most beasts. Not only can these creatures add realism to your dungeon, but the noises and motions they make will keep the player characters antsy. If every part of a cavern is alive, then PCs will be cautious as they enter each room.

Life generally breeds life, so a fantasy cave might have as much life as a real rain forest. A cavern could be filled with different types of fungi, insects, and animals. These creatures might have developed defenses such as thorns, poisons, or bioluminescence. Another world could have millions of species of fungi that we do not have, especially a magical world. These fungi would be the food for other animals and would gain nourishment from the humus caused by other fungi and animals. Thus, a very complex life cycle could develop underground.

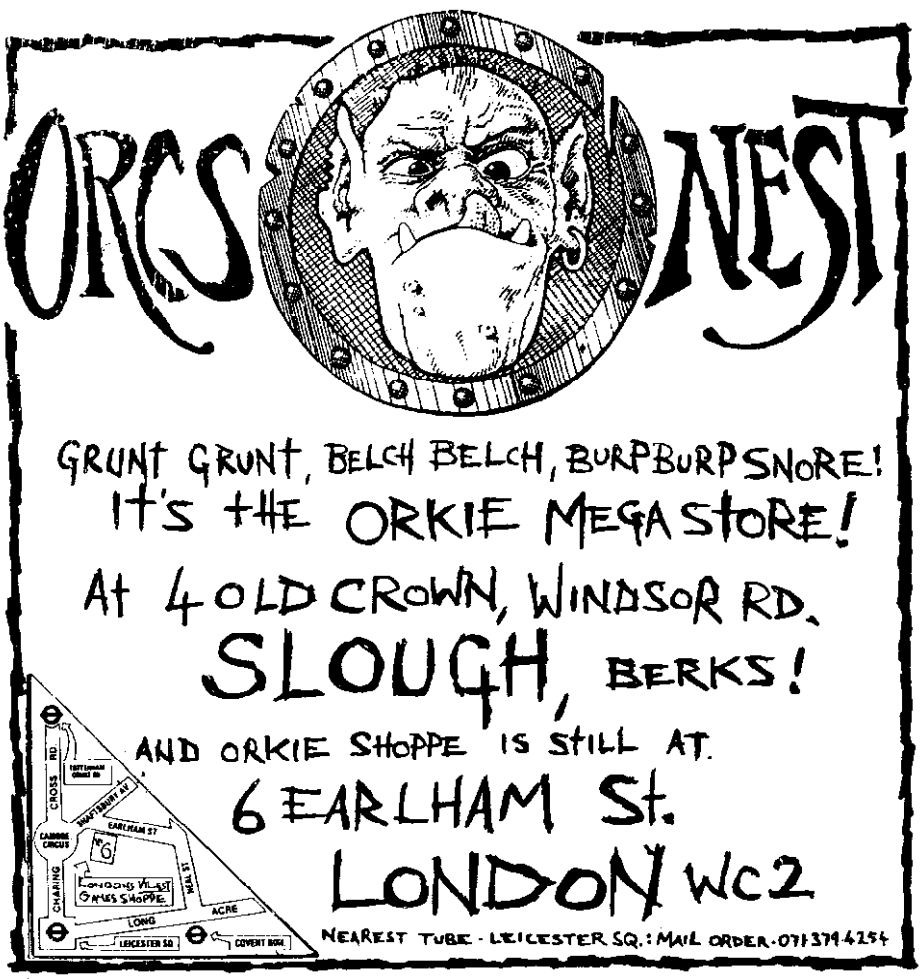
Airflow is another concern within a cave. When orcs roast their victims, where does the smoke go? It will follow the wind and be dispersed throughout the cavern system. Particles of ash will blacken cave walls and leave deposits along the floor. This smoke might be so thick that anyone entering a "chimney" tunnel will not be able to see or breathe. An intelligent group of entities could design their fires so that the smoke will go into a trapped room.

Remember that (most) animals don't just come into existence when the party arrives. They live in the cave. They eat, build lairs, and carry on other life functions. Source books for many games, including the AD&D® game's MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® appendices, give ecological data: try to use this information. Any facts about eating habits, activity cycles, reproduction, and gender interaction will help a DM. If a village of norkers has baby norkers in it, then it becomes a more believable place. These younglings also can create many strategic and moral dilemmas for the PCs.

Another aspect of life is refuse. Anyone who has been to a waste dump can see how trash can affect an area. Where do humanoids that live underground dump their waste? Well, they would probably have a special dump pit far downwind of their home caverns. They would throw everything down into the pit, including but not limited to biological waste, rotten plants and fungi, dead animals, broken tools, and rusted weapons. Crafty humanoids might put a hidden trap door above the trash pit. Anyone walking on this trap would fall into the dump pit.

Not all the trash, however, would make it to the dump pit. Many humanoids are lazy and environmentally unconscious. Garbage of the most unpleasant kind may be found throughout the caverns of a dungeon. Piles of gunk and carcasses are in many rooms, a few covering secret chests of "treasure." When dealing with refuse, remember that any mention of trash makes experienced players think of rot grubs, otyughs, and other unpleasant monsters. In many adventures, I have casually stated that the player characters can see wormlike creatures moving through the filth. While these things were nothing more than normal worms, maggots, grubs, and carrion slugs (gross but not deadly), the PCs didn't know this. To my amusement, they went through all kinds of trouble to destroy these beasties and sort through the trash. ("If there are rot grubs, then there must be some kind of treasure.") Simple parasites can cause as much fear and worry in a group of PCs as a lair of trolls.

A DM also should think about how dungeon denizens interact. Why do the pixies live in room 14 and the hook horrors live in room 15? Do they share food,



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or play games together, or are they trying to rip out each other's throats? Would a small tribe of goblins live next door to a lair of ghasts?

The best way to plan interactions between dungeon natives is to imagine what it would be like to live next to a monster. Before you design your next dungeon, think about the people you have lived with or neighbors you have had trouble with. Maybe they were misanthropes and wanted complete silence. Maybe they partied too loud for too long. Maybe you thought they were casing your place for robbery. Now imagine that those same neighbors or ex-roommates considered you a food source. If you thought that Mr. Rogers next door would eat your friends and take your gold, you might be a little reluctant to live near him. You would at least take precautions to make sure he wouldn't bother you.

As most people who have lived in a dormitory or a thin-walled apartment building know, a place develops "political" alliances. An ogre who is trying to catch some sleep after a long night of pillaging is not going to be very happy about a kobold midday festival; in fact, he is going to "ask" the kobolds to hold the noise down a bit, and he isn't going to be very polite. Perhaps such "political intrigue" could be useful to the party. Those kobolds, upset at being "evicted" from their residence, might show the PCs the best way into and around a cavern. They also might tell the party the strength and power of the ogre "landlord" and his friends.

These territorial battles need not be between intelligent races. Those same kobolds might have been pushed out by a big sabertooth cat or a cave bear. Animals have territory, too. Most creatures mark their territory in some fashion. Many apply their scent to the area, but others (especially intelligent creatures) will define their area with visible markers. Natural boundaries, such as pits and streams, also act as territory lines. Animals can sense these boundaries and respect them. If trolls like the taste of cave crickets, then the troll's lair will be devoid of crickets. Experienced parties might learn these signs and be able to identify territories, and thus be better prepared for upcoming encounters.

Finally, animals that have lived in caves will slowly adapt to survive in that sort of environment. Creatures in caves are generally smaller and lighter than their aboveground counterparts. While they may lose some sensitivity in their sight, they may develop better senses of smell and touch. Some underground versions of aboveground creatures may lose their pigmentation and become white or translucent. Some other creatures, however, might develop the "drow" adaptation: dark skin that acts as camouflage against creatures carrying light sources and allows the creatures to naturally hide in shadows.

Conclusion

The key to developing a cave or dungeon environment is interaction—between geology and life, between hunters and prey. A DM can create many interesting scenarios just by imagining how animals, plants, geology, and weather affect one another. For example, we decide that a cavern contains a vein of silver. It makes sense that someone would be mining the silver, so we add a few drow with their slaves. The drow would have spiders around as pets and guards. The spiders need to eat, so the cavern has insects in it. The insects also need something to eat, so we could put in some giant mushrooms. Now we have a cave full of interactions, a place with possibilities for intriguing adventures.

Not only will this type of creative work help make a dungeon seem real, but it also could help create more adventures. Imagine that the party destroys all the kobolds in a dungeon. Well, it so happens that these kobolds ate the bats that live in the cave. Now that the kobolds are dead, the bats quickly grow in population. Their number becomes so great that some of the bats are forced to leave the cave and move elsewhere. Also, these bats feed on the little skinks that live around the cave; in a short time there are so many bats that all the skinks are devoured. The skinks ate the itoya, a tiny fly whose bite carries a nasty virus lethal to humans. Now, because of the destruction of the kobolds, the nearby town of Shellow is plagued by bats and itoya flies. Imagine the shock the PCs will get when the priests of Shellow, after receiving a message from their deity, tell the characters that they must "restock" the cave with kobolds so that the bats and bugs will not plague the town.

Of course, one needs to be careful not to overdo it. Use the scenery to develop the setting. When writing a story, a good author must create an in-depth and interesting setting. So too, must the good DM. Each does this the same way: by adding details. One should try to make many of the details important: things that someone in the party will find interesting. However, a few mood-setting descriptions—detail just for the sake of detail, to add realism—are good to use and will help players put themselves into character.

Books, conversations with professionals, and even TV are great sources for further ideas. You can't go wrong with an issue of *National Geographic* or an hour of the Discovery channel. TSR's DMGR1 *Campaign Sourcebook and Catacomb Guide* talks about water, air, and loadstone; it also gives tips on creating atmosphere and pacing. Of course, the best way to understand a type of scenery is to visit it. Travel to Mammoth Caves or Carlsbad Caverns if you have the chance (both are really impressive). If you are feeling adventurous, go spelunking. Experiencing a real adventure will help you create hundreds of imaginative imaginary ones.

Ω

by Michael Trice • illustrated by Peter Bergting

The Ecology of the Elemental Weird

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

History of the Elemental Weird

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

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

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

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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

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

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

Seemingly as a limit to these powers, though, all weirds are bound to an elemental pool to which they remain permanently tied. Of diverse shapes and sizes, at their smallest these pools fill an area 20 feet across and 40 feet deep, but whole lakes, volcanoes, or larger tracts of land or sky might comprise them. These pools are more than merely pure accumulations of natural elements, though. Each is in fact a small projection from an Elemental Plane, which contains a portal to that hostile realm. An elemental weird holds great control over its pool, possessing the power to summon creatures through it for aid, as well as the ability to allow others to enter the pool and pass onto its home plane. The draw of the Inner Planes is powerful, though, and a weird's control is not absolute. Thus, many have accidentally entered the pool of an

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

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

Knowledge (the planes)

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ELEMENTAL WEIRD

While aloof toward the mortal races of the Material Plane, elemental weirds possess a certain fondness for creatures tied to their source element. Most often, this relationship resembles that between a guardian and a servant or a demigod and a worshiper. Since a weird cannot travel away from its pool, these attendants serve vital roles as scouts, messengers, and the eyes and ears of the weird.

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

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

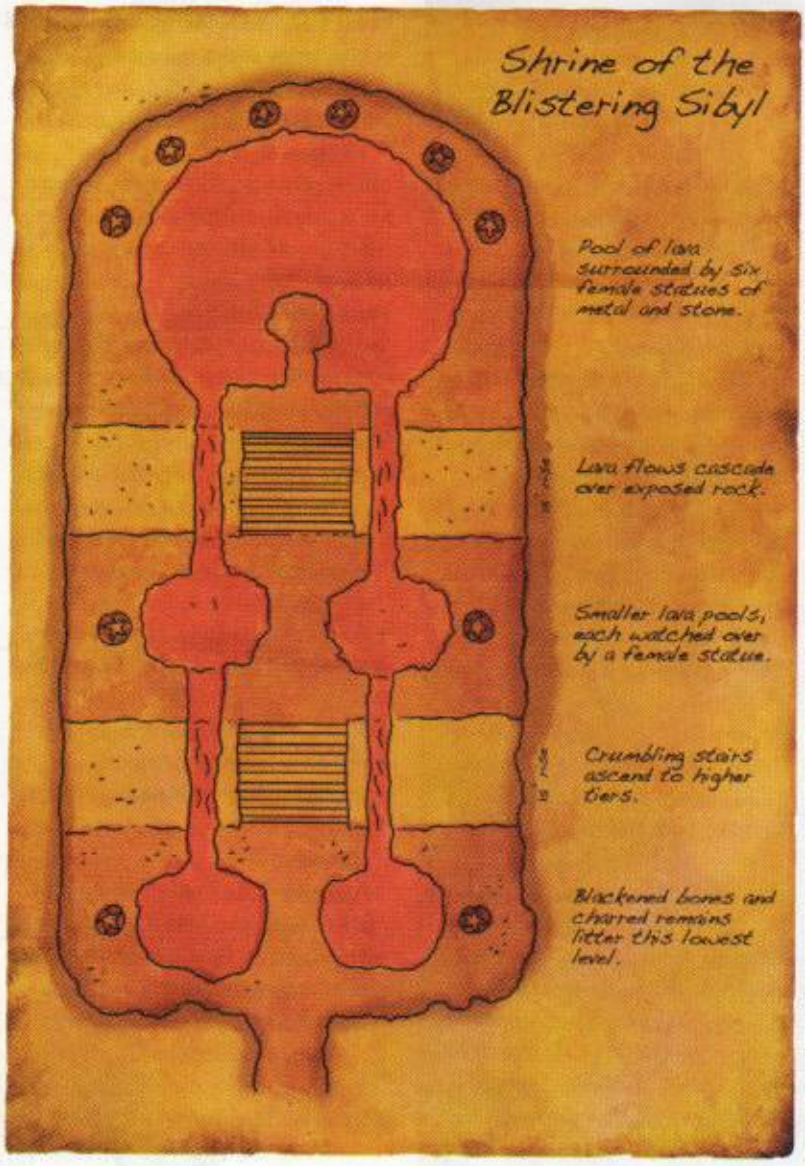
The four most common weirds display a wide range of unique traits and affectations. These tendencies often hint at the type of information likely to provide.

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

In trade for their insight, air weirds often request artifacts from far-flung nations, lost environments, or even other planes. A rock from a mountain that long ago eroded to sand or a gear from Tvashtri's Laboratory on the Outlands would not be unusual offerings.

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

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



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

Fire weirds favor offerings that embody positive feelings and the wishes of other creatures, such as the aged heirloom of a noble family, a kingdom's royal crown, or, ultimately, a preincarnate soul from the Bastion of Unborn Souls on the Positive Energy Plane. Fire weirds care little for the emotional or moral associations mortals place on such items, so stealing such a gift matters little to them.

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

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

ELEMENTAL WEIRD LAIRS

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

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

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

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

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

PROPHECIES

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

Air

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

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

Earth

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

The earth weird known as the Obsidian Duchess of Geoff spoke this forbidding rhyme, seemingly referring to some unknown incursion from the sky, before retreating back to the Plane of Earth.

Fire

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

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

Water

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

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

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

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

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

LESSER ELEMENTAL WEIRDS

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

LESSER ELEMENTAL WEIRD **CR 5**

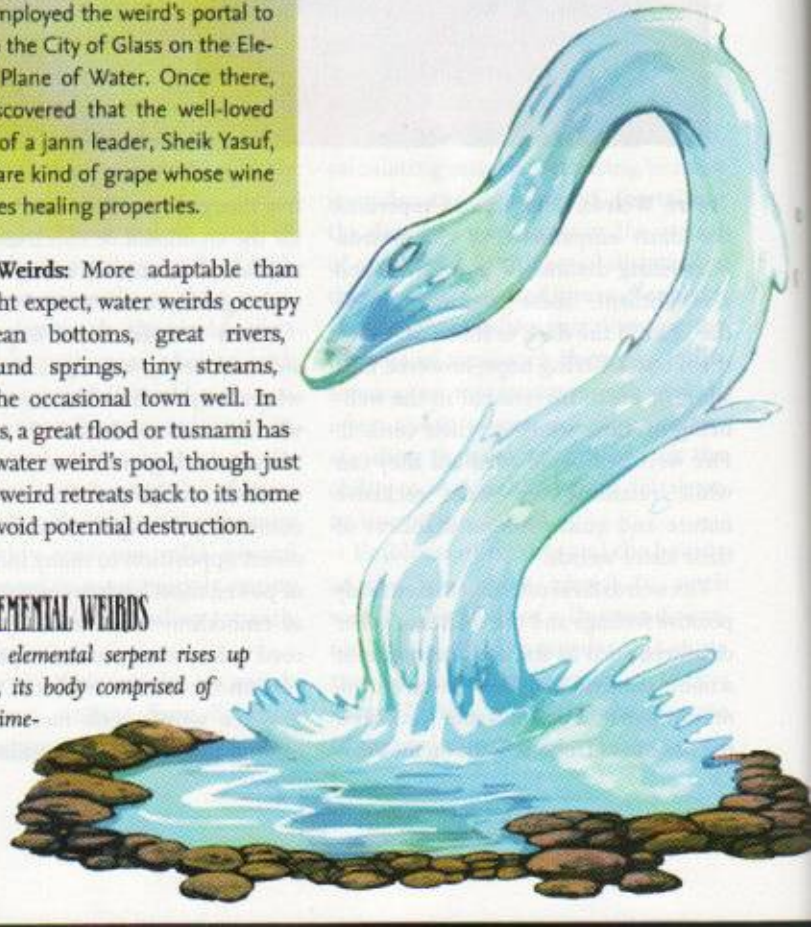
N Medium elemental (extraplanar, see below)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +6, Spot +5
Languages Aquan, Auran, Ignan, or Terran

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 14 (+4 Dex, +4 natural)
hp 36 (8 HD)
Fort +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Spd 20 ft. (2 squares), burrow 90 ft. or fly 90 ft. (perfect) or swim 90 ft.
Melee slam +7 (1d4+1 plus 1d6 energy damage*)
Ranged elemental blast* +10 (2d6)
Base Atk +6; Grp +7
Special Atk constrict, elemental blast, elemental command, improved grab, suffocate
* Energy damage varies by subtype.

Abilities Str 12, Dex 19, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 11
SQ Elemental glide, elemental invisibility, elemental subtype
Feats Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility
Skills Hide +15, Listen +8, Move Silently +14, Spot +8
Advancement 9–14 HD (Medium); 16–30 HD (Large); 31–45 HD (Huge)

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ELEMENTAL GUARDIAN

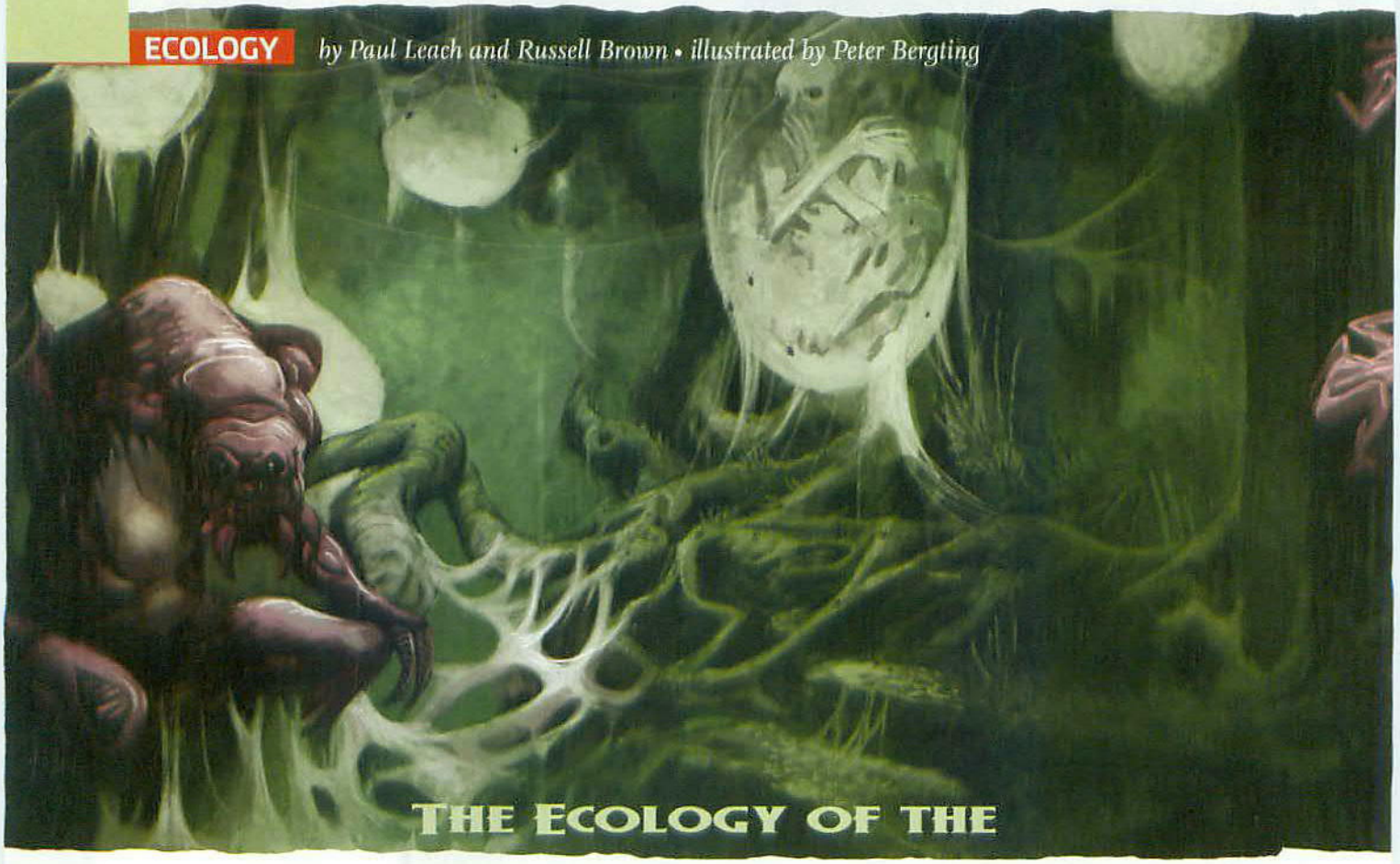
Conjuration (Summoning)
Level: Clr 5, Drd 4, Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 10 minutes
Range: Short (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Effect: One summoned lesser elemental weird
Duration: 1 day/level
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

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

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

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

by Paul Leach and Russell Brown • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE ETTERCAP

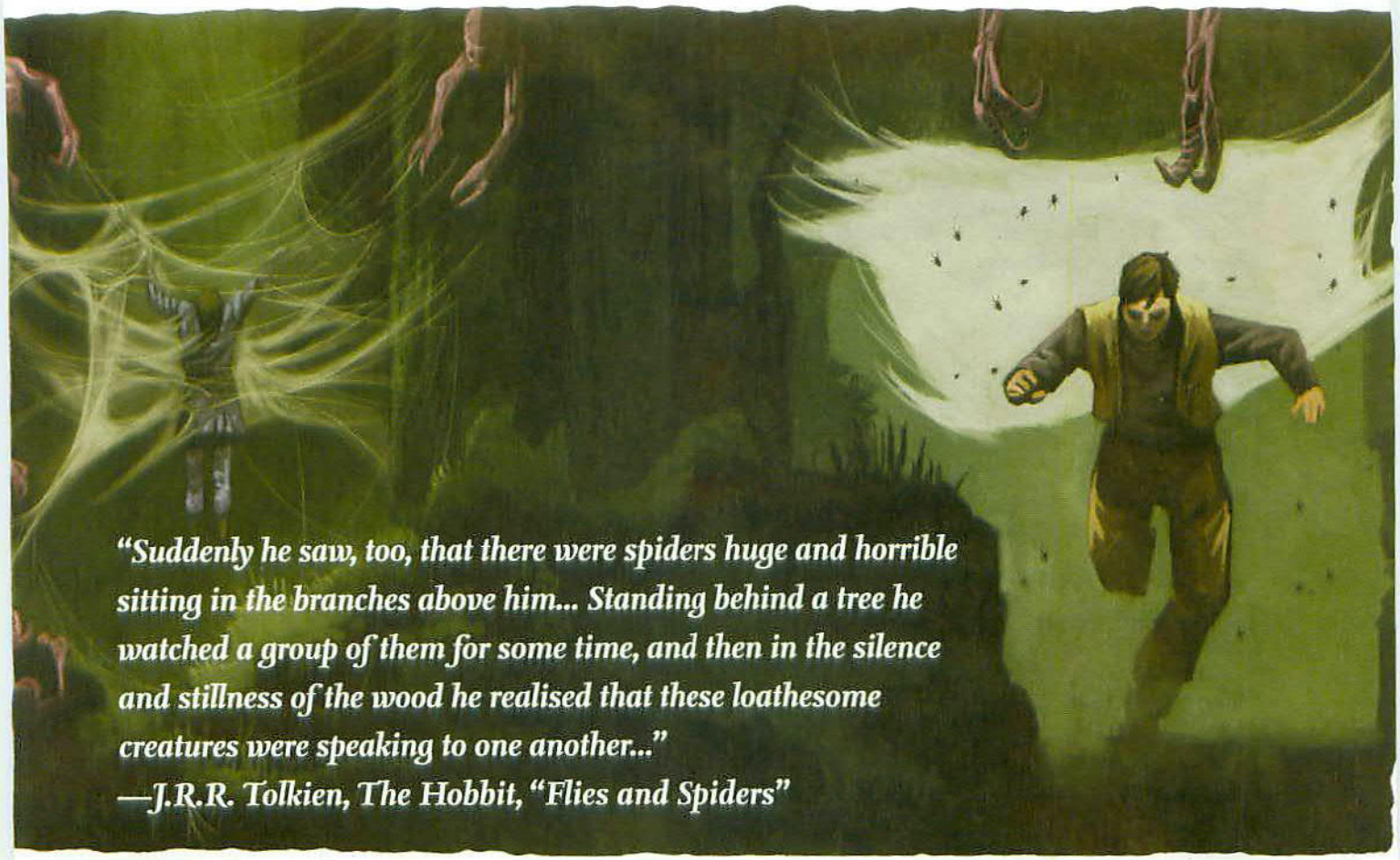
In the darkened tangles of the deepest forest mazes, where eldritch boughs create an endless green night, hang the grasping webs of the degenerate ettercap. Gifted with the cunning patience and bloodthirsty tenacity of the spiders they so closely resemble, ettercaps are master predators and trappers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

HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP

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

Upon great menhirs and carved upon living guardians, pulses the vast, cultic knowledge of the druids. Within their secret circles, druids worship all facets of the world's being, and for each of nature's countless aspects there are corresponding druidic rituals and inspired ceremonies. One such fragment of ancient natural lore mentions a secret cannibalistic tradition, a disgusting rite overlooked or marginalized by many nature worshipers. There were once—and some say still are—druidic sects that adhered to these natural truths of betrayal and blood. One such fleshtearing sect is held responsible for fathering the ettercap race.

These deranged druids embraced vile aspects of nature, particularly the invasive, fecund, and unkillable virtues of vermin. Thus, in a time long past, when a terrible spider fiend came upon their ranks, the druids took its presence as the ultimate validation of nature, seeing the monstrosity as a



"Suddenly he saw, too, that there were spiders huge and horrible sitting in the branches above him... Standing behind a tree he watched a group of them for some time, and then in the silence and stillness of the wood he realised that these loathesome creatures were speaking to one another..."
—J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit, "Flies and Spiders"

prophet and embodiment of all they held sacred. What this foul being was remains disputed. Perhaps it was some demonic bebilith or even a corrupt servant of the ancient demon prince Mishka the Wolf Spider. Regardless, the foul thing delighted in the adoration of an army of devout—if insane—fanatics.

At the behest of the new avatar of its faith, the murderous cult began indulging in increasingly arachnid practices. What began as living in webs and with spiders turned to eating living spiders and imbibing venom, and finally to taking demon-brewed magical infusions and adopting arachnid grafts. Eventually, these broken-minded druids gained a measure of kinship with the arachnids they revered. Slowly, by degrees, they lost their humanity.

At some point, the fiendish leader of the spider cult was either slain or grew bored and departed. The druids, however, retained their corrupt, false faith and rituals. Eventually, from inbred generations of malformed, envenomed, and increasingly heavily grafted devotees emerged the first true ettercaps. Over time, these "perfect born" came to outnumber the humanoid members of their order, and what had been the quest and religion of their ancestors was forgotten. Having no need to attain a more arachnid state, ettercaps abandoned their druidic traditions and forgot their forebearers, embracing their instincts, hunting and living as spiders, exulting and indulging in the profane knowledge of their perverse perfection.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ETTERCAP

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to ettercaps. Those who study arachnids or aberrations, as well as those who inhabit or make their living in the forest, are most likely to possess this information.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Ettercaps are evil forest-dwelling creatures that resemble bloated humanoids with distorted arachnid features.
15	Ettercaps create and hunt with webs, ensnaring prey in their sticky folds. They surround themselves with arachnid pets and prefer to eat live prey.
20	Like many spiders, ettercaps are venomous, possessing a poisonous bite that stiffens and slows victims. Despite their horrific appearance, ettercaps are relatively intelligent and speak Common.
25	Ettercaps are skilled at climbing, hiding, and trapmaking. Typically loners, they riddle their territories with snares and traps incorporating their webs and venom, waiting until victims are defenseless before approaching.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ETTERCAP

An ettercap looks like nothing so much as a disgustingly bruised, rotund, humanoid warped with arachnid features and mounted with a multitude of insectial eyes. Sickeningly pale, sagging skin covers its bloated abdomen while

ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM

Countless tiny horrors gibber and trample one another as they surge toward you, their features something between those of hairy black spiders and sickly pink newborn humans. Dozens of tiny mandibles click and chatter as they come, dripping a mixture of poison and anticipatory drool.

ETTERCAP BROOD SWARM **CR 3**

NE Tiny Aberration

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +6, Spot +5

AC 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex), touch 14, flat-footed 12

hp 18 (4 HD)

Fort +3, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Spd 15 ft. (3 squares), climb 15 ft.

Melee swarm (2d6 plus poison)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Base Atk +3; Grp —

Special Atk distraction

Abilities Str 2, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 2

Feats Alertness, Great Fortitude

Skills Climb +10, Listen +6, Spot +5

Environment warm forests

Organization solitary, tangle (2–4 swarms), or infestation (7–12 swarms)

Treasure none

Advancement none

When it hatches, an ettercap egg sack releases a swarm of starving, underdeveloped ettercap young. These malformed, pink hatchlings attack anything to sate their fetal hunger. See page 237 of the *Monster Manual* for special combat rules for swarms.

Combat

Distraction (Ex): Any living creature that begins its turn with an ettercap brood swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round. The save is Constitution-based.

Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 14, initial and secondary damage 1d3 Dex. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +2 racial bonus.

Skills: An ettercap brood swarm has a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks. It uses its Dexterity modifier instead of its Strength modifier for Climb checks. It can always choose to take 10 on a Climb check, even if rushed or threatened.

splotchy pinks and purples color the rest of its body.

Ettercap physiology relies on a blend of humanoid and arachnid organs and processes. An ettercap's prominent venom-injecting fangs conceal its near-human, yet totally fleshless, mouth. Its exposed teeth allow it to chew meat, while a hidden tubelike tongue allows it to drink its prey's bodily fluids. Like a true arachnid, an ettercap drools enzyme spittle on its meals to start the digestive process. Its muscular and flexible fangs display an ability to manipulate small items, and an ettercap sometimes uses them like a third hand when crafting traps and other items. Its clawed hands also show great versatility, despite their lack of opposable thumbs. With a few quick gyrations and clips, an ettercap quickly weaves, cuts, and casts web nets as speedily as its lower abdominal spinnerets looses strands.

Ettercaps conceive young through normal sexual reproduction, but the gestation and birth cycle results in a large external egg sac filled with scores of tiny ettercap young. These egg sacs are 2- to 3-foot ovoids, wrapped in sticky, protective webs, that allow them to be easily hung in clusters from cave walls, tree boughs, web structures, or other easily defensible locations. Upon hatching, a process that takes nearly three months, thirty to eighty tiny, half-formed ettercap young spill forth with ravenous intent. Ettercap mothers try to keep an immobile but living food source near the eggs—sometimes storing such a creature alive for weeks—so their newly hatched young don't cannibalize too many of their siblings. If a mother fails to find suitable prey, she flees to escape her starving children, returning only after the swarm has had time to sate itself or its numbers have thinned. Thus, these swarms of mindless newborn ettercaps can threaten not just those who stumble across a web-filled ettercap nursery, but whole regions (see the Ettercap Brood Swarm sidebar). In the weeks after hatching, the number of young ettercaps dwindles through exposure, starvation, birth defects, and the predation of their parents, their peers, and other creatures. The mother collects the most promising youngsters (no more than three) and raises them until they reach maturity in four years. The rest are left to their near-inevitable demises.

An ettercap grows throughout its life, possibly attaining Large size if it lives long enough. They can live for approximately 50 years, though, violence ends the lives of most ettercaps, before age 20.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE ETTERCAP

The ettercap's mixed arachnid-humanoid brain sets a natural limit on its emotional and intellectual capacity. Rooted in their collective consciousness, however, is a connection to arachnid life that extends far beyond shared appearance—a holdover from the druidic rites that ultimately inspired the race's creation. Ettercaps feel instinctually obligated to serve as a kind of warden to all arachnid life and to increase their own numbers. Excessive sentiment results in survival risks. Other ettercaps are only needed for breeding, and thus groups of ettercaps larger than a pair are rare. They believe that life and death serve as the only real, tangible truths, and

thus they do not recognize any deities or other moral codes. Religion and higher thought do not place victims in the web.

In some extraordinarily rare conditions, a particularly intelligent ettercap—usually a female—appears and gathers a large number of ettercaps and other arachnids around her. These leaders are often motivated, by destructive humanoid incursions and great loss of arachnid life, to strike out from their webs and stalk prey back to its home. These forays can lead to whole humanoid communities besieged by swarms of ettercaps, monstrous spiders, spider swarms, and other arachnid monstrosities.

An ettercap acts as a lone shepherd in relation to other ettercaps and true spiders. As keepers of their kind, they dispose of (eat) the weak and sick, while nurturing the specimens most likely to thrive and fulfill their intended roles in nature. Their ability to commune with normal spiders results naturally from their inherited spider traits. To an arachnid, an ettercap is just another spider. Ettercaps exude powerful pheromones and bodily resins that have euphoric effects on other arachnids and mask any hint of residual humanity. Thus, spiders are more active and seem more content whenever an ettercap is near.

THE REAL HISTORY OF THE ETTERCAP

The name ettercap can be traced to the Old English word for spider, *attercoppe* ("atter" meaning "poison," and "coppe" meaning "head"). Middle English *coppe* (or *cob*) was synonymous for spider, as in cobweb or spider web. J.R.R. Tolkien gave this name to his intelligent spider monsters in *The Hobbit*.

Dungeons & Dragons ettercap first appeared in the original *Fiend Folio* and has been resurrected in every edition since. An Ettercap miniature also appeared as part of the *D&D Miniatures Giants of Legend* set.

Despite their isolationist attitudes and alien thoughts, ettercaps speak Common. They simply call it "The Old Tongue" and use it on the rare occasions they need to speak to one another or, more often, when they must communicate with outsiders. While ettercaps most often talk to humanoids when attempting to taunt or deceive their prey into following them into an ambush, ettercaps might try to parley their knowledge of the forest and its dangers when a superior enemy prevents their escape. Ettercaps sometimes use coins or other treasure as bait for humanoid prey, although few truly want such treasure for its own value.

ETTERCAP LAIRS

An ettercap's lair defines the creature as much as any of its traits and abilities. Its lair serves many purposes: shelter, food storage, and the nerve center of its trap system. An ettercap builds its cocoonlike home out of specially treated, hardened webbing camouflaged with branches and leaves and suspended from large boughs high in the forest canopy, allowing it to spend much of its time—like a spider—lying in wait.

Aside from shelter, a complex network of web strands runs from an ettercap's lair. Some of these might connect with the lairs of other ettercaps, directly linking several ettercaps in a region to a complex webcraft community. More commonly, a single strand of webbing connects each of an ettercap's traps to its lair. If a trap is disturbed, the strand shakes violently, alerting its creator to the disturbance

and leading him to investigate. Ettercaps regularly crisscross their territories with such strands, which prove so light and difficult to notice that many creatures disturb the webs without ever knowing. As such, an ettercap's lair serves not just as its home but as the center of a complex web that encompasses its entire territory. A character must make a DC 18 Search check to reveal the presence of these warning webs in a 5-foot square. Characters who have gained access to an ettercap's lair might also notice webs vibrating in alarm with a DC 18 Spot check, but they might not realize its meaning without making a DC 20 Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature) check.

ETTERCAP WEB TRAPS

Insidiously imaginative and innately skilled, ettercaps are natural trap makers and create a wide range of booby traps and pitfalls. Usually incorporating their natural webbing and leftovers bits from past meals, some of these arachnid monstrosities' more cunning traps are detailed here.

Baited Limb and Poison Spikes: The most intelligent ettercaps have noticed that a humanoid creature, wrapped tight in webs and suspended as bait from a weakened tree limb, often attracts other humanoids. The victim moves out onto the limb, which breaks, dropping him and the bait into

ADVANCED ETTERCAP

Ettercap males most often advance by Hit Dice, becoming stronger, larger hunters. Females, typically being more intelligent, might advance by Hit Dice but frequently take levels in druid, fighter, ranger, rogue, or sorcerer. The Matriarch, presented here, would be a perfect candidate for a leader instigating an attack on a humanoid community.

THE MATRIARCH **CR 15**

Female ettercap druid 7/ vermin lord 4*
NE Medium aberration
Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +8
Language Common, Sylvan

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17
hp 100 (16 HD); 20 point swarm armor
Fort +9, **Ref** +4, **Will** +13

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares), climb 30 ft.
Melee bite +12 melee (1d8+2 plus blood drain and poison) and 2 claws +10 melee (1d3+1)
Base Atk +10; **Grp** +11
Special Attack blood drain, poison, web
Druid Spells Prepared (CL 9):
5th—*insect plague, tree stride*
4th—*dispel magic, giant vermin* (2)
3rd—*contagion* (DC 18), *greater magic fang, poison* (DC 18), *snare*
2nd—*barkskin, summon swarm* (3), *warp wood* (DC 17)
1st—*entangle* (2, DC 16), long strider, *jump, obscuring mist* (2)
0—*detect magic* (2), *detect poison* (2), *guidance, know direction*
Spell-like Abilities (CL 9):
1/day—*spider hand**

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 20, Cha 12
SQ animal companion, chitin +2, spontaneous casting (*summon nature's ally* spells), swarm armor, vermin servant, wild empathy +8, wild shape 3/day
Feats Ability Focus (poison), Dodge, Great Fortitude, Multiattack, Natural Spell, Run
Skills Climb +17, Craft (trapmaking) +11, Hide +13 Listen +12, Knowledge (nature) +14, Move Silently +9, Ride +5, Spellcraft +6, Spot +16, Survival +12
Possession *bracers of armor +4, dusty rose prism ioun stone*

Blood Drain (Su): The Matriarch has enlarged mandibles. As part of her bite attack she can start a grapple without provoking an attack of opportunity. If successful, the mandibles automatically deal 2d6 points of damage each round as they suck blood from her victim. The blood drain ability only works on living creatures.
Chitin (Ex): The Matriarch has chitinous plates that grant her a +2 natural armor bonus.
Poison (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 24, initial damage 1d6 Dex, secondary damage 2d6 Dex.
Swarm Armor (Su): Every day, upon regaining her spells, the Matriarch is covered by a swarm of spiders. These arachnids absorb up to 20 points of damage from any damaging attack (weapon or spell). The spiders die off when then they absorb such attacks. Swarm armor has no effect if the Matriarch is wearing armor.
Web (Ex): An entangled creature can escape one of the Matriarch's webs with a DC 20 Escape Artist check or burst the web with a DC 24 Strength check. See page 106 of the *Monster Manual* for a full description of this ability.
* From the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).

SPIDER SPELLS

Ettercaps regularly make use of a variety of spider-related magic. Spells like *creeping doom, summon swarm, giant insect,* and various *summon monster* spells that summon monstrous spiders are particular favorites.

Spider Hand

Transmutation
Level: Cleric 1, druid 1
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Personal
Target: Caster's hand
Duration: Concentration (up to 1 minute/level)

You detach your hand, which transforms into a Small monstrous spider (see the *Monster Manual*) that you control. You can see through its eyes, and it can travel up to 20 feet per level away from you. If the spider is killed or prevented from returning to you, your hand is restored when the spell ends, but you take 1d6 points of damage. If you direct the spider to return to your arm (a move-equivalent action), then let the spell end, you take no damage.

the ettercap's web. The trap is even more effective if the bait is left screaming for help and the ground is planted with sticks covered in the ettercap's poison.

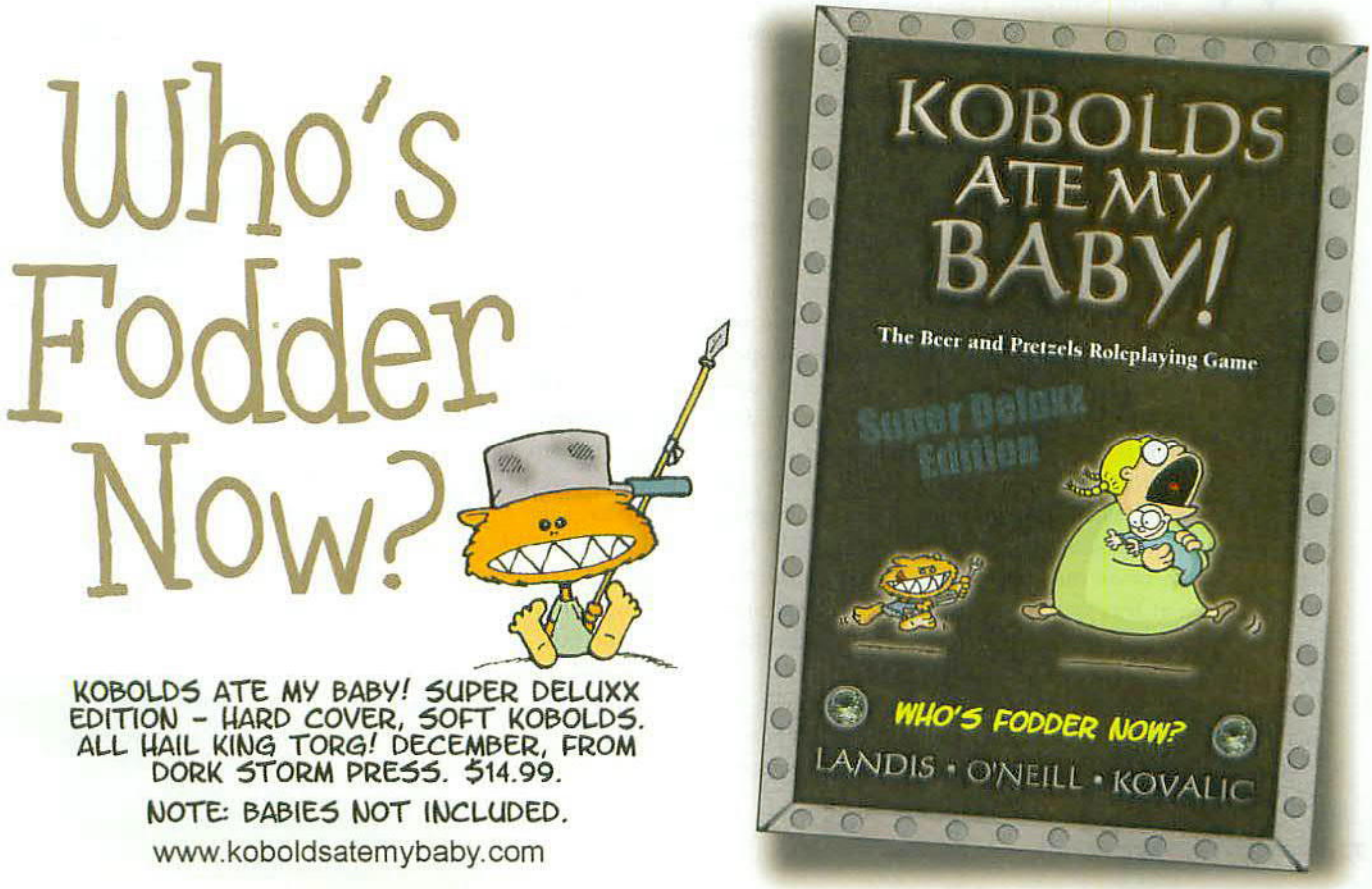
CR 4; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 22 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. high (2d6, fall); crude ground spikes (Atk +5 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each plus poison); poison (ettercap poison, DC 15 Fortitude save resists, 1d6/2d6 Dex); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 17.

Dancing Dead Man: Ettercaps create dancing dead men by filling a humanoid husk with rocks, wet leaves, and liquid webbing. Once attached to a strong web and placed to swing into the victim's path, the device behaves as a pendulum-style giant sap that bursts upon hitting a target, covering it in webs.

CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +5 melee (4d6 nonlethal plus liquid webbing); liquid webbing (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp, Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 15.

Camouflaged Tripping Strand: As a simple trap, ettercaps simply hide strong, braided strands of webbing across a path, causing creatures to trip and fall into a web hidden just a few feet ahead.

CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; Atk +15 melee touch (trip plus entangle); entangle (ettercap web, DC 13 Escape Artist or DC 17 Strength check to escape; 6 hp. Hardness 0, double damage from fire); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 15.



DUH 'COLOGY OF... DUH ETTIN!

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Trail Notes* of Raujur the Ranger:

Ettins, commonly known as the "two-headed giants," are a brutish, aggressive race of carnivores who dwell in caverns, disused mines, and the like, emerging to raid the upper world only by night. They hunt prey well in darkness[1] and subsist on raw flesh of all sorts; however, only rarely do they fight among themselves, and an ettin will only eat the meat of its own kind if it is badly wounded or sorely in need of nourishment, and no other food supply is readily available. As befits their crude and cruel behavior, ettins will typically hammer their food to a pulp, either with a weapon or by flailing the carcass against rocks, before eating it.

Ettins are largely solitary; they have no particular preference for the company of any other creature type, and the feeling is apparently mutual. A mated pair will typically stay together after mating until the offspring is born and has grown to self-sufficiency. Otherwise, ettins will only seldom gather together and live in small groups, in circumstances where an individual shows itself to be more strong-willed or more intelligent than others of its kind. Members of the leader's group will cooperate with the leader, and among themselves, as long as they perceive some gain from doing so. If the leader of such a band leaves, or is killed or discredited, the group will dissolve and each member will go its own way.

Ettins are generally stupid, but can be cunning in matters of chasing, ambushing, and fighting prey. They are wary of all other creatures — even other ettins — and slow to trust.

One fact known by everyone, of course, is that ettins have two heads. This strange property affords them some obvious benefits in combat situations; fortunately, however, their low intelligence prevents them from taking full advantage of this "blessing." The head on the right-hand side of an ettin's body is always dominant; despite folk tales and ballads to the contrary, an ettin never "argues with itself."[2] Also contrary to certain legends, an ettin cannot regrow a lost head; however, a one-headed ettin is well able to survive its loss and carry on a normal life, albeit without the aforementioned combat advantages and most probably

without receiving any trust or respect from its fellow creatures, who will look upon the one-headed ettin as deformed. The former disadvantage is minimal in most cases, since even a one-headed ettin is a formidable foe in physical combat. The latter disadvantage is not considered important either, because such creatures generally do not solicit or value the trust of their fellows in any event.

Typically, these creatures are not especially fluent in any single language, but use a smattering of words and expressions from whichever tongues are most predominant in their vicinity — usually orcish, goblin, and the common speech. Most of them know at least a little of the chaotic evil dialect, and ettins often consider this their "own" language. In some areas of the world where ettin populations have established themselves and resided for a long time, the creatures have developed a debased dialect of the orcish tongue into a language that can truly be called their own.[3]

A female ettin will bear a single offspring seven months after mating, and such young typically grow to full size in little more than a year.[4] Female ettins are always long-haired, and generally more full-bodied than the males, whose frames are relatively gaunt and wiry except for the exceptionally broad shoulders which are (for two obvious reasons) a hallmark of the species. Neither the male nor the female takes any care over personal appearance, but females like to wear jewelry as a status symbol — perhaps to display their hunting prowess and thereby prove themselves attractive to a prospective mate; females may gain their finery from prey they vanquish, or as gifts from male ettins during the crude courtship ritual they practice.

Aside from the uses described above, ettins keep treasure to bargain with and to purchase the services of others for specific tasks, such as hiring a band of orcs to build a wall or a trap near an ettin lair.

An ettin has pink to brownish flesh, with calloused hands and feet that carry a yellowish tinge. Its complexion often looks darker than it actually is, because the creatures are habitually covered with dirt and filth. The clothing of an ettin, if such a term can be used, comprises nothing more than scraggly, filthy animal-skins. The creatures care nothing for the appearance or odor of such garb, and wear it only for the warmth and comfort it affords them when sleeping on cold, rough stone. Such garments never have sleeves or other accessory parts, for ettins don't want to be hampered in a chase or a battle by mere sleeping-furs.[5]

Ettins have no finesse, or the desire to have any, when it comes to physical combat. They fight with crushing and battering weapons such as spiked clubs and iron bars. They have been known to throw rocks[6] if no other weapon is immediately at hand, and they will not hesitate to rip apart furniture or uproot small trees to fight with. Their outlook on combat is as crude as their tactics; ettins know nothing of honor, fairness, or truces.

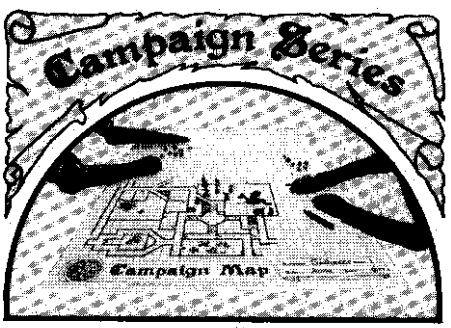
But the two-headed ones are not imprudent, and will not take on obviously superior foes if escape is possible. They will bargain with all intelligent prey if they think more food will be gained by doing so — but if the bargaining gets unpleasant or frustrating, they may abruptly decide that a snack in the hand is worth a feast in the bush. At any rate, ettins do not feel bound by agreements reached by bargaining — they seek only to get what they want, and as much of it as possible, while incurring the least risk to themselves.

Ettins worship a deity that is similar, or identical, to the one the hill giants know as Grolantor, though they usually do not call the deity by this name. They view their deity as a gigantic ettin of great intelligence and wisdom (as well as superior fighting prowess) whose two heads enable him to maintain an eternal vigilance against all who would seek to subjugate or destroy the ettins. The similarity of their deities suggests that ettins and hill giants had some common social or cultural aspects at one time, but the two species have no affinity for each other nowadays. It is possible that ettins and hill giants came from the same stock, given their common religious background and their larger-than-human size, but ettins on the average are substantially taller and thinner than hill giants. In facial appearance and body structure, ettins seem more closely related to orcs — yet that species only grows to half the size of ettins. And, of course, neither orcs nor hill giants have two heads; because of this unique anomaly, it is quite likely that the genetic background of the ettin will never be fully known.

As my friend and fellow ranger Athscar puts it: "An ettin is a nasty brute — murderous in a face-to-face fight if one is unlucky, injured, or weighed down, but easy prey to a well-armed band of three or more who keep their wits about them and meet the monster on ground of their choice."

Notes

1. Ettins have keen senses, well adapted to night hunting: infravision out to a 9" range, and a sense of smell sufficiently developed to distinguish animal, unusual, and specific, known-to-be-dangerous scents from those of the surroundings within 3". They dislike sunlight or other strong light (*continual light*, but not a torch or a *light* spell) intensely, but it does not harm them or impair their fighting abilities. The dislike comes from habit and conditioning, and their self-preservation instinct; they inhabit darkened, hidden places because of their solitary nature. They greatly prefer to hunt at night so as to take full advantage of their keen senses, and to reduce the chances that they themselves will be set upon by adventurers or other adversaries. Apparently, the orcish strain in their makeup is not strong enough to require them to fight at a penalty in lighted areas.



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2. The ettin derives some unusual protection from its dual brains. Spells of mental control, such as *sleep*, *fear*, and any *charms* or *hold* spells, will not completely affect an ettin unless two spells of the same type are cast upon it, either simultaneously or one after the other so that both spells are in effect at the same time. Of course, both spells must succeed; for magics of this sort against which a saving throw is allowed, each head is entitled to a save against one of the spells. If one but not both spells succeed, the unaffected head will assume control of the body without pause or internal struggle, and the affected head will be held powerless until it regains its normal state (at the expiration of the spell's duration). If the affected head is the dominant (right-hand) one, it will immediately resume "control" after returning to normal. During this time of powerlessness, the arm closest to the affected head will hang limp and useless; it will not drop anything it is holding, but cannot consciously use or wield such an object and could (under the right circumstances) be easily disarmed or disengaged from the object by the application of some force (a list or weapon blow, for instance) against either the arm or the object.

Note that *repulsion*, *mass charm*, psionic *domination*, and other "group-effect" magics and powers will affect both heads of an ettin upon a single application; if a saving throw is allowed in such a case, the creature is only entitled to one.

If the ettin's dominant head is destroyed or severely damaged in a fight, the creature will be *confused* for 1-6 rounds, after which time the single functioning head will gain control of the "opposite" arm — but that arm will only be capable of wild (empty-handed) flailing until the ettin learns to control both arms with its single head. This process takes 1-2 months to run its full course, after which time control is perfect and both arms can attack normally. Damage figures for both arms (2-16 for the left, 3-18 for the right) will not change, regardless of which head is controlling both of them.

Because of its low intelligence, an ettin saves against all types of *illusions* at -1 — but each head is entitled to a saving throw, and if one or both of them are unaffected by the illusion, the ettin will be enraged at such a trick, not bewildered at its occurrence, and will angrily seek out its perpetrator.

3. Any creature who is conversant in orcish will be able to understand 60% of what is said in this "ettintongue." Ettins often howl and slobber in bestial rage when in pain or frustrated by nimble foes.

4. The offspring of a pair of ettins has no combat ability until it attains six months of age. From that time until it reaches one year old, the young ettin is size M (5′ tall) with 4 HD and does roughly half damage on an attack with either arm — 2-8 (2d4) with the left and 3-8 (ld6+2) with the right. At the age of one year, an ettin is quite able to fend foritself, and will either be abandoned by its parents or simply treated as another member of the group.

5. The skins worn by an ettin are uncured and rotting, and typically carry parasitic diseases; see the DMG under this heading.

6. Rocks thrown by an ettin do 2-12 points of damage per hit, with range figures of 2", 4", and 6"; each arm can throw one rock per round. Note that this is not an ettin's preferred attack mode, and the monster will always use some sort of hand-held weapon if one is available.

7. See the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Cyclopedia for details of Grolantor. The deity is usually known by a slightly different name, such as "Grolettinor" or "Grelinor," among the ettins that revere or worship this figure. A very few ettins rise in service to their deity to become 3rd-level shamans; see the DMG. p. 40. for details on what spells are available to them.

Write on!

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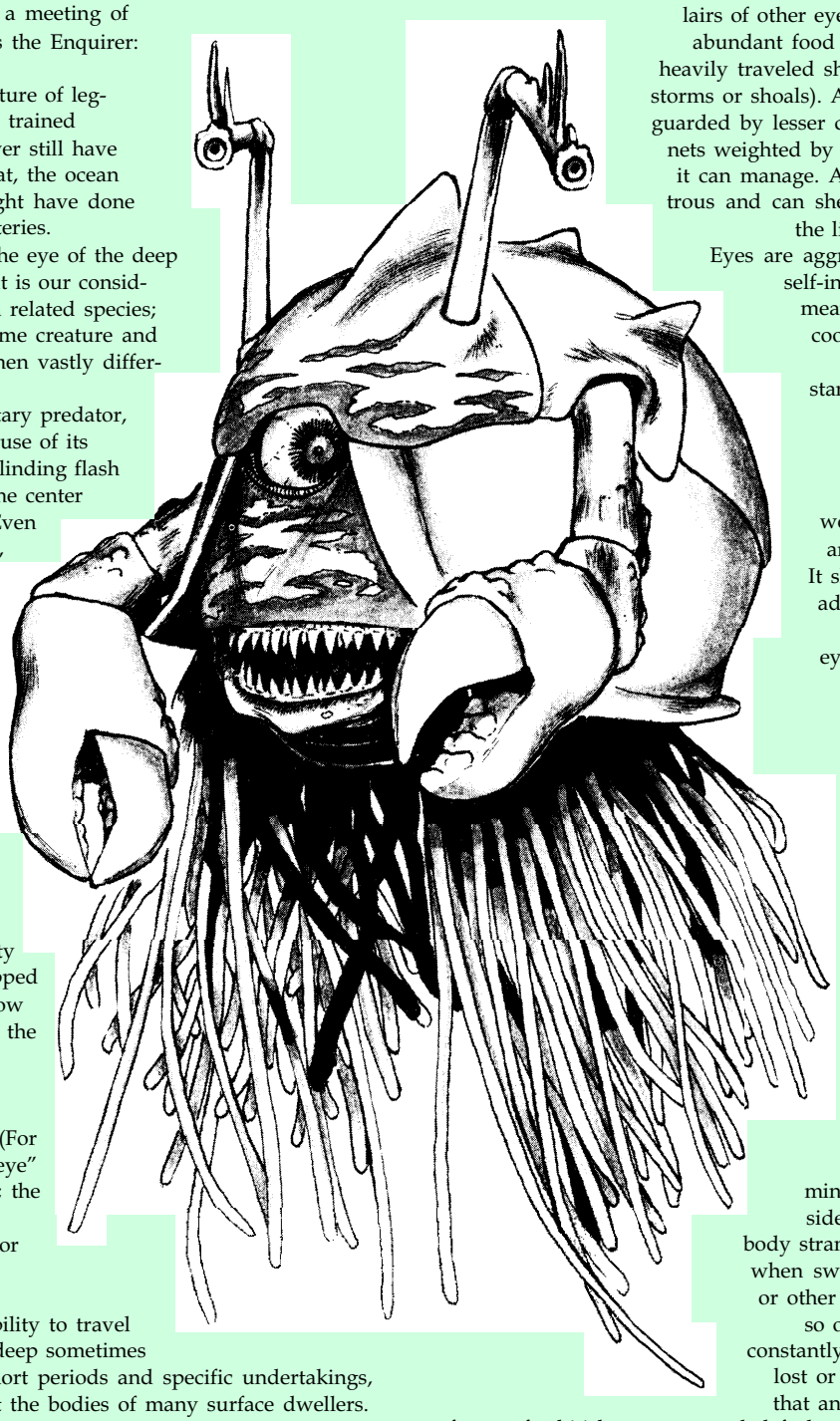
The Ecology of Eye of the deep

by Ed Greenwood

Compiled from a discussion at a meeting of sages in Hillsfar led by Auvras the Enquirer:



The eye of the deep is a creature of legend; though it truly exists, few trained observers have seen it, and fewer still have studied it at length in its habitat, the ocean depths. Several among us tonight have done so, and can answer many mysteries.

Many have speculated that the eye of the deep is related to the beholder, and it is our considered opinion that it is indeed a related species; perhaps both were once the same creature and evolved differently to master then vastly different environments.

The eye of the deep is a solitary predator, catching most of its victims by use of its power to stun its prey with a blinding flash of light from the large eye in the center of its roughly spherical body. Even if prey is not thus immobilized, the eye of the deep can bring its two large pincers into play to grab and rend its victims. [1] These pincers can shred creatures much larger than the "eye" itself, and octopi, giant squids, and the huge cruising fish of the depths form the bulk of the creature's diet. It prizes most highly sinking ships, for it breaks into the disintegrating hulls of these (aided by the intense pressure of deep water), and dines upon the tasty bodies of surface creatures trapped inside. It cannot rise into shallow waters after such prey, because the less intense water pressure at shallow depths causes its body (and internal gases) to expand, and ultimately explode apart. (For this reason, the corpse of an "eye" reaches the surface very rarely; the distorted fragments of its rent body sink back to the bottom, or are devoured by shallow-water marine life.)

To compensate for their inability to travel in shallow waters, eyes of the deep sometimes cooperate with sahuagin for short periods and specific undertakings, usually demanding as payment the bodies of many surface dwellers. (This dietary preference is one of the many hints at a common origin of both the eye of the deep and the beholder.)

Metallic treasure is often ingested by an eye of the deep, but does not harm the creature, and remains in its stomach until it accumulates to uncomfortable proportions, whereupon it is regurgitated forth in the eye's lair. All eyes make themselves a lair in an undersea grotto (slaying any previous occupants, if necessary) far from the lairs of other eyes of the deep and as near to abundant food as possible (such as beneath heavily traveled shipping routes, or in areas of storms or shoals). An eye may well have its lair guarded by lesser creatures, or by traps (falling nets weighted by stones, and so forth) such as it can manage. An eye's claws are quite dextrous and can shear through nets, ropes, and the like with speed and accuracy.

Eyes are aggressive, deceitful, and totally self-interested; "loyalty" has little meaning for them, and they will cooperate with creatures of like alignment only when they stand to gain much prey, or are coerced into doing so. Eyes avoid other eyes purely for reasons of practicality, not desiring to die or be badly wounded in a tough fight with an opponent of equal powers. It should be noted here that the admittedly few observations of such battles indicate that an eye can be affected by another eye's illusions, but each is immune to another's stunning power. Eyestalks can be regenerated in six to eleven days when lost, and other body parts (such as its pincers or central eye) regrown in a matter of months — but the rapidity of such growth depends upon the amount of prey an eye can consume, and a seriously wounded eye is a poor hunter due to its slow natural speed.

Eyes of the deep are highly maneuverable when swimming, due to their many underside "feelers" — flexible, sticky body strands which can act as paddles when swimming, "walk" along rocks or other solid objects, hold prey, and so on. An eye grows new feelers constantly, and feelers are continually lost or damaged by its activities, so that an eye's underside is a tangled forest of whitish, mauve-mottled feelers, all of differing lengths and diameters. Hidden amongst the many feelers are a few "strands" devoted to reproduction — long felers which hold the eye's eggs like peas in a pod. [2] Periodically these egg-holders rupture, depositing their cargoes on the ocean bottom or in the powerful currents of the deeps. Any other eye of the deep can fertilize these eggs; the creatures are bisexual, but cannot fertilize their own eggs. (An eye

will fertilize another eye's eggs instinctively whenever it recognizes the eggs for what they are.

Fertilized eggs fall to the ocean bottom, if they were not there already, and lie there until they hatch or die. Few fertilized eggs survive to see the end of their maturation period, because they are seldom left undisturbed by other denizens of the deep. Fewer still are fertilized in the first place, since they can only be left adrift for two months after being released from the nutrient-rich "strands"; after that time they become inert and infertile. For these reasons, few eyes of the deep are born, and this monster is thankfully very rare.

Hatchlings are rapidly dispersed by ocean currents and typically hide, feeding on bottom life, carrion, and small fish for a year or more, slowly growing to full size and powers. As an eye grows, it actually splits its skin, shedding the tough, chitinous outer armor plates of its body to reveal soft, new, larger plates within. It eats discarded plates to regain lost body minerals and begin building a new layer of plates within itself once more. When an eye reaches physical maturity, its body processes shift to regeneration rather than continual growth. Thus, lost or damaged plates are repaired by the secretion of new material from within. Young eyes cooperate with other creatures more readily than do the more wary older ones. An eye can communicate with all other intelligent creatures by means of telepathy.

Perhaps the most fascinating and dangerous ability of an eye of the deep is its mastery of illusions. These it can create and hold with practiced concentration, for a literally unlimited duration (since eyes never sleep). Such illusions will end when the eye wills it, or when one of its eyestalks is blinded by battle damage or some other mishap (apparently, both must be intact for it to create and focus clear illusions), or when one or both of the eyes is used for its other purpose (the magic of hold person and hold monster spells).

An eye can move its created illusion about, and the image appears three-dimensional. An eye can remain in hiding and manipulate an illusion it cannot see. This skill is assumed to be simply a result of practice; the creatures employ illusions constantly from maturity to death (improving their skill as they age), except for the few times when their eyestalks are incapacitated or otherwise occupied. A typical tactic of the creature is to lure prey to its vicinity with an illusion and then use the light-blast of its large central eye to stun the victim.

Notes

1. Intended victims of the eye-flash stun must save vs. poison to avoid its effects. Targets that are blindfolded, hooded, or unable to see in the visible spectrum cannot be *stunned*. A *darkness* spell will provide an effective screen against such flashes. However, most defenses require more time to put in place than the stunning flash of the eye requires to "fire"; and an eye of the deep will recognize any defensive preparations for what they are. Any physical strike against a creature *stunned* by the eye-flash is made at +4 to hit; the victim cannot attack or defend itself, and AC bonuses for shield or dexterity do not apply. A *stunned* victim is effectively incapacitated for the duration of the effect (2-8 rounds, determined separately for each victim).

The effect of repeated eye-flashes is not cumulative; a stunned victim cannot be "more stunned." The creature can use its *stun* power for as many as five rounds in succession, but then must rest the eye-flash power for an equal number of rounds before it can be used again.

The eye of the deep can use its physical attacks (pincers and teeth) in the same round that it emits an eye-flash. It will go after *stunned* creatures in preference to other nearby prey only if it thinks that the "unstunned" targets (those that made their saving throw) present no immediate threat to itself. The creature will attempt to grab prey with one or both of its pincers and then bring the victim up to its mouth. A bite attack is made at +2 to hit against a victim held by one pincer, or at +4 to hit against a victim held by both pincers — and such a victim can only attack back at a corresponding penalty (-2 or -4). If the creature takes damage in a given melee round, it will release its hold on anything in its pincers; otherwise, prey that is held by both of the pincers will continue to take 2-8 points of damage from each pincer until it dies or the hold is broken. A victim held by only one pincer can (if not *stunned* or otherwise immobilized) wrest itself out of the pincer's grasp and must then be grabbed anew. An eye of the deep will attack prey that is considerably larger than itself (such as a giant squid), but is intelligent enough to only do so when it has an advantage and is not in immediate danger of being severely hurt itself.

2. All of the feelers except for the few reproductive "strands" can be made sticky by the secretion of a gluelike fluid, and made "un-sticky" by the emission of an alcohol-like solvent that counteracts the glue. The former process requires one round and must be performed before the feelers can be used to manipulate objects or provide traction on a solid surface. The latter process takes only one segment and must be performed before the creature can again use the feelers to help it move through the water. The feelers can grab and manipulate any object as large and heavy as a human body, but the creature cannot hold such an object and move under its own power at the same time; as such, the feelers are almost exclusively used either for locomotion, or to anchor the eye of the deep to a solid surface while it awaits the approach of prey.

The reproductive "strands" have none of the properties of the other feelers. They are very few in number (3-6 out of a total of 60-90 feelers) and are continually replaced or regrown like the other feelers. Once every two months, an egg is produced in each strand; when a strand accumulates 6-11 eggs, it splits open lengthwise and deposits the contents into the surrounding water. Each egg is spherical, about 6 inches in diameter, with a tough but flexible shell that enables it to withstand water pressure and moderately hard blows without cracking.

3. Only 50% of all fertilized eggs actually hatch (and only 20% of all eggs released by an eye of the deep are ever fertilized). Hatchlings are weak swimmers (3"), M-sized (2-foot diameter), with 2+4 HD. They have only 11-20 feelers and no strands, and their pincers and teeth are softer and weaker (1-6/1-6/1-4 damage) than those of full-grown eyes of the deep. Their stun attack lasts for only 1-4 rounds, and targets get a +2 bonus to their saving throw to avoid the effect. Young creatures cannot create *illusions* or use the *hold* powers of their still-immature eyestalks. At the age of one year, an eye of the deep specimen will have 8-10 HD, move 4", and the full range of attacks that a mature creature has, with a 3-foot-diameter body and 40-60 feelers, but still no strands. Full physical maturity is attained within 2-3 years after hatching.

4. The *telepathy* ability of an eye of the deep will work on any creature of *animal* intelligence or higher within a 6" range. Eyes of the deep know the tongue of lawful evil, and usually sahuagin, ixitxachitl, common, or (5% chance) some other tongue. Knowledge of these languages is acquired by telepathy; an eye of the deep cannot understand or communicate with a creature that is using a language the eye does not know.

5. The illusionary image created by an eye of the deep is equivalent to a *phantasmal force* with a range of 18" and an area of effect equal to a 6-foot cube or equivalent volume (enough to simulate an M-sized creature or a small school of fish), Any creature of average or higher intelligence that attempts to disbelieve such an illusion obtains a saving throw, and if the save is successful then that creature can add +4 to the saving throws of companions (cf. *phantasmal force*, Players Handbook). An eye of the deep can sense vibrations or unusual currents in the water emanating from as far as 36" away; the creature has infravision out to a range of 12" and can smell blood or sweat in the water from up to 9" away.

The *hold person* and *hold monster* powers of the creature's secondary eyes are treated as spells from a 6th-level magic-user for determination of range and area of effect. Each of the secondary eyes has one of these spell-like powers, i.e., either one cannot use either power. The eye of the deep can employ one or the other of these powers in any given round, but not both in the same round, and can use each power as often as three times per day. Remember that whenever the eye of the deep uses one of its *hold* powers, it cannot *create illusion* at the same time, and any illusion that had existed is dispelled.

The Ecology of the Froghemoth

By Jonathan McAnulty
Art by Michael Jaecks

Cairl Walker stumbled back in panic as the monstrosity rose out of the water. Droplets rained down as the creature heaved itself up, tentacles flailing. They had warned him of the swamp, its hidden dangers and unnatural beasts, yet he had never anticipated such a thing as stood before him. It towered as tall as the trees, and its mouth was like a fanged pit.

Cairl looked right and left, thinking that if he could just rush far enough away from it, he could evade it. He was wrong. Before he could run the creature's tongue unrolled from its mouth, a fifth tentacle that lifted him in the air. In seconds, he had disappeared down the cavernous maw, another victim of the froghemoth.

Sages spend long hours speculating on the history of the bizarre creature commonly called the froghemoth. Some learned scholars insist such a monstrosity must be the result of arcane experimentation. Others point out that it can be found in the deep places of the earth, suggesting some eldritch mutation shaped by dark energies seeping in distant caverns. Yet the bizarre tale of the froghemoth does not begin either on or under the earth.

In truth, the monster is a child of the stars; a creature inadvertently brought to the known world aboard a doomed vessel in an age long past. Its home world a hot, swampy land filled with volcanoes and violent lightning storms. Though the froghemoth was biologically well suited to its new, gentler environment, as a race, the creature became the servant of a restless anger; some say they are homesick.

Today, the monstrous aberrations have expanded their range across the planet, both above and below the ground. They make their homes wherever the water is warm and fresh and they can lie comfortably submerged, waiting for an opportunity to vent both anger and hunger.

Physiology

While froghemoths share some similarities with mundane frogs, those who have studied the massive amphibians realize the similarities are largely superficial. While a froghemoth at rest – with its webbed rear feet and tough, warty skin – might be mistaken for a great frog, once the creature begins moving, any observer can tell the two are entirely distinct creatures.

Locomotion

For one thing, froghemoths are not natural jumpers. Swimming is their preferred method of locomotion. In the rare cases when a froghemoth is encountered on dry land, the great beasts often crawl: their tentacles grasping ahead, pulling their massive bulk slowly forward as their rear legs push. Such movement is deceptive, suggesting clumsiness rather than mere laziness. A froghemoth can stand and walk bipedally, and in battle, it is found upright more often than not. The sight of such an abomination walking is even more disturbing than a four-legged motion might be.

Froghemoths are amphibious. In their early lives, they are aquatic, but as adults they develop powerful lungs and breathe air. The four upper appendages of a froghemoth, though often called tentacles, are properly considered arms. Like your tongue or the arms of an octopus, the arms of the froghemoth are muscular hydrostats. That is, they are limbs comprised entirely of muscle and contain neither bone nor major blood vessels. These limbs are strong and flexible, capable of strangling and crushing massive prey.

Senses

The head of the froghemoth is dominated by a single central eyestalk possessing between one and three keen eyes. The number of eyes seems to make little difference to the ocular abilities of the froghemoth, which are impressive.

The pipe-like nostrils of the froghemoth are also distinctive to the monster. The tips of these nostril tubes are often frilled, so when the froghemoth is submerged, with only eyes and nostrils above the water, the nostrils resemble floating vegetation. Froghemoths can collapse these tubes, retracting them into their skull, and will often do so when moving over dry land. The ears of a froghemoth are internal, designed for listening below the water, rather than above it.

Teeth and Tongue

Inside the froghemoth's mouth we find two more items worth mentioning. The first is that, unlike most amphibious creatures, froghemoths have razor sharp teeth. As the froghemoth typically swallows its food whole, its teeth are mainly defensive. Nevertheless, in areas lacking small prey, a froghemoth is quite capable of tearing apart larger creatures and swallowing them piecemeal.

Secondly, the mouth of the froghemoth contains a long, elastic tongue, perhaps the most frog-like quality of the beast. This tongue is fastened to the front of the froghemoth's mouth and is normally kept rolled up inside the creature's head, though it can reach down its own throat with its tongue to dislodge food or items stuck there. When hunting, the froghemoth uses its tongue as a fifth limb, attacking, grasping, and pulling victims into its mouth to be swallowed.

Adventurers report that froghemoths often lick objects of interest. It uses its tongue to examine potential food and new objects–even, at the appropriate times, potential mates. Indeed, the creature uses its tongue for smell, taste, *and* touch since the tips of its arms are not particularly sensitive.

The final physiological feature of the froghemoth worthy of discussion is its nervous system. The nerves and spinal cord of a froghemoth are prodigious in size and conduct massive amounts of electricity from brain to limb. These powerful electrical charges allow the monster to react with a speed that belies its size. This also explains the creature's curious reaction to electrical attacks. Though the nerves of the froghemoth can absorb and conduct any amount of electricity, electrical attacks from outside the body confuse the creature's muscles as they try to distinguish between the charges sent from the brain and the foreign signals; thus, the apparent slowness of the creature when struck with electrical attacks.

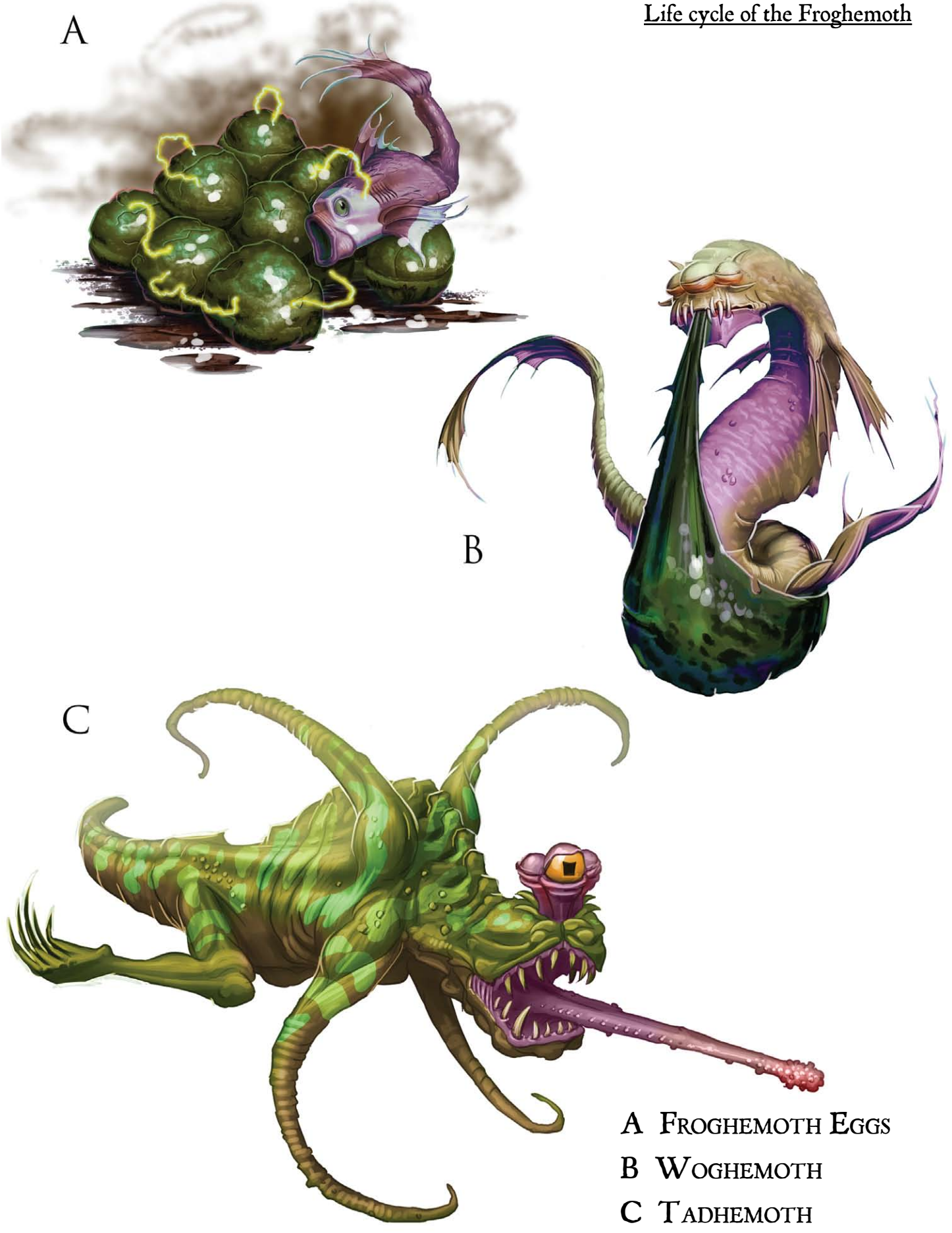
Life Cycle

Froghemoths dwell in fresh water environments in warm and hot climates. Generally, they make their homes in swamps, but they can also be found living in the shallows of a warm lake or along the banks of a slow-moving river. Each froghemoth has a territory of four to nine square miles, which it considers its own. For most of the year, it instinctively avoids the territories of other froghemoths.

The exception to this rule is during the mating season. Froghemoths feel the compulsion to mate in the early spring or during particularly rainy spells, and they leave their homes in search of a mate, often wandering many miles. This accounts for most froghemoths encountered out of the water.

Although froghemoths hunt less during the mating season, they are more aggressive, and they often form mating pods of two to six. Froghemoths are hermaphrodites and,

Life cycle of the Froghemoth



A Froghemoth Eggs
B Woghemoth
C Tadhemoth

following their two-week long unions, each of these mating aberrations lays between 10 and 100 eggs—in the still waters, no more than 6-10 ft. deep.

Eggs Hazards and Hatching
The quirks of the froghemoth's nervous system are most readily apparent in the beast's juvenile forms. The froghemoth eggs, each about 1 ft. in diameter, constantly release pulses of electrical energy into the water around them. Combined with the slimy gel holding the eggs together, this pulse makes froghemoth eggs a very real hazard for any creature passing through the waters nearby.

The eggs incubate for two months before they hatch, releasing newborn froghemoths into the world. Newborn froghemoths are ravenous, and they consume their eggshells, then the slime holding the shells, and then any unfortunate creatures caught in the slime. This is not the end; they then turn on each other. Coupled with the willingness of older froghemoths to eat their own young, this cannibalism helps insure their numbers are never too great.

Woghemoth
Froghemoths pass through two distinct larval stages before they are considered mature. The first larval stage is called the woghemoth stage. (The waggish scholar who first studied the froghemoth and was thus responsible for naming them originally called this stage the pollywoghemoth but later generations shortened the name.)

The woghemoth looks a bit like a pale eel with two rear fins and four pectoral fins. It mindlessly hunts anything that moves, using its unusual electrical abilities to help it stun potential prey.

Tadhemoth
After about 6 months of growth, the woghemoth enters its second larval stage, that of the tadhemoth.

At this point, the pectoral fins have become stubby tentacle looking arms, and the tongue of the tadhemoth has developed enough for it to pull food into its fanged mouth.

Normally, by this stage the juvenile froghemoth has lost the ability to discharge electricity. As the tadhemoth grows, its rear fins morph into legs, its tail shortens through apoptosis, and its tentacles thicken and lengthen.

A froghemoth reaches maturity by 3 years of age although the creature continues to grow all of its life.

Froghemoth Eggs

The small globes, just visible under the brackish water, are black, leathery looking, and approximately a foot in diameter. Piled in a heap, they seem held together by a yellow slime. A fish trapped in the slime quivers spasmodically every few seconds, near death and in obvious distress.

Froghemoth Eggs (Hazard) CR 2
600 XP
Froghemoths lay 10-100 eggs at a time, and the eggs are held together with a glue-like slime that serves three functions. The slime reacts with the water the eggs are laid in, producing a brown aquatic cloud extending 15 ft. from the eggs, similar to muddy water. All perception checks made to spot items in this cloudy water take a -8 circumstance penalty. Spotting the eggs requires a DC 20 Perception check.

The slime's second function is that it traps potential food. Any creature – other than a froghemoth – coming into contact with the slime is held fast. Breaking free from the slime requires a DC 15 Strength check.

The slime's third function is to serve as a conduit for the egg's electrical charge. Every 5 rounds, the eggs release a charge. Any creature within the slime when this charge is released must make a DC 14 Fortitude check or suffer 1d4 Strength damage. Each egg has 6 hp and hardness 2. In a group of fewer than 10 eggs, the electrical discharge is not strong enough to affect creatures of Small size or larger.

Woghemoth

In addition to the two long, feathery fins streaming from the rear of this eel-like monstrosity, four fins radiate from the pectoral area of the pale-white body. Though eyeless, the creature flashes unerringly through the water towards its potential meal, opening a mouth filled with razor sharp teeth. As it swims, electricity crackles along its fins.

Woghemoth CR 1/2
XP 200 XP
N Small vermin (aquatic)
Init +3; **Senses** tremorsense 30 ft.; Perception +6

Defense
AC 16, touch 14, flatfooted 13 (+3 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)
hp 6 (1d8+1)
Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1
Immune electricity (partial); **Resist** fire 5

Offense
Spd 5 ft., swim 30 ft.
Melee +4 bite (1d4)
Special Attack electrical discharge

Statistics
Str 10, **Dex** 16, **Con** 13, **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +0; **CMB** -1; **CMD** 12
Feats Weapon Finesse
Skills Perception +6, Swim +12;
Racial Modifiers +5 Perception

Ecology
Enviroment temperate marsh
Organization solitary, pack (1-6), or hatchlings (10-100)
Treasure none

Special Abilities
Electrical Discharge (Ex) As a free action, once every 3 rounds,

Electric Froghemoth

A rare few froghemoths retain an electrical attack into maturity. When these froghemoths hit with their tentacles, they release an electrical discharge, which can stun an opponent. In addition to the normal damage done by the tentacle, the target of one of these attacks takes 2d6 points of nonlethal damage and must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. This save DC is constitution-based. Such froghemoths have a CR of 14.

a woghemoth can emit a powerful electrical discharge. This must originate in water but affects all creatures within 15 ft. of the woghemoth. Any creature struck by the discharge takes 1d6 nonlethal damage and must make a DC 11 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. Woghemoths, tadhemoths, and froghemoths are immune to these electrical discharges. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Slowed by Electricity (Ex) While woghemoths take no damage from electricity, electrical attacks other than their own confuse them, and they become slowed for 1 round.

Tremorsense (Ex) A woghemoth can sense any movement in the water within 30 ft.

Tactics

Woghemoths employ straightforward tactics and attack almost anything that moves through their waters, including (in times of poor hunting) each other. As they charge in, they release their electrical attack.

As soon as they are injured they flee, but combatants should not be fooled into thinking a fleeing woghemoth is defeated. They mindlessly charge in a few seconds later, as soon as they have built up another electrical charge.

Advancement and Growth

Woghemoths begin life approximately 2 ft. long. If they are not eaten by their siblings or by predators, they grow about 1 ft. per month until they reach 8 ft. long. For each foot of growth, a woghemoth gains another HD and an additional point of Strength.

A 3-HD woghemoth is a Medium vermin: its bite attack improves to 1d6 damage and it loses a point of Dexterity. As a woghemoth grows, its skin darkens and its pectoral fins begin the process of elongating into tentacles, but regardless of their appearance, these appendages are useless in combat.

Tadhemoth

Like some strange tentacular shark, the tadhemoth darts towards its prey. Its eye fixes straight ahead, and its tentacles lash out at the frightened target, grabbing and pulling its meal towards its fanged maw.

Tadhemoth **CR 5**

XP 1,200

N Large aberration (aquatic)

Init +6; **Senses** Perception +14

Defense

AC 19, touch 11, flatfooted 17 (+2 Dex, +8 natural, -1 size)

hp 43 (8d8+8)

Fort +7, **Ref** +4, **Will** +7

Immune electricity (partial) **Resist** fire 10

Offense

Spd 10 ft., swim 30 ft.

Melee +11 bite (1d6+5/19-20 plus grab), +7/+7 tentacles (1d4+2 plus grab), +7 tongue (1d4+2 plus grab)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (15 ft. with tongue)

Special Attack swallow whole (2d6+3 damage, AC 16, hp 10)

Statistics

Str 20, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 1, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +6; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 23

Feats Improve Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Power Attack

Skills Perception +10, Stealth +10 (+18 in marshes), Swim +17; **Racial Modifiers** +5 Perception, +8 Stealth (in marshes)

Special amphibious

Ecology

Enviroment temperate marsh

Organization solitary or pair

Treasure none

Special Abilities

Amphibious (Ex) A tadhemoth can survive either in or out of water although they have more difficulty on dry land.

Slowed by Electricity (Ex) While tadhemoths take no damage from electricity, electrical attacks other than that of a woghemoth confuse them, and they become slow for 1 round, as if affected by the spell *slow*.

Tactics

Tadhemoths hunt with slightly more intelligence than their more juvenile counterparts. Though they will still attack anything they think they can eat, they are more stealthy and cunning in their attacks. The tadhemoth's preferred mode of attack is to approach potential prey from behind.

Once prey has been ensnared and swallowed, the tadhemoth will attempt to break off any combat, retreating to deeper waters to swallow and digest its meal. As tadhemoths fight only for food, they break off any combat in which they take more than 50% of their hp in damage. Tadhemoths rarely attack entities that they remember as seriously hurting them, preferring to seek easy prey.

Advancement and Growth

As tadhemoths age, they continue to grow, reaching maturity at three years of age. A tadhemoth gains an additional HD every 3 months. As they grow, their rear fins morph into legs and their tail thickens. At 12 HD, their land speed improves to 20 ft.

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Ecology of the Fire Archon

by Matthew Sernett

> "Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,
> With whom revenge is virtue."
> --*The Revenge*, Edward Young

Living flames forged by blazing magic, fire archons exist to destroy. Overrun and consume, take all and leave nothing but ashes -- these are the desires that burn within fire archons' incandescent souls from their first moments. Always hungry for conquest, these elemental mercenaries work for anyone with power and the promise of many victories.

History

In an ancient time, when the world had hardly been formed, primordial beings battled the gods for control of creation. In this cataclysmic conflict, the deific host marshaled armies of angels and cadres of exarchs, and though the primordials could call forth titanic beasts and their giant children, they could not muster a true military to face their enemies. To match their foes, the consummate creators gave being to a means by which elemental creatures could be recreated -- reshaped and hammered into soldiers. The warriors formed through this process were the first archons.

Fire archons believe that the honor of being the primordials' first soldiers belongs to them, but that is a secret only the gods and primordials remember. Regardless of which type was first, the presence of the archons turned the tide of battle in the primordials' favor. Given life, the archons could reproduce themselves, building armies faster than giants could be born or angels ordained. Their uncontrolled creation pleased the primordials and worried the gods.

Thus it was that one deity devised the plan that would starve the archon armies of troops. Rather than combat the archons directly, the gods' forces attacked the creatures and energies that served as the archons' source. To create an archon, one needs another elemental being. Virtually any kind will do. That creature is then remade into an archon in a magic foundry built upon a well of elemental power. The angels, exarchs, and gods set about destroying any elementals they encountered and diverting or ruining the largest sources of elemental energy in the Elemental Chaos.

Some reshaped the elemental spirits rather than destroy them. Medusas are said by some to be earth spirits reformed by Zehir. Others blame doppelgangers upon Sehanine's reshaping of water elementals. Yet the vast majority of elementals were slain. Whole races were snuffed out or driven so far to the brink that none have seen one of them to this day. Efreeti remember this time as the Desolation in their legends, and they believe that the Elemental Chaos still hasn't recovered.

The gods might have done more damage, but their defeat of the primordials made continued conflict wasteful. Without the gods' forces to fight, and with no clear direction, the archons began to clash with one another. Some

fell into ranks behind powerful archon leaders. Others aligned with powerful children of the primordials who tried to fill the power void left by their creators. The once innumerable archons ground down their number and might have disappeared altogether had not some races, such as the efreeti, preserved the means for their renewal.

Today, archons are just one type of creature among the countless beings that inhabit the Elemental Chaos. Their numbers wax and wane as different armies of archons go through cycles of creation and conflict, flaring up and burning themselves out as they prepare for war and engage in it.

Knowledge of the Fire Archon

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to fire archons. A result provides the information at the given DC and the information from all lower DCs.

DC	Result
12	Fire archons are a warlike race of fiery elemental beings. Roughly humanoid in shape, they wield weapons and wear armor.
15	There are other archons consisting of other elemental forces. They seem similar in many respects besides the elemental material encased in their armor.
20	Unlike aimless elementals, fire archons have a militaristic culture based on continual conquest. This seems to be true of all fire archons from the moment of their creation. Other archons are militaristic, but none are as rampantly destructive as the fire archons.
25	Fire archons can be created through a difficult ritual involving the use of a special forge built upon a concentration of elemental fire. Once created, a fire archon owes no fealty to its creator, but a person with the power to subdue the fire archon can control it through intimidation.
30	Fire archons were created by the primordials in their war against the gods. The secret of creating fire archons was stolen by the efreeti and it disseminated from them to others. Most fire archons are now either created by other fire archons or the efreeti. When archons created by the efreeti build upon and alter the lands they conquer, they try to recreate the greatest of the efreeti cities, the City of Brass.

Physiology

Fire archons exist as creatures of living flame, but their bodies aren't so mutable as a flickering fire. Every fire archon has two arms, a torso, and a head. Their lower bodies take the form of single conflagrations rather than separate legs.

Despite lacking a skeletal structure, their upper bodies conform in motion to human norms. Their arms are equivalent to a human's, with clearly positioned shoulders, elbows, and hands. Fire archon fingers seem to blend together into a mittenlike form or separate into true digits depending on their need. Whether this is due to the obscuring effect of the flames or a true joining of fiery flesh is unclear, but no fire archon has ever been seen to be missing a finger or limb. If such a member is severed, the fire archon instantly grows another while the severed part burns away in a swirl of fire and smoke. The only exceptions seem to be the head and the torso. Severing these parts from the body is damage sufficient to kill a fire archon instantly.

A fire archon's head has a defined front and back, but it typically lacks facial features. Brighter eyelike points can appear on their faces when they become agitated or angry, and they see as well as most humanoids. Their bodies typically provide light equivalent to a bonfire, and thus they illuminate any darkened area they enter, obviating the need for darkvision. Fire archons seem incapable of diminishing the light their bodies emit, and thus they would find hiding from foes difficult in most situations. However, fire archons aren't inclined toward stealth even when it would benefit them, preferring instead to alert their foes to their presence by sending up columns of smoke from things and creatures they burn. The lower body of a fire archon is one large flame rather than legs. As with other archons, fire archons glide about on a column of their constituent element. The exact method of this locomotion is poorly understood, but it is assumed to resemble a slug's movement, with the fire archon somehow gliding over a thin layer of super-heated

air.

Although made of transparent and flickering flames, and apparently empty of organs, a fire archon has a solid form. Those brave enough to have touched a fire archon's body describe it as being like holding a boiling bag of writhing snakes. A fire archon held in this way is certainly very hot, but it does not truly burn. The archon can set things ablaze with its body, but this seems to require some concentration -- something that a fire archon is incapable of while wrestling or in combat. This solidity gives the archon a weight roughly equivalent to an elf of similar stature, but since they tend to stand close to 7 feet tall, they often weigh close to 200 pounds.

Fire archons must "breathe" in the sense that a fire needs air. Without it, they dwindle and die, suffocated by the lack of fuel. Similarly, fire archons must "eat." Periodically, they must concentrate on burning an object completely to ash. A fire archon might accomplish this by holding the item, standing over it, or even placing it within the fire archon's face and "swallowing" it. Yet like other elementals, fire archons shall never know the joy of dreams or the terror of nightmares for they do not sleep.

Psychology

The primordials created fire archons to be their soldiers, and they come into being with a soldier's mindset. From their first conscious thought, fire archons expect battle and are ready to serve in war. Fire archons seem to recognize the authority of other fiery creatures automatically and fall into ranks for them. Yet others who summon or create them must first cow them by some show of superior force. Once they know their place, fire archons serve willingly so long as their needs are met, particularly the need for conquest.

Fire archons think of everything in terms of conflict. They remain ever aware of what side they are on, their subordinates and commanders, what creatures are current foes, and which enemies are ones they must face in some later fight. This extreme perspective might make them appear brutish, but they possess astonishing cunning and a general's grasp of tactics. Underestimating a fire archon is a sure way to see it gain the upper hand.

Just as a fire archon must breathe and eat, so must they conquer and destroy. Such activity nourishes and energizes them. Without it, they grow restless at first and then careless and sluggish. This need for new ventures keeps fire archons on the move and on the offensive. Defeats, the need to build and train forces, and planning can cause them to stop for long periods, but unless a foe can destroy them utterly, it's often best to attempt to redirect their fury toward easier targets.

Society

Left to their own devices, fire archons adopt a society based on a rough military structure. Physical and strategic contests, usually not lethal, are used to determine rank. Fire archons are quick to acknowledge superior power and intellect in another fire creature, so competitions tend to be few and brief unless there are several contestants of very similar power. Despite their warlike natures, fire archons aren't inclined toward fractiousness and infighting. Fire archons on the opposite sides of a conflict will happily slaughter one another, but within a force, fire archons prefer to focus their aggression outward.

The number of "ranks" in a fire archon society depends upon how many fire archons there are. A leader has five followers, who each in turn have five followers. This structure flows downward to the lowest rank. Each member in a group of five takes its orders from any of the members of a group of five individuals of the next highest rank. Uneven numbers of groups are placed in the lowest rank. Any odd number in a rank filters in as extra members of one of the other groups rather than forming a group of less than five. Similarly, attrition results in eventual redistribution into groups of five. Thus a hundred fire archons would typically have one leader, five subcommanders, twenty-five captains, and sixty-nine members in its lowest rank.

Scholars can't be certain of the significance of the number five, and fire archons themselves simply see it as "natural" and "efficient." In numbers less than five, fire archons see themselves as individuals rather than brethren, and they become less efficient and less willing to work as a team. Those who seek to subjugate fire archons should keep this in mind. Similarly, the rank structure of fire archons doesn't allow an outsider to elevate a favored archon above its personal merits. Doing so can result in the archons flouting commands while they follow the old structure, or the favored member might be ostracized from the ranks, resulting in a reorganization and poor cooperation with the favored member. Material goods, particularly weapons and armor that can make a favored archon more powerful, presents a much better way to reward service.

All fire archon societies inevitably strike outward, and the leader determines the direction and target. When they do, the archons seek to lay waste to nearly everything they encounter. Archons tend to avoid building or creating anything, but they will make fortifications when fighting a long-term conflict or to protect a valuable resource, such as a fire font and foundry. Fire archons prefer not to do such work themselves, and when possible, they enslave conquered people and use them for forced labor. Such slaves face a bleak existence held by captors that have no empathy and no use for them once the job is done. Slaves with an interest in their future therefore find ways to remain useful, playing upon the fire archon's sense of superiority and concern about foes.

Many fire archons owe their existence to the efreeti, and these archons seek to emulate their creators, even long after being freed from their control. They are far more inclined to take and keep slaves, build structures, and

secure territory. They often attempt to create an environment similar to that which surrounds the City of Brass -- a task aided by the effect the presence of fire archons can have on the environment.

When fire archons gather in numbers, they set fire to things and their bodies produce heat, but these factors cannot explain the drought that presages the army's march or the eruption of long-dormant volcanoes. It seems that simply having fire archons in an area creates a sympathetic link to the qualities of heat and flame. Created by elemental flame and composed of it, fire archons seem to form a peculiar gateway for the power of fire in the Elemental Chaos. It's said that within a mile of even a single fire archon, a candle flame burns an inch higher and a single spark can kindle a coal.

Creating a Fire Archon

Fire archons cannot reproduce by any typical means. Instead, they are created from another elemental's body and spirit. To accomplish this, a ritual must be performed in a magic foundry infused with elemental fire. The nature of the elemental summoned by the ritual is not important. It might be a dumb earth beast or a highly intelligent elemental with ties to water. The ritual taps into the creative and recreative power of the primordials, wholly transforming that creature's form and soul. Needless to say, most consider the creation of a fire archon a wholly evil act.

A foundry must be constructed upon a powerful font of elemental fire. That kind of upwelling of fiery energy can be found in the Elemental Chaos as rivers of fire hurtling through space, lakes of molten air flickering in glowing caverns, or great crystals brilliant with internal infernos. Fire fonts can be found on other planes as well. They are most common in places such as volcanoes or tunnels where magma flows, but fire fonts aren't beholden to other sources of heat. A fire font might act as a gateway to the Elemental Chaos or from it to another plane. Or a fire font can be a concentration of elemental energy native to the plane on which it is found. One might be a holdover from the days of creation, a seam in the plane that was never sown shut. Another might be a weakness in danger of widening or perhaps a vent to let power escape so that it is does not build. In all cases, fire fonts are miraculous places of fantastic appearance.

Fire archon foundries vary in appearance, but all have two elements in common: a summoning crucible and a forge. The summoning crucible serves as the transformation space for the summoned elemental creature. It must be large enough to hold the elemental and have the power of the fire font coursing through it. The summoning crucible must have elements designed to focus the fire energy and use it as a binding force. Held in place and infused with this energy, the summoned creature can then be destroyed and reincarnated by the ritual. It must then be encased in armor from the forge.

Although a fire archon can remove its armor and wear different armor during its life, the encasement of its energies in armor from the foundry's forge is a crucial element of the ritual. Without that final step, the fire archon might expire or lack the intelligence and soldier's mindset at best, and at worst, it might grow into something powerful and uncontrollable that seeks revenge for its torturous transformation.

The forge itself rarely appears like a common forge. Using the fire font as a source of heat and flame and elemental energies as hammers and forms, the forge can be an unrecognizable contraption of magic and arcane elements.

A working foundry can produce fire archons as often as the ritual can be performed and for as long as the foundry's resources are maintained. The power of the fire font the foundry is built upon determines the type of fire archon created. As the fire energy fluctuates in strength, so too do the results of the ritual. A fire font at ebb generates basic fire archons, while at high flow it produces the more powerful fire archons, such as blazesteels or ash disciples. Creatures without fiery souls should beware creating fire archons beyond their ability to quell.

Fire Archon Weapons and Armor

The fury of a fire archon's form is contained by its armor, and its first suit of armor is integral to its being inasmuch as a human or elf must have skin and bones. After time however, a fire archon can change its original armor for new should it choose to do so. Many never see the need, but fire archons that evolve or gain levels often perceive the value of a different armor strategy.

Fire archons choose a new armor for the armor's capabilities or they may pick a piece to replace a sundered piece. Armor generally takes the form of a breastplate and pauldrons, but other elements such as bracers, girdles, vambraces, and helms are not uncommon. Breastplate, full plate, chain mail, and chain shirts are most common. Nonmagic organic materials such as leather are destroyed over time because a fire archon unconsciously burns the material when it eats.

Fire archons craft weapons and armor of amazing quality and stunning appearance. Using instinctual knowledge of metallurgy, fire archons craft only items of masterwork quality. Their work is on par with that of dwarves, but of course, the two are easy to tell apart. A flame motif decorates nearly everything a fire archon crafts, and its work looks seamless because it is.

Fire archons can use many different weapons, but they prefer those that remind them of the flickering tongues of

Fire Fonts as Adventure Locations

A fire font presents a great opportunity for a cool adventure location. Let your imagination run wild. Put it anywhere you like, and use it as an excuse to make a truly magical location. Flame throwers in the walls and floor, flying bonfires, jets of fire that leap from place to place, buildings of flickering crystal, inferno tornadoes that carry creatures about, stairs of smoke, blazes that act as teleport pads -- whatever you want.

The location might be a landmark in your campaign known half the world around for its miraculous powers. Or maybe it's a hidden resource jealously guarded beneath the ziggurat of some mortal ruler. It could be an ancient and lost mystery like the Fountain of Youth or it might have thrust itself up from the earth with cataclysmic suddenness.

Of course, it doesn't have to be all about fire damage. Some of the fires might not harm anything and instead act more like *continual flame* spells. Other fires might deal another type of damage, such as cold or acid. Use color to indicate what the fires do, but allow the players to experiment and learn. A blue flame might be cold and a black one negative energy. An upside-down fire might indicate a teleporter, while a fire that doesn't flicker might be solid as a rock.

A fire font gives you a dramatic backdrop and an

fire. Thus they avoid heavy or bludgeoning weapons, and enjoy scimitars, falchions, and even lighter weapons such as rapiers. Metal weapons are a must, since most fire archons can transfer the heat of their bodies through weapons to burn foes -- an impractical attack if the medium for that transference turns to ash.

excuse to plan some very dynamic encounters. Use the environment like monster in the fight. Allow it to become a character in the story of the adventure. You won't regret it.

Behind the Scenes: Monster Evolution

The fire archon derives its origin from two places: the desire for more interesting elemental monsters and **Dreamblade**. When we sat down to discuss which creatures would carry forward to the new edition, what would be in the first *Monster Manual*, and what would inhabit the various planes in the new cosmology, the need for more interesting elemental foes came up again and again. This problem first reared its head in the bland nature and conflicting natures of elementals of 3rd Edition.

Out with the Old

The elementals of 3rd Edition have no needs, no clear desires or motivations, and no culture, yet they attain human Intelligence, speak, and can manipulate objects. They exist in limitless numbers on the elemental planes, but they build nothing and make no lasting impression upon the game. Mechanically, they exist as neat creatures to summon or put in a dungeon and nothing more. What do they do on the elemental planes besides attack interlopers? What do they care about? In 3rd Edition, we have only vague ideas that they fight each other. If they were dumb beasts, they would make more sense. If they had a culture and did interesting things like invade the Material Plane, they would be better. But the elementals of 3rd Edition don't do either. Most creatures of the elemental type follow suit, and you have to look at outsiders such as salamanders and genies for interesting creatures with elemental themes.

Add to this the fact that the elementals' mechanics are either boring or complex. Most of them simply walk up to a PC and hit the character with a fist. Fire elementals at least do fire damage, but it hardly screams cool to face an elemental and have it act like an ogre without Power Attack. It doesn't even whisper it. The flip side of this includes mechanics such as the air elemental's whirlwind. Any mechanic that makes a person look up weather conditions in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is just begging to be "forgotten" by the DM.

We tried to rectify this in the late stages of 3rd Edition. You can see various attempts in *Monster Manuals III*, *IV*, and *V*, the most successful probably being the avatars of elemental evil of *Monster Manual IV*. Yet such inventions were a band-aid on a scar over thirty years old. The new edition offered a chance to shuffle thing up a bit, give elementals a new hand, and deal in some new players.

In With the New

Of course, elementals -- those beings of the four elements that exist so people can summon them and put them in dungeons -- still exist in 4th Edition. We've given them a new story and some clean but cool mechanics, but this article isn't about them. It's about how else we filled the void for interesting elementally based creatures. The upcoming edition uses an altered list of creature types and uses type quite differently when it comes to mechanics. Thus creatures that seemed like they should be elementals (efreeti, salamanders, and so on) bear that type now. Yet even after reshuffling things, the game still cried out for more elemental baddies.

That's where **Dreamblade** comes in. The Flame Harrower caught the eye of several folks in R&D when it came out, and Bill Slavicsek mentioned that he wanted something like that in 4th Edition. On a purely aesthetic level, the combination of a largely transparent miniature with some metallic parts is pleasing to the eye. It's like looking at jewelry or candy. However, we all agreed that the "metal underpants" were not a positive feature. To fix that, we decided that the future monster would have a lower body of solid elemental material.

So we had a hole to fill and a visual cool concept to fill it. All that remained were the name, flavor, and mechanics. The mechanics evolved over time. In fact, as I write this, we are playtesting, and I can't be sure that the current 4th Edition mechanics will remain. The flavor evolved somewhat, but we knew that we wanted them to see a lot of use, so we always planned on them being a somewhat mercenary force. The name was an easy choice, if a bit controversial to some.

Early on in the process of designing 4th Edition, we had many discussions of the elements of 3rd Edition that we could carry forward. We took a long look at which cows really were sacred and which would make fine rump roast. The animal-headed archons weren't high on anyone's list. They exist to fill out an alignment wheel of outsiders -- a dubious purpose -- and they're an inherently strange concept. In **D&D**'s universe, why do some angelic beings have horse heads? What population besides werebears and normal bears do bear angels serve? Add to their innate weirdness the fact that alignment and the planes work differently in 4th Edition, and there simply wasn't reason enough to preserve them.

Yet the word "archon" is powerful, and we knew we wanted 4th Edition to use it in a cooler way that would be more likely to see play than the angelic furries. Giving it to the new elemental beings we wanted in the game seemed a perfect fit. There could be no confusing them with the old archons, and using a cool word that would be familiar to many players would raise their profile.

Sample Fire Archons

The following statistics present three fire archons using 3rd Edition rules. The first fire archon has statistics similar to the Fire Archon miniature from the *Desert of Desolation* set. The second and third fire archons use 3rd Edition mechanics to mimic the fire archon's 4th Edition rules.

Fire Archon CR 6
hp 68 (8 HD); death throes

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +9
Languages Common, Ignan

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15
(+3 Dex, +5 armor)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +6, **Ref** +13, **Will** +7
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 30 ft. in breastplate (6 squares), base speed 40 ft. {{*see skill points below; original text just said 30 ft. (6 squares)*}}
Melee mwk scimitar +14/+9 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) or
mwk scimitar +10/+5 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) and
mwk scimitar +10 (1d6+3 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +12
Special Actions death throes, fire burst

Abilities Str 23, Dex 24, Con 19, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16
SQ darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Iron Will, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Skills Intimidate +14, Jump +14, Listen +8, Spot +9 {{*numbers I come up with if speed is base 30 ft (20 ft. with armor): 14/8/8/9; if speed is base 40 ft (30 ft. with armor), then these numbers work; I'm making the assumption that the base speed is 40 feet above based on the stats here.*}}
Possessions 2 masterwork scimitars, masterwork breastplate

Fire Burst (Su) Three times per day as a standard action, a fire archon can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 3d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 18 for half).

Death Throes (Su) When a fire archon is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a fire burst attack that causes 5d8 points of damage.

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

Fire Archon Blazesteel CR 7
hp 105 (10 HD); wounded burst

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12
Languages Common, Ignan, Terran

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16
(+4 Dex, +4 armor, +2 shield)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee mwk scimitar +16/+11 (1d6+7 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +14
Combat Options flanking fire
Special Actions wounded burst

Abilities Str 25, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 15
SQ darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Skills Balance +5, Intimidate +15, Jump +21, Listen +12, Spot +12, Tumble +15
Possessions masterwork scimitar, masterwork chain shirt, masterwork heavy steel shield

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Wounded Burst (Su) If a fire archon blazesteel is reduced to half its hit points or reduced to 0 hit points, it unleashes a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 5d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 21 for half).

Flanking Fire (Ex) When a fire archon blazesteel flanks a foe, it may make an extra basic attack against that foe whenever it attacks. In addition, the fire archon blazesteel's attacks against the flanked foe cause +1d6 points of fire damage for every other fire archon adjacent to the flanked target.

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

Fire Archon Ash Disciple CR 8
hp 119 (14 HD); death throes

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +10; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12
Languages Common, Ignan, Terran

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15
(+6 Dex, +5 armor)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +8, **Ref** +15, **Will** +9
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); flame step
Melee slam +16 (1d6+5 plus 1d6 fire and target catches fire)
Ranged fire bolt +16 (50-ft. range; 8d6+5 fire and foe catches fire; creatures adjacent to target take 1d6 fire)
Base Atk +10; **Grp** +15
Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot
Special Actions cinder burst, death throes, flame step, flame wave

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Abilities Str 21, Dex 23, Con 19, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 17
SQ darkvision 60 ft., flame step, immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Balance +8, Intimidate +18, Jump +26, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Listen +12, Spot +12, Survival +3 (+5 on other planes), Tumble +23
Possessions *+1 mithral shirt*

Cinder Burst (Su) Once per encounter as a standard action, a fire archon ash disciple can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 8d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area and blinds them for 1 round (Reflex DC 21 for half and to avoid blindness).

Death Throes (Su) When a fire archon ash disciple is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a cinder burst attack that causes 10d8 points of damage.

Flame Step (Su) As a move action, a fire archon ash disciple can teleport to within 15 feet of any fire creature within 100 feet.

Flame Wave (Su) Once per encounter, a fire archon can unleash a wave of flames in a 30-ft. cone. Creatures in the area take 8d8 points of fire damage (Reflex DC 21 for half) and are pushed back two squares (no save).

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

About the Author

Matthew Sernett has been a designer of 4th Edition, the Editor-in-chief of *Dragon* Magazine, a pizza cook, an onion packer, and an assembly line worker in a spring factory. In 1999, while working for *Men's Health* Magazine, he narrowly avoided being a wardrobe tracker in the male fashion industry. He feels very fortunate to now be employed as a creative designer for Gleemax.

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THE ECOLOGIES OF THE FIRENEWT & GIANT STRIDER

Hammer & Anvil

Of those who encounter the deadly firenewts and their terrible steeds, it is written that they shall die.

by
Paul F. Culotta

illustrated by
Terry Dykstra

"ARE YOU SURE YOU FEEL UP TO THIS, MUFTI? Grandfather will wait if you need more time to rest."

"I can manage, Letifa. I must," he grunted. With a lurch, Mufti got to his feet. His face, arms, chest, and feet were still wrapped in concealing gauze. The bandages covered the cooling salves that worked on his tortured, blistered skin. His long black hair was uncovered, as were his brown eyes. There were two holes in the gauze over his face: one for breathing, one for drinking. But he could stand and walk. Most importantly, he could speak. He had to speak. Mufti grimaced through the pain as Letifa dressed him in a black aba.

The glare of the merciless sun staggered Mufti as he and Letifa emerged from the tent. He clutched at her arm to steady himself. How long had he endured the sun's searing heat without burnoose or sandals? Men, women, and children squinted at the pair as they slowly walked toward the large tent at the center of the oasis. Many of the people whispered, and he could imagine what they were saying. How it was written that Mufti should have died, yet he had not. How no one had survived alone in the desert known as the Genie's Anvil without camel or water. Off to one side, the tribe's goats bleated anxiously, as if agreeing with their nomadic owners.

Mufti and Letifa entered the tent and immediately went to their knees, making obeisance to their leader, Mustafa al-Kor, Preserver of Knowledge, Enemy of the Ignorant, Protector of the Bedine, and Grandfather of the Wrath of the Old. With a gesture, he signaled them to rise. He sat amid a pile of fringed and tasseled pillows, puffing on his hookah. Today he was dressed in his black robes and turban. Mustafa's long mustache and beard were white. His face was wrinkled from the sun and his long years. He smiled wryly, showing that his teeth were still strong and white.

"Mufti, once again you have cheated death. This time it was rather close, no?"

"Grandfather, I must tell you ..."

"All in good time, Mufti. Letifa will take notes of your account as you speak, and I am anxious to hear it. It seems you have more lives than the Loregiver's cat, and you must start from the beginning. But first, have some juice. According to our healers, it is the best thing to drink after such an ordeal. And I expect you will share salt with me?"

Mufti took the proffered cup and drank deeply. Faint, dim memories returned. Plodding through an endless, white-hot hell, water gone. Falling, cursing the gods. Baking. Blackness. Excited voices. Water splashing on his face and body, then pouring down his throat. Finally awakening in the dark tent to Letifa's soothing voice, gently urging him to drink more. Screaming as the healers applied their ointments and bandages to his burnt skin. He slept.

Mufti gathered a pinch of salt from the nearby bowl and tasted it. He winced as it dissolved and seeped into his cracked lips. He quickly drank more of the juice and waited for the pain to subside. Meanwhile, Letifa went to a nearby chest and pulled out paper, pen, and ink.

"To begin with, grandfather, you recall that you assigned me to join the expedition to find the lost tomb of Anak-Raya. I did so, hiring on as the caravan barber."

"An excellent disguise. The training you had for the mission in Huzuz has had many uses," said Mustafa.

"Yes, grandfather. After many adventures, we finally reached the High Desert and ..."

"Oh no, Mufti. I want to hear it all! What adventures?"

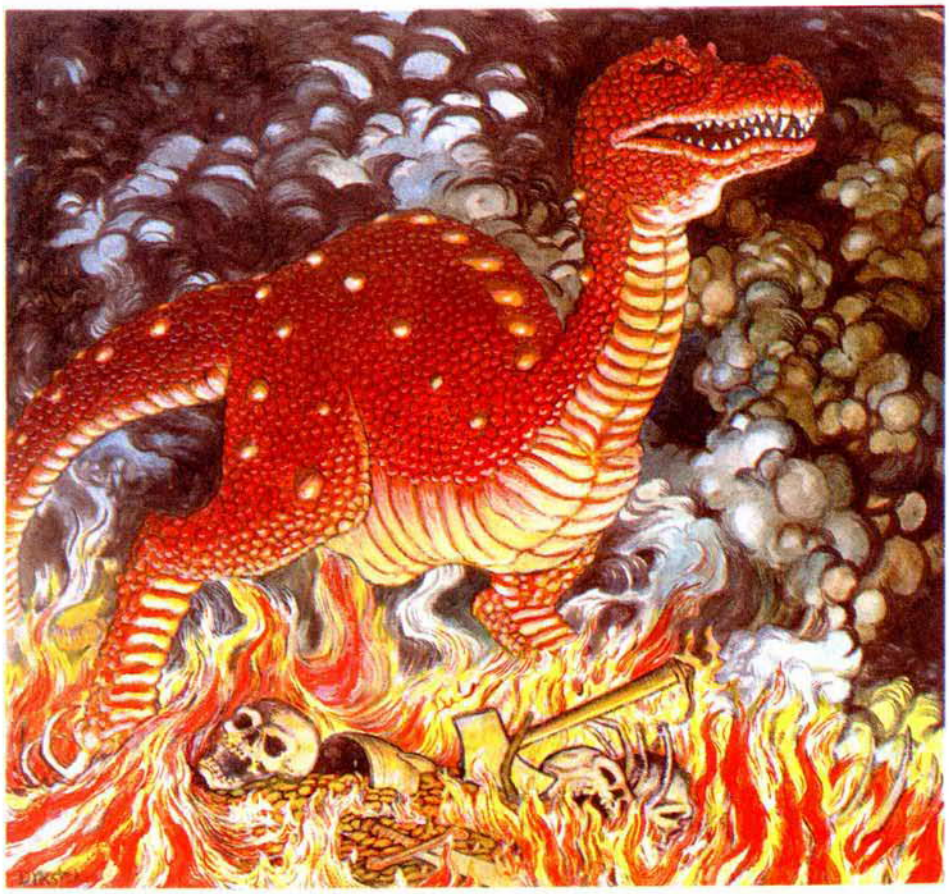
Mufti sighed impatiently. "Grandfather, I beg your indulgence. I know how you love a good story, but just hours from here is a lair of evil creatures that could attack and kill us all. Please let me tell this part to you first."

Mustafa frowned and puffed furiously on the hookah, causing clouds of smoke to billow around his head. He shouted, "Hassan!"

A tall, muscular man quickly came into the tent and knelt. "Yes, grandfather."

"Double the guard immediately! And the patrols as well!"

"As you wish, grandfather." Hassan scowled briefly at Mufti as he bowed his way out.



"Very well, Mufti, continue."

"Thank you, grandfather. As I was saying, we entered the High Desert and, after days of searching, found the tomb. Several of the workers died from hideous traps that Anak-Raya had left for looters, but in the end we found the Scrolls of Destiny. As you suspected, they were large rolls of papyrus in gold cylinders."

"And no doubt Sadam al-Tajar was incensed when you approached him and made him our offer to, ah, relieve him of the Scrolls?" Mustafa grinned.

"Frankly, grandfather, I was waiting until we were closer to this oasis where I was to meet you with the scrolls. But I never got the chance to make the offer. Two days after leaving the tomb, we were attacked by creatures I had never seen before. As you know, Sadam had hired many guards, many of them fearless desert riders rarely surprised by enemies. But as we traveled through a sandy gorge, several heavily armed monsters wielding pikes and swords burst out of the sands on our right flank.[1] They were dark brown, lizardlike beings that stood and fought upright like men. Worse yet, they breathed fire on the camels and stabbed them with spears, which greatly panicked the beasts and put the entire caravan in an uproar."[2]

"Mufti, excuse me. My report must be complete. What time of day was this? And how large were these creatures?" asked Letifa, who was scribbling furiously.

"It was about two hours after sunrise. The creatures were a little taller than me, or about as tall as Hassan."[3]

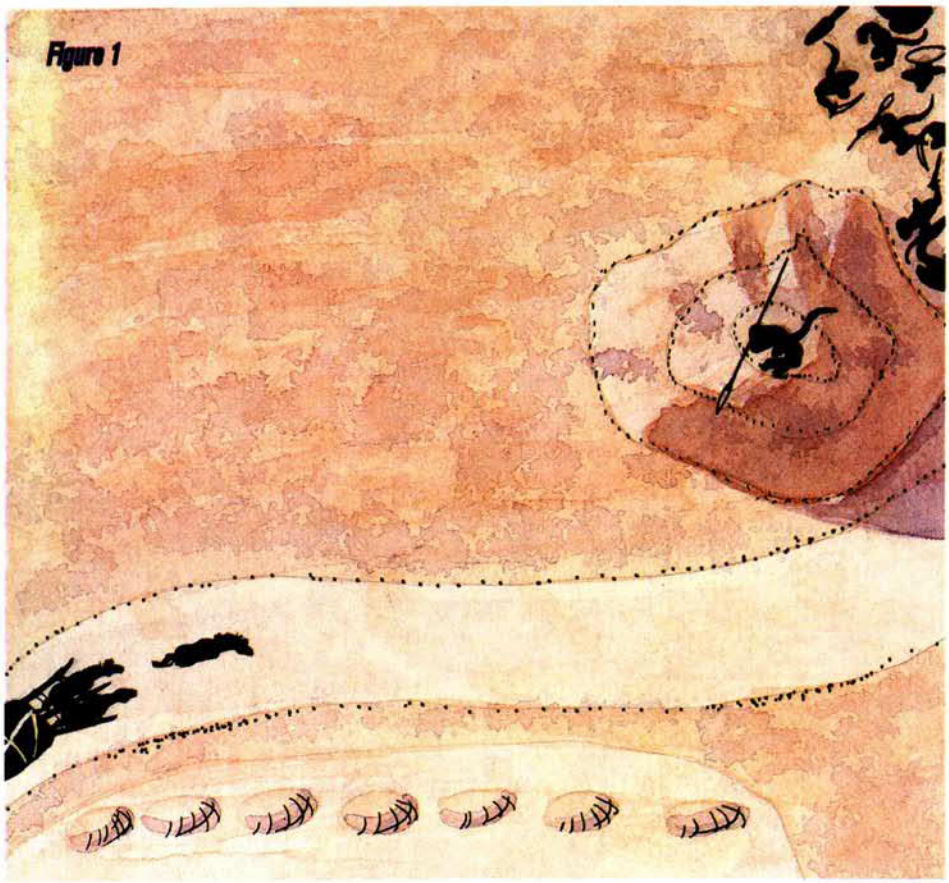
"Thank you. Please continue."

"Grandfather, the fight was terrible.

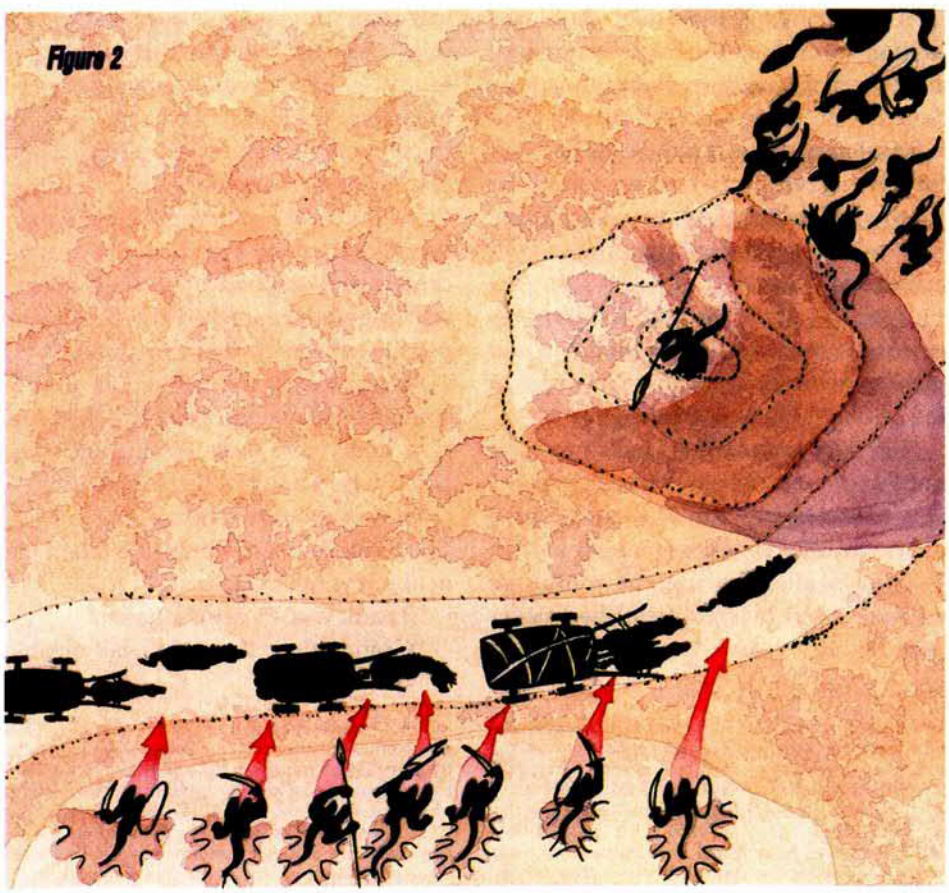
1. Firenewts are generally encountered in volcanic regions, but they may be found in any area of extremely hot temperatures, such as a desert. Their coloration varies from dark brown to a grayish brown that becomes white around the belly, although the belly is no softer than the rest of the creature, and they can easily bury themselves in sand and remain hidden with only their noses and eyes (which look like rocks) sticking out. Most PCs have only a 5% chance of noticing anything strange when walking into a firenewt ambush. Rangers and PCs with the Survival (Desert) proficiency have a 10% chance, while Desert Riders have a 15% chance. PCs with the Alertness NWP gain a 5% bonus.

2. Attacking mounts first is a favorite firenewt tactic. As carnivores, they appreciate the large amount of meat that a horse, camel, or elephant provides. Moreover, killing the mounts ensures that no one can ride away. If the victims of the firenewts' attack prevail in battle (or escape), then they are without mounts, which means that they face a long walk home and probably won't survive. Firenewts focus their attacks on mounts for the first 3 rounds of combat or until at least half the mounts are down before turning to the riders.

3. Firenewts can not abide the coldness of the desert night and do not set ambushes until at least an hour after sunrise. This is yet another good reason for traveling the desert only at night and stopping promptly when the sun comes up.



The ambushers await their victims.



As the first attackers burst from the sands, reinforcements await their command..

At that point, I dropped my disguise as the caravan barber and fought with the others. I found myself pitted against a creature clad in chain armor ..."

"In this heat?" Mustafa exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, and it fought like a mamluke, the way it wielded that battleax.[4] Had it not been for my training, I most likely would have died. As it turned out, after a few moments of dodging the creature's heavy blade, I finally drove my dagger into the creature's eye. With a final gasp, it shot fire on my robe."

"I heard about the burns on your chest, Mufti. From what the healers tell me, the scars will be permanent. I am sorry for this, but please continue. Did you escape and make your way here?"

Mufti snorted and then grimaced in pain.

"I wish that I had. Men and camels were dying everywhere, but Waleed, our guard commander, had rallied us. Just as we were fighting the creatures to a standstill, we heard high-pitched horns and a muted drumming behind us. I turned. Thundering down on us were at least forty giant two-footed lizards, each as large as a camel and bearing a lizard-beastman with a lowered pike.[5] As they charged at us, the giant lizards made a terrible screeching noise, and several of the guards fled, only to be speared in the back or trampled into the dust.[6]

4. While there is one elite Warrior (3+3 HD, AC 3) for every ten firenewts, there is a 30% chance that this Warrior has weapon specialization (+1 to attack rolls, +2 to damage rolls, 3/2 attacks, 420 XP).

5. Giant striders are not lizards, but large, flightless birds. Although firenewts primarily use the giant striders as mounts, when one outlives its usefulness (usually no longer than fifteen years) it is slaughtered for food, and its inedible parts scavenged to make other products. Firenewts fashion saddles from the creatures' tough leathery skins, saddle bindings from tendons and ligaments, and signal horns from bones. Nothing goes to waste in firenewt culture.

6. The second feature of the classic firenewt ambush occurs when the victims are totally engaged in battle with the first group of firenewts that emerged from the sands. At this point, the leader of the dismounted firenewts signals with a polished stone, metal shield, or horn to a concealed band of firenewts mounted on giant striders. At the signal, this group charges from its concealed position and lays into the defenders' rear, causing maximum shock and panic. Just before impact, the giant striders are trained to bellow ferociously, and their terrible cries cause all NPC defenders to make a morale check. The firenewts call this ambush the "hammer and anvil," with the firenewts on foot being the anvil, and those charging on striders being the hammer. The result, combined with the defenders' loss of mounts, is usually a bloody rout. Figures 1–4 graphically depict the hammer and anvil strategy.

"Jaheira, the flame sorceress who had accompanied us, cast a ball of fire at this group, which heartened me greatly. Alas, her magic did little. The blast knocked some of the riders off their mounts, but the big lizards kept coming as if nothing would stop them. Indeed, when they came close, balls of fire blew out of their eyes as they all converged on Jaheira. I was knocked flat by the explosions, and when I looked up, there was nothing left of her except one charred slipper. It was then that something hit me in the head and all went black."[7]

In a mass charge, mounted firenewts use long pikes that inflict double damage. The normal bonus and penalty for a charge apply. A victim struck by the pikes must make a Strength check (–5 penalty) or be knocked to the ground and trampled by the giant strider for an additional 1d10 points of damage. If the firenewt rider misses with his pike, the giant strider gains a separate attack roll with the same mechanic (–5 penalty to Strength check; 1d10 points of trample damage if knocked down).

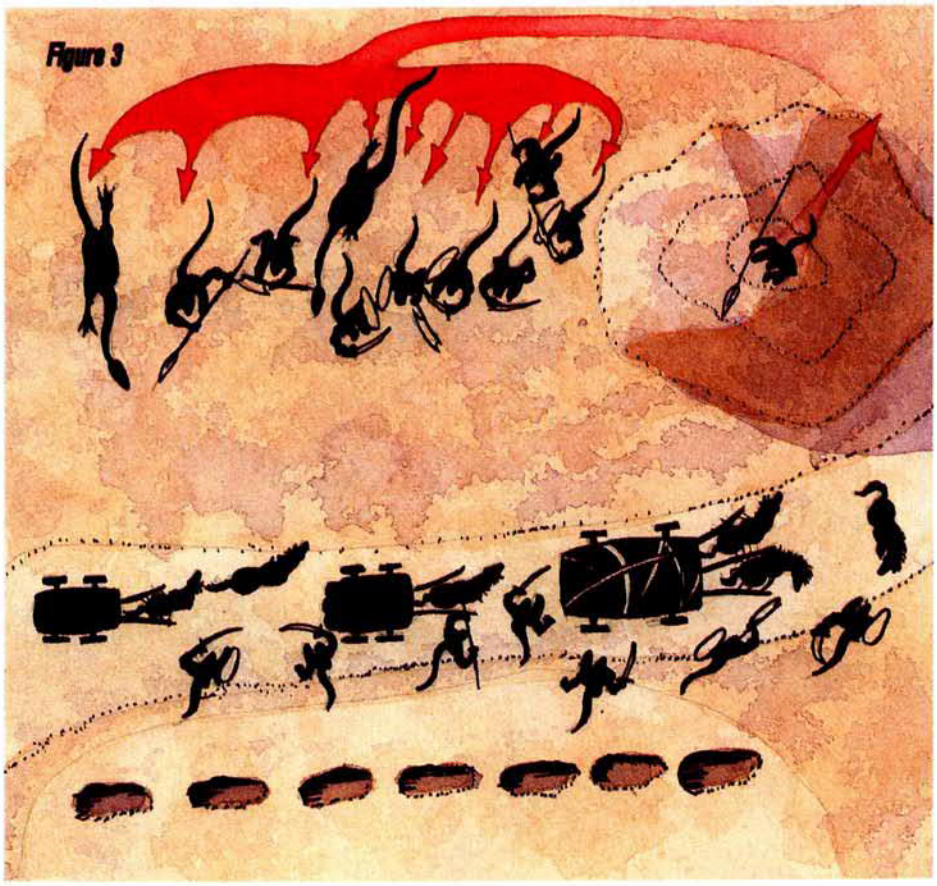
If one must travel in the desert during the day, the best way to avoid the hammer and anvil is for the caravan to have someone with flying magic reconnoiter ahead and spot the "hammer" element. Those who do not have such means are strongly advised to have a screen of riders posted ahead and to the flanks of the caravan. In game terms, aerial reconnaissance has a 65% chance of spotting the "hammer" while screening riders have only a 40% chance (+5% for each rider who is a Ranger, has the Desert Rider kit from *Arabian Adventures*, or who has the Desert Survival nonweapon proficiency).

A variation of the hammer and anvil tactic occurs in volcanic regions. Firenewts call this tactic the fire box. In this case, a few firenewts mounted on striders slowly flee in plain sight from armed opponents. They lead their pursuers to an area where the opponents are channeled by a cliff on one side and a pool of lava on the other. At the end of this passage are three ranks of dismounted firenewts with bristling pikes firmly set to receive any charge. Behind the firenewts is a Priest who first casts *pyrotechnics* (smoke effect), causing the channel to become obscured and possibly causing wayward opponents to plunge into the lava. A blown horn signals a unit of mounted firenewts to fall upon the rear of the pursuers. As the opponents are trapped by dismounted firenewts, a cliff, lava, and mounted firenewts, the Priest casts a unique firenewt spell, *lava splash*, which causes lava to splash onto the opponents and their mounts. Firenewt Priests may cast this spell three times a day. The details of this spell are in the sidebar.

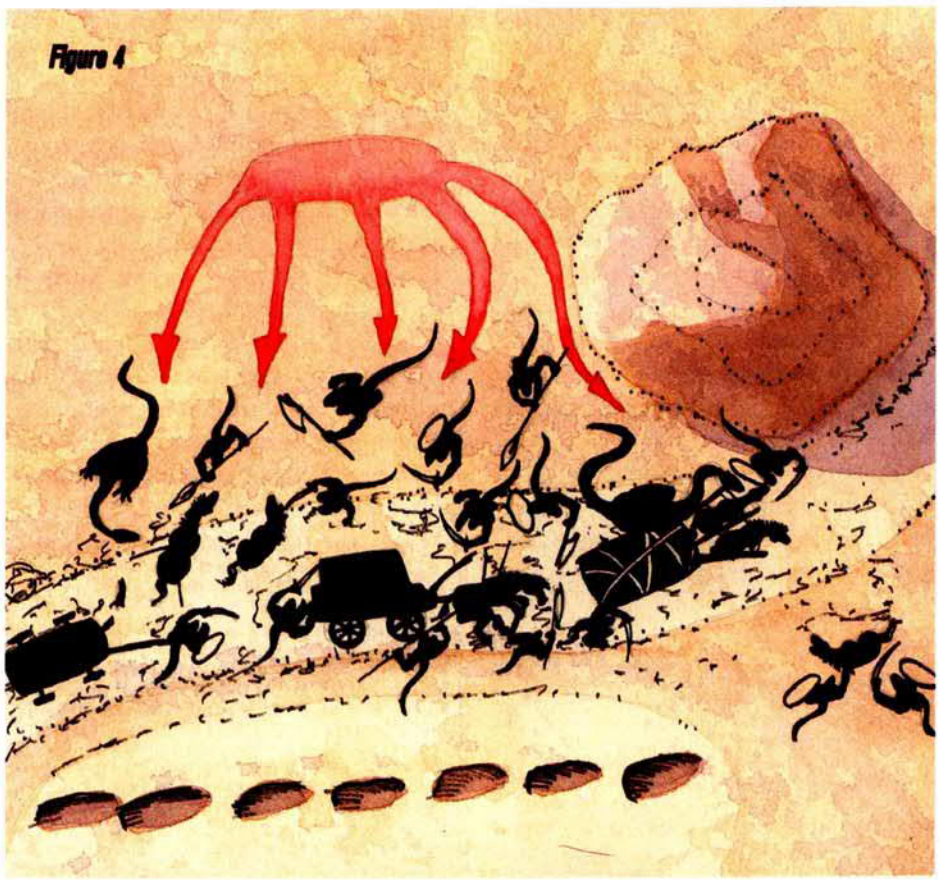
7. As the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ book points out, giant striders are immune to magical fire; indeed, intense heat, such as that produced by a *fireball*, acts as a *cure light wounds* spell on a giant strider. Lesser fire effects (*burning hands*, Greek fire, etc.) cure 1–6 hit points of damage. Because giant striders receive healing benefits from fire, typically one of the first priorities after battle is for the firenewts to breathe fire on badly wounded giant striders.

Giant striders are also trained to fight even when their riders are knocked off. Furthermore, they are trained to focus their *fireballs* on any defender who attempts to use magic.

Firenewts are not immune to magical fire, but they do receive a +3 to their saving throws, and all damage is reduced by 1 point per die of damage.



While the victims fight the first attackers, reinforcements take their positions.



Finally, the reinforcements attack from the rear.

"Somehow you awoke and wandered here? Surely Fate was kind to you."

"Oh, how I wish that were the case, grandfather. When I awoke, I found myself in a dark cavern, chained to the wall, along with dozens of my comrades. The chamber was intensely hot, made so by a mound of glowing, heated rock off to one side.[8]

"We lingered there for days. Each day, several of the creatures would come. One wore a beaten metal breastplate with a design of a bonfire on the chest, and it was he who would examine us, give us a little food or water, then poke at us with his heavy mace. Finally, he would hiss something and point at one of the prisoners. The others then fell upon the designated prisoner and dragged him off to a neighboring chamber where we heard his screams for hours. We would never see him again. Grandfather, I have known fear before on many occasions, but never have I been so terrified as when those creatures would appear each day to make their selection."[9]

"So how did you escape such a place?" asked Mustafa.

"One day I awoke and noticed that one of the chain links was weak and thin. I twisted the chain several times until the link snapped cleanly. From there, I was able to pick the lock on the other manacle and free myself."

"May the Old One be praised!" exclaimed Letifa softly.

"Two of those few comrades who remained were dead. The rest were so weak they could not even stand. I had to leave them." Mufti spoke carefully. He would not shame his order by breaking down.

Mustafa put down the tube from his hookah and came over to Mufti, putting his arms around him and patting him gently on the back. "You did what was necessary, grandson. Think on it no more. It was their fate to die," he said.

Mustafa poured Mufti another cup of juice and gently urged him to continue.

"I went through their caverns, keeping to the shadows, close to the walls as I have been taught, trying desperately to find a way out. There were numerous chambers filled with the beastmen, their lizard mounts, and more of the ones with the metal breastplates."

"What of the place where you heard the screams?" interrupted Mustafa.

Mufti looked at the ground and shook his head. "Please, grandfather, I do not wish to talk about it. Maybe later, but not now."

"Well, yes, later is good," he replied. "But can you tell us how many of these creatures there were and whether they took the scrolls?"

Mufti shook his head. "No, I cannot say exactly how many there were because I did not explore all the caverns. I only wanted to get out. From what I saw, there were at least two hundred, and about half that many of the giant lizards."

"That many!"

"Yes, not all of them were as large as the warriors, and I assume these were females. They were colored differently too, a dull brown. As to the scrolls, yes, they took them, but I could not get them."

"Why not?"

"One of the chambers I passed had

8. Giant striders become sluggish in cold temperatures found in such places as the desert night or underground. Their droppings, however, retain heat for up to ten hours in confined areas and keep any cavern lair toasty. Oddly, the droppings have no odor. They look like piles of oozy rock, and anyone unfortunate enough to step in a pile suffers 1–6 points of heat damage. Fortunately, they are easily detectable, as they glow with as much light as a torch.

9. Although a tribe of firenewts is ruled by an overlord, the day-to-day activity is run by the priesthood. Firenewt Priests worship Kossuth, the tyrant-king of fire elementals, and receive their spells from that entity. It is the Priests who designate which captive human or humanoid becomes the daily meal (after a grueling torture routine) since such prisoners are considered delicacies. Humanoid prisoners (dwarves, gnomes, elves, orcs, etc.) are always the first to be selected. The Priests typically keep the juiciest tidbits for themselves and dole out the rest to the Warriors. Offal (entrails, organs, brains, etc.) is given to the giant striders.

Occasionally Priests, elite Warriors, and overlords may (50% chance) speak Common, but they usually do not choose to do so, since to them, it is just speaking to "food."

Water is an ingested poison to firenewts and giant striders (victims must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die; a successful save results in 1d12 points of damage) and is thus a commodity closely regulated by the firenewt priesthood. Not only is it used to sustain prisoners (firenewts like "fresh" meat), but the Priests use it to kill rivals and to give aged giant striders a "merciful" death.

three beastmen, who bowed and hissed strange noises before an idol of pure gold. Their idol was fashioned in the form of a pillar of fire, the same design as on their breastplates.[10] Behind it were the scrolls and several other possessions taken from the caravan, including my daggers. There were three of these creatures and I had no weapons."

"I see," murmured Mustafa disappointedly.

"But in the same chamber was a small stream of water with several bottles nearby. Fortunately it was close to the entry, and I was able to steal one of the bottles and fill it without discovery. That was the only water I saw in the entire place. A little while later, I found the way out."

Grandfather leaned forward, a gleam in his eye. "It was lightly guarded?"

"Two guards, both now dead," replied Mufti. "I crept up to them, snatched a sword from one's scabbard, and killed it quickly. The other took just a few moments more."

"You had no sword when we found you."

"No, after hours in the heat, I left it. As I left the water jug when it was empty."

"Ah, yes. I remember," replied Grandfather. "It was fortunate that the patrol found you. Many have whispered that your coming here bodes ill, for it was written that you should die."

"Fate is fickle, grandfather, but apparently it was not written, because I am here alive and well, thanks be to the Old One."

"How did you find your way here?"

"In the distance, grandfather, I saw the peak known as the Turban. Between it and the location of the sun, I determined the general direction I had to travel to reach you."

"Mufti, were there any other chambers in the lair that seemed unusual?" asked Letifa.

"Just one. One large cavern had a number of huge eggs lying in holes in the ground. There must have been at least fifty of them, each surrounded by piles of glowing rock. Several of the two-legged lizards kept watch in that place. The heat of the chamber was oppressive, and I dared not go in.

"A strange thing occurred after I left, though. I remember hearing what sounded like an explosion coming from that direction. I feared that perhaps it was an alarm of some sort, and I found a large crack to hide in for a while, but nothing came by. What this had to do with the eggs and the lizards I cannot say."[11]

Mustafa leaned back into his pillows and puffed thoughtfully. One of his eyebrows arched up, and he asked, "Mufti, do you think you could find this place again?"

Mufti paused, thought a few moments, and then answered, "Grandfather, your will is mine. I can try to lead you there, but even if the entire Wrath of the Old were assembled ..."

"Oh, but it is. Every member is here."

Mufti gaped at this statement. The Wrath had hundreds of members all over Zakhara, and they had all been brought here? What was in those Scrolls of Destiny?

10. The idol is a likeness of Kossuth, their deity. Although the Overlord doles out wealth from a communal hoard, the Priests receive the lion's share of it. Their belief is that the larger the idol of Kossuth, the greater the blessings he bestows upon them. When a sufficient amount of new gold is amassed, firenewt metalworkers melt it down along with the old idol and cast a larger one. Small tribes of firenewts have an idol worth at least 500 gp while larger tribes have idols worth up to 3,000 gp, and there is one tribe rumored to have an idol worth 10,000 gp. Obviously, the problem with looting a firenewt lair is transporting such a heavy thing back to civilization.

11. Giant strider eggs require considerable heat for incubation. Not only are they surrounded by heated droppings but also at least six giant strider hens remain with the eggs. They provide security against intruders, and they shoot a *fireball* into the chamber, one per turn, showering more heat down on the eggs. This makes the entire chamber a constant 170 degrees. The eggs are impervious to the heat and may be used as components in making *potions of fire resistance*.

Firenewt eggs are taken to a special hatching ground guarded by one Priest, an elite Warrior servant, and two giant striders. The eggs are kept warm, just like the giant strider eggs, although less heat is required. Firenewt eggs are not used in the making of potions or other magical items. When a firenewt hatches, it tears its way out of its thick egg casing as the Priest looks on. If it fails to emerge from the egg in one turn, it is deemed too weak to remain alive, and the Priest tears it out of the egg and sacrifices it to Kossuth. This is a rare occurrence and is looked upon as a sign that Kossuth is displeased with the tribe. In actuality, the priesthood often uses this as an excuse to eliminate the bloodlines of their enemies.

New Priest Spell: *Lava Splash*

Level: 3
(Alteration)
Sphere: Elemental (Fire, Earth)
Range: 50 yards
Components: V, S, M
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 6
Area of Effect: 10' × 10' area
Saving Throw: Neg.

Lava splash is available only to firenewt Priests of Kossuth. They may cast it up to three times per day as long as they are in Kossuth's favor. These are not bonus spells, so each spell counts against the Priest's number of spells per day. *Lava splash* seems to be a minor variation of an *earthquake* spell, although it affects only lava pools and streams, not the underlying hard ground.

When the Priest casts this spell, he causes a wave of lava to rise up and shower anything within a 25' radius. Victims suffer 3–18 points of damage, although a saving throw vs. breath weapon reduces the damage by half. Victims in metal armor who fail their saving throw are treated in following rounds as if affected by a *heat metal* spell. Victims not in metal armor who fail their saving throw must make additional item saving throws for their clothing. If a character's clothing is ignited by a *lava splash*, he suffers an additional 1–6 points of damage per round for 3 rounds. The *lava splash* never harms a firenewt or giant strider. Indeed, a *lava splash* heals either creature as a *cure serious wounds* spell.

The material component for this spell is a fist size lump of volcanic rock, which is consumed in the casting. The spell may not be cast unless there is also a pool of lava within 50 yards of the caster.

"Even so, grandfather, it would be a bloodbath, and our losses would be heavy. You know that my escape has been discovered by now. The creatures' lair will be well guarded."

Mustafa laughed heartily before answering. "In two hours, the sun will set. These creatures will all be inside their caves, and we can go there quickly by camel. In our camp are sorcerers who have spells of ice and water magic, something I suspect that these beastmen and their lizards will fear. In any case, I don't believe that they will expect anyone to attack them."

Mustafa finished this announcement with a wide smile, but just then the faint sounds of horns blowing in the distance drifted in through the opening.

Letifa stopped her writing and looked up quickly. "The patrols, they have found something!" she exclaimed.

Grandfather no longer smiled; he sprang to his feet quickly. Now a faint drumming, thumping noise came through the tent, along with shouts as nomads rushed about outside.

Mufti sighed and shook his head wearily. "I have heard those horns before, grandfather. Not all of them are ours. Nor is that other noise."

"What are you saying?" demanded Mustafa.

Mufti arose, walked stiffly to a stack of weapons in one corner of the tent, and selected two fine scimitars and a bandoleer of daggers, each inscribed with the symbol of the Old One. He handed one of the scimitars to Mustafa al Kor, the Grandfather of Assassins.

"Grandfather, perhaps it *was* written that I should die. Will you fight at my side?"[12]

One of Paul's regular players is a bewitching young lady named Summer who often brings homemade salsa to the game. Some of the guys say that it bubbles and steams; others believe that it would break a geiger counter's needle. Paul suspects it's really Summer's special potion of polymorph other *that will turn the DM into a firenewt if he isn't nice to her character.*

12. Firenewts are noted for their extreme sadism. One of their favorite jokes is to trick a prisoner like Mufti into thinking he has escaped and let him sneak about through the lair until he finds his way out or is killed in the process. Sometimes the prisoner is totally unmolested and given a healthy head start before any pursuit begins. Firenewts consider it great sport to allow the escapee to get just to the brink of rescue, at which point they swoop down and take him prisoner again.

The firenewts have no fear of the prisoner getting away because the giant striders have extremely sensitive olfactory glands that allow them to track a scent that's as much as three days old. The only real chance a pursued prisoner has is to be caught in a sandstorm that might blow away the scent, to run into powerful allies, or to enjoy some other quirk of fate. Even so, surviving a sandstorm is no easy feat (see p. 82, *Arabian Adventures*), and if an escapee finds rescue, the pursuing firenewts are sure to either attack or go back for reinforcements.

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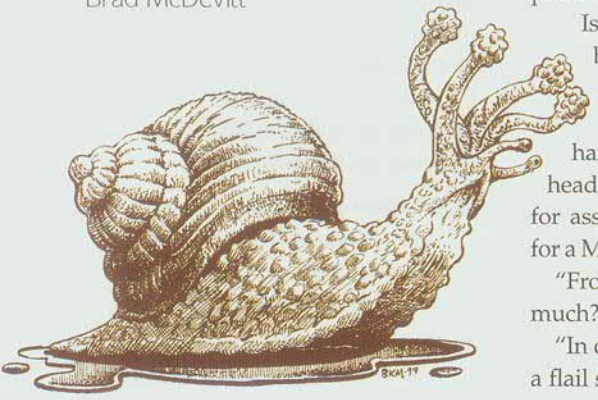
THE ECOLOGY OF THE FLAIL SNAIL

The Price of Flailure

Never forget that the Monster Hunters Association doesn't work for free.

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Brad McDevitt



DREELIX PICKED UP THE GAVEL AND HELD IT BEFORE HIM. He stared at it lovingly for a moment, then, almost ritually, banged it down on the table before him—once, twice, three times—and said the words that drew the attention of all the wizards and sages in the meeting hall.

"This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened," he intoned.

"It seems we have a rather heavy agenda tonight," he continued. "After Grindle briefs us on the pathetic state of our coffers, we'll have an update on the problems with Zantoullios' latest batch of healing potions, something about a fewunexpected and unpleasant side effects"—here he fixed a stern look at the gangly wizard, who swallowed hard and grinned sickly—"followed by Willowquisp's report, or lack thereof, of useful flumph by-products." The elderly sage pursed his lips and looked at the ceiling, but said nothing. Dreelix continued: "Then, let's see, Old Gumphrey has a pitch for some new alchemical paraphernalia he thinks we need to purchase. Is there anything else? If not, let's begin with—"

"Actually, there is something else," said Buntleby, raising his hand and standing up to address the head table. "I have received a request for assistance; in effect, an opportunity for a Monster Hunt presents itself."

"From who? What monster? How much?" fired off Dreelix.

"In order: the gnomes of Wishbottom, a flail snail, and the remains of the slain creature itself."

Dreelix harrumphed. "Another freebie," he scoffed.

"An opportunity to assist those requiring our help," corrected Buntleby. "Several gnomes working in the mines have already been slain. Think of it as a goodwill gesture."

"Goodwill gestures do nothing to fill our depleted coffers," grumbled Dreelix. Then, thinking aloud, he added, "I wonder if there are any magical uses to be had from a dead gnome?"

Buntleby stiffened, then said, "Perhaps you should put the question to Finklebintzer, the gnomish Mayor of Wishbottom." And turning to his side, he held his hand out to acknowledge the tiny gnome seated at his left.

Too late, Dreelix spotted the angry gnome and let out a high-pitched "Eep!" Then, standing to his unimpressive full height, he dressed down his colleague. "Buntleby! What's the meaning of this? Why'd you bring him in here without warning me? Are you trying to make the Association look bad?"

"No need; you seem to be quite capable of taking care of that yourself."

Dreelix fumed, then addressed the gnome. "Flitzenblinky, or whatever your

name is, please, allow me to explain ..." he began, and then proceeded to spout off a few words in an arcane language, waggling his fingers as he did so. A blank look fell across the gnome's face; Dreelix shouted "Hah!" in triumph and sat back down. It wasn't the first time a *forget* spell had saved his bacon.

Buntleby opened his mouth as if to protest, then gave a sigh of exasperation. He had expected little more from his exalted leader. He took his seat.

Dreelix waited until the blank look left the gnome's face, then resumed his opening speech. "... and Old Gumphrey has a pitch for some new alchemical paraphernalia he thinks we need to purchase. But first, I believe we have an honored guest in our midst! Buntleby, would you be so kind as to do the honors?"

Buntleby stood, gave a mental shrug, and pressed on: "Gentlemen—and Lady Ablasta—allow me to introduce Finklebintzer of Wishbottom; Finklebintzer, I present to you our fearless and generous leader Dreelix, to whom we must make our appeals."

"By all means!" agreed Dreelix, a wide, phony approximation of a smile on his face. "Our other business can wait; we are always happy to assist our neighboring communities! Please, tell us of this monster that has been troubling you, and we will decide how best to rid you of it."

The little gnome stood up on his chair and, now at an appropriate height for public speaking, began his plea in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. "Fame of your illustrious organization has spread even to our little corner of the world, so we turn to you for aid. Our mine was recently invaded by a hideous, giant brute of a snail whose flailing appendages have caused the deaths of three of our miners. Brute strength has had no effect; we cannot win past its nasty tentacles to attack its soft body, and our hammers and chisels seem useless against the creature's hard shell when we attack from the rear.[1] We've tried throwing flaming brands at the beast, and, against my better judgment, even purchased a vial of poison from an unscrupulous type in an attempt to kill the thing—all to no avail.[2] We now turn to you in desperation, pleading for your assistance, for we fear to return to the mines that are our livelihood while the terrible creature stalks the tunnels and shafts."

"A sad story, indeed," agreed Dreelix, putting on his equally fake sad-face. "Have you tried magic?"

"We are a small mining village," said Finklebintzer, "with no great wizards among us. My cousin Whigglesponker knows a few illusion spells and tried scaring off the creature with them, but these, too, had no great effect."[3]

"A pity," commiserated Dreelix, sticking out his lower lip in a pout meant to demonstrate his sensitivity to the gnome's plight. "Well, we thank you for your time. Rest assured that we will study up on the creature to determine how best to destroy it for you. You may return to your village with the happy news that the Monster Hunters will be there in but a few short days."

Buntleby stood again. "Willowquisp and I have taken the liberty of researching the creature; we are prepared to brief the Association on our notes, findings, and suggested strategies." Willowquisp the Zoophile, an elderly sage fascinated by the wide variety of creatures inhabiting the planet—even (some might say especially) the goofy-looking ones—nodded to his younger friend and stood, a book full of hastily-scribbled notes at the ready.

Dreelix's face went taut with anger. He mentally reached for another *forget* spell to use on the gnome; finding none remaining, he gritted his teeth and forced his phony happy-face back on (a hideous rictus of muscular tweakings that pulled his mouth into a grotesque and unfamiliar semblance of a smile), making a mental note that from now on he'd have to carry more *forget* spells in his spell inventory. Or better yet, assign Grindle to guard the door and prevent unauthorized guests from entering official Association meetings. At nearly three hundred pounds, Grindle could be intimidating when he wanted to be—and his body odor was intimidating even when he wasn't.

"All right," Dreelix said through gritted teeth. "Let's hear what you two have come up with."

"Thank you," said Buntleby, grabbing Willowquisp by the arm and leading him to the podium on Dreelix's left before the Association president figured out a way to weasel out of the offer.

Willowquisp settled his book of notes upon the podium as Buntleby started their presentation. "The flail snail is a land-based gastropod, different from the standard garden snail in its unusual size, the magical properties of its shell, and the addition of its multiple flailing appendages.[4] We'll address each of these differences in turn."

Willowquisp spoke up. "The flail snail averages about eight feet tall, the highest point being of course the crown of the shell. They are only about ten inches tall when newly-hatched,[5] although they grow quickly, reaching full size within four years. The creatures have a life span of about twenty years."

1. Although the creatures move at a slow speed of 3, flail snails can whip their bodies (or parts thereof) into their shells with astounding quickness. Attacks upon a flail snail's soft body are therefore made against Armor Class –8.

2. Flail snails are immune to both fire and poison. Fire damage is negated both by the creature's thick shell and the layer of wet, protective mucus that covers the snail's exposed skin. As for poison, the flail snail has such a slow metabolism that any poison is negated by natural antitoxins in its blood before it has a chance to affect the creature.

3. The vision of a flail snail is limited. It has two small sensory appendages, one on each side of its head. The sensory appendages allow the creature to detect movement and differentiate between light and dark at a range of 20 feet, but that's about it. Thus, the creatures are immune to most vision-based illusions, although a *light* or *continual light* spell cast upon a flail snail's sensory appendages blinds it. However, a "blind" flail snail can still detect movement, as that sense is based upon the detection of air currents more so than the use of vision. "Blind" flail snails therefore suffer only a –1 to their attack rolls and no penalty to Armor Class.

The sensory appendages also house the creature's olfactory organs. Flail snails have a highly-developed sense of smell.

4. A flail snail has 4–6 clublike appendages growing from the front of its head, between its smaller sensory appendages. Each of these has a 10-lb. tip of hardened flesh covered with many knobby protrusions (not pointed spikes, with which the creature is often depicted in illustrations—spikes would easily rip through the creature's soft flesh when it pulled its head into its shell). These club tentacles are in constant motion, swaying slowly back and forth when the creature is calm and at increased speeds when agitated. The tentacles are the flail snail's only means of active attack, each causing 1d8 points of damage. In addition, they can smash through a 1"-thick piece of wood—thus, most wooden shields must make a successful saving throw vs. crushing blow or be destroyed when struck by a flail snail tentacle.

5. The flail snail entry in *Monstrous Compendium® 5: Greyhawk Adventures* (under "Snail") erroneously states that flail snails give live birth to 1–3 young. It also refers to them as "silicon-based" gastropods and makes reference to flail snail "females" and "mothers."

Flail snails, like most land-dwelling snails, are hermaphroditic, each creature manufacturing both eggs and sperm cells. They reproduce by exchanging packets of sperm cells with another partner through

"As for the creature's shell," added Buntleby, "it has a number of unusual properties. First of all, it is garishly colored, a swirling conglomeration of bright blues, reds, greens, and yellows—rather like someone let a few drunken leprechauns loose in a paint shop. Second, and most important, the shell is highly magical, reflecting, negating, or distorting magical spells directed at the creature. It is perhaps for this reason that your cousin's illusion spells were ineffective toward the beast," he added to Finklebintzer. The gnome raised his eyebrows and nodded.

"A study was once done on the magical properties of the flail snail's shell," supplied Willowquisp, consulting his notes. "A wizard by the name of Gallingrave, some two centuries ago, intrigued by the variable nature of spell effects when centered on the creature, attached a *brooch of shielding* to his robes, scrounged up a *wand of magic missiles,* and repeatedly shot missile after missile at the snail, recording each result.

"Some of the missiles found their target, while some were reflected directly back at Gallingrave. Occasionally, the *wand* discharged no missile at all, or, when it did, the magic was distorted, firing only a harmless beam of light or sending the missile darting off in a random direction.[6] From Gallingrave's recorded notes, we can gather that there is only about a 30% chance of successfully attacking a flail snail with magic—not a very promising figure."

"Finally, there are the flailing appendages themselves, from which the creature gets its name," said Buntleby. "Each snail begins life with four to six appendages, and, much like the number of limbs on an osquip, the number of flails on a flail snail seems to have no correlation with the number of flails of either of its parents."

"All very fascinating," remarked Dreelix dryly. "How do we kill it?"

"Several methods suggest themselves," answered Buntleby. "We could simply hire some skilled men-at-arms to attack the thing. With better armor and weapons than the gnomish miners had available, and if the warriors concentrate on attacking the creature's flails,[7] the creature could no doubt easily be dispatched."

"No good!" piped up Grindle the Coin-Counter. "Our funds are low; I would have to vote against any plan causing further expenditures."

"I agree," added Dreelix. "I'd rather not spend money when there are no doubt alternative solutions available. Plus, you know how I feel about warriors: overvalued lunkheads with more muscle than brains! Any dolt can pick up a sword and wave it around; it takes great skill and mental fortitude to master the wizardly arts!" Dreelix ground his teeth at the thought of warriors. One particular memory came rushing forward, as it always did: being kicked out of Sir Scromblatt's School for Young Knights in Training as a lad. "'Total lack of aptitude in the warrior arts,' my foot," he mumbled to himself, scowling and waving a clenched fist in the air. "Ha! They were just jealous, the lot of them! And the same goes for those fools at Master Micklebie's Junior Warriors—'new levels of ineptitude,' was it? Well, who's laughing now, huh? Who's laughing now?"

There was silence in the meeting hall as the Monster Hunters looked on in embarrassed silence. With a start, Dreelix realized that he'd been speaking aloud.

"Very well then," said Willowquisp, breaking the awkward silence as if nothing had happened. "Another approach: flail snails must keep their soft bodies moist. During hot, dry weather, they undergo a hibernation-like process called estivation, where they seal themselves into their shells with a plug of hardened mucus[8], leaving only a small air hole. While sealed up, they slow down their body processes, and can survive for months without food or water."[9]

"How does this help us?" asked Dreelix.

"What exactly do flail snails eat, anyway?" asked Spontayne at the same time.

---

the genital pore, a small opening near the creature's head. After mating is complete, each snail goes its own way, and the two might never meet again. After about one month, each lays a dozen or so eggs under rocks or in small crevices. Of these, usually 1–3 hatch into baby flail snails.

The young gastropods eat their own egg shells after hatching and are then cared for by the parent for the next two years—until their club-tentacles reach a weight of five pounds or so. At that point, they go off on their own, confident in their ability to survive. These half-grown snails inflict 1d6 points damage with their flailing appendages.

6. A flail snail's magical shell protects it from all magical energy directed at it—even spells that can be "targeted" at body parts other than the shell, like *magic missile.* Whenever a spell (or spell-like effect from a magical item) is cast at a flail snail, the following results occur (roll d%):

1d100	Result
01–40	Spell malfunction
41–70	Spell functions normally
71–90	Spell fails to function at all, but is expended
91–00	Spell is reflected back at the caster

Spell malfunctions are usually only slight variations of the standard spell effects, affecting the creature nearest to the snail at the time of the casting. If no other creatures are nearby (within the spell's area of effect), the spell is centered on a point near the snail (consult Table 45: Grenade-Like Missile Effects in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*).

Note that the shell affects only magic cast directly at the flail snail; it wouldn't prevent the creature from being crushed by a *wall of iron* that was created next to the snail and then tipped over onto it, for instance. Also, when a spell is cast successfully on a flail snail, the snail is still granted any normal saving throws permitted by the spell.

The shell constantly expands as the snail itself grows, with new shell material being added at the base, where the creature's head emerges. The shells can either grow clockwise or counter-clockwise; those growing clockwise are called "dextral" shells, while those growing in the other direction are called "sinistral." The direction of the spiral has no effect on the shell's powers.

7. Combat with a flail snail is handled differently than with most other monsters. Each of the snail's flailing appendages has 1 Hit Die and is treated as a separate creature. Flail snails attack as creatures with as many Hit Dice as they have active tentacles; a snail with five tentacles therefore attacks as a 5-HD creature, with a THAC0 of 15. When a tentacle is reduced to 0 hit points it is useless (if attacked with a bladed weapon, the tentacle is usually assumed to have been severed) and the flail snail drops one Hit Die in power. Once all tentacles have been destroyed, the flail snail withdraws into its shell and utters the most pitiful cries imaginable until it dies some 1–3 turns later. These cries have a 50% chance of attracting wandering monsters. The flail snail's death-wails are the only time it vocalizes—it is otherwise completely silent throughout its life.

The flail snail's body has hit points equal to the total of all of the tentacles, but it is protected by the thick shell and thus has an AC of –8. For purposes of combat, the shell itself is impervious to weapons.

Thus, when fighting a flail snail, two approaches can be taken. One can either hope to slowly hack away at the creature's well-protected body or face off against the flails themselves and take them out one by one. When hacking at tentacles, a PC need only hit AC 4. If successful, the player rolls a d6 or d4 (as appropriate) to determine which active tentacle was hit, rolls for damage, and the DM determines if the tentacle is still "alive" after the attack. If not, the flail snail drops by one Hit Die (affecting the creature's THAC0 and number of attacks in following rounds). In this way, a Warrior with 18/00 Strength and weapon specialization can't take out several tentacles with one stroke just because he caused 16 points of damage with his broadsword.

8. A flail snail's slimy mucus is produced by a gland at the front of its single foot. The mucus has several uses: Besides acting as a protective coating for the creature's skin (protecting it from fire and preventing it from drying out), it is necessary as a locomotive lubricant, without which the creature cannot move. Flail snails leave mucus trails behind as they move, making it easy to track them (at least, until the mucus dries and evaporates).

9. Like most land snails, flail snails living on or near the surface also estivate during the winter months. This is usually in response not to the air temperature but rather to the vegetation—or lack

Willowquisp chose to answer Spontayne's question. "Flail snails mostly eat lichen and algae that grows on the floors of dungeons, mines, and other underground areas. They scrape these substances up using an organ in their mouth called a radula—in effect, a long, flat tongue with numerous tiny, sharp teeth laid out in rows like a file."

"How does this help us?" repeated Dreelix with irritation in his voice.

"Hmm? Oh, the estivation," said Willowquisp. "It appears to me that some spell could be used to alter the temperature and humidity of the mine, forcing the snail into a state of estivation. Then we could lug the creature out of the mine and kill it at our leisure."

"What spell did you have in mind?" Dreelix wanted to know.

"I don't know. I leave that kind of thing up to you wizards."

"I personally have nothing in my spellbooks that can help us there," offered Zantoullios.

"Nor I," admitted Spontayne.

"Me neither," said Buntleby. "However, I believe there is a priestly spell, *control temperature* or something, that could help us. Perhaps if we contacted Delbert the druid ..."

"Absolutely not!" Dreelix exploded. "We don't need that greedy fool's help! The last time he charged us two silver scimitars to cast a lousy *locate animals or plants* spell, then upped his price to four after Grindle and Zantoullios bungled the first Shambler Hunt and we needed another spell!" Both Grindle and Zantoullios exchanged looks: neither remembered the fault having been theirs. Zantoullios shrugged; he was used to being blamed for things out of his control—like those healing potions he had whipped up. So they caused the imbiber's skin to turn green and warty for a few hours; they still worked, didn't they? He made a mental note to ease off on the powdered troll's blood for the next batch.

"Anyway," sputtered Dreelix, "I thought we agreed we weren't spending any money on this!" It was obvious that he was getting excited, for his face was becoming red and he was beginning to spray spittle as he spoke. Spontayne wiped an eye and vowed to sit in the back next time.

"Another approach then," suggested Willowquisp. "The creatures shun bright light;[10] perhaps we could drive it out of the mines with *continual light* spells or something similar."

"Why don't we just throw salt on the thing and be done with it?" asked Old Gumphrey. "I used to pour salt on slugs and snails all the time as a youth. Shriveled 'em up real good, it did!" he cackled.

"The problem there is the amount of salt required," replied Willowquisp.[11]

"Well, how about this," offered Buntleby. "We wizards load ourselves up with as many *reduce* spells as we can, then take turns casting them on the snail. Eventually, we shrink the snail down small enough that we can carry him out of the mine in one of our pockets."

"I thought you said spells bounce off the creature's shell," said Dreelix, surprising everyone by proving he had been paying attention for once.

"Well, they do," Buntleby admitted, "or at least some of them will. But enough *reduce* spells thrown at the beast will do the job, eventually. No doubt we'll also shrink a few of us, but that's easily fixed with a *dispel magic* or two."

thereof—to be found in the winter months. Immediately before sealing themselves up in their shells, they go on a feeding binge, storing up as much food as they can for the long winter months. Of course, flail snails living deep underground do not usually seasonally estivate, as the seasons have little if any effect on the amount of vegetation to be found that far below the earth.

10. This is instinctual behavior, as the sun can dry out the mucus that coats the creature's moist body. Bright lights themselves have no debilitating effect on flail snails.

11. The flail snail's outer coating of mucus protects it somewhat from the drying effects of salt. However, a large enough dose (for instance, the contents of a small belt pouch) thrown at a flail snail inflicts 2d4 points of damage the first round and an additional 1d4 points of damage the second round. After that, the snail's increased mucus production negates any further such attacks. The salt must strike the snail's soft body to be effective, as the creature's hard shell is impervious to being dried out in this fashion.

"It's the best idea we've heard so far," suggested Spontayne.

"Hmmph!" said Dreelix, not convinced. "Let's move on. What can we expect to reap from our efforts in killing the beast?"

"Ah, there we have good news indeed!" said Buntleby. "The main value of the creature is, of course, its shell, which has a market value of about 5,000 gold pieces and a wide number of magical uses."

"The most obvious use of the shell is the creation of magical shields," said Willowquisp, consulting his notes. "Two shields can be made from a single shell, which not only offer excellent protection from weapons, but also carry the shell's magical protection from spells for a number of months."[12]

"Optionally, the shell can be ground down and made into a *robe of scintillating colors*," said Buntleby.

"How many *robes* per shell?" quizzed Dreelix, warming to the subject.

"Alas, only one."

"Grindle, current value of such a robe?"

"About 25,000 gold," answered Grindle, who kept hundreds of such values stored in his head—he wasn't called "the Coin-Counter" for nothing. There were numerous appreciative whistles at the value, one of them belonging to none other than Finklebintzer the gnome.

"Anything else?" demanded Dreelix.

"Optionally, the shell can be brewed into several *potions of rainbow hues*," submitted Willowquisp.

"Grindle?"

"A negligible sum, compared to the robe."

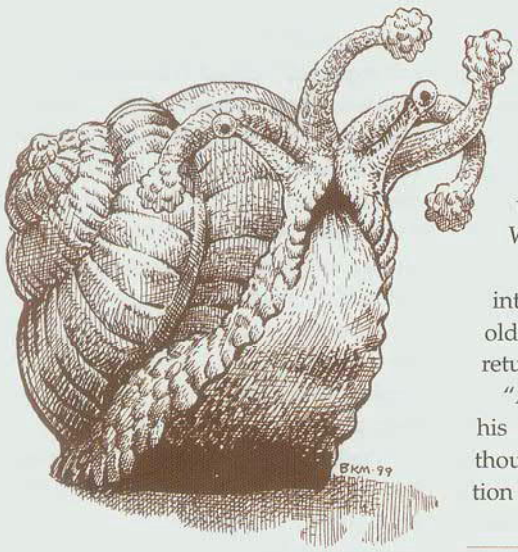
"I thought as much," replied Dreelix. "So then, anything else?" he asked to the two at the podium.

"It is believed that the creature's 'love darts' may be used in *philters of love*," said Buntleby.

"'Love darts?' What in the world is a love dart?"

"A small, sharp dart of shell-like material made in special sacs in the creature's body," answered Willowquisp. "You'd learn of things like this if you allowed us to brief fully, instead of concentrating only on combat and useful body parts. The flail snail mating ritual is really quite fascinating. First, the snails—"

"A subject for another time,"[13] interrupted Dreelix. "So, *philters of love*, huh? Okay, what else?"



"Nothing definite," admitted Buntleby. "Although given the creature's immunity to both fire and poison, it's possible that there are useful flail snail by-products that provide such protection as well.[14] That's all I've got. Willowquisp?"

"Nothing anybody here'd be interested in hearing," grumbled the old sage, packing up his notes and returning to his seat.

"All right, then," beamed Dreelix, his mood vastly improved by the thought of all the money the Association would soon be raking in. "We'll try that shrinking tactic of yours, I guess, Buntleby. All wizards able to cast the spells *reduce* and *dispel magic* will memorize them to capacity. We'll meet here tomorrow at first light. Any questions? No? Then thank you for bringing this to our attention, uh, Flinkyblinky, and rest assured, the monster is as good as dead. You may be excused from the rest of the meeting; we'll just be taking up other boring little bits of business, and you no doubt wish to be on your way ..."

"Actually, there is one final bit of business we need to discuss," replied the gnome.

"That being?"

"The sale of the flail snail. I have decided to withdraw our request for aid; instead, I now offer for sale a living flail snail, yours for the taking, for the small sum of 10,000 gold pieces, a price you will no doubt find very reasonable."

"WHAT?" roared Dreelix, as the audience members gasped in astonishment. "Ten thousand gold? What kind of a joke are you playing at?"

"No joke," replied the gnome. "You yourself said you stand to gain 25,000 pieces of gold from the magical robe you plan to make from the snail's shell; I see no reason why some of that money shouldn't be sent our way. We are, after all, a simple village of poor miners, and the sum will be put to good use. Plus, it's our snail, to do with as we wish, and we now wish to sell it."

"I thought the snail was a 'hideous, giant brute' and a 'terrible creature,'" pointed out Buntleby.

"After listening to your discussions, I have elevated it to the status of 'treasured pet.'"

"But what of your miners?" Buntleby continued. "Three have been killed so far; more deaths may occur."

"As has been pointed out, the crea-ture is essentially harmless—it killed only

12. These are *shields* +2 and provide protection from spells for 1–6 months in the same manner as the shell does for the living flail snail (40% chance of spell malfunction, 30% chance of it working normally, 20% chance of total negation, 10% chance the spell is reflected back at the spellcaster). Even after the spell-altering effects of the shield fade, it remains a *shield* +2.

13. Or, the subject of a footnote: Flail snails begin the mating ritual by slowly circling each other, then rubbing their heads and feet together. The love darts project from the creatures' bodies and stab into their partner, causing neither pain nor damage. Different snail species produce differently-shaped love darts, so it's very likely that this serves as a form of recognition for the two snails involved, to ensure that they're mating with an appropriate species (pretty embarrassing to have mated with the wrong species entirely, but we digress). It also stimulates the snails' bodies, preparing them for the act of mating. Flail snails cannot produce sperm cells without first having sampled their intended mate's love darts.

Hey, it works for them.

14. And there are: The stomach and liver of a flail snail, when ground up and mixed with flail snail blood, are valuable ingredients in an *elixir of health*, negating any previously-ingested poisons. Flail snail skin, along with a small coating of the mucus that normally covers it, when finely ground can be used in the creation of *potions of fire resistance*.

In addition, flail snail mucus, although not a standard ingredient, can be used to create *potions of climbing*. However, this thickens the potion so much that it takes two full rounds to imbibe (and does nothing to enhance the taste, to say the least).

those miners trying to kill it,"[15] responded Finklebintzer. "If we leave it alone, it should leave us alone. And I'm sure even we gnomes, with our stumpy little legs, can manage to outrun a snail, no matter how big!"

"This is preposterous!" thundered Dreelix. "Buntleby, I hold you personally responsible!"

"He's got a point, though," argued Buntleby. "I know we regularly exploit the creatures around us for their magical uses, but that doesn't mean we should similarly exploit those individuals who bring business our way. And we'd still be making fifteen thousand to our profit."

"We're not in the business of buying monster parts; we're bold Monster Hunters! We stalk and slay to our own advantage; we do not haggle over prices like fishwives at the market! Now, I think we've wasted enough time on this. Stinkyfink, if you no longer wish us to rid you of your snail—free of charge—then we have no further business to discuss, and I suggest you vacate the premises, before you are charged a wasting-the-Association's-valuable-time fee."

"Five thousand," offered the gnome.

"Out!"

The small gnome dropped from his chair to the floor and bounded out the door, giving Dreelix a nasty look and a gnomish hand-gesture of dislike on the way out.

Dreelix immediately turned back to Buntleby, face flushed with anger.

"Uh-oh, here it comes," whispered Buntleby to Willowquisp.

"Tirade time," agreed the elderly sage.

"Of all the arrogant, MONEY-GRUBBING little gnomish TOADS!" screamed Dreelix in fury, spittle flying freely in all directions. "Buntleby! How DARE you bring such a person in here without notice? You've not only WASTED our valuable time, but you've managed to BESMIRCH our good name in the neighboring communities! No doubt that GREEDY little pile of PIG-FILTH will return to his stinky little gnome-home and tell his fellow SHRIMPLINGS how the Monster Hunters refused him aid! This is all your fault! Why, I've got half a mind to ..."

Having heard enough, Buntleby caught Zantoullios' eye and saw reflected there a shared determination to put an end to Dreelix's ravings. Fair's fair, after all, he thought.

Standing as one, the two wizards began speaking in an arcane language, waggling their outstretched fingers at the red-faced leader of the Monster Hunters. Dreelix immediately stopped his ranting and raving and plopped back into his seat, a blank expression on his face.

The Monster Hunters in the audience watched in silence as Dreelix stared ahead at nothing. Then, blinking as if to clear his head, he looked around in confusion. Grabbing his gavel as if to draw strength from it, he spoke for the first time since the *forget* spells hit him.

"Where was I? Oh yes. It seems we have a rather heavy agenda tonight. After Grindle briefs us on the sad, sorry state of our coffers, we'll have an update on the problems with Zantoullios' latest batch of healing potions—something about unexpected and unpleasant side effects—what's everyone smirking about?"

Johnathan M. Richards does most of his flailing in the swimming pool. Swimming requires the kicking of legs, the stroking of arms, and proper breathing. Pick any two of the above, and he can handle it—it's only when he tries all three at once that he becomes a menace to those in his immediate vicinity.

15. If left alone, a flail snail is completely nonaggressive. It is only when other beings approach (within the 20' radius of it's sensory abilities) that the flail snail attacks with its flailing appendages. Even then, once the intruder steps out of range, the flail snail does not pursue and goes back to its algae-grazing. Only other giant snails are not attacked immediately; if a flail snail is approached by another giant snail, it begins production of a love-dart in anticipation of a possible mating.

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A little gnoll-ledge can be a dangerous thing

The Sociology of the Flind

by Spike Y. Jones

"Aidan, come away from the window."

"But I heard a wolf," whined the boy. "I want to see it. It sounded strange."

"Curiosity is fine in its own time, but now you must come away from the windows." Another eerie, laughing howl was heard, still distant but approaching through the cool autumn evening. "It's time you were off to bed."

"But it's not bedtime yet," a third voice chimed in, to be followed by a fourth. "Fiona's right, Mr. Farwanderer. We don't have to go to bed until the guests and the help start arriving in the common room. Father said so before he left."

"Tonight is different," replied the bard in a tone strangely weary and tense for a man usually more energetic than some half his age. "Go upstairs *now*."

"Might as well not argue," Aidan said to his sisters, a sly look crossing his freckled face as he thought about the upstairs windows. "We'd better just go."

Halfway up the stairs, the eldest, Grainne, silently stopped her siblings. Through the railing, they saw the bard shudder, then cross the room to take a bottle of wine back to the fire. He settled himself uneasily in his chair and began to drink at an uncharacteristically quick pace, pausing every few gulps to peer over his shoulder at the windows and the door that led outside to the lingering twilight.

Ignoring the bards orders, Grainne silently returned to the ground floor, the others following at her heels. "Mr. Farwanderer," she began, but faltered when the surprised bard spat a mouthful of wine into the air. The nearly full bottle crashed to the rush-strewn floor.

"Child, what are you doing skulking behind me?" snapped the bard. He appeared more agitated than before. "I thought I sent you away!"

"You're afraid of something!" blurted Aidan, hoping to redirect the bard's anger. "It's the wolf outside, isn't it?"

Brendan Farwanderer paused, an angry

Artwork by Jim Holloway

banishment on his lips. He saw the concern on the faces of his charges, then swallowed and nodded, visibly controlling himself. "I am . . . concerned." He bent forward to put an arm across the boy's shoulders. "And yes, it is because of the howlings. But those are not the sounds of a wolf, and it is not the beast but the message he brings that worries me."

Hoping for the beginning of a story, Grainne drew her little sister Fiona to the child's usual seat at the foot of the bards chair, but when Aidan made to go to the board for a bottle to replace the one lost, the storyteller restrained him. "No, boy, it is probably best that I not drink any more this evening. And I cannot afford to sit down for this tale, as I have preparations to make. Attend as you will, for I shall be moving a bit."

The bard began to assemble provisions and equipment on the room's center table, gathering them from the shelves of the inn's kitchen and storerooms with his single hand, his right. The children hesitated briefly before rising to their feet to follow him about.

"At a time just after you were born, Aidan, maybe ten years ago, I was on an expedition in the Imbran Mountains. There were six of us: three warriors, an enchanter, a priest of Marduk, and myself. At first, we had no clear goals but to find adventure, win fame, and possibly make profit. Eventually, we got ourselves hired for a mission; to remove a troublesome band of gnolls from one mountain valley before they denuded it of all game. There was a single human village at the valley's end, and a few villagers had been attacked by these beasts when the former were out hunting in the wilds. It was feared that the gnolls would turn on the settlement once other prey became scarce.

"At first, we thought that it would be an easy thing to eliminate the gnolls, for we consistently found them in groups smaller than our own. In a few of the encounters, the gnolls we faced threw their weapons away and dropped to the ground in surrender." [1]

The bard paused in his tale-telling to select a few dusty items from an alcove off of the inn's common room. As he pulled out a short sword, his voice became deeper and quieter.

"Unfortunately for those creatures, one of our warriors, Hrarfarr of Pah, was a forest-wise barbarian whose mountain tribe considered surrender to be the most dishonorable thing a man could do. Every time one of the gnolls put himself at our mercy, Hrarfarr immediately slew him. And none of the rest of us said a word to censure Hrarfarr, for it was both a matter of honor for him and of logistics for us. We could think of no way to deal with a growing collection of prisoners, and to release our enemies into the forests would have resulted in future attacks by an enemy forewarned."

Brendan Farwanderer's voice regained its normal timbre. "After a few days of these skirmishes, Hrarfarr returned from scouting in the valley to announce that he had found the lair of the gnolls we'd been meeting individually thus far. We soon made for the ruined citadel where he said the gnolls were, but darkness fell as we arrived. Although we had set up some of our previous ambuscades at night, we decided that it would be best to use the advantage of full daylight for this assault. We believed—wrongly—that the noctural gnolls would be at a disadvantage.[2]

"The quality of Hrarfarr's scouting was soon proven, for our nearby quarry made the night almost unbearable with an hours-long chorus of the same laughing, barking howls that we heard earlier tonight. But there was a difference in the sounds we heard that night, something more sinister that set our hair on end and denied us anything but the most fitful of sleep. When the sun rose, we were still tired, and only Hrarfarr's exhortations prevented us from postponing our mission until another day.[3]

"We crept into the ruins, seeking to eliminate the perimeter guards one by one and thus spring upon the main camp without warning. At first, this seemed to be successful, as we encountered only solitary or paired gnolls as we had in the days previously. All surrendered, to be slain by Hrarfarr or the other fighters. We had silenced more than a few guards when Marduk's priest noticed something disquieting. Our most recent victim was armed not with the simple club we'd encountered to that point, but with a curious weapon made of a pair of short iron bars linked by a chain, which he used in a most facile manner to disarm one of our fighters before finally surrendering and being despatched. This weapon the priest identified as a flindbar, and he informed us that the creatures we faced were not normal gnolls at all, but a tougher and more intelligent variety referred to as flinds.[4] But we were already committed and so made nothing of this information.

"After a few more of our little ambushes, we found the tables turned on us." The bard paused at a dark memory. "The flinds had sacrificed a number of their own in order to lure us deeper into the ruins, to an area of ***their*** choosing. Upon engaging our next pair of beastmen in melee, the toppled pillars and ruined houses spewed forth flinds at all quarters.[5] We were set upon by scores of them, those in the forefront wielding their flindbars with blinding speed. Quite contrary to our designs, they split our party asunder before we could assume a proper defensive posture.

"In little time at all, Hrarfarr and I were isolated from the others, surrounded and unable to retreat. After a few moments more, all other sounds of combat ceased; we two were the only surviving remnant of our band.

"Much to my surprise, the flinds did not press their advantage. Rather, they retreated a pace and took defensive stances as if waiting for something. Before I could turn to my remaining companion and suggest a prudent course of action, he bellowed his barbaric war cry and charged forward, to be bludgeoned to death from numerous directions in less time than it takes to tell of it."

Brendan was silent for a moment, remembering, before he continued. "Knowing that I had little hope of fighting my way out, I realized what it was the flinds were waiting for. Mimicking the actions of the many defeated flinds we had slain, I dropped my sword and fell to the ground in the center of the circle of my enemies, praying that I had not misjudged them.

"After removing from me anything that could be used as a weapon and binding me securely, these flinds began arguing among themselves, barking at the top of their voices with only occasional glances at their prisoner. Before long, one, evidently their leader, turned to me and began to ask questions in a variety of strange tongues, the third of which, Orcish, I understood. Once he had found a language we held in common, he immediately ordered all his tribe to conduct their argument in that tongue, 'for the benefit of our guest,' he said.

"To my dismay, they were fighting over the method of my execution. One suggestion was that I be sold to a party known as the Human-Hunters, whom I was later told were a clan of gnolls that stalked and ate humans to the exclusion of all other races, even keeping a few alive in pens to be used for ritual sacrifices to their evil god. But my captors were too revenge-hungry to allow others to sacrifice me as their totem.[6]

"That option discarded, some recommended that I be entered into slavery, suggesting some sort of ritual disfigurement to avenge the deaths of those flinds whose honorable surrenders my party had betrayed, but agreement could not be reached on what the disfigurement would involve: eyes, ears, both, more, whatever."

"Hands?" whispered Aidan, prompting tears to well up in little Fiona's eyes. The children involuntarily glanced at the place where the bard's left arm ended in a stump.

"No, not hands. A slave without hands is of little worth, Aidan. Those who wanted my hands removed suggested that only as a preliminary to other tortures.

"Finally, the hotheads won out over those advocating slavery, and it was decided that I was to be slowly roasted alive. But before they completed preparations for my pyre, a ripple appeared in the ranks of flinds surrounding me, and one flind approached, accompanied by a trio of foul undead.[7]

"This one was apparently the highest-ranking witch doctor in the tribe, and he came making a demand. His son and apprentice had been killed in one of our

earlier ambushes. As the shaman put it, his son had been stolen from this world by our party. As I had already been condemned to death, he demanded that my execution be in the form of a ritual death and rebirth as his new son: a man stolen from the world of humans and forcibly adopted into the clan of the flind.[8]

"The leader of those demanding my death was apparently the mightiest warrior of the lot whose name translated to Grinds-Bone-To-Dust in Orcish. He stepped forward and told the witch doctor, whose name was All-Fear-His-Howl, that my fate was sealed and that nothing could be done to change his mind. The witch doctor was not easily dissuaded and began to harangue the warrior—at first in Orcish, as they had both been speaking for my benefit, but eventually reverting to their own tongue as the argument became more heated.

"As the volume of their howling increased, the two made threatening gestures at each other. Grinds-Bone-To-Dust swung his flindbar within inches of All-Fear-His-Howl's face, while the latter in turn brought forth various magical tokens and threatened dire enchantments in the warrior's direction. The fur on both of them stood on end, making them look half again as large and fearsome to me, the object of their squabble.

"Finally, the witch doctor gained the upper hand when he gestured his undead guardians forward to stand at his side, then presented one particularly powerful talisman that I later was told would have summoned a special unholy assistant directly from their demonic lord.[9]

"The warrior's fur immediately fell back to its normal place, and he seemed to shrink in the face of the witch doctor's threat. Backing away, he made to leave. But as his eyes lit upon me, the hatred he obviously still harbored for the other flind was revealed. A shrewd look appeared on him, and he raised himself erect to inform the assembled band that he respected All-Fear-His-Howl's decision and would personally insure that I, whom he dubbed Long-Legged-Child, became a perfect example of a flind. For if I failed in any respect, he would slay not only me for my failing, but also the witch doctor and his entire family line for forcing an imperfection on the tribe.

"Over the course of the next year, I was forcibly taught much flind lore by my so-called father, who feared that my mistakes would cost him his life. I learned even their history and the intricacies of their language and social structure. I was treated not as a human changeling but exactly as a flind. Thus, I was bruised and beaten many a time by males, females, and even those pups who realized they could get away with it, usually led by the offspring of Grinds-Bone-To-Dust who had appointed themselves my tormentors.[10] Violence is integral to the life of a flind, as I learned to my grief; it is part of the process of toughening the tribe, or so they see it. This treatment went on until I gained the skill with the flindbar needed to defend myself against my more powerful 'relatives.'[11]

"In retrospect, it is well that I did not fall into the claws of common gnolls. The flinds, though they share many of the manners of their less pleasant cousins, are more likely to obey the rulings of their leaders and work together as a whole. Being now considered a flind, I was immune to outright murder. Had I been among gnolls, one group or the other would have done for me long ago, regardless of what the witch doctor had decided. It was poor comfort that long year.

"At first, I was resolved to play the part of a happy convert. But before the year was out, I could no longer play the role, as I was introduced to a practice that I could not be forced to suffer. During one of the tribe's nomadic migrations, we came a cross an isolated farmhouse that the warriors attacked. I could do nothing to save those who were murdered there. Instead of eating the bodies of those they slew, the flinds abandoned them to go through the gate to a recently dedicated cemetery behind the house, where they immediately set to digging."

"When they came upon the bodies there, All-Fear-His-Howl stepped forward and inspected them all, claiming the one in the best repair as his own and magnanimously declaring the rest to be the property of the warriors, who immediately set to squabbling over who got first pick of the disinterred remains. Once the flinds had settled the question of rank, they began to eat the bodies. Before my reeling stomach could betray me, the witch doctor pulled me aside to demonstrate another atrocity.

"He forced me to carry the corpse he had selected to the site of the massacre of the farm's inhabitants and, as I followed him, I was followed by his trio of ghouls, all hoping to somehow get a taste of the body. I was ordered to place the corpse next to the remains of the newly dead. All-Fear-His-Howl then began to perform some ritual over the bodies.

"After an interminable period, the exhumed body began to twitch and rock, while the recent kills became flaccid and empty of all contents, now little more than a collection of bones and skin. And then, suddenly, the jerking corpse's eyes opened, and it stood up, the horrible stench of the dead assaulting my senses like never before. The witch doctor had created a more powerful undead servant in the form of a ghast.[13]

"After seeing these depravities, I was awakened to the fact that I had almost resigned myself to spending the rest of my life with these monsters. Nothing could then convince me to continue in their unholy company. I renewed my interest in

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delivering myself from them. Eventually, I found an opportunity to escape when my tribe encountered a small tribe of orcs that we set upon. While the flind tribe was engaged in the wholesale slaughter of their neighbors, I made good my escape. As I have not encountered a flind in the years since, I made the assumption that I had been forgotten by them, or that they had written me off as if I were a bad debt."

As far as the children could tell, Brendan Farwanderer's packing was finished. He had collected all of the materials a man would need for a journey of a week or more, including a shirt of fine chain and the sword he'd handled earlier. For some reason, he didn't put on the armor or pick up his pack; he merely stood, silently staring at his equipment.

"Mr. Farwanderer—" began Aidan, but he never finished his thought.

Without warning, the door to the inn banged open. The children jumped; the bard did not move. As a cold evening wind brushed past them, what appeared to be an elderly or crippled man shuffled painfully in, supported by the strong arm of another, apparently younger, man.[14] Both were wrapped from head to toe in thick cloaks, with even their faces covered and hidden inside dark cowls. Neither of them unwrapped himself, nor did either move to sit near the banked fire or at one of the long benches along the walls. For almost a minute, the older one stood hunched in the doorway, his unseen face apparently directed at the bard, who kept his back stiffly turned to the newcomers.

"Long-legs, come," the old one said in a harsh, muffled accent, breaking the tense silence. His mouth did not seem right, as if it were more an animal's muzzle and unused to speaking human words. "Leave pups. Time now be adult!'

"Yes, a moment," the bard said, then focused his attention on the children. His face was drawn and white. "Every gnoll or flind must prove himself to his clan by stalking and killing a creature from his tribe's totem race, thereafter to be counted an adult. If he does not perform this duty within the span of one generation, he is slain by the leaders of the tribe, to prevent the taint of cowardice from spreading.[15] I made good my escape before performing this task, but there is now a delegation from my tribe, undoubtedly composed of Grinds-Bone-To-Dust and a party of his sons and grandsons, waiting for me now outside."

He paused. When he tried again to speak, his words caught on something and he had to clear his throat before beginning anew. "If I do not do their bidding, they will slay my 'father' and then do their best to kill all of his kin, including any human children they mistakenly count as All-Fear-His-Howl's adopted grandchildren."

"And his true grandchildren, 'uncle'," growled the able-bodied stranger in rough Common, having overheard the conversation from across the room. "They will kill us all if you fail your tribe. Unless someone from your own family doesn't kill you first, you who runs from adulthood."

The bard moved again, folding the mail shirt into his pack and easing the satchel across his shoulders. The children were silent, stunned by the implications of these last statements. Finally, Grainne spoke up. "Shouldn't we be doing something?" she whispered, her eyes on the visitors and her arms reaching down for her siblings, to pull them close.

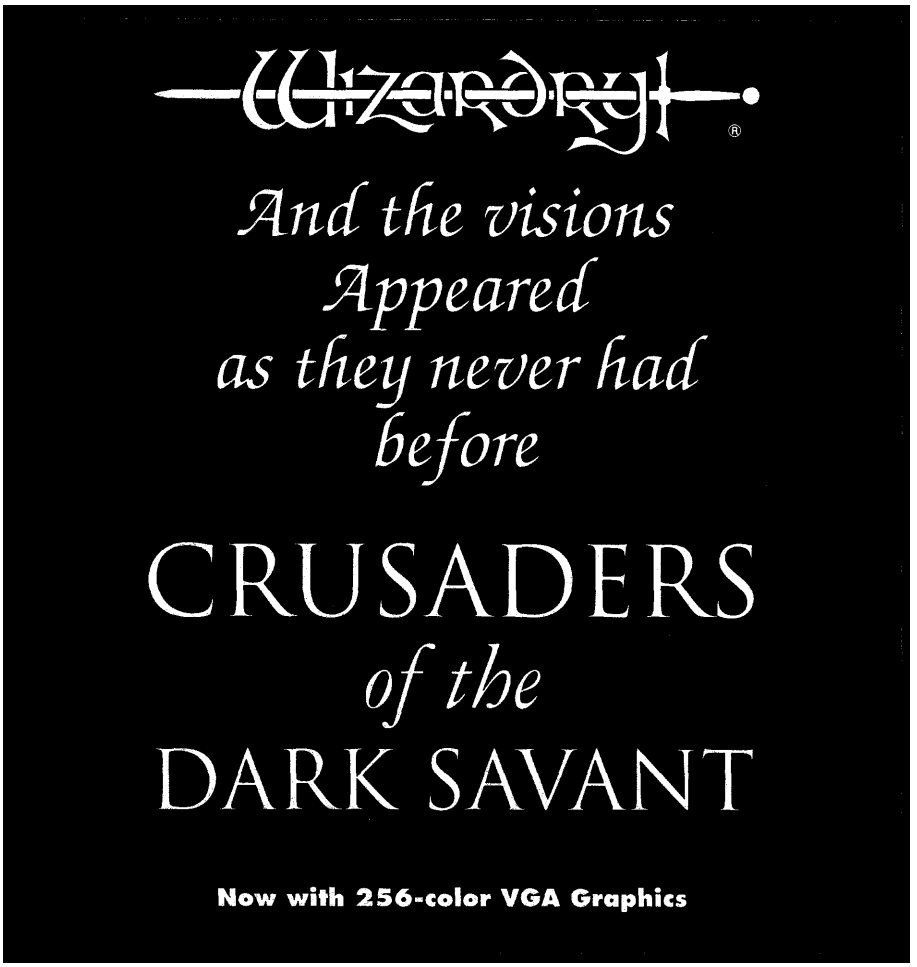
"We could call out the town militia," Aidan suggested in a remarkably restrained manner.

"No, Aidan," said the bard softly. "Grinds-Bone-To-Dust's forces will be waiting for just such an excuse to slaughter all in this town without fear of repercussions from the rest of the tribe. When your father returns home from the markets of Thamox, tell him this tale and tell him to circumspectly prepare the defense of the town, but warn him to make no overtly hostile moves. You should be safe enough alone until the tavern help and guests arrive in a few hours, if I give the flinds no cause to doubt my willingness to comply with their bloody custom. And if you bar the doors and windows, as I had meant to do."

Turning, Farwanderer gingerly picked up his sword, then crossed the room to put it back in its alcove. He returned with a well-wrapped bundle that he placed on the table.

"The word 'flind' is thought by some to have once been merely the name of a particularly strong gnoll clan. If so, that clan is now a thing unto itself. 'Flind' means 'cannibal' or 'gnoll-eater' in Gnollish.[16] Flinds, though they are the masters of all gnolls, hate their lesser cousins scarcely less than they hate all other beings. To become an adult, a flind must slay a gnoll to prove the prey's unworthiness and the hunter's superiority. The howling that we heard earlier was that of All-Fear-His-Howl, telling any gods, flinds, or gnolls within hearing that his 'son' will meet his obligation tonight, or die trying. And thus, I must go." The bards voice dropped to a husky whisper, "If the gods of man go with me, I will return an adult in the eyes of the flind a few days hence, and I will be able to order my . . . kin, as it were, to leave us in peace."

Removing the oiled cloth from the parcel, Brendan hefted a pair of chain-linked iron bars in the lamp light. Then he left the inn, closely following his father and nephew in their all-enveloping cloaks.



Footnotes

Flinds and gnolls are detailed in the AD&D® 2nd Edition ***Monstrous Compendium*** (under "Gnoll") and in the AD&D 1st Edition ***Monster Manual I*** (page 46) and FIEND FOLIO® tome (page 39). Also see "The humanoids" in the ***Best of DRAGON® Magazine*** anthology, vol. V, pages 54-57.

1. Unlike some other evil humanoids, gnolls and flinds rarely continue a losing fight to the point of their own deaths. If outnumbered or beaten, they attempt to flee or, if that's not possible, surrender by throwing away their weapons and falling face down on the ground, leaving themselves to the attacker's mercy. Because it is standard gnoll behavior, they recognize the same sort of posture when performed by enemies (including such variations as standing upright with empty palms turned outward or with empty hands in the air, or even approaching with an empty hand out-thrust to be shaken). Usually, unless extremely hungry, enraged, or when attacking a totem creature (see note 6 below), they respect such behavior—for a while, at least.

2. Gnolls have 60' infravision and prefer to hunt at night. Their senses are all animal-sharp, so that they can follow a scent day or night almost as well as a human could follow a visible trail during the day. They can see quite well in the dark, and their hearing is as good as a watchdog's. If given a choice between attacking a human target in light or in darkness, they chose the dark, as their opponent is at a disadvantage. Gnolls and flinds are not at all hampered by sunlight and, unlike orcs, fight during the day with no penalties.

3. The laughing, hyenalike howls of the flinds and gnolls are social challenges that list the personal history of the howler, including his lineage and family history, his name and personal triumphs, and finally the descriptive threats of what will occur when the gnoll defeats an enemy in combat. In special cases, when a gnoll or flind expects to face a member of his clan totem-race (see note 6 below), the challenge will be made longer by a detailing of the clan history.

A normal challenge lasts as long as 10 minutes (depending on the age and history of the howler), while an extended challenge can last longer than half an hour. As it would take hours for all members of a large group to make their challenges, these howls will not be heard every time one encounters gnolls, but only when considerable warning of an attack is deemed harmless.

Tribal etiquette requires that howlers take turns, with leaders making the first challenges, followed by the rest in descending order of rank within the band. If, as often happens, two gnolls begin their challenges simultaneously, the two will raise the volume of their recital while also expanding upon their personal glories in an attempt to force the other to stop howling (an admission of inferiority). If neither gives in, the dispute is settled in one of two ways: Normal gnolls enter into a duel that rarely continues to the death (see note l), while flinds leave the matter until the two disputants enter combat with an outside enemy, with the valor shown on the battlefield deciding the matter.

Any group subjected to an extended bout of gnoll-howling (longer than one hour) will have to make a morale roll in order to resist the urge to rout. This applies only to NPCs; player characters should be told that they feel exceptionally uncomfortable, and the actions of any NPCs in the group, including animals, must be rolled for. Even if the morale check is made, future checks will be at -1 (cumulative daily, up to -10) during the next day. Thus, in an extended campaign against a large number of gnolls, the nightly howling is almost assured to cause some desertions in the ranks of non-gnolls.

Those who can understand the barked language of gnolls or flinds can ignore the effects of this howling, as they can concentrate on the meaning of the howls instead of the nature of them. Of course, a long night of graphic death threats may not be conducive to sleep, either.

4. While the physical differences between gnolls and flinds are apparent to one versed in monster lore, to an ignorant warrior in the middle of melee these two races are indistinguishable. It is more likely that outward signs, like the flind's

preference for blunt weapons (such as flindbars), will serve to distinguish the two for the average adventurer better than intrinsic body features such as the shape of ear or the slope of brow, or differences in lifestyle that are only exposed to those making in-depth studies.

5. Although they travel in groups of 2-12, gnolls and flinds are often encountered as solitary individuals who turn out to be outrunners or stragglers from a slightly larger group. Gnolls are individually very independent, so an encountered group of 2-12 might be spread out over a few hundred square yards of woods, in pairs or alone in a round or two, all close in on the sounds of an attack against one of their number. Still, while nominally chaotic, gnolls respond to strong threats by grouping together to fight the menace before splitting up again when safe. Flinds are far more organized, having standard tactics and a rough (if abused) chain of command. Flinds sometimes mimic this loose formation anyway to lure the unwary into traps that normal gnolls would rarely think of nor be able to organize.

6. Gnoll society is divided into a number of clans, each with its own clan totem—a specific race of prey that has religious significance to the clan. Among other ritual uses for these totem creatures is ritual sacrifice to Yeenoghu (AD&D 1st Edition ***Monster Manual I,*** **pages** 19-20, and 1st Edition ***Legends & Lore,*** page 94), as the sacrifice of a creature that isn't of the clan's totem race is unlikely to win the archfiend's favor. Gnoll tribes led by flinds, as well as flind tribes themselves, sometimes keep specimens of the tribal totem for just such purposes.

The most common totem races are goblins, humans, gnomes, halflings, and elves (but not dwarves, as they are too stoic during combat and torture to be interesting). Some gnoll clans have totems that are stronger than individual gnolls, and their tribes are composed of only the bravest of gnolls, but they are rarely large tribes. Such clans include the ettin and giant hunters.

Conversely, some large tribes have weak totems, such as kobolds or nonintelligent prey like deer or zebras. These tribes have a low status among gnolls, but they are also quite long-lived due to the ease of conforming to the demands of their religion.

The large gnoll clans are divided into numerous smaller tribes of 20-200 adult males (young and females are almost ignored by the males). Two tribes from the same clan will almost never fight with each other, often joining together for short periods of time to attack particularly large targets. Unrelated tribes are generally less friendly; the only time a tribe of gnolls won't leap upon a tribe of a different clan (except when prevented by a strong leader) is when the other tribe is of equal or greater strength.

The purpose of combat between tribes is not to kill the opposing tribe, but to either gain slaves from among the survivors or merely to establish which of the two tribes is the stronger in a way that neither can dispute. To avoid such battles, obviously weaker tribes will sometimes pay tribute to the stronger in the form of slaves (taken from among their own slaves, not from the tribe's members), especially if they have slaves from the stronger tribe's totem race.

Because they are trained in specific tactics to use against their totem creature, and because of the ferocity religious fervor adds to their actions, gnolls have +1 to hit, damage, and morale when attacking their totem race. Unfortunately, this ferocity means that gnolls attacking their totem tend to lose themselves in the activity. Thus, they won't accept the surrender of a totem creature if it is offered in the heat of combat.

7. All gnolls and flinds worship the archfiend Yeenoghu, and a few gnolls (two in 100) and flinds (three in 100) become shamans or witch doctors who have a closer and more powerful relationship to their deity. Gnolls can be shamans of up to 5th level, or witch doctors of up to 5th level as clerics and 2nd level as mages. Flinds can attain the same shaman level as

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normal gnolls, but as witch doctors they can reach 3rd level as mages.

As with other tribal spell-casters, the spell selection of gnolls and flinds is extremely limited. Unlike other races, these spell-casters typically choose spells to enhance their own power, not necessarily for the betterment of the tribe. Gnolls do not hold any great respect for their shamans, but they do fear them, and fear is a more effective form of command in the chaotic gnoll society. Flinds respect their spell-caster but still curse them in public.

Their favored spells include: ***command, protection from evil*** (as gnolls often fear each other more than good-aligned outsiders), ***shillelagh, enthrall, hold person*** (to emulate the paralysis power of their deity's chosen undead henchmen), ***armor, shield, invisibility, irritation,*** and ***strength.***

In addition to their personal powers, gnoll spell-casters have other ways of instilling fear in lesser beings, the most common of these being that they are often (60%) accompanied by 1-6 ghouls that they automatically control, as these undead are a gift from their deity.

8. Those who surrender to gnolls will usually be killed or made slaves, but a rare few of those taken will be adopted into the tribe to replace tribe members killed during the capturing process. Such adoptions are usually only made of gnolls from other tribes, but there have been cases when members of other races are so adopted (this is more common among flinds).

9. Another gift that Yeenoghu occasionally grants his most powerful shamans (those of 5th level) is the ability to summon a special form of guardian, a giant, glowing, undead hyaenodon called a shoosuva. For more details concerning gnoll shamans and the shoosuva, see "The Humanoids," in the ***Best of DRAGON Magazine*** anthology, vol. V.

10. The lair of a flind tribe is similar to that of normal gnolls. It contains 10-100 males, females totalling up to 75% of that number, and young (who mature at five years of age) up to twice the number of females. Females are as powerful as males but are rarely if ever proficient with flindbars. In addition, there will be one slave (of any race) for every five males in the tribe. For every 20 normal male flinds, there is one leader (as described in the ***Monstrous Compendium),*** and the strongest of these will be considered the chieftain.

Experience point values for the various flind types are: normal flinds—65; flindbar-armed flinds: 120; flind leaders (all with flindbars; includes chieftain): 175. Experience-point values of shamans and witch doctors must be calculated using the tables on page 47 of the ***Dungeon Master's Guide.***

11. The flindbar is a weapon similar to the Oriental nunchaku, but slightly smaller and less damaging. Anyone but a wizard who is adopted into a flind clan can learn this weapon in a few months if he has an open proficiency slot. The flindbar can be used for parrying and for normal strike/thrust attacks, getting two attacks per round and doing 1-4 hp damage on each hit. It cannot be used for called shots or disarming attacks (as described on pages 65-66 of the ***Complete Fighter's Handbook),*** but when used against small- to man-sized foes holding weapons, successful flindbar attacks automatically disarm opponents who fail to save vs. wands (with two-handed weapons granting the holder a bonus of +4 on the save).

Anyone without proficiency in the flindbar who attempts to use one in combat has (along with the normal nonproficiency penalty to hit) a chance of injuring himself when attempting any strike, parry, or disarming maneuver. If a 1 is rolled on the attack die, not counting any modifiers at all, then the user of the flindbar has hit himself, taking 1-4 hp damage and dropping the weapon if a save vs. wands is failed. (If the DM is already using the optional critical fumble system from the ***DMG,*** page 61, a nonproficient flindbar user will suffer this fumble result on a roll of a 1 or 2.)

12. One group of scents that the gnoll's keen sense of smell is practiced at detecting are those involved in the burial of dead humanoids. If the scents of freshly turned earth and dead meat reaches their snouts, they are more likely to seek out this source of food than they are to go through the trouble of hunting on their own. While the scent of slightly rotten flesh is revolting to a human, gnolls and flinds—the worshipers of the prince of ghouls—find it almost irresistible. If flinds are settled into an area and are not desperately hungry, they sometimes bury their kills in a guarded area in order to "age" them as a delicacy. Most gnoll tribes have yet to take up this practice.

13. While Yeenoghu grants the gift of ghouls and shoosuvas to both gnoll and flind spell-casters, one gift is reserved for his more intelligent priests. Some 20% of flind shamans of 4th or higher level know of a special ritual to create a ghast. A spell caster with this spell in his repertoire rarely has more than one ghast in his entourage, because ghasts are more independent than ghouls, obeying commands only 50% of the time (although they will never willingly attack the shaman who created them). Another method of ghast creation is described on page 19 of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® supplement, REF5 ***Lords of Darkness.***

14. Because gnolls are usually encountered at least partly if raggedly dressed, one does not always notice the fact that their legs are short for their body length, if one uses the human form as a standard for comparison. Although this makes a gnoll look somewhat clumsy to differently

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proportioned humanoids, it does not in any way hamper their movements. The normal walk of a gnoll resembles the rolling stride of a human sailor returning to land after a long ocean voyage. When a gnoll is at a run, he will bend deeply at the waist so that his arms are almost brushing the ground. This awkward, hunched running posture becomes more pronounced as a gnoll ages, so that the elderly (those over 30 years old) often maintain this bent attitude even when walking or just standing still.

15. This requirement to kill a member of the totem race in order to be considered an adult gnoll is not a hard and fast one. Small or weak bands tend to ignore the law in order to preserve their population, while tribes with totems such as a troll or hill giant usually relax the rule to allow a party of adolescent gnolls to attack one of these creatures in concert, with all of the survivors claiming the kill. Normally, this initiation rite is undertaken when the young gnoll is 8-10 years old, but some (such as those in giant-hunting tribes) don't perform this task until their prime adulthood, 15-25 years of age. If a gnoll is adopted into a different gnoll clan, he is considered a child again and must fulfill this requirement anew in order to become an adult of the new clan.

16. Many flinds have the gnoll as their totem animal, so it is unlikely that a player character will ever have to worry about the bonuses flinds receive when attacking their totems (the bonuses are the same as those for normal gnolls). Because flinds have dominated other gnoll clans for unknown centuries, they hold themselves as if they were a different species, never stooping so low as to voluntarily mate with their weaker cousins. This dominant position is made easier by the flinds higher intelligence and the use of the flindbar. Ω

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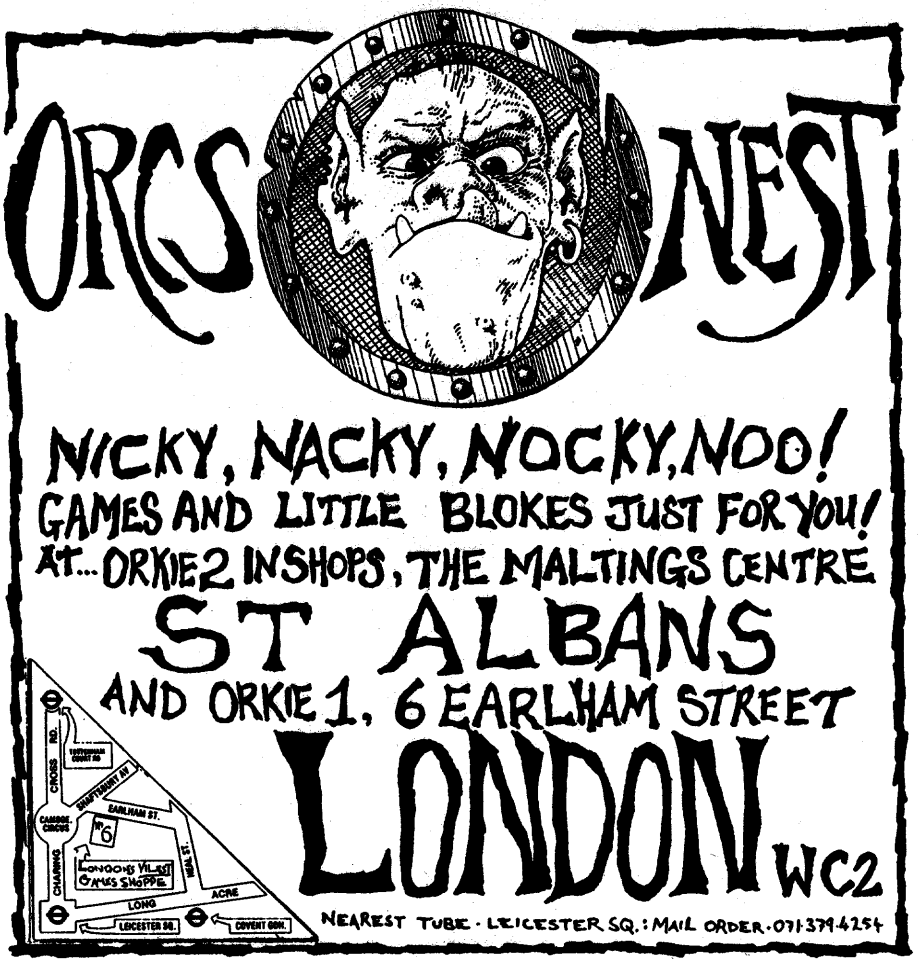

Letters

Continued from page 5

From what I recall in the original letter, I have come up with these solutions to the problem:

1. Give Norb to Andre and Gwendolyn, since there will always be someone looking out for him. Let Andre and Gwendolyn switch back and forth on adventures.

2. Joint custody may also be a solution. It would be hard for Norb, but both parties would be satisfied. (This should be a last resort.)

3. Give Norb to Sir Ronis, but on one condition: to never leave Norb unless it was with someone he could trust.

I'm still in favor of advancing the campaign by 16 years to let Norb go adventuring on his own. It's a heck of a lot simpler that way But a cruel DM could force all three "parents" to live together and care for Norb, who will no doubt love the arrangement and take every advantage of it. ("Norb, I'm sure Daddy Ronis will be happy to buy you another Teenage Mutant Ninja Tarrasque if you would only tell him where you hid his bill-guisarme collection.")

Dear Dragon,

I'm writing to talk about girls. It may not seem important, but for me as a player, a DM, and a boy, it is. Where are girls at role-playing games? I'm 15 years old now, and I have been playing AD&,D® games for about a year. It may not seem like much, but I have talked to long-time players and we have all had the same experience: We've never played with girls. When I DMed for a group of about six people, I always encouraged them to bring some girls along to the session, but none came. I began to panic and took a decision to go wandering around the streets and asking girls what they think about the AD&D game. Well, the results weren't that good. Of the 70 girls I asked, about 80% looked at me and ***[The editor apologizes, but he is unable to continue with this letter. It's just too cruel.1***

Dear TSR

I have come to write about a question. When Bronson was the DM he brought us into the fucher, and his character Lambirant was shot by a .44 and he said it would only do 1d4 points of dammage. Well I said no way. So he is telling me a bullet does the same dammage of an arrow. So we both desided to write to you people down at TSR, well we hope you will give us an idil of what a bullet would do. As in hit point wise.

When all of the characters went back into time Dacian who is my character brought 5 guns with him, as in .44, .45, and .357 magnum. So before Dacian goes shoting the guns we wanted to write you.

The best advice I can give you is that it's never too late to get a girlfriend. Ω

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THE ECOLOGY OF the Flumph

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Terry Dykstra

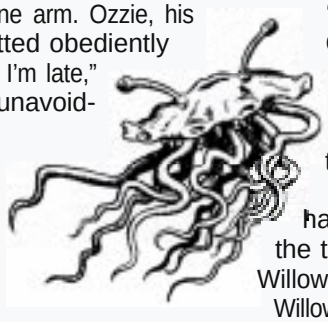
"WELL THEN, if there is no further business," said Dreelix, his gavel raised in the air to strike the table, "I hereby declare this meeting of the Monster Hunters Associa—"

He was cut off in mid-sentence by a commotion in the doorway. Buntleby bustled into the meeting hall, out of breath and with a large, squirming sack tucked under one arm. Ozzie, his osquip familiar, trotted obediently at his feet. "I'm sorry I'm late," he said, "but I was unavoidably detained."

"Late?" squeaked Dreelix. "I was just about to adjourn! You must learn to be a bit more punctual if you wish to continue in this prestigious . . . guh! By the gods! What is that smell?"

Dreelix wasn't the only one to notice. All around the room, the collected wizards and sages that made up the Monster Hunters Association were getting a good whiff of the stench that Buntleby seemed to have brought into the meeting hall with him. Throughout the room, nostrils flared and noses wrinkled in disgust. Lady Ablasta raised a perfumed handkerchief to her nose and pretended not to notice as others administered table napkins or bits of their own cloaks or robes in an attempt to ward off the vile odor.

"Oh, that. Sorry. I sort of had a little encounter on the way here..." Buntleby reached into his bag and pulled out its contents—a whitish, disk-shaped creature with writhing tentacles on top.



"I don't want to hear about it! Get out of here with that thing!"

"Wait!" said Spontayne, a taciturn scholar who seldom spoke up. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Beats me," said Buntleby. "I haven't the foggiest idea what the thing is. I was hoping maybe Willowquisp could tell us."

Willowquisp the Zoophile, an elderly sage with a fondness for all of nature's creatures—even the silly ones—squinted over at his friend. "Why, bless my soul!" he said. "That looks like a flumph!" Spontayne nodded his head in agreement.

"It attacked one of my osquips," Buntleby said. "I managed to capture it, but not before it squirted some foul-smelling gunk all over me. It seems harmless enough now, but it has some unusual properties, and I thought maybe the Association might want to study it."

"Fine, fine," agreed Dreelix, barely understandable as he spoke with his left hand over his nose and mouth. "I hereby appoint Willowquisp, Spontayne, and Buntleby as a subcommittee to study the creature. Zantoullios, maybe you'd better join them. Any questions? Good. Meeting adjourned!" And without another word, he jumped up from the head table and rushed out the door into the fresh night air.

Zantoullios wasn't the most powerful wizard among the Monster Hunters, but he did have the best-equipped lab, filled with the most modern equipment. He prided himself on being on the cutting edge of magical experimentation technology. Perhaps more truthfully, the reason his paraphernalia was so new was it was constantly being replaced after Zantoullios' experiments blew up in his face. He still hadn't lived down his recent attempt to use a summoned fire elemental to test the flame-resisting properties of a new magical oil. The battered sword he had coated in the oil survived just fine; the lab, converted from an old wooden barn, didn't fare quite as well.

Buntleby arrived at Zantoullios' recently-restored laboratory to find the other three members of the newly-created subcommittee already there. Willowquisp was seated at a table, poring over a large book he had brought with him, with Spontayne the Studious looking over his shoulder and nodding occasionally to himself. Zantoullios was pouring brandy into four beakers.

"Hope you don't mind the glassware, Buntleby; I brought the bottle but left the glasses back at the house."

"That's fine. Why'd you build the lab so far away from the house, though? Seems a bit inconvenient."

"It's, uh, safer that way," Zantoullios admitted. "I've had to rebuild the lab three times now after things . . . kind of got out of hand, but the house has managed to avoid any damage so far. Willowquisp? Spontayne? Some brandy? No? Suit yourselves. So, is that the beast?"

Buntleby took the beaker and placed his sack on the worktable. It shifted and wiggled around as the flumph inside it tried vainly to escape. "Thanks," he said to his host. "So, where should we start?"

Willowquisp cleared his throat. "Spontayne and I have been reading

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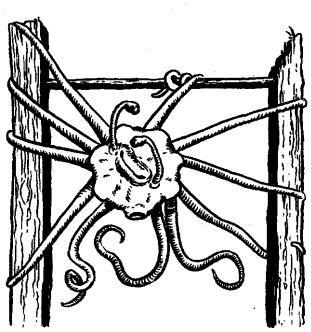
up on it, and you're right: there are some rather interesting features about the creature. Why don't you start by telling us how you came across it?"

Buntleby sipped his brandy and began his tale. "Well, I had just walked out the door and was on my way to the meeting hall when I heard a squeal from the direction of the osquip pen around back. I dashed to the back and found the flumph perched atop one of my osquips-Squinty—with its tentacles wrapped around his body to hold it in place. I ran forward to pull the thing off, when it spotted me with its eyestalks.[1] It immediately let go of Squinty and rose up into the air. I saw its base swivel slightly,[2] and before I knew it, I was being sprayed with this liquid that—well, you all got a whiff of it, and that was after it had worn off a bit.[3]"

"It stunk even worse than Grindle's patented garlic and onion stew!" suggested Zantoullios.



"Anyway," continued Buntleby, "there was a butterfly net at the side of the house, so I grabbed it up thinking to capture the creature for study. Meanwhile, Squinty was running around in a panic at my feet, and in all of the confusion, I sort of..." He winced in memory of the event, and stopped talking.

"Tripped over him?" guessed Willowquisp.

"Stepped on him, actually," admitted Buntleby. "On his head."

"Oof!" said Willowquisp. "Is he okay?"

Buntleby grimaced. "He bit his tongue."

"That's not so bad," pointed out Spontayne.

"Off," added Buntleby. "You know what their teeth are like?"

"Poor thing."

"Getting back to the flumph..." suggested Willowquisp.

"Oh, right. Well, stepping on Squinty put my swing a little off. I twisted my ankle and went plummeting to the ground, but on the way down I gave the net a wild swing at the flumph. I hit him on one side, but as it turned out this was a lucky break, because instead of catching him in the net I flipped the creature over in mid-air, and it crashed to the ground on its back. It seems to be helpless when its upside-down."[4]

"Yes, that's mentioned in my book," noted Willowquisp. "So then what?"

"Well, I fixed Squinty up as best as I could—poured a *potion of healing* down his throat, you know, the cherry-flavored kind he likes. His back was scarred from the flumph's attack,[5] but the potion healed him up okay. So I threw the flumph into an old potato sack and raced to make it to the meeting in time. I guess that's about it."

"So what prompted you to bring the creature to the Association for study?" asked Willowquisp.

"Well, I figured there's got to be something we can make out of it. Zantoullios?"

"Well, you've got our procedures backward: usually, we come across a formula for a new spell or a magical Item, find out what strange body parts we need, and then plan a Hunt accordingly.

But still, we'll see what we can come up with. Hmm, hovering: *potions* of *levitation,* perhaps, or spell components for *levitate,* or possibly reverse *gravity* spells..." he muttered to himself, his mind already examining the possibilities. "Acid secretions: tentacles might be useful in *oil of acid resistance,* possibly tie it in somehow with a *Melf's acid* arrow spell? Maybe. Smelly squirting liquid: *stinking cloud* spell components, perhaps . . . I'll have to check my formulae."[6] He

1. A flumph's eyestalks can move independently of one another, giving it a wide field of vision. As the creatures are nocturnal, flumphs have infravision to a range of 60 feet. They have no eyelids and so cannot close their eyes, even during sleep. For this reason, they are seldom surprised in visually-oriented situations. (For example, it would be difficult to walk up to one without it being aware of the approach.) On the other hand, they tend to take more damage from light-based assaults (for example, they save at -2 against *light* spells cast on them to temporarily blind them).

If an eyestalk or tentacle is severed, it takes about a week to grow back. One-eyed flumphs strike at -2 to hit due to a lack of depth perception; those missing a tentacle or two are not impeded and cause full damage with their acid attacks.

2. The flumph hovers by an innate form of anti-gravity, but it maneuvers by means of several small holes along the rim of its disk-shaped body. A mouth-like organ on its top takes in air, which can be expelled by any of the holes along the rim. Air being jetted out the back of the flumph's body propels it forward; air jetted from the creature's left sends it to the right, and so on.

The air jets propel the creature horizontally, while it moves vertically at will by means of its anti-gravity ability. Its tentacles are used like rudders, enabling the creature to spin clockwise or counter-clockwise, depending on the placement of the tentacles as it forces air out one of its rim holes. This is important in lining up its defensive spray, as the liquid can be expelled from only one of the eight rim holes. This one rim hole is usually referred to as the creature's "front" (a somewhat arbitrary position on a radially-symmetrical creature).

3. A flumph's defensive spray squirts out in a 60° arc from its "front," with a range of 20 feet. The liquid is extremely foul-smelling, something of a unappealing melange of skunk musk, rotting cabbages, and the unwashed armpits of a sweaty, overweight orc. The stench causes those struck to save vs. poison or be unable to attack for 2-5 rounds due to extreme nausea and dizziness. The odor from this attack lasts for up to 4 hours and is detectable from 100 feet away. (This scent could easily attract wandering monsters.) The flumph's spray attack also propels it in the opposite direction, since the attack emanates from one of its rim holes. A flumph can use its spray only once every ten rounds.

4. A flumph is virtually helpless when placed on its back, even more so than a turtle. The creature's innate anti-gravity is aimed downward from the creature's lower side, making it useless if the flumph is flipped over. Its many tentacles are capable of delicate maneuvering but do not possess much strength, so the flumph is unable to flip itself over by grasping at nearby handholds. Furthermore, its "maneuvering jets" cannot be employed unless it is levitating, and this includes the one responsible for its defensive spray. To add insult to injury, its long eyestalks are pinned by its body when overturned, so the creature cannot even get a good look at what is going on around it.

5. Although the flumph's "mouth" is on its upper surface, it is used for air intake only. The creature actually feeds by means of several small spikes located centrally on its underside, surrounded by its tentacles. The flumph drops down on its prey (mostly frogs, lizards, and small rodents), piercing the victim's body with the spikes for 1d8 hp damage. It then introduces acid into the wounds by means of its tentacles. Each tentacle is hollow, much like an elephants trunk, and is highly flexible. While some tentacles entwine around the prey in an effort to hold it still, others secrete acid, causing an additional 1d4 hp damage for the next 2d4 rounds. The acid is produced in the flumph's lower body cavity; anyone piercing a flumph's underside (AC 8) from below is hit with a shower of acid causing damage as noted above. The acid is highly potent, requiring active washing with 2-8 gallons of water or immersion in a swiftly-moving stream in order to remove it completely; simple immersion is not enough.

Once the prey is dead and the acid has had enough time to liquefy the creature partially, the flumph sucks up nutrients through its tentacles. In this respect it is similar to most spiders, whose venom liquefies the insides of its captured prey, allowing the spider to "drink" its victims.

6. The brain of a flumph—a small organ located just under the creature's upper shell, midway between its mouth and its rear rim hole-when pulverized, produces a liquid useful in the production of *potions of levitation.* One flumph brain provides enough liquid for three such potions.

The inner layer of hollow flumph tentacles can be removed and used as one of the ingredients for *oil of acid resistance.* It takes about 20 tentacles for one application of this magical oil.

The gland that stores the flumph's defensive spray can be used as an alternate material component for the *stinking cloud* spell. If used for this purpose, any flumphs within one mile of the spells effect have a 50% chance of investigating the *stinking cloud.*

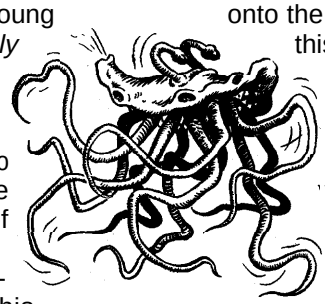
busied himself in the back of the lab, digging through a pile of disorganized notes and books filled with his tiny scrawlings.

Buntleby pulled the flumph out of the sack and looked at it in the light of the laboratory, careful to keep it upside-down. It was entirely white, from the eyestalks to the tentacles. Even its short little spikes were a whitish-gray, although there were specks of dried blood staining a good number of them. Its eyes were a dark blue, almost black, and it looked at Buntleby with an unfathomable expression. Was it angry at its captivity? Curious? Frightened? Buntleby had no way to know.

"Look how long the eyestalks are," said Buntleby, holding up the flumph for his companions to see. "I wonder why they're so long?"

"By necessity, no doubt," suggested Willowquisp, looking up from his tome. "If it spends its life in the air and drops down on its prey, it would have to be able to see past its own body."

"Makes sense," admitted Buntleby. On a whim, he placed the inverted flumph on his own head, and held its eyestalks together under his chin. "Here we go," he said, "A new hat for Lady Ablasta." Tilting his head back so he could look down his nose at his companions, he scrunched his face into a lemon-sucking configuration and did his best Lady Ablasta imitation. "I'm sure you young men cannot *possibly* appreciate just how *proper* and *fashionable* my new headgear is. But of course, such is to be expected of the *uncouth* members of todays society."

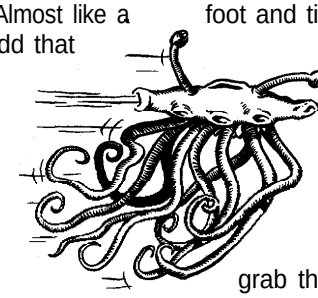


Willowquisp chuckled and held out his hand, and Buntleby passed the flumph over to him, careful to keep it upside-down. Willowquisp tested the sharpness of the creature's spikes with his finger, and offered, "There are times I'd be sorely tempted to place this little fellow, as is, on Dreelix's chair."

"That would be a sight!" agreed Buntleby, placing the flumph down on a chair and waggling his butt over it as if about to sit. Even Spontayne, normally slow to join in any jocularity, allowed a grin to cross his face as he pictured Dreelix sitting on a flumph.

Buntleby picked the creature back up, then examined its shell. "Hey, feel how hard the top is, compared to the bottom," [7] he said.

Spontayne gave a rap on the creature's top, then poked a finger into its squishy, pliant underside. The flumph responded with a squeaky "whee!" of exhaled air, as if ticklish. "Almost like a turtle's shell," he said. "Odd that they can fly with so much weight on top."



"No, really, its not that heavy at all. Here, feel for yourself." Buntleby passed the creature over to his mentor.

"Amazingly light," agreed Spontayne. "Perhaps the shell could be used in the construction of lightweight armor of some type."

"Possibly. Or maybe a buckler, or something." He took the creature back from Spontayne and carried it over to Zantoullios, who was buried in a pile of arcane formulae and research notes, many of which had spilled out onto the floor. "Hey, take a peek at this texture. Think we could fashion some sort of armor from this?"

Zantoullios spun around at the sound of Buntleby's voice. His oversized book of notes bumped the flumph out of Buntleby's hands, and the creature spilled onto the floor. At the same time Buntleby's foot slid on a loose scrap of paper, one of Zantoullios' escaped notes that now littered the floor of his lab. He went crashing to the floor, jarring his funny bone in the process.

The flumph landed on its edge and began spinning across the floor like a runaway wheel. Zantoullios made a grab for it but slipped himself and landed hard on his face, shooting a stack of notes detailing the marvelous new uses he'd found for troglodyte bladders flying out behind him.

"Stop it!" Buntleby yelled, crawling to his feet. "Don't let it get away!"

Willowquisp and Spontayne looked up from the thick zoological tome Willowquisp had brought, to see the flumph barreling across the floor at them in a bee-line, tentacles splayed out on one side and eyestalks splayed out on the other. It hit Spontayne's foot and tipped over, wobbling in a small circle along its circumference like a dropped coin between the two men.

"Look out!" yelled Zantoullios. "It's flipped up! Grab it, quick!" Willowquisp bent over to grab the flumph. Spontayne did the same, and the sound of their heads colliding could be heard clear across the lab. Both staggered backward, and the flumph shot up into the air between them.

In an instant, the flumph reached a height of ten feet, well out of the range of the four humans below, where it teetered drunkenly and attempted to regain its balance. Spontayne staggered over and slammed the shutters closed on the lab window, preventing its escape. "Now what?" he asked.

"Got that butterfly net with you?" asked Zantoullios. Buntleby shook his head. "What about spells?"

Buntleby took a quick mental survey. "Nothing of use," he admitted. "You?"

"Sadly, no. Wait a minute, though, I've got an idea." He disappeared into a back room.

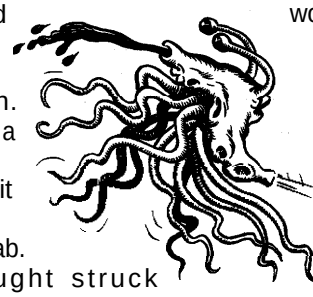
The flumph circled around the room slowly, eyestalks waving back and forth as it looked for a way out. It had apparently regained its equilibrium and

7. A flumph's upper surface is AC 0. During the daylight hours, the creature often flies up into a tree and settles on a sturdy branch, wrapping its tentacles around the branch for support. This leaves its hard upper shell exposed while protecting its softer underside while it sleeps. The eyestalks are retractable and can be whipped into the creature's body quickly if necessary, but the flumph usually keeps them out and facing opposite directions while sleeping. flumph sleep is very light, and the creature remains somewhat aware of its surroundings at all times. If danger is present, It can snap awake in an instant, although it does suffer a -2 penalty to its surprise roll if attacked while sleeping.

8. This noise is just incidental to the flumph's movement through the air and does not constitute a language. There is a flumph language, but it is a sign language based on tentacle and eyestalk movements, difficult for non-flumphs to learn and impossible for them to reproduce (short of using *polymorph* magic to take on the shape of a flumph themselves, or creating the illusion of a flumph and using it to do the "talking").

9. Flumphs have no regular feeding schedule. They almost always attack rodents on sight, regardless of how recently they have fed, leading some to believe that flumphs prefer a rodent diet, or that they were specifically bred as a farming aid to cut down on the rodent population. They will also eat small creatures such as lizards, frogs, and snakes, but given a choice will always go after rodents first. A flumph sees killing rats and mice as a sacred duty to be performed whenever possible.

scooted about along a horizontal plane well out of reach of the humans below. The three Monster Hunters could hear a low whistling as air passed through its maneuvering jets.[8] It glided aerially along one wall, did a quick pirouette, and floated along the next wall, eyestalks in constant motion. Suddenly, its eyes did a double-take, and in a burst of speed it maneuvered over to the far corner of the lab.



A sudden thought struck Buntleby. "Where's Ozzie?" he cried.

The flumph positioned itself over the osquip, making final adjustments as it aligned itself above its unwitting prey. "No!" screamed Buntleby as he leapt across the room toward his familiar? [9]

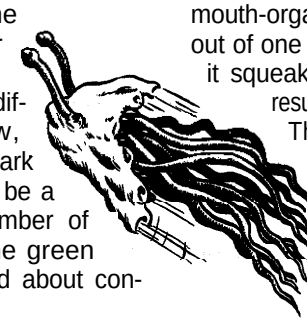
The two reached Ozzie at about the same moment. Buntleby curled protectively over his familiar, and the flumph ended up landing on Buntleby's shoulder. He felt a brief prick of pain as several of the creature's spikes penetrated the layers of his robe, but then the flumph, surprised by the loss of its prey, zoomed back up into the air.

It didn't get far. Zantoullios, brandishing a *staff of striking* he'd been meaning to recharge, gave a blood-curdling scream as he charged across the room and smacked the creature between the eyestalks. The flumph teetered and tottered in the air, wobbling crazily as it tried to regain its balance. Not surprisingly, it let loose with its defensive spray, catching Buntleby, Zantoullios, and Ozzie in their faces. Zantoullios dropped his staff, recoiling in disgust.

Spontayne made a grab for a wand on the worktable and tossed it over to Zantoullios. The gangly wizard caught it, spoke a command word, and the air became more breathable at once. The slim black wand had an inflatable bag at one end. As the bag filled with air, the stench became less and less noticeable. "Troglodyte bladder. Good thinking Spontayne." Spontayne merely grunted his agreement and went over to check on Buntleby. Zantoullios picked up his staff and looked up at the flumph, hovering just out of reach.

"So now what do we do?" asked Willowquisp.

There was a loud bang at the shuttered window. All eyes turned toward it, including those of the flumph.[10] The shutters buckled once, twice, and then crashed open. To the Monster Hunters' amazement, a hammer-shaped field of energy floated into the room, followed by a pair of flumphs.



These flumphs were different-greenish-yellow, with tentacles shaded dark green. There seemed to be a considerably greater number of tentacles present on the green flumphs, and they waved about constantly.[11]

The white flumph hovered up to the newcomers and performed an intricate series of movements with its tentacles and eyestalks, one tentacle pointed accusingly in Buntleby's direction. The green ones positioned themselves between the white flumph and the startled humans below.

Spontayne was bent over Buntleby, both caught staring up at the strange creatures hovering above them. Willowquisp the Zoophile held his large tome up like a shield as if to ward off any evil spells the things might hurl at him. Zantoullios stood with an enlarged troglodyte bladder on a stick in one hand and a staff in the other, ready to strike. Under the creatures' gaze, he lowered the staff to the floor and gave a sickly chuckle, his oversized Adam's-apple following his nervous gulps down his throat.

Buntleby felt a gathering of magical energy about him, and found that he was unable to move. From the corner of his eye he saw the others were immobile as well, and from the look of puzzlement on Willowquisp's face he figured the sage had never been in the grip of a *hold person* spell before.[12]

One of the green flumphs sucked In a large breath of air from its dorsal mouth-organ and forced a few words out of one of its rim holes.[13] "Not evil," it squeaked, evidently revealing the results of a quick detect evil spell. The *spiritual hammer* winked out of existence behind it. "Explain behavior."

Suddenly, Buntleby could move again- apparently, he had been released from the spell. He looked at his companions, but they remained immobilized. It seemed that he was to be their spokesman.

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10. Although flumphs have no external ears, they do have a sense of hearing on a par with that of a human. They do, in fact, have four inner ears spaced equidistant around their bodies just below their maneuvering jets. They have an excellent sense of touch in the tips of their tentacles but a weak sense of smell (based on the mouth-like organ on their upper surface) and no sense of taste.

Their sense of smell is somewhat unique in its extreme sensitivity to one particular scent—the odor of their own defensive spray. A flumph is able to pick up that one scent from over a mile away. This means when a flumph uses its spray, it is also alerting all other flumphs in the immediate vicinity that a dangerous situation has arisen. Being lawful good creatures, any flumph picking up the defensive odor heads toward the scent to assist if it can.

11. Monastic flumphs are a higher order of flumph, able to cast priest spells as if they were clerics of equal level to their hit dice. At 2-5 HD, this gives them access to priest spells of first to third level. These spells are modified versions of the spells known to PCs, requiring only somatic gestures, which they perform with consummate skill with their numerous tentacles. Monastic flumphs have a larger number of tentacles than do common flumphs; while this enables them to cast spells, it also leaves less room on their undersides for spikes, and as a result monastic flumphs cause only 1d6 hp damage instead of the common flumph's 1d8.

Little is known about the mysterious monastic flumphs. They gather together in large caverns to worship unknown, lawful good deities. Each monastic flumph society is called a "cloister," led by a 5-HD "abbot," 3-or 4-HD "priors" (one per six flumphs in the cloister), and a handful of 2-HD "monks." Cloisters commonly hold up to 32 individual monastic flumphs, who act as guardians for the common flumphs and pursue their own mysterious interests.

Most of what little is known of the monastic flumphs was documented by one Cartificant the Learned, a curious sage with a penchant for unusual field-work. It was he who gave the monastic flumphs their religious-based titles, and since so little has been written about the creatures, the terms "cloister," "abbot," "prior," and "monk" have become common usage in describing monastic flumph society.

Had Cartificant finished his field-work with the monastic flumphs (tragically, he was killed in a rare butter-churning accident), he might have learned the true relationship between ordinary flumphs and the monastic variety. Monastic flumphs are not a higher order of flumph so much as normal" flumphs are a lower order of monastic flumph-specifically, their idiot mutant children. About 10% of monastic flumph buds grow into albino flumphs. While these creatures are lower in intelligence and cannot cast spells, they are nonetheless cherished and looked after by the lawful good monastic flumphs. The albinos always breed true, so over time, the "normal" flumphs came to far outnumber the monastic ones.

12. Since monastic flumphs cast their spells using only somatic gestures with their many tentacles and also move their tentacles when communicating with others of their species, there is usually no warning for an outside observer that a monastic flumph is casting a spell.

13. A very few monastic flumphs (about 10%) have mastered the Common tongue or another verbal language. They do not speak often, and when they do it is in short bursts of words as they force air out of their rim holes. A speaking monastic flumph sounds like it just took in a lungful of helium and is trying to do a Mickey Mouse impression.

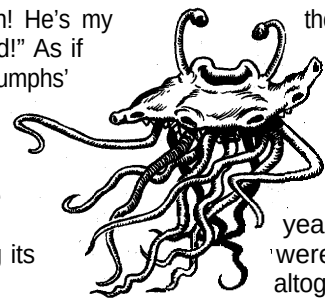
"Why fight?" asked the green flumph in its high-pitched voice.

"We were, uh, defending ourselves," he began.

The green flumph that had spoken pointed at the white flumph with a thin tentacle. "Why attack?" it demanded in its squeaky voice.

"Well, he started it! He attacked one of my osquips!"

The flumph swung its eyestalks to stare down at Ozzie. "Kill vermin."



"Ozzie's not vermin! He's my familiar and my friend!" As if understanding the flumphs' motives, Ozzie prudently scooted behind Buntleby's feet and hid from the hovering creatures.

The flumph swung its eyes back to Buntleby. "Not vermin?" it asked, surprised.

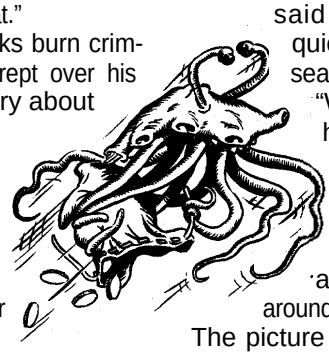
"Definitely not!"

"Not vermin?" it asked again. The green flumph pointed his two eyeballs at each other in confusion, then seemed to give a mental shrug. It pointed a tentacle at its white-skinned cousin, and said, "Not hat."

Buntleby felt his cheeks burn crimson as embarrassment crept over his face. "Yes, well, I'm sorry about that," he mumbled.

"Not cushion. No sit."

Buntleby's face grew even redder.



"Look, I think there's been a terrible misunderstanding on both our parts. I apologize for the way we've treated your friend here, and I see now that no harm was meant on your part toward my osquips, too. How about we just admit to our misunderstandings and each go our own separate ways?"

The flumphs stared at the Monster Hunters for a few seconds, then turned and waggled tentacles at each other. "Agreed," said the flumph spokesman. With a puff of air, it swiveled around on its central axis and jetted out the window, the other two creatures following behind it.

Movement returned to the other Monster Hunters. "Well I'll be," remarked Zantoullios. "I think we were just scolded. What were those things, his parents?"

"Unlikely," Wiliowquisp replied , flipping through his book once again. "Flumphs have but a single parent-they reproduce asexually by budding, once every two years or so. No, I believe they were a different type of flumph altogether. My tome here hints at a race of spellcasting flumphs, and I think that's what we just saw."

"So the little white guy just got rescued by two of his more powerful cousins," remarked Buntleby, bending down to his familiar and stroking him behind the ears.

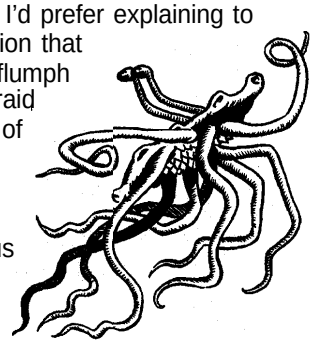
"And I'd say we were lucky at that," said Wiliowquisp, flipping quickly through his book in search of a particular page. "We got off easy in only having to deal with a spell-using flumph; we could have been facing one of these, instead!" Finding the page he was after, he flipped the book around so his friends could see. The picture showed a creature that looked like nothing so much as a giant brain, from which grew a parrot-like beak and ten long tentacles. From the way it was drawn on the page, it was obvious that the creature was hovering in mid-air.

"A grell?" asked Buntleby. "I've never heard of them."[14]

"You're lucky never to have met one," said Zantoullios. "I don't think we'd have got off so easy if it was a couple of grell that burst in here."

There was silence for awhile, as each Monster Hunter reflected on what had just occurred. Finally, Zantoullios broke the silence.

"Actually, I'd prefer explaining to the Association that we lost our flumph to a daring raid by a couple of nasty grell, rather than admit that the four of us were bested by a little green.



flumph," he said with a squeaky voice.

"Good point," admitted Buntleby, rubbing his sore shoulder.

"I think," suggested Willowquisp, "that after much investigation, we decided that flumphs are unsuitable for magical experimentation, and we let him go free."

"I like it," said Spontayne.

"Me too," agreed Buntleby.

"Good plan," said Zantoullios.

Johnathan M. Richards says he is very familiar with the concept of the nausea-inducing smell, since he grew up living across from a mushroom farm that brought in compost daily by the truckload, and currently lives downwind from a meat-rending facility.

14. No grell would ever come to a flumph's rescue, although it is very possible that the flumph and the grell are genetically related. Sages point out the many similarities between the two creatures: both hover in the air by means of an innate ability; both have numerous tentacles; both drop down on prey from above; both are nomadic, seldom staying in one area for long. In addition, each has a solitary type (the common flumph and the rogue grell) as well as a "colony" type (the monastic flumph and the colonial grell). Further Information on grell is available in the MONSTROUS MANUAL® tome (under "Grell"), *MC5 GREYHAWK® Adventures Appendix* (under "Grell"), and MC9: *SPELLJAMMER® Appendix* (under "Grell, Colonial").

Another creature believed to be related to the flumph is the belabra, or "tangler." Somewhat more primitive than either the flumph or the grell, the jellyfish-shaped creature cannot levitate or fly, but instead glides after a springing leap that can take it 60 yards at a time. The creature has 12 rubbery tentacles, a hard, bony upper shell, and four dorsal eyestalks. Further evidence of flumph ancestry is the fact that when a tentacle is severed, the creature sprays Its blood at enemies, which has a debilitating effect on them. Belabra also reproduce through budding, as do flumphs. Many sages believe the belabra to be a precursor to both the flumph and grell species. Further information on belabra can be found in *MC3: FORGOTTEN REALMS® Appendix,* under "Belabra (Tangler)."

The best guess regarding the flumph's origins, taking into account its probable genetic ties to the grell, is that flumphs originate from a different world. They may have traveled on grell spelljamming vessels (perhaps by design, but more likely without the grells' knowledge) and disembarked onto their new planet. Or, for that matter, it might have only been a single (monastic) flumph-since they reproduce asexually, it would only take a single flumph to found an entire race on a new world.

If this theory is true, it might also explain the "normal" flumph's existence-perhaps the albino mutation came about as a result of some subtle difference between this world and the monastic flumph's original home world.

The Ecology of the *Galeb Duhr*

An AD&D® game monster that gives new meaning to the term "rock & roll"

by Robert Isaacson

Artwork by Jim Holloway

As recorded in* Goldenfire, *the third volume of the collected journals of the ranger Leira Silvershadow:

Thus it came to pass, in the early autumn of that year, that the decade-long feud between the dwarves of the Thunderbarrel Clan and the Skull Smasher and Blood Licker goblin tribes was at last resolved. The decisive battle that found the noble dwarves victorious took place during the siege of the ancient dwarven bastion of Yrensparthe. Having had the dubious honor of being present there during the final days of the fight, I can remember all too clearly the horrific allies the goblins called upon in their efforts to overwhelm the fortress: orcish and ogrish warriors, gnoll archers, a band of berserk trolls, and others even more diverse and deadly. While the greatest allies the dwarves possessed were their courage and tenacity, neither were they alone in their long struggle. Indeed, some of the dwarves' greatest aid came from entities the goblins never even saw. "A trick that is known is good; a trick that is unknown, doubly so," is a saying of the elves, and I can readily attest to its truth. For it was in the foothills leading to the besieged Yrensparthe that a young messenger and I had an encounter of note.

I had been hired by the dwarves, at the recommendation of my friend, Wilsar Thunderbarrel, to aid messengers and runners in their return to Yrensparthe. Ordinarily the dwarves would have had no difficulty in getting back on their own; circumstances, however, were not ordinary. The large number of goblin patrols and spies in the area precluded the use of many of the outlying secret entrances to the keep, lest they be discovered and thus bring attack from within on the beleaguered defenders. In addition, as every available stalwart was needed to hold his place on the walls, many of the older and more experienced scouts were involved in planning and orchestrating the defense. Only the younger runners, unused to battle and of little practical worth on the ramparts, could be spared for the exchange of information with the few spies the dwarves had emplaced in secret outposts in the hills. As they mostly carried news of the minor shifts the goblin hordes made from one clearing to another, the lads I was charged with guiding and protecting only rarely had news worthy of even the slightest attention of their commanders. I usually had no trouble sneaking them through the goblin lines, whose sentries were looking out for dwarvish raiding parties, not messengers. I therefore expected that bringing young Slek Aldenroy back to Yrensparthe would not pose much difficulty.

When I got to the outpost where Slek was supposed to be awaiting me, it was empty. The flurry of tracks around the area indicated to me that the hidden station had almost been discovered by a group of goblins on patrol. The shambles Slek had left behind indicated that he had departed in considerable haste. The tracks he had left were clear enough for a kobold to follow; I set off immediately, and before long had caught up with the lad.

I found him sitting half-conscious in a small glade. He was young as dwarf runners go, having not even five years' growth of beard and a dazed and frightened look in his eyes. His only armament was a blood-streaked woodsman's axe, and his left leg had been struck by a gnoll's arrow. The corpses of a pair of gnoll archers lay sprawled nearby.

Slek was dazed with pain and weak with blood loss. I removed the arrow and applied a hasty field dressing to the wound. As I did so, I questioned him about what had happened. He was able to give me some half-coherent explanations, and a swift examination of the surrounding area told the rest. He had indeed discovered some vital information; he had observed the beginnings of a gathering of a huge force, all the remaining hordes in the area, to be hurled against the unsuspecting dwarves in three days time. After the near-discovery of his hidden refuge, he had decided that he could wait no more, lest the knowledge he carried be lost. Unwise in the ways of the woods, however, he had not been traveling long before he bumped into the now-deceased gnolls. I hid the corpses as best I could while trying to get some details from him on the goblins' imminent offensive, but the lad had slipped into a daze and I got nothing more out of him.

I feared it would not be long before the gnolls' bodies were discovered, so I got Slek to his feet and we set off as swiftly as we could. It was not long before we heard an alarm horn in the distance. Before another hour had passed, we could hear the sounds of pursuit. Had I been alone, there should have been no difficulties. But my charge was both wounded and unskilled in woods lore, and the goblins steadily gained on us. By the time we reached Truman's Pass, a rough and steep trail leading up the side of Raven's Ravine to a dwarf-sentried blockhouse some distance away, they were almost at our heels.

There was no choice but to continue running for it. I knew we had scant hope of outrunning them; the pass, extending the length of the ravine, offered little concealment, being nothing but a rough path with a few scattered boulders and patches of scree. But my only alternative was to abandon a wounded runner to the goblins, and with him abandon all hope that the besieged dwarves could hold against the coming attack. We started up.

The goblins howled as they caught sight of us, surging forward up the trail in a pack. Lacking proper bows or slings, they hurled stones and inventive curses after us. The clamorous sounds of their pursuit bounced and echoed off the steep walls around us, and their foul battle-cries rang in our ears as they drew steadily closer.

Then there was another sound, more thunderous and deafening than the goblins that pursued us. The path trembled as a sudden avalanche of soil, loose rock, and debris plowed into the horde pursuing us, sweeping many of the screaming pack into the ravine. The remaining force wavered, daunted by the sudden catastrophe. The incident bought us needed time, and we did not waste it, continuing our flight.

Our pursuers paused only momentarily, though, then set after us with cries of renewed fury. Young Slek slipped further into unconsciousness, and I was obliged to half-carry him up the trail. Our pace was growing steadily slower, and the goblins behind us screeched in joyous anticipation of the kill. We passed under one of the large outcroppings of rock with which Truman's Pass is dotted. I scanned the jutting formation and surrounding cliff face for some small trigger, knowing that one might well have been placed by the dwarves to activate a trap or open a secret door, but my search was futile; there was nothing, and the horde behind us rapidly closed the distance. Once past the rocks, my legs finally gave out. I could run no more. I set Slek down and unslung my longbow, vainly hoping that my elf-wrought arrows could persuade them to abandon the chase. I felled only one, and then they were sweeping beneath the outcropping toward us.

Suddenly, to my utter astonishment, the outcropping changed. It grew darker and glistened with sudden moisture. An instant later, it melted and collapsed upon the goblins, no longer stone but thousands of pounds of mud. A dozen goblins screamed as the sudden mudslide engulfed them and carried them over the edge into the ravine. Again, I did not question the unexpected miracle, but got Slek to his feet and got moving again. The blockhouse was growing steadily closer, and I hoped that the goblins would decide that their losses were too great to continue.

Alas, no one has ever credited goblins with abundant wisdom, though they know something of tenacity; this second disaster only served to incense the remaining handful. They raced after us, shrieking promises of revenge for their lost companions. The blockhouse seemed close, incredibly so, but the one gate lay on the other side of the structure. I knew it to be much too far for the half-dozen dwarves within to aid us. Hurled stones and knives bounced around us as we stumbled up the last rise.

A sudden grating sound met our ears. As we topped the rise, I turned to see a barrier of stone shoot up out of the ground, sealing the path behind the goblins. A split second later, a new rumbling sounded—ahead of me!—and another wall appeared across the path before us. As we reached this wall, a section melted back, opening a hole large enough for a man to pass through. I had no time to wonder at our

salvation; I quickly lifted Slek and stepped through the opening. As I turned to look back, I could see that the hole was already closing on itself, leaving the goblins boxed in. Before the opening vanished completely, however, I caught a glimpse of the goblins panicking. The very boulders along the path seemed to be stirring, as though life had suddenly been breathed into them. Then the hole was closed, and I could see no more. But I heard the goblins' terrified cries. I carried Slek to the gate, where the dwarves within quickly admitted us.

"We'll see to this young one," the sergeant assured me, after I explained the information Slek carried. "So you led those blackguards on quite a chase, eh?"

"Not entirely my doing," I gasped, my heart still pounding in my chest. "There was wizardry at work out there. Walls of stone, seas of mud—"

The sergeant laughed. "Not wizardry. Just the doings of those who know the stone even better than we. It's thanks to them that we require only a company of six in this post; they see to it that no unwelcome trespassers make it here. They've been watching you since you started up the pass. They're just outside. Would you care to meet them?"

We stepped back outside. There was no sound now from the goblins trapped inside the stone walls. "Dead," the sergeant said. "Probably ground to blood and powder by now. Well, here we are. You can thank them yourself."

I looked around, but could see nothing except the wall of the ravine, a struggling mountain pine, a pair of very large boulders, and some scrub. "Where?" I asked.

The sergeant smiled again and pointed at the boulders. "There:' he replied. As I watched amazed, one of the boulders shifted. A rocky brow lifted, revealing a stony black eye. Both stones began to stir, rising up and standing on short, thick legs. Their eyes opened as they hefted themselves up, and their cavernous mouths stretched into a pair of mischievous grins.

Thus was my first encounter with a most rare and fascinating creature, the galeb duhr. During ensuing conversations, both with Yrensparthe's resident sage, Jarek Thunderbarrel, and with the galeb duhr themselves, I have discovered much of the so-called "stone men of the mountains." There is much to wonder about when one considers the lives of beings that are living rocks. How does a galeb duhr eat? What kinds of rigors can they withstand, given their rocky forms? How do they reproduce? What laws do they follow, if any? How long do they ordinarily live? What gives them their legendary powers over stone? Over a course of months, I learned the answers to these questions. Herein do I set down my findings, that I may rectify some misconceptions and enrich the general knowledge about these amazing entities.

Galeb duhr are monolithic in appearance, for these beings are formed entirely of stone. They look like huge boulders or outcroppings of rock, with stony human-like features positioned on the broadest face. They have two limbs, which act as both arms and legs. A galeb duhr walks with a slow, ponderously steady gait, the digits of its appendages gripping the ground surely. A galeb duhr cannot walk while holding something in its "hands," though the digits are capable of fairly delicate manipulation. A galeb duhr that is dormant or wishes to remain hidden can merely close its eyes and mouth, draw its appendages close to its body, and sit still; in such a state, it cannot be distinguished from a normal boulder.

A common thread running through the popular stories told of the galeb duhr is the idea that they eat rocks, an understandable though incorrect conception. More accurate would it be to say that they ***draw sustenance*** from rocks, for a galeb duhr does not eat, at least not as we understand eating. As far as I was able to tell, they also neither sleep nor breathe.[1] Instead, they gain nourishment simply from continual contact with their stony surroundings. Galeb duhr take their sustenance from the earth much the same way a plant grows in the sunlight; the more sunlight, the stronger and healthier the plant. In the same manner, a galeb duhr is strongest and healthiest in areas that are predominantly stony in nature. A galeb duhr lives out its life in a mountainous environment; they are almost never encountered elsewhere, for good reason: loss of contact with the natural mountainous environment progressively weakens a galeb duhr, and it will die if kept from areas of stone for too long a time, much as a plant will die without sunlight.[2] Galeb duhr are often found in underground caverns as well, though they are rarely recognized there in the jumble of rock.

In conversation with the galeb duhr near Raven's Ravine (which was a prolonged business, as galeb duhr rival treants for slowness of speech), I frequently heard references to a thing they called "earth power." When I asked them to describe it, they could only say that they felt "a feeling of strength in places with the earth power." In further discussion, Jarek Thunderbarrel gave me his theory of earth power, which went as follows:

The galeb duhr are very strongly connected to the elemental plane of Earth. This link is unconscious for the most part, and it exists in each of them. Since they are so well attuned to that plane, they are able to consume the rocks themselves and magically control stones without the use of spell-casting, as we understand it. Earth power is simply a measure of a place's "connection" to the plane of Earth; places of strong earth power include mountain ranges, deep caverns, or rocky lands prone to severe earthquakes. Galeb duhr greatly prefer such places, for away from them their endurance and powers wane. All mountains contain the "earth power" to some extent, though some less so than others. Generally, the younger and less eroded by air or water the rocky surroundings are, the stronger the elemental link that such a place possesses. In very new mountains or places where the natural elemental link has been heightened, such as by magical alteration, a galeb duhr's power is said to become greater still. Tales tell of whole colonies of stone men dwelling there, and only the foolish would contest their power.

From this and other dissertations, I gathered that while a galeb duhr's powers over the rocky environment of its home are similar in form to known earth- and stone-affecting spells, such powers may be activated with but a moment's thought (a warning to wily mages who might think to best these creatures at their own game!). It is also my understanding that very old galeb duhr or those dwelling in highly magical areas are stronger than ordinary galeb duhr, and may command additional powers.[3]

Galeb duhr are naturally resistant to certain extremes. Fire does little harm to them, for it takes a great deal of heat to harm stone. Magical fires, which have such intense heat, are more dangerous to these beings. Galeb duhr easily shrug off electrical attack, being nonconductive, and they are completely immune to any and all poisons. However, all stonemasons know that there is nothing like cold to bring out cracks or faults in stone. Intense cold does considerable harm to galeb duhr, and they are often dormant during wintertime, though Jarek told me that this may not be the case in areas of strong earth power.[4] (Caverns at least afford protection from the winter's chill.) Wizards knowledgeable in elemental matters have discovered that certain spells affecting rock will also harm a galeb duhr, though details on these effects are not clearly known.[5]

I am at a loss to converse about the exact interior biology of a galeb duhr. I broached the subject with the galeb duhr at Raven's Ravine but was able to learn little; they seemed surprised at such a question. However, I spoke with one dwarven veteran who had witnessed a battle between two galeb duhr and a marauding young dragon, in which one of the galeb duhr was killed. The galeb duhr was struck a mighty blow by the dragon's tail and broke apart like a rock struck by a sledgehammer. When the dwarf visited the aftermath of the battle, the fragments were almost indistinguishable from the ordinary scree of the area.[6] From this, I gather that galeb duhr have no interior organs at all, being literally solid stone throughout. How such beings can move and think as ordinary creatures do is beyond my understanding. I postulate that their ties to the plane of Earth allow animating elemental forces to flow directly into them; Jarek is supportive of this theory but refuses to commit himself profes-

sionally until proof can be obtained.

Galeb duhr are very territorial creatures. Once they have settled into an area, it is nearly impossible to move them. A galeb duhr usually spends much of its time either sitting in one place, watching and thinking, or slowly patrolling its environs for signs of disturbance. A galeb duhr's territory usually encompasses an area of about 1-4 square miles. It is invariably protective of its mountain home, vigorously defending it as its own against uninvited or hostile intruders. It will often ally itself with those of like mind against potential despoilers; in wooded mountain ranges, galeb duhr and treants often work together, and alliances between galeb duhr and near-surface bands of pech are not unheard of. A galeb duhr is intimately familiar with the lay of the land in its territory and will usually have traps set in various area of access (paths, natural ascents, etc.). Such traps are usually features of the landscape, either natural or created by the galeb duhr, that can be triggered by one of the galeb duhr's earth-affecting powers; the outcropping at Truman's Pass that changed to mud was one of these.

A galeb duhr will typically watch invaders for some time, determining if they are of violent intent or not. Peaceful travelers are allowed to pass unmolested. Should the intruders be deemed hostile, the galeb duhr will attack from hiding, using its powers to harry and waylay the intruders (note that "hiding" to a galeb duhr often means simply closing its eyes and mouth and sitting still). If a galeb duhr cannot persuade invaders to leave its territory in this way, it attacks openly, usually in a steep or narrow area so its foes cannot retaliate easily. In combat, a galeb duhr animates normal boulders and rocks around it and commands them to attack; this action is similar to the way a treant animates trees. Earth-affecting powers will be used in the most effective way possible: ***walls of stone*** may be raised and collapsed on intruders, earthen embankments may be moved to hinder movement or cause an avalanche, and so forth. If any foes come within striking distance, the galeb duhr will attack physically with a crushing bite or a smashing blow from one of its appendages.

Galeb duhr social structure is practically nonexistent. They have no castes or classes, leaders or followers. They are, for the most part, solitary creatures, each of whom will stake out and watch over its own mountain territory. Occasionally, a number of galeb duhr will dwell in the same area, as do those at Raven's Ravine, but this is unusual. I know nothing of their religion, if any such exists; the galeb duhr of Raven's Ravine showed little interest in the subject, but they may not have understood my questions on the topic.

Galeb duhr are extremely long-lived; an average specimen could live to be many thousands of years old. They do not mate; indeed, they have no genders at all. When a galeb duhr dies naturally (that is to say, not from combat or the loss of contact with its earth power), it slowly cracks and crumbles away over a period of 2-7 days. At the end of this time, all that remains of the original galeb duhr is stone dust, gravel, and three large chunks of stone. These chunks of stone are young galeb duhr. They remain immobile for a period of approximately one century, slowly growing and developing, during which time they are completely indistinguishable from normal rocks. At the end of this time, they awaken as adult galeb duhr. The largest then usually takes control of the surrounding territory, while the smaller two move off to find their own territories.[7]

There is little more I can say about these wondrous beings. Perhaps this treatise may serve to guide one more learned than myself in discovering more. I must say that in the time I have spent studying the galeb duhr, I have grown to respect and like them. Bold adventurers who plan expeditions to the mountains may run across these creatures, and I strongly advise friendliness and courtesy when dealing with them. To their friends, they are most benevolent and helpful; those who make them enemies will find the galeb duhr have hearts of stone.

Footnotes

Galeb duhr are described in the AD&D® 2nd Edition ***Monstrous Compendium,*** volume 2, and in the AD&D 1st Edition ***Monster Manual II,*** page 68.

1. Galeb duhr have no need for oxygen or any other inhaled gas for survival, Accordingly, they suffer no damage from harmful gases (poison gas, ***cloudkills,*** green dragon breath, etc.) or immersion in any liquid except acid.

2. If a galeb duhr is removed by any means from its natural surroundings, its physical condition will slowly begin to deteriorate, as the life-giving connection to the elemental plane of Earth slowly fades. In areas where they are not totally cut off from their mountain origins, such as plains or farmland, this deterioration will be slow: the galeb duhr will lose 1 hp per day that it is away from its home. Such loss is permanent until it returns to an area that is predominantly rock and stone, at which time it recovers lost hit points at a rate of 2-5 hp per day. In an area totally removed from its ordinary habitat, such as a desert or an ocean, a galeb duhr will lose 2-5 hp per day, but will regain them at the above rate if returned to its home.

When a galeb duhr falls below 20 hp due to loss of contact with its natural habitat, it loses its powers to control stone. Such powers return at once upon renewed contact with a rocky or mountainous environment. Should a galeb duhr fall to zero hit points due to environmental deprivation, the connection with the elemental plane of Earth is considered to have vanished completely, and it becomes nothing more than a normal boulder. A full ***wish*** is required to revive a galeb duhr from this state.

3. See the AD&D® 2nd Edition ***Dungeon Master's*** Guide, page 64, "Innate Abilities," for details on how a galeb duhr's "spell-casting" powers really work.

For every 500 years over 2,000 that a galeb duhr has lived in its own territory, it gains one of the following advantages. This reflects the galeb duhr's ever-strengthening connection with its territorial surroundings and the plane of Earth. In areas where the natural elemental influence has been heightened, galeb duhr may obtain these additional powers more quickly; this is left to the DM's discretion. DMs may choose powers or roll them randomly; if duplicate powers are obtained on rolls of 13-20, roll again.

1d100	**Benefit**
1-4	+2 AC bonus
5-8	Resist magical fire
9-12	+2 HD bonus
13-16	Resist cold
17-18	***Stone tell***
19	***Stone barrier***
20	Double boulders

Explanation of powers

+2 AC bonus: The galeb duhr's armor class is modified from -2 to -4 initially and may improve further on subsequent rolls to AC -10.

Resist magical fire: The galeb duhr still has a +4 bonus vs. fire attacks. However, the galeb duhr takes -1 hp per die of damage done. Further bonuses of this sort reduce damage down to a minimum of -4 hp per hit die.

+2 HD bonus: For each hit die the galeb duhr possesses, it gains an additional 2 hp, to a maximum of 8 hp per die on subsequent rolls.

Resist cold: Galeb duhr who possess this power may move and function in even the coldest weather. They save normally against cold-based attacks and take only normal damage from them.

Stone tell: This power is identical to the priest spell ***stone tell.*** It is performed at the 20th level of ability.

Stone barrier: This is a new priest spell, described here. Galeb duhr perform it at the 20th level of ability.

Stone barrier (Alteration)

Level: 6	Components: V,S
Range: 30 yards	CT: 5
Duration: 3 rnds. +1 rnd./2 lvls. of caster	
AE: Special	Save: Special

Upon casting this spell, the spell-caster sets a whirling wall of flying stones in motion about a fixed point. Any creature attempting to pass through this barrier will take 8d8 hp damage (when used by galeb duhr, add 1 hp for each hit die the galeb duhr possesses: 8d8 + 8-10 hp). In respect to area of effect and in all other aspects, noting the changes given here, this spell conforms to the sixth-level priest spell ***blade barrier.***

Double boulders: When the galeb duhr ***animates*** normal boulders to fight for it, 2-4 are ***animated*** (as opposed to the normal 1-2).

4. Galeb duhr ordinarily are very sluggish after more than three days of subfreezing temperatures. They are hard to rouse in such times and act as though under the influence of a slow spell when active at all. Those who are resistant to cold (see note #3) may move and act normally.

5. The following effects of wizard and priest spells should be noted when such spells are used against galeb duhr: ***Animate rock,*** if it can affect a stone the size of the galeb duhr, effectively ***charms*** the galeb duhr (who receives no saving throw) and causes it to obey the caster's every command; however, the galeb duhr greatly resents such treatment and always attacks the spell-caster after the spells duration ceases. ***Dig, move earth, passwall, sink, spike stones, stone shape,*** and ***transmute rock to mud*** (and its reverse) have no effect if cast upon on galeb duhr. ***Earthquake,*** if cast directly at the galeb duhr, causes death and shattering if a saving throw vs. death magic is failed, or 3-30 hp damage otherwise. ***Stone tell*** forces the galeb duhr, with no saving throw, to confront the spell-caster and truthfully answer all questions for the spells duration; once the spell ends, the galeb duhr is certain to leave at once, though it might attack the spell-caster if the latter was rude. ***Stone to flesh*** causes the galeb duhr's body to become fleshy (AC 8) if it fails a saving throw vs. spells, a condition that distresses it greatly and causes it to lose all of its spell-like powers; ***flesh to stone*** reverses this effect. Always consider the galeb duhr's 20% magic resistance when figuring spell effects.

6. The stony body of a galeb duhr always matches the predominant stone of the area. Granitelike stone is most common, but marble, quartz, and all other igneous or metamorphic types are possible. No galeb duhr have bodies matching sedimentary rock, such as shale, sandstone, or limestone.

A fragment of a galeb duhr's body, if it can be identified as such, is of special value to spell-casters. Any earth- or stone-related spell requiring a piece of stone as a material component will be half again as effective if the stone used comes from a galeb duhr. Fragments retain this magic-boosting property for one month after their creation, after which they become like normal stone in all respects. Fragments used in spell-casting will always be consumed, even if the spell does not ordinarily destroy the material components. There is no way to prevent this consumption or to cause a fragment to retain its enhancing power for more than one month.

7. Of the three galeb duhr produced, there will be one of each size category: one 10 HD, one 9 HD, and one 8 HD. The 10 HD galeb duhr will instinctively move to take over the immediate territory. The smaller ones usually move off to stake out their own areas, though they sometimes remain (15% chance) and share the area between the three of them. In such cases, the largest does not rule the others, and they take little note of each other in day-to-day activities, though they do not hesitate to aid one another in a crisis. Ω

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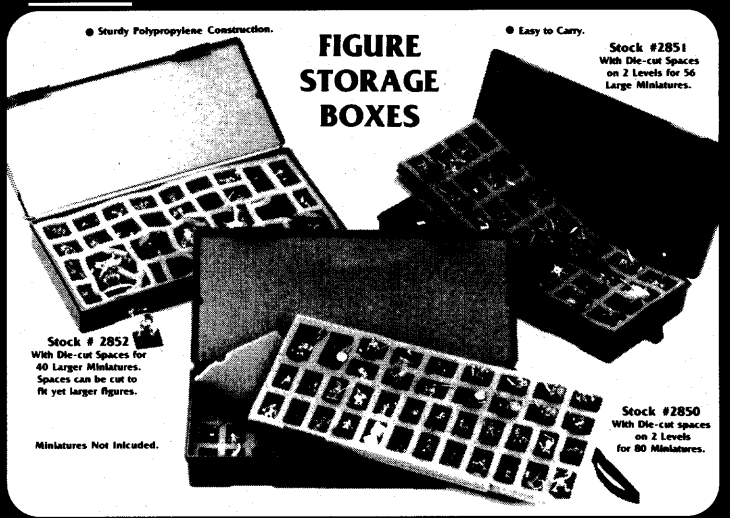

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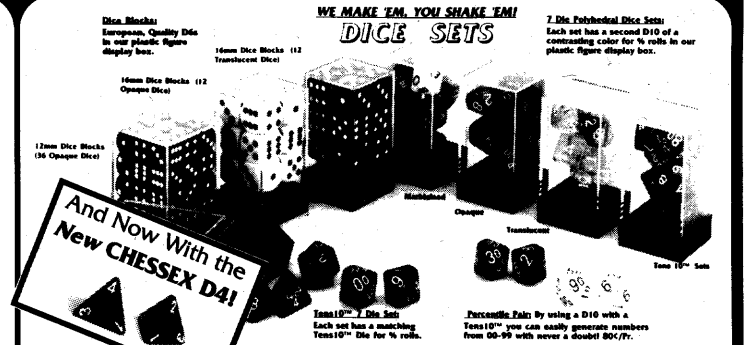


Chapter Three

Gargoyle

"I was walking through the sculpture garden on my rounds late one night, watching for anything unusual, just like any other shift. But I had the queerest feeling that night that some of the statues were watching me. I looked real hard at one of them, kind of a winged, blindfolded angel, but it was just a statue. I rubbed my eyes, thinking I was going crazy, and when I opened 'em again, I swear that statue had moved. I turned around and walked as quick as I could back toward the gate, but I thought I heard a noise, so I whirled around. The statue was right behind me! I walked backward all the way to the gate, never letting that thing out of my sight. I ain't been back since."

—Havred Alocius, retired night watchman at the Statue Garden of Porthmos, Oppara

Sinister hunters of living stone, gargoyles perch high on the rooftops of towns and cities, appearing for all the world like harmless stone sculptures, carved in the likeness of demons, devils, or other hideous humanoid creatures. As still as statues, they patiently wait through the daylight hours, watching the city come to life and hungrily eyeing the unwitting passersby below. When dusk falls, the statues come alive and fly into the night sky, silently soaring above the darkened streets on stony wings looking for prey, snatching up unsuspecting walkers, never to be seen again.

Those "civilized" races that make their homes in cities foolishly think their stone walls and patrolling guards protect them from the dangers of the wild, often not realizing that vicious natural predators lurk above their heads every day, and these urban inhabitants are the gargoyles' favored prey. In such a city, the gargoyles are the top of the food chain, not the unsuspecting humans and other residents. When dawn finally breaks, the handiwork of these nocturnal hunters can be discovered: an unidentified mutilated body in an alleyway, the corpse of a suicide who apparently jumped from the bell tower, and all the people that never came home the night before, whose disappearances are never explained. Wise city dwellers simply nod knowingly and make sure their chimneys are blocked, their shutters closed tight for the night.

Gargoyles are not restricted solely to urban environments, however. They can be found almost anywhere, though they prefer hills, mountains, and rocky badlands where they can use their natural camouflage to great effect. So-called "wild" gargoyles do not have the sculptured appearance of their urban brethren; their bodies are rougher and more jagged, more akin to natural rock. They do not limit their activities to the night, either. Away from the trappings of civilization, wild gargoyles have little fear of organized reprisals, and so hunt whenever the mood strikes them, or whenever choice prey appears. Some half-bury themselves in the earth, sand, or snow to pretend to be mysterious statues.

Wild gargoyles tend to prey on isolated travelers, though a wing of gargoyles will attack a caravan if it doesn't look too heavily guarded. Food is not the object of such hunts, but rather the thrill of the chase, so most local wildlife is safe from the gargoyles' depredations. A gargoyle will harry and toy with a lone traveler for hours, first appearing high above, then reappearing again and again, closer each time, to heighten the fear of its chosen prey. As the traveler becomes more panicked and seeks to escape his pursuer, the gargoyle swoops in to claim its prize. Such travelers usually fail to reach their destinations and are never heard from again, their fates unknown. Most often, the gargoyle kills its prey at the conclusion of a hunt, dropping it from a great height onto sharp rocks below, but occasionally a gargoyle will take a prisoner back to its lair to torture and abuse until the poor victim finally dies. Few travelers marked as prey by wild gargoyles ever escape to tell the tale.

Ecology

When unmoving, a gargoyle appears to be nothing more than a lifeless, winged stone statue, albeit one with a fearsome demonic appearance. Gargoyles can hold themselves perfectly still, and only the keenest observers may notice something is amiss before the statue suddenly explodes into life in a frenzy of knife-edged claws, gnashing teeth, and cruelly pointed horns. Gargoyles are humanoid, standing about 6 feet tall with a wingspan of 15 feet, and their dense stone bodies weigh upward of 1,200 pounds.

Gargoyles have only the most rudimentary bodily systems; they can go a month between meals, and can hibernate for years when food is scarce, leading some to believe they do not eat at all. They are incredibly resistant to damage—attacking one is like hacking a solid stone statue, and only magical weapons prove effective at piercing their stony skin. Over time, however, a gargoyle's skin does gradually erode from exposure to the elements. Young gargoyles appear newly carved, while the eldest among them are weathered and pitted, traced with cracks, and often sporting growths of moss or lichen as well.

Although they rarely need to eat, gargoyles enjoy inflicting pain on other beings, and seem to take a perverse pleasure, if not actual sustenance, from the screams and whimpers of their prey. Because of this predilection, gargoyles focus their hunts on humans and other intelligent beings, and usually disdain lesser animals. They revel in the torture of helpless prey, and gargoyles have been known to feed upon fallen foes while they are still alive, grinning toothily and swaying in ecstasy to the victim's horrified screams.

Gargoyles mate whenever the fancy strikes them, in short, violent aerial clashes that seem more brawl than breeding ritual. They choose partners seemingly at random, with the strong often subduing the weak, and have nothing to do with one another afterward. A female gargoyle lays a clutch of 1–4 stony eggs in a secluded place such as a cleft in a cliff face or the lee of a chimney, then abandons the eggs to their fate. A month later, the eggs hatch, although the first hatchling may succumb to a cruel urge to break the eggs of its clutch-mates before they can hatch, leaving it the sole survivor. A gargoyle reaches full maturity in only 1 year.

Gargoyles can live for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, though their exact lifespan remains a mystery. They do not grow weaker with age, but their stone bodies do become more brittle and subject to accidental breakage as time passes. It has been theorized that a gargoyle can live as long as its stone body can endure, giving it a lifespan of geologic scale, but few gargoyles ever last to such an advanced age. Most fall prey to stronger hunters, accidents, or their own internal feuds long before.

Over time, gargoyles begin to take on the appearance of their environment. The longer they stay in one place, the more they come to resemble the architectural styles or natural features of their surroundings. A tribe of gargoyles

Gargoyle Games

Gargoyles are cruel and look down upon "weak" creatures that cannot fly and have to regularly eat to survive. Though slow of wit, they are remarkably cunning at finding ways to harass and torture other creatures for sport. A bored gargoyle might single out a small farm and spend an entire night pulling up all the crops in the farmer's field just to see his reaction at dawn. Then it might steal his chickens one by one, breaking their wings and letting them plummet to their deaths onto his roof. From there it might kill the larger animals, then the farmer's wife and children, and finally the farmer, dropping him over and over in a remote area until his legs are broken and he starves to death. A city gargoyle may follow a particular night watchman every night, making moonlight shadows and strange noises, dropping pebbles on him, swooping down to clutch at his cloak, and so on, until the man is completely terrified. Few gargoyles have the patience to do this for more than a few days, but those who do gain a reputation as vile as most demons.

Gargoyle Trophies

Driven by their obsessive natures, gargoyles amass a variety of trophies with which to decorate their lairs and boast of their kills. In most cases these trophies have little value, though some prefer jewelry or other trinkets, and a rare few collect magic items.

Use the following table to randomly determine what sort of mementos a gargoyle collects and displays in its territory.

d20	Trophy
1	Books or scrolls
2	Shoes
3	Buttons
4	Rings
5	Brooches or clasps
6	Pieces of armor
7	Scalps
8	Ears
9	Teeth
10	Skulls
11	Bones
12	Fingers
13	Skins or pieces of skin
14	Weapons
15	Necklaces or bracelets
16	Coins
17	Belts
18	Pouches
19	Strips of cloth
20	Minor magic items

inhabiting a vibrant city will eventually look similar to the style of statues prevalent there, while those dwelling in the lava fields below a volcano gradually take on a jagged, ashen appearance. Such adaptations are slow and subtle, but over the span of many years, a gargoyle's appearance can change dramatically depending on its surroundings.

An old Varisian tale says that gargoyles were once a tribe of cowardly hillmen, creatures of soft flesh and weak hearts. Their tribe's shamans made a pact with the demon Xoveron, gaining the ability to transform their warriors into living stone—in exchange for their souls. Emboldened by their near-invulnerability, they raided other tribes for food and treasures, but the more they used this ability, the harder it was for the warriors to resume their normal forms. When these warriors fathered children, they were born demonic and stone-gray, hardening after a few hours to unfeeling rock, and the entire tribe turned on the shamans for dooming their children to ugliness. Within a generation, the entire tribe had become flint-skinned monsters. Petty rivalries escalated into open warfare between families, and the survivors scattered to the four winds, becoming all the kinds of gargoyles known to the world.

Some legends say that one night a year, perhaps late in Lamashan or early Neth, the gargoyles can walk as humans, temporarily freed of their ancient curse, mingling with the people of the cities, perhaps finding love, but becoming hideous monsters once again at the dawn's first light.

Habitat & Society

Gargoyles can live anywhere, but prefer rocky areas or subterranean caverns with ample hiding places for ambushes, as well as crumbling ruins and large cities with plenty of stone construction. One variety of gargoyle, the kapoacinth, has even adapted to aquatic life, dwelling in shallow coastal areas or sunken, ruined cities. Gargoyles can be loosely divided into two main groups, urban and wild, depending upon their chosen habitat.

Urban gargoyles usually live alone, but young hunting pairs are not uncommon. Sometimes larger numbers of urban gargoyles band together in short-lived wings, usually for sport or, in the case of organized resistance, for mutual protection. Wild gargoyles tend to lead solitary lives as well; larger tribes of wild gargoyles do exist, but these are unstable gatherings at best. Gargoyles are petty, spiteful, and perfidious creatures, and individuals feud and squabble with one another constantly. Tribal membership changes frequently as individuals are driven out, killed, or leave of their own volition, while new members join or smaller wings and tribes are conquered and assimilated. There is no division based on gender, only on strength—males and females hunt and kill equally, and the strong of either sex dominate the weak.

The leadership of such tribes is always hotly contested, and no warlord or tribal chieftain lasts long if he is unable

to defend his rule from younger rivals eager to prove their strength and prowess. Challenges for leadership are common, and most often take the form of boasting duels. Gargoyles love to brag about themselves, and the challenger who can boast of the most conquests, the most interesting kills, and the most cunning and long-lasting tortures usually wins by acclaim. In cases where there is no clear winner, the challengers must prove their worth in the Ritual of the Thousand Pains. The entire tribe gathers in two facing lines, and the competitors must fly the gauntlet as their tribe-mates slash at them with sharpened claws. If a contender falters, even for a moment, the tribe falls upon it and rips it to shreds. The victor emerges at the end of line, torn and tattered, scarred for life, but with the bragging rights to claim rulership.

Gargoyles are notoriously obsessive, and avid collectors of trinkets and trophies, both as proof of their boasts and as decoration for their bodies and lairs. They do this less for material wealth than as a way to distinguish themselves from others in their tribe. One gargoyle might collect scalps claimed from her fallen foes, while another wears the coins of his kills strung together in belts and necklaces. Still another might proudly display the weapons of her defeated opponents.

Most gargoyles worship Xoveron, the Horned Prince, demon lord of gargoyles and ruins. Gargoyle religion is far from organized, and while larger tribes might have an adept or two, they are seldom treated any differently from their peers and have no special status or influence among their fellows. The rare four-armed gargoyles, however, are considered blessed by Xoveron, and are frequently paid great respect and given positions of power, at least as long as their actions match their boasts.

Campaign Role

Gargoyles function as superb aerial predators and ambush hunters. Any rooftop, ruin, cliff face, or statue garden can hold a gargoyle silently and patiently waiting to attack unwary PCs. Gargoyles can also serve as excellent guards for an enemy's fortress or villain's lair—with little need for food or water and the ability to blend seamlessly into its surroundings, a gargoyle guard can wait endlessly for intruders.

Gargoyles are perhaps most easily used in urban or ruined settings. Their ability to appear as harmless statues provides excellent cover for their vicious activities. But beyond their role as solitary hunters, gargoyles can also be used to add a bit of mystery to a campaign. A series of unexplained disappearances or murders can eventually lead back to a gargoyle serial killer who soars the rooftops by night but perches quietly on a church steeple during the day.

Outside of cities, wings of tribal gargoyles can rampage through the wilds, attacking travelers and merchant caravans or even isolated homesteads and villages. The PCs might be hired as guards for a caravan venturing into known gargoyle territory, or be tasked with protecting a village from a gargoyle raiding party. In these situations, the gargoyles' aerial abilities and damage reduction can prove quite a challenge, especially for lower-level groups.

Variant Gargoyles

In addition to the aquatic kapoacinth, several other varieties of gargoyle exist that have adapted to their surroundings.

Arctic Gargoyle: In cold, northern climes, some gargoyles have adapted to hunt the icy glaciers and snowfields. The skin of arctic gargoyles looks like weathered rock with scattered white patches that helps them hide among the snowy mountains. They gain a +6 racial modifier on Stealth checks made in stony or snowy environs and have cold resistance 5. (CR +0)

Forest Gargoyle: These strange gargoyles prefer the tall trees of forests and jungles to the rocky spires of mountains. Their skin has the appearance of bark, granting them a +6 racial modifier on Stealth checks in wooded areas (this replaces the normal gargoyle's modifier in stony areas). Forest gargoyles lose the normal gargoyle's freeze ability, but gain the following spell-like ability: 3/day—*warp wood*. (CR +0)

Gemstone Gargoyle: Rarely, an individual gargoyle is born with skin with the luster and appearance of a valuable gemstone. Amethyst, opal, sapphire, and topaz are most common, but legends also tell of diamond, emerald, and ruby gargoyles. Gemstone gargoyles are usually smarter and stronger than other gargoyles, and often rise to positions of leadership within tribes or wings. Gemstone gargoyles have the advanced creature template and usually have class levels, typically in barbarian or fighter. They have DR 10/adamantine (instead of the normal gargoyle DR), SR 14, and resistance 10 to acid, cold, electricity, or fire. (CR +1 plus advanced creature template and class levels)

Obsidian Gargoyle: Creatures at home in the searing heat of volcanoes and lava fields, obsidian gargoyles have the dark, glassy appearance of polished obsidian. The razor-sharp edges of their claws and teeth increase the damage of their natural attacks by one step, and anyone attacking an obsidian gargoyle

Facets of Fear

Among the monuments of a city, statues stare blankly at nothing, devoid of intellect and feeling, as cold, uncaring, and lifeless as the walls of the city's man-made canyons. But sometimes the walls seem to have eyes, and in the play of shadows, statues can appear to move with dark intent. Gargoyles embody this fear, the terror that comes when night falls and the city itself seems to come alive, to purge itself of the living vermin who populate its streets.

Urbanization can have a dehumanizing and isolating effect as well, where one feels alone in a crowd of thousands. Among such teeming multitudes, a person could disappear without a trace and no one would notice his absence. Humans and other intelligent races pride themselves on their "civilization," their ability to tame and impose order on nature. Behind their walls, in their cities of wood and stone, they feel safe, with all the terrors of the wilderness locked safely outside. But lying just below the surface is always the fear that maybe they are *not* safe, that perhaps civilization is just a facade, and that danger can lurk in the eaves of buildings just as easily as among the branches of the forest. In urban environments, gargoyles are apex predators, swooping out of the night sky on soundless wings to snatch unsuspecting residents, who quickly learn they may be prey as well as predator. And when such poor unfortunates are taken, will anyone hear their screams? Will anyone care?

with unarmed or natural attacks takes 1d4 points of damage from the gargoyle's jagged glass spikes. Obsidian gargoyles also have fire resistance 10. (CR +0)

Sandstone Gargoyle: Sandstone gargoyles inhabit wide beaches and deserts, or anywhere with a large amount of sand or loose dirt. They have a rough, granulated appearance, and small bits of debris constantly fall from their bodies. Sandstone gargoyles have a burrow speed of 10 feet, though only through sand or loose soil. They can also bury themselves in sand, erupting forth to attack with surprise. This counts as a charge, except the gargoyle can only move its speed (not twice its speed). (CR +0)

Waterspout Gargoyle: These creatures have adapted to life in a magical city, and may be the descendents of a wizard's team of modified gargoyle guards and spies. They can cling to buildings with ease and have a climb speed of 20 feet. Waterspout gargoyles have a breath weapon in the form of a stream of high-velocity water 20 feet long and 1 foot wide which expels about 30 gallons of water. The force of this geyser deals 1d4 points of damage to a single target and the gargoyle can use this ability to trip or bull rush the target as a free action (if the attempt fails, the gargoyle cannot be tripped or bull rushed in return). The breath weapon is usable every 1d4 rounds and is a supernatural ability. In addition, particularly daring gargoyles can reduce their stream to a trickle in order to pass themselves off as ornamental fountains. (CR +0)

Known Gargoyles

The following are a few particularly infamous gargoyles.

The Blind Angels: This wing of gargoyles inhabits the famed Statue Garden of Porthmos in Oppara's Memorial Park. Unlike their normal kin, these gargoyles look like blindfolded angelic statues with feathered wings rather than the more usual bat-winged demons. Even stranger, the Blind Angels seem to suffer from a curse that freezes them involuntarily when viewed directly. Alone or in total darkness, they can move freely, but as long as someone is looking at them, they are frozen in statue form, unable to move. This curse has made them masters of stealth and ambush, as they can only attack unseen. Although many stories circulate through Oppara about statues that come to life and kill when one's back is turned, most Opparans believe these to be mere myths, even in the face of several unexplained disappearances in the Statue Garden.

Xiveraka and the Twisted Horns: This scarred priestess of Xoveron leads a tribe of wild gargoyles that roam the blasted wastelands of the Worldwound. Warped and tainted by the Worldwound's abyssal energies, the Twisted Horns regularly raid the few remaining settlements of lost Sarkoris that cling to life on the Worldwound's southwestern frontier, and even fly occasional sorties against the crusaders of Mendev as well. The tribe sometimes allies itself with one demonic warlord or another, but such partnerships are short-lived, as Xiveraka constantly breaks alliances to lead the Twisted Horns on her own mysterious vision quests that she claims to receive from the Horned Prince himself.

Sample Gargoyle

This solitary gargoyle hunter prowls the rooftops and skies of Magnimar's Underbridge district, where the shadow of the Irespan allows him to hunt his victims in the safety of darkness at almost any hour of the day. While Underbridge is his primary hunting ground, Ajekrith does sometimes venture out from under the Shadow, especially when bored of his usual prey. At these times, Ajekrith usually stalks the rooftops of Lowcleft and Dockway, preying upon lone late-night revelers. He rarely visits the districts atop the Summit, except for occasional forays into the Alabaster and Marble districts to wander among the statue-lined streets.

The frightened vagabonds, vagrants, and other slum-dwellers that he hunts don't know who or what he is, but they know that *something* snatches lone victims from the deserted streets and alleyways, and have come to call it "the Nightwing Snatcher," an epithet Ajekrith privately enjoys.

Ajekrith likes to toy with his prey, and those unfortunate enough to survive his initial attacks are often brought back

to his lair where he can torture them at his leisure. One of his favorite pastimes is to drop a live and conscious victim from the heights of the Irespan or the Arvensoar, relishing the unfortunate's screams as they fall to the rocks below.

Ajekrith roosts on the top floor of a dilapidated, condemned tower near one of the Irespan's immense pylons. Flight provides the only access to his nest, as all of the tower's interior staircases have collapsed. Inside, his lair is bedecked with strips of dried skin torn with perverse care from his victims, dangling from ropes like drying laundry. When not out hunting, Ajekrith can usually be found here fondling these grisly trophies, speaking to them in guttural whispers as he brags of his most recent kills.

AJEKRITH, THE NIGHTWING SNATCHER CR 8

XP 4,800

Male gargoyle rogue 4

CE Medium monstrous humanoid (earth)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 21 (+1 armor, +1 deflection, +5 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 63 (5d10+4d8+18)

Fort +4, **Ref** +13, **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities evasion, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge; **DR** 10/magic

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)

Melee 2 claws +13 (1d6+5), bite +13 (1d4+5), gore +13 (1d4+5)

Special Attacks bleeding attack, sneak attack +2d6, surprise attacks

TACTICS

Before Combat Ajekrith enjoys perching among carved stone gargoyles and other city decorations, blending in and observing all who pass by. He sometimes waits above an alley or entrance to a spooky church, relying on stealth to give him an advantage against an unsuspecting victim.

During Combat Ajekrith prefers to ambush lone prey, silently tracking his target from above. When a choice moment presents itself, he swoops down with a flyby sneak attack. Once a victim is bleeding, Ajekrith pulls back and follows his prey from a distance until it collapses from blood loss. Against foes who fight back, Ajekrith uses Flyby Attack to stay out of range of his opponents' weapons. He only lands to make full attacks if he thinks he can quickly put an opponent out of commission.

Morale Ajekrith flees if reduced to below 20 hit points, to nurse his wounds and plot his revenge.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 20, **Con** 14, **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +12; **CMD** 28

Feats Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Fly), Skill Focus (Stealth)

Skills Acrobatics +13 (+17 to jump), Bluff +7, Escape Artist +13, Fly +20, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (local) +6, Perception +12, Stealth +21 (+27 in stony areas); **Racial Modifiers** +2 Stealth (+6 in stony and urban areas)

Languages Common, Terran

SQ freeze, trapfinding

Gear *amulet of mighty fists* +1, *bracers of armor* +1, *ring of protection* +1, masterwork thieves' tools, 1,274 gp worth of coins, gems, and jewelry

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Freeze (Ex) A gargoyle can hold itself so still it appears to be a statue. A gargoyle that uses freeze can take 20 on its Stealth check to hide in plain sight as a stone statue.

The Ecology of the Gas Spore

Not a beholder, but bad nonetheless

by Ed Greenwood

From the journals of Shulheddin, Master Thief, founder of the "Soft Hands" Brotherhood:

"… Kedulkin, who was always the eager one, claimed the right to descend first, since it was he who had discovered the shaft. If it was indeed a way into the Lost City, there would soon be treasure enough for us all, and so we agreed. Taking a deep breath of fresh air, Kedulkin drew one of his throwing blades and a dropline, and vanished through the opening without fanfare. The fighting-men crowded close around, trying to peer down into the gloom, but Mairclyn and I were too cynical to stay that close, and too old to be taken by surprise from behind in such lawless country. We were eyeing the tumbled rocks all about with ready weapons when there came the muffled thud of an explosion beneath our feet, followed by startled cries from the warriors. Kedulkin made no sound as his body, tangled with the rope, was flung high into the air like a child's doll, coming down to sprawl torn and lifeless on a high rock. Mairclyn and I were well away on the next rise when the fighters began stumbling about in a spreading yellow cloud of spores, coughing and crying out. Some were blinded, some shivered uncontrollably, and all seemed dazed and witless. We decided to leave that place ere a breeze came up to carry the spores our way. . . "

From the *Bestiary of Creatures Strange and Wonderful,* a tome of unknown authorship presently in the library of Piergeiron's Palace, Waterdeep:

"One of the deadliest deceivers in nature is the *aniatha,* or gas spore, a creature which precisely resembles the dreaded beholder. If an aniatha is struck and pierced, it explodes violently, injuring all within seven paces or so. Here follows all that is presently known of the true nature of this odd and hazardous creature.

"An aniatha is a large, mobile, fungoid plant of unusual sophistication. It derives energy from visible light, particularly sunlight, and feeds on other plants to gain chlorophyll (necessary for this process) and cellulose (which it uses for structural growth and repair). In this, it is no different from the luminescent "crawling nightmoss" and other ambulatory fungus growths found in the forests and thickets, and it is just as unintelligent. But an aniatha has the unusual natural ability of ***levitation*** and floats slowly about, turning so as to absorb the maximum amount of light in the vicinity — sunlight, if above ground, or torchlight or phosphorescence if in subterranean regions. Areas of ***continual light*** radiance often serve as underground lairs for gas spores. The false eye

of an aniatha (so-called because of its external resemblance to the central visual organ of a beholder, whose magical powers the aniatha does not share) is indeed an eye, which is sensitive to all light and enables the creature to orient itself so as to gain the maximum possible available light, identify food, and navigate through its surroundings.

"The gas spore also has 10 tentacle-like arms which resemble a beholder's eyestalks. These arms, sometimes called rhizome growths, are actually the feeding organs of the gas spore. With them, an aniatha sucks molds and lichens from rock walls, leaves from treetops and aerial plants, and duckweed or pond scum from the surface of pools of standing water. The arms also help the aniatha "walk" delicately along rock walls, tree trunks, and the like, keeping the central body of the gas spore from injury against such obstructions. Under certain conditions, the arms also discharge rhizomes. Gas spores often group together where food and light are plentiful, but they have no apparent intercommunication, and never attack or feed on each other.

"The danger to adventurers lies in the aniatha's asexual means of reproduction. The interior of a gas spore is a hollow cavity filled with gas, in which a cloud of rhizomes is suspended (in whirling motion), nourished, and protected. These reproductive spores are produced on the interior surface of the gas spore and released into the gas storage bladder when fully developed. Here, they whirl at a constant temperature and pressure, until a tentacle of the gas spore touches the flesh of a warm-blooded mammal of gnomish or greater size (for such are the aniatha's minimum needs for a reproductive host creature). Upon such contact, the flexible tentacle exudes moisture to create a temporary airtight suction-seal with the flesh of the mammal, and a jet of rhizomes is expelled through the hollow tentacle, where they stick to the hapless victim's skin, thus infesting the mammal. The tentacle constricts to pinch itself shut at its base (within the spherical body). The creature then withdraws from the mammal. Adventurers report that severing tentacles does not cause the central body to leak or explode.

"Warm-blooded creatures of sufficient size are located by a gas spore's infravision. The aniatha will pursue such a prospective host until the creature is contacted or until pursuit is ended by the disappearance of the creature, by a barrier, or by the availability of other food. (Being unintelligent, an aniatha will break off pursuit immediately to ingest plant material.)

"Unless the rhizomes are destroyed by magical means, an infested host creature dies, sprouting 2-8 gas spores from its body. In the last few hours before their emergence, the growing spores eat away and absorb surrounding bodily fluids and tissue material, leaving only the empty husk of the host.

"If the tough, fibrous epidermis of a gas spore is ruptured and its gaseous interior contents are mixed with air, it will explode, as mentioned earlier. Accidental contact with branches, rock, flesh, and other obstructions rarely splits an aniatha's skin — it must be pierced by a thorn, spike of rock, or the cutting edge of a weapon or similar object in order to rupture. It is the violent reaction of the gas spore's internal gas with air — "a mere accident of nature," as the eminent naturalist, Gessage of Neverwinter, puts it — that makes the gas spore infamous and dangerous. It is thought that the tiny jet of gas exposed to the air when rhizomes are ejected at an intended host does not explode because it is chemically altered by cells within the tentacle, so as not to react with air. There is certainly no truth to the belief that a gas spore must die (that is, explode) to reproduce.

"Any aniatha that lacks sufficient food and energy to remain fully active will hibernate, floating motionless or drifting aimlessly in air currents with its bodily processes halted, eye closed, and tentacles curled in upon itself. Such suspended hibernation can last for centuries, until nearby light, heat, noise, or movement revives the gas spore. Truly, it is a curiosity of our world, if not a sentient creature proper in the sense that others in this bestiary are."

Notes

1. The explosion of a gas spore does 6-36 hp damage to all beings within a 20′ radius (half damage if a saving throw vs. wands is made). Warm-blooded mammals within this range must also save vs. poison at +3 to avoid being infested with rhizomes (see note 5 for effects). Any creature in direct contact with an exploding aniatha (i.e., touching the aniatha physically or with a held weapon) takes full blast damage with no saving throw, but saves normally versus rhizome infestation due to the force of the blast, which tends to drive most rhizomes past the victim. This saving throw versus rhizomes represents the possibility of being infested at any time while a character is within the spreading, dissipating spore cloud — creatures remaining in the vicinity need not roll for a saving throw each round.

2. A gas spore's levitation is a natural, spell-like ability, and is *not,* as is popularly believed, linked to buoyant internal gases. Instead, this ability is the result of an independent power which is not fully understood at present. In this way, the gas spore's ***levitation*** is akin to that of the beholder, and it is perhaps magical in nature. Such ***levitation*** is an ability held only by the living plant and not by dead or severed portions thereof. It enables the aniatha to move 3" per round in any direction (horizontal, vertical, lateral, and at any vector or angle), and is a strong force, capable of resisting normal breezes (although a *gust of wind* can often hold one at bay), and is thus unaffected by ***dispel magic*** or *reverse gravity. A push* or ***repulsion*** spell is effective in fending off a spore in most situations.

3. A gas spore's eye has 12" infravision and is sensitive to all forms of light and heat energy. Presumably, it can also detect vibratory and pressure-fluctuation disturbances, for a gas spore can detect noise and movement within 6" (although how it does this is unknown). It should be noted that a gas spore's eye cannot be blinded or dazzled by sudden or intense bursts of light, such as those produced by explosions and some creature and spell effects; these are merely absorbed by the gas spore.

4. A ***cure disease*** spell cast upon any rhizome-infested creature within 24 hours automatically destroys all the rhizomes. Note that from 20 hours of infestation until death (when the rhizomes hatch), a host body is being eaten away from within (see below).

5. Rhizome-infested creatures are ***feeble-minded*** within two rounds of initial infestation and cannot grasp objects, perform tasks, or even move without aid. This can only be cured by the application of ***cure disease*** as noted above. An affected person could stand, for example, but could not fight, defend himself, climb stairs, walk, or even push open a door unaided. If the character fell, he would lie unmoving until helped up. After 4-7 turns (3 + 1d4), the victim slips into a coma and remains therein until cured or killed by the hatching spores, regardless of external stimuli. (Application of a ***temporal stasis*** spell affects both victim and rhizomes normally, effectively freezing their activity.) After 18 hours of infestation, a victim ravaged by the spreading rhizomes must make a successful system-shock survival roll to avoid death. At 20 hours of infestation (and every hour thereafter), a host victim loses l-4 hp. These losses accumulate until death occurs, whereupon 2-8 spores erupt from the corpse. These effects occur unless curative spells are used to halt the growth of the proto-aniathas. A ***cure disease*** will destroy the rhizomes at this point, but will not cure any internal damage. By attaching themselves to such hosts, the proto-aniathas provide themselves with protein substances not found in plant life — substances which are essential to their growth and survival.

Expelled, fledgling spores hatched from a host are of small size (4′ diameter), do only 2-16 hp damage if ruptured, and are otherwise identical to a mature spore. They grow to full size at whatever rate available food and light energy permit (usually within the first one to five years of life).

The Ecology of the Gelatinous Cube

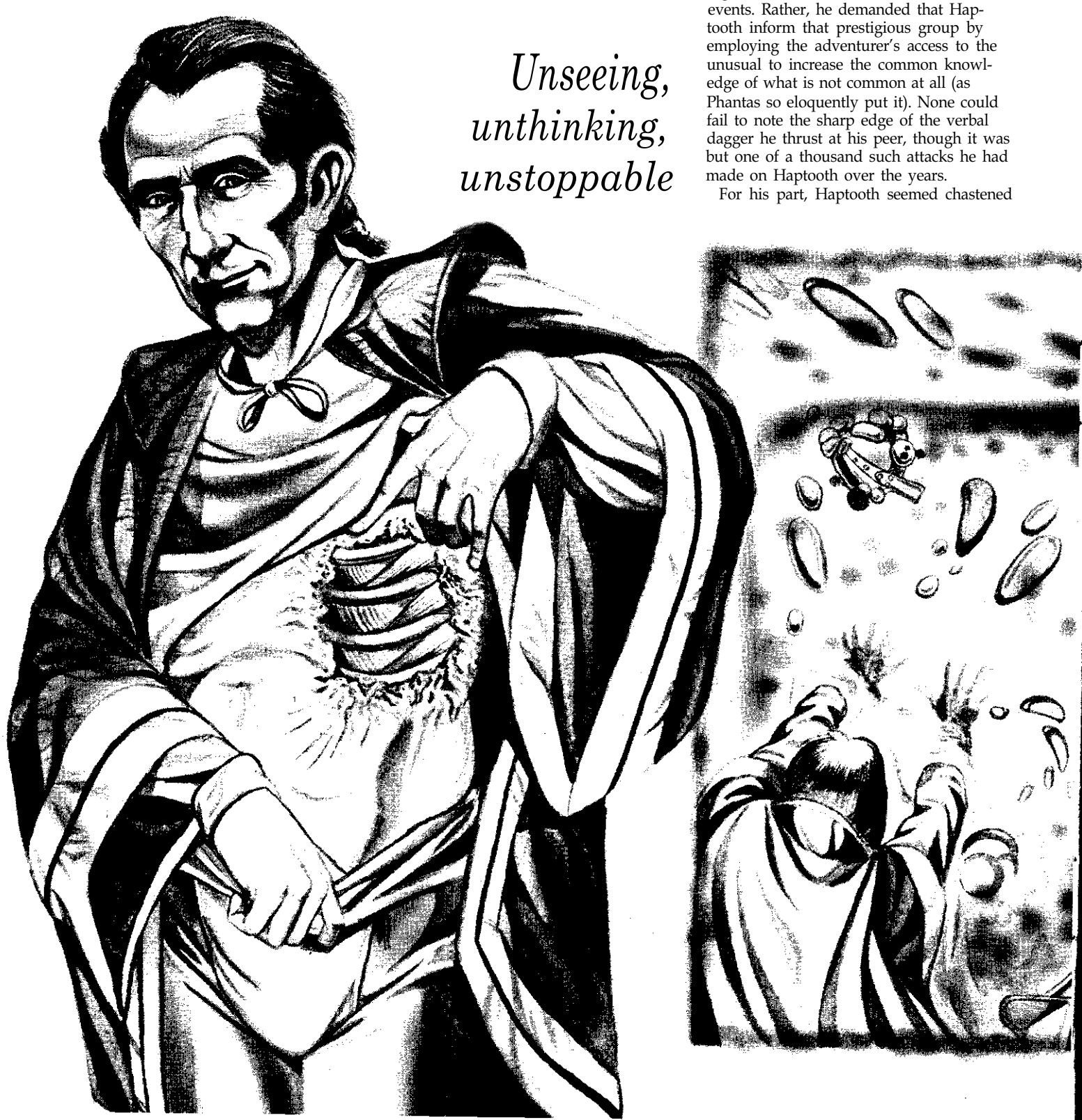
Unseeing, unthinking, unstoppable

by Ed Greenwood

The adventurer Haptooth had spent many years exploring the vast, labyrinthine, subterranean ways of Undermountain, Waterdeep. Many and strange were the tales he shared over sour brintmash wine at The Sign of the Staff or before the Council of Mages upon the Feast of the Moon, at winter's onset.

At the last Feast, Phantas, a member of that Council, pointedly challenged Haptooth to do more than entertain by speaking of curious observations and dramatic events. Rather, he demanded that Haptooth inform that prestigious group by employing the adventurer's access to the unusual to increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all (as Phantas so eloquently put it). None could fail to note the sharp edge of the verbal dagger he thrust at his peer, though it was but one of a thousand such attacks he had made on Haptooth over the years.

For his part, Haptooth seemed chastened



by the words of his rival and, indeed, came to the next yearly Feast with words of note, for he spoke of inquiries into the nature of that curious creature, the athcoid — more commonly known as the gelatinous cube.

Controversy over the athcoid has long raged among the wise — quite heatedly so in the corridors of the Hall of Beast-Tamers and in the offices of the Imperial Zoo of Amn, the keepers of which have managed to keep a cube alive in captivity for some 12 winters. Over and over, the questions are asked: How intelligent are the cubes? How amorphous are their forms? Of what is their digestive fluid composed, and can it be used as a weapon or in alchemy (or, for that matter, in medicine or in the handling of beasts)? How do athcoids mate —indeed, *do* athcoids mate? Haptooth provided all at the Council of Mages with answers.

"Even now," he said, "in the lightless ways beneath us, these great creatures glide noiselessly along, devoid of malicious intent — indeed, devoid of an consciousness at all — but fully a menace to all who encounter them. Even children know that these nearly transparent, gelatinous monsters cannot digest metal or stone, but feed on plants and beasts of all sorts by paralyzing those encountered, engulfing them, and absorbing nutrients from such prey by means of corrosive digestive fluids.

"Athcoids have no thoughts as we know them, but rather respond automatically — and identically, in all cases — to certain stimuli. They cease to advance when they encounter a cold surface or object, then probe forward to seek a way past or around it. Athcoids are attracted to vibrations or warmth, but seem devoid of hearing. When flowing over or around objects, they seem quite fluid and mutable, but return always to a rectangular or rhomboidal form when their surroundings permit.

"An athcoid does not appear to communicate with any creature, nor can it be controlled, save by use of the stimuli I have already mentioned. When two athcoids meet — and this I saw happen — they merge to become one, of greater size and of an apparently stable nature. This monstrous combination has twice the innate hardiness of either of its component creatures, though it eventually divides into two normal athcoids, each exactly like the original component creatures, which go their separate ways.

"More I can tell, gained from the darkest researches. Sadly, athcoids are ignorant of sex." Mutterings and chuckles from the Council followed the comment. "Rather, they reproduce by growing to sufficient size, then split into two slightly smaller creatures. These creatures then grow to a stage which passes for adulthood within a short time.

"As you all must know, athcoids anesthetize prey by means of a gummy secretion which is absorbed into the bloodstream of the prey through its skin. An oral antidote is now available to counteract this effect." Haptooth held up a metal flask, then returned it to its place beside another such flask on the lectern before him. "This antidote is of my own devise. It's expensive, but then so are the consequences if you lack it."

Haptooth paused, appearing to reflect upon some matter. "As to their digestive fluids — these are produced and held in movable, elastic cavities or bubbles within an athcoid's body. When prey is engulfed by a cube, one or more of these mobile bubbles are shifted into contact with the prey. Such fluid has no effect on metal of any sort, and, as we have all heard, metal objects are held for a time within the creature, then expelled through its skin; but the fluid has devastating effects on flesh and cellulose."

So saying, Haptooth undid his sash and pulled his robe open. The crowd mumbled grunts and oaths of amazement. Haptooths ribs were laid bare in an ivory lattice on one flank. All about this gaping hole, his flesh was gnarled and twisted like half-melted wax.

"I recently fought my way through a cube, when trapped in a dead-end passage, and this was the result," he said simply. He continued to hold his robe open, turning slowly to allow all in the Hall to see his injury. Then, dropping his arms, he went back to his lectern and took up the two flasks, pocketing the antidote. As he undid the cap on the other, he slowly walked toward the audience, in the direction of Phantas. "Dearly, I paid for my labors, but they were well rewarded. I captured a sample of the digestive fluid," he said in a loud voice, whereupon he drenched the astonished councillor with its contents. "Now, the eminent alchemist Phantas can in his turn increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all."

He left then, *teleporting* with a last fiendish grin, as Phantas's scream echoed loudly through the hall.

Notes

1. Gelatinous cubes may flow through openings as small as 1′ across. They sense all living, moving beings within 120′ from the vibrations and heat given off by such creatures, and actively pursue such prey.

2. Being so totally mindless, a gelatinous cube should be immune to all will-force and mind-affecting magical powers — particularly enchantment/charm spells and mind-reading talents. Charm *monster* thus has no effect upon them.

3. When two cubes meet and merge, the resulting "double cube" attacks as an 8-HD monster with a total number of hit points equal to the total of the two merged cubes. This combination creature retains a size of 10′ x 10′ x 20′, the longest axis being pointed in its direction of travel like a thick-bodied (but square) worm. Otherwise, it is like a normal cube in all respects. Division occurs either immediately upon contact with a third cube or after a period of 2-8 days. Normal-sized cubes divide after a period of six years. Each of the two resulting cubes has 3 HD, half the number of hit points the "parent" cube originally had, and a size of slightly under 8′ x 8′ x 8′. These "little" cubes grow to maturity in three months. Technitally speaking, the gelatinous cube is an immortal organism, since (unless destroyed by adventurers, starvation, or disaster) a cube never dies.

4. Cubes may move about underwater with ease, though the contact poison which paralyzes opponents is much diluted. Saving throws against this effect are made at +6 in this environment.

5. If Haptooth's antidote against a cube's *paralysis* is made available, it removes the *paralysis* within 1-4 rounds after being swallowed (an automatic reflex not stopped by the paralysis). However, the potion has no effect on any other form of *paralysis*, such as that from ghouls or carrion crawlers. The antidote is not magical in nature. Ω

Gelatinous Cube

"We thought it was a ghost at first, some armored spectre slain long ago who still haunted the halls of his death. Brandeis, our cleric, stepped forward to banish it back from where it came. He froze in mid-prayer, then let loose a blood-curdling scream from paralyzed lips as the thing engulfed him. 'Twasn't a ghost at all, you see, but a vast cube of quivering jelly that filled the corridor from floor to ceiling. We fled then, and when we later returned, all we found was his silver holy symbol, gleaming wetly and etched by acid. Nothing else remained of poor Brandeis."

—"Scar" Helgask, retired adventurer

Dungeons are filled with a variety of subterranean slimes and oozes, some harmless, others—such as the puddle-like gray ooze, ameboid ochre jelly, and much-feared black pudding—exceedingly dangerous. But perhaps no ooze is stranger than the gelatinous cube. Filling entire corridors with their surprisingly geometric shapes, gelatinous cubes scour their lairs clean of all organic debris, whether offal, carrion, or living creatures. Even inorganic objects are picked up in the cleansing sweeps of a gelatinous cube, forming a treasure trove of undigested riches, the sole remains of its devoured victims.

Overview

Gelatinous cubes are mindless scavengers that live only to eat, wandering aimlessly through caverns and underground tunnels, engulfing anything in their paths. They produce powerful digestive acids to break down organic materials. Gelatinous cube acid is also a paralyzing anesthetic, but different varieties have their own unique acidic secretions, some even capable of dissolving inorganic materials like metal.

While other oozes are known to climb, and can be found lurking in dark alcoves preparing to drop down on unsuspecting explorers, gelatinous cubes are firmly landbound. Their mass and shape, and their slippery mucus coating, prevent them from climbing walls or clinging to ceilings. They can, however, move up and down stairs with no trouble, provided such impediments are less than half the height of the cube. While they can compress themselves to fit into narrow or low-ceilinged corridors, gelatinous cubes cannot fit into spaces smaller than half their width. Because gelatinous cubes breathe (a cube's entire body acts as a rudimentary lung), they are not normally found in aquatic environments. Shallow pools up to 10 feet deep provide no obstacle to gelatinous cubes, however, as long as at least some parts of their bodies protrude above the surface to allow breathing.

Unlike their amorphous brethren, gelatinous cubes have a defined shape; they are usually found inhabiting worked dungeons and mines rather than natural caves. Additionally, they are immune to electricity and nearly transparent. Experienced adventurers learn to watch for a strange shimmering in the air, the reflection of light off a cube's glistening sides, or faint slime tracks on the floor and walls—all telltale signs of a gelatinous cube's presence in a dungeon.

Ecology

A typical gelatinous cube is 10 feet on a side and weighs over 7 tons. They grow to fit their surroundings, however, so a cube inhabiting a giant-built dungeon can reach sizes of 20 or even 30 feet to a side with enough food. Unlike most other large creatures, gelatinous cubes are single-celled organisms grown to monstrous size. The viscid interior of the ooze's body is surrounded by a thin, permeable layer called the cytoskeleton, which protects the ooze, enables it to move, and maintains its cubic shape. The cytoskeleton is able to repair itself at a remarkable rate, preventing its semifluid interior from gushing out when the creature is wounded. Like other oozes, a gelatinous cube has no eyes or other dedicated sensors. Instead, its entire body acts as a primitive sensory organ, detecting the scent and vibrations of nearby food sources, to the extent that even *invisibility* is no defense against it.

A gelatinous cube feeds by engulfing anything it encounters, using its anesthetizing slime to paralyze living prey. Once inside a cube's body, organic material is quickly dissolved and digested. Inorganic objects, such as metal or stone, remain suspended within the cube's gelatinous protoplasm until such time as they are expelled from the cube's body. Because of its simple composition, a gelatinous cube can survive long periods of time with no food, going into a state of torpor until it detects a nearby food source. Due to this ability to hibernate for extended periods, the actual lifespan of gelatinous cubes remains a mystery.

The gelatinous cube is widely regarded as too bizarre to be the product of natural evolution. Scholars point to its cubic shape as evidence of intelligent design, and several obscure texts contain ambiguous passages that hint at strange rituals devised by ancient magicians to create gelatinous cubes. In fact, the first gelatinous cube was the accidental product of two warring obsessions in a demented mind. A long-forgotten sorcerer postulated that all ooze life was the product of a vast empire of intelligent oozes from another plane that sought to absorb all other forms of life across the multiverse. While he believed that oozes represented the pinnacle of pseudonatural evolution, this sorcerer was convinced that true perfection lay in geometric precision, and endeavored to merge the two into a race of loyal guardians and servants.

Using a variety of existing oozes as raw material for his experiments, the mage summoned bodiless alien beings from other realities in a blasphemous attempt to combine their alien intelligence with the raw potential inherent in protoplasm, imposing the order of the planes on the chaos of ooze life. Frustrated and maddened, his experiments grew ever more elaborate and crazed, but he was unable either to implant even rudimentary intelligence into the ooze or to constrain it into geometric shapes. His research ended abruptly when he ran an electrical current through a quantity of paralytic ooze, causing it to grow exponentially. He was overwhelmed and absorbed by his new creation, which continued growing until it completely filled the confines of the mage's 10-foot-square laboratory cell.

Although the researcher's experiments were a failure, the end result proved surprisingly popular among other mages and paranoid recluses: an unsleeping, remorseless killing machine, perfectly adapted to guard the rooms and hallways of a wizard's sanctum or dungeon. Over time, the secret of creating these singular guardians spread, and others expanded upon the lost sorcerer's work.

Although gelatinous cubes were originally created through magical experimentation, they can reproduce on their own, and can now be found throughout the world. Gelatinous cubes replicate themselves asexually, usually through the process of budding. When food is plentiful, a cube may extrude a small part of itself, which soon drops off to become a separate gelatinous cube. Such young are of Small size, and live in some danger, as they are frequently reabsorbed by their mindless parent. Given enough food and luck, however, a young budded cube can grow to full size within a month's time.

Rarely, gelatinous cubes have been known to reproduce via fission, though this has only been observed in large habitats with an overabundance of food. In these cases,

Ooze Feats

Here are some feats for dealing with ooze friends or foes.

Indigestible

You have acquired a resistance to the acids of oozes.

Prerequisites: Favored enemy (ooze) or survived engulfing by an ooze.

Benefit: You gain acid resistance 5.

Ooze Companion

Your understanding of oozes has grown to the point where you can bond with one as a companion.

Prerequisites: Ooze Whisperer, animal companion, wild empathy.

Benefit: Add the following oozes to your list of possible animal companions. 7th—gelatinous cube, gray ooze; 10th—ochre jelly; 13th—black pudding. Because of its non-intelligence, an ooze companion starts with 0 tricks (only your bonus tricks from druid levels apply) and can only learn the following bonus tricks: attack, come, defend, and stay.

Ooze Whisperer

You have a special bond with slimes and oozes.

Prerequisites: Wild empathy class feature.

Benefit: You may target oozes with spells and special abilities that normally only affect animals as if the oozes were magical beasts with Intelligence 1, though they gain a +4 bonus to their saving throws. You may use wild empathy to influence oozes as easily as you influence magical beasts with Intelligence 1.

an adult cube divides itself into two equal cubes of Medium size. With plentiful food available, these cubes usually avoid the threat of reabsorption and quickly grow to Large size. As such, this method remains the most successful means of gelatinous cube reproduction.

Habitat & Society

Oozes can be found across the world in nearly any environment, but gelatinous cubes almost invariably occupy underground or indoor habitats. They prefer damp tunnels to dry, and well-traveled dungeons to abandoned ones, as these provide plenty of moisture and food for a hungry cube.

A typical gelatinous cube lair is a dungeon or mine with worked, regular features. Unlike most such places, however, a gelatinous cube lair is amazingly clean—no mold or slime growing on the walls, no patches of fungi, and no sign of other subterranean creatures such as bats and insects. Even small amounts of rubble and dirt, commonly scattered throughout most dungeons, are missing. Careful investigation reveals signs of dried slime trails on the floors and walls, but these faint glistening patches might be mistaken for trace amounts of crystal in the walls themselves.

Rooms within such a dungeon are completely empty, with no sign of decayed furnishings or even dust, unless a stout metal or stone door bars entry. In dungeons where a gelatinous cube is used as a guardian, there is often one closely fitted, vault-like door of stone or metal to keep the cube away from the treasure it guards. One disused room may contain a small mound of shining metal and polished stone objects, comprised of indigestible items ejected by the cube, but there is just as likely to be a number of such tiny piles scattered randomly throughout the dungeon, constantly changing position and composition in an endless cycle of absorption and expulsion.

Gelatinous cubes and other oozes have no society to speak of, living solitary existences as scavengers. Rarely, more than one ooze may be encountered in close proximity, although gelatinous cubes avoid each other so long as food is plentiful. (Similar to how all creatures with at least Charisma 1 recognize themselves as separate from their environment, different cubes react to each other in a primitive, instinctual, "this is me, do not eat" sort of way.) In conditions of famine, one cube may attempt to engulf another. In such cases, the larger, stronger cube is the usual winner after a brief battle. A clash between two evenly matched cubes is a titanic struggle that can last for days, as the glutinous horrors push against one another, extruding pseudopods while they seek purchase on slimy walls and floors, with each attempting to envelop its opponent until one cube inevitably tires and is absorbed by the victor.

Campaign Role

Gelatinous cubes best serve as obstacles for low-level adventurers delving underground. Intelligent dungeon denizens may suffer the presence of a cube nearby as a guardian and janitor, and its square shape makes it preferable to other oozes, as even a simple stone door can easily block it from entering certain rooms. Perhaps the PCs have been hired to find an adventurer who recently disappeared in the local cave system and recover his ancestral sword, which can now be found floating in the depths of a gelatinous cube.

Other creative uses can make a gelatinous cube a greater threat. Due to a cube's transparency, it may not be readily apparent to inexperienced adventurers what danger they actually face. A shield suspended in a cube might seem to be hanging on the wall behind it, giving greedy adventurers a nasty surprise. A suit of absorbed armor, perhaps with a faint magical glow, might look like a ghostly figure in a darkened corridor (see *D1: Crown of the Kobold King* for an example of this tactic).

Due to its slow speed, a gelatinous cube is easily avoided once its presence is known. Canny dungeon designers may incorporate cubes into traps to address this shortcoming. A careless rogue who falls through a spring-loaded trapdoor into a 10-foot-square pit filled with a gelatinous cube is in some trouble until his companions can work out how to reach him. More dangerous are traps that drop a cube on top of the party.

Treasure

Gelatinous cubes do not collect treasure. They do, however, absorb valuables as they sweep through their lairs, and the indigestible remains of past victims can remain suspended in a cube for weeks until they are expelled from the creature's body.

A gelatinous cube's treasure consists solely of various coins (1/10th the normal amount) as well as goods and items made of stone or metal. Weapons, metallic armor, gems, jewelry, and even the occasional potion in a metal or glass flask are all likely to be found in a cube's lair, or within the cube itself.

Variants

As a product of magical experimentation, the gelatinous cube exists in several different varieties.

Ebony Cube: This creature is a gelatinous cube that has been crossed with a deadly black pudding. Vast cubes of inky slime, they lose their transparent ability, but their acid is more powerful, able to dissolve even metal. Any melee hit or engulf attack deals 1d6 acid damage and the opponent's armor and clothing dissolve and become useless immediately unless he succeeds on a DC 20 Reflex save. A metal or wooden weapon that strikes an ebony cube also dissolves immediately unless it succeeds on a DC 20 Reflex save. The cube's acidic touch deals 20 points of damage per round to wooden or metal objects, but the ooze must remain in contact with the object for 1 full round to deal this damage. (CR +2)

Electric Jelly: This rare variant is capable of producing powerful electrical shocks. It has a purplish sheen, reducing Spot checks to notice it to DC 10. Once every 1d4 rounds, the ooze can generate an electric pulse in a 10-foot radius that deals 1d8 points of electricity damage and stuns creatures

Ooze-Hunting Gear

Ooze-hunting rangers and underground explorers have developed several alchemical and magical items to protect them from ooze attacks.

Alkali flask: This is a flask of caustic liquid that reacts with an ooze's natural acids. You can throw an alkali flask as a splash weapon. Treat this attack as a ranged touch attack with a range increment of 10 feet. A direct hit deals 1d6 points of acid damage. Every creature within 5 feet of the point where the acid hits takes 1 point of acid damage from the splash. Oozes and other acid-based creatures take double damage from the flask. **Cost** 15 gp; **Requirements** Craft (alchemy) DC 20; **Weight** 1 lb.

Alkali salt: These tiny granules can be dissolved in water, creating a slimy material used to coat metallic items such as weapons or armor. Such a coating neutralizes the metal-eating acid of black puddings and gray oozes, protecting the item from 1d3 contacts with an ooze's acidic touch. **Cost** 30 gp; **Requirements** Craft (alchemy) DC 20.

Ooze grease: This alchemical concoction can be spread over a Medium or Small creature's body as a full-round action. It provides a +5 alchemical bonus on Escape Artist checks, grapple checks to avoid a grapple, and Reflex saves to avoid an ooze's improved grab or engulf abilities, but gives a –5 penalty to disarm checks, grapple checks to start or maintain a grapple or pin, and other checks that may be hindered by a loose grip (such as Climb). One application lasts for up to 1 hour and can be removed with soap and water. **Cost** 50 gp; **Requirements** Craft (alchemy) DC 25; **Weight** 1 lb.

Sovereign glue: This fluid immediately thickens ooze protoplasm, acting as a permanent *slow* spell on the creature. Applying the glue is a standard action that provokes an attack of opportunity. Applying *universal solvent* to an ooze under the effect of the glue returns the ooze to normal (without doing damage, see below).

Universal solvent: This substance dissolves ooze protoplasm. A single application inflicts 4d6 points of damage to an ooze (Fortitude half DC 19). Applying the solvent is a standard action that provokes an attack of opportunity, or it can be thrown as a splash weapon (affecting only the targeted ooze) for half damage. *Stone salve* has the same effect against gray oozes.

Flesh to Ooze
School transmutation (polymorph); **Level** Sor/Wiz 6

CASTING

Casting Time 1 standard action
Components V, S, M (alchemical reagents worth 100 gp)

EFFECT

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)
Target 1 creature or see text
Duration permanent
Saving Throw Fortitude negates, Will partial, see text; **Spell Resistance** No

DESCRIPTION

This functions like *baleful polymorph*, except the target becomes an ooze. A creature of 3 HD or less becomes a gray ooze, 4–9 HD becomes a gelatinous cube or ochre jelly, and 10+ HD becomes a black pudding. Alternatively, instead of a creature you may target a quantity of inert flesh (such as that created by the *stone to flesh* spell) of sufficient mass, which becomes an ooze of your choice.

Because a target's gear does not transform with it, any items fall under or within the ooze's body, which may mean the items are destroyed. If the ooze has the split ability, splitting the ooze creates one ooze that retains the creature's original identity (for the purpose of memories or restoring the creature) and one normal mindless ooze of that type.

for 1 round. A DC 20 Fortitude save reduces the damage by half and negates the stunning effect. (CR +1)

Frost Cube: This ooze contains floating pockets of symbiotic brown mold (DMG 76). In addition to eating whatever organic materials they pick up, frost cubes feed on warmth and radiate cold. Living creatures within 5 feet of the cube take 3d6 points of nonlethal cold damage per round. Fire brought within 5 feet of a frost cube gives it fast healing 3. It takes +50% damage from cold attacks. (CR +1)

Sorcerer Ooze: Also called the brain cube, this is perhaps the strangest variant ever reported. Presumably some mad mage or ooze-cultist found a way to transfer humanoid intelligence into the cube's body as a way of achieving immortality without resorting to undeath, but at the cost of the humanoid's sanity. Still able to cast spells (using Silent Spell and Still Spell), a typical sorcerer ooze has Intelligence 10, Wisdom 12, and Charisma 18, with the spellcasting ability of a 10th-level sorcerer. Some know the *ventriloquism* spell, allowing them to communicate with others (though their madness means they eventually attack anyway), but most didn't plan ahead enough and have been locked inside a gelatinous prison, able only to eat and cast spells, never interacting with intelligent creatures in any meaningful way. (CR +6)

Stunjelly: This most commonly encountered variant is gray in color and slightly translucent. A stunjelly looks like a section of dungeon wall 10 feet square, where it waits to engulf passing prey. It has the same paralytic acid as a standard gelatinous cube, and requires a DC 20 Spot check to notice it, but may also be detected by the mild odor of vinegar it exudes (see *Tome of Horrors, Revised*).

Gelatinous Cubes on Golarion

On Golarion, gelatinous cubes may be found inhabiting nearly any subterranean dungeon, from the ice-clad reaches of the Crown of the World to the steaming jungles of Garund and even farther afield. In Avistan, the Acadamae of Korvosa has at least one gelatinous cube sweeping corridors clean of garbage and wayward students, while the abandoned dwarf-holds of the Five Kings Mountains provide numerous lairs for the creatures. In the Garundi interior, gelatinous cubes are known to infest the vine-choked cities of the Mwangi Expanse as well. Scattered cults of Rovagug in Casmaron particularly favor the mindless, destructive oozes as guardians for their hidden temples.

Scholars of ooze lore usually attribute the origin of gelatinous cubes on Golarion to Jubilex, the Demon Lord of Poison and Ooze, who gave his inspiration or aid to one of three sources: the antediluvian wizardry of the alien aboleths (and their human protégés of Old Azlant), the slime pits of Haruka (the Thassilonian domain of Sloth), or the god-kings of ancient Osirion. While many sages scoff at tales of Osirian oozes, claiming the dry climate of that land is inimical to ooze life, stories abound of lost Osirian tombs rediscovered and opened after being sealed for millennia, empty of all living things save a single, ravenous gelatinous cube that suddenly stirs to life. It is just as undeniable, however, that the Thassilonian ruins of Varisia are home to large concentrations of gelatinous cubes. It is even rumored that aquatic varieties of gelatinous cubes can be found wandering the sunken halls of lost Azlant, though the secretive elves of the Mordant Spire drive away most explorers wishing to confirm these stories.

Perhaps the strangest story of all comes from beneath Golarion. Recently, reports have surfaced of a huge vault located in Orv, the deepest level of the Darklands. These accounts describe a gelatinous cube of truly mountainous proportions, worshiped as a god by an aberrant race of half-ooze humanoids who placate it with a never-ending tribute of food and slaves captured from neighboring vaults. Normal-sized gelatinous cubes are said to cleave like icebergs from the sides of this thing and wander aimlessly through the tunnels of the Darklands. Thus far, these statements remain unconfirmed on the surface, and a Pathfinder expedition to investigate these disturbing claims, led by famed venture-captain Rixmir Thal, has not been heard from in months.

Gelatinous Cube

This transparent, cube-shaped creature has no visible organs or appendages, only a few bits of corroded bone and metal suspended inside its quivering protoplasm.

Gelatinous Cube **CR 3**

N Large ooze

Init –5; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft.

DEFENSE

AC 4, touch 4, flat-footed 4
(–5 Dex, –1 size)

hp 54 (4d10+32)

Fort +9, **Ref** –4, **Will** –4

Defensive Abilities ooze traits; **Immune** electricity

OFFENSE

Spd 15 ft.

Melee slam +2 (1d6 plus 1d6 acid)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks acid, engulf, paralysis

TACTICS

During Combat A gelatinous cube attacks by slamming its body into its prey. Though it is capable of making a slam attack with a pseudopod, it normally uses its engulf ability against foes.

Morale A gelatinous cube fights mindlessly to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 1, **Con** 26, **Int** —, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +7

SQ transparent

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Acid (Ex) A gelatinous cube's acid does not harm metal or stone.

Engulf (Ex) Although it moves slowly, a gelatinous cube can simply mow down Large or smaller creatures as a standard action. It cannot make a slam attack during a round in which it engulfs. The gelatinous cube merely has to move over the opponents, affecting as many targets as it can cover. Opponents can make attacks of opportunity against the cube, but if they do so they are not entitled to a saving throw. Those who do not attempt attacks of opportunity must succeed on a DC 13 Reflex save or be engulfed; on a success, they are pushed back or aside (opponent's choice) as the cube moves forward. Engulfed creatures are subject to the cube's paralysis and acid, and are considered grappled and trapped within its body. The save DC is Strength-based and includes a +1 racial bonus.

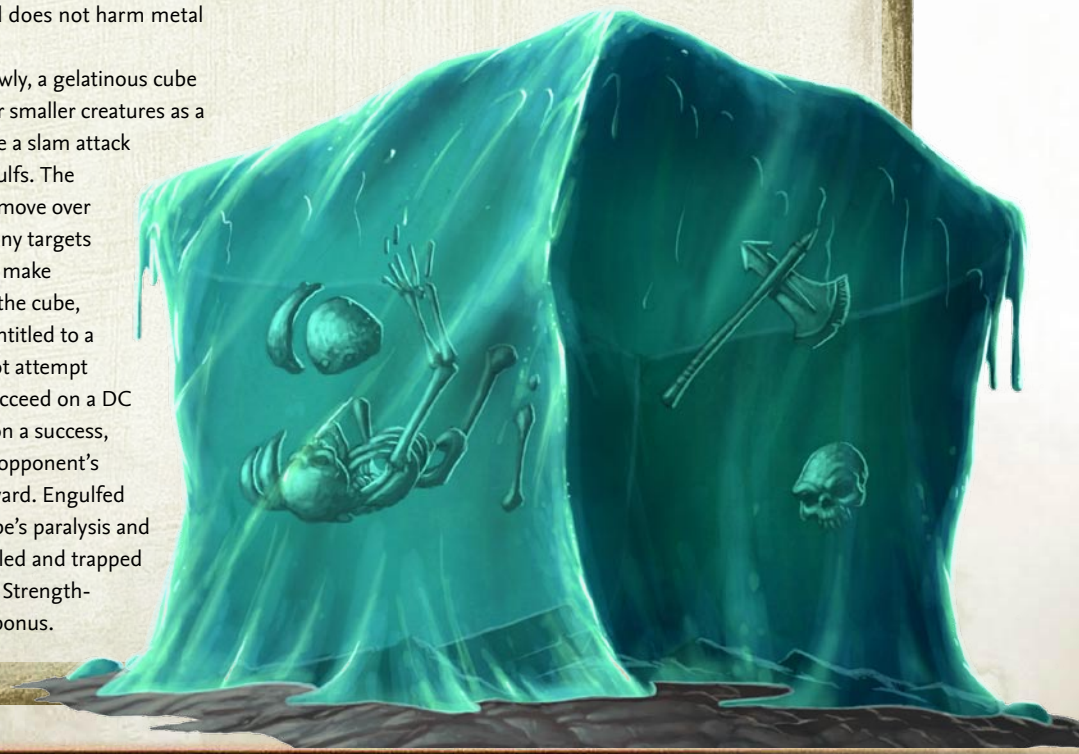
Paralysis (Ex) A gelatinous cube secretes an anesthetizing slime. A target hit by a cube's melee or engulf attack must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 3d6 rounds. The cube can automatically engulf a paralyzed opponent as an immediate action. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Transparent (Ex) Gelatinous cubes are hard to see, even under ideal conditions, and it takes a DC 15 Spot check to notice one. Creatures who fail to notice a cube and walk into it are automatically engulfed.

Creating a Gelatinous Cube

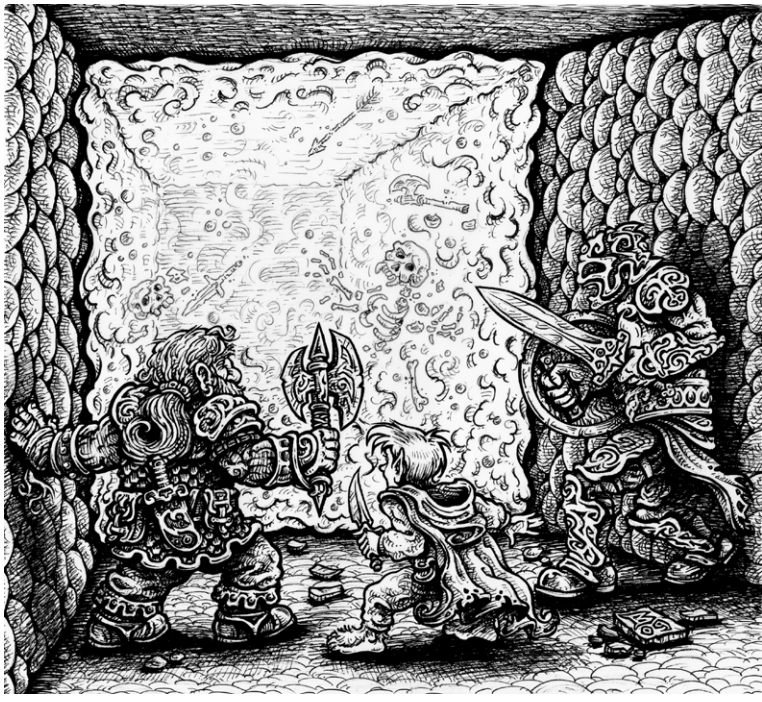
A variety of techniques for creating gelatinous cubes and other oozes in a laboratory exist, several of which may be found in an ancient tome called *A Treatise on Jellies, Puddings, and Other Dangerous Oozes*. One process involves summoned gangs of ooze mephits and lemures, which are transmuted into mindless protoplasm using the *flesh to ooze* spell. The resulting ooze is then treated with an alchemical concoction of aboleth slime and paralytic chuul extract before being poured into a large, 10-foot-square wooden mold. Kept warm and moist, by the time its acid has dissolved the wooden mold the ooze has solidified and matured into a full-grown gelatinous cube.

Despite the extraplanar nature of the creatures used in its creation, the gelatinous cube is not an outsider, although different recipes may create one with the fiendish template.



On the Care and Keeping of Gelatinous Cubes

By Jonathan McAnulty
Art by Ben Hodson



Some men raise dogs. Others train falcons. Some cultivate orchids or stunted trees. It is a select few, however, who nurture and shape gelatinous cubes—and they call themselves "cubists."

Whether brave or mad, the small, tightknit circle of enthusiasts who breed gelatinous cubes are certainly dedicated. Regardless of alignment or vocation, cubists share a genuine fondness for these odd oozes. They regularly correspond with one another, sharing tips and concerns and advancing their hobby. Anyone looking to join their ranks will quickly find staunch supporters who are happy to see others take up the care and keeping of these transparent geometrical monstrosities.

The Basics of Gelatinous Care

Gelatinous cubes are not hard to raise: they require only living space and food. Cubes are constantly in motion and thrive best in stone corridors that are approximately 10 ft. wide and at least 30 ft. in length (3,000 cubic ft.). The massive bulk of a gelatinous cube requires constant nourishment—a minimum of 50 lb. of organic matter a day to maintain proper health and constant size.

A healthy cube is firm to the touch, giving slightly with small amounts of pressure, and has a glossy sheen at its surface. They grow noticeably with overfeeding, rapidly entering their reproductive cycle. Undernourished or confined cubes rapidly dry out and die, losing mass and vitality while their surface dries and cracks. Cubes that are too constrained or malnourished will eventually die.

PCs wishing to raise a gelatinous cube need place for their cube to live. The minimum upkeep for a cube is 1 cp/HD (or level)/day, which provides sufficient nourishment to maintain the pet's current size. Undernourished or confined cubes lose 1 hp each day until the cube dies.

A cube needs much more than this minimum to grow. Cubes can be deliberately overfed at the cost of 1 sp/HD (or level)/day; a week of overfeeding will advance the gelatinous cube by 1 HD (or level). A cube with more than 4 HD (or greater than level 5) has a cumulative 5% chance per extra HD (or level) to experience mitosis within 1d6 days (i.e. a 5 HD cube has a 5% chance and a 7 HD cube has a 15% chance). Mitosis splits a single cube into two smaller cubes (divide the total HD or level in half and give one cube any extra). Make this mitosis check on a weekly basis for cubes. With insufficient space and food, new cubes risk recombining in a form of reverse mitosis.

Advanced Cube Care

All cubists start with the basics and find enjoyment in the simple raising of gelatinous cubes, but passing that stage, any true connoisseur soon discovers that the real joy of breeding cubes is in the art of shaping.

Cubists know many different ways to shape a gelatinous cube. The easiest is to slowly force a cube to mold itself into a rectangular shape by manipulating its living space. Careful use of moveable walls, floors, and ceilings can safely reduce an ooze in either width or height by 1 ft. a week. For every foot in width or height a cube is reduced, it gains an equal amount of cubic space in length. (Changing a cube in this way does not affect the creature's speed, size, or required nourishment and living space.)

Among certain members of the cubist community, it is quite fashionable to make long, snakelike "cubes." These cuboids can be quite a surprise when encountered in small crawl spaces.

However, the art of shaping is not limited to the creation

of gelatinous cuboids. Glowing cubes, opaque cubes, giant cubes, dwarf cubes, and even round cubes have all been raised by cubists. Though seasoned adventurers are no doubt acquainted with the gelatinous cube, even the most experienced might be surprised when they encounter one of these variants in a dungeon belonging to a devoted cubist.

Opaque Cubes

Some cubists have discovered they can create colorful oozes by feeding metal-based dyes to their cubes. Such enthusiasts find beauty in these creations and have been known to build vast stone mazes with glass ceilings. Just as lesser men watch bright fish, these hobbyists spend their leisure time watching brightly colored cubes wind slowly through their homes. Evil cubists often enjoy throwing living creatures into their mazes to watch the ensuing feeding.

Fashioning an opaque gelatinous cube is as simple as purchasing the right dyes. Vast amounts of these dyes are required, however, and over time, they must be reapplied. In game terms, it costs 10 gp/HD (or level)/month to maintain a cube's coloration. Opaque cubes may be any color. They lose their transparent nature.

Glowing Cubes

Many cubists enjoy the effect created by the strategic placement of magical lights within their pets. When done correctly, the light appears to float through the air like a willow-the-wisp or fairy light.

In addition to the cost of the magical light—glass globes containing a *continual flame* are the current rage among the trendiest cubists—great care has to be taken in the placement of each light. In game terms, the cubist must make a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check (DC 15) or a Nature check (DC 20) to set a light inside a cube: failure means the light is placed askew, spoiling the effect, and failure by more than 5 points means the gelatinous cube attacks the cubist.

Cubes of Unusual Sizes

Raising huge cubes is not hard, requiring only that the cubes be overfed. Some enthusiasts like to see how long they can maintain their cubes in an oversized state before mitosis eventually occurs. They carefully regulate the diet of their wards, alternately overfeeding and underfeeding the oozes. With constant monitoring, they can keep a cube in an oversized condition indefinitely.

Keeping an oversized cube from undergoing mitosis requires a weekly Knowledge (dungeoneering) check with a DC of 10 + the HD of the

Fun Facts about Gelatinous Cubes

Gelatinous cubes are asexual. They reproduce through mitosis, dividing one creature into two. Additionally, small portions of a cube can be removed and, if tended with care, can be grown into a full cube: this requires a weekly Knowledge (dungeoneering) check (DC 15) or Nature check (DC 20). In the wild, gelatinous cubes will normally grow until they are about 15 ft. across before dividing.

Under the right conditions, two separate cubes will meld into a larger cube. Such unions seldom last long before mitosis occurs.

Gelatinous cubes can strip an entire cow to bare bones in under a minute.

Gelatinous cubes are not rigid cubes. Their forms are malleable and flow around corners. While they are normally encountered in nature as cubes, other shapes have been reported.

Gelatinous cubes can survive in fresh water. When submerged, their paralytic poison is not as effective (victims receive +4 to saving throws), but they are harder to notice, requiring a Spot check (DC 20) or Perception check (DC 30). Gelatinous cubes are too heavy to swim, but they feed and move on the bottom of some lakes. In these environments, they often achieve more massive sizes.

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gelatinous cube or a Nature check with a DC of 15 + the level of the gelatinous cube. Even if this check fails, the weekly chance for mitosis to occur is unchanged. Huge cubes require living spaces of at least 9,000 cubic ft.

Dwarf Cubes

Just as some grow bonsai trees, certain cubists enjoy keeping miniatures of their monsters. Through weekly ministrations involving alchemical salves and careful cuts, a gelatinous cube can be kept as small as 3 ft. across in width and height. Dwarf cube enthusiasts often start their projects from cuttings (the removal of gelatinous material from fully grown oozes). More intelligent enthusiasts also know to trap their cubes in boxes or special rooms before beginning their weekly shaping.

Keeping a smaller cube alive without allowing it to grow in size requires 5 gp a week for the proper chemicals and a Heal check (DC 15) to keep the ooze from dying. Dwarf cubes have between 1 and 3 HD (or levels). The 1 HD cubes are 3 ft. across with a Strength of 6, a -2 attack bonus, and a CR of ½. The 2 HD cubes are 6 ft. across with a strength of 8, a +0 attack bonus and a CR of 1. The 3 HD cubes are 9 ft. across with a +1 attack bonus and a CR of 2. Medium cubes can only engulf Medium or smaller opponents. All other gelatinous cube abilities, including damage, remain the same.

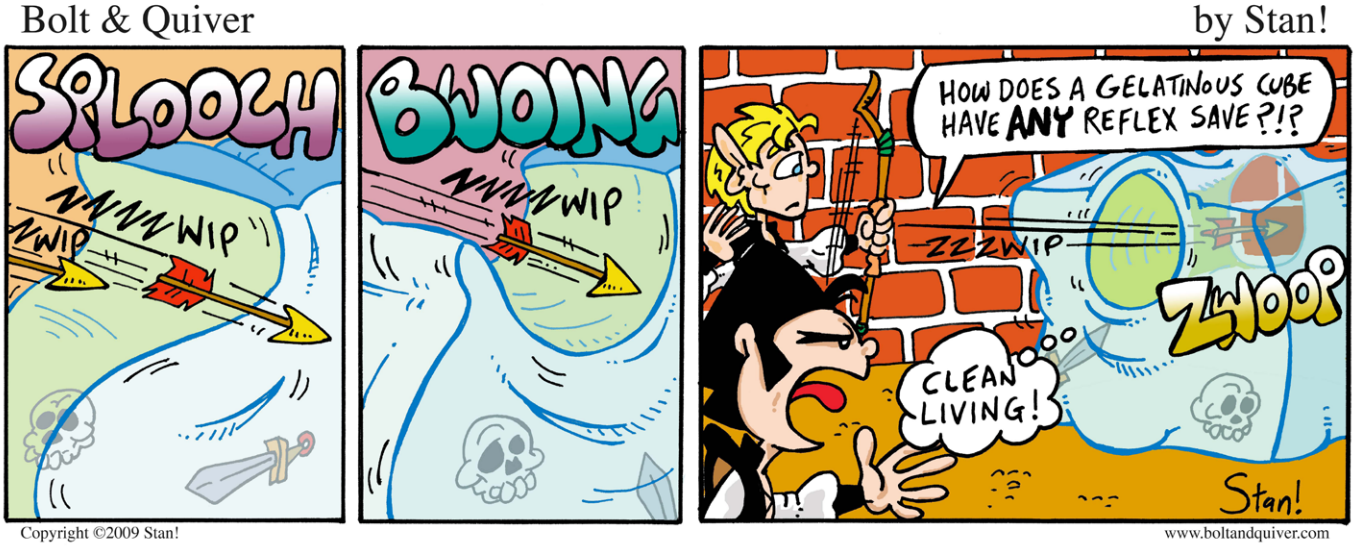
Dwarf cubes range from level 2 to 4. Level 2 cubes are 3 ft. across with a -3 to attacks and defenses, -1 to damage, and 60 less hp. Level 3 cubes are 6 ft. across with a -2 to attacks and defenses, -1 to damage, and 40 less hp. Level 4 cubes are 9 ft. across with a -1 to attacks and defenses and 20 less hp. Medium cubes can only engulf a single Medium or smaller opponent at a time

Round Cubes

Only a select few ever reach the pinnacle of cube shaping—a round cube. For one thing, shaping a round cube requires a special container of massive proportions into which a cube must be lured. This metallic sphere, attached to an axle-like arrangement is akin to a giant hamster wheel and allows the trapped ooze the continual movement it requires to flourish. Food for the gelatinous monster is fed into the container through a special hatch. When the cube is properly molded within its spherical home, the container opens to release the rounded creature. Round cubes never retain their new shape for more than a week and those that raise them typically have two or three of the special containers in constant use.

The metal sphere in which the cube is shaped costs 5,000 gp. Luring a gelatinous cube into the sphere requires a DC 20 Handle Animal skill check. It takes 1 month of constant care and feeding for the cube to accept its new shape, and once released, the cube reverts to its more natural shape within 1d6 days. Cubes cannot gain in size while in the sphere.

Gelatinous spheres have a speed of 60 ft. and are always assumed to be charging. They move in straight lines each round and cannot roll over obstacles higher than half their height.



Ecology of the Genasi

by Rodney Thompson

illustrations by William O'Connor

"I might despair, to see the aimless way
Such lawless elements exert their sway.
Yet no despair shall my resolve benumb;
Here I might struggle, here might overcome!"

–Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust

"Nature that framed us of four elements,
warring within our breasts for regiment, doth
teach us all to have aspiring minds."

–Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine

Imagine for a moment that every day, when you awaken, the first thing you feel is the heartbeat of the world around you. Imagine that each day, as you go about your tasks, you feel the ebb and flow of the very elements. Imagine that the elements are so strongly a part of you that your body feels bonded to the world around you. Imagine that the most common elements of the world are not just ingrained into your very being, but are also yours to command and to bend to your will. Imagine that this power was not learned or given to you, but is merely a part of who you are, and that the most powerful forces from deep in the Elemental Chaos course through your veins and react to your whims. Imagine the feeling of having the wildest, most primitive energies at your fingertips, beckoning you to call upon them.

Imagine that your thoughts and emotions swirl within you like a tempest, and every day you struggle not only to control the latent power you possess but also to keep from being swept up in a torrent of chaos that threatens to wipe away any sense of discipline or resolve you might have. This constant give and take, the struggle between the raw, elemental power in your blood and the rational, logical part of your mind, is an ever-present reminder of your tumultuous nature. Imagine that every time an obstacle comes into your path, you must struggle not to smite it with fire, stomp it into the earth, or flee from it with the swiftness of wind or water.

This is what it means to be a genasi.

History

The true dawn of the genasi race has been long lost in the tumult of the ages, but stories abound regarding their origins. The most prominent origin story, and the one sages near and far believe is true, is that the genasi are the result of dalliances and pacts made between ancient humans and elemental beings such as efreets and genies. Long ago, human wizards known as sha'irs bound themselves to elemental beings with magic, bargaining with genies to gain the knowledge and wisdom those ancient elemental being possessed. After spending decades in such close proximity to their gens, these wizards became infused with elemental power, so much so that their own offspring were transformed by these elemental energies. Other humans engaged in more traditional unions with elemental creatures that had disguised themselves as humans, and eventually enough children of such unions were born to create a true breeding race, which would come to be known as the genasi. As a result, the genies, dao, djinn, and other humanoid elemental beings of the world are seen by genasi as distant cousins, even ancestors, and are afforded a greater degree of respect than other races offer.

A darker twist on the genasi origin tale, and one considered an insulting heresy by genasi, is that the genasi were created long ago by agents of the primordials. This tale, often whispered in dark corners by those who secretly revere the primordials, tells of human worshipers who were taken from their homes and twisted using elemental magic, creating men and women who could command the elements as easily as most humans eat or breathe. These new beings were meant to be the scions of the primordials and were commanded to go forth into the world and multiply. Adherents to this origin story believe that when the agents of the primordials created the genasi, they did so with the intention that the genasi would be the heirs to the world and would pave the way for a future where humans, elves, dwarves, and other races had been wiped out and replaced by the superior genasi race. This belief is widely held by heretics who worship the primordials and is not a tale genasi acknowledge.

Yet another tale tells of a brave band of human warriors, their names and identities long lost in the annals of time, who traveled to the Elemental Chaos to steal the primordials' power. Of the many who set out on this quest, only five survived to see it through to its end. The craftiest, most powerful, most cunning, and bravest of these heroes snatched the elemental power away from the primordials, in the process becoming forever changed. These five heroes became the progenitors of the genasi race, and each one embodied a different manifestation and became revered by those who believed this tale to be true. Their names have become common names in genasi society, and tales of their adventures are staples of genasi households.

Yet a fourth origin story declares that the genasi race originated in the depths of the Elemental Chaos. Like other origin tales, this one also has the genasi beginning as humans. These humans became trapped in the Elemental Chaos, living for years and raising their children on that dangerous plane. Over time, the offspring of these humans began to take on the qualities of the plane around them, absorbing the chaotic powers of the elements. Eventually, the descendants of those who originally became trapped on the Elemental Chaos made their way back to the world of their forefathers, where they became the first of the new genasi race.

Regardless of which one (if any) of these stories depicts the true origin of the genasi, over time the genasi went through a transition period where they passed from being half-breeds into a full-fledged race of beings with their own unique culture and physiology. This transitory period began when genasi of all different types began drifting together, forming small communities and living among their own kind. These settlements started small and remained small, since many of the early genasi were already well integrated into other societies by virtue of their ancestors. However, as more and more genasi began forming pocket communities, a true genasi culture took form.

While many races rose from small settlements to form vast Empires, like the tieflings' Bael Turath or the dragonborn empire, Arkhosia, the genasi never truly formed the alliances necessary to forge a vast, far-reaching civilization. At best, some of the genasi communities became thriving city-states, but the chaotic nature of the genasi made extending the authority of these city-states difficult. For example, the windsoul genasi are reluctant to take part in any sort of permanent establishment, while firesoul genasi have quick tempers that make it difficult to maintain long-term diplomatic relationships. Many of the genasi city-states crumbled as their inhabitants scattered to the four corners of the world, and others were taken over, either through hostility or through an influx of outsiders, by other races.

The recent history of the genasi people sees them integrating themselves into multicultural environments and thriving there. Possibly because genasi share so many traits with humans (indeed, there is a reason that all the genasi origin stories involve humans in the creation of their race), genasi fit in well alongside humans, and most human cities are also safe havens for genasi. Likewise, genasi with different manifestations have made themselves valuable members of other communities; earthsoul genasi, for example, commonly make their homes among the dwarves, who share their affinity for the stone and steel. In modern times, the genasi remain scattered, but they live in nearly any civilized settlement.

Physiology

Genasi resemble humans in many ways, but they have strong elemental features tied to their manifestation. Every genasi has a series of elemental lines etched into the skin from birth, and these lines glow with a color associated with the element they manifest. These energy lines, called *szuldar* in primordial, are unique to each genasi. Similarities can exist in the *szuldar* patterns between genasi of the same family, or even living in the same area due to intermingling bloodlines, and genasi speak of a "family resemblance" when comparing *szuldar*. For many genasi, one's *szuldar* are a point of pride, and many wear clothes designed to show off the *szuldar*. Some genasi are known to acquire tattoos designed to highlight or otherwise enhance their *szuldar*, and almost every genasi has an extremely sensitive understanding of even the subtlest variations in *szuldar*.

When a genasi is born, most of his *szuldar* are already fully formed in the patterns that remain for the rest of the genasi's life. Sometimes physical alterations to a genasi's body, such as scarring or intentional modification, can also alter the *szuldar* patterns, but this is a rarity. In fact, since genasi strongly identify their individuality with their *szuldar*, most see actual alterations to their *szuldar* as causing a loss of self-awareness, and avoid it. Some genasi, particularly those on the run from the law, have their *szuldar* altered by scarring or magical means to hide their true identities, but this is typically a last resort.

Though their origins are likely tied to a blending of bloodlines, genasi are a true breeding race that produces offspring that share their elemental traits. Genasi who produce children typically share at least one elemental manifestation, though rare exceptions to this rule exist. Likewise, the child's primary manifestation is a matter of genetics; if both parents share the same primary manifestation (or, if both parents have only one manifestation and they share the same one), chances are extremely high that the child has the same manifestation. In essence, firesoul genasi have firesoul genasi children. Heredity becomes a bit muddied when the parents are of mixed manifestations, or if a particular family has a mixture of different primary manifestations throughout the generations. Essentially, a genasi child's manifestation

Knowledge of the Genasi

Arcana

DC 15: Genasi are a race of humanoids who have been infused with great elemental power and affinity.

DC 20: A genasi manifests a single element from birth, which determines its appearance and the element with which it has an affinity.

DC 25: A genasi's elemental manifestation also grants special powers tied to that element. An Arcana check at this DC can also identify the racial power of a particular genasi elemental manifestation.

DC 30: Some genasi learn to manifest multiple elements, which grants them access to the powers tied to each element. A small number of genasi can even manifest two elements simultaneously.

Dungeoneering

DC 20: Abandoned genasi cities and settlements contain elemental traps. These traps are the remnants of security systems used by the genasi who inhabited the settlement.

DC 25: Most genasi-made traps can be bypassed through the application of elemental power or manifestation, which allows genasi with certain manifestations to avoid the trap entirely.

History

DC 20: The genasi have never had a major empire, but they did build several great city-states, most of which have fallen into ruin or been taken over by other races.

DC 25: Many of the genasi city-states were built in places favored by the manifestations of the population. Earthsoul genasi built city-states high in the mountains, while firesoul genasi built city-states in the deep desert.

Religion

DC 20: Genasi worship deities tied to their own primary manifestations. In general, stormsoul genasi worship Kord, watersoul genasi worship Melora, earthsoul genasi worship Moradin, and firesoul and windsoul genasi worship Pelor.

DC 25: Among cults dedicated to the primordials, genasi hold high-ranking positions and are among the most dedicated followers.

DC 30: Secret sects of Tharizdun worshipers exist in almost every settlement with a large number of genasi. Most genasi consider worship of Tharizdun to be heresy, but a few revere Tharizdun as the master of all things elemental.

is inherited from his or her ancestors, just as humans inherit hair and eye color or other physical traits.

Genasi children are born with a single manifestation that typically remains their primary and only manifestation through young adulthood. Since genasi of the same manifestation gravitate toward one another, genasi children spend a good deal of time around others with their same manifestation, and they develop their mastery of elemental powers through exposure to other genasi doing the same. Similarly, genasi children that are exposed to other manifestations are more likely to develop a second elemental manifestation. Though the relationship between a genasi child's upbringing and the ability to manifest a second element is not fully understood, scholars believe that proximity to alternate elemental manifestations is enough to trigger a second manifestation in a genasi. Likewise, genasi children that grow up in regions where the environment does not mirror their own elemental manifestation are highly likely to develop another manifestation later in life. For example, a watersoul genasi that grows up in a dwarven hold high in the mountains is likely to develop an earthsoul manifestation upon reaching adulthood. Developing a second manifestation does not occur until young adulthood, but some genasi adolescents have been known to manifest a second element early. Going through one's first shift between manifestations can be a harrowing experience for young genasi, since the transformation can come on suddenly and is typically physically uncomfortable, even painful.

For genasi, shifting between two elemental manifestations takes a physical toll, though a small one. The process of shifting manifestations is more than just a change of clothes; doing so is more like rebuilding oneself piece by piece out of new materials, and the result is feeling like having one's mind placed in an alien (if not unfamiliar) body. The change happens quickly, and genasi with multiple manifestations are so numbed to the physical trauma that changing manifestations is no more than a passing discomfort. It is no wonder that genasi with multiple manifestations develop multiple identities; such massive reconstruction of one's physical self can be horrifying the first time it is undergone.

A rare few genasi control their inner elemental turmoil and manifest multiple elements simultaneously. The genasi, known as tempests, are in a constant state of flux between two elements. These genasi embrace the chaos of elemental power within them, allowing it to wash over their bodies. In much the same way as genasi allow the elements to rebuild their bodies during the transition between two elements, these genasi tempests keep their bodies constantly changing—in part or in their entirety—between the elements they manifest. These genasi have a unique appearance, since their bodies appear to shift between two manifestations constantly. A genasi tempest's body flickers between elemental states, and they experience a constant physical strain of elemental flux—a feeling that they embrace.

New Genasi Heroic Feats

Any feat in this section is available to a genasi character who meets the prerequisites.

Genasi Fire Affinity [Genasi]

Prerequisite: Genasi

Benefit: If you have resistance to fire, increase that resistance by 2. Whenever a creature makes a saving throw to end ongoing fire damage from one of your powers, that creature gets -1 penalty to the roll.

Earthshock Master [Genasi]

Prerequisites: Genasi, earthsoul manifestation

Benefit: Your *earthshock* power deals 1d8 damage when it hits, and it gains the Reliable keyword.

Fast Manifestation [Genasi]

Prerequisites: Genasi, Extra Manifestation

Benefit: Once per day you can change your elemental manifestation as a minor action. If you have already used an encounter power associated with your elemental manifestation, you can still use the

encounter power associated with your newly changed elemental manifestation.

Firepulse Master [Genasi]

Prerequisites: Genasi, firesoul manifestation

Benefit: Your *firepulse* power gains the Reliable keyword and deals an extra 1d6 damage over its normal damage.

Genasi Frost Affinity [Genasi]

Prerequisite: Genasi

Benefit: If you have resistance to cold, increase that resistance by 3. You are immune to any slow and immobilize effects caused by cold powers.

Primordial Surge [Genasi]

Prerequisite: Genasi

Benefit: Whenever you successfully use a genasi racial power, you gain temporary hit points equal to 5 + your Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity modifier (your choice).

Psychology

The most important thing to understand about genasi is that their lives are dominated by the chaotic nature of their elemental aspect. A constant struggle takes place in the mind of a genasi, who must keep its chaotic urges in check—at least long enough to interact with members of other species. Even those genasi with the best self control are described as passionate by their comrades, since flashes of joy, anger, or sadness still break through even the most disciplined genasi exterior. There is no such thing as a true stone-faced genasi (though earthsoul genasi probably come the closest), and cracks appear in even the calmest genasi repose. Though it might seem like genasi are impulsive and prone to outbursts, the truth is that, with difficulty, most genasi control their inner turmoil enough so that they are no more chaotic than the average human.

Ambient Environmental Effects

One way Dungeon Masters can bring the elemental nature of the genasi to life is through the use of ambient environmental effects. A genasi is strongly tied to one or more of the primordial elements, and as a result their bodies sometimes warp the environment around them, particularly when the genasi is experiencing strong emotions. For example, when an earthsoul genasi is angry, the DM can describe the room as trembling slightly—just enough that the player characters are aware of it, as the earth rumbles beneath the genasi's feet. A firesoul genasi might raise the temperature in the room by a few degrees as he makes a passionate plea for assistance from a local lord, while thunder might rumble or lightning might flash when a stormsoul genasi is troubled. A thin mist might precede a watersoul genasi as she enters a room where she fears danger might wait, and a slight breeze could accompany the righteous wrath of a windsoul genasi cleric who rebukes the forces of evil. These ambient environmental effects shouldn't have any mechanical benefit, but could serve as ways to flavorfully describe the elements bowing to the chaotic emotions of genasi player characters and NPCs.

Genasi philosophers believe that, regardless of the truth behind their race's origins, the genasi people came into being out of a cosmic sense of balance. These philosophers believe that the genasi people serve as the fulcrum on which the balance between the chaos of the primordials and the order of the mortal races rests. According to this philosophy, the genasi race came into existence when forces beyond the gods or the primordials—believed by many to be Fate, or something akin to it—deemed that the world and all the planes needed something to serve as an intermediate point between raw Elemental Chaos and the law of divine creation. As a result, this philosophy, which is embraced by many genasi, organizes them into two distinct camps: those who embrace their role as a tamer of chaos, and those who believe that they were created to break free of the shackles of order.

The genasi that believe that the genasi race was meant to tame chaos strive to do so first within themselves and then in the world around them. These genasi are among the most lawful, ordered beings, and they work hard to fit in among the other mortal races, to whom they feel more attached. After all, they reason, the genasi were meant to be brothers to the mortal races, those races created by divine beings, who could transform the chaos into order. These genasi discipline themselves and keep their emotions in check—they do not allow their passions to rule their minds. That accomplished, genasi of this philosophy then turn their attention to the world around them, seeking to maintain order and stamp out lawlessness. However, this philosophy, while lending itself well to civilization, does not always equate to goodness. Many genasi tyrants have embraced these same philosophies, and they took it upon themselves to impose order at the point of a sword. It is no surprise that genasi who believe in this philosophy join militaries or law enforcement organizations, such as town guards of night watches.

On the other hand, those genasi who see themselves as chaos made flesh take a decidedly different approach. They embrace their emotions and have no compunctions about letting their passions dictate their course of action. These genasi see their role in the world as the breakers of chains (namely, the chains of law), and they believe that their elemental infusion is a gift, given to them by the primordials or other cosmic forces, so that they can show the other races of the world that chaos can liberate. These genasi are wild, passionate, and excitable, but not necessarily evil. Genasi who embrace this philosophy lead rebellions against tyrants, steal from the wealthy to help the poverty-stricken, and follow their passions wherever they might lead.

One trait that all genasi share, regardless of their level of self-discipline, is a strong sense of ambition. Genasi have an inherent desire to better themselves, or at least improve their station in life. They might do so through the pursuit of power, or by earning the respect of their peers, but nearly all genasi have great dreams and aspirations. Genasi chase their dreams with gusto, and though patience isn't their strong suit, genasi can put years of work into the pursuit of an individual goal. The passionate nature of the genasi keeps them pursuing their goals long after other, less dedicated races would have given up.

Genasi are passionate beings, which is a result of the surging elemental turmoil present in the fiber of their very being. Even those genasi who have a strong sense of discipline are susceptible to strong emotions. They rage with more anger, they love with more passion, and they mourn with more sorrow than any other race. Though genasi might keep a tight rein on their emotions, once they allow their feelings to show, there can be no question of their strength. Genasi clerics thunder with righteous wrath, while genasi rogues revel in the chaos they sow with maddened glee. Regardless of their chosen profession, their passions reach the highest peaks and the lowest valleys, many times within the span of a single day.

Genasi are surprisingly good at adapting, for all their strong emotions might make them passionate about their own ways. Most genasi embrace change, either as an inevitability (spawned by the swirling chaos of existence) or as a natural part of existence to be welcomed and celebrated. Change, in their personal lives or in the wider world, brings about new experiences, new opportunities, and new allies. With the ambitious nature of the genasi, every new opportunity could be a means of growing one step closer to achieving one's goals. In many respects, genasi are among the most flexible races when it comes to accepting the changes that their lives have undergone. Genasi bend with the breeze, but they do not break, and they can adapt to almost any course of events that their lives take.

Just as a genasi's elemental manifestation is an important part of its physiology, it is also a major component to its psychology. All genasi have a primary manifestation from birth, and it is this manifestation that defines the genasi's basic personality. Most genasi identify themselves, the very essence of their beings, by their primary manifestation. Even if a genasi learns to manifest other elements, its primary manifestation is at the very core of who it is as a person. Humans and other races would call this their identity, but for the genasi the personality defined by their primary manifestation is so much more: It is a touchstone that the genasi uses to maintain the integrity of its true self.

Likewise, genasi that learn to manifest multiple elements might also develop multiple personalities, each one associated with a different manifestation. These personalities are not completely distinct from one another (unlike those developed by humans with mental illnesses), but rather are radically different aspects of the genasi's primary identity. A genasi with multiple manifestations effectively has strong personality traits that come to the surface when a particular element is manifested. A genasi who is manifesting one element might behave completely differently when manifesting another, though the same knowledge remains through both manifestations. Similarly, a genasi might change its manifestation to better match or express its mood, physically reflecting the emotions it feels at the time.

The rare genasi tempest that manifests multiple elements simultaneously also has two strong personalities struggling for control at once. These genasi can be called mercurial at best, since they switch between strong emotions at the opposite ends of the spectrum in the blink of an eye. A genasi tempest manifesting two elements might seem somewhat schizophrenic at first glance, even talking to itself as its manifestations war for control of its psyche, though in truth these genasi are no more unstable than anyone under great stress or strain.

Though it might seem like genasi families would be prone to breaking apart when passions run hot, in truth genasi parents are monogamous and remain so for most of their lives. Perhaps because the relationships between genasi rarely lose their spark or become boring, genasi have large families with many children, and in turn have large extended families with dozens of aunts, uncles, and cousins. The fact that genasi refer to other genasi as "brother" or "cousin" is more than just a colloquialism—there is a chance that the person they are talking to is, in fact, a distant relation.

The following section includes notes about the general personality traits of different genasi elemental manifestations. These personality traits are commonly seen in genasi manifesting the related element, though exceptions exist even within these common personality manifestations.

Earthsoul Genasi

Earthsoul genasi are frequently stubborn and immovable. They are strong like they mountains and they know it. Earthsoul genasi also are proud and confident, and sometimes this spills over into vanity. Coupled with the inherent genasi ambition, many earthsoul genasi bend their strength into domination—physical or otherwise—of their enemies. Of all the genasi elemental manifestations, earthsoul genasi come the closest to possessing patience and engaging in contemplation. However, the true strength of all earthsoul genasi becomes visible when someone tries to push them in a direction they do not want to go. When this happens, earthsoul genasi resist with the might of the stone and the earth, and they knock down anyone that stands in the way.

Firesoul Genasi

Of all the genasi manifestations, firesoul genasi embody the passionate nature of their race the best. Firesoul genasi are the most aggressive, most impulsive, and the easiest to anger. Among all the genasi manifestations, they are the most in tune with the raw power of their elemental heritage. Firesoul genasi feels the raw energy at their fingertips and are among the most eager to use it. They are highly competitive as well, since they constantly seek a productive outlet for their passions. The tempers of firesoul genasi burn hot, but also fast, and once the heat of the moment has passed, they are just as likely to jump from rage to elation in a matter of seconds.

Stormsoul Genasi

Wild and powerful as a sudden thunderstorm, stormsoul genasi are of the same mercurial nature as all genasi, but while they can be slower to rouse, they can be a far more terrible sight to behold. Stormsoul genasi lash out at those that trouble them, like a lightning strike that is accompanied by a roar of thunder. Stormsoul genasi are prone to brooding, but when the storm of their emotions rolls in, nobody can do much to stop it. Unlike firesoul genasi, stormsoul genasi can control themselves under great duress for long periods of time, but when they reach their breaking point, they snap and strike with sudden ferocity. Stormsoul genasi in the grip of their own emotions can be extremely unpredictable, since once they reach the point of unleashing their rage, they must do so until their wrath has run its course.

Watersoul Genasi

Watersoul genasi are strongly independent and determined to make their way on their own. Watersoul manifesters, feeling close ties to rivers and oceans, see themselves as possessing the same deep strength as those great bodies of water. In many ways, watersoul genasi can be recalcitrant, preferring to remain as untamed as the rushing river. Watersoul genasi have much of the same pride as earthsoul genasi, which manifests itself in a kind of fearlessness unmatched among others of their race. Since they can live both on land and beneath the sea, they have a strong sense of superiority; after all, they can go places where no other members of their own race can go, so they feel empowered by the ability to determine their own path in life.

Windsoul Genasi

Quick of speech and of gait, windsoul genasi are prone to flights of fancy and rapid changes in mood. They drift from one emotion to the next, though most have an air of carelessness about them. Windsoul genasi embody the genasi passion by quickly latching onto emotions and riding them for a short time, then just as quickly abandoning them. Windsoul genasi don't form strong attachments, at least not without great reason, and as a result windsoul genasi are seen as loners and drifters. Likewise, windsoul genasi are among the most adaptive, and they can take whatever comes their way with aplomb.

Culture

Genasi are one of the most culturally diverse races—perhaps second only to humans. Owing to the fact that they integrate well into other societies, genasi culture is a melting pot of traditions drawn from those of many other races. Despite their ability to adapt to the customs of other races, genasi have developed unique practices of their own as well. The strong passions of the genasi people have made their culture vibrant and dynamic, and life in genasi society is compared to an ever-changing tapestry woven of the brightest threads.

Society

Genasi society is nearly as tumultuous as the genasi themselves. The strong sense of ambition fostered by the genasi leads to a constant struggle between those in power and those seeking power. Likewise, one's social status is far from static; the genasi have no real concept of a social class that cannot be transcended, and few genasi would even understand the meaning of "knowing one's place." Indeed, the genasi are constantly rising and falling in social status, and where a genasi might be a revered member of the community one week, he might be forgotten the next as another genasi's star is on the rise. As a result, few genasi look down upon any other being based on social standing, since the beggar you shun one day might be the governor of the town mere months later—at least in the genasi view.

Genasi have no concept of nobility or hereditary leadership, at least not of their own. They might adopt these concepts when blending into other societies,

but left to their own devices the genasi people do not divide themselves into social classes. There are only genasi on the rise, and genasi falling out of favor. The genasi do not believe in divine right, royal or noble bloodlines, or any transference of prestige from parents to offspring. Each genasi must achieve its goals on its own merits, and competition between genasi is fierce. Although this creates a somewhat level playing field as far as social prestige is concerned, the end result is that genasi society is like a constantly bubbling vat, where the entire social structure churns and boils, and can be radically different from one week to the next.

Since genasi society is so mutable, genasi truly believe (and rightly so) that no matter their current situation things change eventually. Genasi find it difficult to feel downtrodden in its society when fate has brought ill fortune, since it truly is only a matter of time before it can once again be in the limelight. Likewise, wealthy and powerful genasi are rarely as callous and unaware of the repercussions of their actions as human nobles can be, and though their fiery nature can lead them to be capricious and even hedonistic, they never forget that all their stature could be brought crashing down the next moment.

Family

A genasi's family holds a very important place. Because it can be difficult for a genasi to form bonds with others without a great deal of time and effort, the genasi family is regarded as one of the few groups where a genasi can establish true life-long bonds. Though genasi families share the same problems and issues as families in other races, it is far rarer that genasi offspring become truly estranged from their parents. For genasi, family might be the only other people that they can rely on to understand them. Even the bitterest feuds might lead to only a temporary separation, and even when family members are spread to the four corners of the world, they still look forward to their reunion.

In most cases, genasi children are raised by family members who share an elemental manifestation with the child. However, genasi parents go out of their way to make sure their children spend time with genasi of other manifestations, so that they gain a greater appreciation for the differences between members of their own race. This is particularly prevalent when members of the genasi's family have different primary manifestations; in some cases, genasi children go to live with relatives with other manifestations for weeks or months at a time, in the hopes that the child can come to respect those genasi who are different. In families with multiple manifestations, parents see the exposure of their children to multiple manifestations as being of utmost importance.

Manifestations

For the genasi, their elemental manifestation is central to the fiber of their being. Culturally, genasi of different manifestations are not very different, much like humans of different temperaments still share most cultural trappings. However, a genasi's manifestation is as important to it as its religion or profession, if not more so. Though genasi respect the differences between members of their race, when confronted with prejudice against their manifestation, they anger quickly. Anyone who discriminates against a genasi due to its elemental manifestation might find the full force of an enraged genasi confronting him or her, since insults to a manifestation are the most offensive anyone can make. Genasi are proud of their manifestations, but also sensitive, and they can be very touchy about the subject unless it is breached with care.

Magic

As beings of great elemental power, genasi favor elemental magic as well. Genasi wizards are common, and when studying the ways of the arcane, genasi wizards research spells that are tied somehow to their elemental manifestations. Since the genasi have a built-in affinity for certain elements, they also have greater control over elemental magic and bend such spells to their will. When a genasi lashes out with elemental magic, most beings know to stay out of the way.

Though the excitable nature of the genasi makes it difficult for them to maintain the discipline of wizardly life, what they lack in control they make up for in natural accuracy. Genasi spellcasters harness raw power through strength of will and not through any sense of finesse or study. However, since the genasi knowledge of elemental forces is so great, other wizards value the insight of genasi spellcasters since they can see things that wizards of other races would never be aware of.

Religion

Genasi favor deities that share elements of their portfolio with the genasi's primary manifestation. Genasi with multiple manifestations might also be prone to calling upon multiple deities when in need, depending on the current manifestation they have. Regardless, genasi feel comforted knowing that something that is so integral to their very being is under the watchful eye of a powerful deity. Particularly religious genasi feel the hand of the divine guiding their actions, believing that, more so than any other race, they are intimately connected to the divine by the elements in the gods' portfolios.

Most genasi have small shrines to their gods in their homes, and they do not attend religious services at larger temples. Genasi tend to worship whenever the mood strikes them, which rarely conforms to the

more rigid schedules of worship held in organized temples. Genasi are rarely fond of formal ceremonies and rituals, instead preferring to confer their worship on their chosen gods at their own pace and in their own way. Genasi independence is present even in their religious practices, which, like the genasi themselves, are full of passionate belief and a willingness to embrace change.

The Primordials

A controversial subject among the genasi is that of the primordials. The ancient elemental beings known as the primordials are rivals to the gods themselves, and many genasi are well aware of this fact. Some genasi revere the primordials as though they were gods, conferring worship upon them in secret. These genasi believe that they were created to serve the primordials and spread chaos, and, as a result, this reverence for elemental forces takes the place of religion in their lives. Particularly zealous followers of this belief even seek to make pacts with beings of Elemental Chaos to bring themselves one step closer to the primordials.

Worse yet, a few misguided souls even seek out the Elder Elemental Eye, Tharizdun. These genasi are typically among the most evil and chaotic of their race, and some would argue insane, since they seek the means to free Tharizdun and unleash his destructive power upon the world. These misguided genasi think that Tharizdun placed them on the world, and that they were created when the Chained God strained against his restraints long enough to touch the world. They believe that the genasi race is a remnant of his awesome power, and that they were created at the moment he touched the world with the intent that they become his liberators.

At the same time, genasi see the primordials as beings of great evil and destructive power. These genasi revile the primordials, believing that the conflict within themselves (that between Elemental Chaos and mortal order) embodies a great struggle in the universe. Since the genasi are mortal, they place themselves on the opposite side of the struggle from the primordials. These genasi believe that it is the duty of the genasi to harness the power of chaos and tame its destructive power, while the primordials continue to try to tear down these good works.

Art

Genasi art is nothing if not exciting. Genasi crafts embody the wild, untamed nature of the genasi soul, and even the simplest or most practical items (like furniture) look as though they were merely snatched out of the Elemental Chaos whole. Genasi art uses bright, vibrant colors that express a wide range of emotions, and carvings and sculptures feature swirling or bursting patterns that resemble surges of power or even explosions. For more functional items, such as weapons, genasi artisans like to make their mark with swirling color patterns, bright gems, and elaborate carvings that give the surface of weapons and armor a flamboyant feel.

Most genasi artists see their craft as a means of gaining prestige in society. Likewise, genasi artisans want nothing more than to be in high demand, so most work hard not only to please their own sensibilities but also to please their intended audience. For example, though genasi blacksmiths might not be as skilled as dwarves when it comes to creating swords, they go to great lengths to tailor the swords to the person who plans to wield it. As a result, genasi weapons are intended for use by a specific individual, and they can sometimes seem unwieldy in the hands of others.

Leisure

Genasi love athletics and games of all kinds, thanks to their competitive nature. Most genasi see leisure time as just another opportunity to improve their standing in the eyes of their peers. Genasi prefer to remain extremely active during their leisure time, which allows them an outlet for their wilder urges and impulses. Festivals and celebrations in genasi communities are frequently marked by footraces, feats of strength, and other physical competitions.

Team athletics are somewhat more rare (mostly due to the fact that genasi teammates turn on one another when the pressure is on), though genasi find themselves quite at home in gladiatorial competitions and the like. In fact, many genasi actively pursue careers in the gladiator arena because it gives them a chance to vent their frustrations and bask in the adoration of others, all at the same time. Gladiatorial events play both to the genasi's pride and their uncontrollable nature, making for an excellent spectacle.

Enemies and Allies

Despite their unpredictable nature, genasi work rather well with most races, especially humans. Genasi and humans share a number of common traits, including strong emotions and a sense of ambition, and any race that mixes well with humans is also likely to mix well with genasi. Elves and eladrin are uncomfortable around genasi, since their more reserved, measured perspective on life does not mix well with the genasi's impulsiveness.

With no inherent racial conflicts, the genasi can make allies anywhere they go, depending on the degree of control they keep over their more chaotic urges. However, when genasi make enemies, their rivalry forms quickly and burns hot. Genasi show their enemies none of the discretion they offer their allies, and they are not afraid to unleash their full potential on someone who has crossed them. Though genasi try to abide by the laws of the land, many genasi cannot restrain themselves from incinerating their enemies, which sometimes put the genasi in conflict with the authorities even if the killing was done in self-defense. A genasi enemy is likely to be ruthless and aggressive, two traits that combine to make genasi extremely dangerous.

Most genasi see themselves as related, if only distantly, to beings of elemental power and origin. They are inclined to show respect, if not reverence, to elemental creatures that they deal with, unless that creature is overtly hostile to the genasi. When encountering beings of great elemental power, genasi go out of their way to try to make peace with, or even make allies of, these beings in the hopes of fostering the bond between two creatures of the elements.

Encounters

Genasi are aggressive and, in combat, violent without reservation. They call upon elemental power when dealing with enemies, and they prefer to use elements associated with their manifestation when possible.

Genasi Flamechaser

The genasi flamechaser is a firesoul genasi that has mastered the ability to create and manipulate fire. It needs no weapons since it creates them from pure flame.

Genasi Flamechaser	**Level 6 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +8
HP 61; Bloodied 30	
AC 18; Fortitude 19, Reflex 18, Will 18	
Speed 6	
Dagger of Flame (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
+10 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 fire damage.	
Fire Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
Ranged 20; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire damage.	
Firepulse (immediate reaction; when hit by a melee attack; encounter) ✦ **Fire**	
+13 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 fire damage.	
Explosive Burst (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Fire**	
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 fire damage, and the genasi flamechaser makes a secondary attack against each creature adjacent to the target. Secondary Attack: +11 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire damage.	
Lingering Flameburst (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**	
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 fire damage, and any creature that starts its turn adjacent to the target takes 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	Languages Common, Primordial
Skills Perception +8	
Str 14 (+5)	**Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+3)
Con 19 (+7)	**Int** 11 (+3) **Cha** 16 (+6)

Genasi Flamechaser Tactics

The genasi flamechaser opens combat with its *explosive burst* or *lingering flameburst* powers, depending on whether their targets are clustered close together. From there, the flamechaser attempts to stay back, lobbing *fire bolts* and *explosive bursts* (if it recharges), only resorting to *firepulse* if enemies move in too close.

Genasi Stormmaster

A genasi stormmaster is a stormsoul genasi that combines swordplay with a mastery of thunder and lightning. The stormmaster sweeps across the battlefield like a maelstrom.

Genasi Stormmaster	Level 9 Controller
Medium natural humanoid	XP 400
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +7	
HP 97; **Bloodied** 48	
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21	
Speed 6	
(+) **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.	
⚕ **Storm Sword** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning, Weapon**	
+14 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 lightning damage, and slide the target 5 squares. At the end of the slide, enemies adjacent to the target take 1d8 + 5 lightning damage.	
✲ **Wrath of the Thunderstorm** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**	
Area burst 2 within 10; +12 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 lightning damage the target slides 3 squares.	
Promise of Storm (minor; encounter) ✦ Lightning, Thunder	
Personal; until the end of its next turn, the genasi stormmaster deals an extra 1d8 damage with a lightning or thunder power it uses.	
Thunderclap Rebuke (immediate interrupt; when hit by a melee attack; encounter)	
The attacking creature is pushed 5 squares.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Primordial	
Skills Arcana +14	
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+7)	
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 21 (+9) **Cha** 13 (+5)	
Equipment longsword	

Genasi Stormmaster Tactics

The genasi stormmaster is a melee combatant who uses its sword to enhance its controller abilities. The stormmaster approaches its enemies, opening the combat with the *storm sword* power. If distant enemies are on the battlefield, the stormmaster uses its *wrath of the thunderstorm* to move enemies into position for further attacks.

Genasi Tempest

A genasi tempest has learned to manifest two elements at once. This particular tempest has a dual manifestation of earth and water.

Genasi Tempest	Level 8 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 350
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +5	
HP 89; **Bloodied** 44	
AC 22; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20	
Speed 6	
(+) **Rapier** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+13 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.	
⚕ **Rush of the River** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**	
+13 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 damage, and the genasi tempest can shift up to 2 squares before or after making this attack.	
✧ **Earthshock** (minor; encounter)	
Close burst 2; affects one creature in burst that is touching the ground; +13 vs. Fortitude; target is knocked prone.	
✧ **Thundering Earth** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Thunder**	
Close blast 3; +11 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 4 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.	
Pity is for the Weak	
The genasi tempest deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Swiftcurrent (move; encounter)	
The genasi tempest shifts up to 6 squares over ground or liquid terrain, taking no penalties for squeezing. The genasi tempest can move through enemy spaces, ignore difficult terrain, and take no damage if the surface it moves across would normally deal damage to it.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Primordial	
Skills Acrobatics +14	
Str 13 (+5) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 13 (+5)	
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 17 (+7)	
Equipment leather armor, rapier	

Genasi Tempest Tactics

A genasi tempest tries to gain combat advantage when possible. If it cannot flank its targets, the genasi tempest uses its *earthshock* power to knock a target prone, and then uses *rush of the river* to approach the target and strike, or (if the target is more than 2 squares away) uses *swiftcurrent* to cross the battlefield safely as a move action before making its attack.

Encounter Group

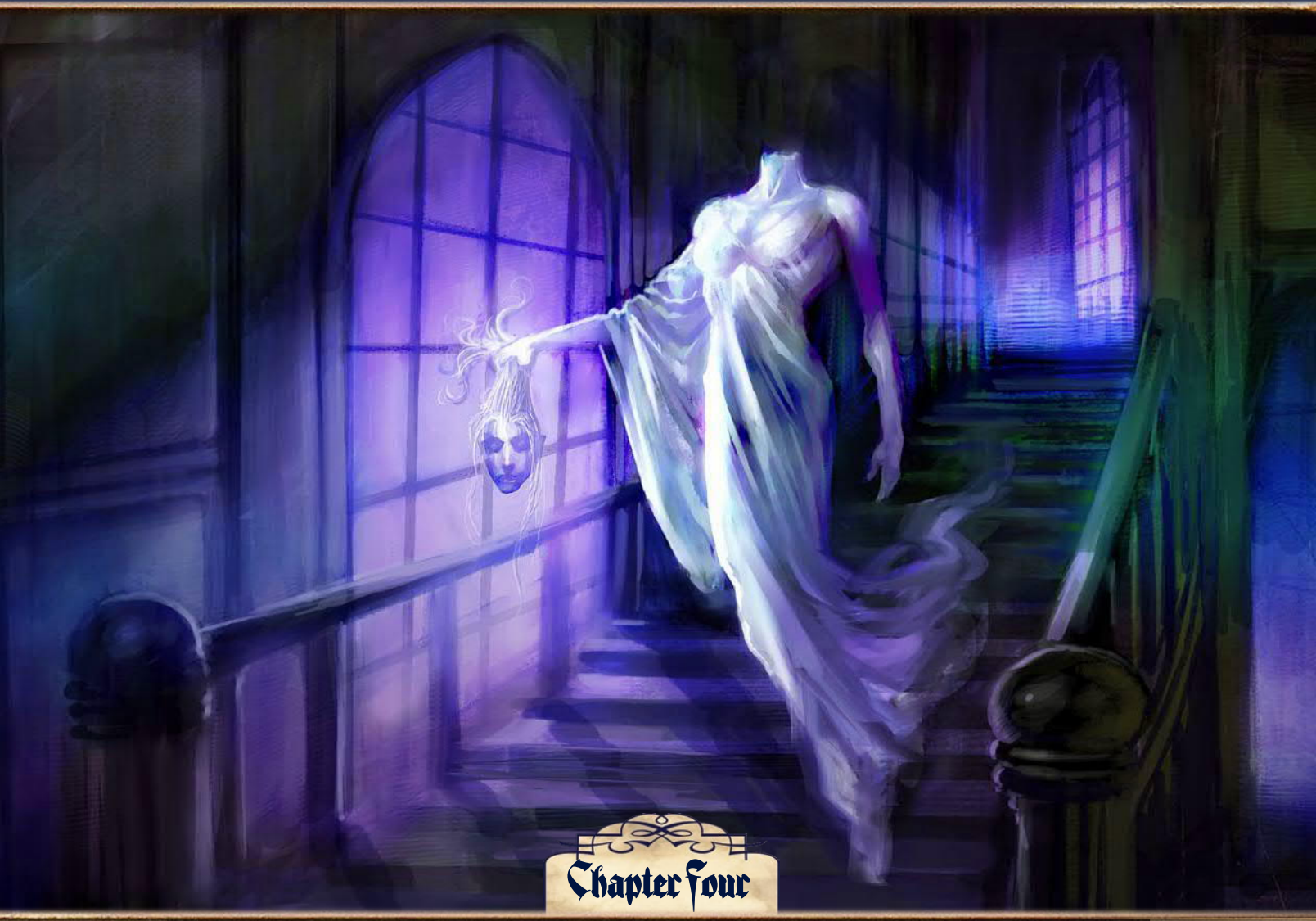
The following is a sample group of genasi cultists of Tharizdun. It represents a small cell of cultists that might operate in any small town or city, including the stormmaster leader of the cultists, his tempest followers, and an elemental emissary from their hidden masters (a bloodfire harpy).

Level 8 Encounter (XP 1,850)

- ✦ 1 genasi stormmaster (level 9 controller)
- ✦ 1 bloodfire harpy (level 9 soldier)
- ✦ 2 genasi tempests (level 8 skirmisher)
- ✦ 2 genasi flamechasers (level 6 artillery)

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is a game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His previous design credits include the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition*, *Starships of the Galaxy*, and *Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide*.



Chapter Four

Ghost

There upon the house stairs stood the lady in question herself—more a thing of aether and ectoplasm than skin and substance. Still clad in a gown befitting a queen of the ladies of the night, her ivory skin shimmered in spectral translucence, the suggestive curves of her shoulders sweeping upward to a neck wearing gore like a ruby choker—and nothing more! Outstretched in a delicate claw, gripped unceremoniously by a shock of ephemeral hair, swung the lady's misplaced head, her beguiling features darkened by the sight of vistas unknowable. Slowly she descended, her every spectral step heralded by a grave note from the towering salon clock's invocation of the eleventh hour—exactly the time Boles had conjectured the house mistress had been so thoroughly finished.

—Ailson Kindler, *Steps Upon the Sanguine Stair*

Beyond the world of mortals lies a realm of spirits, an unknowable reach forbidden to all but departed souls and the guardians and gaolers of that fantastic and terrible realm. Death alone serves as both gate and key to this eternity, a supposedly one-way passage from which few return. Yet for some, even the laws of existence prove insufficient to drive them from the realm of the living, with injustice, delusion, fury, or fear compelling them to cling to the fleeting tendrils of their failing lives. In states of boundless sorrow or deathless malice, such spirits linger on, no longer kin to the quick, but death given an impression of thought and form, dire witnesses at the door to beyond—ghosts of the living.

With indescribable forms and myriad intentions, the wayward souls of those recently felled and long forgotten wreak their wills upon the mortal world, seeking to compel or terrorize the living with their undeniable ambitions. While the legends of ages spread stories of unquiet spirits, perhaps no tales prove so diverse and haunting as those of the disembodied dead, and what dread intentions they hold for the living.

Necrology

More than merely wayward souls cast from the cycle of eternity by random chance, the vast majority of ghosts manifest for a purpose—whether one of their own desires or born from the method of their deaths. So-called "ghost stories" often tell of souls lingering upon the mortal world in an attempt to put right some injustice—typically whatever evil led to their deaths—or to prevent some terrible fate. Yet the circumstances leading to the appearance of a ghost need not be so iconic. Although the mysteries of death may never be fully understood by mortals, the most significant requisite in a ghost's appearance seems to be extraordinary circumstances of trauma surrounding its death. Such a condition need not be a torturous murder or a violent betrayal—the knowledge of a great responsibility or the jeopardized life of a loved one can potentially prove sufficient cause to compel a soul to linger on past its physical capacity. Such leads some scholars of the afterlife to debate whether or not ghosts are truly wayward souls, or rather mere impressions of a single powerful emotion or desire, left as an obsessed copy of a powerful will.

Aside from personal determination, extreme circumstances might also lead to the formation of ghosts. Tales of unquiet battlefields, ghostly ships, and whole haunted cities typically arise from some manner of terrible collective ordeal. Such conditions must be exceptionally painful or damaging to the mortal mind, as not every fallen fortress or disaster-scoured community results in some mass haunting. While individual ghosts typically require some measure of personal connection, suffering, or desire to bind them to the land of the living, such is lessened for ghosts created en masse. The shared experience of multitudinous lesser horrors are seemingly significant enough to match the singular distress of a lone spirit, allowing large groups of spirits to manifest due to an incident of extreme shared emotion or disturbance that might not provoke the ghostly manifestation of an individual.

While many forms of undeath carry with them some measure of dark appeal, such can never be said of ghosts. Foremost, the transition from life to spirit is mysterious and unreliable, with no known cases of a willing, purposeful transition into this state of unlife being recorded. Adding to this is the typically stagnant condition of the ghostly state. Unlike many varieties of undead, most ghosts are unable to retain new knowledge after their deaths, and even memories of their undead existences seem blurred and timeless. Only in exceedingly rare exceptions have ghosts that defy these truths been encountered, with even those existing for millennia having little impression of the modern age or the gulfs of time since their deaths.

Habitat & Society

Encountering a ghost rarely proves as simple as stories of the macabre often imply. Few, for example, care to linger about the monument-dotted graveyards or moldering potter's fields containing their remains. Such a seeming incongruity is perhaps better understood if one views ghosts as remnants of the living rather than as manifestations of the dead. Typically, ghosts arise near the places they died or at sites to which their lives were connected, with the manors of fallen lords, the vaunted halls of deceased statesmen, and the simple hovels of wayward peasant spirits all holding more connection to the time and meaning of a life than the circumstances of death.

To say that a ghost might appear anywhere only slightly hyperbolizes the truth. As noted, a traumatic event and a place of meaning characterize the unlives of most wandering spirits. Beyond these truths, though, nearly any location might give rise to ghostly hauntings. A certain genuineness hides behind the common fear of aged places, crumbling ruins, abandoned residences, and even shadowy attics. Such settings typically hold connections to lives past, whether as the homes of the deceased or repositories of the trappings of past generations, and draw an undeniable weight from the histories, events, and meaningful happenings that transpired within and about them. And with such weight comes the potential for connection, possibly strong enough to draw the spirits of former owners. This is not to imply that ghosts only linger in the dusty places of the world, though. Tales tell of innumerable ghosts with unusual haunts—such as apparitions upon pilgrim roads, the spirits of fallen mountaineers, or the ghostly beasts of ravaged wildernesses—even those that follow the vestiges of their former homes into new dwellings. Only reaches devoid of contact with the living are sure to be entirely free of ghosts, for where the quick tread, their spirits inexorably follow.

Despite nearly any place's potential for a ghost's appearance, lost spirits are an extreme rarity, for the laws and paths of natural life are powerful beyond the strength of most mortal

Facets of Fear

More so than even the dread of death, ghosts embody the eternally unknowable, and the irreconcilable fear of the afterlife. Among the oldest of humanity's fears, the question of what occurs after one's last breath has been addressed by philosophers, theologians, and storytellers since prehistory. Finding evidence lacking, nearly every approach to the question suggests some manner of life after death, each such answer proving from one vantage comforting and, from another, singularly terrifying. The concept of one's flesh being possessed by a greater, spiritual self that goes on to life again—whether in reward or punishment, in this world again or on one wholly new—inspires more than just tales of the afterlife, but of spirits that fail to move past the mortal world, whether by cosmic accident or undying intention. Thus, one of the oldest literary and folkloric traditions, the ghost story, is born.

Aside from being intrinsically fearful creatures themselves—unnatural, disembodied manifestations of the dead—ghosts possess a deeper horror in the questions concerning their reasons for existence and intentions toward the living. Rarely do spirits forgo the afterlife without great cause, giving spirits typically dire motivations. The ghost that seeks to avenge its death, to right some injustice, to torment its murderer, or to lay claim to that which it eternally views as its own all occur again and again in the folklore and literature of dozens of cultures. To aid them in their dire goals, ghosts draw upon strange powers of the dead and the afterlife, manifesting a wide range of supernatural powers from intense cold to possession of bodies or items, moving or destroying objects, unnaturally changing their environment, or even wilder and stranger effects. The ghostly traditions of different cultures also have widely different explanations and descriptions of ghosts and their powers, making such spirits among the most variable and unpredictable of all undead.

wills and all but the most potent magic to defy. Even those that do appear only do so temporarily, as many circumstances that might draw a soul away from its final rest lose their significance with the passing of time. Souls attempting to protect someone, avenge some wrong, or see a loved one once more typically linger only for a matter of hours or days before their desires are fulfilled and they willingly release their holds on life. The will or dementia that shackles a spirit to the world for ages proves far rarer and born of elaborate circumstances. Thus, while sightings of ghosts or brushes with the dead are relatively common in the folktales of even the smallest communities, actual incidents of an established ghostly resident or continuous haunting prove truly extraordinary.

Even in areas where multiple ghosts do arise through the most unusual of circumstances, these spirits typically have no concern for one another, showing little more interest toward the living. In most cases, such undead seek only to interact with those who hold some connection to their former lives, bearing on their deathless existences, or those who somehow interrupt their immortal reveries. For example, the ghost of a murder victim might only interact with those it deems sympathetic to avenging its death, while the spirit of lonesome dowager might only treat with those who resemble her lost ancestors. Even in exceptionally rare cases where multiple ghosts haunt the same area, how such apparitions interact largely reflects their relations in life, with the apparitions of strangers ignoring one another even after centuries of cohabitation and enemies playing out rivalries over endless ages.

Campaign Role

Ghosts generally serve GMs in a twofold manner: bluntly as enemies, and in a potentially more elegant form as storytelling devices. As undead foes, ghosts measure among vampires and liches in menace, though less so in terms of scale. Rarely are ghosts unfettered, even though their statistics do not require a place or purpose. While spectres, wraiths, and all manner of similar incorporeal undead make fine spooks and unquiet spirits to menace characters, ghosts imply a greater personality, history, and effort to banish. GMs are thus encouraged to create meaningful histories for these apparitions, as their value stems not from wide-reaching plots or even evil intentions at all, but from the stories inherent in their existences and the conditions that might lead them finally to rest.

As storytelling devices, ghosts serve as exceptionally useful links between the world of the present and the past, and manifestations of the wisdom of the realm of the dead as it might affect the lands of the living. Perhaps the ultimate method of "telling" rather than "showing," a non-combative ghost might frame a tale of woe in no uncertain terms, presenting the ultimate in sympathetic victims—those affected even beyond death. Yet even under the most extreme and seemingly sympathetic conditions, ghosts retain the most strongly held goals and desires of their lives, and not all ghostly ambitions are altruistic or liberating. The trope of ghostly intervention should be carefully utilized, though, as it moves a measure of control and discovery from the PCs' hands entirely to the GM. Ghosts who guilt the living into doing their will or who possess all knowledge can swiftly feel heavy-handed or lead to lazy, unbelievable storytelling. Ghosts with an imperfect vantage, though, or with goals more mysterious than they at first seem, are typically more interesting, but still should be utilized only rarely so as not to force players into specific actions or to undermine their place in a story's spotlight.

Varieties of Ghosts

Much confusion arises in folktales and legends between the use of the word "ghost" referring to a specific type of undead and as a generalization for all ethereal undead. Aside from

ghosts, numerous disembodied undead exist, just a smattering of the most common being noted here.

Allips: Few fates could be more horrifying than having a life of fear and suffering end, only to find another existence of such torment stretching into eternity. Such is the doom of allips, the mad dead. Souls of the insane too hate-crazed and vicious to find their ways to the afterlife, these shades blather endlessly, spouting profanities and demented tirades from forms stripped of all mortal reason, reduced to nightmarish hallucinations themselves.

Shadows: Little more than impressions of wickedness, shadows are the souls of petty villains too fearful of their eternal punishments to pass on to the outer planes, yet too weak-willed to manifest as greater undead. Cursed to wander the darkened places of the world, these pathetic spirits become scavengers of life, sapping vitality from the living in a hopeless attempt to reclaim even an impression of their forgotten lives.

Spectres: While ghosts take on a fearful variety of forms for all manner of traumatic reasons, instances of extreme violence and hatred often give rise to a lesser form of spirit: spectres, souls of rage. Compelled to linger upon the mortal plane by their fury, these vicious spirits seek to revenge themselves upon all living creatures, violently afflicting others with their own terrible condition. The light of the sun weakens spectres, forcing them into dark, dismal haunts that only further fuel their loathing for life in all its forms.

Wraiths: The souls of exceptionally malevolent individuals, wraiths are manifestations of true evil. They torment the living not out of any particular desire or rampant emotion, but in the indulgence and sadistic enjoyment of malice for malice's sake. Those that intrude upon their darkened realms risk falling victim to their deadly touch, a freezing grip that drains the vital energy from the living until all that's left is an ashen husk and a pathetic soul enslaved to the wraith's cruel whims.

Ghostly Corruptions

Just as the reasons for ghostly materialization differ wildly, so too do the abilities manifested by the disembodied dead. Upon creating a ghost, GMs choose from a range of special attacks, each representative of the spirit's cause of death or undead intentions. Presented here are a variety of additional special attacks, available to further tailor the tales and powers of these lost souls. As with all other ghostly abilities, the DCs for these special attacks are equal to 10 + 1/2 the ghost's HD + the ghost's Charisma modifier.

Deathly Delusion (Su): The ghost died suddenly or unexpectedly. Not even realizing it's dead, this spirit goes about the routines of its daily life, ignoring the living in a state of undead denial. Should a ghost with this ability pass through the square of a living being, that creature must make a Will save or fall into a fitful sleep full of nightmares that aren't its own for 1d4 minutes. For a number of following nights equal to the ghost's Charisma modifier, the victim must make an additional Will save or be affected as per the spell *nightmare*. (CR +0)

Fatal Fate (Su): The ghost died with some work undone or desire unfulfilled. In its desire to see its efforts completed, once per day, a ghost can lay a compulsive curse upon the living, forcing them to either take up its work or face a terrible end. A ghost can lay this curse by making a touch attack, which forces the target to make a Will save or be stunned for 1 round. During this round, the target receives a flood of images suggesting a course of action—though such might remain vague or require research into the ghost's history to discern an exact meaning. The target has a number of days to fulfill the ghost's intentions equal to 14 days minus the ghost's Charisma modifier, to a minimum of 7 days. If the target does not fulfill the course of action suggested by the vision within this set period, he takes 1d4 points of Constitution drain per day. This effect can be overcome via the spell *remove curse*, requiring a caster level check with a DC equal to this effect's initial DC. (CR +0)

Frightener (Su): The ghost's unique personality manifests even in death. The ghost gains a number of spell-like abilities equal to its Charisma modifier. It may select these abilities from the following list: *animate rope, chill metal, control undead, dancing lights, entangle, faerie fire, fog cloud, ghost sound, heat metal, hideous laughter, invisibility, minor image, open/close, pyrotechnics, scare, sleep, spiritual weapon, soften earth and stone, summon swarm, warp wood*, or *whispering wind*. A ghost may use each of these abilities 3 times per day. The DCs are 10 + spell level + the ghost's Charisma modifier. (CR +0)

Grave Trappings (Su) The ghost died with a strong attachment to a specific item or set of objects. A ghost with this ability may choose a number of items it died with equal to its Charisma modifier to carry with it into death. The ghost continues to be able to use and benefit from these spectral

duplicates just as though they were the real things. Weapons and armor are treated as having the *ghost touch* special ability, while other items act as being incorporeal themselves and can be manipulated by the ghost. Regardless of the type of object, all selected items are treated as being part of the ghost's form and cannot be disarmed or removed from the ghost (even by the ghost). Should a ghost be destroyed, its equipment reappears with it upon rejuvenating. (CR +0)

Occasionally, and at the GM's discretion, the transition into death might imbue a single ghostly item with strange powers, granting it powers comparable to a magic item suited to the ghost's character level.

Phantasmagoria (Su): The ghost died as a victim of its own delusions or folly. A number of times per day equal to the ghost's Charisma modifier, the ghost can create an elaborate illusion. This illusion functions similarly to the spell *mirage arcana* in combination with multiple *major images*, allowing the ghost to recreate any scene, setting, or characters it wishes. The ghost can even incorporate itself into the effect, appearing as it wishes within the illusion as if it were under the effects of *alter self*. The entire illusion can be disbelieved with a Will save. The illusion is treated as a 6th-level spell created by a caster with a level equal to the ghost's CR. If any part of the illusion is dispelled, the entire illusion fades. (CR +0)

Reinvigoration (Su): The ghost died in the throes of a terrible fear, and is desperate for any way to escape its fate, both perceived and actual. Once per round a ghost can possess an adjacent corpse, merging with the remains and reanimating them as a skeleton or zombie. The skeleton or zombie animated by this ability may be no higher than the ghost's CR minus 2. If the animated corpse is destroyed, the ghost reappears in the corpse's square and cannot possess another body for 1d4 rounds. (CR +0)

Vehemence (Su): A ghost with a powerful connection to a specific location gains a measure of mastery over the objects in that place. Once per round, a ghost can possess an object of size Large or smaller, giving it life as an animated object. This animated object's CR can be no higher than the ghost's CR minus 2. If the target object is being held by a creature, the object can make a Will save using its bearer's saving throw to resist possession. If the animated object is destroyed, the ghost reappears in its square and cannot possess another object for 1d4 rounds. (CR +0)

Known Ghosts

All manner of geists and apparitions linger in the dark, ancient, and mysterious places of Golarion. A handful of some of the best-known local ghosts follows.

Coath, The Wight Whale: Tales along the eastern coast of Garund have long told of Coath, the Black Whale, a murderous leviathan that seemed to take umbrage at man's incursion into its watery realm. For years, the gigantic, dusky whale roamed the seas and brought ruin to even the best-armed vessels, typically under the cover of starless night. Finally, whalers from Ilizmagorti managed to coax the beast into a stretch of sandy shallows, and with blade, poison, and great loss of life finally laid the monster low. Soon after, a gigantic ghost of radiant darkness was spotted near Mediogalti Island, seeming to circle the vast landmass in search of land-bound prey, with several able ships disappearing soon after. Claimed by pirates to be the vengeful spirit of that hateful sea beast Coath, many sailors of Ilizmagorti fear to travel on moonless nights, when the sea proves darker and the stars less bright, out of fear of what they call the Wight Whale, the king of the stormy seas returned to take revenge on not just its killers, but all who sail.

Lord Carnavy Trous: In life, the good-natured Lord Trous straddled Oppara's social and scholarly world, being a gentleman antiquarian of some repute. The third son of a minor noble family, he filled his sumptuous home with room upon room of bookshelves, creating a maze-like library mansion. When Trous finally took a wife (late in life and at his family's insistence), Lady Sharrine Lemmor, it was for show and entirely loveless. Lemmor, a vain and moody woman, demanded Carnavy dote on her, giving him little peace and coming to resent his historical pursuits. In her instability and bitterness, it was little problem to murder her husband by crushing him under a stack of his beloved tomes. In death, however, the timid nobleman found himself free of the demands of standing and courtesy, taking to haunting his terrible former wife with zeal. The Trous Manor, a half-day's travel from Oppara, is now a deadly trap of winding halls and shifting tomes wherein lurk the thoroughly insane Lady Sharrine Lemmor and the spirit of her vengeful husband.

Ordellia Whilwren: Tales in the Varisian city of Magnimar tell of the ghost of one of the city's first leaders, Mistress Ordellia Whilwren, who aided in establishing friendly relations between the fledgling city and the region's Varisian wanderers. Magnimarians have long claimed that during poor fishing seasons, at the threat of war, or when the people seem lost, a vision of the dead leader appears upon the towering Arvensoar, her comforting ghost often leaving some token to aid the city through its need, such as a historical relic or an encouraging Harrow card. The sightings and tokens often serve to hearten the people and comfort the city with the knowledge that the spirits of the past still watch over their descendents.

Sample Ghost

From the taprooms and firesides of Galt comes the tale of the spirit known as Maven Mosslight. A modest maiden from an esteemed family, she led a fairytale life that fell under the shadow of a careless romance. Smitten with Lord Reneis Whitchaste, Maven confessed her intentions to tame his wandering ways. To her downfall, one who heard her avowal was the lowborn and envious servant Sylnia, a maid

in Maven's family's employ who physically resembled the young lady. Long obsessing over Lord Whitchaste herself, Sylnia coaxed Maven into inviting the nobleman on a secret spring dalliance. As the women traveled by skiff to the twilit rendezvous, Sylnia remarked on the fairy-like fish that seemed to guide their craft. Raising her lantern to see the fictitious creatures, Maven never saw the hefted oar her servant brought crashing down upon her, sending her headlong into the murky river.

Under the pretense of being Maven, Sylnia met and eloped with Lord Whitchaste that very night, the dastard never knowing the ruse. Maven's body was never discovered, but for decades since, a soggy soul has wandered the mossy shores of the Boarwood, a mournful maiden with a lantern who ever seeks a lost love and leads all perceived imposters to a watery grave.

MAVEN MOSSLIGHT — CR 10

XP 9,600

Female human ghost sorcerer 9

NE Medium undead (augmented humanoid, incorporeal)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +21

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 15; (+3 Dex, +1 dodge, +5 deflection)

hp 94 (9d6+63)

Fort +8, **Ref** +8, **Will** +7

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4, incorporeal, rejuvenation; **Resist** cold 20; **Immune** undead traits

OFFENSE

Speed fly 30 ft. (perfect)

Melee corrupting touch +7 (10d6, Fort DC 19 half)

Ranged elemental ray +7 (1d6+4 cold)

Special Attacks elemental blast, telekinesis (CL 12th, Will DC 19)

Bloodline Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th)
8/day—elemental ray
1/day—elemental blast

Spells Known (CL 9th)
4th (5/day)—*bestow curse* (DC 19), *elemental body**, *solid fog*
3rd (7/day)—*protection from energy*, *ray of exhaustion* (DC 18), *stinking cloud* (DC 18), *water breathing*
2nd (7/day)—*command undead* (DC 17), *gust of wind* (DC 17), *invisibility* (DC 17), *scorching ray**, *summon swarm*
1st (8/day)—*animate rope*, *burning hands** (DC 16), *cause fear* (DC 16), *hold portal*, *sleep* (DC 16), *silent image* (DC 16)
0—*acid splash*, *bleed* (DC 15), *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 15), *open/close*, *message*, *prestidigitation*
* These spells deal cold damage and have the water subtype.

Bloodline elemental (water)

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 16, **Con** —, **Int** 12, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 21

Base Atk +4; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 23

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Lightning Reflexes, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Toughness

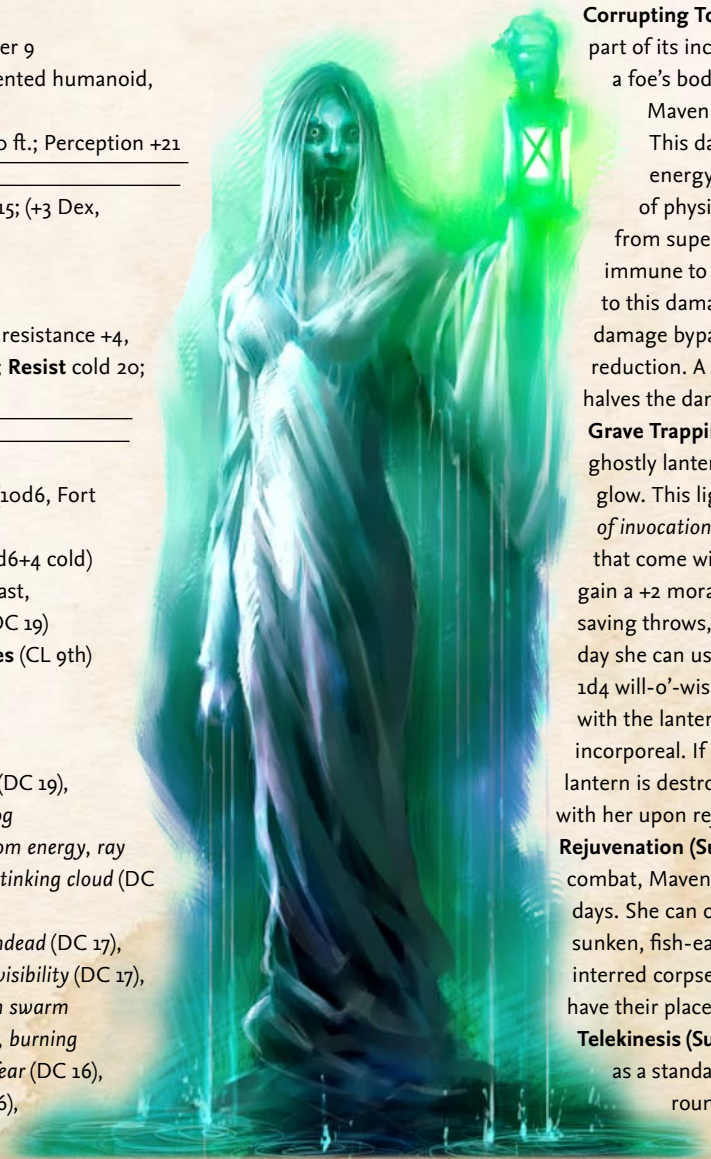
Skills Bluff +12, Fly +8, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (local) +2, Knowledge (nature) +9, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Perception +21, Stealth +15; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Perception, +8 Stealth

Languages Common, Hallit

SQ grave trappings

Gear lantern of souls (grave trappings)

SPECIAL ABILITIES



Corrupting Touch (Su) By passing part of its incorporeal body through a foe's body as a standard action, Maven inflicts 10d6 damage. This damage is not negative energy—it manifests in the form of physical wounds and aches from supernatural aging. Creatures immune to magical aging are immune to this damage, but otherwise the damage bypasses all forms of damage reduction. A Fortitude save (DC 19) halves the damage inflicted.

Grave Trappings (Su) Maven bears a ghostly lantern that sheds an unnerving glow. This light functions like a *candle of invocation*, causing all evil creatures that come within 30 feet of Maven to gain a +2 morale bonus on attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks. Once per day she can use the candle to summon 1d4 will-o'-wisps. Maven can interact with the lantern as though it were incorporeal. If Maven is destroyed, the lantern is destroyed as well, and reforms with her upon rejuvenating.

Rejuvenation (Su) If "destroyed" through combat, Maven restores herself in 2d4 days. She can only be put to rest if her sunken, fish-eaten remains and the richly interred corpse of Lady Sylnia Whitchaste have their places swapped.

Telekinesis (Su) Maven can use *telekinesis* as a standard action once every 1d4 rounds (caster level 12th).

Chapter five

Ghoul

"The subsidence was evident in every grave. A sunken scar marked many of the town's burial sites, each filled with a muddy puddle from the afternoon rain. Yet more disturbing were those graves without puddles—for these graves were scarred instead by gaping holes into the darkness. A terrible smell rose from those holes, a smell of death and decay far too pungent and strong to come from the relatively small number of bodies likely buried in the boneyard, and far too fresh to come from anything more than a week dead. Yet worst of all were the sounds coming from those graveyard holes, sounds of a sloppy, frantic feasting punctuated all too often by screams."

—Officer Vade Andermen's testimony recounting the aftermath of the Clover's Crossing tragedy

The lonely graveyard that looms on the outskirts of the rural town has long been a place to haunt nightmares. By day, such sites carry with them an air of loss, mournful memory, and somber gloom. Those who visit usually seem eager to leave, either in hopes of leaving their grief for departed loved ones behind or out of fear of being caught within the yard after sun's ebb. Animals spied amid the tombstones and graves seem to carry with them a lurking threat, be they feral dogs merely passing through the yard in search of prey or dark raucous crows and ravens perched on statue angels and stone markers. Even trees seem more ominous when they grow from amid the stones of a graveyard, as if they might draw foulness from the surrounding soil, drinking deep with hungry roots.

Yet these subtle terrors are nothing compared to what many graveyards hide. Stories of lone mourners going missing when a trip to pay respects occurs too close to nightfall, of graves mysteriously sagging as if collapsing from within, of uncounted tunnels and warrens winding maze-like below the graves themselves, and darker tales of hauntings and hideous coffin-births are unnervingly common as a traveler moves from township to township. In many cases, these legends and tales are simply the by-product of the grim power of a graveyard's mystique, but in a few, there is a very real and very dangerous source for the graveyard's ill reputation.

For not all the dead remain dead.

Tales of necromancers instilling a fell unlife in dead bodies and sinister ghosts with a vengeful hatred or jealousy of the living are common, yet undead created in this manner are, for all the horror their shambling frames hold, limited in number and hampered by madness or mindlessness. Zombies and skeletons are little more than the tools of evil, and possess no drive of their own. Golems crafted from the dead have something more of a mind, yet most remain under their creators' control, and of those who escape, most do not carry in their lumbering hearts an intrinsic evil. And wraiths and wights and spectres, for all their haunting malevolence, do not range far from the sites of their mortal end, bound to bone by lingering madness or mystic decree.

Viewed in this light, those among the undead who retain free will and a driving hunger for destruction are perhaps the most horrifying of the lot. And while the vampire might carry all the hallmarks of such horror, its evil is often of a more subtle nature—a vampire can mask its predation behind a veneer of civility and calm. Not so the ghoul, a feral, constantly ravening glutton whose hunger compels it to seek out the living and whose curse is so horrifyingly fecund. Here, one sees the perfect synthesis of undead blasphemy and living cruelty—a death that brings no peace from madness or hunger.

Creation

Myth holds that the first man to feed upon the flesh of his brother was seized by a most uncommon malady of the intestinal tract, and after lingering for days in the throes of this painful inflammation of the belly, he died, only to rise on the Abyss as Kabriri, the first ghoul. Whether the demon lord of graves and ghouls was indeed the first remains the subject of debate among scholars of necromancy, but certainly the methods by which bodies can rise as the hungry dead are myriad.

Necromancers have long known the secrets of infusing a dead body with this vile animating force. With the spell *create undead*, a spellcaster can waken a body's hunger and transform it into a ravenous ghoul. Stories abound as well of spontaneous transformations when a man or woman, driven by bleakest desperation or blackest madness, resorts to cannibalism as a means of survival. Whether the expiration that follows rises from further starvation or the death of the will to carry on in light of such atrocity matters not, for when death occurs after such a choice, a hideous rebirth as a ghoul may occur.

In the Darklands, yet another route to ghoulishness exists—lazurite. This strange, magical ore, thought to be the remnant of a dead god who staggered through the Darklands and left behind black bloodstains upon the caverns of the Cold Hell, appears as a thin black crust where it is exposed. The white veins of rock in which it often forms are known as marrowstone. Lazurite itself exudes a magical radiation that gives off a strong aura of necromancy. Any intact corpse left within a few paces of a significant lazurite deposit for a day is likely to rise as a ghoul or ghast, often retaining any abilities it had in life. The vast majority of non-humanoid "ghouls" in the Darklands rise from such conditions. Ghouls often build lairs near lazurite deposits, for its radiation bolsters them against holy energy.

Yet the most common route to transformation is through violent contact with other ghouls. Called by a wide variety of regional names (such as gnaw pangs, belly blight, or Kabriri's curse), this contagion is known in most circles simply as "ghoul fever." Transmitted by a ghoul's bite (or, more rarely, through the consumption of ghoulish flesh), ghoul fever causes the victim to grow increasingly hungry and manic, yet makes it impossible to keep down any food or water. The horrific hunger pangs caused by the sickness rob the victim of coordination and cause increasingly painful spasms, and eventually the victim starves to death, only to rise soon thereafter as a ghoul. That those who perish from ghoul fever invariably animate as undead at midnight has long intrigued scholars of necromancy—the general thought is that only at the dead of night can such a hideous transformation complete its course. Fortunately, ghoul fever can only be transmitted from ghoul to victim, not between the infected and the rest of their community—for if the ailment could be so spread, the ghoul apocalypse could be but one bite away.

Necrology

Ghouls are somewhat unusual among the undead in that they have a strangely lifelike defining feature—their hunger. No

Facets of Fear

Two particularly hideous fears lie at the rotten core of ghoulish genesis: the fear of cannibalism and the fear of disease. That a ghoul's bite can transform the victim, through a strange disease, into one of the ravenous undead plays to primal taboos and gut-churning horror. Being eaten alive is bad enough, but what about being eaten alive by a person? What if that person were a loved one, like a mother or wife or child? And would it be worse if *you* were the one doing the eating?

While ghoulish traditions have roots in Arabian folklore, where they were demons who haunted graveyards, the classic concept of what a "ghoul" is often has more to do with vampire or zombie myths. Stories like Lovecraft's "Pickman's Model" and "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" (which introduces the concept of ghoul nations and powerful ghasts) and many of Clark Ashton Smith's stories of Zothique (a realm where necromancers rule ghoul empires) give us great sources of inspiration. Yet it is to filmmaker George Romero that the game's ghouls owe their greatest debt. *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead* are popularly known as zombie movies, but the monsters featured in them have less to do with zombies than they do with ghouls. Zombies in this game (yes, even the fast ones) are really little more than mindless automatons, yet these movies have starving undead creatures that not only hunger for the flesh of the living, but whose bites result in a terrible infection that causes the victim to rise as one of the undead. While the mechanic of why the dead come back to life in zombie movies is often never explained, the end result is the same.

You cannot trust the dead.

natural biological functions continue within a ghoul's body, and to a ghoul, hunger is a constant sensation. Only during the actual act of consuming humanoid flesh does the hunger abate, and it returns immediately upon the end of the grisly meal, typically forcing the ghoul to seek out new prey immediately. A ghoul forced to go without food does not suffer for its fasting—its hunger remains as constant as ever, but does not grow in power. A ghoul could dwell in a crypt for ages with nothing to feed upon without suffering for the passage of time. Effectively, a ghoul's hunger represents the limit to which the sensation can go—there is no greater hunger than that of a ghoul.

Fortunately for the living, the ghoul is also an intelligent creature and not a feral beast or mindless automaton. As a creature of intellect, a ghoul has other needs than satisfying its hunger. It does not constantly seek to satiate itself, for hunger is such an abiding reality that, to a ghoul, it is the norm. Ghouls spend long hours decorating their underground lairs, tormenting prisoners, reading ancient texts, or simply exploring the remote corners of their territories. As a general rule, a ghoul seeks to satiate its hunger once per day, often emerging from its warren at nightfall to seek out prey. Even then, each ghoul's tastes can vary widely, and these preferences can further limit violent interactions with the living.

The question of what exactly happens to all the meat ghouls eat has fascinated necromancers for ages. No natural digestive process operates in a ghoul's dead body, just as a ghoul has no need to breathe and its heart pumps no blood through its veins, thus ghouls do not excrete solid or liquid wastes. Nor do they become bloated with undigested food building in throats and bellies. *Something* happens to the meat. Although the exact process is still not understood, it seems that the act of swallowing carrion or fresh flesh causes the meat to be absorbed directly into the ghoul's decaying flesh. As a ghoul exists, it constantly sheds bits of flesh as its undead body endlessly rots away, yet over time, a ghoul's size does not diminish. Thus, the necromantic animating force somehow uses consumed flesh to replace what drops away in corruption. A ghoul forced to go long without feeding is correspondingly less likely to have parts of its body drop away, as if the process of decay were, ironically, fueled by the same mechanism that replaces spent flesh.

Beyond its hunger and the virulent disease it can inflict on the living, one other quality defines the dangers a ghoul presents: its paralytic touch. Mere touch is not enough to visit this doom on a foe, the ghoul must pierce flesh with tooth or claw and actually inflict damage before the paralysis can seize the victim's body. Victims of this hideous affliction who survive describe it as a sudden and overwhelming hunger that causes the limbs to go limp with weakness—while paralyzed by a ghoul, a victim can do little but lie in a nerveless heap of incapacitating hunger. Unfortunately, the paralysis afforded does not deaden physical sensation, and the despair and horror of those who are eaten by ghouls while paralyzed must be terrible indeed. The fact that elves have an unusual immunity to this paralysis is curious indeed, but most point to Kabriri's form (and to the almost elven features of most ghouls) as the answer. They say that before he succumbed to his cannibal urge and became a demon, Kabriri himself was an elf. The long ears and slender bodies that most ghouls develop, despite their original race, is thus an echo of Kabriri's legacy—and the fact that their paralytic hungers have no effect on elves is but another manifestation of this strange bit of history.

It should be noted that not all who begin the transformation into ghoul become actual ghouls. Particularly hearty humanoids (often those with racial Hit Dice, or who in life were already gluttons or cannibals by choice) often become ghasts, which are similar in many ways to ghouls but are generally more powerful and more aggressive. This increased aggression has the side effect of forcing them into confrontations with the living, and as a result, ghasts generally do not exist for long once created. Lacedons are another variant, ghouls who rise from the bodies of starving humanoids who died from

drowning, often as a result of a shipwreck. (See the nearby sidebar for an exploration of other variant forms of ghouls.)

Habitat & Society

Although a ghoul's basest urge, to feed on humanoid flesh, might seem savage and bestial, the ghoul itself is an intelligent and often imaginative creature. They temper their insatiable hungers with other desires that are all-too-human: a need for companionship, entertainment, education, and comfort. Yet one would be foolish to assume that these traits instill in the ghoul a chance at redemption or peaceful coexistence with the living. For a ghoul, companionship means either time spent with others of its kind or time spent conversing with prisoners the ghoul fully intends to feed on. Entertainment is focused on grisly "dinner parties" where meals are served raw or rotten direct from coffin, or from tombstones serving as platters and plates. Education manifests as an urge to study the dark secrets, be they necromancy, demonology, torture, or some other vile pursuit. And comfort, to a ghoul, means the pursuit of the most grisly and hideous accouterments imaginable—chairs made of bones, curtains made of flesh, and decorations made from parts of the body a particular ghoul might find distasteful to eat.

Ghouls have a discerning taste. Despite (or perhaps because of) their horrific diet, all ghouls have favorite flavors of flesh. Some feed only on the most rotten of corpses, while others prefer flesh stripped fresh from living bone. All ghouls maintain that the nature of a creature's death infuses the flesh with a different flavor—and among most ghouls, flesh salted with fear and despair is the most delicious of all.

Ghouls dwell in large communities, a mocking parody of the societies to which they once belonged. A ghoul warren can extend for miles underground, although most are limited by the size of the graveyards under which they become established. In the Darklands, though, ghouls build towns or even cities in which they dwell, often around prominent repositories of lore or temples devoted to the worship of Kabriri. The greatest of these cities is deep under the nation of Osirion, a city of bone-white towers called Nemret Noktoria.

In rare cases, ghouls (particularly those who prefer the flavor of bodies who died of natural causes or old age, or that have been given ample time to ripen) can establish peaceful alliances with living evil allies. The ghouls of Nemret Noktoria maintain trade with several living cities, as an example. Ghouls are often unusually literate for undead, and many learn multiple languages as a result. Obscure languages of the Darklands (such as Gug or Orvian) are popular choices, as are ancient languages like Aklo or Draconic. The ghouls of the Darklands even speak their own language, a tongue called Necril that mixes elements of Aklo, Undercommon, and Osiriani with a long tradition of ghoulish interests and development.

Variant Ghouls

The typical ghoul is assumed to have come from a Medium humanoid like a human, half-elf, dwarf, or elf. Yet some humanoids have remarkably different characteristics that make these ghouls more or less powerful.

Larger Ghouls: A giant that succumbs to ghoul fever retains its larger size, its higher natural armor bonus, and all of its racial Hit Dice, but is otherwise treated as a ghoul advanced to its new Hit Dice and size.

Smaller Ghouls: Small humanoids who become ghouls have 1 HD and all of the appropriate bonuses and penalties for dropping from Medium to Small size (–4 Str, +2 Dex, +1 size bonus on attack rolls and to AC, reduced natural attack damage, etc.). A Small ghoul is CR 1/2.

Unusual Ghouls: Some humanoids transformed into ghouls have unusual advantages.

Boggard, Merfolk: These races always spawn into lacedons.

Bugbear, Lizardfolk, Troglodyte: These races always spawn into ghasts.

Ettin: An ettin ghoul has two bite attacks, in addition to being advanced to Large size and 10 HD.

Fire Giant: A fire giant ghoul gains the Fire subtype.

Frost Giant: A frost giant ghoul gains the Cold subtype.

Lycanthrope: While a ghoul cannot become a lycanthrope, a living lycanthrope who succumbs to ghoul fever could rise as a ghoul. In most cases, this transformation removes the lycanthropic curse, resulting in a standard ghoul, but in rare events the resulting monster is a true ghoul lycanthrope. To create stats for such a creature, simply apply the lycanthrope template to a ghoul—this is an exception to the general rule that you can normally only add the lycanthrope template to a humanoid.

Ghoul Feats

The following feats are intended to be used by ghouls (including ghasts and lacedons), but could make interesting options for many other types of undead as well.

Brain Eater

You gain some of the skills and knowledge of a consumed foe by eating its brain.

Prerequisite: Ghoul, Intelligence 17.

Benefit: If you eat a portion of the brain of a creature with Intelligence 3 or higher, you gain a +2 insight bonus on all skill checks and Will saving throws for 1 hour. Eating a brain is a full-round action, and the target must be dead or helpless. If the target is living, you may attempt to eat its brain as a coup de grace attack on the target, but you gain the insight bonus only if your attempt results in the victim's death.

Civilized Ghoulishness

Although undead, you can easily pass as living.

Prerequisite: Ghoul, Charisma 18.

Benefit: Your appearance is such that, while pale-skinned and gaunt, you can pass as a living humanoid of your choice. You gain a +10 racial bonus on Disguise checks made to appear human, and your channel resistance increases by +2. Ghasts with this feat can activate or suppress their stench ability as a free action.

Warren Digger

You can burrow through soil and dirt.

Prerequisite: Ghoul, Strength 17.

Benefit: You gain a burrow speed of 10 feet through earth, sand, or soil.

Special: You can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take it, add 10 feet to your burrow speed, up to a maximum of your base land speed.

Campaign Role

Ghouls make excellent foes for both low- and high-level play. At low level, they serve as horrifying foes for their mix of disease and paralysis abilities, and a single ghoul can remain a dangerous foe for even the largest of parties. Ghouls' intellects and natural predisposition toward necromancy make them excellent subjects for advancement via class level, particularly as clerics, rogues, sorcerers, and wizards. Finally, a nation of underground-dwelling ghouls can make for a refreshing change from the norm. (See *Pathfinder Chronicles: Into the Darklands* for an extensive discussion of such a ghoulish society.)

Known Ghouls

Although one might expect the majority of powerful ghouls to rise from the naturally more dangerous legions of ghasts, in fact the opposite is true. Ghouls seem more capable of retaining the shreds of civilization and sanity required to look beyond the constant hunger and seek more out of their unlives. This is particularly true of those who dwell in the Darklands, where ghasts are little more than man-sized feral beasts and the ghouls themselves rule an empire.

Captain Irnesee: Irnesee didn't begin her undead life as the captain of the *Avenaria*—she earned it. A stowaway aboard the merchant ship *Red Razor*, she was forced to abandon ship when it burned to the waterline. After many weeks adrift, the survivors in Irnesee's boat were forced to draw lots to determine who would be executed and provide food for the survivors. Eventually Irnesee was the only survivor, a desperate woman in a boat filled with the gnawed bones of her onetime fellow survivors. When the whaler *Avenaria* found her adrift, she was strangely quiet—the whalers assumed her necessary cannibalism had broken her mind. In truth, she had died of starvation just before the *Avenaria* "rescued" her, and had transformed into a ghoul. That night, her hunger wakened fully and she slew the Avenaria's crew but was unable to gorge on them all before they rose as ghouls themselves. The *Avenaria* never returned to port, but whispered stories of the "ghoul ship" continue to this day, with sailors predicting that the night the *Avenaria* makes call in a port shall presage the end of that city and the dawn of an empire of ghouls.

Kortash Khain: Priest-King of the ghoul city of Nemret Noktoria and high priest of the cult of Kabriri on Golarion, Kortash Khain is a towering figure of power and tradition. One of the most powerful creatures in the Inner Sea region, Kortash Khain rarely leaves the city he founded so long ago. Kortash maintains open trade with the nations of Thuvia and Geb, and secret trade with many others, and periodically wages war on his Darklands neighbors or the sands of Osirion above, but his true desire is to see Nemret Noktoria become an unliving copy of Kabriri's Abyssal realm.

Sample Ghoul

While the Priest-King of Nemret Noktoria only rarely leaves his haunted palace, the same cannot be said for his ambassadors, assassins, diplomats, and spies. These agents are universally powerful ghoul necromancers, and while they are common on the streets of Nemret Noktoria where they might also serve as judges, executioners, or seers, the most dangerous are those found beyond Nemret Noktoria's walls. While some such ghouls might be on legitimate pilgrimages or missions to allies, the majority, like the one presented here, are dangerous exiles forced to relocate to the surface world.

In Ehrimun's case, this exile was self-inflicted. Always discontent with what he viewed as a lingering existence in the bowels of the world, he longed to dwell on the surface and devour all the flesh that its diverse nations could offer. Ehrimun can be an undead warlord or master necromancer—using a powerful ghoul like this instead of a lich gives an adventure against an undead lord a different flavor and style.

EHRIMUN CR 14

XP 38,400

Male ghoul necromancer 14

CE Medium undead

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., life sight 20 ft. (14 rounds/day); Perception +22

DEFENSE

AC 24, touch 18, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor, +2 deflection, +5 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural)

hp 152 (16 HD; 2d8+14d6+94)

Fort +10, **Ref** +11, **Will** +17

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +2

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee bite +13 (1d6+1 plus disease and paralysis), 2 claws +13 (1d6+1 plus paralysis)

Special Attacks power over undead 8/day (DC 21), paralysis (1d4+1 rounds, DC 15, elves are immune)

Necromancer Spell-Like Abilities (CL 14th)

8/day—*grave touch*

Spells Known (CL 14th)

7th—quickened *dispel magic*, *finger of death* (DC 24)

6th—*circle of death* (DC 23), quickened *false life*, *summon monster IV*

5th—*magic jar* (DC 22), quickened *shield*, *teleport*, *telekinesis* (DC 20), *waves of fatigue*

4th—*arcane eye*, *black tentacles*, *contagion* (DC 21), *fear* (DC 21), *stoneskin*, *summon monster IV*

3rd—*dispel magic*, *fireball* (DC 18), *gaseous form*, *haste*, *stinking cloud* (DC 18), *vampiric touch*

2nd—*acid arrow*, *blindness/deafness* (DC 19), *cat's grace*, *detect thoughts* (DC 17), extended *mage armor* (already cast), *resist energy*

1st—*chill touch*, *expeditious retreat*, *feather fall*, *grease* (DC 16), *obscuring mist*, *protection from good*, *reduce person* (DC 16)

0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 17), *detect magic*, *light*, *mage hand*, *read magic*

Prohibited Schools enchantment, illusion

TACTICS

Before Combat Ehrimun summons a minion and casts *stoneskin*, *cat's grace*, and *protection from good*.

During Combat Ehrimun leads with *circle of death* to eliminate many foes, then uses area spells to eliminate survivors.

Morale Ehrimun relies on his *contingency* to save him from destruction.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 20, **Con** —, **Int** 20, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 33

Feats Arcane Strike, Combat Casting, Command Undead, Defensive Combat Training, Dodge, Extend Spell, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Quicken Spell, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (necromancy), Toughness, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +6, Climb +6, Fly +17, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +24, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +24, Knowledge (religion) +24, Linguistics +14, Perception +22, Spellcraft +24, Stealth +23

Languages Abyssal, Aklo, Common, Dwarven, Elven, Gnome, Goblin, Gug, Necril, Orvian, Osiriani, Undercommon

SQ *contingency*

Combat Gear *wand of fly* (25 charges); **Other Gear** staff (arcane bond), *belt of incredible dexterity +2*, *cloak of resistance +2*, *ring of protection +2*, diamond worth 1,500 gp, diamond dust worth 750 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Arcane Bond Ehrimun's staff is a unique magic item, capped with the skulls of several halflings and a rune-etched nightmare's skull. It allows the use of the following spells: *magic missile* (1 charge), *ray of enfeeblement* (1 charge), *ray of exhaustion* (2 charges), *dimension door* (3 charges), and *enervation* (3 charges).

Contingency If Ehrimun is reduced to 20 or fewer hit points, a *dimension door* spell activates and removes him from battle.

THE ECOLOGY OF THE GHOUL

Among the Carrion Crows

Alone in his study late at night, Pelagast the Younger chanced to notice a message burning in the brazier he kept to warm his aging bones.

by Wolfgang Baur

illustrated by Brad McDevitt

THE PIECE OF PAPER HADN'T BEEN THERE A MOMENT BEFORE; indeed, the paper seemed to be pulling smoke out of the air, becoming more and more concrete with each passing second. Pelagast snatched at it quickly, lest the fully-formed note catch fire and be reduced to the smoke that had formed it.

The paper was still hot—he almost dropped it back into the brazier—but its smoky characters resolved themselves into letters. He recognized the handwriting as that of one of his colleagues, a fellow given to long absences in the pursuit of knowledge, one Wrennar the Laughing Mage. The message read thus:

"Learned colleagues and fellow necromages of the Bemmean council, I send you greetings from the underworld, and a report of the recent disruptions here. The objects of my study for the last year and more have been ghouls, ghasts, and a previously unknown ruling ghoul type, the shadow ghoul, a subtype that has formed a society among the ghouls. Among the races of the Underdark, these master ghouls are sometimes called the noble ghouls, or true ghouls. Their existence has shed much light on the formation and abilities of ghouls and ghoul-kind. Allow me to report to you the workings of this distinctly dangerous form of undead."

Wrennar's Expedition

My investigations began in the winter of 3812 by the Bemmean Reckoning, for I had required the entire summer to locate a group of at least marginally competent sellswords willing to take a chance in the deepest reaches of the Underdark. Our travels continued without incident until the twenty-third march below ground. Shortly after the first rest, we heard a sound like the dry rasp of insect wings—though we did not yet know it, it was a sound we would soon dread, for it was the sound of ghouls on the march.[1]

Within a minute, they were upon us, a swarm of wasted creatures with lambent eyes, the first ghouls we met in the Lands Below. Balint, our priest of Ouroboros, stepped forward to turn them aside, brandishing his serpent staff. The ghouls seemed reluctant to recognize the serpent-god's power, but after Balint hurled a few choice scriptures their way, they turned and retreated to the side of the passage as might be expected.[2]

1. Large groups of ghouls can march in almost complete silence; they do not breathe, and they prepare their weapons and armor for silent movement. When they march, only the vibration of their footfalls and the rush of air past their bodies marks their passage. This increases their chance of obtaining surprise to 1–4. When moving alone, a shadow ghoul has a 20% chance to move silently.

2. Shadow ghouls are difficult to get rid of; they are turned as wraiths. *Protection from evil* has no effect on shadow ghouls, even when strengthened with cold iron. All physical attacks against shadow ghouls inflict only half normal damage, as they are already dead and are well-protected by their undead state. They are immune or resistant to any form of *charm*, mental or psionic control, and *ESP*. They have 4+4 HD, rather than a ghast's standard 4 or a ghoul's 2. Shadow ghouls move at 12, are armor class 3, and enjoy Fanatical morale (17–18). They are worth 1,400 experience points.

We forged ahead, but I could not resist examining these creatures as we passed. More than that, I weighed the odds of successfully capturing an intact specimen. With my mercenary companions, the odds seems slim. Furthermore, the ghouls were not as I had been taught, bestial, lumpy forms bereft of intelligence. Indeed, several of them carried weapons and all of them wore clothing. Though much of the clothing was tattered or worn, the weapons were in good repair.[3] Though the accouterments were surprising and at odds with what I thought I knew, the ghouls' distinguishing physical features were as I expected: forked tongues, hairy, doglike legs, and pointed or even ragged ears. A few of the older ghouls could be distinguished by their bald heads.[4]

Only scant seconds after we had passed them by, the ghouls rushed us in a body. Balint and the others were caught completely by surprise, but I had watched the undead things suspiciously and was ready for the attack. Invoking the elemental power of Osti's fire to destroy their front rank with a breath of flame, I gave my companions enough time to prepare a defense. Once the ghoul's first momentum was lost, we soon sent the rest of the pack howling into the darkness. Nevertheless, the entire incident was disturbing. Ghouls are among the easiest undead to turn or even to destroy utterly. How had these resisted? The question would not be answered for some days. We pushed the issue aside and set up camp.

Our rest was disturbed by the screams of Mandac, one of our younger warriors. He had been scratched in the fight a few hours ago, and already the wound showed signs of infection; red lines spread from the scab along the veins toward his heart.[5] Balint performed a healing ritual, checked the wounds for signs of similar problems, and then returned to sleep. By morning, Mandac's tracery of red lines had receded, and Balint reassured the warrior that such infections were rarely serious.

The next march we met and spoke with a small party of derro; they approached us with open hands from the shadows, and we had fought enough the day before. The degenerate dwarves warned us that the border of a ghoul "kingdom" lay just ahead—the derro themselves were returning from a trade mission there and had just recently passed a checkpoint marked by the gnawed bones of a dozen drow. My companions and I were amazed that anyone could trade with such grave-robbing filth, but we did our best to disguise our reactions. We believed that ghouls put little or no value on anything other than meat, grave goods, and a few shiny baubles. Why trade with them at all? But regardless, we spoke to the derro, listening to their tales of a ghoul kingdom and a nation of the undead.[6] Perhaps they were merely telling us stories to scare surface dwellers, or perhaps they hoped for some fee or trophy from us, but their stories did little but confuse. Balint asked the derro how the ghouls resisted his turning efforts, but they could tell us nothing. Given their consort with dark powers themselves, perhaps this should not be too surprising.

Not long after our meeting with the derro, we met our second group of ghouls, just as they had warned us. However, we were traveling quite stealthily at this point, covered by invisibility and priestly wardings, we caught them off-guard and chanced upon them as they fed. Two sentries stood watch while the rest slowly stripped the meat from a paralyzed victim.[7] Our attack

3. Like ghasts, shadow ghouls can use weapons. When they fight unarmed, they inflict 1–6/1–6/1–8 with their claws and teeth. Common ghouls are too stupid to do more than rend and claw. While shadow ghouls prefer to use forged weapons in hand-to-hand combat, they may also attack with claws and teeth, and with these natural weapons each attack offers a chance of paralysis (saving throw applies). Creatures paralyzed by a true ghoul remain paralyzed for 8–18 (6+2d6) rounds rather than the usual 3–8 of common ghouls or the 5–10 of ghasts.

4. The lack of new growth leads to complete baldness, though younger ghouls may retain thinning hair for years with proper care. Indeed, some nobles among the shadow ghouls wear wigs made of human or drow hair. These wigs fool some observers but can be detected by anyone within 10 feet who makes a successful Wisdom check.

5. All ghouls keep their teeth and claws full of the filth of carrion or the grave. Likewise, they keep their weapons smeared with charnel filth as a result, they spread numerous diseases. After each battle with ghouls, creatures wounded by the ghouls must make a saving throw vs. poison. Those who fail lose 1d6 hp each day until the disease is cured or until they make a Constitution check with a –4 penalty.

In the case of those injured by shadow ghouls, victims who fail are infected with ghoul-rot and begin the slow transformation into ghouls.

6. Ghouls have overwhelming effects on surrounding communities of creatures. They eat until all major sentient and animal species are exterminated or driven away, and they transform humans, derro, halflings, and half-elves into ghouls , increasing the hunger of the ghoul community.

Underground and surface communities faced with armies of ghouls sometimes take to burning their dead and killing their wounded, to prevent ghouls from appearing among them.

7. The ghoul's diet is a subject of considerable interest; few undead need to eat in the usual sense, digesting and excreting. A ghoul's feeding is more spiritual than physical. While it must eat, just as vampires do, a ghoul is nourished by the link to the flesh of sentient creatures, not by blood. If ghouls do not eat, they cannot heal their wounds. In addition, prolonged lack of sentient flesh breaks the strength of the ghoul's undead state, eventually returning the ghoul to a purely animal cunning. For ghouls to retain their intelligence over time, they must feast on the brains of sentient creatures.

caught them completely by surprise and threw their vile feast into a quick retreat. The victim had been gnawed to the bone; we buried him as best we could under the circumstances, piling rocks to make a simple cairn and blessing the ground he lay on to prevent the undead from returning to finish their meal.

Transformation

We met ghouls again after we had given up counting days; instead, we counted marches, though Balint argued that we should refer to them as "rests" instead, since we did not always march. In either case, on our twenty-second march, we learned at last all we wanted to know about them: their use of tools, their resistance to turning, their "kingdom" and trade with other races, and the method of their creation. The answer to the last seems to be the key to understanding the life cycles of not only shadow ghouls, but also of common ghouls and ghasts. But I've gotten ahead of the tale. First, the tale of how our expedition found what it sought.

I ADMIT I WAS A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK hearing such fine speech from a reeking, split-tongued creature . . .

We had continued beyond the ghoul "border crossing"—the drow bones were there, just as the derro had claimed—for two marches when we saw the first sign of civilization: a set of three sentries, armored in ill-kept chain and armed with spears. One of them had spotted our advance, for we had grown tired of marching in darkness and had lit a lantern. The ghouls had a lantern as well, though it was unlit. I convinced Balint and the warriors to keep their weapons sheathed and approached the sentries with open hands, speaking in the Undercommon I had mastered for the trip. As I suspected, they answered me, saying, "Welcome to the Great Army of the Ghouls. We are soldiers of Murliss, the Lady of Worms and general of this army. Who are you? What do you bring us?"

I admit I was a little taken aback hearing such fine speech from a reeking, split-tongued creature clearly meant for the grave years ago. But I rallied and spoke, "We are dwellers form the surface, come to learn the language and customs of the ghouls in return for precious gifts and magics." I made a little bow, as a mage should to an inferior.

"You'd best see the general, then," he said. "I am Surnliven, lieutenant of the second cohort. I give you my safe conduct into the camp to see the general."

"I see. And how can I trust this assurance?"

He straightened into a perfectly-straight, military posture. "A ghoul's word is his bond. I swear by my king that you will suffer no indignity at the hands of my troops."

I motioned my marching companions forward. I told them that we were entering the ghoul camp under the protection of a safe conduct, and that there we would meet and bargain with the ghouls for permission to enter their kingdom. They seemed suspicious, indeed they opposed the idea, but I calmed their fears by mentioning that I could always *teleport* us out of harm's way. I neglected to mention that this spell would not be enough to transport all of us.

I couldn't have been more mistaken about the size of the ghoul army. The darkness and silence of the ghoul camp had fooled me: we walked for fully ten minutes past row after row of ghouls preparing weapons, eating, herding prisoners (food?), and praying under the direction of a white-clad priest of Arabis, god of death, travel, and wisdom. I had expected the Lieutenant's boast to reveal little more than a patrol in force. The army we passed through numbered in the thousands. The darkness made an exact estimate impossible.

At last we came to a tent of spider silk, doubtless plundered from the drow. Two finely-outfitted guards in plate and full helms stood outside, though they stepped aside at a world from our escort. Within stood a ghoul regaled in black with a horned headdress and a wicked sword with a wavy blade. "I am Murliss, leader of this host. What do you bring me?" If it had not been for the pallor of her skin, I might have mistaken the figure before me for a knight of the surface world, so noble was her bearing and manner.[8]

"Ourselves and our strong swords, if you require mercenaries," I said.

The general waved the offer away. "What do you know of the city of Glimmerfell?"

"I have never heard of it," I said, truthfully. "But know that I am a wizard of Bemmea, and I have much to offer you. These soldiers behind me, for instance, will make good allies, and my knowledge of spellcraft is considerable. All I ask in return is the freedom to study your armies, your customs, and your soldiers." I heard a brief scuffle behind me as Balint protested, but I didn't turn to look. It was too late to turn back. Besides, my *stone skin* spell would protect me from the first of my mercenaries' blows, if they objected to my throwing in our lot with these ghouls.

"Your followers are already mine by virtue of their presence within my army's grasp. And if you are as ignorant of my enemies as you claim, I have little use for your either, surface mage." The ghoul calmly raised a goblet in my direction. "But I'm always looking for new recruits."

"Your lieutenant guaranteed our safe conduct," I said, making my words bolder than I felt.

8. Ghoul nobles have all of the abilities of priests except spell use, and may *summon shadows* once per day (as an 8th-level caster). They have 8+8 HD, AC or 2 or better, and often use magical weapons. They are turned as vampires.

Ghoul royalty cannot *animate dead* or *summon shadows* as their nobles do, but they can create automata, golems, special *wizard eyes* (like the Eyes of the King), and necromantic siege engines, huge constructs that resemble fused flesh golems. Shadow ghoul royalty may also eat the knowledge of any creature they devour whole, from liches to dead adventurers—this grants them spell ability equal to the highest-level creature whose brain they have devoured. They have 12+12 HD, an AC of –2 or higher, and always employ magical armor and weapons. Ghoul kings, queens, and emperors are turned as Special undead. Nobles are worth 6,000 experience points (plus 1,000 per level over 4th), while royalty is worth 14,000.

"Is this true, Surnliven?" asked the general.

"Indeed it is, general," said the lieutenant, saluting. "I personally guaranteed their safe passage into the camp," he smiled. "I said nothing of the trip out."

The general motioned to his soldiers. We turned to face them and heard the cry of a thousand hungry throats from without the tent. I had been outsmarted by a ghoul. I suspected it would be an embarrassing death.

A Final Journey

Listen closely: the transition from life to death is a path strewn with hazards, as the recent attempt at lichdom by Dragos the Mad showed. The great advantage of the shadow ghouls is that they have mastered portions of this path, and they help their future companions along it. This is not to say that all risks are circumvented. Creatures slain by a ghoul are often driven mad by the experience; they lose all memories of their former lives, indeed lose all their higher faculties, and become merely raving, fleshing-eating undead. These are the lesser or common ghouls.

But these sad husks are not the only possible result of a ghoul's transformation. Those who survive the transition into undeath with their faculties intact are in all ways stronger than their lesser kin. These few retain the intelligence and cunning of ghasts, and their link to the shadow plane that grants them power is stronger, allowing them to paralyze elves as well as other humanoids. But even ghasts are not the highest form of ghouldom; to enter that state requires help or a force of sheer will that ghasts rarely possess.

Long after the fight at the camp, I was able to observe the birth of a fledgling shadow ghoul. The prey—a young svirfneblin male—had been run down by a pack of shadow ghoul nobles and their retainers, dragged to complete exhaustion and then brought before a priest of Nerull.[9] Gnomes and dwarves were prized by shadow ghouls as breeding stock, because their small frames require less food than elven, orc, or human bodies do.[10]

The creature touched by a ghoul priest always become infected with a condition the ghouls call *grave rot*.[11] The resulting transformation is quite different from the creation of a common ghoul or ghast. First, the shadow ghoul is constantly attended by one of its fellows, who seems to provide an anchor point to strengthen the developing link to the elemental planes that power the undead. Though the transforming ghoul cannot see, it can hear even more keenly than normal; even spoken voices seem to thunder in its head. The subject retains its intelligence and its memories, far more than one might expect.[12] It also gains some control over its link to the plane of Shadow.[13] In fact, many humans retain the power of their former, breathing lives when they enter the ranks of the ghouls, just as many wizards retain their power when embraced by a vampire.[14] The slow ebbing of bodily feeling continues until one is paralyzed, unable to do more than listen to the drone and feel heat and breath leave the body. Then, a black nectar is forced into the dead subject's mouth, and a power from without animates the limbs, restoring feeling, sight, and the ability to move though not to breath. The sensation of is quite remarkable, like an infusion of poppy nectar or the application of lotus powder to the lips—a jolt of primal energy animates the limbs. Priests, however, suffer a noticeable decline after the change—not only have they been denied the promised afterlife, but they have become what many of them abhor.[15] Unlike lesser ghouls or ghasts, true ghouls emit no stench of death or decay, and they have fashioned a civilization of sorts here in the Underdark.

The transition to ghouldom is much easier for humans, dwarves, gnomes, and the humanoid species than it is for

9. The ghouls' patron god is Nerull, the deity of death and decay. Though the god is known to spurn the prayers and offerings of almost all sentient creatures, for some reason he accepts the devotion of the ghouls. Whether this is because his cold heart actually feels some warmth for the ghouls and their kin or because he finds them pitiful and amusing is a matter of speculation among ghoul theologians.

Shadow ghouls are led by two classes, priests and nobles, which are often at odds with each other. The powerful clerical leaders can create zombies and skeletons; the ghoul nobles lead most raiding parties and armies. Wizards among shadow ghouls generally arise among the priesthood but are occasionally found among the nobility as well.

The touch of a ghoul priest always drains 1 point of Strength, even when striking normally with a paralyzing claw. Great priests of 5th level and higher can *animate dead* once per week, with no limit to the number of undead they may ultimately control; high priests can fuse these dead into necromantic siege engines and conveyances of as many HD as they have levels. Priests range in ability from 1st to 11th level; they have 4+4 HD until they reach 4th level. Thereafter they gain 1+1 HD for each additional level they attain. Thus, for example, a 7th-level priest would have 7+7 HD. Priests are all turned as mummies, regardless of level. They are worth 3,000 experience point, plus 1,000 per level over 4th.

10. Small gnomes and dwarves transformed into ghouls retain their size but gain all normal shadow ghoul, ghast, or common ghoul abilities. In some instances, these smaller ghouls are trained as bat-riders, soaring through caverns as couriers and scouts on the backs of enormous mobats.

11. While the true ghoul priests are indeed largely responsible for the maintenance and multiplication of the line, the mechanism by which they passed on the closer planar connection of the shadow ghoul was a secret for many years. It is apparent to any observer that the priests' touch inflicts a deadly disease; the shadow ghoul, duergar, and drow call this disease grave rot. This rotting disease superficially resembles that caused by a mummy's touch, but it serves another purpose, which is the simple heart of the shadow ghoul's secret. Unlike other undead, they do not need to kill their victims to multiply. Instead, ghoul-rot transforms living flesh into the undead flesh of the ghoul. The victim never dies and is reborn, as is a vampire or a zombie. Instead, living flesh is slowly but inexorably replaced by shadow material, the source of undead power. Much as shades, ghouls derive their power entirely from this shadow-flesh.

The role of grave-rot also explains the existence of lesser forms of shadow ghoul. If the grave-rot process is disturbed (for instance, by the death of the intended target), a ghoul or ghast is created from the flawed vessel.

The power and influence of the ghoul priests comes from the magical disease or curse they carry. This disease is grave-rot; anyone killed by a priest in combat become a ghoul after a number of hours equal to the victim's level. The victim must make a saving throw vs. death magic; if it succeeds, he becomes a shadow ghoul. If it fails, he must make a system shock roll. If the system shock roll succeeds, he becomes a ghast in a number of days equal to his level or Hit Dice. If it fails, he becomes a lesser ghoul in number of days equal to victim's level or Hit Dice.

12. Common ghouls have a low intelligence (5–7), ghasts retain fragmentary memories and much intelligence (11–12), and shadow ghouls retain all memories and generally become more intelligent (15–18). However, all creatures transformed into ghouls gain chaotic evil or neutral evil alignments.

13 This control over the shadow link is limited to ghoul priests and wizards.

14. Characters of any level retain that level as ghouls and may continue to advance as members of the class. All kit, racial, and subclass bonuses are lost, however, with the exception of necromancer specialty wizards, who retain all their benefits.

Shadow ghouls can gain levels as do living things, strengthened by an ever-growing link to the plane of Shadow. They may be fighters, priests, thieves, or mages but may not be members of subclass other than necromancer. They are limited to 9th level in all the classes available to them except priests, who may attain 11th level.

15. Few gods embrace undead worshipers, and thus priests lose a level and lose all access to spells above second level when they become ghouls. However, gods of death usually take up the sponsorship of any such priest who embraces a new faith.

elves, half-elves, and drow.[16] In general, however, any sentient, warm-blooded creature capable of magic can be transformed into a ghoul. As ghouls age, their original species becomes less and less obvious, and their similarity to other ghouls grow.

A ghoul's touch is the source of its power.[17] All ghouls, even the lesser ones and the newly-created, can paralyze their prey, allowing them to feast on still-living flesh. Some can paralyze elves, some can mimic the effect of a *chill touch* spell, and the greatest among them can command shadows, inflict grave rot, and even command other undead. These powers are all derive from the ghoul's link to the Negative material plane.[18] The link of common ghouls to this plane is weak, and thus their paralyzation ability is likewise weak. The link of ghasts is stronger, so their ability to paralyze elves is greater as well. However, the vile grave-stench of shared by common ghouls and ghasts is entirely absent in shadow ghouls. This is because the imperfect link of the two lesser species permits their bodies to decay over time, eventually collapsing altogether, while shadow ghoul's perfect link to the Negative plane permits their bodies to be entirely preserved from corruption. Any source of contagion and rot is kept from them and focused on their enemies.[19]

This new race of ghouls is the greatest discovery of my journey, and indeed of my career in necromancy. I maintain that the ghouls commonly found on the surface world are pale reflections of the true ghoul race, for the ghouls of the Underdark are intelligent, obey the social ladder common to civilized races, and worship their own gods. Indeed, shadow ghouls are quite religious, for they see the survival of their intelligence as a gift from Nerull. Without his blessing, they believe, they would sink to the realm of common ghouls. As a result, all ghouls show some degree of piety, if only by uttering Nerull's name before they feed, or as a battle cry.[20]

Preliminary research indicates that a true ghoul who is slain might still survive if its planar link is strong enough, becoming a spectre.[21] This almost always means that the ghoul is a true ghoul and a noble; weaker shadow ghouls do not survive the transformation, presumably because too little of their substance has been replaced by shadow flesh. More research is necessary before I can verify this hypothesis; unfortunately, obtaining willing experimental subjects among the shadow ghoul nobility has proven more difficult than anticipated.

OBTAINING WILLING EXPERIMENTAL SUBJECTS among the shadow ghoul nobility has proven ... difficult ...

The White Kingdom

When I awoke from the transformation—for surely, dear reader, by now you have guessed that I have joined the Elect Nobles of the Great and Potent Kingdom of White Bone—I was lying on a simple tombstone graven into the cavern floor, meant to represent my mortal life, cast off and beneath me. As a ghoul, I would soon be expected to build a tomb of my own, for my final rest, though it might be centuries in coming. I could not yet read the tombstone's text, but it was surely mine.[22] I had entered with all my faculties intact, and indeed even my wizard's gift had not abandoned me. I endeavored, with more fervor than ever, to continue my researches into the nature of the ghouls' undead state and into their secular state, a realm of simple needs and complex hierarchies.

The Kingdom of the Ghouls, sometimes called the White Kingdom, is both a city and a series of settlements in the deep Underdark. Ruled by their founder and his small court, the city has expanded at the expense of other races of the Underdark, especially the drow and the svirfneblin, whose dead can be transformed to swell the ghoul army's ranks. Why do undead creatures need a city? For many reasons, but chief among them are the common defense and the need for workshops to construct automata.[23] Fearsome as ghouls are, they are social creatures, depending on one another for survival in the hostile environs of the Underdark.

16. The human transition to ghouldom is much easier than that of most other races except dwarves, whose high Constitution makes the shift bearable. Elves, however, perhaps because of their unsleeping minds, suffer greatly during the change and rarely become more than mere ghasts. They suffer a –4 penalty to all saving throws and ability checks related to the change into undeath. Half-elves suffer a –2 penalty, and gnomes and halflings gain no benefit except as provided by their Constitution.

In the Underdark, the most common prey of ghouls are drow, svirfneblin, dwarves, and derro, but any warm-blooded creature can be made into a ghoul.

17. Why touch? Elves are immune to the touch of lesser or common ghouls for the same reason they are immune to *charm* and *sleep* spells; the ghoul-touch is a type of glamour that paralyzes through suggestion and enchantment, rather than through any toxin or life-draining effect.

18. Some would argue the proper plane is that of Shadow; the correct answer is unclear.

19. Dagros the Mad has suggested that a ghoul's stench is due to the decay and absorption of rotting meat. This may be so, but it leaves the shadow ghouls' lack of odor unexplained. Dagros also suggested that the stench rather than touch is the medium of its paralyzation, but he also suggested this of troglodytes. A few members of the Academy maintain that the two influences work in concert. More study is required.

20. In other realms, the ghouls pay homage to Orcus, Bane, Arabis, and to other powers of death, decay, darkness, and evil. Ghouls are as undiscriminating in their choice of patrons as they are in their choice of meats.

21. Any slain true ghoul noble who makes a saving throw vs. death magic immediately becomes a spectre, gaining 1 additional Hit Die and becoming more difficult to turn.

22. Ghouls speak a language of their own, Ghoulish, which they slowly "remember" in the first weeks after they awake from the transformation to undeath. It is thought that the knowledge is imparted to the ghouls either by the plane of Shadow or by some god residing there who created the ghouls. The transfer's principles are still unclear.

23. Ghoul priests and mages are experts at constructing, commanding, and destroying magical golems of all types, especially those of stone and bone. They have a love for automatons of all kinds, and they are experts at constructing new types of both servants powered by necromantic magic and at golem manufacture.

In addition, they have perfected a sort of undead siege engine called the ghoul war machine. This unholy contraption is composed of the fused remains of 40 or more zombified creatures; their flesh is magically melded to gather around a central beam to create a living battering ram. The flesh is then hardened to the consistency of soft stone; the result is a heavy, durable engine capable of battering down stone portals, gates, and obstacles of all kinds, as well as serving as a bridge over small chasms (up to 15 feet wide).

The creature has 40 legs and can be ridden comfortably by as many as four riders. INT semi- (2–4); AL N; AC 2; MV 9; HD 16; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 2–40; SA crush, trample; SD immune to mind-affecting spells; SZ G (30' long, 9' tall); ML 18; XP 10,000 each. It can be turned as "Special" undead, and it can crush foes. If a ghoul battering ram strikes a foe with a natural 20, it destroys all items carried by the target unless they save versus a crushing blow at –5. When the ram strikes a foe, he must make an ability check equal to half his Strength (percentile Strength counts as 19 for this calculation). If the check fails, the victim suffers an additional 2d10 hp damage as the ram tramples him.

In addition, their city contains many areas where the ghouls can build their war machines; these labors may require months of work and the industry of hundreds of priests, flesh-shapers, and necromancers. These war machines help defend the ghoul's city and attack their neighbors' cities.

The kingdom lies near the Cloaker Rift—a landmark surely as familiar to those who have traveled extensively in the Lands Below as the Vault of the Drow. There, between cavern and rift the two races exist in a fragile co-existence. Indeed, the cloakers and the ghouls have joined together in an alliance against their mutual enemies. Normally, the proud ghouls would disdain any such alliance, but even ghouls have enemies they fear. In the case of the shadow ghouls, the enemies they fear are few. Their greatest foes are the kuo-toans, who are immune to the ghoul's paralyzation ability and whose icthyoid bodies cannot be transformed into ghoul-flesh. In return, the psionically-immune ghouls assist the cloakers against their foes, the illithids.

The White Kingdom is lit by an unusual form of illumination called ghoul-light. This yellowish-green light is shed by special lanterns; it is a weak glow that discomfits drow but does not eliminate infravision. In addition, legends say that it reveals all hidden things to ghoul eyes, even those on another plane or hidden behind thin screens or barriers.[24] The secret of manufacturing the special oils that create ghoul-light lanterns are closely guarded by the ghoul priests and unknown to other races. Indeed, it seems that the priests among the ghouls are the secret masters of the kingdom, for rarely do the nobles lead a simple raid—much less lead an army to war—without the backing of the priests.

The priests, while they are always eager for both sacrifices to their gods and new converts, are rarely found at the front lines. They prefer to work from just beyond the front, choosing some to be transformed into more ghoul soldiers, others to serve the ghoul armies as fodder. I have seen the priests' ceremonies, clouded in smoke and harsh incense, preparing to ease the transition from life to unlife.[25] To prevent a creature infected with grave rot from becoming a shadow ghoul, they either make sure it is quickly devoured (within 24 hours) or ensure that it is not attended by a spirit guide, leaving the body to linger and grow mad on the path between life and death.

Contrariwise, when they wish to strengthen the link to the shadow plane, they burn special gutting candles around the body until it rises. The ceremony is named the Chant of Flickering Hours after these lights, and after the flickering spark of the new ghoul's mind as it struggles to retain some memories while accommodating new appetites. Young ghouls are generally fed cooked meat for the first few weeks of their lives to ease the transition to an exclusively carnivorous diet; this behavior has never been recorded among surface ghouls.

These creatures were as distant from their surface-dwelling cousins as the drow are from the grey elves. Indeed, I was later to learn, they disdain their brutish relations, considering them distant kin at best, and embarrassing kinfolk at that. Having had a chance to compare the two at closer quarters, I am inclined to agree.[26]

24. The magical, yellowish-green ghoul light is quite distinctive, a phosphorescent glow the color of marsh gas and rot. This light reveals hidden things and dispels illusions of all kinds; in a way, it is the reverse of *true seeing*. Invisible, ethereal, and shadowed creatures all become visible in ghoul-light, as do creatures cloaked in illusion or altered forms, even lycanthropes. It inflicts the same penalties on drow as a continual light spell.

25. Since shadow ghouls are created by their priests, the priests' control over ghoulish politics is considerable. They can breed new generations to support a war effort and create new worshipers for their god, or they can slow the transformation and prevent a body from becoming a shadow ghoul, leaving it to fall into the madness and decay of the ghasts and common ghouls.

All this information took me months of diligent investigation to ferret out: questioning the priests, speaking to the nobles (though not all answered), and generally annoying all who would suffer my inquiries. Perhaps I eventually grew too zealous in my search for the source of the kingdom's power, for one day, as I was dissecting and noting the degree of mummification in the form of a partially transformed goblin-ghoul. I received an unexpected visitor: a metallic herald of the realm's king. The figure was clad entirely in plate armor, well-oiled and coated in a layer of black enamel.[27] My indiscrete inquiries had aroused the notice of the king, and he requestioned my presence in the palace of Blackgate.

THE MAIN GATE was under the watchful eye of two strange devas——winged but black as pitch. Perhaps they were spirits . . .

I had long desired an audience with King Doresain, founder and tyrant of the realm, but so far I had been unable to obtain one. I donned my best robes, called Balint, my ghast servant, to attend me, and made my way to the center of the necropolis. I was told that he permitted no conflict among his subjects (an assertion I was later to discover false[28]), and thus I felt safe approaching his palace. Its appearance did not inspire as much confidence: Blackgate teeters nigh on the edge of an abyss. The main gate was under the watchful eye of two strange devas—winged but black as pitch. Perhaps they were spirits; no one could ever quite explain their origins to my satisfaction.

Beyond the portal, past the gatekeeper, my armored companion left me. I was handed to the care of a rosewater-scented chamberlain, though he seemed to have few words for me. "Follow me," he said, "and say nothing until you are addressed." Down black passages, I was brought into the coldest halls of the palace.

The halls leading to the audience chamber were cold and drafty; my ghoul guide, of course, did not feel the chill, but my newer flesh still remembered chills. The king himself sat in a hall limned in ghoul-light and surrounded by a set of floating skulls. I had heard of these: they were said to be the ensorcelled heads of wizards who had displeased him. I resolved to be careful, bowed deeply, and waited for the king to speak.

He took his time examining me, sending a small fiery bat closer to me. I had heard of these creatures and had even seen them from a distance—small green comets flitting through the darkness. Called the Eyes of the King, they are enchanted spies their liege used to keep watch on his distant servants and armies. Though they resemble bats constantly engulfed in green faerie fire, it is said that the king sees everything their eyes see.[29] I fidgeted until the thing disappeared down the hall.

The king spoke: "You are the first surface dweller in many years to stand before me. Tell me, are there many more of your kind who might come to visit."

"Yes, there are, " I said. "In my breathing life, I was a wizard of a city of wizards. Many of them are curious about your realms. Surely they would come if you offered them an invitation and a chance at new knowledge." I considered that perhaps, with the help of a few members of the Council, it would not be too difficult to seize power here and take the riches of the ghouls for ourselves.

The king did not notice my treacherous thoughts. "Arrange it," he said. His hollow eye sockets turned away to contemplate the flickering of his skull-servants. I had half a hundred questions—about the mechanisms of paralysis, about my own growing and disquieting desire to possess grave goods[30]—but the eldest of the ghouls had no time for them, or for me.

And so, before I close this missive, a last request. The king has invited you to come attend upon him and dine at the heart of this fabulous kingdom. Please do attend. The meal wouldn't be the same without you.

Your devoted Servant,
Wrennar the Laughing Ghoul

Wolfgang Baur maintains small shrines to Clark Ashton Smith and E.R. Eddison, and makes regular offerings. Many of the events detailed in this article figure prominently in Wolf's "Kingdom of the Ghouls" adventure appearing in DUNGEON® Adventures *#70.*

26. Ghouls are quite dangerous to other races of the Underdark, as they can overwhelm most living races with sheer numbers. If ghouls ever expand their numbers too far, they might be able to besiege and conquer a city stronghold of one of the major races and then convert many of the dead to their own cause, to take the next city. Despite the severity of this threat, in general, living races tend to treat the ghouls as a form of rot that must be contained. The reason is simple; none of them can afford the losses they might incur in an all-out assault against the ghoul capital. Even if they wiped out the ghouls, they might leave themselves easy prey for another inimical Underdark species.

27. This figure was surely a helmed horror or similar automaton, for the ghoul-king does not trust his subjects and grants many tasks to the dozens of machines that inhabit the palace. The shadow ghoul nobles emulate this fashion, though few are able to construct or purchase such servants.

28. When there are too many of the undead and not enough living things for them to feed on, the ghouls enter a frenzy of madness, killing and slaying one another until their numbers are reduced to a level their environment can sustain.

29. The king of the ghouls commands a special form of magical scrying that no other race of the Underdark can match. The Eyes of the King are difficult to avoid or lose once they find an intruder; they flit through darkness almost more quickly than the eye can follow. They are said to patrol regular routes on the borders of the ghouls' kingdom.

Each Eye acts as a *wizard eye* of unlimited distance and duration. Only the king and perhaps the priests understand the spell that creates them. Others who claim to know the secret have been driven insane when they attempt to duplicate the spell's effect.

30. Ghouls develop a fetish for death and things of the grave; generally, this desire seems to be a sort of nesting principle, as they construct elaborate tombs for themselves. Far from feeling immortal as vampires do, most shadow ghouls seem to know instinctively that they will die again. Their time as ghouls merely gives them the opportunity to gather memento moris.

In practice, this love for grave goods gives shadow ghouls treasure types B, T, R, S, and T. Nobles also gain Q×3, X, and Y.

Ecology of the Hill Giant

By Richard Pett
Art by Arthur Rackham

O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.

—William Shakespeare,
Measure for Measure (II. ii.)

The earliest tales tell of giants—beings like men but tall and strong. From the oldest religious texts to modern stories, the giant has been with us every oversized step of the way.

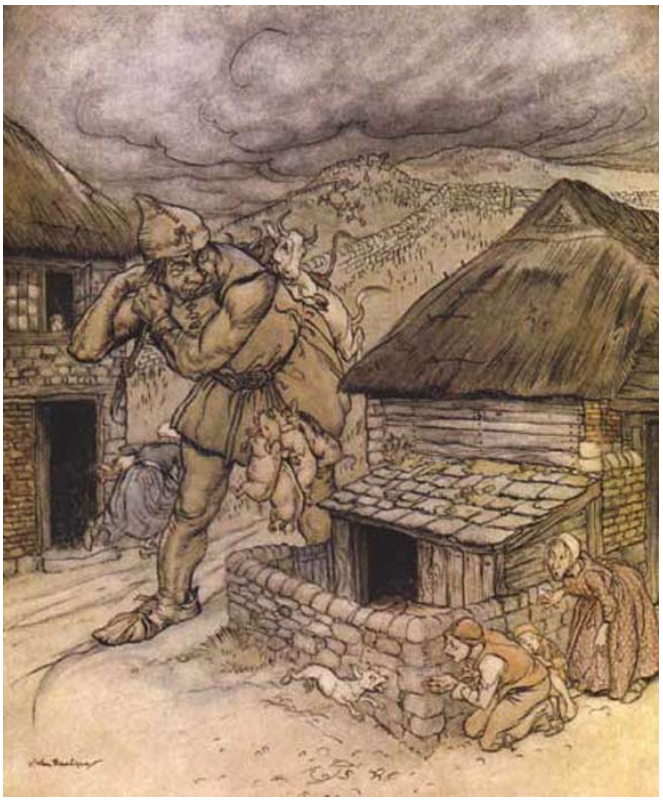
Giants appear in many mythologies; from the Jotun of icy Norse mythology to the Giant Kings of the Incas, they have been the subject of folklore and fairy tales throughout the ages. Giants originated when gods mated with humans, producing monstrous or gigantic offspring with superhuman strength and size; sometimes, giants were gods that walked among men and became heroes. They threw rocks, had one or more heads, and often had a taste for man-flesh. They could be 10 ft. tall like Goemagog or have a 10-mile stride like Bolster.

One thing all giants have in common is their slow wittedness, which perhaps casts hill giants in the truest spirit of the fantasy giants. Consider the tale of the origin of the Wrekin, a hill in Shropshire, England. The story tells that an old Welsh giant was carrying a spadeful of earth, intending to dam the river Severn and drown the people of Shrewsbury. On the road, he met a cobbler who, realizing the giant's evil intention, showed him a sackful of worn shoes, claiming he had worn out the shoes on the journey from Shrewsbury. The giant was so discouraged by the apparent distance that he dumped his massive shovel of earth and went back to Wales. The earth he dumped formed the Wrekin Hill.

This myth, though entertaining, is hardly unique in its portrayal of giants. Countless legendary giants exist and can provide inspiration for many unique adventures.

Physiology

Male hill giants stand around 10 ½ ft. tall; some tribes are barely larger than ogres (at about 9 ft.) while others are 12 feet tall, as large as smallish stone giants. Females tend to be 1 ½ ft. or so smaller than males although both tend to weigh around 1,100 lb. Their skin tone ranges from light tan to a deep ruddy brown, although the color often hides beneath a layer of filth. Their lank hair can be brown or black like their eyes.



Both hill giant males and females tend to go bald in old age and are prone to being fat. Older females cover their bald pates with animal skins or heavy woolen cloaks to preserve their misguided vanity and keep their heads warm. Females tend to live much longer than males.

Hill giants dress in the badly cured hides of any animal abundant enough and large enough to wear. Because a hill giant body is large, giants dress in whatever gives warmth, and they can be found wearing an astonishing array of patched suits of armor, whole sheep skins, and cow hides (often with heads and legs still attached). Others simply wear stiff, untanned furs ripped from the carcasses of dire animals or monsters. Everything they wear is rotting and alive with lice and maggots. Hill giants seem untroubled by filth.

Psychology and Society

"Fie, foh, and fum"

—William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (III. iv.)

In most hill giant societies, males do practically nothing. Some have even given up the pretense of hunting in favor of sitting around drinking, eating, and bragging. Bragging is an important game and ritual in most hill giant groups. Worth, in males, is judged solely by size: the fattest and largest of the giants rule the roost although tenuous bloodlines are occasionally followed. Male giants make a great show of their hunts, and tribes give these occasions fanciful names although they invariably involve copious drinking, play-fighting, and shows of strength that tend to drive any

potential game away long before it is ever spotted.

Female hill giants, on the other hand, are generally the more skilled, resourceful, and—often—capable in a fight. Though slightly smaller than their male counterparts female statistics match those of their lazy, corpulent, menfolk. Those of good breeding stock—the fatter the better with wide hips and corpulent behinds—are prized above all mates, though skill at brewing ale is also particularly valued in addition to mending, cooking, preserving food, bringing up young, tidying up, repairing lairs, and hunting.

Young hill giants, if they're wise, stay out of the way of the adult males although the eldest son is usually considered an adult from birth and immediately brought into the group. The young daughters exist like cattle at best and, often, end up considerably worse off.

Hill giants are selfish and cunning creatures that survive through raiding and trading. Trading with them can be very dangerous, but also very profitable. Large numbers of dwarves, humans, and gnomes have made their fortunes by tricking stupid tribe leaders into taking pretty trinkets for dull, uncut gemstones, and other valuables. A giant's non-existent Sense Motive skill makes them easy to Bluff, but traders always run the risk that one of the more alert wives has the ear of the tribe leader. On his next visit, the trader may get more than he bargained for, or a giant may simply be bored and decide to hit the trader with his club to see what happens.

Dwarves take a particular chance in trading with hill giants, since giants regard dwarves as a succulent delicacy. Hill giants love to eat dwarf flesh above all other food and may even resort to cooking it to savor the taste and smell more. A giant always pays handsomely for some tasty fresh dwarf meat.

A typical hill giant lair is found anywhere an abundance of hills or mountains exist although many are also found underground in vast caves or cavern complexes. All lairs are typically forsaken places that need repair and sanitation—or, better, demolition and burning.

Hill giants keep an astonishing array of livestock, pets, and guards—in most cases, the same creature fulfills all three functions. Wolves, particularly dire wolves, form close bonds with particular tribes of giants and are treated like pet dogs; occasionally, they are even given names and allowed to sit below feasting tables and eat scraps. Ogres and orcs often live with hill giants, but the giants typically treat them as naughty children and either beat them senseless for some misdemeanor or lavish affection upon them as "loyal followers." Some hill giant tribes have even used chained giant lizards as guards; lizard is also a particular delicacy of hill giants. These creatures represent those more commonly found, but hill giants, the women at least, seem to be capable of capturing and eating anything.

Finally, hill giants are prone to falling in with those who wish for their "friendship," the men at least. Constantly, huge numbers of hill giants find themselves in the service of wicked overlords, cunning drow, and powerful fiends without ever remembering how the situation came about.

A very brief word on clever hill giants...

Female hill giants, who effectively run the show, realize survival depends as much on cunning as on strength, and they often form sisterhoods (usually under the guise of a coven) that encourage women to learn and think. These matriarchal groups protect intelligent young girls, who go on to become wise women if they survive. Hill giant wise women are tutored in a class (favored class druid) and covertly run all their tribe's affairs. Without realizing it, the males become tools in an above average intelligent tribe, and adventurers have reported cunning traps, defense plans, and superior equipment in such lairs.

Hill Giant Feats

The following special attacks often develop from the drunken brawls and play fights in hill giant steadings.

Living Club [General]

You lift a creature and use it as an improvised club.

Prerequisite: giant, Str 25

Benefit: To use this attack, you must first make a successful grapple attempt on a creature at least one size category smaller than you. If you succeed, you establish a hold on your opponent

Hill Giant Lore

Characters with bardic knowledge or ranks in Knowledge (nature) may know about hill giants. With a successful skill check, a character knows all the information up to and including the DC value:

DC	Result
10	Hill giants have a deserved reputation for stupidity and can be easily outsmarted. Unfortunately, their ability to be outwitted is matched by their short tempers.
15	Female hill giants are the true leaders and do all the work, while males sit around playing all day. Females are as tough as males and tend to be crueler and more tenacious.
20	Your average hill giant loves a tall tale and is easily fooled. Stories abound of giants swapping bags of uncut gems and other treasure for "magic" bread that makes the eater stronger or invisible gold clothes that are visible only to intelligent people. Some gullible giants happily lie down with their eyes shut to receive a special present of submission.
25	Some hill giants can use their foes as living clubs or toss them as if they were boulders.

and can attempt to use this creature as a weapon. Because your opponent is unwilling, using a living club requires a full attack action, and the attack is made at a -4 penalty (this is on top of the -4 penalty for using improvised weapons). On a successful hit, you deliver 2d8 + 1 ½ Str modifier in damage for a Medium living club (2d6 + 1 ½ Str modifier in damage for a Small living club) to both your opponent and to the living club.

Each round the grappled creature may attempt to escape the grapple in the usual manner.

Living Rock [General]

You lift a creature and use it as a thrown weapon.

Prerequisite: giant, Str 25

Benefit: To use this attack, you must first make a successful grapple attempt on a creature at least one size category smaller than you. If you succeed, you establish a hold on your opponent and can attempt to use this creature as an improvised thrown weapon. Because your opponent is unwilling, using a living rock requires a full attack action, and this attack is made at a -4 penalty (this is on top of the -4 penalty for using improvised weapons); the increment is 60 ft. If the hit is successful, you deliver 2d6 + Str modifier in damage for a Medium living rock (2d4 + Str modifier in damage for a Small living rock) to both your opponent and to the living rock. The creature can resist being thrown if it makes a Str check (DC 10 + your Str modifier).

The thrown creature takes the damage listed above even if you miss.

Death from Above [General]

You deliver a deadly belly flop to prone opponents.

Prerequisite: hill giant

Benefit: To use this attack, either you must be physically above your opponent by at least 10 ft. or your opponent must be lying prone. You hurl yourself onto your opponent as a full attack action in an attempt to crush the creature. If you succeed in this slam attack, you deliver 6d6 damage to your opponent and can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If you miss, you are considered prone.

Fun and Games

Male hill giants have plenty of time on their hands and play any number of games to distract themselves from drinking too much, too early. Each tribe has a selection of games—usually cruel, violent, and dangerous in nature. Of course, any visitor or trader must participate in these tests of skill.

Rugbyalive–This game consists of two teams that must each defend a goal (usually a stone) against the opposing team while trying to score a goal themselves. The ball is invariably some living creature. Hill giants consider dwarves to be the best balls since they put up the biggest fight and provide the most sport. Smashing the ball's skull against the goalstone scores a goal.

Scrum–A mass fight; the last giant standing wins.

Bragging–Bragging contests amongst giants are the stuff of their legends. Sadly, the giants' total lack of Bluff or Perform skills means that it is generally the most ridiculous brag that wins; the game is often won by a catastrophic fail of the skill check by one of the participants. The bigger the brag the better, and contestants' prowess as a troll juggler, eating seven whole chimera at a sitting, or being king of the whole world are always well received. Traders able to spin incredible yarns using high (or even mediocre) Bluff skills quickly gain a hill giant's respect.

Stag Fight–Played between maturing males, this game involves two giants starting some considerable distance apart, running at each other with heads down, and making a bull rush attack. To add spice to the proceedings, they occasionally play this game on narrow ridges.

Touch Kill–One giant is the Touch Kill (or "It"), and is allowed to have a weapon of his choice. The other giants must get past him by fair means or foul when their names are called and try to reach some prearranged safe point beyond the Touch Kill.

Drinking Games–An uncountable number of giant drinking games exist. Usually, the games revolve around the giants either drinking a whole gallon of alcohol without taking a breath or facing a forfeit. Forfeits tend to be suicidally dangerous affairs.

Rock Games–These usually involve tossing rocks of incredible size. Some local variations allow the opponent to dodge or attempt to catch such rocks, but others insist he stays still until the rock has landed or that the catcher is blindfolded. Throwing rocks at (often living) targets is another common game.

History of the Hill Giant

Wise women have kept up the stories of old; though variations occur from tribe to tribe, the general story of hill giant genesis remains the same.

The Great Womb Hill was born when the world was young, and she was the first hill seen; her sides were steep and laced with virgin scree, her summit wore a white crown of snow, her vales were hidden under countless

sheep, and her caverns were filled with dwarves and gold. Every aspect of the hill lived, and soon, the rocks themselves began to walk, these were the first hill giants.

They wandered the hills for many days and talked to all the inhabitants, including the dwarves. The giants were kind hearted and wanted only to help their new friends. Soon, however, the dwarves had the giants digging in the mines and working all day while those dwarves simply grew fat from the proceeds. They fed the giants only the worst cuts of mutton while they gorged themselves on only the choicest meats, wines, and beers, which they traded for with merchants from far away.

A particularly cruel and fat one, Thamris Goodbody, led the dwarves. One day, he brought the giants together and told their leader, a huge and strong hill giant called Tam, that they would have to work harder. You see, Goodbody had heard that, farther away, men made a drink called ambrosia, the nectar of the gods, and he greatly desired to taste it. However, the ambrosia was expensive, so the giants would have to mine harder and bring up more gold. The giants toiled and toiled and soon the dwarves became so fat they could no longer move without help from their giant friends, who had now become little more than slaves.

The time came when at last the ambrosia was brought to the dwarf king, who Tam himself now carried about (with no gratitude, of course). The dwarf king drank the ambrosia and found it very good, but Tam was thirsty too; he and his followers had nothing to eat or drink for days, and he asked the dwarf king for a little ambrosia for the giants. The dwarf king grew angry and told Tam that far from getting any ambrosia, they would get no food at all for their impertinence, and further, they would have to work even harder as he needed more ambrosia for his dwarves.

Tam grew angry for the first time in his life, and as he did, he saw the truth of their position, of how the dwarves had pretended to befriend the giants but, instead, treated them like slaves. He saw his starving kin and bellowed in fury, biting the dwarf king's head off and throwing the body at his kin. And as he swallowed the dwarf he could taste the ambrosia, and the wine, and all the fine foods the dwarf had eaten, and it tasted good. He roused his people and they fell upon the dwarves, feasting on their flesh, which they all found good to eat.

For many days, the giants ate and flung the dwarves about like rocks, and soon, they became the rulers of Womb Hill and lived there happily ever after.

Hill Giant Encounters (Sample Hill Giant Tribes)

The Terrible Feudal Lords

Advanced by the influence of a great coven of sorcerers, witches, and druids, this hill giant society has achieved a level of feudalism. The males wear heavy mail armor and dwell in crude castles; they ride dire

boars, mammoths, and dire wolves and engage in jousting. The women plot, seduce, and murder to gain power and use the men as tools for their ambitions.

These hill giants are identical to those found in the rulebook except they have access to better equipment (generally favoring plate armor) and can ride and fight mounted. Despite these differences and a few more airs and graces, they are still hill giants and quickly revert to type when angered.
AC 25, touch 8, flat-footed 25; full plate (+8 armor, -1 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)
Skills Ride +6, Spot +0
Feats (add) Mounted Combat, (remove) Improved Bull Rush

The Dolmen Men
These hill giants have a particular love of working stone (a talent encouraged by the women), and the lands about are full of great stone circles, menhirs, and dolmens. These giants, when bored, have taken to using menhirs as rocks to throw though they are generally too heavy to throw directly and, instead, are tossed like a highland caber. They are again the same as standard hill giants, except they throw rocks a little harder.
Ranged rock +6 (2d10+7); **Increment** 60 ft.

The Lazy Giants of the Long Mountain
A decade ago, the men in this tribe lost patience with the women and killed them all. It wasn't until the last skull was broken that they realized how much the women did for them. The men almost starved before a stroke of luck brought a tribe of ogres into their area. The hill giants have lapsed into using the ogres for everything—as slaves, food, and mates—and the ogres have finally had enough. They have sent one of their kin out into the lands of men to seek help.

A Quartet of Unusual Hill Giants
Zarig Garr (male hill giant rogue 4)—The muscle of the Free City Thieves Guild, Zarig's skin is a patchwork of self-inflicted cuts and scars. He carries a huge scythe into combat and is renowned for attacking his victims by removing the roof of the building they are sleeping in.
The Sjeumatré Giant Rat (female hill giant wererat rogue 4)—The Giant Rat of Sjeumatré hobbles spastically through the stinking canals beneath the Great City of Triolo. She is always so hungry and lonely in the dark since her chosen prey of young men so seldom visit these days.
The Pressed (male hill giant barbarian 6)—Dare anyone face the Pressed Giant? Boxing impresario Tangle Flasmind offers a prize of 1,000 gp to anyone who can spend 1 min. in the ring with his hill giant and live.
The Towering Queen of Deceit (female hill giant druid 12)—Beneath Thorn Tor she dwells, guiding her children in the dark. The wise woman's followers have grown braver from the harsh winter and hunt in the lands of men. Her pack is beyond counting: dozens or even hundreds of hill giants cursed with lycanthropy, part giant and part wolf.

Obscenity of Hill Giant Half-Breeds
One particularly foul practice that many races of giants engage in is slavery. Having little need for anyone to fetch and carry (since the women do all that sort of thing), male prisoners are killed and eaten (not necessarily in that order). Female prisoners are kept as breeding stock to provide impure fodder both as guards and, if necessary, food. Often the female hill giants are so outraged by this behavior that they slay the female slaves and, occasionally, all the male hill giants.

When humanoids learn of a tribe that practices such unspeakable acts, they generally do not rest until the entire tribe (and often the progeny of the tribe) are put to the sword.

The outcome of this horror is a hill giant half-breed. Theirs is a terrible life: hated and tormented by true giants and often loathed even by their own mothers, many of these unfortunates slip into madness. Some, however, escape and make their way in civilized lands while still others scavenge in or near hill giant lairs.

Hill Giant Half-Breeds

Creatures suffering gigantism possess giants for fathers but other humanoids for mothers. They exist as their mother's race but with distorted and enlarged features, brutish faces, thin hair, and their father's skin color. They are also prone to deformities and many have twisted spines, bones that rupture through inadequate flesh, or one feature of their father's at his proportion—such as a huge bloated eye or a distended hand or foot.

Creating a Hill Giant Half-Breed
"Hill giant half-breed" is a template that any humanoid (hereafter referred to as the base creature) can have. The template can only be inherited from birth. Mechanically, the creature remains the same as the base creature with the following exceptions:
Size and Type increase size category by one; add augmented subtype
Speed increases by 10 ft. (to a maximum of 40 ft.)
AC +4 natural armor bonus
Special Attacks mixed blood, rock throwing
Special Qualities low-light vision, mixed blood
Str +4, **Dex** -2, **Con** +2, **Int** -2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -2
Skills Climb, Jump, Listen, and Spot become class skills
Environment temperate hills (if living with hill giants), otherwise any
Organization solitary or cattle (11-40)
Treasure none (if living with hill giants), otherwise standard
Level Adjustment +1; CR +1
Rock Throwing (Ex) Hill giant half-breeds retain some of their father's skills at throwing rocks. The character can hurl a rock weighing 20-25 lb. up to 5 range increments. The range increment is 60 ft., and the rocks deal 1d8 damage.
Mixed Blood (Ex) The blood of half-breeds can run thicker with one or the other parent, and this manifests itself in one of three ways. The effect is chosen when the half-breed is created and never changes:

Blood Rebel (Ex) The blood of both parents has rebelled and left something with a twisted and tragic appearance, which causes repulsion in all who see them. On viewing the hill giant half-breed, any creature within 30 ft. must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or be shaken for 1d3 rounds. With a successful saving throw, no further saves are required to avoid this effect. Characters with this trait gain +4 to Intimidate checks.

Changeling Blooded (Ex) Such a child favors the female parent and can pass in civilized lands as nothing more than an individual of unusual size. The half-breed's features retain some of the father's blood: dark hair, ruddy skin, clumsy hands, and low brow.

Giant Blessed (Ex) This child favors the father's blood with unusually thick and swollen limbs, thick skin, and brutish demeanor. These characters gain an additional +2 Str and -4 Int.

Possible uses for the hill giant half-breed template

PCs

The template provides excellent opportunities for roleplaying. Perhaps, the first adventure pits the other PCs against Count L'aress and his wicked troupe of actors, and the lead male is the half-breed PC.

An Encounter

The PCs travel through a lonely locale when they spot a fleeing figure. What they first mistook for a man is actually a half-breed youth. He begs the PCs for help just as a hunting group of hill giants arrives.

An Adventure

The stealing of villagers must stop, and a robber-baron hires a group of brave adventurers to infiltrate the offenders—a distant tribe of hill giants. He suggests that the PCs may have more success if they allow themselves to be captured and led directly into the hill giant's rotting lair.

An Adventure Path

The initial adventure above is but an aperitif to an ongoing adventure path. The PCs learn that the giants are but an outpost for an entire kingdom: in fact, numerous villages in the mountains are preparing for war with the intention of invading the PC's homeland and enslaving it. Before long, the raids begin, and as they increase in ferocity, it becomes obvious that unless a blow is struck at the heart of the giant's kingdom, the raids will never end. A small group of adventurers, working independently, has the best chance of infiltrating the giants' lands, learning its secrets, and striking a fatal blow by killing its ruler, the Broken King.

Other versions of gigantic half-breeds, including ettin and titan half-breeds, may occasionally be encountered.

Coming Next Issue

No rest for the wicked! The Fall issue of Kobold Quarterly magazine is fully loaded with tricks and treats.

Werewolves Howl! by John E. Ling

More furry madness than you can shake wolvesbane at! A full set of rules for making lycanthropes shine in the moonshine.

With a Steady Eye by Stefen Styrsky

A new take on the classic ranger class, with both a 4E or a Pathfinder twist. Defending the borders of civilization a with steady eye.

The Reign of Men by John Wick

Master designer John Wick makes humans interesting with the second of his Wicked Fantasy articles.

We've killed some fatted calves and read the entrails - and our augurs assure us that darker articles lie ahead. Perhaps fiendish new weapons and devilish new traps. Or sheets of parchment wrapped around a mass of bat guano. What can we say? Kobolds are tricksy creatures.

The Ecology of the Giant Leech

Not all assassins kill with their hands

by Anthony Gerard

Slowly, like a drugged man regaining consciousness, the sun rose over the dead water. The quavering calls of the night birds, the croaking of the frogs, and the hidden plops and gurgles were slowly replaced by the drone of the day insects and the songs of distant sparrows. The sun began to burn away the night mist, revealing the thousands of shades of green in the vast swamp of the Wet Maze.

Jaffang watched it all and hated it. It was the wrong place for a full-blooded orc. He hated the birds, the frogs, the insects, the green of the plants. Most of all, he hated Sasher.

He looked at his silent companion. Sasher squatted motionless, looking out across the water; only his yellow eyes moved. A myriad of gnats and mosquitoes swarmed around his face and arms, but he made no effort to slap them away. On either forearm were curious Y-shaped scars — probably the brand of the thieves' or assassins' guild. Sasher *liked* it here. Jaffang knew he did. It was the human half of him. Sasher liked it here, and he probably liked it that much more because he knew Jaffang hated it. Jaffang hated him that much more for it.

Sasher stood up slowly. Taking an onion from a leather belt pouch, he rubbed it vigorously over several spots on his pants and shirt before he took a bite. That was also the human in him — afraid to eat a dirty onion. What more could one expect of a half-breed?

Drawn by his companion's gaze, Sasher looked at Jaffang. Jaffang tried to smile, but it didn't work. He thought of running his spear through Sasher and the smile came, but by that time Sasher had turned away.

"Light enough. Better take off your armor," Sasher said, as if to no one in particular.

Jaffang's immediate suspicion was slowly replaced by the realization that he couldn't swim well, and that armor would just be a bother. As Jaffang removed his armor, Sasher arranged a wooden box on a shield-sized raft, then waded out waist-deep in the swamp's green water, probing with the butt of his spear as he went. "You bring the box," he said.

Jaffang started to curse but caught himself. With Sasher in front, the half-breed would be the first to meet any possible danger. Jaffang contented himself by watching the place between Sasher's shoulder blades — the place where one day an orcish spear would rest.

For now, Sasher was necessary. Soon, Jaffang would learn the secret of making blade venom from the leech's spit, the venom which could make a man bleed to death from a single cut. Then, by One Eye's Spear, they'd all have reason to fear Jaffang. And he would kill Sasher first — of that he was certain.

The water was warm, almost like fresh blood. Jaffang's bare feet sank ankle deep into the receptive ooze on the bottom. He pulled the raft along the trail Sasher created as he pushed through the water plants. Suddenly, Jaffang tripped on an underwater snag, fell headlong, and came up sputtering. Sasher looked back and laughed out loud.

Laugh now, Jaffang thought. He decided to kill Sasher slowly. But first he needed to learn about the leeches and the blade venom.

"Where do we find these leeches?" Jaffang asked, to cover his rage more than to get a response.

Sasher maintained his distant gaze. "We don't," he replied. "They find us."

Jaffang looked suspiciously at the water, belly-deep on him. "Ragshaf says they're bigger than a man." It was more of a question than a statement.

"Ragshaf's a fool. Besides, he's only seen one." Sasher seemed more talkative than usual. So much the better.

"When?"

"Not long after I got into the guild." Sasher rarely talked about anything at all, much less about guild activities. "Me, Ragshaf, and a couple of other boys from the canting crew were supposed to pop a smuggler coming down river at night." Sasher smiled as he stared into the distance. "Ol' Jandamon was along to guide us. We were in a boat on the river, not

knowin' exactly when he'd come by, so we decided to draw lots for a watcher while the others slept.

"Anyway, after a while Ragshaf — it was his watch — got spooked over something and woke us, all but Jandamon. We went to wake him, but he's as limp as a worm. When we rolled him over, there was a leech as big as your leg and just as thick, hanging on his neck. It must have crawled over the side. Killed him while he slept, and he never so much as squeaked. And him such a warrior and all. We laughed so hard our prize heard us, and we lost him. Ragshaf killed the leech with the boat gaff, which was a real waste."

"I thought the leeches breathed water."

"They don't have to. They live just fine as long as they're wet, so they come out at night or in a rain. Good climbers, too. Watch for some on the tree trunks — it's still early enough yet."

Sasher stopped. From a fallen tree, a sinuous, mottled gray-brown form lazily sculled across the stagnant water toward them.

"A leech! A leech!" Jaffang cried as he readied his spear. Now that they had found their quarry, he was not sure what to do next.

"It's a marsh adder," Sasher said, leaving the word "fool" unspoken. He reached for an arm-long cane tube slung across his back. As the adder swam slowly past, he put the tube to his lips and puffed his cheeks. After what seemed to be the longest seconds Jaffang could remember, the snake convulsed violently and disappeared underwater.

"A leech wiggles up and down when he swims, not side to side like a snake,, Sasher murmured, putting the blowpipe away. "Leeches swim fast, too."

Jaffang stared. at the water where the adder had vanished. "Can one swim down a man?"

"Probably could, but they don't. Leeches sit and wait for something to pass by. They only swim to get away from something."

"What would a giant leech need to get away from?"

"Big snapper turtles, garfish, lots of things. Kobolds spit 'em on a stick and roast them like a rack of lamb — when the runts can catch 'em, and if the leeches don't eat the kobolds first."

"How many people wade through here for leeches to eat? They must have a long time between feeds."

Sasher smiled crookedly. "You think they eat nothing but people and orcs? I've never seen a swamp troll without a couple on him — 'course, trolls don't care. A leech'll eat other things than just blood, too — frogs, mud dragon eggs, eels, and the like. Mama leech feeds her brood on small frogs. They may suckle on her, too; I'm not real sure. After a good meal, they just find a hiding place and lie low for a time."

Jaffang sneered. "Mama leech? You expect me to believe that a big worm takes care of its babies?"

Sasher spat. "Better mother than my own — they ride their babies on their bellies, like little piglets on a sow."

Sasher was making fun of him now. Big mother worms riding their babies around! Damn him for a half-human anyway! Soon enough, he'd wish he'd been respectful.

Jaffang asked no more questions, and Sasher lapsed into his usual silence.

The sun was straight overhead as Jaffang jerked the raft across yet another snag. The full sunlight hurt his eyes, and his jerkin and pants were heavy with mud and water. He had begun to fall further and further behind Sasher. Often, he lost sight of the half-breed altogether and was left with only the trail through the water weeds to follow. He would eventually come upon Sasher sitting on a fallen log or leaned against a tree. Sasher would immediately lead out again, without time for a rest, but always with an amused smile. *By the Cave Mother's Claws*, Jaffang thought, *You'll eat that smile and choke on it.* He was going to love killing Sasher.

Sasher was ahead of him again and out of sight. Jaffang began feeling the heavy press of exhaustion. This was worse than the forced march on the Dunlands last year. Jaffang shoved the raft through a thick mat of cattails. Following through, he found Sasher sitting cross-legged on the bank, eating an onion. Why was this place so familiar . . . no!

It was the place from which they'd started! Sasher had played him for a fool! Jaffang had hauled the damned raft through a swamp all day for no reason, and Sasher was smiling about it!

He'd kill Sasher *now* — to the Hells with the blade venom! Tired as he was, Jaffang knew he could still handle any half-human dog.

Dropping the raft rope, Jaffang advanced purposely toward the bank, clutching his spear. Then it hit him — something was wrong. He hefted his spear to throw, but he fumbled it in clumsy fingers. The spear fell and splashed into the green water. Jaffang swayed but managed to stagger forward again, pulling his dagger free with a nerveless hand. Something. . . something was very . . . very . . .

Sasher watched Jaffang come toward him. The fool meant to kill him. The fact that he was still walking was a credit to his race's endurance; he might even have to be finished by a dart in the throat. Perhaps it would be wise to . . .

Jaffang dropped his dagger. As Sasher relaxed and watched, the life drained from the orc's eyes like liquid from a slashed wineskin. The orc stumbled ashore and fell face forward onto the grassy bank.

Sasher finished his onion. Tossing the core aside, he waded out and retrieved the raft. Taking a large heavy canvas sack out of the box, Sasher dumped its contents of rocks. Returning to Jaffang's body, Sasher drew a dagger and slit the orc's mud-stained jerkin up the back.

"Oh, ho, now!" he murmured. "Don't you boys look fat and happy!"

Attached to the middle of Jaffang's back were two glistening leeches, each mottled red and green, and each a forearm in length. Sasher found a third of similar size on Jaffang's calf.

Sasher removed a small pouch from around his neck and took out a pinch of salt. Gently, he sprinkled the salt over one of the leeches. The passive leech released its hold and began a series of wild undulations. Sasher splashed a handful of water over the leech and quickly worked the parasite into the bag.

Where the leech had been attached, a neat Y-shaped cut began to well up with thin, watery blood. Sasher repeated the operation for the other two leeches.

Wasting no time, Sasher removed a smaller leech from a pouch on his belt and put it in the bag with the others. Each time he was well ahead of Jaffang, Sasher had searched himself carefully for leeches. The onion had worked well; only one had dared get near him.

Sasher turned to go but stopped short. Out from a tangle of roots at the water's edge, a leech worked its way up the bank. The leech's head waved back and forth as it followed the thin stream of blood which ran from Jaffang's body. Sasher gently placed the opening of the bag in the leech's path, and the leech obligingly crawled inside.

Five leeches. It had been a good day's work, even if he did have to spend it making conversation with an orc.

Notes

1. Leeches (both the small variety of our world and the giant variety of AD&D® game worlds) are segmented worms. The posterior and anterior segments of leeches are modified into suction disks. The posterior disk is larger and is used only to hold the leech in place against rocks and the like. The smaller anterior disk contains the leech's mouth, which is equipped with three jaws of teeth which make a clean, Y-shaped incision.

A leech's saliva contains an anesthetic; because of this, a leech bite is painless and almost always goes unnoticed. This viscous saliva acts immediately upon contact with the victim's skin, and is only removed by alcohol, ether, or similar liquids. Additionally, leech saliva contains an anticoagulant (hirudin) and a substance which enlarges the blood vessels in the area of the bite (a vasodilator, in medical terms) for increased blood flow. Some leech saliva even contains a substance which dissolves pre-existing blood clots.

Due to these anticoagulants, blood continues to flow from a leech bite much longer than from a normal wound. Characters bitten by a leech lose blood at the rate of 1-4 hp per melee round for l-12 rounds after the leech is removed (or until the wound is bound). Clerical healing

spells negate this excessive blood loss, as may other actions at the DM's discretion. As an example, some swamp-dwelling races commonly use spider webs to help clot leech bites.

In addition to anticoagulants and vasodilators, a leech's saliva contains antibiotics, so leech bites rarely become infected. It is suggested that the Monster Manual section dealing with increased chance of disease from leech bites be disregarded, and that leech bites should be treated as any other wound for chances of infection.

2. Not all leech species are blood-sucking parasites. Many are predacious species which feed on other animals, and many parasitic species eat other animals on occasion. Some leech species also eat carrion.

Leeches typically rest attached to plants and other underwater objects, waiting for prey to pass by. Extremely sensitive to vibrations, leeches become restless and attempt to locate the source of the vibrations by stretching and waving their anterior disk through the water.

A leech may thrive for months on a single meal. Once sated, a leech typically finds a sheltered place and stays relatively inactive for a time. A well-fed leech cannot be induced to feed again for weeks.

It has long been known that blood in a leech's digestive tract does not coagulate. This knowledge may be exploited by some evil forces in the AD&D® game world to keep blood used in ceremonial liquids for a longer duration.

3. A leech's eyes typically consist of groups of light receptive cells (ocelli) which register light intensity but cannot see images. Leeches often react when light conditions change, such as when a shadow is cast by a passing boat, fish, or a wading person.

Receptor cells on the leech's skin are sensitive to slight amounts of certain chemicals. This keen sense of "smell" allows leeches to home in on substances or organisms attractive to the leech or to avoid those which may be harmful.

Blood-sucking species may be attracted to bloody areas in the water. In AD&D® game terms, the chance for encountering giant leeches should be doubled for wounded characters.

4. Leeches have two main modes of locomotion. The most common is an "inchworm" movement, by which the leech stretches forward and attaches its anterior disk, then moves the posterior disk forward and attaches it in turn. This method is slow (3"/round) but very efficient. A leech can climb any vertical or overhanging surface in this manner, although it generally avoids those that are potentially harmful (such as one covered with thorns or salt). Additionally, a leech may swim very rapidly (12"/round) by employing vertical undulations, but it will not attack prey in this manner.

Leeches do not bite in self-defense. If attacked while unattached, a leech tries to escape as soon as it is wounded. An escaping leech swims away or attempts to crawl into a protective tangle. Since leeches are invertebrates, a relatively large leech can crawl through a very small space.

5. While attached to prey, leeches are very unresponsive to outside stimuli. Salt, ashes, or other dehydrating substances cause them to release their hold quickly, as will an open flame. An attached leech which is slain continues to draw blood at the normal rate for an additional 1-4 rounds.

6. Leeches are hermaphroditic, but they cannot fertilize their own eggs. Eggs may be laid in protective cocoons attached to underwater rocks or logs, or buried in the bottom ooze. Some species of leech carry their eggs in membranous sacs on their underside. In such cases, the young live for a time attached to the parent's ventral surface, although they gain no nourishment from the parent in this manner.

7. Leeches are very sensitive to traces of metals in the water. Copper in their water always proves fatal to captive leeches. Additionally, captive leeches must be provided with a rock or other rough surface to rub against, in order to slough off old skin. Ω

The Ecology of the Giant Scorpion

by Ruth Cooke

Artwork by Tony DiTerlizzi

The little ones are dangerous enough, but the *big* ones . . .

Brandi remained hidden among the rocks until the sun had been down for almost an hour. Then she slowly began to make her way back across the mountainside to the others, her scouting of the ancient mine entrance complete. Her slipper-clad feet were silent as she invisibly traversed the rocky ground. She was very careful not to dislodge any loose stones. A single sound could be fatal, revealing her whereabouts to the denizens of the mountainside. Goblins might be living deep in the old mine, but goblins were the last things on Brandi's mind.

Brandi's keen elven eyes spotted several faint red glows ahead of her, weaving among the rocks. She froze instantly, watching. After a moment, she sighed

with relief. A fire beetle, she thought to herself. Not terribly dangerous, certainly not something she would have difficulty dispatching, but to be avoided nevertheless. She didn't want to forego the benefits of her spell of *invisibility,* and any fight would attract more powerful predators.

And there were many such predators in these mountains. She watched with interest as the fire beetle neared a pile of loose stones, for she knew from research and experience that such places were seldom uninhabited in the Dragon's Teeth Mountains. Her vigilance was rewarded in an unexpected way. As the beetle passed the stones, a pale and unmistakable shape the size of a pony arose from behind the stones in the twilight. It rushed over and down the rock pile with lightning speed and great silence, tail high and pincers outstretched.

A giant scorpion. Brandi gasped in horror, resisting an urge to run. With an effort of sheer will, she forced her emotions into detachment and began to observe what transpired.

Barely a dozen yards away, the scorpion hurled itself upon its intended meal. The fire beetle became aware of the danger too late to scramble away, and the scorpion caught it easily, holding the beetle down with both pincers. Brandi watched, disgusted and fascinated, as the scorpion cracked open the struggling beetle's carapace. Then, when all resistance had ceased, the pale monster proceeded to tear its meal into small, twitching pieces.

Brandi was widely traveled, but she had never heard of a scorpion living outside the desert.[1] And this scorpion was white, not green like the other, smaller versions she had seen. Overcoming her fear and revulsion, she approached the feeding scorpion as closely as she dared. The thing stank with a bitter smell, one she couldn't identify. With her heat-sensing infravision, she soon noticed that the monster was drooling on the pieces of the beetle before it ate them. Probably helps with the digestive process, the elf thought to herself.[2]

She was only six or seven yards away when she made a second unpleasant discovery. The scorpion's white carapace had appeared to be moving or rippling before, and almost seemed furry. Now she saw that the giant scorpion was not actually white itself, but was covered by what appeared to be white baby scorpions with their tails up.[3] She shivered. This was definitely something to ask about when she and Ortega and Michael returned to the village!

Brandi could see that the scorpion would be occupied for some time, so she withdrew and gave the beast a wide berth as she continued on her way, carefully observing potential hiding places before she passed them. She had heard that scorpions hunted in swarms, and she fervently wished to avoid this one's companions.[4]

The elf had crossed a few hundred yards when she recognized the great rock where her companions were awaiting her. She could barely see at all now except with her heat vision and the faint starlight overhead. Brandi smiled as she approached the rock. Wait until she told Ortega about the scorpion. He was always teasing her about her fear of spiders. She started to giggle.

In the next second, the monster had her.

A terrific force crushed the wind from her lungs. Two of her ribs snapped and stabbed into her chest. She tried to scream but the pain was blinding, and she choked. She looked down as she struggled. A crablike claw three feet long held her from behind. The air reeked of the bitter scorpion-stink.

Brandi's right arm was pinned down in the pincer's vise-tight grip. Nearly overcome by panic, she fought to reach the sword hilt at her side. The pincer clamped harder into her chest. She couldn't pull the sword free. A second giant claw appeared from her left and seized her one free arm at the shoulder, tearing her skin. Brandi drew in a shallow breath and shrieked, her lungs on fire with agony. "Ortega! Michael! Gods help me!"

A roaring sound was building up in her ears. Brandi's vision grew dim at the edges. She kicked backwards, striking nothing. With her left arm, she pounded at the ceramic-like surface of the two huge claws. It was almost impossible to breathe. Use a *magic missile!* cried the sane part of her mind. She half-turned in the claws' grip to prepare the spell. The claws shoved her forward. Brandi stumbled and sank to her knees, her shin striking a sharp rock outcropping. The pain erased the spell's words from her mind. She twisted again and tried to kick upward for the giant scorpion's claw-arm, but couldn't connect. She remembered the scorpion's tail stinger, but it hardly seemed to matter now. The roaring in her ears was louder, now louder, now louder, now—

A wild battle-cry split the night sky. Boots scrambled over rock shards on the giant scorpion's right side. Brandi dazedly felt the giant claws shiver from some great impact, then abruptly release her. She fell forward on the rocks, barely conscious. In moments, the pain in her chest forced her back to wakefulness. She took a gasping, burning breath and opened her eyes. The air was filled with Ortega's maddened war screams and the whir of a long axe slicing back and forth.

Help had arrived.

Perhaps too late.

A sob escaped Brandi's lips. With an effort, she mentally forced the all-consuming pain aside and concentrated on breathing slowly and with shallow breaths. Did she have enough strength to reach the healing potion in the pouch on her belt? She tried to move her hand, but her whole right arm felt like lead. The claw had cut off all circulation from her elbow down. She tried with her left arm, but her fingers fumbled with the potion's stopper.

Bootsteps quickly came up and stopped in the dust and gravel beside her head. Someone was kneeling over her.

"Just lie still," a deep voice said, calm but tight with concern. "I'll take care of you."

Thank Corellon, she thought, Michael made it in time! She closed her eyes and lay quietly as the half-elven priest cast a healing spell. She felt a warm hand press down on the center of her chest. The burning pain in her lungs was lessened, then—abruptly—was gone. She raised her arms and covered her face with her hands, giddy with relief and exhaustion.

"I thought for a minute there I was doomed," she gasped, then shivered violently. "It could have stung me!"

"Scorpions have little venom in their stingers," Michael murmured as he checked her over, "so they only use it if their prey is able to effectively resist—which you obviously weren't."[5]

Michael quickly got to his feet. "Stay back," he warned, and was gone himself. She struggled to sit up, eyes focusing on the furious battle taking place barely fifteen paces from her. Heat images danced and dodged in her vision.

Ortega had managed to wound the scorpion severely, judging from the warm ichor splattered about the place, but he was now caught in the giant scorpion's pincers and unable to act. The dwarf roared with pain as he fought to escape. Brandi looked up and saw the huge tail curl forward, the venomous sting ready to strike. If it hit home, her best friend would be dead in just seconds. She knew that although the poison of the smaller species of scorpion was seldom fatal, the sting of a giant scorpion almost always meant death.[6]

The tail struck down; there was a dull clanging sound. Brandi flinched, then realized that the stinger had hit a plate of the dwarf's heavy armor. She could even see a large splash of warm poison dribbling down Ortega's armored back.

Energy surged through her. Before the thing could strike again, Brandi was on her feet, the words of a spell on her lips. She fired off several *magic missiles* from her fingertips, the glowing bolts lancing into the beast's side. The giant scorpion jumped wildly from the attack. A moment later, Michael came in and dealt it a solid blow with his mace. The scorpion's carapace split from the impact. Ortega, using his enormous strength, managed to free himself from the pincers and roll out of harm's way.

Brandi raised a hand and shouted the words to another *magic missile* spell.

Power bolted from her fingers into the monster. The creature's tail and pincers suddenly flailed about spasmodically as the scorpion danced in a tight circle. Without warning, it fell on its side, limbs shivering. Then the legs, pincer arms, and tail stiffened—and slowly, very slowly, fell back against the rocks. They did not move again.

It was dawn before the three adventurers could bring themselves to examine the dead scorpion from close range. Each kept a weapon ready and one eye out for further trouble, but none came.

"No wonder I didn't see the thing," Brandi said, running a hand through her golden hair. "I always thought scorpions were green, but this one's the same color as the rock."

"Maybe scorpions in different environments have differently colored shells to help them hide," Michael said.[7]

"That's possible," Brandi admitted. "I don't think they have the ability to change colors automatically, so they must gain their coloration at birth."

"What are those hairs for?" Ortega asked, pointing with his axe handle. "They're all over the thing's body."

"I believe the hairs help the scorpion detect prey by sensing vibrations in the air," Michael answered.[8] "Think of them as being like a cat's whiskers."

"So that's how it found me!" Brandi exclaimed. "I was invisible when it attacked me, and I swear I wasn't making any noise, but it knew exactly where I was."

"Next time, you'd better fly," Ortega advised grimly.

"I don't think flying would have helped her, unless she was high enough to be out of the scorpion's reach," Michael told them. "My brother once captured a few normal scorpions so that he could study them, and I watched one of them grab a fly from midair."

Ortega shook his head. "And I thought scorpions were just big stupid insects!"[9]

"They're not insects," Michael said quickly. "Insects have only six legs, but scorpions have eight. They're arachnids."

Ortega grinned wickedly at Brandi, his old humor returning. "That means they're related to spiders, you know."

Brandi pretended to shiver, but her act was no longer as forced as it once was. "Don't mention spiders! I've had enough of them to last me for my next ten lifetimes!"

Footnotes

1. In the real world, scorpions are found in habitats as diverse as scorching deserts, temperate woodlands, dark caves, tropical rain forests, and snow-covered mountains. It only makes sense that their larger cousins would be able to adapt to similarly diverse situations.

2. In fact, the saliva liquifies the fleshy parts of the scorpion's meal. Victims killed and eaten by a giant scorpion are unrecoverable by magic, unless a *wish* spell or similar means is used.

3. Scorpions do not actually lay eggs. The eggs hatch inside the mother, and the female gives birth to live young. After they are born, they climb on her back and ride there until they are old enough to fend for themselves. At the DM's option, 5% of scorpion encounters can be with a mother scorpion carrying 5-20 young on her back. Since the young do not eat or have effective attacks, it is possible that adventurers could sell those babies that survive to interested alchemists or wizards.

4. As befits a species with cannibalistic tendencies, scorpions are usually solitary creatures. However, during the colder months of the year, they do congregate in large groups of a hundred or more individuals. Encounters with these groups probably started the rumor that scorpions live and hunt in swarms.

5. Normal scorpions have enough venom for only one attack, and it takes a week to replenish the poison. A giant scorpion will use its stinger only against an opponent with an effective means of attack. I suggest a limit of two stinger attacks per week for large scorpions, four per week for huge scorpions, and five per week for giant scorpions.

6. Most of the 1,500 or so species of normal scorpions presently known to exist in the real world deliver stings no more harmful than a bee sting. However, about 25 species have venom that is potentially lethal to humans. (It's a wise adventurer who always checks her boots before she puts them on when adventuring in the desert.)

7. Because of the camouflaging and their ability to remain motionless for long periods of time, scorpions have a greater chance of surprising the party (-2 to party's roll to detect them). Giant scorpions cannot be surprised unless the players can think of a way to nullify the advantage given by the sensitive hairs, which detect all movement through the air, visible or not, within a 90′ radius. Large and huge scorpions have 30′ and 60′ radii of detection, respectively. The first giant scorpion Brandi met simply ignored her in favor of its meal, leading her to think she was still unnoticed.

8. These hairs are sensitive enough to allow the scorpion to attack *invisible* opponents with no penalty. In addition, a large, huge, or giant scorpion can attack any flying creature which comes within range of its pincers, again with no penalty.

9. Suggested revised experience-point values for scorpions with the extra powers listed in this article are: large scorpions, 420 XP; huge scorpions, 975 XP; giant scorpions, 1,400 XP.

[For more information, see "Scorpion Tales," in DRAGON® issue #120.] Ω

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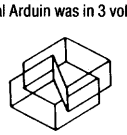

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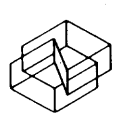

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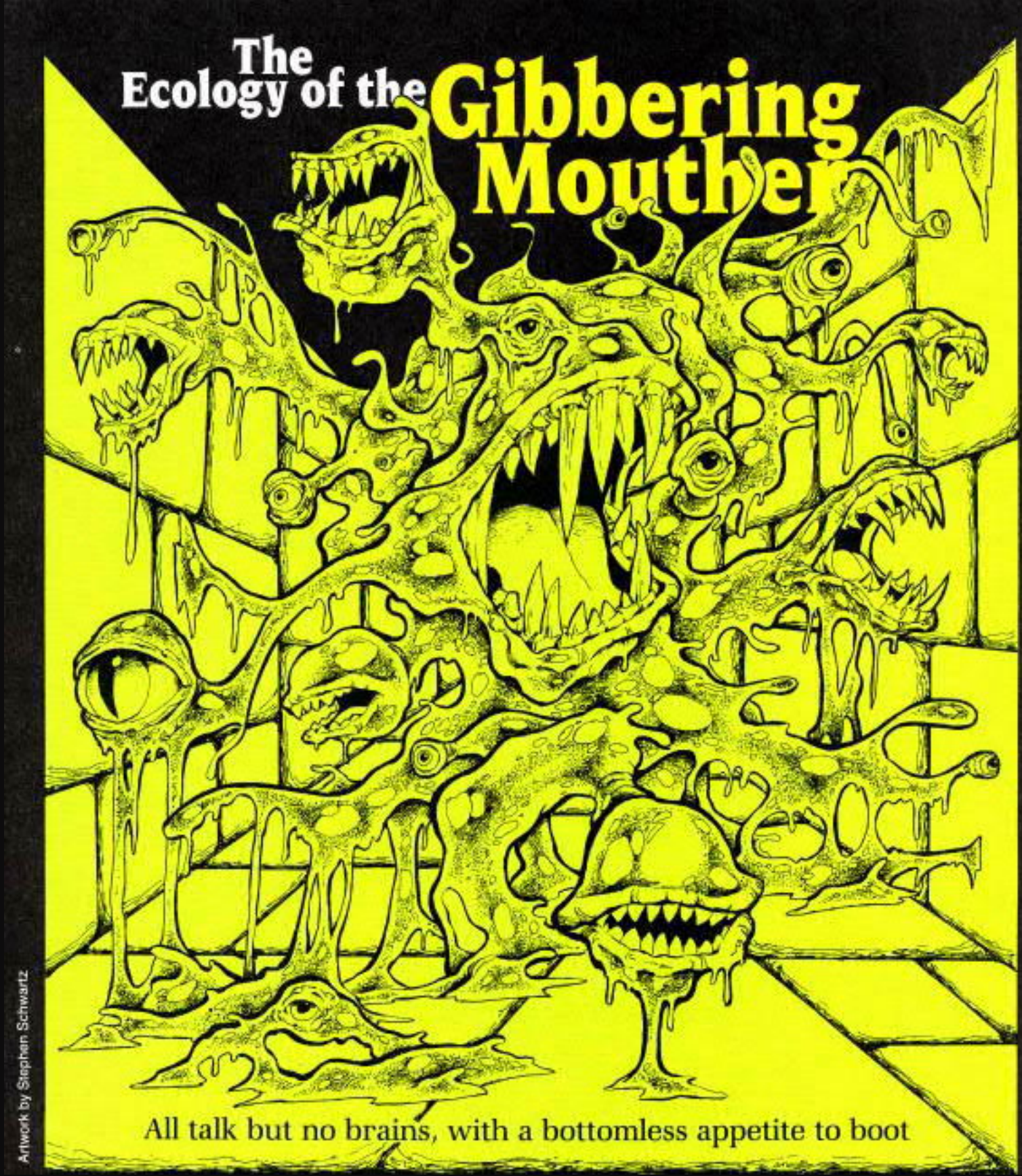
The Ecology of the Gibbering Mouther



All talk but no brains, with a bottomless appetite to boot

Artwork by Stephen Schwartz

"Lykan."

There are times when a single word can be more startling than a heavy-handed clap on the shoulder. Lykan is my birth name. The problem? It wasn't the name I was using at the time.

I turned around toward the speaker with an inane grin and a denial on my lips. "I'm sorry, kind sir, but you must have mistaken me for . . . oh, hell." (That last bit came as I saw who was accosting me.)

I'm a big man—unfortunate, since it's hard to disguise size—but this guy was even bigger. The impression of size wasn't hurt by the fact that he was carrying a mace the size of a small watchtower, and by the fact that he stood a full head taller than the two fighters in plate mail who flanked him.

I knew his face, of course. Who doesn't know the face of the vice prelate, second-ranking cleric in the Order of the Prelacy? I knew his name too—Reifus endearingly nicknamed "the Pagan Hammer"—and he obviously knew mine, which he proceeded to demonstrate a second time.

by Nigel D. Findley

"You are Lykan," he said in a growl that would make a war dog proud, "the thief."

I glanced over my shoulder at my audience, which was listening with growing interest, and I gestured for him to lower his voice. "Peace, good sir," I said, playing to the gallery. "Perhaps we can clear up this . . . misunderstanding." I stepped closer to him—his bodyguards stiffened—keeping my hands in plain sight and a fawning smile on my face.

"You are Lykan," he growled again. But this time his voice was pitched lower. "I have need of your services."

With an effort, I kept astonishment off my face. "Well, then," I said, "perhaps we can deal."

He scowled. "I talk. You obey. You live."

Whatever happened to the fine art of negotiation? I sighed. "All right."

They escorted me to the Prelacy's headquarters, the Basilica—you know the building, the only church built according to the Ancient Barbarian Fortress school of architecture—and into a reception room large enough for the prelate to receive a full battalion, should it strike his fancy. I stood while the Pagan Hammer sat on an ornate wooden throne (the throne normally reserved for the prelate). I raised an eyebrow.

Reifus nodded and answered the unspoken question. "Yes. The prelate has gone to his eternal reward, as the Father wills." He made a complex gesture, but his heart wasn't in it and his presentation was desultory. Then he got down to business. "The Order of the Prelacy keeps its coffers and its treasures within this Basilica," he said—and I could hear the capital letters—"within the Vault of the Holies. You probably know that, considering your occupation."

Though he said it with a sneer, I took it as a compliment to my thorough research. "Of course," I told him. "And I also know that the vault is guarded by a trap that your prelate designed himself. What of it?"

Reifus raised his eyes to whatever heaven the prelate was now occupying, and he controlled himself with an effort. "Yes, the trap. That's where your skills will prove of use."

I caught on then and tried not to giggle. "He didn't tell you how to disarm it, did he? How inconsiderate of him."

Reifus scowled again; he was very good at scowling. "I need—the Order needs to gain access to the treasures. You will disarm the trap and open the vault."

"And if I won't?"

His face was like a rock. "Then I shall kill you."

I sighed, having already known the answer to that question. "I need some information first. What's in the vault?"

"You have no need to know," he said gruffly.

"Well, did the prelate leave any notes behind—personal writings, anything like that?"

"You have no need to know."

Again, I sighed. "When did he set up the trap? Where had he been just beforehand? What had he been reading? Tell me anything that'll give me a clue—"

He cut me off. "You have no—"

"—need to know. Right." I ground my teeth in frustration. "Look, did the prelate know he was dying, and did he tell anyone—anyone—the secret?"

The Pagan Hammer's lips made a single thin line. He stared at me in a new and uncomfortable way. "Yes, he knew he was dying, but no, he didn't tell anyone." There was a strange tone to the cleric's voice. I made a mental note not to ask in any depth ***how*** the prelate had met his maker.

I gave up. "Okay, you win. Take me to the vault."

He did. Down into the bowels of the Basilica we went, eventually stopping in front of a heavy ironbound door. Reifus dismissed the two guards who'd been dogging my steps. I watched them leave, then turned to the cleric with a nasty grin. "So you think, wearing your armor and packing your mace, you're more than a match for a sniveling, unarmed thief. Is that what you think?"

"Yes," he said.

I glanced him up and down a moment, then put my mind on business and looked at the door. "Is this the vault?"

"The first door."

"And beyond the first door?"

"The second door."

His dialogue was beginning to irritate me. "What if I refuse to go farther?"

"I'll kill you."

"And if I try but fail?"

"If the trap doesn't kill you, I will."

I was as good as dead, so I quit stalling. I pulled out my thieves' kit and turned to the lock—a big, clunky, old fashioned one. I laugh at locks like that. I laughed at this lock, picked it, and swung open the door. Just before I stepped through, I said to Reifus, "Shut the door behind me, but don't lock it. And don't come in, or I just might disarm the trap by letting you walk into it." His expression told me I had no worry on that score; the thought of the trap scared the religion out of him. I grabbed a lit torch from a sconce on the wall and stepped through the first door. Reifus shut the door behind me.

There was a short passageway between the first and second doors. I scanned the floor for trip wires, trapped stones—the usual things. There was nothing. But when I rested my hand on the stonework beside the second door, the surface felt slightly warm. Oh-ho, I thought.

I knew something about the prelate—my research was even better than Reifus thought. While he was working his way up the hierarchical ladder, the prelate had been a busy boy with his traps, setting up tricky protections for various church valuables. Like any ambitious thief checking out the prize purses in his territory, I'd read everything I could about the prelate's masterworks, and I was impressed (as much as I can be by an amateur). The prelate, it seems, favored biological traps. In fact, he might have been the one who conceived that oft-imitated beauty where the trap dumps the victim into a gelatinous cube. With that in mind, I knew exactly what was on the other side of the door.

I pulled a glob of soft wax out of my kit and quickly fashioned a pair of earplugs. Next, out came some gauze from my first-aid supplies (it pays to be prepared); I bound a strip across my eyes. I could still see, but dimly—which is how I wanted to see. I picked the lock—it was as easy as picking my teeth—and swung open the second door. Prepared as I was, I almost choked on the reek of ammonia and other noxious substances that wafted out.[1]

There it was, just as expected: a gibbering mouther, the prelate's biological trap, sitting in the middle of a bare room with glass-lined walls.

Gods, but it was ugly in the torchlight—all eyes and mouths, like a bevy of stool pigeons. The mouther lurched its green, slimy body toward me, all its mouths working. Some were biting at the floor, pulling its nasty bulk along; others were babbling nonstop.

Imagine all the inmates of an asylum talking, screaming, and mumbling at once. The noise the mouther was making was even worse than that—or it would have been if I could have heard it through my earplugs. At least madmen speak in voices that are human. The mouther doesn't; its din is a combination of sounds resembling human voices, animal noises, and things you would rather not think about. It's enough to unseat your reason. It's the sound of chaos incarnate—not just the voices of the insane, but the voice of insanity itself. It's the voice of every creature that makes up the mouther, each crying out its torment.

I used to wonder where the mouther got all of its eyes and mouths. One day someone told me. There's a theory—and I've no reason to dispute it—that creatures absorbed by a mouther become part of the mouther.[2] Their minds merge with its mind, and they exist forever, irreversibly mad, in a horrible form of living death. When I saw this mouther, I believed it all.

I know a little about mouthers (it's good business to learn at least something about all the things in the world that want to eat you), but I don't know where they come from. Apparently, no one does. Some cite these hideous creatures as examples of why mages shouldn't be allowed to experiment with magic.

Gibbering mouthers are very hard to kill. People will tell you the mouther's brain is buried somewhere in its middle, and that's why it's so hard to land a telling blow. Actually, the creature's nervous system is distributed throughout its bulk; it has no distinct organ that you can point at and call a brain. Hit a small pseudopod and you're just as likely—or unlikely—to hit brain tissue as you are when you run

the beast through with a battle lance. You can't even suffocate it properly.[3]

One thing I do know about mouthers reinforces one of my pet peeves. I've got some advice for people (like the ex-prelate) who do their own traps: Don't. Use a thief to stop a thief. I could have told the prelate the problem with the gibbering mouther. Yes, it'll confuse, it'll kill, it'll eat anyone who comes in to steal your treasure. But if left alone long enough, it'll eat your treasure—that is, if the treasure's not on fire. That's why I wasn't too surprised to find a bare room—once a treasure room—at the end of the passage.[4]

I didn't stop to ponder all of this then and there. I acted. Otherwise, I would have known the mouther's secrets more intimately than I really cared to. I backpedaled fast, just as the monster advanced and one of its mouths cut loose with a nasty gob of saliva. The liquid struck the wall behind me (I duck fast) and exploded impressively. I almost dropped the torch when I felt the heat and pressure from the burst on my back. Even through the gauze, the flash was impressive enough to almost blind me. Mouther spittle contains what alchemists call ammonium iodide, an unstable compound and an effective contact explosive: lots of flash, some punch, and an impressive bang. It's easy to concoct in a lab; I've used it myself on occasion. But the mouther does it naturally.[5]

I kept moving back. The mouther kept advancing. The stone floor around the monster smelled like it was baking; it was probably beginning to soften now that the creature was out of its glass-lined cell. This was just another of the mouther's tricks. Lots of people think a mouther's control over ground consistency is magical. Not really; it secretes a hellish mixture of acids, solvents, and other foul fluids that break down the integrity of stone. The heat I felt was simply the heat liberated by this chemical reaction—an exothermic reaction, an alchemist friend called it. If there's any magic, it's in the fact that the mouther can wallow in this corrosive stuff and not dissolve itself. (Incidentally, that's why the room was lined with glass. The prelate must have known something about mouthers. Glass is one of the few substances they can't digest.)

The mouther let fly with another spitball—flash, bang!—but I was out of there, already at the other end of the corridor by the first door. Mouthers are nasty beggars, but they're slow. I had enough time to take off the gauze blindfold, remove the earplugs, and pocket the lot. Then I threw the torch at the mouther as it closed in. A mouth opened to catch it, and the flame went out immediately. The mouther shut up, probably startled by the pain. I opened the door just enough to slip through, then shut it calmly behind me.

Reifus was anything but calm, almost hopping from foot to foot. His face was streaked with sweat. I smiled up at his face and said casually, "Piece of cake."

His jaw dropped. "You did it?"

I didn't dignify his question with an answer. "Everything that's in there is yours."

Reifus stared hard into my eyes. But if the eyes are windows to the soul, I'd long ago learned how to close the shutters.

I knew Reifus intended to kill me, but not until he'd made sure of his new-found wealth. He opened the door and stepped inside, striding down the dark hall. I remembered only at the last second to slap my hands over my ears.

His scream was very, very loud—louder than the babble. I wished I'd kept the earplugs in. I won't trouble you with details on my subsequent escape.

I suppose I could have told him the mouther was probably just on the other side of the door—that, I could have done. But then again, I figured he had no need to know.

Footnotes

1. Under ideal conditions, a mouther's pungent reek can give warning of its presence up to 20′ away.

2. A mouther drains blood and nutrients from its victim—hence the additional 1 hp damage per round per mouth attached. When the victim reaches zero hit points and falls into a terminal coma, the mouther flows over the body and begins to absorb it. The mouther secretes digestive juices that dissolve the victim's outer tissue. Complete dissolution takes 1d6 + 2 rounds for a human-size body; the body is irrecoverable after 1d3 + 1 rounds. The secretions have an additional effect, however: they supply the nutrients needed by the victim's brain and nervous system to keep the creature alive. The tissues making up the victim's central nervous system and its eyes are absorbed into the mouther, intact and functional. Though the nervous tissues are spread throughout the bulk of the mouther, they remain in contact through thin fibrils of mouther nervous tissue. The victim's brain, therefore, never actually dies, and its anima (its soul or spirit, as described on page 10 of the AD&D 1st Edition *Legends & Lore)* is never freed. Thus, a creature absorbed by a mouther cannot be reincarnated or resurrected, and cannot be contacted through a speak with dead spell, since the victim is not strictly dead. It is only when the mouther is slain that the victim's anima is free to travel to the Outer or Inner plane awaiting it.

Once the absorption is complete, the mouther grows new eyes to surround and utilize the victim's corneas. The victim's teeth are not affected by the enzymes since the enzymes cannot dissolve dental enamel, and these are also "pirated" for use by the mouther.

Absorption by a mouther invariably causes the victim to go incurably insane. The mind of a victim known to have been absorbed by a mouther can be contacted through *ESP,* telepathy, and similar spells, but with great difficulty (+ 6 bonus to saving throws, for spells that allow them). The mind is totally insane, however, and nothing of use can be communicated to or learned from the absorbed intelligence. In fact, there is a cumulative 25% chance per round of contact that the spell-caster performing such mind reading will become insane for 1d4 +8 rounds following such contact.

3. Metabolically, the mouther is as confused as its appearance implies. Though it doesn't breathe in the traditional sense, some parts of its body require oxygen and some do not (the latter using other chemicals to respire). As a consequence, it is impossible to asphyxiate a mouther: it simply shifts to anaerobic respiration so that it no longer requires oxygen. Similarly, poisonous gases (e.g., *cloudkill)* are ineffective; the mouther shifts its metabolism to a different system that is unaffected by the poisonous gas. Injected and ingestive poisons are somewhat effective against a mouther (though the creature saves at +6), because these typically cause tissue damage in addition to their metabolic effects.)

4. A gibbering mouther eats virtually anything, whether the food is animal, vegetable, or mineral. While it prefers animal tissue (preferably still alive and kicking) and vegetable matter, the mouther can also absorb and make use of most metals and minerals. This is a consequence of its strange metabolism: Virtually anything can be incorporated into its makeup or used as a life-giving nutrient. If there is no animal or plant tissue available, a mouther can change its metabolism so as to sustain itself by absorbing other material. If they actually swallow or absorb it, mouthers can dissolve and utilize any material except dental enamel (i.e., teeth), glass, diamond, adamantite, and mithral. These materials are resistant to all of a mouther's corrosive secretions and are eventually expelled.

When it is well fed, a mouther can reproduce through binary fission, much like an amoeba; one mouther becomes two smaller mouthers. The offspring are initially 2 HD but grow to full size (assuming an adequate food supply is available) in 3-6 months. Offspring have the full powers of an adult from the outset. When a mouther divides, its mouths and eyes are shared evenly between its offspring. When a mouther has insufficient food or must live on minerals, it does not reproduce.

5. These secretions are also highly corrosive to flesh. Touching a mouther causes 1d4 hp corrosive damage to bare flesh. Metals are unaffected unless they remain in contact with the mouther for an extended time or are absorbed. Nonmetallic weapons, armor, and other items (e.g., wooden clubs, staves, leather armor, etc.) that come in contact with a mouther for even an instant must save vs. acid or dissolve immediately. Ω

Gnoll

"The resemblance of gnolls to hyenas only begins with their appearance. Gnolls make a chattering 'laughing' noise like that of hyenas when excited or agitated, and like their bestial cousins often drop to all fours when pursuing prey. Possessing formidable jaws and steely stomachs, they'll eat things no other thinking race would even imagine as food and, worse still, thrive on such scraps. Yet, most like their feral counterparts, they prefer to let others perform the hard work and then skulk in to snatch up the spoils."

—Sivoah Huot,
The Savagekind of Garund

Feral, savage, and bloodthirsty, gnolls represent the brutal, unforgiving aspects of nature. Discordantly, they also represent the laziest aspects of nature. While slothful gnolls can quite effectively hunt and craft and build for themselves, they favor forcing slaves to do their hardest labors. Opportunists of the highest caliber, gnolls also take as a sign of Lamashtu's favor the accidental discovery of food, housing, or materiel.

Overview

Gnolls live, work, and fight in groups. A lone gnoll is a survivor of some calamity inevitably looking for a new band to join or an exile trying to find some other group of humanoids to join. Strong believers in the power of community, most gnolls cannot comprehend the lure of independence exhibited by other humanoids. That is not to say gnolls do not have individual tastes and desires, but rather that they cannot imagine living alone or without the presence of other gnolls nearby.

Although they typically live on warm savannahs and plains, they can frequently be encountered underground.

Gnolls are not strong miners, however, and combined with their legendary laziness, they tend to rely on the backbreaking labor of slaves for their subterranean homes. In some cases, gnolls invade dungeons or the underground homes of other races with the intent of controlling and residing within the tunnels.

Gnolls possess a reputation for laziness that, while deserved, occasionally becomes overstated by detractors. While gnolls do despise hard physical labor and most forms of even moderate exertion, they do enjoy hunting and are also more than willing to work hard for a brief period in order to acquire slaves and workers (who then work hard for them thereafter).

Leaders of gnoll bands call themselves all manner of lofty titles, from Chieftain to Consort (of Lamashtu) to Emperor. Regardless of title, although, a gnoll band's leader only retains control with the careful application of force. As the strongest among his band, he leads with brute strength, and his control only extends as far as his reach. Gnolls in an area all pay some homage to a particularly powerful chieftain who goes by a truly grand title, such as the King of All Gnolls.

As the children of Lamashtu, gnolls strive daily to serve the Mother of Monsters. Every band has at least one (and usually more) cleric or shaman of Lamashtu. Clerics are universally female, while shamans always are male.

Ecology

Despite their unnatural creation, gnolls have fully integrated themselves into the natural order. As a species, they have affected the world less than some other humanoids, especially the digging dwarves, plant-manipulating elves, and industrious humans. Gnolls live as a part of nature, serving as upper-level predators who only provide food for true monsters that sit at the very top of the food web, such as dragons.

A gnoll begins life as part of a litter of three to five siblings. Few gnolls come into the world naturally, by passing through a bitch's birth canal. Instead, most are forcefully removed from the womb when their mother slices into her own belly with a knife or claw and delivers her pups by a grotesque form of caesarian delivery. The rarest of gnoll births occur in a similar manner, but initiated instead by a robust pup who rips his own way out of the womb. Such a birth occurs maybe once a century, and he who performs it becomes a great leader of gnolls. These great leaders, called in the gnoll tongue *Garrgarrtarrm* ("Most Holy Son" in Common), tend to unite massive armies and become legends not only among the gnolls, but also among those who battle them.

At three years of age, a gnoll is dangerous. At eight years it is considered physically mature and is forced to hunt or otherwise contribute to the band. Females become fertile as young as 10 but sometimes not until 18. Late bloomers do not receive sympathy from the band, as females must become either mothers or clerics of Lamashtu by 15 (or, preferably, both). Those incapable of motherhood by that age strive to serve Lamashtu in the hopes of being chosen by her. The unfortunate gnoll bitch who does not meet one of the female obligations by 15 is sacrificed to Lamashtu and consumed by the band. Males have a much easier time in life and are merely required to provide at least 20 pounds of meat to the band before they reach 12. Many gnolls die or are killed in their 20s, but most survive into their 30s, giving the species an average life span of about 28 years. Only the most wily, clever, and lucky gnolls live into their 40s. When a gnoll dies, it becomes meat for the rest of the band. If the gnoll proved itself worthy in life, it gains a short ceremony where its soul is sent along to Lamashtu for eternal service. Otherwise, the gnoll is merely consumed.

A gnoll looks like (and in many ways is) an anthromorphic hyena. It has a hyena's blunt muzzle and rounded ears, coarse hair (which covers its entire body except the pads on its feet and the leathery skin of its palms), hairy tail, and doglike hindquarters. As a humanoid, a gnoll mostly moves about on its legs, carrying weapons and food with its human-like hands. When agitated, a gnoll frequently drops to all fours, yapping and laughing like a hyena and jumping straight up and down. A gnoll walks and trots on its hind legs with an inefficient loping movement that resembles a half-hop, but when it needs to cover ground quickly it again drops to all fours and breaks into a smooth run reminiscent of the locomotion of a normal hyena.

Gnolls and Hyenas

Bands of gnolls in the appropriate climates live, hunt, and travel with hyenas and hyaenodons (dire hyenas). Some sages speculate that gnolls get along so well with hyenas because Lamashtu created gnolls from the scavengers. Gnolls themselves believe this and hold hyenas in high regard, worshiping them even as some cultures worship ancestors. Indeed, the Gnoll word for hyena is *Rrgarr-rr*, which translates directly to "grandmother" (and which is sometimes mistranslated as "great mother," a title reserved for Lamashtu herself).

When a particularly beloved hyena dies, the band with which it traveled (gnolls become insulted if a visitor suggests they own their hyena "brethren") gives its body to Lamashtu in a day-long ceremony. This ceremony, in truth, involves little more than skinning the hyena and slow-cooking it over a smoky fire to be eaten at sunrise. Such an honored hyena's skull is cleaned, bleached, painted with numerous "magical" symbols (little more than swirls and wavy lines), and drilled with a third eye socket above and between the other two. Gnolls consider these specially prepared skulls extremely sacred, usually as the holiest objects a band possesses.

Crime and Punishment

The gnoll concepts of crime and punishment do not correspond with any other intelligent race. To them, exile is considered the worst punishment imaginable. The following list shows a few of the crimes humanoids tend to commit against one another (as well as a few distinctly gnoll crimes), with their accompanying punishments.

Crime	Punishment
Regicide	Ascend to leadership of band
Murder (non-gnoll, non-slave)	None
Rape	None
Theft (not from band)	None
Theft (from band)	10 lashings
Murder (slave or non-band gnoll)	10 lashings
Possession of contraband	Must share goods with band
Murder (band-mate)	Sacrificed and consumed
Treason (with other gnolls)	Sacrificed and burned
Force other gnoll to work	Exile
Freeing slaves	Exile
Treason (with non-gnolls)	Exile
Worshiping Lamashtu enemy	Exile

Gnolls scarcely affect the surrounding environment, and in fact they tend to aid the natural health of the area in which they settle. Consummate scavengers, gnolls pick up after other races and creatures, reusing or otherwise recycling the leftovers and discards of more industrious creatures. Although most gnoll bands survive by hunting, in truth they use the term "hunter" to truly mean "scavenger and gatherer," as hunting groups more often return with meat (and other foods) originally brought down by other predators, who are then driven off by the gnolls. In addition to food, gnolls scavenge clothing, armor, weapons, supplies, and even homes. Gnolls live in the wilderness for the most part, but they sometimes take up residence in a village or settlement left behind by another humanoid group. They never build their own homes and they try to avoid displacing groups for a place to live, instead waiting for more powerful creatures to clean out an area before moving on.

In order to support themselves with a minimum of work, gnolls take from and enslave weaker creatures and hire, bribe, or avoid stronger ones. The stronger creatures they hire, such as trolls, act as guards and enforcers. Gnolls actively seek out the service and company of trolls for this reason, and the two races in general get along very well.

Habitat & Society

Gnolls live in small, aggressive bands of raiders and hunters brought together and ruled by a large, powerful male. These small groups exist for as long as their leaders live, disbanding if their chieftains die naturally. Members of disbanded groups melt into the wilds and join other bands still extant. Despite their warlike ways, gnoll groups rarely fight among themselves (and do so mainly to establish hunting territories), and when they do they rarely fight to the death.

Every region infested with gnolls suffers from one particularly large band led by an especially strong leader, often a flind (see Variants). This leader calls himself the King of All Gnolls (a title that does not carry past his particular region) and his decisions indirectly influence the decisions of other bands' leaders in the area. Of course, because his subjects are all gnolls, his actual authority only extends as far as his own band.

Religion: At the same time worshipers of Lamashtu and misogynists, gnolls give their females the choice of two paths in life: mother or cleric of Lamashtu. Many of the latter are also the former. A gnoll bitch who has not become one or the other by her 15th birthday finds herself at the receiving end of the sacrificial knife. She who becomes both by that day receives great honor in the band, for she has received twice the blessings of the Mother of Monsters.

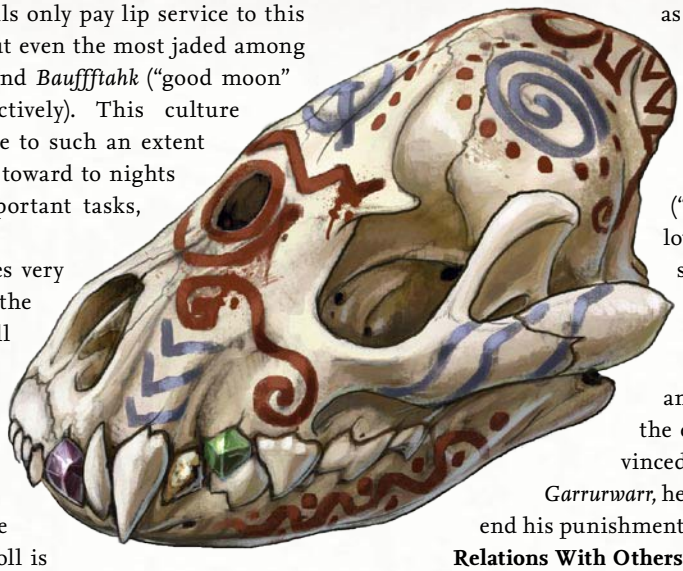
The worship of Lamashtu follows two lines: the female clerics and the male shamans. Clerics of Lamashtu perform all the normal functions of clerics in societies—they oversee the births of litters, enforce the spiritual laws of the goddess, perform appropriate sacrifices and other rites, and officiate at the deaths of those deserving of a death service. In these ways, the clerics perform the heavily ritualistic and infrequent practices of the clergy. The day-to-day services performed by religious leaders fall to the male shamans. Shamans bless the daily food of the band, provide magical and mundane healing, beseech Lamashtu for great success in both war and hunting, and advise the band's leader.

Clerics of Lamashtu show their status in ways recognizable by any creature of the Mother of Monster's faith, with great gashes in their bellies and sagging mammary glands heavy with milk. A gnoll cleric is regarded by her bands as its mother, and is called as such, regardless of who actually births its members. The cleric serves her band as teacher and caretaker, in addition to her divine duties. It is considered a high honor among the males to be chosen by the cleric for breeding, and even the laziest males work hard to impress her enough to earn a nighttime visit.

A shaman of Lamashtu shows his status with a grotesque practice known as *Raffgarrhurrtauff* ("growing the third eye"). Once he becomes a shaman (a process requiring 2 years of apprenticeship followed by a ritual that determines if Lamashtu blesses the acolyte or desires his flesh in sacrifice), he pierces his own forehead just above and between his eyes. This piercing provides either tiny

studs or hooks from which the shaman hangs the eyeball of a humanoid victim. This eyeball, periodically replaced from a ritualistically sacrificed slave or prisoner, acts as the shaman's divine focus, symbolizing the third eye of Lamashtu and allowing him to channel her divine magic through himself.

While gnolls faithfully worship Lamashtu before all other deities, they also practice a form of secular and superstitious iconographic devotion to the Moon that echoes the devotion of other races to astrology, numerology, and other forms of mundane divination. Gnolls pay great heed to the movement of the Moon and enthusiastically study its position and phase, always carefully noting the best time of day, month, or year in which to undertake a major activity. Most gnolls only pay lip service to this Moon-based divination, but even the most jaded among them speak of *Baufffgarr* and *Bauffftahk* ("good moon" and "bad moon," respectively). This culture infiltrates the gnoll psyche to such an extent that many constantly look toward to nights of *Baufffgarr* to begin important tasks, such as raids.



Laws: Gnoll society relies very heavily on the cohesion of the band. To that end, all gnoll laws prohibit activities that harm the band. While causing permanent harm to gnolls outside the band is seen as improper, it is generally not a punishable offense. Hurting a non-gnoll is never considered a crime, unless the creature harmed belongs to another gnoll or is an ally of the band. Gnolls grow up learning that the good of the band outweighs their own good, and the desires of the band supercede their own desires. Betraying the band is the worst possible crime.

Outside of the band, gnolls respect others of their species. If given a choice, most gnolls do not harm other gnolls, for the two might someday be band-mates. This respect for one another only goes so far, however, and gnolls frequently murder and rape members of other bands, receiving relatively light punishments for the former and pats on the back for the latter (except for clerics of Lamashtu, female gnolls occupy the same social position in a band as non-gnoll slaves). Two gnolls who disagree settle their differences with a nonlethal combat.

Intelligent creatures who work for the gnolls but who are not slaves (such as hired troll guardians or the like) are considered members of the band for as long as they remain with the group. These honorary members of the band can lose their standing more easily than can true gnolls, however, but most adjust well to living with the gnolls and become true members of the band after a few years.

Punishments: The harshest punishment for a gnoll is exile. A gnoll prefers death to loneliness, and one who is cast from his society frequently seeks companionship from other humanoids—usually orcs or trolls. When a gnoll is exiled, his head is shaved and scarred, showing to all who meet him that he was cast out of his band. Gnolls reserve this punishment for only the most horrific of crimes, which in gnoll society include freeing slaves, betraying the band to non-gnolls, worshiping a deity not allied with Lamashtu, or forcing a fellow gnoll to perform hard labor.

If a gnoll cannot find camaraderie among other races, he walks. He continues walking in as straight a line as possible until hunger, exhaustion, exposure, or predation finally ends his pitiful life. This practice, known as *Garrurwarr* ("holy walk of death") allows the gnoll to regain some amount of respect from his kind. If the *Garrurwarr* walker comes across another gnoll, and after a brief exchange the encountered gnoll is convinced of the legitimacy of the *Garrurwarr,* he might kill the walker and end his punishment.

Relations With Others: Gnolls hire or otherwise coerce trolls to guard their lairs and homes, and the two races tend to get along well. In addition, gnolls cooperate with many goblinoids and orcs. Bands of gnolls who dwell underground frequently take up residence in caves occupied by those other races, working with their neighbors to protect their subterranean homes and to maximize the effectiveness of slave-gathering raids. Groups of other creatures weaker than the gnoll band usually become slaves (although they particularly favor dwarves and humans in that role), groups of equitable strength become partners, and stronger groups are avoided or paid preemptive "protection money."

Campaign Role

Gnolls work well in one of two roles in a campaign: either as slavers of middling importance or as savage and unpredictable antagonists.

As they put precious little effort into anything, even the acquisition of slaves, gnolls tend to keep few of them (usually numbering no more than one slave per gnoll in the band). Slaves of gnolls must work hard in order to

Flindbar

Flinds use a weapon unique to themselves known as a flindbar. A flindbar consists of two iron bars, approximately 18 inches long, connected by a short piece of chain (or, in some cases, connected to one another directly with loops at the ends). A flindbar is a one-handed exotic melee weapon that deals 1d8 points of damage as a Medium weapon, 1d6 as a Small weapon. While using a flindbar, you get a +2 bonus on opposed attack rolls made to disarm an enemy, including the roll to avoid being disarmed if such an attempt fails. Flinds are automatically proficient with flindbars and, thanks to their familiarity with similar weapons, treat nunchaku as martial weapons.

provide for the band to which they belong. Those who become ill, injured, or exhausted shortly find themselves the main course in the next day's meal. Thus, the turnover rate of slaves for gnolls is exceedingly high, meaning gnoll bands are almost constantly on the search for new and easily acquired ones.

Feral and savage but also settled and lazy, gnolls are difficult to predict and, thus, to interact with in any meaningful way. A gnoll might immediately attack, attempt to bargain with, run away from, or loudly threaten any human or demihuman who tries to interact with it, and a particular gnoll's response one day has no bearing whatsoever on its possible reaction the next.

Treasure

In theory, everything a gnoll possesses belongs to the band in which it lives, with the leader of the band the final arbiter of ownership. In practice, however, gnolls very much believe that possession grants ownership. Individual gnoll treasure therefore usually consists of items easy to carry and conceal (especially gems), armor, and weapons. Gnolls rarely carry coins, as the jingling made by multiple coins can give away a gnoll's position during a hunt or attract the attention of its band's leader.

Larger pieces of treasure or those too fragile to survive rough handling become the communal property of the entire band. The leader of the band, then, exerts marginal control over these group treasures. Such treasures include finely crafted furniture, expensive trade goods and commodities, chests full of coins and other amassed precious metals, and magic items unusable by anyone in the band or that provides no benefit on a hunt or in a fight.

Variants

In addition to regional and climactic variations, gnolls have a close relationship with a cousin race known as the flind.

Flinds: Larger, smarter, and meaner than normal gnolls, flind tend to become leaders of gnoll bands in which they find themselves. As a race, gnolls look up to flind as younger siblings admire their older brethren.

Perhaps as a result of their creation or for some other reason, flinds are almost universally sterile. That alone keeps their numbers low, and those flinds who can produce young tend to have relatively easy lives, possessing influence at nearly chieftain level.

Flind lifestyles very closely mirror those of gnolls, although with more pronounced extremes of savagery and lethargy. Most flinds live among their gnoll cousins and blend in almost seamlessly. Those who do not study gnolls cannot tell apart the two races except by size, as the largest gnolls and smallest flinds are roughly the same. Flinds have 4 Hit Dice, use the elite array for their ability scores, and are proficient in the flindbar. Flinds are CR 2.

Gnolls in Golarion

Gnolls live on almost every continent, and every geographic area produces its own slightly different version of gnoll.

At the height of Thassilon, most gnolls of Avistan lived in Haruka, where their apathy and laziness were appreciated and encouraged. The armies of Haruka contained thousands of gnolls who ostensibly served as scouts and forward observers. With Thassilon's fall, the gnoll population in Varisia was cut in half. Stricken with fear, the gnolls fled from the region, leaving behind only a few exceptionally brave (or lazy) bands. Most gnolls in Avistan now live beneath the ground or in the forests of Razmiran, the River Kingdoms, Kyonin, and Galt.

Gnolls of Garund live as seminomadic raiders in the northern deserts (except for Osirion, which actively exterminates gnolls it discovers) and as slavers in the central jungles. The desert-raiding gnolls tend to move between known trading routes, attacking caravans to loot food and—most importantly—water. Long before the great cataclysm that created the Mana Wastes, gnolls lived in the area currently occupied by Geb and Nex. With the magical destruction wrought by those two nations, however, gnolls have completely fled the area. Those that remained became crocottans, which continue to terrorize the area.

Names

Gnoll names often sound like the growls and yipping of wild hyenas, having a variety of hard consonants and rolling "r"s.

Male: Daag, Fekkur, Garrour, Gegg, Gurr, Hakk, Hurrurr, Kaggur, Kurrmrr, Lok, Nrurr, Tarr-Kurr, Tukrr, Vogg, Vorum

Female: Aaturr, Akaam, Arruggurr, Eag, Ekurrn, Errnhor, Ilnn, Irrok, Itrugg, Ok-Ur-Okk, Orrot, Ovvurr, Ukramak, Urmmnmarr, Uud

GNOLL

This humanoid stands slightly taller than a human (despite a slightly stooped posture) on doglike legs. It has the head, neck, and fur of a hyena, with a humanoid torso and arms.

GNOLL **CR 1**

CE Medium humanoid (gnoll)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15 (+2 armor, +1 natural, +2 shield)

hp 11 (2d8+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +0, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee battleaxe +3 (1d8+2/x3)

Ranged shortbow +1 (1d6/x3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

Before Combat Gnolls try to set up ambushes which are usually crudely planned and poorly executed, but they prefer to let allies and slaves fight for them whenever possible.

During Combat Against foes they consider evenly matched (or stronger than themselves), gnolls work together only so far as ganging up on a single powerful target to bring it down before moving onto the next target. An individual gnoll might switch targets if it is damaged by another opponent or its attention is otherwise drawn away from the target at hand. Against foes weaker than themselves, gnolls fight individually, engaging their opponents one-on-one in an attempt to gain individual glory. Regardless of the relative strength of their opponents, if gnolls have slaves available they force their slaves into battle beforehand to weaken or overwhelm their foes.

Morale A gnoll flees as soon as it is reduced to a quarter its total hit points, it is the last combatant on its side, or if all its slaves and allies flee.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 10, **Con** 13, **Int** 8, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3

Feats Power Attack

Skills Listen +2, Spot +3

Languages Gnoll

Gear battleaxe, heavy steel shield, leather armor, shortbow

In Qadira it's said that gnolls were once thieves who were exiled into the desert. Facing starvation, they forsook their tribe's taboos and ate hyena meat to survive. For their trespasses against the laws of both man and the gods, the desert cursed them with the blood of hyenas, condemning them to be outcasts forever more.

Goblin

"So you wanna know about goblins, huh? Wanna know the best way to kill them? Of course you do. S'why you came to me. Trick is, they're cowards. Dogs, horses, and even words will stop them dead in their tracks—they think words steal their soul, or some such. Anyway, once you got them all ascairt', it's just a matter of what weapon you prefer. Me? I prefer the hatchet right to the middle of the skull. That's how I put down ol' Chief Whartus. Put one right in his head. I got him in a barrel of brine out back... wanna see?"

—Daviren Hosk: owner, Goblin Squash Stables

Few creatures take such glee from destruction and mayhem as goblins. These small pests can be found in nearly any environment, straining the local food chain, menacing the locals, and generally causing trouble for any forced to deal with them, including their kin. They are goblins, and to them, life is here for their twisted amusement, much to the detriment of everyone else.

Overview

To most races, goblins are little more than a nuisance. Their penchant for keeping their own numbers under control from in-fighting, poor common sense, and general accident-prone tendencies prevents them from forming sizeable nations. Their own laziness and disinterest in making anything bigger for themselves leads to them living in small tribes. Notorious cowards and gifted scavengers, goblin tribes can often be found living in relatively close proximity to human and demihuman settlements—since the goblins can't organize themselves into proper raiding parties and tend to run in terror when confronted with even a half-hearted defense (or a single barking dog), most

view them as little more than amusing pests. It's only when a particularly ambitious chieftain rises among their kind, or (more often) a bandit or warlord of another race seizes upon their numbers and bullies them into a more organized force, that they become honestly dangerous.

When properly motivated and organized, goblins can cross the line from comical nuisances to ruthless killers with surprising and disconcerting ease. It's almost as if they grow smarter and more cunning the more of them there are involved in an attack. In actuality, larger numbers simply increase the odds of one goblin in a group being particularly brave or foolhardy, but the net result can't be ignored. Goblins, used properly by a crafty or ambitious warlord or bandit, can be as effective a tool for mayhem as any number of highly paid mercenaries or trained man-eating monsters.

Ecology

Goblins have it rough from the day they're born. Goblin babies are treated little better than pets—they're kept in cages and fed and watered when the goblins remember, and often left to fight and bicker as they will. Few goblin parents take an active interest in their children—the only real exception being chieftains interested in preserving their bloodlines. Of course, since most goblin chieftains would rather die than give up their throne to anyone (sons and daughters included), these exceptions are rare. Fortunately for goblins, they mature quickly, achieving adulthood by the age of 5. A goblin who survives childhood is thought to be either lucky or tough—in either case, a quality that can help the goblin in its life to come.

Goblins are somewhat short-lived, rarely surviving longer than 50. Of course, the reality of a goblin's lifestyle means that most never reach the age of 20. Goblins are high-strung and energetic, a result of their accelerated metabolism to a certain extent, but also a result of their society. The goblin who can react swiftly to danger (real or imagined—mostly imagined) tends to be the goblin who lives to see another day.

One amusing side effect of their fast metabolism is the legendary goblin hunger. Goblins are voracious—not because of gluttony, per say, but simply because their bodies digest food with shocking speed. A goblin's life is usually one of constant hunger, since as a race they are not patient enough to fish or farm or hunt. Most of a goblin's food comes from raiding, and most goblin raids are fueled by little more than the constant quest for more food. In times of desperation, goblins can subsist on lichens, mushrooms, grass, and pine needles, but they find such food to be foul-tasting at best. Salty foods and meat are much preferred. Goblins usually enjoy cooked food better than raw (mostly because they like watching things burn), but often their hunger is at odds with their desires in this venue. Many goblins are particularly fond of pickled foods of any type. Soak anything in brine long enough and chances are a goblin eats it, given the chance.

Habitat & Society

Goblins have a fairly minimal impact on their environs, and actually have a relatively healthy respect for the natural world. Most goblins are quite gifted in seeing how their surroundings could be used as defenses for their lairs. Rather than clearing tangled undergrowth to make room for their homes, goblins instead make the thistles themselves their homes, settling into the undergrowth's natural animal trails and hollows. Caves are also popular lairs, both because they're easy to defend and because they provide so many handy places to hide. Often, goblin tribes can be found inside of larger buildings, stockades, and ruins—in most cases, these buildings are leftovers from previous inhabitants. Goblins only rarely build their own structures, but they do enjoy the comforts afforded by furniture and roofs and windows that can actually be closed, so when they find an out-of-the-way structure that suits their needs, they waste no time claiming it as a lair. In some cases, these buildings might still be inhabited—if goblins want a building hard enough, their desires can sometimes overcome their natural cowardice enough that they might even lay siege to such a site.

Goblins are gifted scavengers—this, combined with their fecundity and willingness to eat anything that even remotely smells like food, makes it easy for them to prosper in most any environment. Goblin tribes have been encountered in deserts, on glaciers, atop mountains, deep in jungles, and far underground. Yet given the choice, most goblins seem to prefer coastal environs for their lairs, likely due to their preference for heavy amounts of salt in their diet as much as for any other reason. While goblins are adept at hiding and possess some level of skill at disguising the entrances to their lairs, they generally don't understand the point of hygiene and sanitation. Perhaps because they're resistant to the more common forms of filth-associated disease, goblin lairs have a certain unmistakable odor about them—when seeking a goblin lair, it's usually best to follow the nose rather than the eyes.

Goblin tribes typically number only a few dozen. A tribe is led by a chieftain, and in the cases of tribes numbering more than two dozen, it often has several sub-chiefs as well, selected from the tribe's toughest warriors. The majority of the rest of the tribe squabbles and fights over pecking order, but the actual breakdown beyond sub-chief rarely amounts to anything more than which goblin happens to be loudest that particular day. Successful goblin tribes also incorporate mounts into their lairs—goblins are gifted riders, after all. Worgs and wolves are

Typical Goblin Distractions

Goblins have notoriously short attention spans, even at times when they should be concentrating and focused—like in the middle of combat. Feel free to have a goblin take actions during a fight that aren't the best choices—some of these actions might even provoke attacks of opportunity. As a general rule, a goblin shouldn't waste his turn more than once per combat, but having a host of goblins take strange actions during a fight goes a long way toward establishing their personality.

Several possible goblin distractions in the middle of a fight are given here. During combat, any given goblin might...

- Bend over to pull a fat earthworm form the ground, blow the dirt off it, and either stick it in a pocket or eat it.
- Take a full round to laugh at another goblin's misfortune.
- Attempt to grapple a foe who's obviously much stronger.
- Run a circle around a foe in a feeble attempt to attack from a direction the foe doesn't expect.
- Try to pickpocket another goblin, or attempt to bite another goblin's ear.
- Drop his weapon and furiously try to scratch his back.
- Cough out a wad of phlegm, spit it somewhere inappropriate, and then brag to another goblin about it.

classic goblin mounts, as are the rat-like goblin dogs, giant lizards, or even giant spiders. Yet for all their skill at riding, a goblin would never consider a horse or horselike creature as a mount. Goblins have a strange and irrational fear of horses, and most horses seem to realize this and antagonize goblins whenever the opportunity presents itself. Among most goblin tribes, "being stepped on by a horse" is the number one feared way to die.

The relationship between goblins and dogs deserves special mention as well. Logically, one might assume that a race that lives in close harmony with wolves, worgs, goblin dogs, and other relatives of canines would make for a natural ally to the common dog, but nothing could be further from the truth. Goblins hate dogs with a fierce and universal strength. As with horses, dogs seem to pick up on this hate and bark right back at goblins. To a goblin, a dog is the ultimate insult—a domestication of the raw power evident in their favored mounts. There's no surer way to insult a goblin than to call a wolf a dog. Often, goblin raids on human-held lands fail only because the goblins lose sight of their actual goals when they notice a few barking dogs on an outlying farm and sacrifice the element of surprise just to have a chance at killing a few dogs. Guard dogs are, as a result, popular pets in communities with known goblin problems.

Goblins live in constant fear—of dog attack, of rampaging horses, and of the daily possibility that a band of adventurers might discover their lair. This fear carries over into their religious beliefs—for a goblin, the one thing that can be counted on to offset these daily fears is the fear of divine retribution—most often delivered via the weapons and magic of the tribe's shamans and priests. Larger goblin tribes almost always have favored deities that they venerate—sometimes a demon lord or arch devil, but usually one of the various deities of the relatively small goblin pantheon.

Smaller goblin tribes often lack members capable of becoming actual priests, yet even in these tribes religion holds an important role. It is that situation which gave rise to tales of goblins worshiping stumps that look sort of like monster faces, patches of mold on the wall that could might be mistaken for a three-armed goblin, or even the bones of some large creature that dwelt in their cave before they moved in. Although humorous and ridiculous to most other races, this crude form of animism seems to serve smaller goblin tribes well—fear that the Monster Stump might be behind the unexplained midnight disappearance of the last chieftain works just as well whether or not the stump actually ate him or he was secretly assassinated by a goblin witty enough to come up with the story.

Although a significant portion of a goblin's life is spent raiding other tribes or nearby humanoid settlements for food, goblins don't spend all of their waking hours at war. In fact, left to their own devices, goblins are generally content to stay within the bounds of their territories—food shortages and the meddling of more powerful individuals seeking to use the tribes as private armies are the typical reasons behind goblin raids. Goblins who aren't worried about where their next meal comes from can be quite creative in finding ways to entertain themselves. Goblin games tend to focus on cruelty and sadism as core concepts—the suffering of creatures smaller than them is a surefire way to mirth in goblin society, and most of their games involve using small animals in key roles. Fire is also a common entertainment in goblin society—the dancing of flames is a constant source of interest to them, and in many tribes, arson is considered an art form. To the untrained eye, a goblin's fascination with fire might seem to be a recipe for disaster, but goblins have such a deep respect for fire that they very rarely accidentally burn things down. In fact, many goblins consider it a mark of pride to be able to wrap a prisoner in dry leaves, light him up, then watch as the prisoner tries frantically to put himself out while not being able to actually spread the fire to the surroundings.

Yet cruelty and fire aren't the only goblin pastimes. Perhaps their least destructive form of entertainment is song—goblins actually have rather good singing voices, and their songs are catchy and memorable. Yet while the act of singing isn't destructive, the topics of their songs invariably are, with subjects like raiding, dog killing, arson, and torture being classic favorites. Goblin bards

are of well thought in tribes, and those tribes that count among them skilled war chanters are generally the more dangerous in battle, for a rousing song is an excellent way to distract a goblin from being afraid of what he should be afraid of.

No two goblin songs from different tribes are ever quite exactly alike, though, and with good reason: No goblin has ever written down a song. Perhaps one of their strangest quirks, goblins are profoundly suspicious of writing. A few scholars believe this strange fear is some sort of deep racial memory of the original barghests exiled in goblin form to the Material Plane, for that story tells that each barghest was required by Asmodeus to sign away his true name (and all his resulting power) to a twitching scroll of haghide, and in so doing consigned himself to exile. Whatever the source of this fear, most goblins believe that writing down words steals them out of your head—you can't get them back. Writing down a goblin's name is a surefire way to send the little monster into a blind frenzy of fear and panic.

Campaign Role

Goblins make great "first monsters" for a campaign. Not only are they relatively weak and easy to kill, they're lunatics. You can have a goblin "waste" actions in combat, which not only helps to make the game more entertaining, but gives 1st-level characters an even greater advantage over them. And those poor 1st-level characters need all the help they can get.

Although the rules of the game certainly support concepts like goblin arch-villains, you should generally try to resist the urge to make a 15th-level goblin assassin or a 20th-level goblin necromancer. Not only does it stretch credulity to have a goblin much higher level than 5th level (that goblin better be one bad-ass menace to live that long!), but goblins are so iconically the chumps of the game that it just feels a little strange to run into one that can go toe-to-toe with a dragon or a pit fiend. Players want to be facing "real" monsters once they're high level, after all. Now, that's not to say you should *never* build a high-level goblin—but really, that's only a stunt you should pull once per campaign.

Treasure

Goblins aren't picky about their treasure. In fact, they often don't really understand what constitutes treasure in the first place. To most goblins, the shinier something is, the more valuable it must be—it's not uncommon to see a goblin lair's treasury to be filled with polished but poor-quality weapons and bits of scrap metal, while a crooked wooden *wand of stoneskin* might be regulated to the ignominious role of back scratcher or baby poker. Goblins don't help their treasuries much with their habits of scavenging the junkyards and garbage heaps of nearby humanoids. Granted, most goblin tribes can make an old bent dagger or a torn bit of saddle go a long way—most of their armor and weapons are made of scavenged refuse, after all—but in the long run, garbage is mostly just that.

The true treasure in a goblin tribe invariably resides with the chieftain. Often, a chieftain squirrels away stashes of treasure in secret areas of the lair, hoping to keep his best baubles and magic trinkets safe from his minions. Sometimes, a chieftain forgets where he hid his last stash—more often, he gets deposed by a younger upstart who has no idea where the previous chieftain hid his goods. As a result, goblin lairs tend to look fairly ramshackle and run-down, yet the canny adventurer who knows where to look can often find a surprising amount of wealth hidden away under rocks, in hollow logs, buried in the dirt, or stuffed inside the previous chieftain's skull.

Goblin Variants

Goblins are but one of three elements of goblinoid kind—the race also includes hobgoblins and bugbears. Both of these races are more powerful and more dangerous than their goblin kin, and both tend to look down on goblins—hobgoblins see them as little better than vermin, suitable only for the most undesirable jobs in society and war, while bugbears find them endlessly amusing and too tiny to take seriously. The ironic part is that goblins were here

Goblin Deities

Barring simple animism and druidic tradition, the following five deities are the ones most often worshiped by goblins.

Deity	AL	Portfolios	Domains	Favored Weapon
Hadregash	LE	Goblin supremacy, slavery, territory	Law, Evil, War	flail
Lamashtu	CE	Madness, monsters, nightmares	Chaos, Evil, Madness, Strength, Trickery	falchion
Venkelvore	NE	Famine, graves, torture	Death, Destruction, Evil	spear
Zarongel	NE	Dog killing, fire, mounted combat	Animal, Fire, Travel	dogslicer
Zogmugot	CE	Drowning, flotsam, scavenging	Chaos, Trickery, Water	sickle

first—both hobgoblins and bugbears developed after the first goblin tribes appeared in the world.

Yet the goblin race itself is far more complex than even this. In the extremes of the world, goblins forced from their ancestral homes by war or expansions from other, more powerful cultures must live in places other societies avoid. Glacial rifts at the edge of storm-haunted frozen seas, parched and searing deserts, or even the lightless deep of the world below become the homes of these displaced goblin tribes. Over the course of several short generations spent in these rugged regions—it takes a surprisingly short time for such a tribe to change—the hardiest goblins survive and pass on their traits to their offspring. An arctic goblin is furrier than its kin, covered with white hair that grants it cold resistance 5. Those who seek shelter in the endless caverns of the deep underworld grow large bulbous eyes that grant darkvision out to 120 feet and long spidery limbs that give them a +5 racial bonus on Climb checks. At their core, though, these subraces retain most of the traits that make goblins goblins.

Goblins in Golarion

The goblins of Golarion worship a small pantheon of deities. Their religions teach that, in the beginning, there was Lamashtu. As the mother of monsters and beasts, she saw the creatures known as barghests as slaves to the devils of the Outer Rifts. She saw promise in their bestial form, yet shackled as they were to their devilish masters, they were hobbled. Lamashtu, in goblin myth, stole into Asmodeus's barghest kennel and rescued the four most promising, fleeing with them to the Material Plane, where she set them loose on the western coast of Avistan to hide and wait for Asmodeus' wrath to fade. Of the four barghests, handsome Hadregash was the strongest and the greatest leader. Obese Venkelvore was perhaps the most beautiful of the barghests—she was Hadregash's consort. Zarongel was blessed with fire for hair and alone among the exiled barghests retained a portion of his wolflike body after Lamashtu snatched them away from Asmodeus. Finally, there was keen-eyed Zogmugot (who was ugly even for a goblin), the most gifted at scavenging treasures from the land.

These four powerful barghests quickly noticed that when they killed creatures native to this realm, the spilled blood gave birth to smaller versions of themselves—goblins. Each of the barghests set about building small armies of followers in their own way. Hadregash was the most successful, and he organized his goblins into tribes to serve his needs. Venkelvore's ravenous hunger made keeping her goblins alive difficult, for they rarely had enough food and often starved. Zarongel's goblins fared little better, for he dwelt in a region infested with wild dogs, beasts that found the taste of goblins delicious. Poor Zogmugot, so obsessed with what washed up on the shore, found that many of her goblins drowned before they figured out that they could not breathe water.

Eventually Asmodeus grew tired of his search and gave up on the four stolen barghests. The Mother of Monsters created a realm for the four barghests above her rift in the outer spheres, a place she called Basalfeyst, and it was to here she brought them. In return for this new home, all she asked of them was the loyalty of the hordes of goblins they left upon the world.

So it is that today most goblins venerate Lamashtu as their primary deity. The four barghests became gods and goddesses in their own right, but even they acknowledge Lamashtu as their true mother. Recently, though, rumors have surfaced of heretic tribes who worship one of the barghests exclusively, who seek to elevate their chosen deity above his kin and even above Lamashtu herself. The mother of monsters doubtless knows of these heretics, but as of yet she has made no move to oppose them—perhaps they work according to her hidden goals?

Goblin Names

Goblins have characteristically mean-spirited naming conventions, usually employing one of their language's hundreds of curse words or combinations of crudely funny noises.

Male: Chuff, Churkus, Drubbus, Gawg, Ghorg, Irnk, Kavak, Lunthus, Mogawg, Murch, Pogus, Ronk, Unk, Vogun, Zord

Female: Aka, Chee, Fevva, Gretcha, Janka, Klongy, Lupi, Medge, Namby, Olba, Rempy, Ruxi, Vruta, Yalla, Ziku

GOBLIN

This small creature stands about three feet in height, yet its elliptical head is almost comically oversized for its gangly physique. Its eyes are set wide apart—tiny red beads in a wrinkled face that almost seem too eager to reflect firelight. Just below is a wide maw full of tiny, sharp teeth. The creature is of green-gray hue, dressed in cast-off bits of scavenged refuse and hand-me-downs, right down to its sword—a long jagged piece of broken metal that it waves about menacingly.

GOBLIN **CR 1/3**

Goblin warrior 1

NE Small humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +3, Spot +3

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 14
(+2 armor, +1 Dexterity, +1 shield, +1 size)

hp 5 (1d8+1)

Fort +3, **Ref** +1, **Will** –1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee dogslicer +2 (1d4/19–20)

TACTICS

During Combat Goblins prefer to attack in groups, preferably so that a single target can be attacked by at least two (four is better) goblins at once. Not only does this allow the goblins to enjoy flanking bonuses, but it lessens the odds for any one goblin to be attacked in return, giving those goblins not attacked a better chance to run in terror when their enemy fights back. Only when faced with truly hated enemies (typically dwarves and gnomes) does a goblin's natural cowardice go away.

Morale Goblins are brave only when they outnumber foes at least two to one. Often, a goblin gives up the fight after even taking one hit, assuming he survives the blow. Against foes who use horses or dogs, goblins typically flee at once, hoping for tougher goblins to step in to save the day.

STATISTICS

Str 11, **Dex** 13, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +1; **Grp** –3

Feats Alertness

Skills Hide +7, Listen +3, Move Silently +5, Ride +7, Spot +3

Languages Common, Goblin

Gear leather armor, light shield, dogslicer

"Catch a snake and flick its head,
Throw it in the halfling's bed
Snake gets angry, BITE, BITE, BITE!
Stupid halfling wakes up dead!"
—Training chant for goblin commandos (Ninth Verse)

THE GOBLIN SONG

GOBLINS CHEW AND GOBLINS BITE.
GOBLINS CUT AND GOBLINS FIGHT.
STAB THE DOG AND CUT THE HORSE,
GOBLINS EAT AND TAKE BY FORCE!

GOBLINS RACE AND GOBLINS JUMP.
GOBLINS SLASH AND GOBLINS BUMP.
BURN THE SKIN AND MASH THE HEAD,
GOBLINS HERE AND YOU BE DEAD!

CHASE THE BABY, CATCH THE PUP.
BONK THE HEAD TO SHUT IT UP.
BONES BE CRACKED, FLESH BE STEWED,
WE BE GOBLINS! YOU BE FOOD!

Legends of the Golem

A Breath of Life in Clay

By Ross Byers

"They are not men. They are better than men! They are untiring workers, obedient servants, and eternal guardians. They are my legacy."

—Aris the Golemwright

"You want to go traipsing around in some forsaken crypt, fighting goblins, seeking treasure, that sort of thing? Lemme give you a piece of advice, kid: never trust statues."

—Drogar, a retired adventurer

A golem is a magical wonder, known by its creators as a marvel of elemental magics and by its foes as an unstoppable juggernaut. Now golems are legend, and countless mages and holy men have dedicated their lives to the study and creation of these constructs. But the first of them was something special.

Origins: the First Golem

Golems are a wholly artificial race, so their origins involve the work of men, not gods.

It is said that at the dawn of creation, the gods molded the first mortal races from the base materials of the world. Dwarves were sculpted from the solidity of stone, their hearts full of forge-sparks. Elves were carved from living wood, their souls filled with the wind and the sky. Lizardfolk were elevated from the simple creatures that already crawled across the surface of the world. The races of men, however, had no single benefactor and—made of humble, shapeless clay—were given spirits consisting of all the elements, allowing both their lives and destiny to be of their own making.

This legend inspired Father Marcello Joirus to create the first golem. A master of healing and other life-giving magic, he sought an understanding of the gods and, perhaps, the attainment of a bit of divinity for himself. Joirus believed that creation is the fundamental act of divinity. He worked tirelessly for years, researching the nature of life itself and the function of the soul. He conferred with the most righteous priests, the most brilliant sages, and the wisest druids and hermits. He concluded that every living creature was composed of all elements and that the soul was a reflection of this mixed composition. Therefore, he could construct a soul out of elemental essences. Since the purpose of a soul is to bring vitality to its vessel, Joirus reasoned that he need not craft a full body of flesh if he could keep the soul from departing a vessel.

In imitation of the making of humankind, Joirus brought together a great mass of virgin clay and spoke over it words of great power. He shaped the clay into the form of a man, and as his words infused it with the semblance of life and a soul, he anointed it with sacramental oils and wines to seal the ersatz soul-essence within the vessel.

Before long, the clay effigy rose from

where it lay, and Joirus named it after himself, as he would any natural-born son. Joirus was overjoyed. His 'son' was stronger than any man, and would perform any task he asked without error or hesitation. While the creature was mute and lacked any intelligence or initiative, so was a newborn baby, so Joirus assumed that in time it would learn and grow in time, like any living being.

As time passed, though, Joirus became more and more disappointed in his creation. It never seemed to learn, not even through coaching and repetition of simple tasks. The priest realized that he had created a mindless hulk, little better than zombies that are forced into a semblance of life with the trapping of their once-living souls.

It would be necessary to start over.

But when Joirus tried to destroy the clay man, he discovered it was immune to both his blows and all the heavenly power he could summon. Eventually, in desperate anger, he ordered the hulk to leave and never return. Obedient as ever, the thing walked off into the distance, never to be seen again.

Joirus made no secret of his work: the creation of a soul was a great theological puzzle and his primary goal. However, those he consulted were far less picky, and it was not long before many others built upon his works to produce their own golems as servants, temple guards, and status symbols. Some of these creations broke free of their masters' control and rampaged with berserk fury until they destroyed themselves, proving the imperfection of Joirus' creation.

Joirus could only shake his head.

Arcane Imitators

Once it became known that the golems of clay were not truly divine creations, countless young mages turned their will toward improving on Joiru's designs. They were soon disappointed to discover that their eldritch magics could not bind a soul-essence within an artificial body.

One particularly gifted, if amoral, wizard decided that if an artificial body would not suffice, then perhaps a natural one would. Flesh, after all, is naturally meant to contain a soul. After a few failed experiments, he and his cohorts brought to life an artificial being composed of once-living human remains.

Hailed as a marvel, the stitched man became an object of intense study. And while this golem eventually ran amok during a trial, information gleaned from its creation (and destruction) allowed mages to instill soul-essences in more perfect, more durable forms of stone and steel.

Physiology

Golems have wildly varying physiology, since their basic physical makeup is dependent on their maker's whim. Golems share the same basic design, consisting of a roughly humanoid shape made of a base material and, usually, with no actual moving parts beyond simple joints. But the physical build of golems is not their defining trait. Golems are unified by the nature of their magical construction.

The motivating spirit of a golem is a synthetic soul forged from elemental essences. While it is commonly believed to simply be an earth spirit, this is merely an oldwives' tale brought on by the solid and earthy nature of a golem's body. Like most living creatures, a golem's soul-essence is made of equal parts of all elements. Unlike a true soul forged by a divine source, however, the different elements are not fully merged with one another as they are in a true soul. It is this incompleteness that deprives a golem of free will and leaves it completely suggestible to the will of its master.

Generally speaking, a soul requires a living (or at least undying) vessel to reside in. The natural action of a soul placed in dead matter is to depart, in a similar manner to how a man's soul deserts the body upon death. Powerful magic is required to bind a golem's essence within its body as it forms a semi-permeable membrane and creates extradimensional space within the body of the golem.

These containing magics grant golems their nigh-invulnerability to both physical attacks and magical effects of all kinds. The binding magic that holds a golem's soul together also binds its body, strengthening the material such that ordinary weapons cannot reliably damage it, and the same magics that safeguard the soul-essence within also keep other magical forces out.

In practical terms, golems have a skintight antimagic field. Only spells that directly affect its elemental essence can penetrate that field. Of course, certain types of magical energy can also pass through the field and be directly absorbed by the elemental essence. Mundane versions of the same energies are not transmuted in this manner. That is, an iron golem may gain energy from being struck by a *fireball* but will melt in a blacksmith's forge as easily as any heap of steel.

The Wakening

Golems have a reputation for breaking free of external control, becoming uncontrollable berserk monsters. While this reputation is well-deserved, it is not entirely true. A golem is a blank slate and bears no inherent malice toward anything.

The elemental forces that make up a golem's soul-essence can spontaneously fuse, transforming the soul-essence into a proper soul. Usually, this effect is temporary: the golem continues to follow its programmed functions and the soul breaks up again. If this 'awakening' occurs in a threatening or strenuous situation, however, the newborn soul can snap to awareness, reacting on a primitive level to destroy the threat. Even once the immediate threat is destroyed, the only thing the waking golem has known in its exceedingly short life is fear and violence, and it will continue to attack anything and everything nearby. In exercising its newfound free will, the golem cements the existence of its soul.

Left unmolested, the rampage will eventually run its course. After a few days, a berserk golem will give pause as its primitive mind realizes it has

choices other than destruction and violence. Over the course of several weeks, the golem gains a mind equal to that of a man, although an ignorant one. An intelligence emerges, and its inherent wisdom and charisma are further developed: each of its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores becomes equal to 3d6, and it gains feats and skills according to its hit dice. This can result in a reduction of an awakened golem's wisdom score. The golem's memories and personality vary wildly from case to case. Some recall nothing before their berserk rampage. Some remember even less. For others, their previous life as an automaton is remembered only in glimmers of previous waking. Some flesh golems even inherit some of the memories and personality traits of their 'donors'.

An awakened golem understands the language of its creator, plus additional languages its creator knew as determined by its new intelligence score. A recently awakened golem may still have trouble learning to speak or articulate itself, and golems crafted without a mouth may never be able to speak at all. A character with the Craft Construct feat can grant a mute golem a mouth with which to speak by spending one day and 50 gp/HD of the golem.

Psychology and Society

Golems have no minds to speak of. They merely carry out their most recent order until given a new one. Even an inactive golem is following the order, "Go, and wait over there." Likewise, they have no society and merely serve whatever purpose their master designates for them.

Awakened golems have minds, but each is tempered by a unique creation and history. Two men from opposite sides of the world will think more similarly than two awakened golems. However, since almost all awakened golems are born from violence, they do tend to share a distrust of men. Golems recall them only as enemies intent on destroying them and men in turn view golems as dangerous monsters.

Awakened golems are exceedingly rare, and as a result, they do not form societies. Usually, they either hide from civilization or integrate themselves within another society in a similar manner to a gray render by bonding with and protecting another creature. Occasionally an awakened golem will seek to wake more of his "brethren" to build a colony of free-willed constructs. Thus far however, these occurrences have all inevitably failed when one of the golems turns to violence against humanity, resulting in the group's dissolution or even extermination.

Creating Golems

Creating golems is an ancient practice, and by now, countless formulas for creating golems exist as practitioners tinker by improving older recipes or attempt to fill in the missing pieces. The resulting golems differ in the nature of the binding magic needed for the golem's soul-essence.

In all cases, the body must be crafted from the best materials available, lest the enchantments simply fail for the same reasons a common sword cannot be enchanted.

Variant Golems

While the commonly known golems are certainly the most tried and true formulas, these are not the only paths to making a golem. Presented below are variants on the most common golem varieties. Except as described, they are the same as their more ordinary counterparts.

Barrier Golem

Stone golems are frequently designated as the guardians of arcane complexes and other important sites. Barrier golems are built almost exclusively for this task, especially when it is necessary to keep something in, rather than keeping others out. Where ordinary stone golems can slow their foes down, a barrier golem can stop them entirely.

Barrier golems lack a stone golem's *slow* ability.

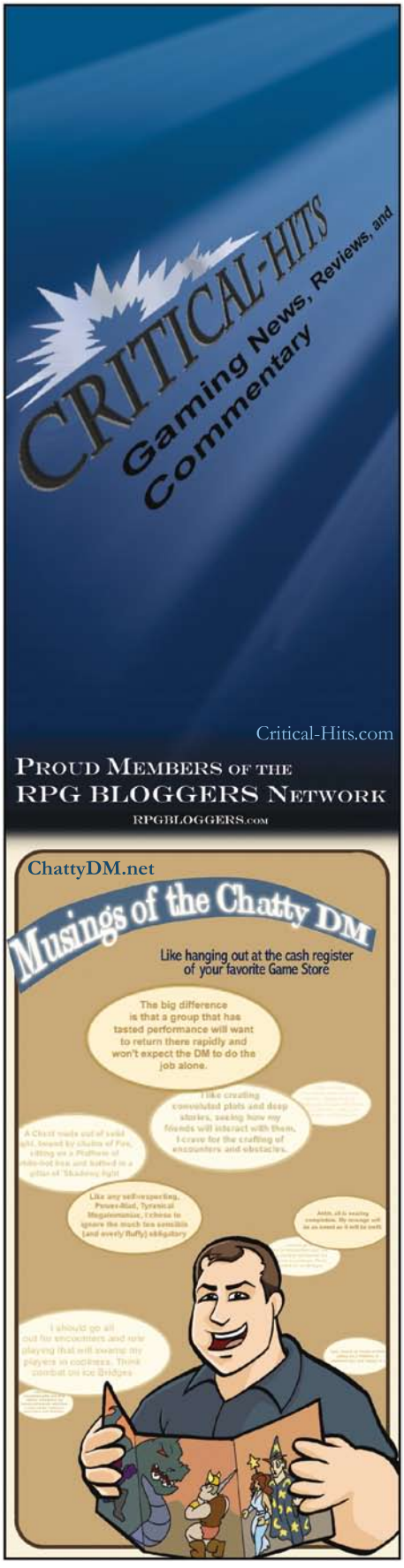
Wall of Force (Sp) Every 1d4+1 rounds, a barrier golem may use *wall of force* as a spell-like ability at CL 5th.

CL 16th; Craft Construct, *antimagic field*, *geas/quest*, *wall of force*, *symbol of stunning*, caster must be at least 16th level; Price 100,000 gp; Cost 55,000 gp + 3,800 XP.

A barrier golem is CR 13.

Forge Golems

These iron golems are created by dwarf magesmiths and major artificers' guilds. Designed to help forge massive metal objects, their hands resemble massive hammers. Instead of breathing poisonous gas, the forge golem can spout fire for heating the metal it is working or



Golem Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge (arcana) can learn more about golems. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

DC	Result
10	Golems are powerful constructs animated by elemental forces with bodies constructed of various materials.
15	A golem's unique construction shields it from the effects of most magic, and they can sometimes absorb the energies of a magical attack.
20	A golem's body is also strengthened by its magical bindings. Only weapons forged of adamantine can reliably pierce their hides.
25	The elemental spirit that animates a golem is imperfect and incomplete. Golems have been known to break their controlling bindings and go on a berserk rampage of destruction.
30	Golems that go berserk are actually developing free will. Given time, they can gain a real personality.

incinerating its foes. Forge golems are particularly dangerous in groups as their fiery breath can heal each other.

Forge golems lack an iron golem's breath weapon.

Breath Weapon (Su) A forge golem may breathe a 10-ft. cube gout of fire as a free action once every 1d4+1 rounds. It deals 10d6 fire damage. Reflex DC 19 negates. The save DC is Constitution-based.

CL 16; Craft Construct, w*all of fire*, *geas/quest*, *limited wish*; Price 150,000 gp; Cost 80,000 gp + 5,600 XP.

Warden Golems

Clerics of oppressed religions occasionally create golems to protect their people from harassment and mob violence. Since a clay golem's unsubtle ways are not ideal for this situation, warden golems were created that can walk through the marketplace unseen.

Warden golems lack a clay golem's *haste* ability.

Invisibility (Su) As a full-round action, a warden golem can cloak itself from view as if by *invisibility*. This lasts as long as the golem maintains concentration and ends when the golem stops concentrating. The warden golem may only affect itself in this manner.

Berserk (Ex) A warden golem has an increased chance of going berserk. It has a cumulative 2% chance of going berserk each round of combat.

CL 11; Craft Construct, *animate objects*, *invisibility, commune*, *resurrection*; Price 40,000 gp; Cost 21,500 gp + 1,540 XP.

Death Golems

A favored creation of necromantic golemwrights, a death golem is a flesh golem made from the parts of zombies and other undead, rather than normal corpses. Death golems lack the muscular vitality of fresher golems, but more than make up for it with a life-sapping touch.

A death golem's Strength score is 16. (This replaces the flesh golem's Strength of 21.) Other stats are not affected.

Energy Drain (Su) Living creatures hit by a death golem's slam attack gain one negative level. The DC is 9 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based. For each such negative level bestowed, the golem gains 5 temporary hit points.

CL 8; Craft Construct, *animate dead*, *enervation, geas/quest*, *limited wish*; Price 20,000 gp; Cost 10,500 gp + 780 XP.

Other Constructs

Spellcasters of all stripes practice golem crafting, and a wide variety of golems exist. Druids have even been known to create golems of wood or soil. Additionally, spellcasters have developed other constructs as well. Unlike golems, these constructs lack anything resembling a soul although some of them have minds of their own, such as homunculi. Even the fire-hearted brass men lack souls of their own, being powered instead by enslaved efreet.

Only the mysterious inevitables seem to possess souls and minds of

their own (though some might argue that they are so purpose-driven as to lack free will), but they are not created by mortal hands. Many an aspiring golemwright has sought to dismantle an inevitable to learn its secrets. Some have even captured one, but thus far, the details of their power remain hidden to mortals.

History of the Golem

The term *golem* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "unfinished." In this use, Adam was the first golem, created by God from the dust of the Earth. (Adam ceased to be a golem when God gave him a soul.) In Jewish folklore, holy men gained a portion of God's power, and the wisest and most powerful rabbis could bring life to the lifeless, using knowledge from the *Sefer Yetzira* (or the Book of Formation). Some even used this ability to create calves, which they slaughtered and ate. However, unlike God, they could not create a being with a soul: only animals or soulless golems. Animating a golem this way required the use of holy words, frequently the names of God, both as part of the ritual and as part of the golem itself.

Creating anything in this way required utmost purity: clean white vestments (discarded afterward); virgin, untilled earth; and clear, fresh rainwater. Any impurity and the creation would fail.

Owning a golem servant was seen as a great honor, because it proved closeness with God. Golems, however, were still viewed as dangerous since they lacked souls, and their intelligence was quite limited and literal.

Golems were usually visually indistinct from real humans, only being discerned by their lack of intelligence and inability to speak.

The Golem of Prague

The best known of the golem legends is that of the golem of Prague. As the story goes, in 1580, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II issued an edict expelling the Jews from Prague. Rabbi Judah Loew the Maharal received a vision, telling him how to create a golem to protect his people. He carved the golem's body from the clay bank of the Vltava River. Loew called on his fellow rabbis Isaac Ha-Cohen and Jecob Ha-Levi to assist him: Cohen was born under the sign of fire, while Levi was born under the sign of water. As Loew himself was born under the sign of air, together with the earth of the body, they represented all four necessary elements. Loew and his assistants performed the ritual, carving the word '*Emet*', meaning 'truth', into the golem's forehead as the final step.

The golem, named Yosele, was tasked with protecting the Jews of the Prague ghetto. This it did, but over time, Yosele became more powerful, and more violent. Its magical powers included invisibility, a burning touch, and the ability to summon the spirits of the dead. Eventually, the Golem began attacking Christians indiscriminately (and in some versions, it attacked the Jews or even the Maharal as well).

In light of the terror and destruction wrought by the golem, the Emperor begged Rabbi Loew to destroy Yosele Golem, promising that the violence and harassment of the Jews would stop. The Golem having served its purpose, Loew accepted the offer. He went to Yosele and wiped the first letter from its clay forehead, transforming 'Emet' into 'Met', meaning 'death'. The golem fell still, and the rabbi hid its body in a coffin in the attic of the Old New Synagogue in Prague and banned anyone else from entering the room.

According to legend, the body lies there to this day, ready to rise if it is ever again needed. Indeed, some credit the golem with protecting the synagogue during the Nazi occupation of Prague.

Other Golems

Rabbi Elijah of Chelm, a contemporary of Rabbi Loew, is also said to have created a golem. Elijah's golem was activated with the name of God and grew larger and more powerful each day. Eventually, the golem grew so

large that Elijah feared it would be too large for his house and deactivated it. The golem was nearly too tall for Elijah to reach the name on its forehead. The deactivated golem then fell onto Elijah, scarring his face.

In other versions of the story, Elijah is killed by the falling golem. Since one of this golem's duties was to defend Jews from beatings in the marketplace, the Golem of Chelm may have inspired the legend of the Golem of Prague.

Legends of the golem inspired many, and variations appear in Goethe's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Meyrink's *The Golem*, Capek's *Rossum's Universal Robots*, Pratchett's Discworld series, and Steven's "Ecology of the Homunculus" (*Kobold Quarterly* #5).

Marcello the Mendicant

An awakened clay golem lives as a hermit on the outskirts of a small village. Hiding his form under a great hooded cloak, most of the townsfolk assume he is an outcast ogre or hill giant. They also know he can fix anything and answer impossible questions.

Marcello spends his time meditating on creation and on the mysteries of life. Known as a scholar, he receives visitors seeking knowledge or specially crafted items. While he speaks readily about theology and arcana in a booming voice, he guards his privacy carefully, not wanting to become a curiosity himself. Instead, he lets people believe that he is some kind of giant, ogre, or ogre magi. When a visitor earns his trust, he casts off his cloak, revealing his earthy complexion and great expressive face. To these people, he claims to be the first golem of them all.

Marcello Joirus, CR 15

Male-identified awakened clay golem cleric 9
NG Large construct
Init -1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +3, Spot +3
Aura aura of good

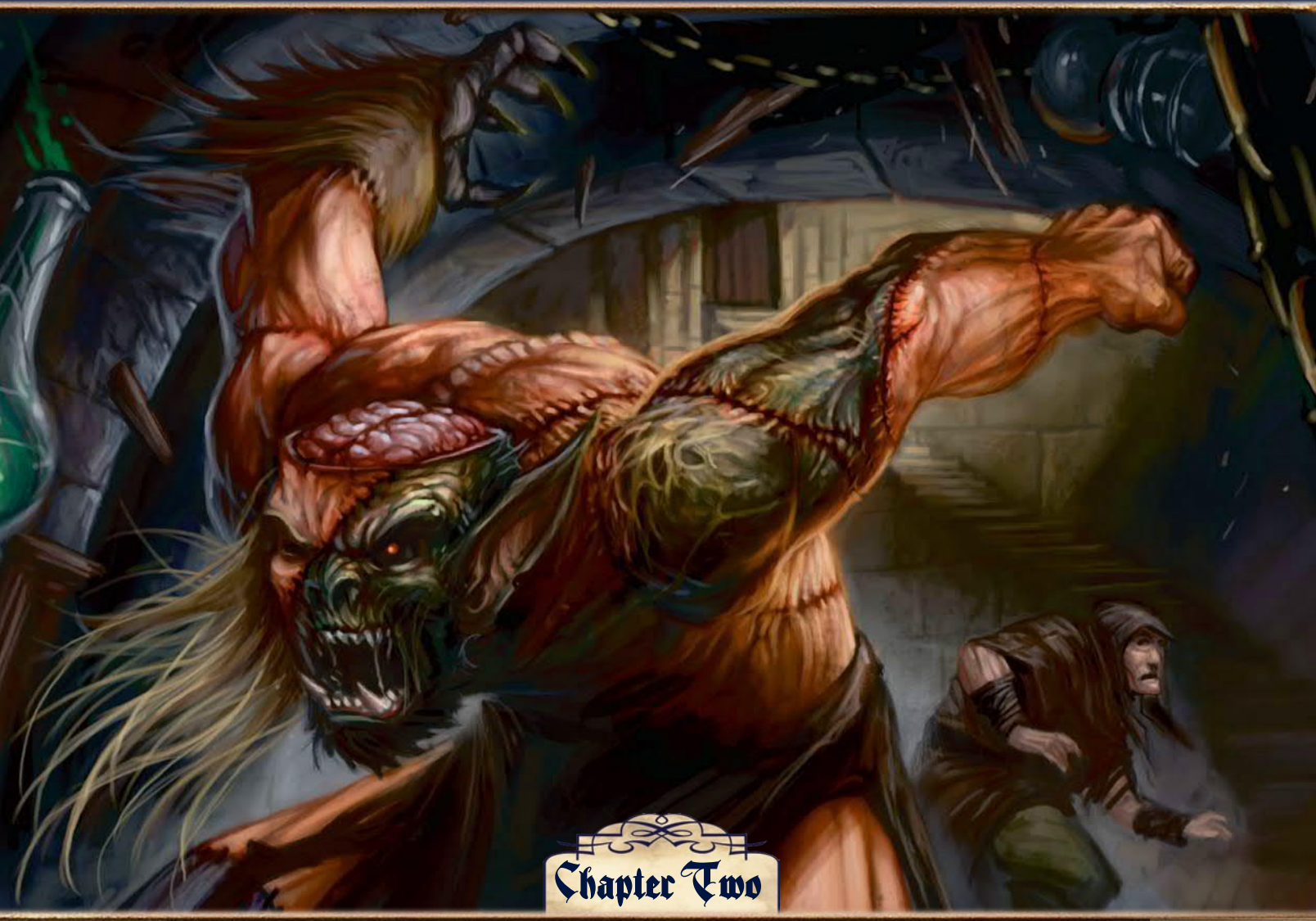
DEFENSE
AC 25 *[27]*, touch 11, flat-footed 25 *[27]*
(*[+2 armor]*, +3 deflection, -1 Dex, +14 natural, -1 size)
hp 130 (11d10+9d8+30); *[9 Temporary Hit Points]*
Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +12
Defensive Abilities immunity to magic; **DR** 10/adamantine and bludgeoning; **Immune** construct traits

OFFENSE
Speed 20 ft.
Melee 2 slams +21 *[+26]* (4d8+7 *[4d8 + 10]* and cursed wound)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks cursed wound, turn undead 4/day
Spells Prepared (CL 9th):
5th—*fabricate*^{D}*, slay living* (DC 18)
4th—*divination, divine power*, *minor creation*^{D}
3rd—*bestow curse* (DC 16)*, create food and water*^{D}*, magic vestment, meld into stone, stone shape*
2nd—*enthrall* (DC 15), *hold person* (DC 15), *make whole, shatter* (DC 15), *wood shape*^{D}*, zone of truth* (DC 15)
1st—*animate rope*^{D}, *command* (DC 14)*, comprehend languages, doom* (DC 14), *magic stone* (x2)
0—*create water, detect magic, light, mending* (x3)
D Domain Spell; **Domains** Artifice, Creation; conjuration (creation) spells cast +3 CL

TACTICS
Before Combat If Marcello expects a fight, he uses *magic vestment* on his cloak or breeches, and uses *divine power* to enhance his already formidable physical prowess. These effects are reflected in the bracketed statistics.
During Combat Marcello relies on his natural resilience to protect himself while using disabling spells like *bestow curse* and *hold person* to end fights with a minimum of mortality. If dropped below half hit points, he "takes the gloves off" and lashes out using *slay living* and his fists.
Morale If Marcello believes he may be destroyed (below quarter hit points), he will flee or surrender.

STATISTICS
Str 25 *[31]*, **Dex** 9, **Con** —, **Int** 11, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 13
Base Atk +15 *[+17]*; **Grp** +26 *[+28]*
Feats Craft Construct, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Forge Ring, Improved Natural Attack (slam), Scribe Scroll
Skills Craft (sculpture) +8, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (religion) +10
Languages Common
SQ aura of good, *haste,* spontaneous casting (cure spells)
Combat Gear *ring of protection +3, ring of free movement, scroll of raise dead*; **Other Gear** 50 ft. of hemp rope, common cloak and breeches, masterwork smith's tools

SPECIAL ABILITIES
Aura of Good (Ex) Marcello radiates a strong aura of good.
Cursed Wound (Ex) The wounds left by Marcello's slam attacks do not heal naturally and resist healing spells. A character attempting to cast a conjuration (healing) spell on a creature damaged the way must succeed on a DC 26 caster level check, or the spell has no effect on the injured character.
Domains (Ex) The Artifice and Creation domains grant Marcello a +4 bonus on all Craft checks and allow him to cast all conjuration (creation) spells at +3 caster level.
Haste (Su) After 1 round of combat, Marcello can *haste* himself once per day as a free action for 3 rounds.
Immunity to Magic (Ex) Marcello is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against him.
A *move earth* spell drives him back 120 feet and deals 3d12 points of damage.
A *disintegrate* spell slows him (as the *slow* spell) for 1d6 rounds and deals 1d12 points of damage.
An *earthquake* spell cast directly at Marcello stops it from moving on its next turn and deals 5d10 points of damage. He gets no saving throw against any of these effects.
Any magical acid damage heals 1 point of damage for every 3 hp damage it would otherwise deal. If this healing would lead Marcello to exceed his full normal hit points, he gains any excess as temporary hit points. He gets no saving throw against magical attacks that deal acid damage.
Turn or Rebuke Undead (Su) Marcello may attempt to turn undead 4 times per day. He gains a +2 bonus on turning checks because of his ranks in Knowledge (religion).



Chapter Two

Flesh Golem

Soon my beloved Elsa will once more lie in my arms. After her untimely death, I have finally found a way for my love to rejoin me. Unfortunately, by the time I was able to recover her body from the priests, she had already begun to display the ravages of decay. I was only able to rescue her head and most of her lissome torso, but I have found replacements for what she lost. I have depleted my inheritance purchasing the alchemical unguents needed to treat her delicate skin, but I have stitched the parts together with loving care, and I can honestly say that her beauty is still as rare as when her cheeks yet bloomed with life. All that remains is to add the final spark that will return her to life. Tonight we shall be reunited!

—Final entry in the journal of Dr. Septimus Thesiger

Towering monstrosities of stolen, necrotic body parts, flesh golems are neither alive, dead, nor undead. Instead, they are lifeless constructs, given a spark of lifelike mobility through the animating spirit of a bound elemental. Though weaker than their counterparts of clay, stone, and iron, flesh golems nevertheless possess a horror all their own, as they are composed of the mismatched limbs and pieces of multiple humanoid cadavers.

Utterly mindless, flesh golems have no independent thoughts or emotions and are completely beholden to their creators. While incapable of strategy or tactics, they prove tenacious, implacable foes, explicitly following the commands they are given. Flesh golems obey their last instructions until the task is completed, whether that be to attack, guard a room, or kill all creatures that enter. Only its creator's command, or the golem's total destruction, can stop it from fulfilling its orders.

But flesh golems have a shortcoming as well. Under the stress of combat, many types of golems can go on a berserk rampage, caused by the elemental spirit within the golem as it struggles against its bonds. In flesh golems, however, this berserk frenzy usually has another source. While the golem's creation rituals firmly bind the elemental spirit in place, they have no such power over the angry spirits of the bodies used in the golem's construction. Outraged over the misuse of their stolen flesh, these spirits can usurp control of the golem, sending it into an uncontrolled, destructive rage. Only when the spirits have vented their fury can the golem's creator once more assert his command over the monster.

Rarely, flesh golems have been known to gain some measure of consciousness after going berserk. These exceptional specimens become gifted with a simple intelligence, and often rebel more purposefully against their masters. Such awakened golems are typically destroyed by their creators, but occasionally one escapes to make a life for itself, usually somewhere beyond the bounds of civilization.

Flesh golems are usually crafted by powerful wizards with the help of potent magics and rare alchemical or pseudo-scientific processes, although the common methods are well known and instructions can easily be found in assorted texts, including magical *golem manuals*. Yet other varieties of flesh golems exist, usually of a more crude construction. Carrion golems (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #7) are similar to the standard flesh golem, but are not limited to human corpses for their constituent parts. These patchwork horrors are often diseased, and their assortment of flesh makes carrion golems weaker than their larger cousins—though considerably easier and cheaper to construct as a result.

Stories from the deepest jungles also speak of more primitive flesh golems crafted by the witch doctors and shamans of savage tribes. The creation process often differs from the more generally accepted methods, and usually incorporates religious rituals and magic (and some say, dark sacrifices and long-forgotten rites). Such barbaric flesh golems are generally stronger, but have a higher chance of going berserk and turning against their masters.

Ecology

A typical flesh golem stands about 8 feet tall and weighs almost 500 pounds. Its skin has a sickly green or yellowish tint, like that of decaying flesh, and it is usually clothed in no more than a ragged pair of trousers. It carries no weapons and owns no other possessions. Incapable of human speech, flesh golems are only able to produce a hoarse roar from their lifeless mouths. They are prodigiously strong, but somewhat clumsy, moving in a jerky, stiff-jointed manner akin to a puppet.

Physically, awakened flesh golems look no different from their unintelligent brethren. They clothe themselves in whatever hodgepodge scraps they can scrounge, and may own battered, discarded weapons, as well as a handful of belongings that have some personal value only to them. No longer under another's control, intelligent flesh golems move more easily and naturally, though they can never approach the grace of a living being. Unlike normal golems, intelligent flesh golems also have the ability to speak. Because they learn language through mimicry and self-teaching, however, their speech patterns are often childlike, but with a disturbing groaning quality, as if their voices are rusty from disuse.

As unliving constructs, flesh golems do not eat, breathe, or sleep. Their dead organs and other bodily systems no longer function, although their eyes are magically enhanced far beyond the human norm. Flesh golems are tireless, effortlessly able to stand perfectly still or labor continuously. They do not age or die, nor are they susceptible to poisons or diseases that afflict the living. Their dead flesh is alchemically preserved against decay and deterioration, and proves highly resistant to damage of any kind. Barring accident or misfortune, a flesh golem can exist indefinitely, ceasing to function only when its body is damaged beyond repair or suffers complete destruction.

Although flesh golems are unable to heal naturally, electricity can be used to repair their preserved bodies, even strengthening them for a short time if enough power is applied. Flesh golems are immune to most other magical spells, but they are somewhat susceptible to cold and fire. While such energies do no additional damage to a flesh golem, they do slow the creature temporarily.

Flesh golems are generally constructed of parts from no less than six human corpses, none of which can show signs of significant decay. Occasionally, parts from additional bodies may be required to complete construction. Once the pieces have been gathered, they are stitched and stapled together, creating the golem's composite humanoid body. Because of the difficulty in replicating and connecting the tiny parts of the human body, flesh golems usually

Variant Flesh Golems

The exact methods of creating a flesh golem frequently differ as a result of knowledge, geography, or culture. These variations in the creation process can sometimes result in flesh golems with previously unheard-of powers and abilities.

Electrified Flesh Golem: Through unknown processes, some flesh golems retain some of the electrical power used in their creation, while others are fashioned with implanted electro-thaumaturgical dynamos and capacitors that generate and store electrical energy. Electrified golems are able to channel this electricity into their attacks, as well as absorb electrical attacks to increase their speed. An electrified flesh golem's melee attacks deal 1d6 points of electricity damage in addition to their normal damage.

The golem has the supernatural ability to generate a blast of electricity that strikes one creature within 60 feet. The golem must make a ranged touch attack; if it hits, the bolt deals 4d6 points of electricity damage. The golem can use this ability once every 1d6 rounds. It cannot use this attack on itself.

Electrical attacks against the golem heal it just like a normal flesh golem and also *haste* it (as the spell) for 1 round per die of damage the attack normally deals. (+1 CR)

Unholy Flesh Golem: Evil golem creators sometimes infuse their creations with negative energy. Positive channeled energy harms them and negative channeled energy heals them as if they were undead, although they are unaffected by special abilities that use channel energy (such as Command Undead, Turn Undead, or the power of the Sun domain).

Any living creature hit by an unholy flesh golem's melee attacks also takes 1 point of Strength damage. This is a negative energy effect. An unholy flesh golem has an evil aura. Creating an unholy flesh golem is an evil act. (+0 CR)

end up significantly larger than the typical humans they superficially represent. Once the body has been assembled, it is wrapped in special bindings and alchemical unguents are applied, followed by the casting of the required spells. A final application of electrical energy animates the golem and gives it the semblance of life.

Habitat & Society

As unintelligent constructs, flesh golems have no culture or society of their own, other than those physical trappings given to them by their creators. They can be found anywhere wizards and alchemists quest for power, from the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse to the frozen wastes of the Crown of the World. Flesh golems are often created as guards, whether at entrances to a wizard's tower or in deep vaults to watch over a precious treasure. They can also be found sealed within ancient tombs to safeguard those interred there, animating only when grave robbers attempt to plunder the treasures buried within. Some powerful crime lords have even been known to use flesh golems as indisputably loyal enforcers and brute muscle that diligently follow orders without question.

Uncontrolled, berserk golems can be found anywhere, wandering aimlessly and without purpose, although usually far from civilization, where they would otherwise be hunted down and destroyed. Intelligent flesh golems, on the other hand, live solitary lives by nature and necessity. Faced with fear and prejudice if not outright hatred, awakened flesh golems are usually driven away from civilized areas. Nevertheless, humans fascinate the golems, and these unfortunate outcasts try to eke out what meager livings they can on the fringes of human society, lurking in crumbling tenements and slums, dank sewers, and isolated cabins or abandoned ruins, often providing fodder for local tales of terrible monsters.

Rumors persist, however, of a settlement of awakened golems that have banded together deep in the wilds. Led by an intelligent flesh golem known as the Thinker, this community welcomes golems of all makes who have achieved consciousness. Their goal is to create a civilization of their own, far from the frightened and intolerant meddling of human society, where awakened golems can learn to control their berserk rages and work together to build a unique golem culture. Still, most human nations that hear of this place continue to fear these uncontrolled golems, and would eradicate or try to control them for their own ends if the settlement's location ever became known.

Spark of Consciousness

Through some unknown process, rare berserk golems have been known to spontaneously generate consciousness and intelligence, breaking free of their masters' control and setting them far above their mindless counterparts. This can only occur if the golem has ever gone berserk.

The golem becomes an intelligent, sentient creature. Roll 3d6 for its new Intelligence and Charisma scores. The awakened golem immediately gains skill points equal to 2 + Int modifier (minimum 1) per Hit Die, as well as feats based on its Hit Dice. A golem has no class skills. The golem also gains the ability to speak the language of its creator and chooses any bonus languages from among those its creator speaks. While the golem retains its immunity to magic and most other construct traits, it loses its immunity to mind-affecting effects.

An awakened golem can advance like any other creature, even taking levels in character classes. An awakened golem has no favored classes. Though intelligent, an awakened

golem may still be controlled by its creator, but it can attempt to break free of its master's control with an opposed Charisma check.

An intelligent golem also has a higher chance of going berserk. An awakened golem has a cumulative 5% chance each round to go berserk during combat. The golem's creator, if within 60 feet, can try to regain control of the awakened golem, which requires a successful Intimidate check, but the golem gets a Will save (DC equal to creator's Intimidate result) to resist. It takes 1 minute of inactivity by the golem to reset the golem's berserk chance to 0%.

Campaign Role

Flesh golems are frequently encountered as guards in powerful wizards' sanctums. Yet a flesh golem can be even more effective when it is least expected. A flesh golem among the undead inhabiting a necromancer's lair, for example, might appear as a large zombie, giving the party's cleric a nasty surprise when his turning ability doesn't work and the creature proves far more difficult to destroy than simple undead.

A flesh golem can also be behind a series of unexplained, grisly murders in a town, which the PCs are tasked to investigate. The reasons behind the murders can be varied—is it just a golem gone berserk, or is it following its creator's orders for some darker purpose? Is it perhaps an intelligent flesh golem blindly lashing out at those who have hunted and persecuted it, or even worse, collecting spare parts?

An intelligent flesh golem can make for an interesting roleplaying opportunity. Hired by an angry mob to hunt down and destroy a berserk golem, what will the PCs do when they find the golem is not a mindless automaton, but rather a tragically misunderstood thinking creature? Or perhaps an awakened golem seeks out the PCs, hoping they might be able to teach it about human ways and help it join human society, or even hiring the PCs to procure the materials it needs to create a mate for itself.

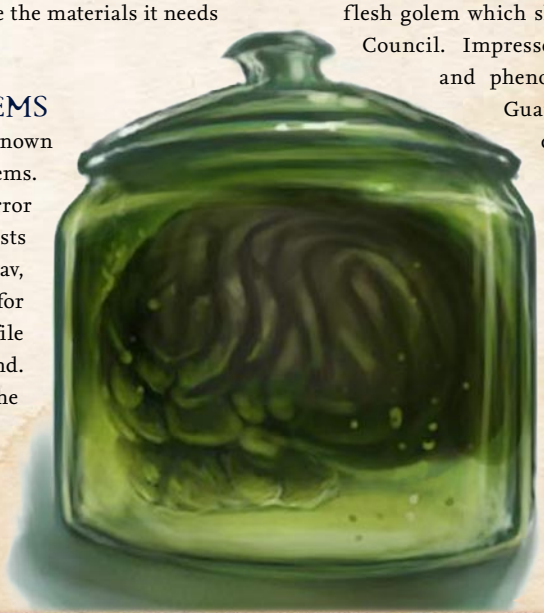
Known Flesh Golems

The following are a few well-known monsters believed to be flesh golems.

The Beast of Lepidstadt: A terror stalks the mist-shrouded forests and fens of northwestern Ustalav, a monster held responsible for the deaths of several high-profile figures in the Palatinate of Vieland. First appearing 20 years ago in the city of Lepidstadt after a spate of grave robberies, the Beast of Lepidstadt (as it is called) is thought to be an unnatural creation made of the corpses of condemned criminals who died hanging from the city's gallows. Although human in appearance, the Beast is said to have the strength of an ogre and be prone to murderous rages. There seems to be some purpose behind the Beast's killings, however, as it has been known to ignore some people, and has even helped children in need on more than one occasion. Also known as the Dippelmere Horror, the creature hasn't been seen in Lepidstadt since the Lampblack Murders 5 years ago, and is now believed to lurk among the strange stone monoliths of the Dippelmere swamp.

The Carcass-Man of Belkzen: Rumors from out of the Hold of Belkzen speak of a terrible flesh golem created by a shaman of the Defiled Corpse tribe from the body parts of their slain human foes. This primitive monstrosity is said to be taller than a hill giant, towering over the orcs, with three powerful arms and two heads like an ettin. The Carcass-Man leads the tribe into battle, crushing the orcs' enemies with a giant spiked tree-trunk club and ripping foes limb from limb with its mighty fists. Its effectiveness in battle has catapulted the Defiled Corpse to a position of strength among the warring orc tribes of Belkzen, but the monster frequently goes berserk in battle, tearing into both friendly and enemy combatants with mindless abandon. It is believed that the Defiled Corpse orcs cannot hold their position of power for long, as they are losing more warriors than they can easily replace due to the destructive rampages of their pet war machine.

The Red Guardians: Erszebet Lavenza is a woman long fascinated with the sciences of alchemy, biology, and galvanism. A gifted wizard and the newest member of Galt's Revolutionary Council, her fascination became an obsession after studying at the golemworks of Oenopion in Nex. Having returned home to Galt, Erszebet took a position as surgeon at the Torvin Academy in Edme, now a notorious prison. Using the cadavers of condemned prisoners, Erszebet crafted a flesh golem which she brought before the Revolutionary Council. Impressed with the unshakable devotion and phenomenal strength of her first "Red Guardian," the Council instructed her to create more golems for the Revolution. Citizen Goss hopes to eventually have a small army of flesh golems at his command to enforce the Council's will, protect him from the mob's anger, and even replace the worrisomely independent Gray Gardeners as Galt's loyal executioners. Thus far, Erszebet has completed three flesh golems using the body parts of those executed by Edme's guillotine, Razor Jenni, not realizing that using the victims of the *final blade* as components



Facets of Fear

Flesh golems can be viewed as a warning against unhindered progress, representing both the fear of magic gone amok and—especially in magical societies—of unchecked scientific discovery. There are some things that human beings were not meant to understand, such as the boundary between life and death, and tampering with such forbidden subjects treads on the domains of the gods themselves. And if magic or science can animate dead bodies without divine intervention and control them like puppets on a string, might they not also be able to do the same to a living, thinking person?

In another sense, flesh golems also reflect humans' intolerance toward one another, for it is easier to fear and hate than to love and accept. People have a tendency to make anyone different from them an "other"—an object, not a person, something to be feared, hated, and reviled. Flesh golems represent this prejudiced and narrow-minded part of ourselves, the little voice inside that whispers incessantly and cannot be ignored.

To a lesser extent, flesh golems also embody a fear of death, or more specifically what happens to a person's remains after death, the dread that one's deceased loved ones can be used to create something unnatural and horrid. And while other terrors of the night have their weaknesses—the undead can be repelled with holy symbols or even something as simple as garlic or running water, and silver can be used against werewolves—what can stand against the brute strength and mindless, implacable rage of a golem?

for her creations has had an unforeseen side effect—with the souls of the condemned trapped inside Razor Jenni, Erszebet's golems have a much lower chance of going berserk than normal.

Sample Flesh Golem

It is not known for sure who built the golem now known as the Beast of Lepidstadt, but those who have studied the creature believe it to be the creation of Dr. Henri Moritz, a promising student of alchemy and magic at Lepidstadt College and the first victim attributed to the Beast. Over the past 20 years, the Beast has been blamed for a series of brutal murders, including many notables of the Palatinate, all butchered with the Beast's signature weapon, a jagged ogre hook. Strangely, a few witnesses to the Beast's attacks have claimed to hear it reciting poetry before its rampages.

The Beast of Lepidstadt is that rarest of all flesh golems, one who has gained intelligence, having achieved consciousness after it killed its creator in a berserk rage. Ashamed of what it had done, but curious about the wider world, the Beast attempted to make contact with the citizens of Lepidstadt, but its appearance frightened the people it met. When the city watch was called to attack it, the Beast went berserk again, and when it came to its senses, half a dozen guardsmen and a passing merchant were dead. A series of similarly unfortunate encounters followed, enough that the Beast grew angry and began targeting specific powerful individuals it viewed as threats to its existence.

Over the years, the Beast has learned to embrace and control its rage somewhat, though the stress of battle inevitably causes it to lose control and go berserk. It doesn't understand why the humans hate it so much and seeks to better understand them, even memorizing the verses in an old book of Taldan poetry it came across in an attempt to find some meaning. Although it no longer makes the mistake of trying to join human society, the Beast desperately wants to be accepted, and has returned children lost in the forest unharmed to their homes in hopes of gaining some measure of tolerance.

About 5 years ago, the Beast found a *flesh golem manual* on the body of a self-professed "golem slayer" it had killed. Hoping that the book might help it to overcome its monstrous nature, the Beast fled to an abandoned hovel deep in the Dippelmere swamp to study the text in isolation. So far, it has been unsuccessful, but it perseveres in trying to decipher the esoteric manuscript. Occasionally, however, the Beast's frustration proves too much and it is unable to contain its rage. Its berserk rampages through the swamps (and the deaths of three unfortunate swamp dwellers so far) have given rise to the new legend of the Dippelmere Horror.

THE BEAST OF LEPIDSTADT **CR 13**

XP 25,600

Flesh golem barbarian 6

N Large construct

Init –1; **Senses** low-light vision, darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +1

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 6, flat-footed 23
(+5 armor, –1 Dex, +12 natural, –2 rage, –1 size)

hp 118 (9d10+6d12+30)

Fort +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +10

Defensive Abilities improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +2; **DR** 5/adamantine; **Immune** construct traits, magic

Weaknesses open mind

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee ogre hook +21/+16/+11 (3d6+7/×3) or 2 slams +21 (2d8+7 plus 1d6 electricity)

Ranged double crossbow +12 (2d6/19–20 plus 2d6)

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

Special Attacks berserk, knockback, rage (14 rounds/day), rage powers (knockback, moment of clarity, renewed vigor [1d8+2 hp])

TACTICS

Before Combat The Beast tries to avoid combat if at all

possible, unless hunting a particular foe.

During Combat The Beast begins by attempting to demoralize its target before attacking with its ogre hook. If faced with multiple opponents or ones who seem able to bypass its damage reduction, the Beast rages. While raging or berserk, the Beast has little grasp of tactics, pummeling a single enemy with its fists until it stops moving.

Morale With no way to heal itself except its renewed vigor rage power, the Beast flees from battle if reduced to less than half its hit points. If berserk, the Beast fights until destroyed.

Base Statistics When not raging, the Beast's statistics are as follows: **AC** 25, touch 8, flat-footed 25; **Will** +8; **Melee** ogre hook +19/+14/+9 (3d6+5/×3) or 2 slams +19 (2d8+5 plus 1d6 electricity); **Str** 21; **CMB** +21 (+23 bull rush); **CMD** 30 (32 vs. bull rush); **Skills** Intimidate +16 (+20 against Medium or smaller creatures)

STATISTICS

Str 25, **Dex** 9, **Con** —, **Int** 7, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +15; **CMB** +23 (+25 bull rush); **CMD** 32 (34 vs. bull rush)

Feats Cleave, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (double crossbow), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Iron Will, Intimidating Prowess, Iron Will, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Stealth)

Skills Disguise +8, Intimidate +18 (+22 against Medium or smaller creatures), Perception +1, Stealth +7

Languages Common

SQ fast movement, moment of clarity, renewed vigor (1/day; 1d8)

Gear battered masterwork breastplate, double crossbow (see *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting*), ogre hook, *boots of the mire* (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #3), *cloak of elvenkind*, *flesh golem manual*, *shock amulet of mighty fists*, ragged and torn explorer's outfit, headless doll, tattered book of Taldan poetry, aquamarine worth 100 gp.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Berserk (Ex) When the Beast enters combat, there is a cumulative 5% chance each round that it goes berserk. This increases to 10% per round when using its rage ability. The uncontrolled golem goes on a rampage, attacking the nearest living creature or smashing some object smaller than itself if no creature is within reach, then moving on to spread more destruction. It takes 1 minute of inactivity by the golem to reset its berserk chance to 0%.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A flesh golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

- A magical attack that deals cold or fire damage slows a flesh golem (as the *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds (no save).
- A magical attack that deals electricity damage breaks any *slow* effect on the golem and heals 1 point of damage for every 3 points of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the amount of healing would cause the golem to exceed its full normal hit points, it gains any excess as temporary hit points. A flesh golem gets no saving throw against attacks that deal electricity damage.

Knockback (Ex) The Beast can make one free bull rush attempt against one target hit in melee this round. The Beast does not need to move back with the target if successful. This power is used as an immediate action after the attack roll is made.

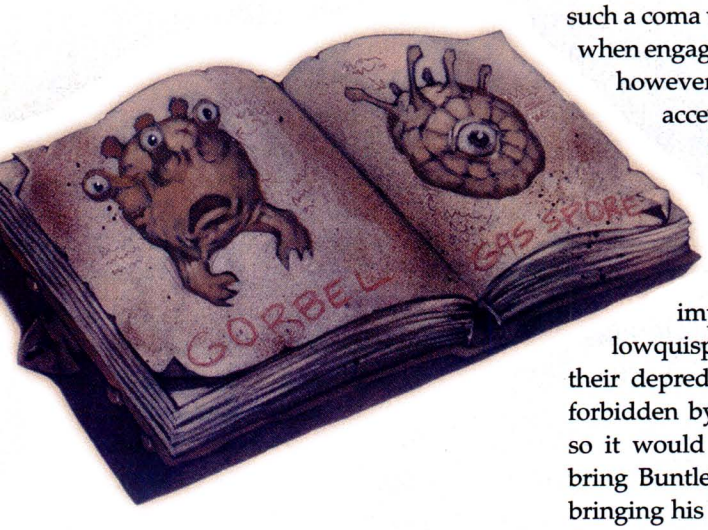
Open Mind (Ex) Unlike other constructs, the Beast is susceptible to mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects).

Rage (Ex) The Beast does not gain a bonus to its Constitution while in a rage, nor does it gain any extra hit points. Likewise, it is not fatigued after rage.

The Ecology of the Gorbel

Full of Hot Air

When mutant killer beholders ravage the countryside, it's the Monster Hunters to the rescue!



by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Jeff Miracola

With much more force than was necessary, Dreelix slammed his gavel three times onto the table in front of him, leaving three curved indentations in the hard wood. "I hereby call this meeting of the Monster Hunters Association to order," he barked, bringing the whispered conversations among the sages and wizards making up his audience to an immediate halt.

The pre-meeting conversations were much more animated today than normal, for everyone was eager to see what Dreelix's reaction to his recent travails would be: He had spent the better part of the past week in a pseudodragon-induced coma, along with his cohorts in crime, Zantoullios and Grindle. True, such a coma was an occupational hazard when engaged in a pseudodragon hunt; however, Dreelix was less likely to accept Buntleby's having placed them on display in embarrassing positions during their immobility. Still, the three renegade wizards had magically impersonated Buntleby, Willowquisp, and Spontayne during their depredations, an action explicitly forbidden by the Association's bylaws, so it would be difficult for Dreelix to bring Buntleby up on charges without bringing his own improprieties out into the open as well.

Buntleby stared directly into Dreelix's eyes, silently daring him to take action. Willowquisp and Spontayne sat at either side of the young wizard, adding their looks of determination to Buntleby's own. Dreelix fumed in silence, then took a deep breath and began the meeting minutes.

"Tonight we'll go over Zantoullios' formula for potions of healing and attempt to reduce the troll-skin side effects plaguing his most recent batches; Old Gumphrey, your expertise is especially relevant in this endeavor, so try to stay awake! Grindle will read a list of those members delinquent in their monthly dues payments and will assign a suitable fee for tardiness. Then, the rest of the meeting will be spent on our initial planning for the Mage Fair later this year." He looked around the room. "Anything else? No? Then Grindle, approach with your list!"

As the corpulent wizard ambled up to the front podium with a crumpled sheet of parchment in one pudgy hand, Buntleby turned to his companions and whispered, "See? Told you he'd cave!"

Grindle had no sooner reached the podium when there was a commotion at the front entrance of the meeting hall. The door burst open, and in walked a mustachioed warrior in a suit of fine mail links, a thick sword at his belt.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Dreelix. "You can't just burst in here—"

"You the Monster Hunters?" interrupted the warrior.

"Indeed we are, and we're not accustomed—"

"Let's go, then," said the warrior. "I've been sent to fetch you; there's trouble in the Duke's fields."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?" demanded Dreelix.

"Monster trouble," said the warrior, as if that should have been obvious. "Let's go, people, shake a leg! I've got a wagon waiting outside." Despite Dreelix's blusters, the Monster Hunters were unceremoniously herded out the door of their meeting hall and into the back of a wagon pulled by two tired-looking nags. By reason of his importance, Dreelix sat up front with the warrior.

"Perhaps now would be a good time to discuss our fees," suggested Dreelix.

"No need. As Undermarshall, I'm authorized to deputize the lot of you; you are now working for the city and must take any appeals for monetary compensation to the Duke himself, an undertaking for which I wish you good luck." He encouraged the nags to greater speed, as if eager to discharge his passengers at the earliest convenience.

"Hrrmph!" scoffed Dreelix, folding his arms in disgust. "Again we are forced to work for free!"

"If I might ask, what type of monster is it we're being sent after?" asked Buntleby from the back of the wagon.

"Beholders,"[1] replied the Undermarshall. "About a dozen or so, chomping away in the Duke's cornstalks, and he's none too happy about it. My men refuse to go up against beholders without magical assistance. Hence, your immediate deputization."

"Yes, completely understandable," agreed Dreelix, his spirits brightening at once. "Why should your simple soldiers, armed solely with the knowledge of how to wave a spear around, be expected to confront such a menace? Have your men stand aside while the bold and brave Monster Hunters show them the true power of the wizardly arts!"

"This, essentially, was my plan," said the Undermarshall as the wagon pulled up to the edge of the Duke's fields. The Monster Hunters piled out of the wagon in a disorganized gaggle.

A trio of guardsmen approached the Undermarshall and saluted. "They haven't moved much," reported the highest-ranking of the three. "Don't seem to have spotted us yet, either.[2] We've got guardsmen posted around the fields, but we've held off the attack until your arrival."

"Good, good, excellent," replied Dreelix, as if the comments had been addressed to him. "Now, just keep your men out of our way, and we'll have this little beholder problem taken care of in no time." He motioned for the other Monster Hunters to gather around him. "Okay," he whispered, "What do we know about beholders?"

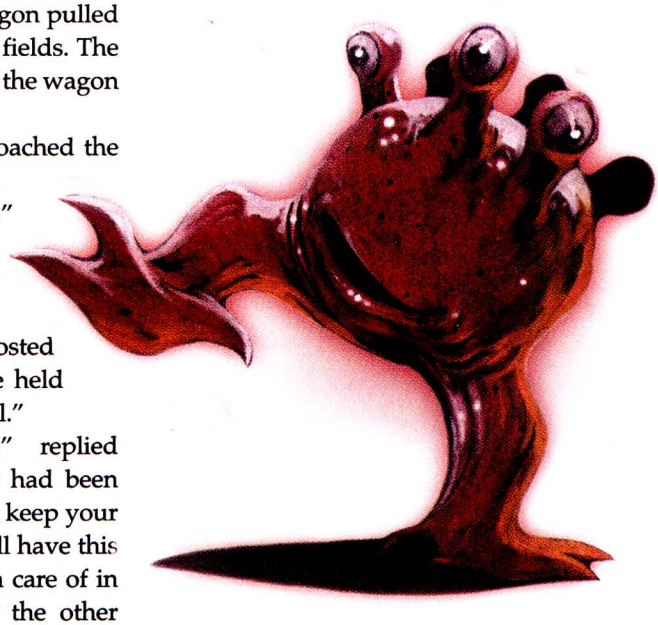
"Well, for one thing," remarked Zantoullios, "if there's really a dozen of them out there in the cornfield, we're gonna get our butts kicked but good! I don't think the lot of us could take on a single beholder right now, without having made the appropriate preparations. I, for one, have only a small handful of combat spells memorized at present."

"My inventory is similarly spare," lamented Spontayne.

"Let's not hear such pessimistic thoughts!" replied Dreelix. "We're in the spotlight here; a successful routing can enhance our reputation to no small effect!"

"Unless we're the ones getting routed," mumbled the gangly wizard.

"We'll probably fare better than you might expect," remarked Willowquisp. "For one thing, I don't think we're up against beholders at all. To the best of my knowledge, they seldom travel in such numbers out in the open. Even if such were the case, I doubt they'd have entered our fair city merely to munch on some corn."



"So what else could they be?" asked Buntleby. "Gas spores?"

"Doubtful. Gas spores don't eat corn, either."

"Then what?"

"A good question. Lady Ablasta, I wonder if you might have a wizard eye available?"

"By purest chance, yes, I do," replied Lady Ablasta with a sniff. She settled herself onto the ground, closed her eyes, and began the preparations for her spell. "Ready," she said momentarily.

"Send it off, then, and tell us what you see."

"Perhaps a view from above would be best," suggested Spontayne.

"Very well, it's off. I'm hovering above the corn, higher, higher ... there they are!"

"How many?" demanded Dreelix.

"Eight, ten ... looks like thirteen."[3]

"Choose a target and move in for a close-up," commanded Willowquisp. "Count the eyestalks if you would, please."

"I see six, evenly-spaced around the body. The eyes are red, just like the skin."[4]

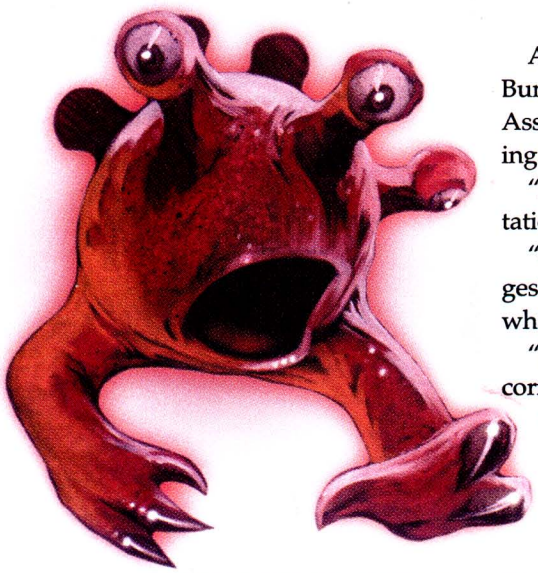
1. Gorbels are distant cousins of beholders and can easily be mistaken for them from a distance. The gorbel appears as a red, rubbery sphere, floating suspended in midair like a balloon. A ring of six eyes on narrow, retractable eyestalks crown the top of the gorbel's body, while two clawed limbs dangle down from below. A circular mouth ringed with numerous tiny teeth appears to the front of the two limbs. The gorbel lacks the beholder's central eye, however, and is much smaller: 3 feet in diameter, compared to the beholder's standard 5' girth.

2. Had the gorbels spotted the guardsmen, there would have been no doubt about the fact, for gorbels immediately attack anything that moves (except other gorbels), often including trees swaying in the breeze.

3. Unlike beholders, gorbels travel about in small herds numbering up to twenty or so. The herds constantly move on to new territory as they deplete the vegetation of a given area. The size of the herd fluctuates as individual gorbels drift off on their own or two smaller groups merge into a larger herd.

4. Because of a gorbel's eyestalk distribution, the creature generally enjoys a full 360° vision. It is therefore difficult to approach one without being spotted; rogues incur a –20% penalty when attempting to Hide in Shadows within a gorbel's field of vision.

Fortunately, the creatures have only the approximate visual acuity of a human, without infravisual capabilities. They sleep at night, pulling their eyestalks into their central body mass and closing their six sets of rubbery eyelids.



"There you go," said Willowquisp matter-of-factly. "Beholders have ten eyestalks, these have six. Therefore, these are not beholders."

"Shhh! Keep your voice down!" demanded Dreelix. "Maybe they're just a different kind. Lady Ablasta, do these beholders have a large eyeball in the front?"

"No, they don't. Wait a minute, what's this? Goodness, they've got little arms and fingers! Or is that legs and toes?"

"Definitely not a beholder," confirmed Willowquisp.

"That still remains to be seen," argued Dreelix.

"What's going on?" demanded the Undermarshall, who had sidled up to see what all the fuss was about.

"Silence, please!" demanded Dreelix. "We are in the midst of intense magical reconnaissance, and interruptions are not helpful! We will inform you of all in time; for now, be apprised that these are no ordinary beholders, but a rare strain of mutant killer beholders! Have your men double their vigilance while we investigate further!"

"Mutant killer beholders?" gasped the Undermarshall, blanching at the thought. "I'll inform the men at once!"

As the warrior rushed off to do so, Buntleby directed a look of scorn at the Association President. "Wasn't that laying it on a little thick?" he asked.

"It does no harm to enhance our reputation," remarked Dreelix.

"Getting back to the monsters ..." suggested Willowquisp. "Lady Ablasta, what exactly are they doing?"

"The one I'm watching is chewing on corn. It's floating in place, holding onto the stalk with both of its claws, and biting off ears of corn. Goodness, look at that!"

"What?" asked Buntleby.

"Its arms bend funny," she replied. "Not like elbows or knees, but more like tentacles!"[5]

"Okay, so just what is it we're up against?" Buntleby asked Willowquisp.

"From the description, I'd almost have to say gorbels," he replied, scratching his head. "But that doesn't make sense; if I recall correctly, gorbels live in the tropics. How would a herd of gorbels have made it all the way up here?"[6]

"Okay, so we're up against gorbels," said Buntleby. "How does that help us? What do we know about gorbels?"

"Eh? What's that? Gerbils?" asked Old Gumphrey from the back of the huddle, cupping his hand over his ear to make out the whispered conversation going on ahead.

"I wish I had my notebooks with me," lamented the elderly sage, ignoring the ancient alchemist. Old Gumphrey gave a snort of disgust and stopped paying attention."I've never actually seen a gorbel, only read about them," continued Willowquisp. "They are mentioned only briefly in Ronassic's definitive work on the beholder races, I'm sure of it.[7] I just wish I could remember more of the specifics."

"Do they wield magic?" asked Dreelix.

"I don't think so," responded Willowquisp. "If memory serves, they're rather simple creatures, with an animal-level intelligence."

"Excellent!" replied Dreelix, rubbing his hands together with glee. "This will be even easier than I had hoped for! Has anybody got anything else for Lady Ablasta? If not, I say we head in there and let the Hunt begin!"

"I think I'll keep my wizard eye active, nonetheless," said the Conjurer Ablasta, struggling to her feet. "You never know when it'll come in handy."

"All right, we're going in!" Dreelix called to the Undermarshall. "Have your men at the ready for immediate action, in case any survive our initial assault! They'll no doubt scamper like frightened kittens at the first sign of our raw power, so be on your guard! Follow me, men! Uh, you too, Lady Ablasta." And Dreelix entered the cornfield, to disappear between the rows of tall stalks.

One by one, the other Monster Hunters followed into the cornfield. Old Gumphrey the alchemist was the last in line; as soon as the others were out of sight he turned and went back to the wagon.

"Shouldn't you be going with them?" asked the Undermarshall.

"Pshaw! I'm eighty-seven years old; let them go on without me! Besides, uh, as the most powerful and intelligent of the wizards, my expertise is needed here, as coordinator! What's that, Dreelix?" he asked suddenly, closing his eyes as if in telepathic communication with the rest of the party. "No, ahead another twenty feet, then turn right. Yes, that's it." Old Gumphrey turned back to the Undermarshall. "If you'll excuse me, I'm rather busy here." The armor-clad warrior, suitably impressed, backed off to give the old man room.

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5. Gorbels have no bones. Their central body is basically a gas-filled bag, similar to a balloon, from which dangle the creature's two short legs. Each leg moves by means of numerous strips of muscle running the length of each appendage; gorbels can therefore bend their legs in any direction with equal ease.

Each leg ends in three sharp claws, two fore and one aft. The claws are the gorbel's only means of attack; the creatures inflict a total of 1–4 points of damage with their initial claw strike. Once their claws have made contact with a victim, they latch on with a remarkable strength, automatically inflicting 1–6 points of damage on subsequent rounds. Once a gorbel has sunk its claws into a victim, nothing short of the victim's death causes it to release its grip.

6. While most often encountered in a tropical environment, the far-ranging gorbel can be found in nearly any temperate climate. Since their lighter-than-air gas performs best in warm areas, they do not stray too far from warm climates, as the cold tends to keep them grounded.

7. Much of Ronassic's master work—*Observations On the Sphere of Many Eyes, Its Habits and Behavior, Its Settlements and Community, And What Not To Do In Its Presence*—was incorporated into *I, Tyrant*. Gorbels are mentioned briefly on page 17 of this work, which erroneously states that the gorbel's eyestalks end in claws. The *Monstrous Manual*™ tome mentions gorbels in passing (page 26); the best source of information is *Monstrous Compendium® 14: Fiend Folio Appendix*, where the obnoxious little creatures have their own listing.

Dreelix halted the Monster Hunters as soon as they were out of sight and earshot of the guardsmen. "Okay, what's the plan?" he asked.

"What's the plan? I thought you were leading this little expedition!" replied Willowquisp.

"What's our weapons status?" asked Buntleby. "I've got a dagger."

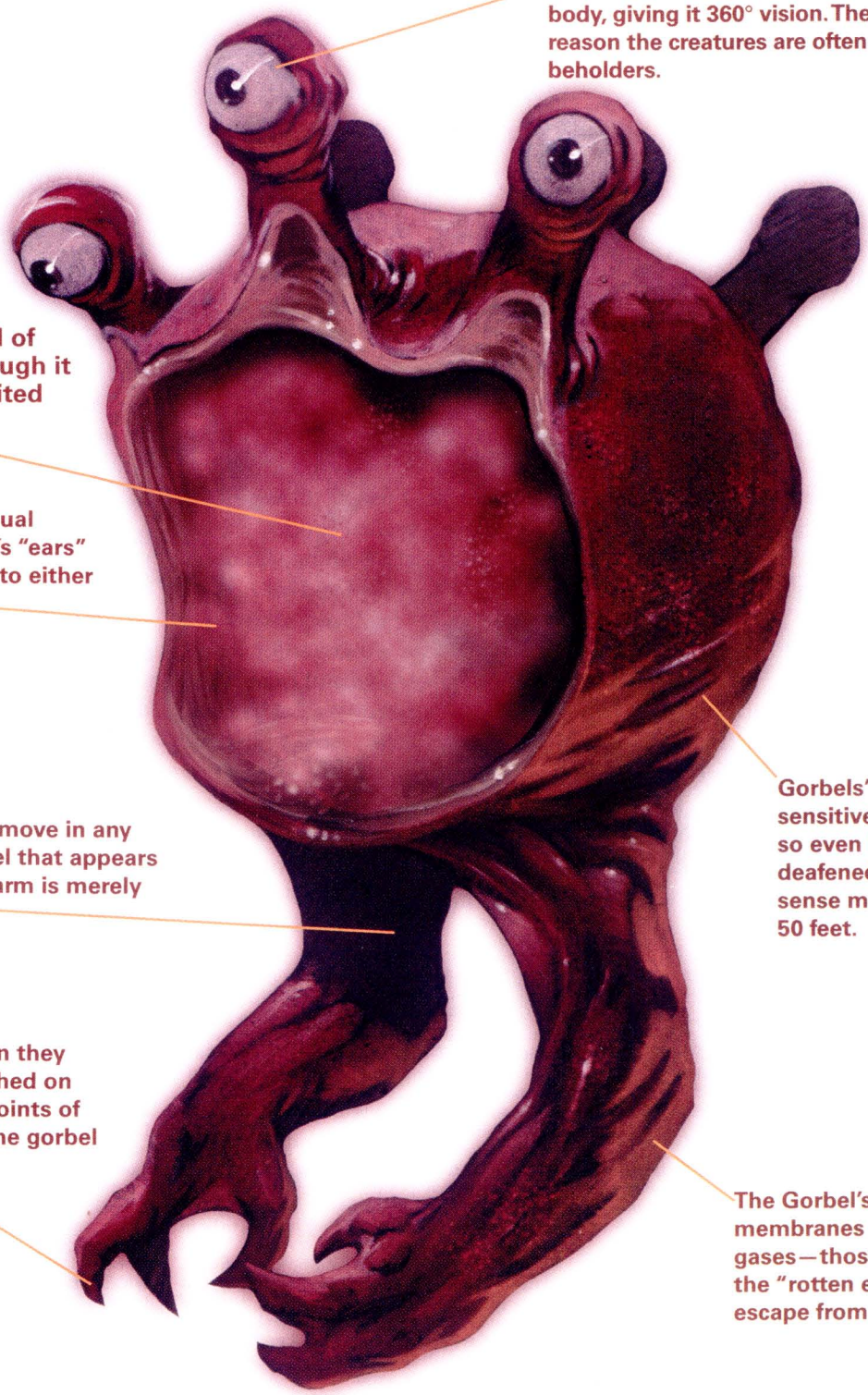
"As do I," replied Spontayne. Zantoullios brought forth his collapsible staff, and extended it to its full length.

"Anyone else? Nothing?"

"Oh goodness, gentlemen," said the Lady Ablasta, rolling up the puffy sleeves of her embroidered gown and exposing several thin wands strapped to each forearm. "Here: wands of fire, frost, lightning, magic missiles, paralyzation, and fear. Go easy on the wand of fear, though; it's nearly depleted. I've been using it on the neighborhood kids, the scamps!"

"You're a regular walking arsenal!" marveled Grindle, as the Lady Ablasta distributed wands and explained their command words.

Gorbel



The creature's six eyes form a "crown" atop its body, giving it 360° vision. These are the main reason the creatures are often mistaken for beholders.

The gorbel's body is full of lighter-than-air gas, though it moves by means of limited telekinesis.

They aren't obvious to casual inspection, but the gorbel's "ears" are tympanic membranes to either side of its mouth.

Gorbels' skin is highly sensitive to air pressure, so even if blinded and deafened, they can sense movement within 50 feet.

Boneless limbs can move in any direction, so a gorbel that appears to have a "broken" arm is merely reaching backward.

The claws are stronger than they look. One a gorbel has latched on to a victim, it causes 1d6 points of damage each round until the gorbel or the victim dies.

The Gorbel's rubbery skin membranes allow certain gases—those responsible for the "rotten egg" smell—to escape from the body.

"It pays to be prepared," she sniffed.

"So we go in wands ablazing?" asked Buntleby.

"And the tanar'ri take the hindmost!" agreed Dreelix.

"Actually, I'd like to volunteer for the position of 'hindmost,'" said Willowquisp. The elderly sage was not one for combat. Buntleby handed him his dagger, just in case.

"Let's try to pick them off one by one," suggested Spontayne. "Lady Ablasta, is there one apart from the others?"

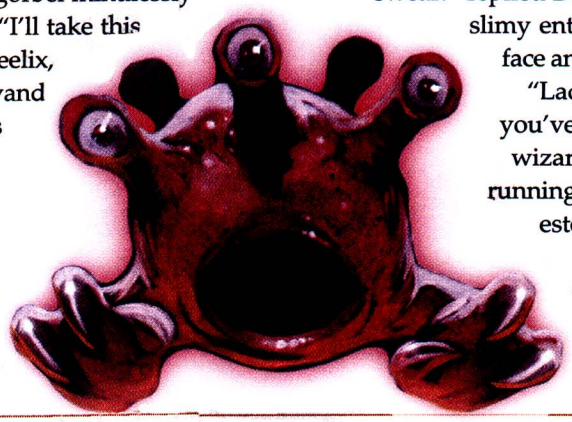
Lady Ablasta closed her eyes and reactivated her wizard eye. "Yes," she replied after a moment. "This way."

As they trudged on through the field, Zantoullios suddenly winced in an expression of disgust and started waving his hand rapidly in front of his face. "Ugh!" he complained. "Grindle, was that you?"[8]

"Was that me what?" asked Grindle innocently. "I didn't do anything."

Lady Ablasta halted them behind a row of corn; ahead, through the leaves, the Monster Hunters could see a floating red sphere and hear the sounds of crunching as the gorbel mindlessly chewed its meal. "I'll take this one," boasted Dreelix, Lady Ablasta's wand of magic missiles in his hand.

Boldly, Dreelix stepped through the row of corn to stand face-to-face with the gorbel. The creature immediately stopped its meal and swung several eyestalks in Dreelix's direction. It mewled like a kitten,[9] released its hold on the cornstalk, and sped toward the Monster Hunter with alarming speed.[10] Dreelix bleated in terror but managed to fire off a shot with the wand.



The results were spectacular. The magical beam of energy no sooner touched the gorbel's skin than the creature exploded in a puff of flame.[11] Dreelix jumped and was half-propelled back into the midst of the other Monster Hunters, gorbel guts splattered over his head. A rain of gorbel parts fell down among the stalks of corn, fortunately still wet from a recent rain.

"Down!" warned Zantoullios. "Here come some more!" Sure enough, several more red spheres could be seen through the leaves of the corn stalks, apparently investigating the explosion.[12] The Monster Hunters crawled away in silence to huddle several rows distant.

"What did you do?" asked Willowquisp.

"One magic missile, that's all. I swear!" replied Dreelix, wiping slimy entrails from his face and hair.

"Lady Ablasta, if you've still got that wizard eye up and running, I'd be interested in hearing what those others are up to," said Willowquisp.

The Conjurer Ablasta composed herself, straining her senses to peer through her magical construct. "Three of them have investigated the explosion," she reported. "They're gulping down—huh!—it looks like dandelion fluff! Look at them go! They're like goldfish at feeding time!"[13]

"What's all that about?" Buntleby wanted to know.

"Beats me," admitted Willowquisp.

"Who cares? Let's go get them!" said Dreelix, eager for further combat now that he knew how easily the gorbels could be slain.

"Hey, go easy on my wands!" called Lady Ablasta. "I'd like them returned with some charges left, if you please!"

But Dreelix was having fun now. He raced through the cornstalks, hooting and hollering, with Grindle and Zantoullios right behind. Buntleby turned to his friend Willowquisp and suggested that he stay with the Conjurer Ablasta, and that she monitor their progress through her wizard eye from their current position. Then he and Spontayne followed in Dreelix's wake.

A few rapid-fire explosions told of several gorbel deaths. When Buntleby and Spontayne caught up to the others, they found them covered in gorbel-gore, grinning like idiots. "C'mon!" called Dreelix. "I think there's some more over this way!"

Two more gorbels popped over the next row and sped toward the Monster Hunters, circular mouths opening wide.[14] "I got this one!" called Zantoullios, his collapsible staff poised above his

8. Gorbels produce their lighter-than-air gas as a by-product of their omnivorous diet, which consists mainly of green foliage, bark, and trace amounts of scrap metal or ore, as well as any carrion they might come across. Small quantities of gas constantly "leak" out of the gorbels through their pores; the gas smells significantly like rotten eggs and often betrays the gorbel's presence before it is seen.

9. While normally silent, gorbels make mewling noises when curious. They lack the intelligence and vocal apparatus for a formalized language.

10. Gorbels usually float as a result of their gas-filled bodies and drift serenely in the breeze when in no particular hurry. They can, however, move with an innate telekinetic ability at a Movement Rate of 18 and have an aerial Maneuverability Class of C. The gorbel's speed and agility often come as quite a surprise to those accustomed to the beholder's relatively slow movement rate.

11. Unfortunately (for the gorbel), the creature's lift-producing gas is pyrophoric, exploding into flames upon contact with the air. (The gorbel's rubbery skin membranes allow certain gases—those responsible for the "rotten egg" smell—to escape from the body, but these gases, while nauseating, are not pyrophoric.) Any slashing or piercing weapons used to attack a gorbel penetrate its balloonlike body, causing it to explode in a small fireball that inflicts 1–4 points of damage to anyone within a 5' radius. Magically-induced damage, such as that produced by a *magic missile* spell, have a similar effect upon the hapless creature.

To make matters worse, gorbels are not themselves immune to the explosive properties of their own gas. A properly positioned blow with a sharp weapon can cause a cascading chain reaction, blowing up several gorbels in turn if they happen to be in each other's blast radius.

12. Like beholders, gorbels have no external ears, but they do have two tympanic membranes, spaced equidistant on either side of the mouth, that give them a limited sense of hearing. Gorbel skin is very sensitive to the slightest of breezes; a gorbel explosion creates a small shock wave that other gorbels within 50 feet can easily sense.

13. The gorbel's mouth is the only opening in the gorbel's body, and so must perform a variety of functions. Not only is it the orifice through which the gorbel eats and breathes, but it also has a role to play in gorbel reproduction.

Gorbels are hermaphroditic. Each gorbel produces eggs within its hollow body cavity, and these eggs are fertilized only upon the explosive death of another gorbel. When a gorbel explodes, its balloonlike body is instantly ripped asunder, and eyestalks and appendages fly off in all directions. The explosion also frees the dead gorbel's "seed pods," burning off the harder outer layer and releasing the fluffy, dandelion-like interior cells. These cells float in the breeze and, if swallowed by another gorbel, act to fertilize its eggs.

Gorbel gestation time is about a month, after which small, 6" infants float out of their parent's mouth. The newborn gorbels grow to full size within 6 months. Gorbels live for 6–8 years.

14. A gorbel's tiny, sphincterlike mouth can slowly stretch to accommodate food as wide as 18 inches. The mouth is ringed with little teeth; these

shoulder, ready to swat the approaching gorbel like a living piñata.

It didn't turn out that way. Zantoullios' staff bounced off the gorbel without any visible effect,[15] and only Spontayne's thrown dagger prevented the creature from reaching the gangly wizard. It popped like an overripe melon, spewing entrails every which way.

Grindle, meanwhile, had put his borrowed wand in the sash of his stained robes and jumped up at the other approaching gorbel. Grabbing it by an eyestalk, he tucked it close to his stomach and belly-flopped on top of it. It burst asunder, squished nearly flat between the ground and Grindle's massive frame. Even the small explosion was muffled under Grindle's prodigious belly; when he rose to his feet, the only evidence of the battle was that his robes were a little more stained than normal, and now slightly singed.

Suddenly, a shriek rang out. "That's Lady Ablasta!" called Buntleby, rushing toward the sound of the scream, Spontayne at his heels. Emerging between two rows of corn, they saw Lady Ablasta's predicament. A gorbel had approached her from behind and sunk its sharp claws into her back.[16] She hopped around in a panic, trying to shake the beast off of her, while Willowquisp frantically chased her, attempting to get into position to "pop" the gorbel with Buntleby's dagger without harming Lady Ablasta further.

Buntleby tackled Lady Ablasta around the knees, dropping her to the ground; Spontayne helped hold her still while Willowquisp poked the sharp point of the dagger into the gorbel's skin. It popped with the obligatory fireball, sending the elderly sage flying backward into Zantoullios, who had just stepped through the row of corn. The two tumbled to the ground in a tangle of limbs.

Buntleby, meanwhile, was pulling the gorbel's claws out of Lady Ablasta's back with great effort; even though the gorbel was no more, its severed limbs retained their death grip.[17]

"She's going to need medical attention," said Buntleby to the others.

"Here," said Zantoullios, pulling a flask from his robes. Unstoppering it, he helped the Conjurer Ablasta to a sitting position and watched as she drank it down. "Potion of extra healing," he said. "Ought to fix her up in a flash."

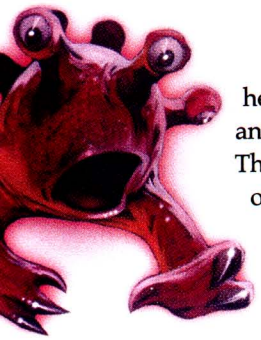
"Let me see," said Buntleby, looking at the wounds on Lady Ablasta's back. As he watched, the deep claw grooves sealed themselves up, leaving only traces of blood to show that she had ever been injured. "Good as new," he said. "I don't think there'll even be any scars."

teeth are too small to inflict damage and are primarily used to hold struggling prey while the mouth expands to engulf the rest of the prey.

15. Because of their rubbery nature, gorbels are immune to all attacks from blunt instruments, like clubs, maces, hammers, and staves.

16. The gorbel instinctively strikes humanoid victims in the upper back and shoulders, where it is the most awkward for the victim to strike back at the gorbel. This is in the gorbel's best interests, for its Armor Class drops from 3 to 10 as soon as it perches on a victim.

17. A gorbel can "lock" the muscles of its feet into position at will and habitually does this when attacking. The ability is also put to good use at night, as well: Gorbels usually clamp tight onto a tree branch or heavy stone before sleeping, as this prevents the herd from being scattered by the wind.



Lady Ablasta turned her head with a look of anger flaring in her eyes. The reason was instantly obvious: Her nose had grown by an extra six inches, and green warts had popped up along both sides of her face. "You and your stupid potions!" she screamed at Zantoullios. In fear, the gangly wizard backed up several steps, bumping into Willowquisp and sending him toppling back down to the slippery ground.

"That does it. I have had it with the way this day has gone!" screamed Lady Ablasta, her neatly coiffured hair now standing out in all directions, several strands hanging in her face. Grabbing up Buntleby's dagger, she raced through the cornfield rows screaming like a banshee.

"What's all that screaming?" asked the Undermarshall, concern and a little tinge of fear in his voice.

Old Gumphrey closed his eyes as if mentally conferring with the others. "Everything's under control," he said.

Back in the cornfield, Grindle and Dreelix had encountered a group of four gorbels in an unusual position: they were on the ground instead of hovering in the air, waddling awkwardly about on their stumpy legs.[18]

"Oh, I like this!" said Dreelix, grinning evilly. He raised his wand and fired a magic missile into the nearest creature; its explosion took the gorbel next to it along as well. The two remaining gorbels, eyestalks pointed at the two Monster Hunters and eyes wide open in obvious fear, started vomiting up their recent meals in a panic.[19] Two more magic missiles, and they were no more.

"That should be nearly it," said Grindle. "Thirteen, wasn't it? We should be around ten or eleven by now. Do you think we should try to take one of others alive? You never know what we might be able to do with their body parts."

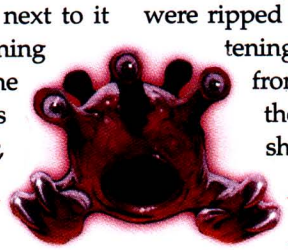
"Ah, let's just skip it this time," dismissed Dreelix. "I don't know how we'd harvest anything from a stupid creature that explodes when you kill it, anyway.[20] Let's just call this a public relations exercise and be done with it!"

"So where's Lady Ablasta?" asked Grindle. "We should get her to sniff out those last gorbels with her wizard eye." As if on cue, Lady Ablasta came shrieking through the corn, dagger held high, intent on bloody murder. She passed from view through another corn row, and, before either wizard could move, there were explosions from nearby—and a wild scream of savage triumph.

"Was that her?" Grindle asked timidly, all three hundred pounds of him quivering in fear.

"I'm not quite sure," admitted Dreelix, equally cowed.

By the time Lady Ablasta returned, the other Monster Hunters had found Grindle and Dreelix, and the six men stared in awe (and not a little fear) at their sole female member. She was a bedraggled mess: Her hair hung in wild disarray, her prim and proper garments were ripped and singed, and wet, glistening gorbel guts covered her from head to toe. Even without the temporary troll features, she looked scary.



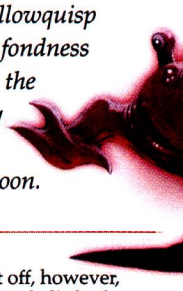
"I believe you all have wands of mine," she said, holding out a greenish hand. The wizards stumbled over themselves in their efforts to return them to her immediately. In return, Lady Ablasta handed Buntleby's dagger back to him. "Thank you, young man," she said to him. "Now then, shall we go?"

Old Gumphrey watched as his fellow Monster Hunters trudged out of the cornfields, as messy and disheveled as he'd ever seen them. "Your mutant killer beholder problem has been dealt with," Dreelix informed the Undermarshall with regal haughtiness. "You may notify the Duke that the Monster Hunters expertly defeated the menace, and any physical manifestations of his gratitude can be delivered to our meeting hall; I believe you know its location. Into the wagon, Monster Hunters! I believe the Undermarshall is ready to deliver us home!" The Undermarshall, in awe at the Monster Hunters' obvious power, scrambled to comply.

On the way back to the meeting hall, the Monster Hunters were a silent and introspective bunch—even Dreelix—each thinking his or her own private thoughts and thoroughly exhausted by their efforts. Only Old Gumphrey, who had rested comfortably in the wagon while the others went off on their Gorbel Hunt, had anything to say:

"Those must have been some gerbils!"

Johnathan M. Richards, like Willowquisp the Zoophile, has an inordinate fondness for some of the goofier of the AD&D® monsters. Fortunately for him, he's not likely to run out of goofy monsters any time soon.



18. After eating a heavy meal, the gorbel's excess weight forces it to land, where it awkwardly walks about on its two legs at Movement Rate 1. The gorbel is then pretty much defenseless, unless it can manage to walk onto its enemy and claw him or her that way. For this reason, gorbels don't often overindulge, usually eating only until they begin to "hang low" in the air.

19. In an emergency, a gorbel can force a regurgitation to get rid of excess weight (or "ballast"), vomiting up enough to get the creature airborne again, where it is both much more maneuverable and able to use its claws. Once the danger is over, the gorbel can then retrieve its meal.

20. It isn't easy, but it is possible to harvest useful gorbel byproducts. Gorbel eyes can be used as substitute material components for the *wizard eye* spell, but must be harvested before the gorbel explodes. (The explosion generally damages the gorbel's eyes and eyestalks, making them useless.) The easiest way to do this is to capture the gorbel in a net or otherwise immobilize it (*hold monster* spells are useless for this task, as gorbels move about telekinetically and can continue to do so while under the effects of the spell), then cut off the eyestalks with a knife. Severed eyestalks do not cause the gorbel to explode, as the eyestalks and limbs are not filled with the gorbel's buoyancy gas. (This also explains why gorbels have 2 HD when they are immune to all blunt damage and explode instantly upon being pierced or cut: It allows them to take some damage to eyestalks or limbs before bleeding to death. Hitting a gorbel in these areas during combat requires a called shot; the rules for called shots are found in the "Combat" section of the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*.)

Another byproduct of possible use is the pyrophoric gas produced in the gorbel's hollow body, which, if extracted, can be used in the production of potions of *fire breath*. Since harvesting this gas is nearly impossible without setting it off, however, the best receptacle for the gas is the gorbel's body itself. Some have attempted fastening gorbels to catapult stones and bombarding them at enemy fortifications; if the impact doesn't detonate the gorbel, a simple arrow shot can do so afterward. Others have carefully slain a gorbel (with poison or by severing the eyestalks and limbs and letting the creature bleed to death), then carried it around like a balloon on a string for future use against enemies. The problem with this last approach is that the "gorbel balloon" makes a good target itself, and the creature decomposes within a day or two in any case. Gorbels, never the most sweet-smelling of creatures, exude a horrific stench upon decomposition.

The gorbel's rubbery hide, if taken intact, could be put to use in fashioning a lighter-than-air craft like a balloon or a zeppelin. Of course, it would take many gorbel hides to create a large craft; to date, no successes in this endeavor have been documented.

The ecology of the

GORGON

by Ed Greenwood

"The gorgon," Elminster told me severely, "is best avoided."

I nodded. And waited. He eyed me for two or three puffs of his pipe, and then sighed. "I expect you will heed that advice — and," he added with a wry smile, "I. also expect you will want an explanation."

"Oh, yes," I responded. "And who better to provide that explanation than yourself?"

"Very well," said the sage, satisfied that I had played my part by showing the proper respect for him and his knowledge. "I will tell you what I know, and what I have heard, about the gorgon. The folk where I grew up called it the 'stone bull.' They killed one by loosing a rust monster upon it and thus forcing it into a dead-end cavern, and then unleashing several volleys of arrows — but several members of the hunting party did not return to share in the glory of their accomplishment. I know of no tales about the gorgon that have a happy ending."

"Indeed," I chimed in. "Still, there are a lot of unanswered questions about the beast."

"Aye," Elminster agreed. "I have with me an excerpt from a traveller's diary, and the researches of several colleagues of mine, notably Asheyron of Arabel, who possesses an amulet that prevents petrification. He tells me, by the way, that a gorgon's breath smells like stewed cabbage."

The excerpt is reproduced below, followed by footnotes that sum up what Elminster had to say about Asheyron's research (and that of Elephras of Melvaunt and Kiiragar of Port Llast). From the way he expressed himself, it is obvious that Elminster hates gorgons; in fact, he revealed that he once lost a pet dog to one. I asked him what he would do if he met a gorgon, and he indicated a piece of jewelry around his neck, half-hidden by his beard. "This is a thing of magic — a necklace of missiles," he said. "This big bauble near the center is my gorgon-killer."

From the diaries of the adventurer and naturalist Djaril Phylapur:

The gorgon is a bull-like creature greatly feared by travellers in the wilderness hereabout, because of its fearsome breath. Four times each day a gorgon can turn creatures to stone by its breath, using this attack whenever it meets creatures it senses to be dangerous, such as man.[1] Certain beasts (notably the xorn, pech, piercer, rust monster, earth elemental, and the gorgon itself) are known to be immune to this effect, and other such immunities doubtless remain to be discovered. Gorgons will ignore an apparently petrified victim, instinctively realizing that it is no longer dangerous. Some have been known to escape the creature by feigning death — but just as many others have tried this tactic and failed, because they were unable to keep completely still, and their deception was found out. Even the mere blink of an eye at the wrong time will alert the gorgon to the fact that its quarry is still alive — for the moment.

Gorgons are omnivorous, subsisting on carrion, vegetable material of all types, and small creatures which they gore or trample but do not petrify, seeing them as food and not potential adversaries. A lone, unarmed or weak human or humanoid would be considered food, and attacked as such; a creature that is petrified is a meal forever lost.

The breathing of the petrifying vapors is entirely a voluntary act, these vapors being produced by and stored in an internal organ opening into the roof of the mouth. The corpse of a gorgon is often still dangerous for hours after the beast's death, as a result of the slow seepage of this gas from the still-active organ, or the sudden explosion of a full cloud of gas that will envelop anyone or anything that disturbs the body. After this seepage has run its course, the gas-producing mechanism within the gorgon's body is inert and useless, so no one has succeeded in storing or synthesizing this gas, and its nature and method of manufacture remain a mystery.

Gorgons are always in an irritable mood,

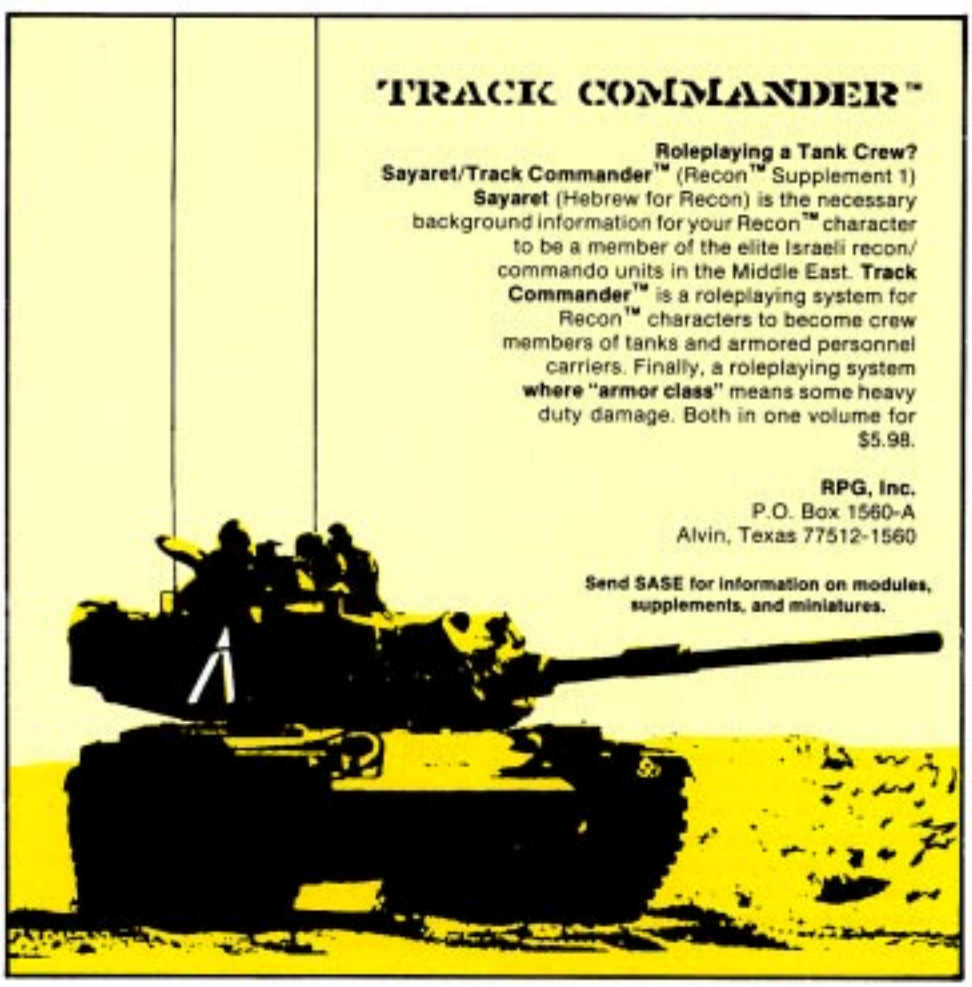
and quick to attack.[2] They will kill prey whenever it is encountered (even if their appetites are presently sated, in which case they may return to devour the prey at a later time). They lair in wilderness caverns, canyons, or "badland" areas, and there they keep treasure acquired from prey. The spoils found in a gorgon lair will be chiefly coinage and other metallic treasure, which is useful to distract the attention of would-be gorgon-killers (including rust monsters) that might stumble upon such a hoard.

The skin of a gorgon is covered with close-fitting, irregularly shaped metal scales. The scales are actually composed of impure iron; in order to maintain their strength and durability, a gorgon must derive substantial amounts of iron from its diet, chiefly from green plants and the blood of mammals. The gorgon cannot consume actual metal, in either raw or relined form (such as a suit of armor), and accumulates such metal as part of its "treasure," as described above.

The scales are coated with a waxy secretion that is constantly drying out and being worn away, and at the same time is continually replenished by the beast's internal processes (exuding from the cartilaginous seams between the scales). This coating keeps a gorgon's scales from rusting due to rain or dampness, and — coupled with the irregular shapes and curves of the scales — makes a gorgon difficult to grapple, and causes many blows to glance off its hide. The plates are rather soft (being easily marked by weapon-blows, even if those blows do not actually harm the creature), but are both thick and durable; they will not crack under crushing blows. The scales are useful as a source of iron for smelting (although other, better sources are usually available), but cannot be used directly for protection — for example, as bucklers — because they are too small and too soft. A gorgon plate of average size might bring a price of 10 copper pieces, or perhaps more if it is sold in an area where metal is scarce and in great demand.

The creature most feared by the gorgon is the rust monster, and gorgons rarely delve deeply into subterranean areas as a result. Rust monsters are themselves well armored against a gorgon's hooves and horns, and view gorgon scales as a desirable and substantial meal. At the touch of their antennae, a scale will rust and fall off[3], and although a biting, kicking gorgon will rarely let a rust monster munch happily upon the result (usually biting off its antennae or overturning the rust monster with a horn and then running away), the damage is then done. For their part, rust monsters can move more rapidly than gorgons can, and will pursue one, or even a group of gorgons, fearlessly.

Gorgons often hunt[5] together in small bands (of two mated[6] pairs, three males plus a female that one or all of them are courting, four or fewer young males, and so on). They wander a wide range, and typically know of most caverns (potential lairs) within a sixty-mile radius. If large numbers of human, demi-human, or humanoid creatures begin to move into a gorgon-inhabited area, solitary gorgons and isolated pairs not raising young will gather in the more inaccessible and labyrinthine caverns for mutual protection.



Notes

1. The breath weapon of a gorgon consists of a truncated cone-shaped cloud of visible, misty grey-green vapors. For reasons not fully understood, this cloud exists simultaneously on the Astral, Ethereal, and Prime Material Planes, and has the same effect upon creatures in any of those environments that are within the area the cloud occupies. Any creature enveloped by the cloud of vapors (which billows out with some force to fill a conical area, ½" wide at the gorgon's maw to a maximum diameter of 2" and a maximum length of 6", within 2 segments) must save versus petrification to avoid being turned to stone (which takes effect in 1-4 segments thereafter, and is permanent unless somehow counteracted at a later time). The vapors hang in the air throughout the round after the round in which they were expelled, clearly visible, and are effective until the end of this second round, whereupon they will have dissipated sufficiently to lose their petrifying power. Gorgon breath does not work underwater, and will be harmlessly destroyed by the whirlwind of an air elemental, a wind walker, or similar force of moving air. A *gust of wind* spell or similar effect will merely shift an intact breath cloud from 1" to 6" in the direction of the gust. A creature who has successfully saved versus a cloud of vapors can remain in, re-enter, or move through its confines without fear of petrification — but any creature entering a particular gorgon-breath cloud must make a save; i.e., if characters are battling a gorgon who breathes in four successive rounds, they must save four times, even if the clouds are all breathed in the same area and the characters do not change their locations. If the breath weapons of two or more gorgons overlap, however, a creature within their confines need make only one save, not two or more.

A spell caster employing a statue spell prior to encountering breath vapors is immune to petrification while in statue form, as is a druid within a tree, and any character(s) in an extra-dimensional space created by a *rope trick, portable hole,* or similar magic.

Petrified creatures are immobile and have no sense of the passage of time, nor awareness of their surroundings (they are effectively deaf, dumb, and blind, but still technically alive). Some soon become insane; most sleep, retreating from conscious awareness into an endless dream-world. They may be conversed with by means of *stone tell,* or mentally communicated with by *ESP* or *telepathy* magic and similar

psionic powers. A stone to flesh spell will free a petrified creature, but *dispel magic* will not. "Stoned" creatures are immune to all illusion and vision-related magics (e.g., *demi-shadow monsters)*, and cannot be affected by fire, electricity, any death magic, or spoken *power words* — but a *dig*, *shatter*, or *disintegrate* spell will destroy such a creature instantly.

2. In battle, gorgons breathe, gore with horns, strike with hooves, or bite — listed in order of preference; only one type of attack is possible per round.

Goring (or ripping and slashing) with horns does 2-12 hit points of damage (-1 per die of damage if the target is bearing a shield or wearing plate mail in such a location or manner as to lessen the strike). On a natural "to hit" roll of 20, a gorgon has impaled a victim with its horns; the character takes maximum damage (12 hp) on the round in which impaling occurs, and may (50% chance) remain impaled for one round afterward, taking another 2-8 points of damage if this is the case. (A gorgon can mount another attack in the round during which a victim remains impaled, but obviously this cannot be an attack with the horns.)

Gorgons can readily stand and walk about on their hind legs as well as on all fours (movement rate is the same in either stance), and can rise up on their hind legs to lash out with their front hooves. In most cases (75% of the time), the gorgon will only strike with one front hoof, using the other foreleg for balance. Its hooves do 2-8 points of damage apiece so that a creature that is trampled may suffer as much as 8-32 (2-8 times 4) points of damage if all four hooves hit. The gorgon's rear hooves can lash out just as their front ones do, but the creature will only use this attack form if it is assaulted from behind — and obviously it cannot lash out with front hooves and rear hooves both in the same round.

A gorgon rarely bites in battle unless its breath weapon is expended (or the beast has chosen not to use it) and its horns are gone or encumbered (usually by another, impaled creature). A gorgon bite does 1-3 points of damage; this attack mode is often employed to finish off a victim that has been incapacitated or rendered unconscious by its other physical attacks, and which the gorgon intends to use as a meal.

3. The attack of a rust monster upon a gorgon only affects the one or two body plates that are touched by the rust monster's antennae; the non-metallic, cartilage-like seams between plates prevent the rusting effect from traveling any farther than the plate(s) it actually hits. A rusted, corroded plate will immediately (in the same round) detach from the skin underneath and fall off. A gorgon cannot re-grow or otherwise replace body plates that fall off (due to rusting or any other effect). A young gorgon's plates will grow in area and thickness as the creature matures, but will always be the "original equipment"; i.e., there is no moulting or shedding process involved.

The repeated loss of body plates can render a gorgon more vulnerable to physical attacks; whenever 20% or more of the surface area of a gorgon's body is devoid of metal plates, there is a chance equal to that percentage that a strike against the gorgon's body will be made against AC 8 (the unprotected area) instead of AC 2 (the creature's normal armor class).

4. A gorgon can see in normal light as well as a man does, and simultaneously use normal vision out to a 6" distance on the Astral and Ethereal Planes. It has infravision out to a range of 8", on the Prime Material Plane only. A gorgon can smell most creatures within 3", and will always try to confront (or in some way react to) a creature it detects by smell — whether it is a potential meal, a strong adversary who must be fought off or killed, or a rust monster, which must be led to another source of metal and then fled from as fast as possible.

5. Male and female gorgons are identical in size and powers and are externally indistinguishable (except to other gorgons). A mated pair will stay together for 2-6 years and will reproduce approximately once a year (more often if food is plentiful, less often if it is not). The female will bear 1-3 offspring 6-8 months after mating, and will keep to the lair (her mate hunting for her) from the fourth month of pregnancy until she gives birth. A newborn gorgon is able to move and attack for itself at one month of age; young are size S, have 3 hit dice, can breathe a half-normal-size cloud of vapors twice per day, and do half normal damage on all physical attacks. At 3 months of age a young gorgon has grown to size M and 5 hit dice, and can use its breath weapon (still a half-sized cloud) three times per day. A gorgon reaches full adult size and powers within 5-7 months after being born. It will achieve maturity (the ability to mate) at the age of two years, at which time it will leave its parents' lair (if it has not done so already). Very rarely, a gorgon will mate with a chimera to produce a gorgimera (see Monster Manual II and DRAGON® issue #94), but the two creatures will not habitually consort together for any length of time.

Guidelines

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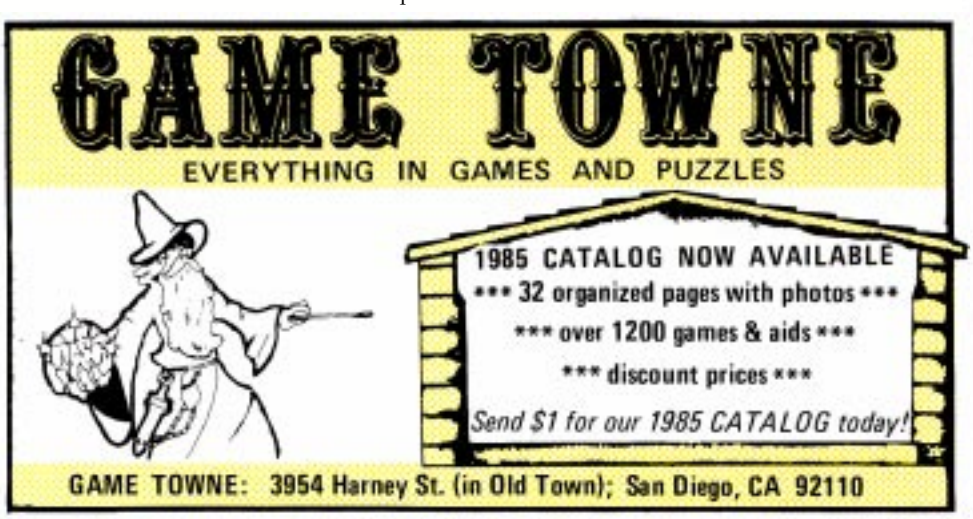
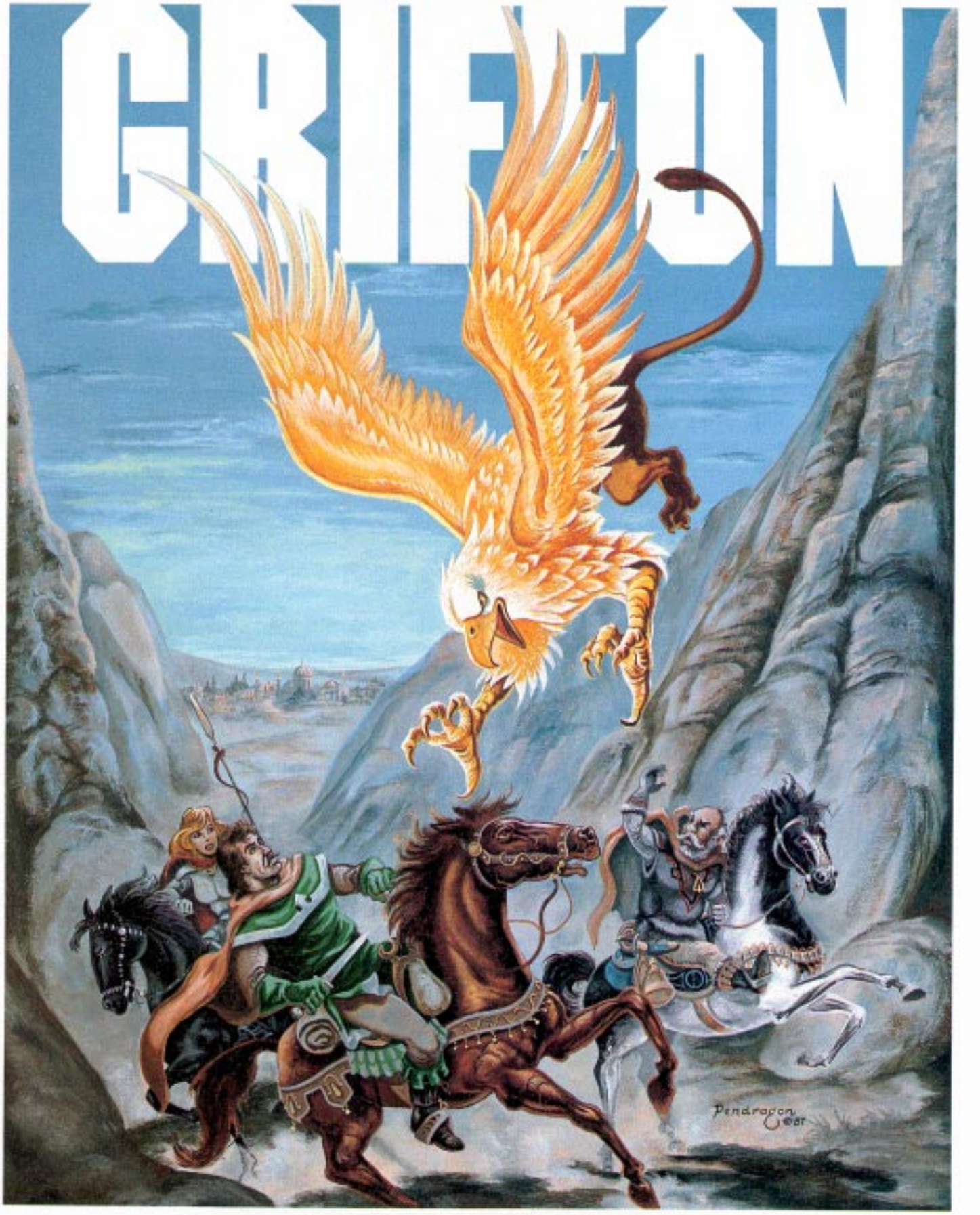


THE ECOLOGY OF THE GRIFFON



Taking flight with *Felis aquila*

by Christopher Kederich

From a popular lecture by forest warden Defaeben Knazzer, of the Royal Zoological Gardens of Zinfinjord:

One of the best known of all fantastic creatures, the griffon is seen both as a feared monster and a much-desired flying mount. The griffon is accurately described by sages as a ferocious avian carnivore, and it is probably the most successful large flying predator, being more common and voracious than any sort of dragon. It is the true king of the air.

The origins of the griffon are unclear. Some scholars have speculated that it was the result of magical experimentation by an ancient civilization. Yet the legends of griffons seem to be older than the earliest records, older than this theory would explain. Like the centaurs, griffons are probably the result of natural magical forces granting an adaptable creature the traits of different mundane animals. In the griffon, these forces produced a powerful being indeed.

Anatomy

In appearance, griffons resemble great lionlike cats with the taloned forelimbs, wings, and heads of great eagles, but with prominent tufted ears. Their body fur colors range from golden bronze to dark brown, the colors darkening with age. Males have touches of red on their breast feathers; females have duller coloration than males.

The size of an adult griffon is on the order of the largest of lions and tigers, being of similar proportions though with an especially heavy chest and with the shoulders to accommodate wings and flight muscles. While standing on all fours, the overall length from beak to rump measures 7-10′. An adult male may weigh up to 1,100 lbs., with females averaging one-third less.

Artists and heralds have incorrectly pictured griffons as having thin, sticklike forelimbs. In fact, a griffon's forelegs are as heavy as a lion's and are capable of striking like clubs with sufficient force to break a victim's neck. The raptor's talons, which are up to 6″ long, can not only slash but can clench in a bone-crushing grip. Like lions, griffons can bowl over large animals with one sweep of a foreleg.

With pinions fully stretched, the griffon's wingspan is often eight or nine yards across, a magnificent and awe-inspiring sight. Though without tail feathers and looking entirely lionlike, the griffon's tail helps it steer and stay balanced in flight. The moderately pointed wings are well suited for soaring and for diving onto prey. A griffon's feathers are gold in color, often with patterns of black washing across them.

The eyes of the griffon have been said to resemble living flames, usually being ruby red, burning yellow, or icy blue. Griffons have the same keen vision that giant eagles have, being able to see a horse from two miles away in the air. It is said that if a griffon could read, it could see normal print clearly from 100′. It lacks infravision but can see clearly in the dark as its eyes gather the faintest of light. Its sense of smell is only average for a predatory animal, still much better than that of humans but inferior to that of dogs. It might be possible for a griffon to track quarry by scent alone, and one would certainly be able to detect most enemies approaching from upwind, but not as readily as could many of its prey. A griffon's sense of hearing, on the other hand, is very sharp. It can hear hoofbeats on packed earth from at least a mile altitude, and a trainer's call will reach it from the same distance.

Flying

Eagles can roll completely over in midair and griffons can do likewise, but not without some difficulty. Due to their great size, it would take longer to correct an error or regain height, making aerobatics dangerous. Midair loops and somersaults may be possible under good conditions but probably not with a rider. Nevertheless, the griffon is a nimble and powerful flyer, though less so than the Pegasus, which is both faster and more agile in flight. The griffon is built to catch moderately quick prey and carry it back to a high nest.

Griffons can fly in almost any weather, having an elemental feel for the sky and its conditions. They can sense changes in the weather and can detect downdrafts and thermals. Griffon riders need at least as much training to learn how griffons fly as their griffons need to learn how to carry their riders. Griffons can be intractable at times and simply may not want to fly, much less convey a rider, though usually not without good reason; they are quite sure of themselves in the air.

Hunting

Very few carnivores are as superbly capable of hunting as is the griffon. With its combination of speed and agility, as well as its natural armament, the griffon is a tenacious predator. Although a griffon can strike large prey out of the air, it favors hunting ground-dwelling animals, especially herd animals and most especially horses, which it craves. The variety of potential prey is very large, as griffons are opportunistic hunters; they feed on almost anything from the size of a rabbit to a buffalo—including, at times, humans. Unlike lions, griffons are not scavengers and will usually ignore food that isn't fresh. A griffon can locate prey in near total darkness, but it normally hunts during the day as it is easier to fly on sun-heated thermals and many herd animals are up and about during this time. Open plains, savannahs, and rolling grasslands are its preferred hunting grounds.

If it is injured, a griffon can function as a land predator as well as an aerial one, though it will be slow and is then most likely to become a man-eater. When acting as a land hunter, it will behave much as a big cat, though it shows some flexibility in adjusting its hunting techniques. It may stalk and pounce like a leopard, or stalk

Artwork by Pendragon

and charge like a tiger; if there are two or more griffons, a group charge, as per the lion, might be used. If the griffon's wings are partially functioning, it is then able to drop onto its prey from a tree or cliff.

Although griffons can and do hunt a large variety of prey, equine flesh is their obsession. Griffons wing their ways at once toward any horses they see, selecting the group that offers the best feeding with the least danger. Young griffons pay no heed to warriors who may be riding or leading horses, attacking with no regard for swords or arrows. An older griffon, however, devotes a few moments to consider such an attack in advance. An unprotected wild horse is an immediate target, but a column of cavalry may be given up as too much trouble unless the griffon is extremely hungry, stupid, arrogant, or has never fought warriors before.

Griffons are not often clever, but experienced ones have learned a few tricks. Adventurers tell tales of griffons that bide their time until after dark when a large mounted party is bedded down, then approach on the ground from upwind to spook the horses into bolting from the camp. The griffons then follow the horses for a safe distance before making the kill to minimize the hazards from the party. If horses are tied down, a quick kill from the air and an immediate escape will ensure something worth eating after the party is gone. The less-intelligent lion is well known for similar tactics.

Family matters

The griffon's range is extremely wide, from the tropics to the subarctic, and from coastal areas to high mountains. Because of the wide variety of prey it can hunt, and its ability to fly long distances for food or water; the griffon is the dominant predator in most areas unsuitable for other large hunters.

A griffon's preferred nesting place is in the most remote and inaccessible part of its territory. High places commanding a wide view of the surrounding countryside are typical, including cliffs, mountaintops, mountainous caves, and large ruins. Even some great trees can support the weight of a griffon's nest. These nests are normally far apart, but if prey is plentiful griffons can be gregarious and live among a small cluster of nests within earshot of each other.

As with eagles, griffons are monogamous and mate for life. They are devoted parents and will defend mate and young unto death. The young are fed first from any family kill. It is the male that hunts while the female guards the nest, again much as with eagles. Typically, two agate-colored eggs are laid at a time, hatching in four weeks. The hatchlings are ravenous and eat at least their weight in food a day for the first three months of life. At four months, the fledglings are the sizes of large dogs and can climb and move about on the ground. The parents now begin to teach their young hunting methods without using wings. At six months, the young begin flight training and aerial hunting, which lasts at least six more months. The nest is moved if necessary until the young can fend for themselves. Leaving the parents after two years, the young travel great distances before establishing their own home ranges.

On occasion, two or more griffons (usually males, typically brothers) team up and hunt together. This may last for a short time, a lifetime, or until one finds a mate. Less cautious than mated pairs, these bachelor groups are more likely to be seen than others and are the basis on which most people form their impressions of griffons. Intensely loyal to each other, these griffons will back each other up in almost any situation.

Griffons rarely fight among themselves in the way many other predators do. The males are very protective of females, even if they are not mates. It is this instinctive sense of loyalty and discipline that makes a griffon a much more dependable battle mount than a horse or most other flying steeds. Griffons are naturally combative and fear almost nothing, yet neither will they fight for no apparent reason.

Treasure

Suspicious and bold, griffons may investigate anything that interests them despite possible danger. Attracted to shiny objects to decorate their nests, some griffons collect assorted treasures solely for their looks and will fight strenuously to protect what is theirs, but may trade precious items for something more interesting.

The treasure types to be found in a griffon's nest are those that have survived examination and rough handling. Potions are likely to be broken because the griffons like to toss colorful things about and try to catch them in their beaks, or drop them to hear how they sound upon hitting the rocks. Furs, clothes, and leather goods are apt to be employed in tugging matches or claw sharpening. Scrolls similarly suffer unless well protected. Only durable metal objects will last.

An exceedingly rare species of griffon is known to have a peculiar sense that allows it to detect gold up to 10′ away. Since gold is of little value to griffons except as nest decorations, they do not often exercise. this ability. Even so, this species can tell a fake piece of gold at a glance. A narrow strip of dark fur over the middle of the chest seems to grant this ability. It is possible to use this fur to enchant an item to locate gold. The difficulty in this is that the fur must come from a live griffon, and few if any are willing to part with their fur. If fur is removed from a live donor (which is necessary in order for this power to be transferred), the griffon's gold-detecting ability fades for a year while the fur grows back on its chest.

Being both possessive and curious, even a trained griffon will not take kindly to being completely left out of the division of the adventure's spoils, especially if the griffon's sense for gold helped to locate the treasure. On the other hand, a nestless griffon is likely to quickly tire of its valuable "toys" and will soon discard them.

Training

Griffons can be trained to be companions and mounts with striking loyalty, though not without unique problems. Horses are tamed and trained with ease by comparison; domesticated horses find the company of other horses or herbivores often makes them feel secure. Griffons are more solitary and dislike crowds. They do poorly in captivity, needing open spaces to exercise. Most would eventually refuse to eat if caged, making it difficult to hold them against their will.

Gaining a griffon is difficult at best. Griffon eggs and fledglings command a high price—2000 and 5,000 gold pieces each respectively on the open market. Raising the young is often more trouble than most adventurers expect. Fledglings must be captured before their first feathers grow in at three months of age in order to bond with an owner. If taken later, the griffon will not readily accept its new "family" and has a 10% per month chance of deserting (if mistreated, 20% per month; confinement is considered mistreatment).

Training the young must include hunting in order to make the fullest use of the griffon's abilities and to maintain a balanced mind. Here, the outdoor skills of the trainer become the common ground between rider and griffon. Although flying is instinctive, the fledgling must be coaxed into flight. During the training, a trainer may teach the griffon special skills to be used on an adventure, such as dropping bombs or grabbing ground-based objects from the air.

Unlike the griffon, any adventurer will find learning how to fly competently very difficult. The time required is usually about 11-16 weeks. Use of *speak with animals* spells or the like will lessen the time by another 2-5 weeks. Those with less than normal agility and dexterity cannot fly with any competency, but they may be tied on and carried about as baggage. Characters with low endurance will not be able to fly without becoming helplessly ill from motion sickness. Griffons bob up and down a great deal in their flight, unlike pegasi, making riding one rather like being a jockey in a steeplechase. A large part of riding one lies not merely in being strapped down but in hanging on, resisting the wind and moving with the animal to make it easier on both parties.

On occasion, adventurers may earn the gratitude of a griffon by releasing it from a trap or saving it from some illness or injury. If made to feel a part of the "family," such a griffon is more likely stay with a group indefinitely. Since only adult griffons are likely to be encountered in this

way, there will be no need for flight or hunting training. The griffon will be most likely to bond to an adventurer to whom loyalty is an important virtue.

One cannot subject griffons to the indignities commonly placed upon horses, like corralling, hobbles, and branding. Bit and bridle would, at best, interfere with their own defenses and would probably be intolerable. Vocal commands and body movements are sufficient for nearly all situations, and a hackamore helps for special ones. The best battle-trained horses are trained to obey complex vocal commands; griffons are both more intelligent and naturally battle-ready creatures, and they can obey even more complex orders.

A horse saddle will not fit on a griffon. Any saddle made for a griffon must take into account its wings and should not hamper flight. Sidesaddles are out of the question. If made out of horse leather, a saddle may even be eaten. The saddle may be positioned in front of or behind the wings; it may be less tiring to the griffon for the weight to be behind the wings but will restrict the rider's vision and ability to fight. Barding is rarely used, as it always lowers flight speed and maneuverability. Simple and light head, neck, and chest armor should create no problems as long as it weighs much less than a rider.

A rider should be able to do anything that can generally be done 'in a high wind while bobbing up and down strapped between the flapping wings of a large predator that will probably object if the rider sits up and creates drag. If properly buckled in, the rider will have at least one free hand much of the time and be able to fight or grasp objects. Flight clothing should take into consideration wind chill, weather, weight load, etc.

As mounts, griffons should not be counted on to travel overland even though they can handle rough terrain easily. If you are going to ride—fly. Griffons may be more argumentative and uncooperative than horses, but they don't spook at rabbits, birds, or shadows. On the other hand, horses are not often known to hungrily chase rabbits, deer, or other horses, and they don't eat riders who've been abusive to them. Griffons are fearless if aggressive and loyal if moody. Griffon males usually make better mounts, being not only larger and stronger than females but also calmer and more patient.

Unfortunately, there are other problems involved in owning a griffon mount. For example, after long contact with griffons, a rider may walk upwind of someone's horse; what will the horse do upon smelling its worst enemy? After an adventure, heroes may want to relax in town for a while—and so might their loyal griffons, whether or not the townspeople agree. Naturally, the disappearance of any horses will be blamed on the griffons. And if a character is eating steak, his griffon will not easily tolerate left-over iron rations.

Abilities

Just how strong griffons are is a matter of measurement. Griffons can fly carrying loads as great as their own body weight, though not for long periods. With their taloned forelimbs, griffons can grasp objects and hold them, probably damaging anything fragile. If so trained, they have a 40% chance to bend bars or lift gates. With the same basic strength as a lion, a griffon will be far stronger than any normal humanoid. On the ground, a griffon should be able to do the same sort of feats that a huge lion or tiger can manage.

A griffon's appetite is remarkable. Even if not flying, a griffon will eat more than a similarly sized lion, typically on the order of at least 25-30 lbs. of fresh meat a day. If flying, it will eat half again to twice as much when possible, depending on whether or not a load is being carried. When hungry, a griffon becomes very irritable and aggressive. Although a person to whom the griffon is loyal is in no danger of being eaten, anything else is considered fair game.

Without proper food, the griffon will be a poor flier and very uncooperative. When food is available, griffons sometimes consume tremendous amounts and may be too gorged to fly well, but won't require another feeding for some time. Riders should make sure that their griffons don't overindulge themselves between adventures and become lethargic.

Friends and foes

Being choosy, griffons will not serve as mounts or companions for humanoids prone to mistreat animals. These are such beings as the griffon would consider dirty, disgusting, and incapable of returning trust, such as orcs, gnolls, and kobolds. A griffon will also not hunt other griffons.

A griffon has very few natural enemies, and none count it as regular prey. Only humanoid species present a significant threat. Some creatures will nevertheless always be enemies with griffons. Hippogriffs and pegasi are no match in a fight and will normally be chased if rarely caught. Manticores are slower if more difficult prey. Harpies will always be attacked at the first opportunity. The hypnotic song of the harpy does not affect the griffon as it does a human, but if such a song is heard, it will enrage the griffon and bring it winging in to attack. Perytons are another natural adversary; although invulnerable to most nonmagical attacks, they are subject to predation by the innately powerful griffons. Thus griffons help clear the skies of certain hazards that threaten humanity.

Having as few natural allies as they have enemies, griffons are compatible with giant eagles, for example, and are generally on good terms with them. Those races and classes more attuned to nature, such as elves and druids, are best apt to understand and be compatible with griffons. Centaurs, on the other hand, and other quasi-equine species (even if they don't taste like horses) will be in perpetual strife with griffons.

Sacred to Apollo, griffons are said to draw this gods chariot home from his winter retreat. Several other deities have held griffons sacred and may have had something to do with their creation, but whatever their origins, the griffon is such a successful predator that it needs no guiding force to sustain it. There are even reports of sentient griffons which may represent a separate species largely indistinguishable from the familiar one and which may wish to remain unrecognized.

Miscellaneous

Griffons have a language that sounds like a collection of squawks and growls to other creatures. It is composed mostly of words relating to flying, hunting, weather, and the visual appearance of things. It is not suited to abstract concepts.

Like tigers, griffons can swim, but if their feathers are wet they must dry off before flying. By nature compulsively neat and tidy, enjoying baths and frequently preening for hours, griffons are not likely to accept filthy would-be riders or accommodations.

The lifespan of a griffon is very long, some serving several generations of a family. Actual lifespan is dependent on many factors but may extend as long as several centuries. One hundred and fifty years is considered average in the wild.

A griffon is a magnificent creature to be treasured by all humanity. Dangerous it is, but marvelous, too. As long as it wings through the skies, we can look up at it and know the meaning of courage.

Game information

In combat, griffons prefer to use their beak and talon attacks first, If diving onto a victim from a greater height (at least 60') or a victim that is flying more slowly (MV fly 24 or less), the griffon will double its claw damage and gain a + 2 to hit, but not be able to employ its beak in the same round. If a griffon can strike an enemy on the ground with both of its foreclaws, it can employ its rear claws for an additional 1-4 hp damage, but at a -2 to hit because they are not accustomed to doing so unless so trained. A griffon can use the rake even in midair, but it loses altitude rapidly and disengages as soon as possible. Its last means of defense may include a wing buffet, but this does only 1-2 hp damage per wing because the wings are feathered and soft. If a flying griffon snatches someone from the ground (requiring one to-hit roll), it causes 1-6 hp damage from roughness even if it does not mean any harm. Training the griffon in this snatch can lessen the damage to 1-4 hp.

For more information on flying, see "Flying the Friendly(?) Skies," in DRAGON® Magazine #124. Ω

by Mark A. Hart • illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE GRIMLOCK

In the dark realms below lives a race of stalwart, aggressive, and paranoid creatures capable of operating with equal ease in darkness and in light. These creatures, known by many on the world above as grimlocks, possess preternatural camouflage in their cavernous homes, the heightened senses of true Underdark predators, and a xenophobic mistrust of all other races. Often toiling as slave-warriors in the armies of the drow, duergar, and mind flayers, grimlocks have endured centuries of enslavement and deprivation. Although these creatures demonstrate a remarkable capacity for evil, they nonetheless display qualities of bravery, determination, and sometimes even fierce loyalty. The races of the surface world rarely witness this grim nobility, however, and thus most consider grimlocks as nothing more than twisted, evil, and degenerate monsters.

History

In the distant past, grimlocks lived on the surface as a race of stony-skinned, mountain-dwelling barbarians. Carving out a fierce warrior society upon their mountaintop homes, they made war with all those who lived below, subsisting by raiding the settlements of more peaceful races. Although widely feared, such brutality could only be tolerated for so long, and eventually an alliance of their victims struck back, forcing the grimlocks from their lofty homes. Hunted by their one-time prey, those grimlocks who weren't exterminated hid wherever they could find shelter, many retreating deep into the tunnels below the peaks they once called home. Thus, grimlocks gained both their place among the creatures of the Underdark and their race-wide loathing of all other beings.

Unexpectedly, grimlocks found a pathetic kind of purchase within the Underdark, wandering widely through its depths

in separated groups and multiplying as they could. Their stone-colored skin allowed the surviving grimlocks to hide from many of the Underdark's greatest predators and flourish within thelightless depths. However, their survival was not assured by their own tenacity to survive, but unexpectedly by the cruel whimsy of one of the Underdark's greatest horrors: illithids.

When a group of blindly wandering grimlock refugees encountered and wiped out a group of their kobold thralls, the mind flayers turned their sinister attentions upon this new band of interlopers. Seeking out and capturing this displaced people, the illithids found that the grimlocks' weak will combined with martial prowess made them perfect thralls. Altering their forms to better suit the grimlocks' new darkened homes and the needs of their masters, the illithids and the strange radiations of the Underdark warped the grimlocks into the perfect slave race. Breeding them as cattle, the mind flayers put the newly adapted grimlocks to widespread use as servants, food, warriors, and as trade goods to the other foul races of the Underdark. Thus, sold and traded like animals, grimlocks spread far and wide.

Only a few roving bands of grimlocks remained free, adapting to their new environments through exposure to the Underdark's strange radiations in much the same way as the illithids warped their enslaved cousins. Today, these tribes, as well as bands of slave grimlocks who have somehow found their freedom, roam the Underdark in search of food. Many free grimlocks also serve other creatures to improve their chances of survival and worship powerful creatures like aboleths, medusae, deep-dwelling dragons, or other powerful, intelligent monstrosities. The grimlocks bring them food, slaves, and other offerings in exchange for protection.

A handful of grimlock cities have developed throughout the underground realms. Such communities, small by human standards, survive in remote locations, distant from other races. If anything, a grimlock city resembles a fortress more than a settlement. Grimlock builders make use of natural terrain as well as obstacles such as rivers and ravines. Often, these communities originate when a grimlock tribe breaks free from enslavement and many might even be within the ruins of another race's fallen city. Former slaves often prove more successful and fiercely independent than their free brethren, as they understand the price of failure. Ex-slaves of the Underdark's cruelest masters, these grimlocks almost universally prefer death to servitude.

Physiology

In the light, a grimlock's appearance resembles a half-formed, almost fetuslike humanoid with drooping skin and underdefined features. A smooth mask of skin stretches taut across grimlock faces in place of eye sockets and their splotchy gray flesh appears mottled and sickly, like melted stone. Although average grimlocks stand over 5 feet tall, they walk with a hunched, stooped posture that gives them a shorter, bulkier appearance.

Grimlocks possess impressive strength significantly beyond that of a normal human. Because the Underdark consists of endless tunnels, caverns, and cliffs, grimlocks gain much of their might through constant climbing, jumping, running, and toil. In addition to their wiry physical power, grimlocks boast a high degree of agility and flexibility, along with a hardy stamina. Even the weakest

grimlock walks, runs, hunts, or performs heavy labor for long periods of time without tiring, as life in the Underdark permits only the strongest and healthiest to survive.

Although blind, grimlocks enjoy heightened hearing, sense of smell, and even touch. In combat, they detect enemies through both noise and smell, using their acute senses to pinpoint nearby targets. Using their improved sense of touch, grimlocks can run their hands across a surface and learn almost as much about it as any sighted creature looking at it. With only a fleeting touch, a grimlock perceives minute variations and changes in temperature and texture.

Young grimlocks mature rapidly and gain strength over their first three years of life. The weak fall prey to monsters, accidents, or the slaver's lash; the survivors representing the strongest, fastest, and sturdiest of their generation. Although children appear emaciated and small, the scrawniest grimlock child possesses considerable strength and impressive speed.

Grimlocks often ritually scar their bodies with intricately tattooed spiral patterns. The older a grimlock lives, the more scars one accumulates, with each tattoo growing more elaborate by the year. Grimlocks recognize one another through scent, speech, and by each other's scars. Indeed, a grimlock's tattoos describe his name, his skills, his profession, his deeds, and his history with remarkable detail. While some scholars believe this practice might be an extreme reinterpretation of one of the grimlocks' lost surface traditions, others suggest that it is an attempt by grimlocks to exert some control over their forms, which have been so altered by the Underdark and torturous illithid augmentations. Grimlocks take excessive pride in their tattooed scars and many grimlock masters, primarily drow who favor using whips in culling their slaves, have been overwhelmed by unexpectedly enraged grimlocks whose ornate scars are marred by the lash.

Psychology & Society

Grimlocks live harsh, brutal, and often short lives. Because most grimlocks serve as slaves and live in the Underdark, day-to-day survival is always uncertain. Free grimlocks spend their time foraging for food and hiding from enemies, while enslaved grimlocks serve as disposable soldiers or perform bone-crushing labor all day. Regardless, an individual grimlock struggles every day to survive.

Scraping together sufficient food often proves difficult in the Underdark and free grimlocks must forage daily for sustenance. Grimlocks will eat nearly anything, but prefer fresh meat and fish. Quite regularly, grimlocks are forced to subsist on mushrooms and other fungi, insects, carrion, and rodents. With true adaptability, grimlocks digest anything remotely edible, regardless of taste or consistency. Without regard to morality, grimlocks frequently practice cannibalism, disposing of the weak, aged, and infirm before they become a hindrance to the tribe.

Grimlock tribes are little more than loose-knit groups of families. While families care for children for the first year, after that the tribe shares responsibility for the young. Indeed, after the first year, the average grimlock maintains the same degree of contact with his parents as with everyone else in the community. Tribes consider their children a shared resource for the future, something for which every member holds responsibility.

Whether enslaved or free, grimlocks learned to expect the worst from other races. Other races inevitably attack them, enslave them, or steal their food and resources. In the cruel world of the Underdark, grimlocks expect brutality, violence, and betrayal from everyone they encounter. Since their relocation to the Underdark, grimlocks have endured the bullying and abuse of every major underground race. As a result, trust remains a difficult concept for them to accept. For the most part, grimlocks prefer peace and isolation. When other races steal their food and enslave their children, grimlocks must raid to survive. At times, simple desperation forces grimlocks to raid surface villages and farms, creating a monstrous cycle of predation and survival.

In rare circumstances, grimlocks come to treat other individual creatures as equals. For example, grimlocks might view someone who saved a tribe member's life as an equal. Although the grimlock language includes no word for "friend," these creatures understand the concept of an ally, fellow hunter, and brother. When an outsider enters grimlock culture and demonstrates he deserves equal status, usually through skill at the hunt or in battle, an unusual bond might develop between that individual and the grimlocks. Although such intense loyalty remains rare, it demonstrates grimlocks share a few traits in common with surface dwellers. Grimlocks share their food with adopted friends and demonstrate a willingness to fight alongside that person, as long as the individual continues to prove his usefulness. Understanding that a weak individual is a sickness to society who makes the whole tribe vulnerable, grimlocks do not allow frail members of their own race to survive and feeble outsiders are cast out or quickly put to another use—often as food.

Despite the grimlock familiarity with aggression and xenophobia, their culture involves more breadth and depth than survival and hunting. Grimlocks enjoy several unique styles of art and entertainment, and demonstrate a knack for music. Thanks to their acute sense of hearing, grimlocks interpret a wider range of sound than many other races. Their material art, seemingly little more than cave etchings to most cultures, relies on touch and scent rather than sight and includes variations in texture, moisture, and temperature to create pictures and tell stories. Grimlocks have also cultivated a unique art form that combines their skill at music and sculpture. By shaping cavern walls and creating complexly shaped hollow pillars within windy tunnels, grimlocks are able to alter the sounds underground breezes create as they pass through such formations. This art, called wind sculpting, has thus far only been mastered by grimlocks, although it appeals to many of the Underdark races that hold them as slaves and has appeared near the cavernous homes of many such peoples.

On rare occasions, grimlocks abandon their tribes or their tribes abandon them—often in the case of extreme

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The following table shows the results of Knowledge (nature) checks as they relate to grimlocks. Those who travel the Underdark or have dealings with evil Underdark races might possess this information.

DC 10: Grimlocks are blind creatures that dwell underground.

DC 15: Grimlocks possess exceptional skill in hiding when in the mountains or underground. Grimlocks often ally with drow, duergar, illithids, and other powerful Underdark monstrosities.

DC 20: Grimlocks rely on sound and smell to navigate and are thus immune to most illusions and all gaze attacks. Xenophobic in the extreme, grimlocks are often held as slaves and eagerly rebel against their masters.

DC 25: Because grimlocks sense their surroundings through sound and scent, sonic attacks and strong smells render them effectively blind. Strength of arms and offers of food might win a grimlock's assistance if not its trust or loyalty.

illness when cannibalism seems more dangerous. A few exceptional individuals survive alone, living short nomadic lives constantly on the run from the Underdark's countless threats. A few of these individuals journey to the surface, either seeking a more hospitable home or with the desire to learn about the world above. Yet even these unusual grimlocks must struggle each day to be viewed as more than monsters, rely upon what allies they make, and put aside their inherent mistrust of other races.

Versus Grimlocks

Underground or in darkness, grimlocks make vicious enemies. Alone, a grimlock is a fierce but often unmotivated combatant, favoring its own survival to needless fighting. However, a grimlock raiding party fights in total silence and cooperates like a pack of wolves, exhibiting savage fury and fearlessness. Although a grimlock raiding party poses a serious threat, when motivated by a cruel taskmaster like a mind flayer or other monster, grimlocks become even deadlier.

Beware Ambushes: Against most opponents, grimlocks rely upon their stealth and camouflage abilities as well as natural cover. The preferred grimlock tactic involves hiding and waiting for enemies to enter melee range. Often, grimlocks position themselves in nooks or crevices above enemies, waiting for hours if necessary until prey passes close.

Once in melee, grimlocks attack with heavy, simply made weapons such as axes or clubs. Grimlocks fight almost exclusively with such melee weapons as their senses don't allow them to perceive distant creatures with the clarity ranged weaponry requires. Thus, PCs combating grimlocks should consider using spells that limit their enemies' mobility and access to allies, such as *entangle*, *web*, and the various *wall* spells.

Blind Them: Countering either a grimlock's hearing or sense of smell effectively hampers its blindsight ability. If a grimlock loses both its hearing and sense of smell, it experiences the full effects of blindness.

Give Them Targets: Grimlocks lack the tactical awareness to attack spellcasters or other specialized targets. When confronted with an enemy, they attack. When characters face grimlocks, they should find ways to bring in allies and thus provide more targets for grimlocks to attack. The *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells provide quick and inexpensive allies to the party and force grimlocks to spread their attacks. Even if the party's spellcasters summon weak creatures such as wolves or monstrous centipedes, grimlocks lack the ability to immediately differentiate a weak opponent from a strong one. The party's spellcasters should also place a few summoned monsters between them and the battle as a front line of defense. Spellcasters should avoid casting spells like *mirror image* or similar illusions, as the sight-based nature of such spells prove completely ineffective against blind grimlock attackers.

Look for Leaders: Often, non-grimlocks command grimlock raiding parties. Any creature capable of controlling grimlocks and commanding their fear deserves the PC's respect. Aboleths, drow, duergar, medusa, mind flayers, and numerous other more intelligent monstrosities often control a band of grimlocks on patrols or raids. In most cases, leaders remain hidden while their minions fight. As such, characters should take steps to locate and eliminate the creature leading the grimlocks. Because such leaders often prove cowardly, characters should look for concentrations of grimlocks or other creatures serving as bodyguards or defenders. However, in some cases, a leader might prove even more powerful than its entire grimlock entourage, so PCs should exercise extreme caution.

Remember Immunities: Grimlocks lack both eyes and eyesight. A grimlock's blindness renders him immune to all visual illusions, gaze attacks, and any spell or effect dependent on sight. A great many spells become ineffective against grimlocks, including *blindness*, *color spray*, *dancing lights*, *darkness*, *deeper darkness*, *flare*, *fog cloud*, *mirror image*, *obscuring mist*, and many others.

Show Overwhelming Strength: Despite their savage and barbaric culture, grimlocks possess intelligence and self-preservation instincts. If adventurers demonstrate overwhelming strength and superiority against a grimlock band, the grimlocks might accept truce or parley. PCs also stand a better chance of ending a battle if they eliminate the grimlocks' leader. Certain destructive spells, such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt*, might convince grimlocks to retreat or offer a truce rather than fight to the death. Of course, such diplomacy can only take place if the grimlocks aren't being driven on by a master they fear even more than the PCs.

Target Scouts: As grimlocks rely heavily on their sense of hearing while traveling, bands of grimlock warriors and hunters often send lone scouts in various directions ahead of them. These scouts perform the dangerous role of providing warnings to their brethren as they stumble across danger or draw them on when they come upon prey. By the sounds of either the scouts' screams or a series of swift barks, a scouts' allies can swiftly close on its position. Thus, PCs who encounter lone grimlocks should seek to dispatch them swiftly and quietly, before they have the opportunity to alert other grimlocks in the area.

The ecology of the GULGUTHRA

by Ed Greenwood

The Gulguthra, or "Dung-Eaters" (the otyugh and neo-otyugh), are strange and deadly creatures indeed. I asked Elminster about them some time ago, and it happened that upon his next visit the house was — unexpected by us both — full of children; a captive audience to any sage worth his tongue. Elminster did not disappoint.

"Gather round," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "and I'll tell you of Erammon and the Kitchen Midden." He waited until the small whirlwind of visiting nieces and nephews had settled at his feet, and his pipe had drawn into life, green smoke rings rising from it. I had introduced him as "Uncle El," and he was enjoying the role gleefully — although he had muttered an aside to me that it had better only last this one night. I'll set down the tale as he told it — although, of course, without the voices'. (Elminster is a master vocal mimic when he wants to be.)

Erammon was a minor lordling of the eastern Dales — of Harrowdale on the Inner Sea. even then a sleepy farmers' land. His father, the Lord Oraun, was wise and just, strong in battle, and well respected in the Dales. Erammon was a young prince like any other, reckless and fun-loving and full of himself. He longed for battles and ravening monsters and fell wizards so that he could swing his shining sword and win the day and walk into the taverns in Harrowdale to a hero's welcome (and not the usual hushed, wary silence). One day he asked his swordmaster why Harrowdale was so tranquil (that was not the word he used) and why his father was so respected as a fighter, since Oraun never seemed to fight.

The swordmaster, old Thaeron, replied: "Harrowdale's at peace because it's strong, boy, and it's strong because of your father. I fought with him, in the wars with Thar and with the outcasts of Sembia; he's a man to be feared over blades."

"But why then does he not fight?" Erammon persisted. "Why does he not raid into the elven-woods, or strike down the upstart in Scardale?"

Thaeron fixed a cold eye on the prince and said, "The wise man fights only when he has to. The fewer enemies made,. the fewer to come at you all at once."

"But father *has* enemies," said Erammon. "Scardale, and Featherdale — and

everyone's an enemy of Archendale. . . ."

"Aye, but they are enemies who fear him more than they hate him. Remember that, boy — when the hate overcomes the fear, you'll see their swords. Besides, your father protects the dales to the south from the fell elves, and the brigands who live in the woods along the river Lis."

"But I've never even seen an elf, or a brigand!" Erammon protested.

"He does a good job, then," replied Thaeron, wrinkling his moustache into what might have been a grin.

"But how do the other lords think these brigands, and the elves, so dangerous — and Harrowdale's force of arms so strong?" the prince demanded.

Thaeron was silent for a moment, and then said, "Those who come threatening your father, or, come uninvited, he does not protect — and they vanish; this the other lords know."

"But I've never seen any fighting, nor any strangers with swords."

"Only brigands threaten with swords, boy," Thaeron answered. "Learn that, if you learn nothing else from me." The swordmaster paused, jerked his head in the direction of the feasting hall, and said, "Come."

"To the hall?" Erammon asked, following hastily.

"This is where all guests come, is it not?" Thaeron replied, waving an arm at the great hall, where servants were scrubbing and dusting and filling lamps with oil for the evening ahead. "Aye," Erammon said, not understanding why the swordmaster had brought him here.

"And then they go to your father's chambers for wine and sweets, do they not?" Thaeron continued.

"Aye," said the prince again — and then his mind leaped ahead. "You mean . . . poison?" At that, Thaeron turned on him a look of such cold disgust that the prince recoiled as though menaced by a dagger-thrust.

"No! You think the other lords have no spies in our kitchens? Nor your father in theirs? No one dares to use poison in the Dales, lest all the other lords retaliate."

"What, then?"

"Some visitors disappear, do they not?" the swordmaster asked, returning to his earlier line of discourse. Erammon nodded. "So, even you have noticed that," the old warrior said sarcastically.

"And how not?" said Erammon in an irritated tone. "Word spreads, among travelers as well as among those who live in Harrowdale."

"Aye, talk travels," Thaeron agreed. "Those who disappear are brigands, or so your father tells the gossips."

"But — no bones? No corpses on the battlements?" Erammon asked, still bewildered. The pair kept walking through the hall, and Thaeron made a gesture toward the far end.

"The kitchens? You mean we *eat* . . . ?" The prince gasped and began to go pale.

Thaeron shook his head. "One so dense will not hold Harrowdale for long, helm-head!" he barked. "What is a corpse but garbage? And where do the kitchen-maids throw the garbage?"

"In the midden," Erammon said, following the swordmaster up to a stout, barred wooden door.

"Have you not wondered why the balcony of your father's audience chamber overlooks the stink of his kitchen midden?" Thaeron asked, unlocking the last chain and hurling its bar aside.

"Oh." Erammon thought for a moment. "Yes . . . yes, so it does. But why?"

Thaeron swung open the door and pointed out into the fetid pit beyond, ringed by a stout palisade of weathered timbers. "Look out to the base of the wall there . . . look hard, and look for an enemy." Erammon peered into the midden as he had been told, and suddenly realized that he had locked gaze with —

"An eye!" he cried. "An eye — coming up from the ground like a worm!"

Thaeron was already pulling the door closed, but an instant before it slammed shut, Erammon saw the festering garbage ripple, undulating right before his wide eyes as though the refuse itself was alive.

"But — but — what is it, out there?" Erammon fairly screamed.

Thaeron fastened chains and set bars in place for a long time before he turned to face the prince. When he did, his face was blank, his eyes cold and level. "Only your father can tell you that, Erammon," he said. "And if I were you, I'd make sure he was in a good mood when I asked him."

The children were petrified, or thrilled, or asleep when Elminster finished the tale. They were tucked into their beds, and "Uncle El" and I took up mugs of cocoa and sat for a time in silence, enjoying the peace of the evening by the fireside. Then I broke the quiet, opening a discussion I could wait no longer to have.

"That was an otyugh in the midden?" I asked, for the benefit of my hidden tape recorder.

"Was," Elminster replied. "It turns out that Lashan, at least, knew of it — when he overran Harrowdale, his archers emptied flasks of oil and then quiversfull of flaming arrows from that balcony until the whole midden was aflame."

"What about Erammon?"

"He lives, some say, hiding in exile, but has not come to reclaim his seat since Lashan's fall. Certainly his body has not been found. Thaeron died fighting Lashan's armies . . . and of course Oraun died of heart-stop some winters ago." The sage stared into the fire and shrugged. "Interesting times, indeed. But I have more than a tale to answer your query. I have brought with me a certain document, and know more besides. Bend thine ears, then — and be sure that recording instrument you hide so well is working properly."

I flushed a bit, shifted in my seat to hide my embarrassment, and leaned forward attentively as Elminster began to read. . . .

From a report by Phiraz of the Naturalists to the Commissioner of Public Sewers in the city of Scornubel:

. . . The greatest of the nuisance creatures that will plague your system is the "dungheap" or otyugh, a scavenger of the strangest appearance and habits. The otyugh and its larger cousin, the neo-otyugh, share the form of a pile of festering dung with a toothed maw set into it. An otyugh's body is lumpy, mottled purple, green, and (primarily) brown, and the creature stumps about on three fat legs of similar appearance. From this delightful bulk — which the creature is wont to bury in piles of rubbish and dung — protrude two long[1] ridged tentacles with large, heart-shaped gripping ends, and a flesh-colored and segmented wormlike stalk containing two yellow-purple eyes. A buried otyugh watches its surroundings constantly by means of this stalk, so look for it when you suspect that one of these creatures is near.

An otyugh is never surprised by the approach of a creature; take care that you or your men are not in turn surprised by one lying in wait. Otyughs often happily attack and kill parties of three people or less; they will eat fresh meat as readily as they consume carrion, dung, or offal. Beware this predator!

Otyughs are terrifically strong, able to snatch warriors off their feet, armor and all, and fling them aside as children throw dolls. They are under no circumstances to be fought a1one.[2]

The otyugh is most often solitary, but may exist in symbiosis with another (often more dangerous or energetic) creature, such as a doppleganger, ettin, will-o-the-wisp, or even a beholder. For such creatures they serve to guard treasure, which they always conceal at the very bottom of their offal pile, hidden from view beneath the otyugh itself. Encountering an otyugh is bad enough — but if you do see one, be sure to look around for another even more fearsome foe!

Thankfully, otyughs mate only seldom (perhaps once in every seven years or so), traveling by night and subterranean routes to bonepits deep under the earth, where the remains of many ancient creatures lie in vast layers. There they mate in mass gatherings with others of their kind who have made the same journey.[3]

Notes

1. Elminster provided precise details of a gulguthra's reach (tentacles can grow up to 14 feet in length, fully extended) and senses. An otyugh can communicate telepathically with creatures up to 4" away; the neo-otyugh's telepathic range is 6", and the higher intelligence of the latter creature enables it to communicate on a more sophisticated level with creatures it encounters. Only rarely, however, will a gulguthra initiate such communication, for it has little

to "say" to any other creatures. The eyes of a gulguthra have infravision and ultravision, both out to a range of 9". Both eyes are positioned on the same side of their stalk, but this does not contribute to any lack of alertness because the eyestalk continually swivels, periscope-style, and any creature that comes within range of its visual powers is instantly detected. (The creature does sleep, but only when it is not threatened, and even in this semi-dormant state, its eyestalk and eyes function as though it were awake, for the purpose of detecting approaching creatures.) The eyes function very well in gloom or darkness, but narrow to mere blurred slits in bright sunlight — for which reason the creature lives below ground. The presence of a torch or the casting of a *light* spell can sometimes so disconcert these creatures that they do not attack. Gulguthras cannot smell with any acuity, probably due to the dung and decay that customarily surrounds them, and so they cannot track prey, nor readily discern the true natures of disguised creatures.

2. Phiraz, never having fought a gulguthra and having viewed only one such encounter through the eyes of a sedentary scholar and not a fighting-man, is both vague and brief as to their fighting style and abilities. Elminster has other sources, and their information boils down to this: When it is attacking, an otyugh's tentacles erupt from the concealing pile of offal and slap victims with force equivalent to 18 (no percentile) strength for purposes of matching the creature's grip or the force of its thrust against the strength of an opponent. A tentacle does 1-8 points of damage on a slap that hits its target, and can also curl about an opponent within range, constricting for 2-4 points of damage per round until the hold is broken. The otyugh can lift a grasped opponent and hurl the victim into a pit or against a wall; the more intelligent neo-otyugh also likes to use a grasped creature as a shield, flailing the victim about to fend off attacks from other adversaries.

Either sort of creature can sense when a grasped opponent is weakened or disabled, and will try to push such prey into reach of its suckerlike, toothed mouth. Due to the creature's favored habitat (proximity to dung and carrion) and its digestive system (wastes are spat back out of its mouth), anyone bitten will suffer both 2-5 points of damage and a 90% likelihood of contracting *typhus* (treat as a parasitic infestation; see pages 13-14 of the DMG). There are no known cases of gulguthra suffering from any such diseases carried in waste and filth themselves, and they are thought to be immune or at least highly resistant to these.

3. Phiraz again is vague; his research had gone so far as to confirm at least the partial truth (periodic journeys far underground) of a legend concerning gulguthra mating — but, having a mistrust of legends, he merely reported it briefly and without comment. Elminster checked with the sorcerer known as Jovriam of the Mines, and certain svirfnebli, and was able to glean the following facts and observations:

Every gulguthra is bisexual. Each produces, once every seven winters, a jellylike "eggmass" and travels underground (in a slow, patient journey) by instinct and memory until it reaches others of its kind. Then it regurgitates the eggmass from a secondary stomach and wanders off, that part of its task done. In some manner not yet understood, another gulguthra can fertilize any eggmass (except its own) by taking it briefly into its mouth, or perhaps some internal organ, and expelling it again.

An eggmass that is fertilized, if left undisturbed, will develop in one week's time into a miniature version of the parent that provided the eggmass. (An otyugh eggmass will only produce another otyugh, and likewise for the neo-otyugh, even though either species can fertilize any eggmass.) This "newborn" creature is driven by an instinctual urge to find warmth and food, and will wander off to seek its own "fortune," returning to its birthplace years later to breed in its turn.

Gulguthra young are smaller (3-5 HD) and weaker (damage of 1-6/1-6/1-4, tentacle strength of 16) than mature specimens, but are otherwise identical to their parents, and grow to maturity within 4 months.

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2 — there is no floor, but there are stepping stones suspended in midair, 2-5′ apart
3 — while there is no floor at all, a character will be telekinesized to the point in the room that he or she wishes to go
4 — there is no floor; a series of tightropes connect any doors present

24-26 Floor has an alignment and only allows those of similar alignment to touch it (others suffer cause *light wounds)*

27-32 Depending on the nature of the room (i.e., whether it is a prayer room or a vault for gold), the floor can cast a malevolent or benevolent spell on those who enter the room (automatically so for those effects which are harmful, and a percentage chance determined by the DM for those spells which are of benefit; beneficial effects should only be checked once per day at the most, regardless of time spent in the room by characters). Harmful spell effects (at 12th level of ability; roll 1d10) include:
1— *fear*
2 — *paralyzation*
3 — *suggestion*
4 — *teleport* (no save)
5 — *repulsion* (no save)
6— *slow* (no save)
7 — *maze* (no save)
8— *cause blindness*
9— *cause critical wounds* (no save)
10 — *feeblemind*
Beneficial spell effects (at 12th level; roll 1d8)
1 — *dispel exhaustion*
2— *cure light wounds*
3— *slow poison*
4 — *protection from evil/good*
5-8 — *bless*

33 Floor rises to meet ceiling in one round under specific conditions, doing exceptional crushing damage

34-38 Floor dumps characters into pit (roll ld4):
1 — floor opens like a pair of shutters
2 — floor slides under walls like a pair of elevator doors
3 — floor unlocks and spins on a central axis, spilling unfixed objects
4 — portion of floor over pit goes temporarily *ethereal* or *astral*

39 Floor lowers like a ramp/elevator platform to the next level

40 Floor is an opaque block of ice

41-42 Floor (and ceiling and walls) are carved and painted to look like a monster's mouth

43-48 Floor's size and shape are inconsistent with those of the room (i.e., square peg in a round hole)

49-52 Floor has a painting or mosaic on it (1-10% chance it is prophetic or magical, portraying players in combat, etc.)

53 Floor appears solid, but is similar to a trampoline when stepped upon

54-55 Floor is divided into sections of varying heights (10% chance that these sections rise and fall at random)

56 Floor is divided into tiny squares that record the portraits of characters over zero-level who enter the room

57-61 Portion of floor is magnetic

62 Sections of floor are removed; the holes serve as viewing/entry portals from other planes of existence

6 3 Floor is shaped like (roll 1d4):
1- a bowl
2— an inverted dome or bubble-shape
3 — pyramid
4 — upside-down pyramid

64-67 Floor is covered with a jagged, crystalline growth

68 Anything touching the floor is rendered *invisible*

69 *Invisible* caltrops on floor

70 Floor alternates from solid to semisolid state at a given interval (like a *transmute rock to mud* spell)

71-76 Floor has a trap door leading to a set of stairs or subchamber

77-79 Floor is metallic and gives off echoes when walked upon with hard boots or metal-shod feet

80 Floor is covered with *dust of choking*

81-84 Floor gives an electrical shock (damage and saving throw potential determined by the DM)

85 Floor is transparent/translucent, and acts like a (one-way?) window to the next level

86-87 Floor is quicksand, made to look like sandstone

88 Floor makes random, unusual noises when touched

89-92 Floor is phosphorescent

93 Under certain conditions, floor emits *sleep* gas

94-95 Runes or glyphs carved into floor's surface (5% chance that each party member reads a different writing)

96 Persons standing on floor begin to speak a different, random language (as per *tongues,* reversed)

97-98 Objects (and, optionally, people) in the room that are in contact with the floor *blink* (as a blink dog) at random intervals to random locations

99-00 Floor alternates between two different states; roll twice and apply results as desired

---

Here are some suggested modifications to the most obvious floor hazard, the pit trap, as a supplement to the ideas in Appendix G on page 216 of the *DMG.* Most are unsuitable for low-level characters as presented below. Unless otherwise stated, modifications come into effect when something hits the bottom of the pit.

Dice roll	Property of pit
01-09	Pit is an *illusion* to cover a trap door entrance to another level
10-16	Floor of pit lowers 10-40′ like an elevator
17-20	Spikes extend from the walls of pit when something hits the bottom, preventing climbing attempts
21-26	Pit is cylindrical and spins victims who fall inside, pressing them against sides of pit
27-36	Pit narrows as it descends
37-38	Pit appears to be (and might actually be) bottomless
39	Persons making contact with the pit bottom of the pit are *plane shifted* (save vs. spells allowed)
40-42	Pit has a guardian monster which is released when someone falls into the pit; monster immediately fights party (could be used in conjunction with a locking-and-flooding pit)
43-45	One wall of pit is actually a stone golem, stone guardian, or caryatid column, and it attacks the victims in the pit
46-55	Pit has ethereal spikes that come into phase when victim hits the floor
56-65	When something hits bottom of pit, a horizontal portcullis slides out, separating party from victim(s)
66-69	As above, but portcullis is replaced by a *blade barrier*
70-79	Pit is enclosed in a *silence* spell, as are its victims
80-89	Pit is 50-75% (45 + (5 x 1d6)) filled with (roll 1d100): 01-60 — water 61-66 — acid (1-8 hp damage/round of exposure) 67-73 — grey ooze/green slime/other mold 74-90 — garbage 91-00 — *webs*
90-96	A mischievous creature teases victims in the pit (roll 1d4): 1 — doppleganger 2 — leprechaun 3 — pixie or sprite 4 — unseen servant (performing automatic activities)
97-00	Victims who fail to save vs. spells undergo a gradual alignment change

Chapter Six

Hag

When the boats have been drawn up on shore, and the day's catch has been hung in the smoking shed, the fisherfolk light their pipes and gather close round the fire, whispering tales of the witch who dwells in the flooded sea cave. "She'll call up storms and dash your boat to splinters 'gainst the rocks," one old-timer tells a young man just back from his first outing. "Aye, and she'll drag ye down 'neath the waves and have her way with ye before ye drown," another adds. A woman mending her husband's nets tells her child to be good, "or the witch'll come in the night and take ye from your bed, throw ye into her stew and make a shawl from your skin," leaving the poor girl awake long into the night, staring wide-eyed and fearful into the dark. And for good reason—for in children's stories lie truths that adult minds dare not acknowledge.

—From *Folk Tales of the Lost Coast*

If dryads, nymphs, and sprites represent the grace and beauty of unspoiled nature, then surely the annis hag, green hag, and sea hag embody its savage, destructive side. Though not fey themselves, hags appear to be somehow tied to nature, even if no more than as a distorted reflection of it. Hags are foul, wicked creatures, warped with cruelty and evil. Uniformly female and invariably repulsive, these misshapen crones plot dark deeds over bubbling cauldrons, either singly or in sinister triads known as covens.

Hags have appeared in tales dating back to the earliest ages of history, leading many sages to speculate that hags may have come from the First World long ago. The famed Taldan scholar Nikephoros of Oppara even went so far as to claim that hags were once beautiful, benevolent fey themselves, who were cursed for their vanity and fell from grace, becoming the twisted crones they are today, but his claims are widely discredited. Although the actual specifics of their origin are unknown, no one can deny that some hags are ancient beyond reckoning. Cunning and devious, they are the remnants of an earlier age, possessed of powers that few now understand and that most people fear. Bitter and resentful that the world has passed them by, hags seek revenge on all living things, but focus their rage especially on those of great beauty or purity.

Annis hags, also known as black hags or iron hags, are the most physically powerful of their kind. Annis tend to disdain the malevolent machinations of their sister hags, preferring to revel in more visceral pleasures such as torture and murder. Their warty skin proves resistant to damage and their iron claws are capable of shredding those unfortunate enough to fall into their clutches. Annis are able to cloak themselves in cloying mists or illusion, appearing as harmless children, damsels in distress, or delicate fey creatures to lure their unsuspecting prey to their dooms.

Although weaker than their annis sisters, green hags command a variety of magic powers. They are stealthy and deceptive, preferring to manipulate from the shadows, their insidious whispers and uncanny mimicry driving men to madness and the pure of heart to blasphemy. More than any of the hags, green hags hate things of beauty and work tirelessly to destroy or despoil them. While they prefer to strike from hiding, green hags are capable of holding their own in combat, and their claws sap the strength of anyone they touch.

Sea hags are the most hideous members of the hag sisterhood—just gazing upon their horrific appearance can bring a strong man to his knees. While they don't have the spell-like abilities of the other hags, the evil eye of a sea hag is powerful enough to kill. Sea hags are aquatic, and are known to destroy ships and drown sailors, causing suffering to those poor folk living near the water's edge.

Ecology

The fact that hags possess some tie to the natural world is indisputable, although poorly understood. Similar in some ways to that of fey creatures (perhaps reflecting a First World origin for these crones as well), this connection is also strikingly different, for hags have no interest in preserving or protecting nature, only in possessing it for its own sake and twisting it to their own ends. Practitioners of ancient, esoteric witchcraft, hags are holdovers from a world of untamed savagery and ferocity that is long gone (and perhaps the loss of that feral time and place is what drove them to their madness and hate).

Physically, hags display great differences among themselves. Annis hags are almost giantesses, standing over 8 feet tall and weighing 300 pounds or more. Annis have warty, toad-like skin that ranges in color from deep blue to purple and black, as well as long, tangled hair. Their jagged black teeth can crunch through bone, and their claws resemble rusty knives, though they are as sharp as any honed blade. Green hags are similar in size to human women, appearing sickly and emaciated, with dark, knotted hair and sagging skin tinged green with a variety of clinging molds and fungi. Sea hags are of human size as well, though many weigh more than their annis sisters as a result of their insatiable gluttony. Their hair resembles rotting seaweed, and rank algae grow on their flesh, exuding the foul stink of waterlogged corruption and decay.

Hags are all female, requiring males from other races to propagate their own. Hags can breed with virtually any human-like creature, including some monstrous humanoids and debased fey. Because of their repulsive appearance, however, hags must often use trickery or force to seduce or coerce men to impregnate them, although some degenerate races and tribes have been known to willingly mate with hags.

Upon giving birth, a hag secretly exchanges her child for one of its father's species. After finding a suitable family with a newborn, the hag creeps into the house in the dead of night, steals the family's baby, and leaves the hag-child in its crib. These changelings are known as killcrops, or wisselkind, and appear as perfectly normal specimens of the father's race. Most families don't even realize that a switch has been made, and raise the killcrops as their own children, relieving the hag birth mother of all responsibility for rearing the child, and freeing her to pursue her own dark plots. The unfortunate babies stolen from their homes usually end up in the hag's stew-pot, never to be heard from again.

While outwardly identical to other children, killcrops tend to grow more slowly than normal. They are likely to develop unusual physical traits and strange behaviors, such as oddly colored eyes, pointy ears, or tangled, fast-growing hair, as well as voracious appetites, vicious tempers, and a casual cruelty that sets them apart from other children (though in some primitive humanoid tribes these qualities are not that unusual). These are the children who like to experiment on small animals, and accidents and bad luck seem to happen more frequently around them. These qualities become more noticeable as the child matures, until the killcrop reaches

The Three Sisters of Simarron

One of the oldest fables of the fey tells of three alluring faerie princesses who lived in three magnificent palaces in the idyllic forest of Simarron, a fabled location in the First World. The three sisters, Caillea, Jurissa, and Neithrope, lived a carefree, idyllic life, full of poetry, song, and games. They were renowned for their beauty and grace, and wealthy and charming princes from faerie courts throughout the First World flocked to Simarron to seek the sisters' hands in marriage.

At first, the princesses accepted their suitors graciously, and competed good-naturedly with one another for the most handsome prince, the most lyrical compliments, and the finest gifts. But as more and more suitors vied for the sisters' hands, they became ever more vain and self-important, and their friendly rivalry turned wicked and bitter.

The three princesses became jealous of one another, but even more so of any other living thing that dared to overshadow their beauty, and in time the sickness within them turned outward. The ancient, verdant forest of Simarron was reduced to a nightmarish place of twisted, blackened trees and wilted flowers, and the few animals who escaped the sisters' wrath fled to more hospitable regions. The three girls, once so beautiful and elegant, became repulsive and grotesque mockeries of their former selves.

Eventually, the blight that was Simarron threatened to expand further into the First World, and a council of faerie courts was called to deal with the sisters once and for all. Powerful fey sorcerers cursed the sisters for their vanity and wickedness, and banished them to Golarion, where Caillea became the first annis, Jurissa the first green hag, and Neithrope the first sea hag. The forest of Simarron and the princesses' palaces were razed to the ground, wiping away any trace of the sisters' existence forever.

adulthood and finally discovers its hag heritage. At this time, the killcrop's birth mother might even return to reclaim her child and initiate it into hag society.

Hag births are overwhelmingly female; hags usually kill and devour any rare male children. Any male hag-children that survive look like their father's race, but are often sterile and display no trace of their mother's powers, only a certain "wrongness" to their appearance and behavior.

Habitat & Society

Hags usually dwell in wild, untamed locales far enough from civilization to offer isolation and security, but close enough to settled areas that they provide ample opportunities for hunting or the corruption of innocents. They prefer to lair in sites that were once beautiful or picturesque, but have now fallen to the ravages of time and decay, such as diseased forest thickets or crumbling ruins. Annis prefer colder climes, inhabiting dank caves or cursed ruins in gloomy fens and dark forests. Green hags are most often found lurking in the fetid marshes and tangled woods of more temperate regions, while the amphibious sea hags haunt deep, stagnant lakes or the stormy, windswept coastlines of salt seas.

Solitary by nature, hags do not usually tolerate others of their kind for very long. An established hag who discovers another hag in her territory will attempt to drive away the intruder with shouted insults and curses. If the interloper does not get the message, the conflict can turn violent, and hags squabbling over territory have no scruples about killing their own kind. Some scholars of hag lore believe such territorial aggression to be an archaic form of ritual combat that serves some forgotten purpose. Others theorize that the presence of one of her sisters reminds a hag of her own twisted, corrupt form, a reflection of her own base nature she can't bear to face.

When hags put aside these petty differences, they can become a powerful force of discord and malevolence, forming fell trios known as covens. Hag covens always contain three hags—no more, no less—but can include hags of any type. Green hags are the most amenable to forming such groups. Annis are more solitary and tend to prefer direct action to the subtle trickeries of their sisters, so they rarely join covens unless coerced. More so than any other hag, annis hate their own kind, and almost never join a coven that already includes another black hag. Sea hags rarely join mixed covens, mainly due to their aquatic nature, but two sea hags may form a coven under the leadership of a green hag who lives in a coastal salt marsh. Even the terrifying, plane-traveling night hags occasionally join covens of their world-bound sisters, for hidden reasons of their own.

Hag covens frequently employ ogres and giants as bodyguards and minions, and hags with access to illusion magic often cloak these guards in disguises to help them act as spies. Marsh giants (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #5) are especially favored, but brutish hill giants and even degenerate ogrekin (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #3) can be found serving hag covens.

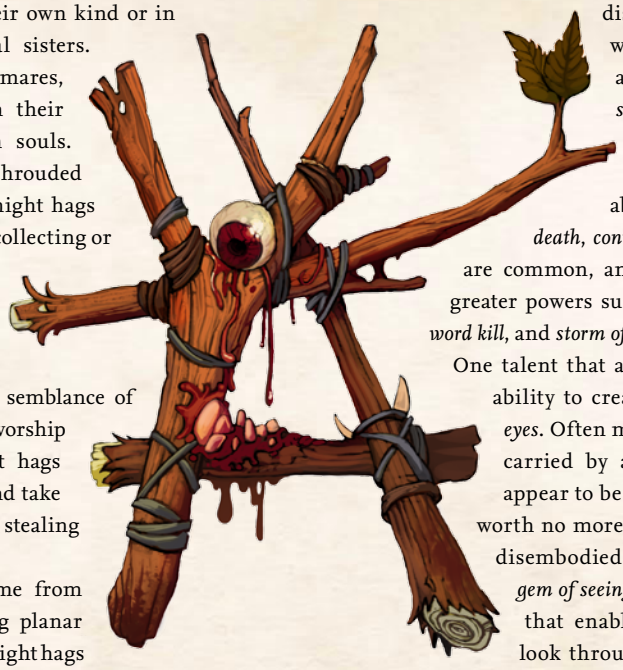
When hags deign to revere beings greater than themselves, they most often follow Mestama, the Mother of Witches, demon lord of hags and deception. Others worship Gyronna, the Angry Hag, particularly in the River Kingdoms, with hags taking positions of leadership in many cults. Individual hags or covens might also venerate Calistria, Lamashtu, or Zon-Kuthon, or even the female aspect of the ogre god Haggakal.

Night Hags

Of all the breeds of hags, the depraved night hags are perhaps the most terrifying. Mercantile and greedy, night hags are also consummate predators in search of very particular prey—mortal souls. Using periapts known as *heartstones*,

night hags infiltrate the dreams of mortals and pervert them into nightmares. The hag rides her chosen victim's back all night, tormenting the person over time and slowly draining his health and sanity, giving rise to the description "hag-ridden." Eventually, the hag steals the unfortunate mortal's soul to sell in corrupt planar markets.

Like all hags, night hags tend to be solitary creatures, but they do join covens, either of their own kind or in mixed covens with their mortal sisters. Night hags often ally with nightmares, which carry the evil crones on their plane-spanning hunts for fresh souls. Although native to the mist-shrouded expanses of the Ethereal Plane, night hags can be found virtually anywhere, collecting or trading their dreadful wares.



Most night hags pay homage to a being known as Alazhra the Dream Eater, possibly one of their own who achieved some semblance of godhood, though others might worship Zon-Kuthon or Lamashtu. Night hags hate Desna, goddess of dreams, and take great pleasure in corrupting and stealing the carefree souls of her followers.

Exactly where night hags come from is a hotly contested topic among planar scholars. It is not known whether night hags are an offshoot of worldly hags who ventured forth into the outer planes, or whether these extraplanar soul-traffickers spawned mortal hags on the Material Plane. Night hags themselves claim to be the favored daughters of their patron Alazhra, but they are hardly a credible source as to their origin.

Hag Magic

Hags are the witches of the wild places, sorceresses of lost lore, and mystics of the moon, wind, and water. Their rituals and enchantments are of a primeval tradition long forgotten or ignored by modern spellcasters. Although their magic superficially resembles the most ancient elven spellcraft, these powers come to hags innately, without long years of study and practice, and are devoid of wonder and beauty.

Individually, hags possess only minor magics of illusion, deception, and transformation. But when gathered into covens, hags can command truly formidable supernatural powers. Working together, hags can control the weather, create powerful illusions, and divine the future. They can make people their willing slaves, curse them with hexes, turn men into mice, or enter their dreams. Hag covens can speak with the deceased, animate corpses, and even bring the dead back to life.

Depending upon a coven's specific members, they can call upon other spell-like abilities as well. Green hag covens sometimes possess powers that warp and twist the natural world, such as *creeping doom*, *entangle*, *insect plague*, *spike growth*, and *wall of thorns*. Annis covens favor abilities that increase their physical prowess, such as *mass bull's strength*, *rage*, *giant form*, and *iron body*, and can cast enhanced mist spells such as *acid fog*, *solid fog*, and *cloudkill*. Sea hag covens can call up powerful storms with *call lightning storm* and *whirlwind*, and disable or slay opponents with *eyebite*, *finger of death*, and *power word blind* and *stun*. Particularly powerful mixed hag covens exhibit a wide variety of additional abilities. Reports of *circle of death*, *contagion*, *insanity*, and *nightmare* are common, and some tales speak of even greater powers such as *dominate monster*, *power word kill*, and *storm of vengeance*.

One talent that all hag covens possess is the ability to create magical gems called *hag eyes*. Often mounted in rings or brooches carried by a coven's servants, *hag eyes* appear to be normal semiprecious stones worth no more than 20 gp, but are actually disembodied eyes (visible as such with a *gem of seeing* or spells such as *true seeing*) that enable the hags of the coven to look through the gem as a free action, so long as it is on the same plane. Some covens have even learned how to channel their cooperative spellcasting through their *hag eyes*, allowing them to wreak havoc at great distances from the safety of their lairs. Destroying a *hag eye* can have detrimental effects on the coven that created it, inflicting damage and temporary blindness on the unlucky hags.

Campaign Role

With the possible exception of the annis (who may be encountered alone, with a coven, or leading a gang of ogres, trolls, or giants), hags are best used as behind-the-scenes manipulators rather than face-to-face combat encounters. Their strengths lie in stealth, deception, and trickery, not physical battle. A nervous mother could approach the PCs, worried that something has happened to her child. Upon investigation, the PCs discover the child is a killcrop, and must track down the hag responsible (and perhaps rescue the swapped baby before the hag consumes it, assuming the swap was recent). A series of attacks by goblins, ogres, and giants might be traced back to a hag coven seeking to destroy the town. A hag could become jealous of a beautiful PC, cursing the unfortunate character and throwing obstacles in the party's way, or could trick and seduce a male PC into siring her child. Alternatively, the PCs might

Facets of Fear

The village wise woman who spends all her time in the woods, gathering strange herbs and fungi for her remedies and tonics; the aged midwife who seems to know more than the university-trained doctor; the eccentric old woman who lives alone in the dilapidated cottage on the outskirts of town, said to know all the old superstitions, wards, and curses—are these just normal women, with no children of their own, no husbands, and no family, or are they something more—something worse? Is your own family safe? Is your husband faithful? Is that *your* baby asleep in its crib?

Hags are the embodiment of man's fear of women, and a reflection of women's jealousy for each other. In many medieval societies, women are poorly educated and fulfill a very traditional role: that of wife and mother. Women who exclude themselves from that role, either through knowledge and education, or by exclusion from the reproductive cycle, are easily marginalized and become natural targets for intolerance. Men are intimidated by what they see as a threat to their own dominant position in the social order, and women resent other women who have escaped the traditional role imposed on them by society.

Finally, tales of hags are used to frighten children. Ancient, withered crones are the antithesis of lively youth, and having no children of their own, provide the basis for horrible stories of wickedness and depravity to scare children into behaving well or avoiding certain areas.

need information that can only be gleaned through the divinatory powers of a hag coven. The party must decide whether to trust the wicked crones, who might twist the threads of fate for their own fell purposes.

Known Hags

The following are some of the known hags of Golarion.

Peg o' Ness: Also known as Peg Powler, this obese sea hag inhabits a seaweed-choked sea cave off of Hag's Plummet on Varisia's Lost Coast. She haunts the coastline between Sandpoint and the Foxglove River, alternately extorting tribute from the fisherfolk with false promises of good weather and bountiful catches or sinking their boats for the perverse pleasure of it. Said to be responsible for most of the shipwrecks off Grubber's Hermitage, Peg occasionally swims inland along Cougar Creek and the Soggy River in search of innocent children, her favorite delicacy. In recent years, Peg has become more domestic, breeding with local fishermen and leaving no less than half a dozen killcrops to be raised by unsuspecting villagers up and down the coast.

The Stroud Sisters: This coven of green hags inhabits a dank swamp known as the Ditches in the central River Kingdoms. The three ogre-born Stroud Sisters are Demelza, Elspeth, and Mairghread—triplets who miraculously recovered after stillborn births, which mysteriously granted them sorcerous powers over the undead. The sisters are disturbingly fertile, and have no compunctions about breeding with any male that happens by, whether an unfortunate explorer, a wandering ogre, or their own brothers and sons. Demelza Stroud is the clan matriarch and leader of the coven, presiding over an incestuous brood of over a dozen deformed and degenerate ogrekin, along with one exceptionally dull-witted marsh giant called Brother Grunt. The Stroud clan preys on unsuspecting travelers and marsh dwellers, and the Sisters take particular pleasure in tormenting the desperate exiled Galtan nobles of Gralton.

Ulla Jarnrygg: This powerful annis makes her home in an enormous, ice-rimed hollow tree in the depths of the Grungir Forest in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings. Said to be an exile from Irrisen, Ulla is a winter witch of some power, feared as much for her wintry magic as for her iron claws. Known to consort with frost giants and ice trolls, Ulla is often accompanied by a flock of undead crows on her hunts. While she normally prowls the dark woodlands, she sometimes ventures into the frozen marshes surrounding the forest to raid isolated farms and steadings. Ulla takes pernicious delight in terrorizing poor peasants by night, then stealing their livestock, or even better, their children, before vanishing back into the woods before morning.

Sample Annis Hag

The iron hag Ulla Jarnrygg claims to be the daughter of a mighty frost giant jarl, and certainly her sorcerer powers reflect an icy heritage well suited to the frigid Lands of the Linnorm Kings. Once a member of a formidable coven of winter witches in Irrisen, Ulla had a falling-out with her sisters and was exiled to the west.

From her lair deep within the Grungir Forest, Ulla stalks lone hunters who brave the winter woods in search of game. When in the mood for deception, Ulla disguises herself as a tall, beautiful Ulfen huntress seeking companionship on a cold night, a sight most hunters find hard to resist. Otherwise, she uses *dancing lights* and *ventriloquism* to lure her prey to an isolated spot where she can ambush them at her leisure. When traveling or meeting with others to barter, bargain, or plot, she uses *alter self* to appear as a pale-haired human woman, a green hag, or even as a common hobgoblin or orc.

Although she is a sorcerer, Ulla relishes the savage struggle of physical combat. When her blood is up, she often forgoes her magical powers completely and tears into her victims with tooth and claw until she is drenched in the blood of her enemies.

Once her prey has been caught, Ulla spikes them to an ancient, gnarled oak tree where she can stretch out their torture for days to relish their screams. Only when her hunger

has grown into a gnawing fire in her belly does she grant her victims release, though even that can take some time, as Ulla much prefers the taste of still-living flesh.

Ulla's thick skin is the deep blue of a starless winter's night, and her hair is the yellow-white of dirty snow. Ulla is almost 9 feet tall, and her long, clawed arms hang to her knees. Dressed in smelly, uncured furs, she wears a cloak woven from human hair and a girdle made from the skin of slain babies round her waist.

ULLA JARNRYGG — CR 10

XP 9,600

Female annis sorcerer 9

CE Large monstrous humanoid

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +18

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 13, flat-footed 24 (+4 armor, +1 deflection, +3 Dex, +10 natural, –1 size)

hp 149 (7d10+9d6+80)

Fort +13, **Ref** +14, **Will** +13

DR 2/bludgeoning; **Resist** cold 20; **SR** 17

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +18 (1d6+8), 2 claws +18 (1d6+8 plus grab)

Ranged ray +13 (by spell)

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

Special Attacks bloodline arcana (change energy damage spells to cold damage), elemental blast (9d6 cold, Reflex half DC 17, 1/day), elemental ray (1d6+4 cold, 6/day), rend (2 claws, 2d6+12)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th)

3/day—*alter self*, *fog cloud*

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 8th)

4th (4)—*elemental body I*, *greater invisibility*, *ice storm*

3rd (7)—*haste*, *protection from energy*, *ray of exhaustion*, *sleet storm*

2nd (7)—*bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *gust of wind* (DC 15), *scorching ray* (cold)

1st (7)—*burning hands* (cold, DC 14), *chill touch* (DC 14), *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *ventriloquism* (DC 14)

0 (at will)—*acid splash*, *bleed* (DC 13), *dancing lights*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 13), *mending*, *ray of frost*, *touch of fatigue* (DC 13)

TACTICS

Before Combat Ulla keeps *mage armor* active at all times, recasting it as needed. When she has time to prepare for combat, Ulla casts *bull's strength*, *bear's endurance*, *greater invisibility*, and *haste*.

During Combat Ulla hits massed foes with area effect spells like *ice storm* and *sleet storm*, and targets strong warriors with *ray of exhaustion* or *ray of enfeeblement*. She uses *scorching ray* and *magic missile* against ranged attackers. Once in melee combat, Ulla combines her hasted claw attacks with *chill touch*, making use of *greater invisibility* to cast spells safely before attacking again with surprise. If surrounded by enemies, she makes use of her elemental blast ability.

Morale If reduced to below 30 hit points, Ulla casts *elemental body I* and flees, using *fog cloud* to cover her escape, returning later to exact revenge on her attackers.

Base Statistics Without *mage armor*, Ulla's stats are as follows: **AC** 23, touch 13, flat-footed 20.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 16, **Con** 20, **Int** 11, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 16

Base Atk +11; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 34

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Casting, Eschew Materials, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Intimidating Prowess, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack

Skills Bluff +16, Fly +0, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (planes) +4, Linguistics +1, Perception +18, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +11, Stealth +15

Languages Common, Giant, Hallit, Skald

SQ elemental bloodline (water)

Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds* (3), *potion of fly*; **Other Gear** *ring of protection +1*, *cloak of resistance +1*, *boots of the winterlands*, *brooch of shielding* (80 charges), large sack, flensing knives, hammer and iron spikes, iron pot, whetstone, block of salt, 300 gp

by F. Wesley Schneider • illustrated by Peter Bergting

The Ecology of the Annis Hag

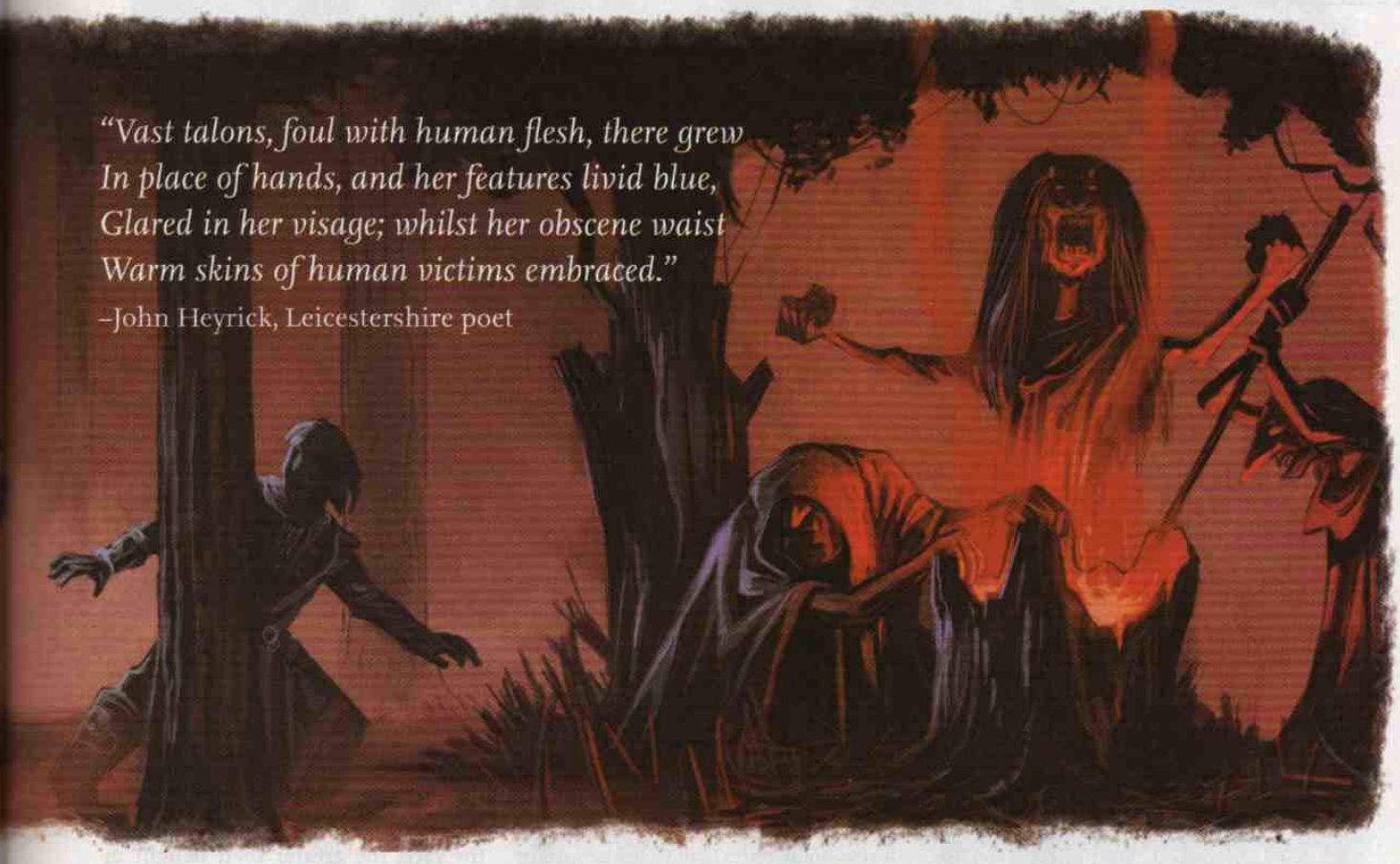
Not all tales of lurking monsters and hungry witches are mere fantasies to terrify children. In the lonely, rotten places of the world, where few tread out of instinctual fear, rule undisputed queens of bitterness and savagery. Witches, ogresses, hags—these cursed crones give form to hatreds as old as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

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

History of the Annis Hag

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

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



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

For an age, Cegilune garnered the fear and love of her worshipers, but eventually she grew complacent, indulging in her followers' adoration but rarely intervening on their behalves. At the same time, the deities of distant lands began to encroach upon her disciples' hearts. Only when a wrinkle first marred the moon goddess's supposedly eternal beauty did she realize her error. Appearing before her remaining followers, the goddess found that only her daughters had remained devout, but that they too had aged as she weakened. Others who had left her fold bitterly mocked the moon goddess, flaunting the powers of their new divine patrons. Enraged, Cegilune slaughtered hundreds of her former worshipers, sending her remaining daughters on a bloody crusade.

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

KNOWLEDGE OF ANNIS HAGS

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

Knowledge (nature)

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

CEGILUNE

Lesser Deity (Neutral Evil)

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

Portfolio: Hags, larvae, the moon

Domains: Evil, Knowledge, Moon*

Favored Weapon: Quarterstaff

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

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

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

*See the *Spell Compendium*.

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

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

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

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE ANNIS HAG

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

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

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

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE ANNIS HAG

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CHANGE: ABERRANT ADOLESCENCE

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

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

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

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

Hags frequently use such tactics of spreading suffering by targeting the weakest members of a community, both the eldest and youngest, as such losses often prove the most painful. For example, the tragedy at Hobb's End is widely thought to have been orchestrated by a sorcerous hag haunting the nearby swamp. That grim morning the townsfolk woke to find their children replaced by crudely carved, child-sized manikins, each missing a limb, several digits, or other vital part. Despite much searching and the villager's many prayers, though, the children were never seen again.

POWERS OF THE COVEY: HAG BREWS

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

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

Formulating a hag brew is a process much like creating a hag eye. Instead of creating such a gem, a covey that meets the proper requirements (noted with each individual brew) can produce one hag brew a month on the night of the full moon. Every hag brew requires the sacrifice of a sentient creature, a number of other grotesque ingredients, and a two-hour-long ritual taking place in the hours before and after midnight. The hags creating the brew must remain within 10 feet of each other and can perform no other action for the duration of the rite. Leaving the area or being distracted from the ceremony ruins the brew, the creation of which cannot be attempted for another month. A covey also cannot use their covey-related spell-like abilities the day after creating a brew, as this magic is expended by the brew's creation. Coveys that create a hag brew cannot create a hag eye in the same month.

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

BREW OF BLACK EYES

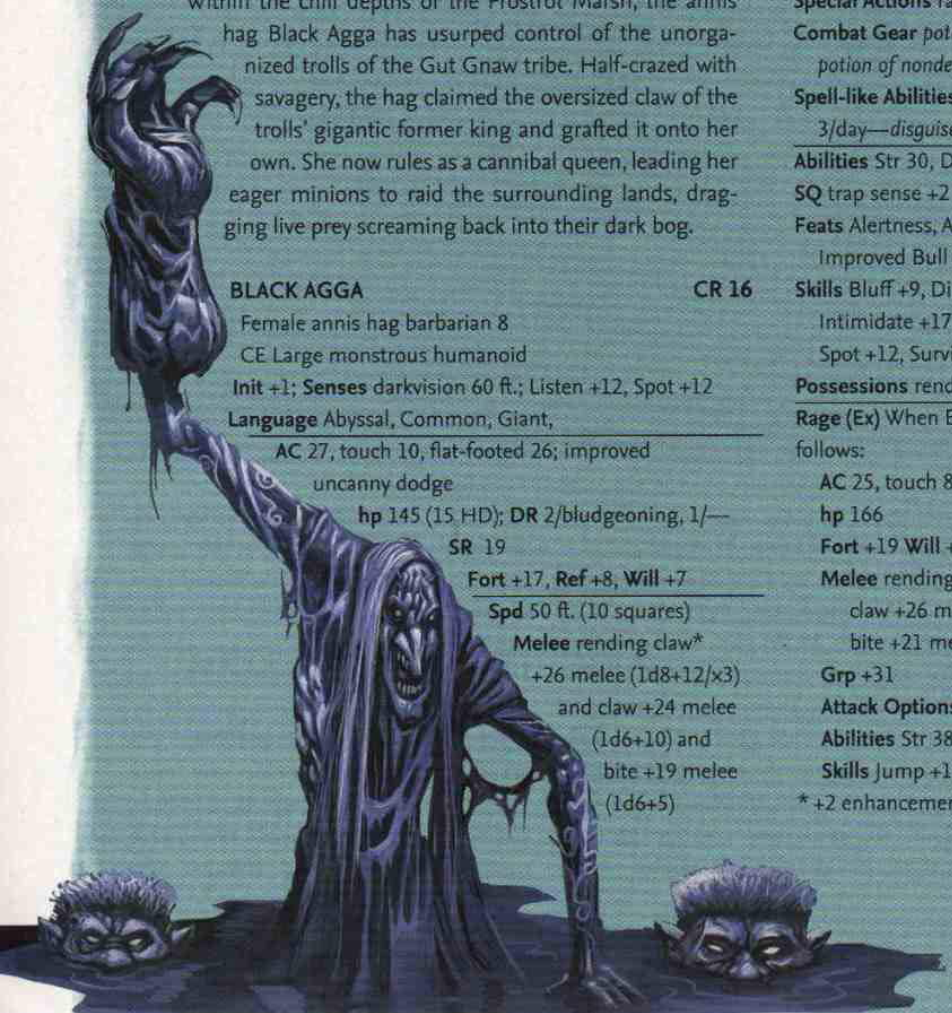
Infused with a sliver of hag tongue, a creature that drinks of this thick black brew gains the effects of *arcane sight*, *darkvision*, and *see invisibility* for 1 week. For the duration of the brew, however, the drinker is afflicted by terrible nightmares of the hags that created the concoction, preventing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

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

ADVANCED ANNIS HAG

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

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



BLACK AGGA **CR 16**

Female annis hag barbarian 8

CE Large monstrous humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12

Language Abyssal, Common, Giant,

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

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

SR 19

Fort +17, **Ref** +8, **Will** +7

Spd 50 ft. (10 squares)

Melee rending claw* +26 melee (1d8+12/×3) and claw +24 melee (1d6+10) and bite +19 melee (1d6+5)

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

Base Atk +15; **Grp** +29

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

Special Actions rage 2/day

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

Spell-like Abilities (CL 8th):

3/day—*disguise self*, *fog cloud*

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

SQ trap sense +2

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

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

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

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

AC 25, touch 8, flat-footed 24

hp 166

Fort +19 **Will** +9

Melee rending claw* +28 melee (1d8+14/×3) and claw +26 melee (1d6+12) and bite +21 melee (1d6+6)

Grp +31

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

Abilities Str 38, Con 23

Skills Jump +14, Swim +18

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

by F. Wesley Schneider • illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE Green Hag

Foul beyond reasoning and old beyond reckoning, half-crazed shadows cackle madly in the mist-shrouded night. Lurking in the rank, wild places even the bravest fear to tread, nightmare crones haunt the legends of every culture and hint at the corruption that festers deep within each mortal soul. Cunning predators, vengeful adversaries, and warped reflections of the civilized races, these are the monstrosities known as hags.

This treatise marks the first of a three-part series detailing the foul powers, cruel plots, and preternatural lifecycle of the mostly frequently encountered and arguably most deadly breeds of hags.

History of Green Hags

For as long as there have been tales to tell, there have been whispered warnings of hags. From legends of cruel yet wise seers prowling the fringes of civilization to cautionary tales of cursed, hate-filled women, hags haunt the mythology and folk-stories of nearly every race.

One legend stands out among the countless others, told among dozens of races with little variation. Known as Kiersana the Unfaithful to elves and to orcs as Grigga Toegnawer, the fable of the creature most commonly called Green Mary terrorizes the dreams of countless children, regardless of race.

In a time long ago Green Mary lived as a protector of the woodlands and its creatures, a beautiful druid with a forest domain encompassing hundreds of miles. Making her home at her forest's heart, protected and served by the creatures that she in turn watched over, Green Mary worshiped and obeyed the spirits of nature and their timeless laws. On the day the winds whispered of danger and the crows squawked of death, she investigated their reports. Her search led her to a powerful and skilled hunter who stalked her animal wards

out of sport and felled the trees to make his weapons. Although the voices of the forest cried out for revenge against the careless hunter, Green Mary found him as comely as he was dangerous. Moved to speak with him, she became entranced by his silken words and he compelled by her beauty. That night, Green Mary defied the timeless whispers of the forest and lay with the source of their wrath.

The next morning, the hunter awoke to find his lover horrifically transformed. The forest had reclaimed its servant's willful body, changing her milky skin into gnarled bark, her raven hair into vines, and her soft hands into twisted claws. Realizing the extent of her sin, Green Mary obeyed her spirit masters' orders with a fearful and repentant fervor. When it was done, not even a drop of the hunter's blood remained to stain the verdant ground.

Yet nature knows no mercy, and, despite Green Mary's atonement, her form did not return to its one-time alluring shape. Disgusted by her actions and new form, she fled the beautiful groves and glens through which she once danced and took up residence among the rotting vines and festering pools of her forest's most putrid swamp. Thus rose the first green hag, a creature of nature enslaved to passion but fated to destroy all after which she lusts.

Physiology of Green Hags

Green hags possess fearsome powers, horrible diseased features, and cruel natural weaponry, but despite all of this, perhaps their most disturbing trait is how closely they resemble normal humans. Ranging the same heights and weights as human females, only their withered, swampy appearances mark green hags as anything more then particularly misshapen crones, and even these tell-tale deformities might be hidden behind myriad magical disguises. Monstrous yet strangely familiar, green hags prove the least physically terrifying of all hags, marking them as the best examples of all hags' aberrant crossbred ancestry.

Although their proportions mimic those of withered human women, their bent backs and hunched postures make some appear far shorter. Their weight also runs to far greater extremes, with some green hags appearing as emaciated, skeletal things while others can barely support their own obese bulk. Regardless of appearance, one must never assume that a green hag is frail or sickly, as all of their race possess physical powers outstripping nearly any humanoid of similar size.

Aside from seemingly unnatural strength, a green hag's twisted form affords it a host of extraordinary and deadly powers. A green hag's physical similarity to human women is only superficial, as any who nears swiftly sees. Their mold-colored hair forms a wild viny tangle that rings their exaggerated, wart-covered features like a swampy mane. Their bent bodies possess a similar algae-green coloring as their hair but appear scarred and thick like bark, often marked with cancerous, knobby protrusions. This calloused hide makes green hags particularly resistant to physical attacks and often aids them in hiding amid the decaying overgrown areas in which they lair. This warped, hard physiology becomes most deadly as it extends to green hags' hands, which twist into yellow-nailed, filth-encrusted talons as deadly as any wild beast's.

Perhaps it's their physical heartiness, or their similarity to gnarled trees, but

GREEN HAG KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to green hags. Inhabitants of rural and frontier communities most often know this information, as it passes on through folktales and local legends. Due to widespread fictitious stories involving green hags, some of the information provided at low DCs (15 and lower) is mere superstition and has no basis in truth. Higher DC results (20 or greater) contradict such fables with legitimate facts.

Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
10	Green hags are sadistic cronelike monstrosities who lurk only in swamps and marshes. No plant, stone, or water way hinders them within their fetid domain and they hold mastery over all natural creatures.
15	Green hags know much of magic and the natural world, and can mimic the sounds of any animal that lives near their lair. Hags can magically swap their foul spawn with the unborn babes of other races. Children suspected of having been swapped by a hag are called calibans or changelings*.
20	Green hags can drain an enemy's strength with the slightest touch and possess significant resistance to magic. Although absolutely evil, green hags are very intelligent and might barter or be reasoned with.
25	Green hags are the least xenophobic of all hags and might appear in nearly any environment. They frequently infiltrate urban settings using their innate abilities to change shape, speak any language, turn invisible, or create any number of other distractions.
30	Green hags operate just as well above water as below. They often foster their children to humanoid families, but cannot switch children before birth. There is no such thing as a caliban or changeling*.

*This is merely a colloquial term and has no relation to the changelings of the EBERRON campaign setting.

green hags never seem to age or suffer the ravages of time. As such, a green hag might terrorize a region for untold centuries, commonly becoming a famous monstrosity that haunts local legends for generations.

Already so like the uncaring natural predators of the swamps, it's little surprise that green hags can naturally mimic the sounds of the creatures that live within their domains. This ability does not extend to speech or the noises of manufactured items, but the sounds of wounded animals often prove sufficient enough to cause potential prey—whether other beasts or passing travelers—to investigate. Green hags are known for slaying and dragging away the bodies of pets and animals owned by those who live on the edge of swamps and forests, then coaxing their owners into the wilderness with the creature's mimicked cries. As such, local wisdom commonly holds that anything lost to the swamp remains there.

With all their deadly natural powers, the fact that green hags also possess an arsenal of supernatural and magic abilities merely compounds their horrific nature. Aside from their ability to see in total darkness, resist magic, and perform a wide range of deceitful and misleading magic, a green hag's most deadly weapon is her slightest touch. With a mere brush of her misshapen claw a green hag might sap the strength from even the strongest warrior. Although some might resist, few can hope to overpower a green hag's already formidable strength with their own leeched away. Frequently using this ability to their advantage, green hags favor draining an enemy's strength until he's totally unable to move, then either drowning him in their boggy homes or dragging him back to their lairs, usually for some unspeakable magical or—even worse—amorous purpose.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY

Hatred and dreams of ruin dominate the minds of green hags. They seek the destruction of all things civilized and beautiful,

POWERS OF THE COVEY: HAG EYES

One of the most potent and versatile abilities of a hag covey is the unique power to create magic gems known as *hag eyes*. While these gems superficially appear as nothing more than semiprecious stones, spells such as *true seeing* reveal them as monstrous disembodied eyes. As long as a *hag eye* remains on the same plane as its makers, any of the hags who created it can see through it whenever they please.

The creation of a *hag eye* requires a gem of any size worth no less than 50 gp, the cooperative efforts of an entire covey of hags, and three days. During these three days a covey spends much of its time in deep concentration and meditation, preventing its members from performing any action besides eating, drinking, and sleeping. Any disruption of this meditative state foils the creation of the *hag eye*, and while it does not destroy the gem, it forces the covey to begin the ritual anew. At the end of this period, the life essences of all the covey's members are bound to the *hag eye*, allowing any of them to use its powers at any time, but also causing all of them to suffer should the gem ever be destroyed (see page 144 of the *Monster Manual*). There is no limit to the number of *hag eyes* a covey might create, although only one can be created in any three-day period.

Hag coveys make use of their *hag eyes* in an insidious variety of ways.

Aberrant Accessories: Often setting *hag eyes* into jewelry, a hag with the ability to change her shape might distribute these gems to potential victims or powerful opponents as innocuous gifts, keepsakes, or forget-me-nots. Once in place, a hag knows the wearer's every step.

Watchful Masters: Hags frequently equip their servants with *hag eyes*, allowing them to keep aware of all of their minions' dealings and encounters. Combined with spells such as *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *sending*, or *whispering wind*, hags might effectively communicate through even their weakest servitors.

Natural Spies: Hags with animal companions or familiars often send such nondescript creatures (especially those with wings) on reconnaissance and patrol duties bearing *hag eyes*. Setting the gems in tree branches, hallows, and rocky crevices scattered throughout their territories also allow is hags to keep constant vigil over their claimed territories.

Treasure Trap: *Hag eyes* are frequently worked into magic items or otherwise attached to a hag covey's most powerful or valuable treasures. Should a thief steal such an item, its hag owners murderously seek out and punish the culprit, swiftly retrieving their possession.

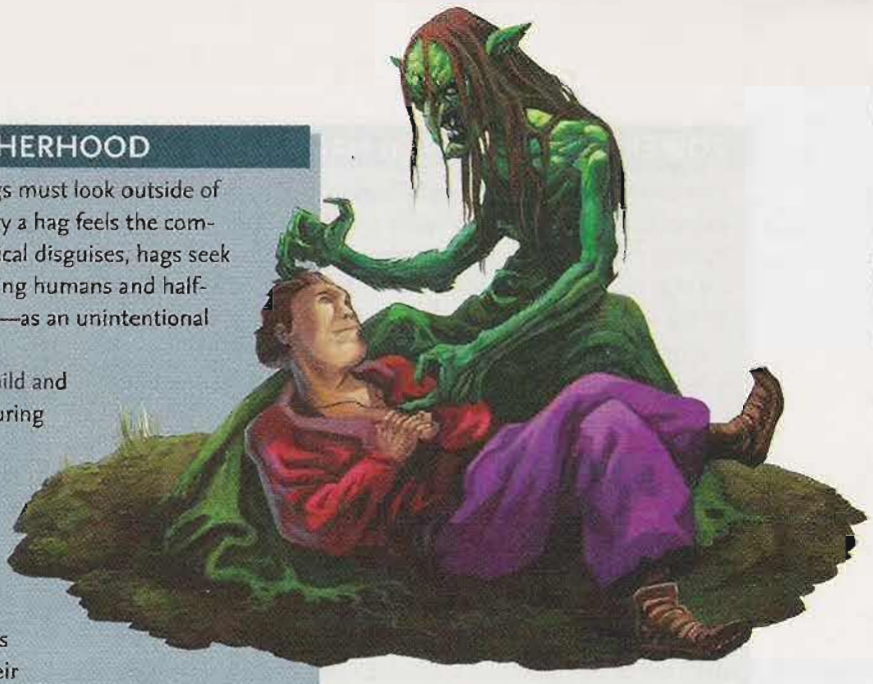
but whether out of some forgotten offense or hereditary spite is unknown. Yet while these cruel aspirations and the seemingly innate need to torment and kill inspire the foul deeds of all hags, green hags act with a malevolence and deceitfulness in excess of even their most savage brethren.

Far more glib and persuasive then any of their sister hags, green hags excel at manipulation and temptation. Their simplest plots involve using their natural and magical abilities to lure trespassers into their swampy home to face some horrible end, but green hags commonly favor far more grandiose plots. Frequently, green hags disguise themselves and walk among the very races they terrorize. Spreading rumors of wise women or beautiful fey who live in the nearby wilderness, they eagerly make themselves into local legends. Such rumors often lead the foolish and desperate to seek the source of the tales, only to fall into the green hag's clutches.

Besides luring victims to their homes, more so than any other types of hags, green hags actively seek out and invade humanoid settlements. Disguising themselves under layers of their inherent magic, green hags sometimes lair in the slums or sewers of cities, stalking their prey within their own homes. In such cases, green hags frequently disguise themselves as beautiful women and tempt men to secluded locales with libidinous promises and appealing disguises. Although green hags do not seek out male victims exclusively, they find that men quite easily, almost willingly, fall to their temptations. Once alone, they take sadistic pleasure in revealing their true forms to their would-be lovers before savagely slaughtering them. However, even worse is when a green hag's victims are more than mere would-be lovers. Insanity often follows those that survive such a traumatizing rendezvous.

With thoughts of feeding and reproduction aside, green hags ultimately seek the corruption and downfall of all things civil and pure. Intelligent and cunning in the extreme, green hags seduce and beguile their way into positions of power, installing themselves as consorts of community leaders or even false goddesses to tribes of savage humanoids. Daring those under their influence to more and more profane and degenerate acts, the greatest plots of green hags seek to recreate civilization into the brutal, decaying morasses they naturally favor.

Green hags prove far more willing to cooperate with other creatures harboring similar goals—both of their own race and others—than other breeds of hags. While all hags gain great benefits from forming coveys, green hags most frequently form such alliances and triunes of green hags form far more frequently than ones consisting exclusively of annis or sea hags. Besides their own sisters, green hags frequently ally with other evil swamp dwelling creatures, finding particular affinity with the alien cruelty of will-o-wisps, and sometimes putting



THE CHANGE: MONSTROUS MOTHERHOOD

Being a race exclusively consisting of females, hags must look outside of their own species to propagate. Once every century a hag feels the compulsion to reproduce. Using kidnapping and magical disguises, hags seek out nearly any humanoid male (seemingly preferring humans and half-elves). The resulting tryst is swift and brutal, often—as an unintentional mercy—culminating in the death of the male.

Hags innately know the moment they are with child and enter a nine-month period of decreased activity. During this time, hags largely rely on their covey sisters or guardians to protect them. However, this lethargy makes them no less deadly if they are roused to action. At the end of this period the hag gives birth to a female child that looks like a perfectly normal member of the father's race.

Despite their compulsion to bear children, hags possess no maternal instincts and rarely raise their own spawn. Instead, hags frequently seek out female newborns in nearby humanoid settlements, kidnapping and murdering a suitable child, and replacing it with their own. In this way, hags perpetuate their foul species, leaving their daughters to grow as parasites within the same cultures they despise. Often the young hags know nothing of their nature, at least until they reach maturity and undergo the Change, when they take on the form and mannerisms of a true hag.

aside their hatred of humanoids to ally with evil druids. However, like all hags, green hags feel a natural—although sometimes unwarranted—sense of superiority over all creatures and know nothing of true trust or partnership. Although a green hag might ally with or even pose as a servant to another creature, such an alliance lasts only as long as it is convenient or until she sees an opportunity to supplant her supposed master.

Vs. Green Hags

Cunning and duplicitous in ways that far outstrip even their hag sisters, only adventurers armed with the best equipment and information can hope to stand against a green hag and survive.

Second Your Senses: Green hags possess a host of spell-like abilities that allow them to trick the senses. When pursuing one of these monstrosities, adventurers should rely on multiple senses before taking anything at face value. For example, a green hag under the effect of her *disguise self* ability might be revealed simply by interacting with her physically (as creatures that touch such a glamer receive a save to disbelieve the illusion). In addition, adventurers should be wary of distracting and misleading spell-like and extraordinary abilities, such as *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*, or the hag's mimicry ability, and should only investigate unexplained sights and sounds with extreme caution.

Steel Your Strength: A green hag can sap the vigor from even the strongest warrior with the merest touch. To defend against her weakening touch, adventurers should consider casting spells like *bull's strength*, *heroism*, *protection from evil*, *lesser restoration*, or even make use of a bard's inspire courage ability to boost their Fortitude saving throws or regain lost Strength.

Dispel Disguises: Green hags may use any of their spell-like abilities at will, and thus use them frequently. While adventurers might seek to cast spells like *dispel magic* or *glitterdust* to reveal a magically masked green hag, these crones can replace their dispelled disguises in moments. Instead, hag hunters should cast spells that continually reveal or bypass illusions, such as *detect thoughts*, *invisibility purge*, or *true seeing*. Better funded adventurers should seek out magic items like *dust of appearance* or *gems of seeing*, which provide more versatile, longer-lasting, and more reliable effects.

Unexpectedly Underwater: Adventurers cannot afford to forget that green hags can move just as nimbly underwater as on land. Possessing both a swim speed and the spell-like ability to breathe water, every stagnant pool and placid pond becomes a potential ambush site. Taking advantage of their weakness supernatural ability and their target's vulnerable state, green hags take special pleasure in grappling those who pass by their hunting waters and dragging them underwater, where the victim's surprise and terror swiftly brings a particularly horrific death by drowning.

Classed Crones and Local Legends: Perhaps more than any other hag, green hags are likely to take levels in a variety of character classes (see "Root of Evil" in DUNGEON #122 for an example). Well suited to the various spellcasting classes, as well as those that thrive in natural settings, green hags frequently add the abilities of barbarians, druids, or sorcerers to their already potent arsenal of abilities. Thus, adventurers should always research their prey and listen well to the stories of locals. The tale of Gnarled Jan controlling the beasts of the swamps might suggest a green hag druid more powerful than her ordinary kin.

The Ecology

One of a broad and

by Nigel D. Findley

"And," said Baylock with great relish, "thus ends the tale of Nex the Archer. Somehow, he escaped the will-o'-wisps with his life; how, we'll never know — at least, not from him." The guide nodded sagely. "Aye, he escaped with his life. But his mind is another story. Nex will never speak again, I hear." He glanced at his employer — Araman, that was his name — huddled nervously on the other side of the fire. "It happened near here, they say," Baylock continued innocently, with an airy gesture at the mangroves pressing close around them. Araman looked about him, licking his lips nervously. Baylock grinned to himself.

Then he decided to let the other man off the hook. Araman wasn't such a bad sort, not like many of the rich dimwits Baylock had wet-nursed through the marshes in the past. Certainly, he was a soft city dweller, not tempered to hardship like Baylock and his lads. But he'd come to Baylock with a fair price — and without the rankling disdain that most city dwellers had for the mist-eaters who lived and worked along the marshes. Araman also kept up and pulled his weight — that, moreso than most.

"But no worries," Baylock finished. "That was five years ago — or more — and nobody's seen a will-o'-wisp around here since. Don't concern yourself with it, sir,"

Across the fire, Araman glanced up with surprise at the guide's "sir," Since they'd struck the deal for guided passage through the marsh, Baylock had addressed him as nothing but "you." What had mellowed the grizzled mist-eater, Araman couldn't guess. But he wasn't going to question it.

Still, Araman was uncomfortable. He looked again at the gnarled mangroves and saw that they seemed to move in the flickering firelight. Baylock's three "boys" — actually men of Araman's age — lay wrapped in their sleeping rolls, well away from the fire. Their backs were turned to the warmth as if to scorn the city man's weak need for a fire. But Baylock himself sat near the blaze. Was he trying to be companionly? Whatever the reason, if the guide was suddenly willing to talk, Araman wanted to take advantage of the chance.

of the Greenhag

evil family of hags

"So," Araman said, his voice weaker than he liked. "No will-o'-wisps. Then what does live around here? The most dangerous creature?"

Baylock smiled. "Apart from the vultures and the giant lizards and the occasional mist dragon, you mean?" He thought for a moment, and his smile faded. "Well," he went on slowly, "there are tales of a shellycoat."

Araman glanced at the three backs turned to the fire. Had they stiffened slightly? "What's a shellycoat?" the city dweller asked. He wasn't sure that he should have inquired.

Baylock looked for another stick to add to the fire. "Maybe you know it as a greenhag."

No doubt about it this time. Baylock's men were listening. One stirred briefly as if turning in his sleep, but he merely positioned himself to hear the discussion better. Araman. leaned forward, fascinated but nervous. Anything that could scare these mist-eaters was worth knowing of. "Tell me about it."

Baylock shrugged and waved a hand. "Not much to tell," he said. "The shellycoat — the greenhag — well, it's like the annis, but even more dangerous."

"It's like the . . . ?"

Baylock sighed. "The annis," he repeated patiently. "A blue giantess. As vicious and cruel a creature as you'd ever be sorry enough to meet. You find them in wilderness mountains, swamps, forests — any climate but the warmest. Just about anywhere well away from civilization. Same with the greenhag. Both are relatives of the night hag." He leaned forward. "You do know of the night hag?"

"Of course. But how — how are they related?"

"Simple. What do you get when you cross a night hag with a human or a demi-human, eh? You get a greenhag."[1] Baylock chuckled. "You think that every time a night hag goes out hunting, it's only to drag some poor soul off to Hades? Oh, no; sometimes it's not a man's *life* she wants. Enough to make your blood run cold, it is."

Baylock stopped suddenly and cocked his head, listening. "Hear that?" he asked quietly.

Araman strained his ears. Nothing: just the constant background murmur of the swamp insects. Suddenly, a chilling howl broke above the subtle murmur. "What was that?" Araman gasped. Baylock's men got to their feet in remarkable time, short swords and daggers free in their hands. They seemed quite awake.

"A wolf, I think." Baylock called some instructions, and his three men sheathed blades, unlimbered short bows, and melted into the darkness out of the firelight. "Don't worry," he said, turning back to Araman. "My boys'll take care of it, whatever it is. If they can't stab it, shaft it, or slice it, they'll salute it. Now, where were we?"

"The greenhag," Araman reminded him. "And the shellycoat, if there's any difference."

Baylock shook his head. "No, no difference. 'Shellycoat' is just what we call her when she lives in a swamp or river. That's when she's most dangerous, to my mind. Sometimes she'll lie in wait underwater to rend fishermen — aye, and mist-eaters, too — as they pass by."[2]

Araman shivered. "You say 'she.' Are there no male greenhags?"

"Never," Baylock said flatly. "Some say it's because the female hag's blood is dominant; some say it's because the night hag mother eats the male babes at birth. Whichever. No male greenhags." A thin smile wrinkled his face. "Though that's not to say the greenhag doesn't get a yen for male companionship, if you take my meaning. She just has to look for it outside her own species, like her mother, though the greenhag prefers the big boys like ogres and giants. And that's where you get the annis.[3] Now, the annis—"

Both men stiffened as a bowstring sang in the darkness. Another twang was followed by a hoarse call of "Over here!" Through the clatter of underbrush, a high-pitched cry assaulted the evening air. The cry ended abruptly in silence.

Baylock started to get to his feet, then slowly sat down again and forced a smile. "Whatever that is, my boys are giving it what for." He nervously eyed the treeline. "Anyway, the annis follows her mother's attitude towards ogres and giants. She deals with them for the same things: information, provender, and companionship. On occasion, you even find an annis living with an ogre or giant tribe as the wife of the tribal chieftain." Baylock smiled briefly. "If that isn't a case of the power behind the throne, I don't know what is."[4]

The sound of combat again stirred the night. A commotion in the undergrowth was followed quickly by another twanging bowstring — then by a cry hoarse with agony: "Help me, Baylock!"

The guide was on his feet in a moment, his blade drawn. "Stay put," he said grimly. "I'll be back." Rushing off into the brush, Baylock disappeared into the blackness.

Araman wrapped his cloak closer around him. He glanced down at his hands; they shook as though with the palsy. He clenched them, and the shaking stopped. The night grew quiet and long.

Araman didn't see the figure until she had stepped into the clearing, squinting her orange eyes against the light of the fire. Her rags were tattered, and dark blood — not hers — fell from her black claws and splotched her green skin. Withered lips drew back from needle-pointed fangs in a mockery of a smile. When she spoke, it was in the same pain-roughened voice Araman had just heard, but black with irony. "Help me, Araman!"

Araman knew it would do no good to scream.

But he screamed anyway.

Notes

1. After mating with a human or demi-human male, a pregnant night hag remains in Hades throughout the 13-month gestation period. Following this time, she returns to the Prime Material Plane to give birth. From the moment of delivery, the newborn greenhag is able to fend for herself (which is just as well, since the night hag mother abandons the infant immediately). The greenhag, which is always female, is similar in appearance to a human infant; only her long black fingernails and the greenish tinge of her skin give away her true nature.

At birth, the greenhag has only 2 HD, and does limited damage (1-2/1-2; no strength bonus). She maintains her characteristic armor class of -2, however. The greenhag originally has no spell-like powers or mimicry ability, and so depends on cunning and stealth to catch her food — generally, anything that moves, with humans and demi-humans preferred. The greenhag grows rapidly, reaching her full size, strength, and powers at the age of 18 months.

The greenhag's alignment is always that of the mother: neutral evil. Her intelligence, which ranges from low to very, is equal to the father's intelligence score minus 1d6 (as long as this figure does not put it out of the allowable range: 5-12). The language of the night hag, which is wrongly reputed to be a dialect of annis, is actually a degenerate form of the tongue spoken by night hags. The greenhag's knowledge of her own language is innate; other languages (and sounds she can mimic) must be learned.

The greenhag's spell-like abilities and her inhuman strength are also degenerate gifts of the monster's mother. Dilution with human or demi-human blood has weakened the night hag's extraplanar powers, making some abilities mere shadows of the original powers *(invisibility* instead of *etherealness, change self* instead of *polymorph self, weakness* instead of *enfeeblement).* Some of these powers are removed altogether (e.g., the night hag's ability to *gate* in demons or devils and her resistance to nonmagical weapons). As if in recompense for this, some new powers, which are more in tune with the Prime Material Plane, have been given to the greenhag (e.g., ***pass without trace,*** speak ***with monsters,*** etc.). A greenhag's lifespan is usually around 500 years (less than her mother's 1,000-year span because of the diluting effect of human or demi-human blood).

2. A greenhag often makes her lair in an underwater cave, using her ***water breathing*** ability (which lasts for 27 turns, or 4½ hours) to dwell therein. If no suitable body of water is available, the lair is usually concealed (for example, screened by overhanging plants or shielded from view by a large boulder). Being a cowardly creature at heart, a greenhag will go to great lengths to prevent her lair from being found, often going so far as to enter and leave it only while *invisible.*

This innate cowardice also dictates the greenhag's favored methods of hunting: lying in wait while *invisible* or otherwise concealed, or using her mimicry — which is often coupled with her *change self* ability — to lure prey into an indefensible position (for example, into quicksand) or away from comrades. Although physically very powerful, the greenhag is a bully who often shuns a fair fight. If confronted by strong, determined opposition, she will flee. Conversely, if her prey is much weaker than she, a greenhag will cruelly "play" with it (in the same manner that a cat plays with a bird or mouse) before killing and eating it.

3. Although basically solitary creatures, greenhags sometimes deal with ogres and hill giants (usually those of lower intelligence who are easily dominated), trading baubles looted from their victims for information, food, and protection as necessary. Quite frequently, greenhags also mate with smaller members of ogre or hill-giant tribes. Any male ogre or giant may father the greenhag's child.

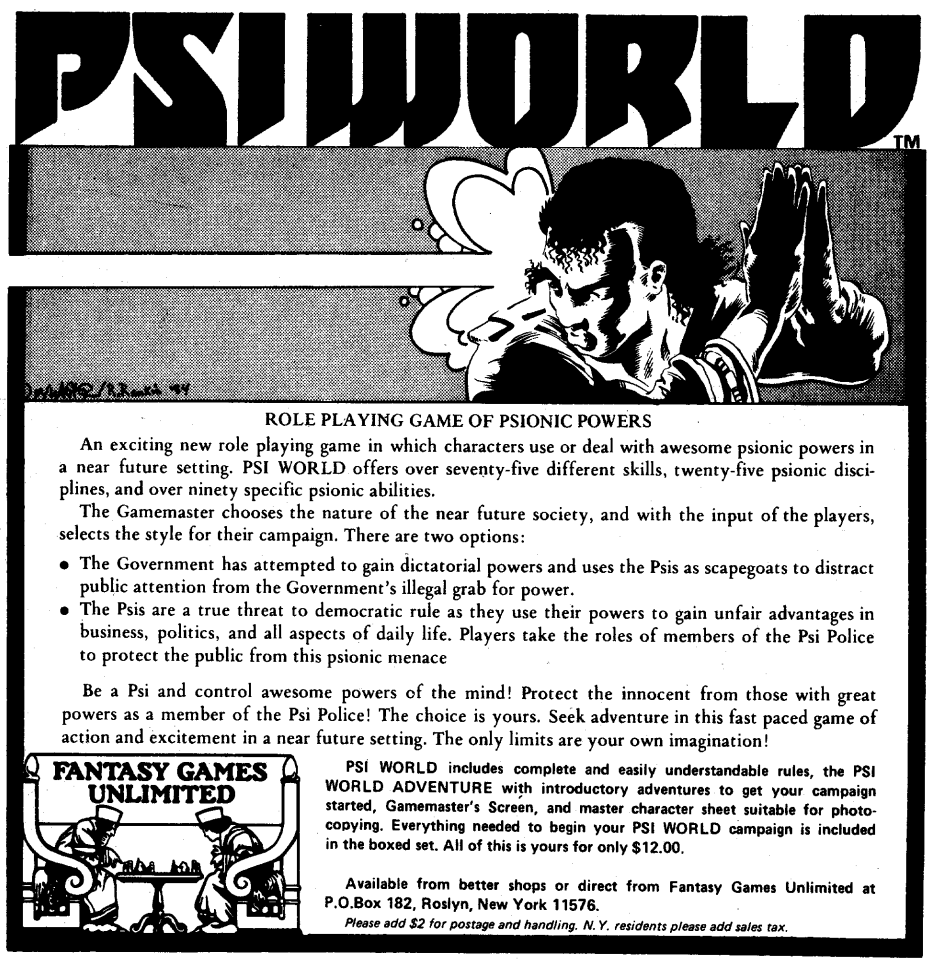
After a seven-month gestation period, the greenhag gives birth to an annis. Like the greenhag, the newborn annis (which is always female) is similar in appearance to a large human infant, again except for skin color. At birth, the annis has 1 HD and can attack by bite only, doing 1d4 hp damage (no strength bonus). Her armor class from birth is 0. Like the greenhag, the annis infant has no spell-like powers, but can sometimes depend on her ogrish or giantish father to feed her for a brief while. The greenhag provides nothing for the baby annis, which the mother abandons at birth. The annis grows even more rapidly than the greenhag, reaching full maturity at the age of 12 months.

As the night hag's characteristics are diluted by breeding with a human or demi-human, so are the greenhag's characteristics weakened by the addition of ogrish or giantish blood. The annis's innate knowledge of language is even more imperfect, so her tongue becomes a further degeneration of the original night hag speech. The annis's resistance to punishment is decreased, and more of the night hag's powers have vanished. The annis's lifespan, too, is lessened, dropping to approximately double the lifespan of her father's race. Even the annis's alignment is changed from neutral evil to a more selfish, chaotic bent.

Apart from size, the only boon the annis receives from her father is increased strength. The annis's enhanced range of intelligence (to a maximum of exceptional) is a special case, resulting more from the recessive inheritance of night hag intelligence; the higher range of intelligence has skipped a generation. This throwback situation also explains the annis's return to the night hag's purity of complexion.

4. The annis shares her mother's bullying nature — although she is not as much of a coward — and will often be found amongst a tribe of non-humans if she can dominate them (usually by dominating the leader). An ogre or giant clan that includes an annis is generally more cunning and cruel in nature than the norm.

An annis will mate with an ogre or hill giant, if one can be found. Such a mating rarely (10%) results in live offspring. Although not strictly a mule, the annis is not a very fertile strain. When the annis does produce offspring, the infant is always the same race as the father, and always female. The only legacies of the mother are increased resilience (i.e., the offspring always has the maximum hit points for the species in question) and a bluish tinge to her complexion. All other characteristics are derived from the father. Unlike the night hag and greenhag, the annis usually succors the infant as would a female of the father's species. Ω



by F. Wesley Schneider
illustrated by Peter Bergting

The Ecology of Night Hags

Begone, you hag who lurks in dreams, who drains our life through cries and screams. Gods bless this ward to keep me whole, and keep the night hag from my soul.
—Van Richten's Guide to Witches

Innumerable fears plague mortals, but among them fear of the dark, the intangible, and the unknown rank as some of the greatest. Hailing from the bleakest hells of the Outer Planes' endless infinities, countless creatures embody these most potent of fears. Among these extraplanar terrors, no one cruel breed so seeks to wreak horror and spread suffering as the nightmare queens of Hades, the sinister and hateful night hags. With a lust for power that rivals even the most ambitious devils combined with the hungry bloodlust of demons, night hags insatiably crave that which only the living provide. Commoner or prince, human or elf, all have reason to fear, as night hags hunger equally for the souls of all mortals.

Having preyed upon the living for countless centuries, warnings of night hags and their powers have become the stuff of superstitions and old wives' tales. Although little truth remains in such country advice, many such tales find their basis in actual practices capable of warding off a night hag's predatory wrath. This article examines the nature of night hags, collecting an assortment of such rumors, legends, and advice, to best prepare those who would face these otherworldly horrors.

History of Night Hags

For many extraplanar creatures, it is enough to say that they always were, and thus they are now. However, night hags are as ancient as any fiend, and their similarities to the hags of the Material Plane raises the peculiar question of their origins.

Many scholars speculate that night hags are merely planar relatives of normal hags; another breed, native to the Outer Planes, and different only in the same ways that annis hags differ from green hags or sea hags. However, the fearful abilities and cruel cunning of night hags make them seem like ideals of the hag race. Regardless of their origins, most of those who investigate the specifics of night hags are interested in a much different history: the countless stories and towering records of terrorized countries and lifeless villages that owe their ruin to these hag queens.

PHYSIOLOGY OF NIGHT HAGS

Even when compared to other hags, night hags appear as grotesque crones. Said to look like extraordinarily ugly human women, such a statement does an irreparable disservice to the gender of that species. Thus, a more apt description might compare them to small, female trolls; their skin ranging from a light purple-blue all the way to near black and blistered with the foul planar diseases they carry.

Nearly all night hags wear wild manes of coarse black hair with bones, severed fingers, and small trinkets woven into it in whatever manner they believe makes them appear most threatening. This grotesque coif often dangles over a night hag's face and much of her body, possibly hiding her rows of awkwardly protruding pointed teeth dripping with diseased saliva. Above, a pair of deep hollows veil hellish red pupils, little more than maddened pinpricks looking out over a sharply pointed nose.

To augment their fearsome appearances, night hags often cover their grotesquely emaciated bodies in self-inflicted tattoolike scars. This sickly, tormented facade belies a night hag's significant strength and the threat of her wicked claws. However, many of a night hag's joints seem to bend in awkward ways, disturbing to mortal witnesses, which make them relatively slow and ungainly creatures.

NIGHT HAG KNOWLEDGE

A character might know something about night hags from stories or prior studies. The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to night hags.

Knowledge (the planes) DC	Result
10	Some foul creatures haunt the dreams of mortals, wearing them down with increasingly horrible nightmares that eventually kill.
15	Night hags are fearful beings from the Outer Planes, more powerful than other hags, that take the forms of mortals and hunger for the flesh and souls of innocent creatures.
20	Night hags are mistresses of nightmares that put their enemies to sleep and strangle them while unconscious. They are immune to many forces that affect mortals, such as fire and cold, and they never sleep.
25	Night hags are far different creatures from normal hags, with vast knowledge of forbidden secrets and the power to become ethereal. Fortunately, night hags are vulnerable to weapons of magic cold iron.
30	Night hags form alliances with a multitude of evil extraplanar creatures, know much of their ways, and afflict their enemies with the diseases of the lower planes. All night hags carry *heartstones*, which they need to become ethereal and which hold the power to cure any disease.

Night hags reproduce in a manner exceedingly foul to mortal minds, creating young to serve in their coveys or as servants. Using their *polymorph* spell-like ability to disguise themselves as mortal women, night hags seduce men into a meeting that as likely as not culminates in the males' deaths. After such a coupling, a night hag becomes pregnant for a length of time normal for women of her mate's species. At the end of this period, the night hag gives birth to a dark-haired female child otherwise indistinguishable from others of her mate's species. Having no concept of maternal instincts, night hags always foster their children, usually to unsuspecting good-aligned creatures and even with the child's father if he still lives.

At any time between the child's first birthday and puberty, a night hag might return to perform a series of despoiling rites that culminates in the child's transformation into a normal night hag. The process begins with an initial visitation during which the night hag must engage her child in a foul ceremony for an uninterrupted hour. After this initial ritual, the night hag must return three times, each visit thirteen days after the

last. On these visits, the night hag must suckle the child and feed it the flesh of a living larva, a process that takes an hour. If any of these feedings are interrupted, or if the night hag can't access the child by the end of the proper day, the child cannot be transformed into a night hag. Otherwise, the end of the final feeding initiates a rapid and irreversible transformation, and within an hour the child becomes a full-grown night hag. Uncaring of their daughters but covetous of their uses, night hags often foster more children than they have any intention of transforming into full-blooded night hags, essentially keeping spare children littered across the planes should their plans require more servants or their current broods dwindle.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF NIGHT HAGS

Naturally cruel beings, night hags obsess over dreams of power and endless feasts of mortal souls. They think nothing of other creatures except in how they relate to the night hags' desires. This leads night hags to relegate any creature less powerful than them to the position of either slave or meal, with slaves often merely serving as future meals. Night hags manipulate and bargain with creatures they don't believe they can defeat, in the hopes of extorting as much use as possible and perhaps leaving them vulnerable.

Night hags pay little respect to the concept of racial privilege and contend with others of their race in the same manner they deal with all other creatures, with strong night hags subjugating their weaker sisters. Night hags sometimes deal with the hags of the Material Plane but never as equals and always as masters. These extraplanar hags maintain a deeply rooted sense of superiority when it comes to normal hags and cruelly dominate either an individual or whole covey. Selfish and supercilious in the extreme, night hags rarely form coveys with their own kind and most assuredly never with lesser hags of the Material Plane. When a covey of night hags does form, it most often consists of a dominant night hag and two weaker night hags or even three night hags forced by a more powerful night hag to do her bidding. These weaker night hags might be hags the leader subjugated or, more often, the dominant hag's own daughters. A covey of night hags has the same abilities of a covey of normal hags, as noted on page 144 of the *Monster Manual*.

NIGHT HAG LAIRS

Night hags most commonly inhabit the grim plane known as the Gray Waste of Hades, but their cruel ambitions cause them to roam far. Using portals, powerful magic items, and other planar connections, night hags often travel quite extensively and know much of the planes.

Only the most powerful night hags make lairs on their native planes, using legions of lesser fiends, extraplanar horrors, and their own daughters to carve out small personal empires. Weaker hags prefer nomadic existences in such infernal realms but more often haunt wooded ruins and lonely crags near secluded towns and villages on the Material Plane. A night hag's lair often consists of two lairs, one on the Material Plane and another on the Ethereal Plane. Using their *etherealness* ability to drag materials with them from the Material Plane, they construct simplistic towers of stone and iron—grim, hard edifices among the ghostly vapors. These terrible lairs are little more than planar prisons, holding captives a night hag particularly values or protecting her uncorrupted children during their crucial transformation period. Although these lairs might leave hostages victim to unpredictable planar dangers, night hags often delight in trapping their captives in the dual prisons of their grisly lair and the ghostly Ethereal Plane.

With the ability to shift from lair to lair using her *etherealness* spell-like ability, a night hag spends much of her time on the Ethereal Plane scheming and performing all manner of foul rites. A night hag would probably lair solely on the Ethereal Plane, rendering herself nearly undetectable to most hunters, if not for that plane's numerous threats. Between sporadic ether cyclones and the countless powerful creatures that lurk in that misty realm, the Material Plane sometimes offers a safer place to store possessions and captives.

NIGHT HAGS AND LARVAE

Night hags engage in a strange connection to the rare petitioners of Hades known as larva (see page 108 of the *Manual of the Planes*). The manifested souls of unquestionably evil creatures reborn as bloated, yellow, wormlike beings, the existence of these creatures presents one of the great mysteries of the planes. With distorted faces reminiscent of those they had in life, larvae ooze a sickening, bilious fluid and constantly writhe like giant, squirming maggots. Although the specifics of their use remain vague, night hags require these abominations to reproduce. Some night hags even gather and trade larvae to other powerful evil creatures, which use them as food, currency, and as "soul stuff" for unspeakable projects.

Night hags possess an uncanny ability to determine which mortals become larva upon their deaths and perhaps even know what foul deeds a soul must commit to damn it to eternity as a larva. Knowing that these irredeemably corrupt souls hold value among the most depraved creatures of the planes, night hags often seek out powerful evil individuals, either to slay them and claim the newly spawned larva or to corrupt their immortal beings into the abominations they covet. As creatures with more Hit Dice spawn more powerful larvae, night hags are an incessant threat to powerful evil creatures, especially to spellcasters who bargain with infernal powers.

From her strategically chosen lair, a night hag ventures into the homes of her victims nightly and with ease, afflicting one creature at a time, savoring its torment as its body weakens and dies. As a night hag's dream haunting can only affect chaotic or evil creatures, a night hag often preys first upon the outcasts of a settlement. Few become concerned when the criminals and rabble-rousers of their community die in their sleep—many even consider it a blessing—until the night hag's nocturnal assaults kill a notable person or someone considered innocent. Often, a community with a night hag lairing nearby believes some kind of plague resistant to all forms of natural and magical healing afflicts them. Such a belief might even cause a country to quarantine an area, effectively dooming it to a slow death at the claws of a voracious night hag. As some of the populace sickens and dies from the hag's dream haunting, even those who suspect

an otherworldly force can rarely hope to survive a combat against a night hag.

On the rare occasions a night hag is suspected or discovered, actually finding her lair presents a formidable challenge. Night hags prefer small, secluded caves, hollows, or ruins, choosing a lair both difficult to reach and that elicits fear from those who come near. Riddling the areas near their homes with magic traps and their servants, and with no need to sleep, night hags are rarely caught unaware. Night hags take great offense to intruders and often possess a variety of unique magic traps and weapons to deal with interlopers (see *"By the Hands of Hags"* in DRAGON #300).

VS. NIGHT HAGS

When facing a night hag, be prepared to face what might be the most dangerous and unrepentantly evil threat you could ever encounter. A night hag employs every advantage she commands and gladly makes even the most dire sacrifices to save her own life. Thus, extreme caution, devotion to your cause, and the blessings of whatever gods you pray to are the only things that might see you through.

Revealing Nightmares: Beings suffering from dream haunting gradually lose Constitution and often appear physically weaker. Although many diseases cause similar effects, night hags only haunt the dreams of chaotic and evil creatures, thus spells like *detect chaos* and *detect evil* might reveal a hag's potential victims. *True seeing* most definitively reveals the presence of a dream haunting night hag, however, as she lurks on the Ethereal Plane while terrorizing her victim.

Locate the Lair: Although a night hag most likely travels ethereally, the tracks of her allies or those she's captured might offer a hint about the creature's whereabouts. Once you locate it, a night hag's lair might be guarded by almost any threat culled from the mortal world or from the outer planes. Thus, divination spells and high Listen, Spot, and Search bonuses help protect you from any manner of attack.

Prepare for Etherealness: Upon encountering a night hag, you must prepare to defend yourself from a creature capable of becoming ethereal. *Shield* spells and items like a *broach of shielding* defend against her ability to cast *magic missile* at will. *True seeing* helps immensely, both to locate the night hag on the Ethereal Plane and to detect her attempts to *polymorph* herself into another form and hide. Spells and magic items capable of ensnaring even ethereal creatures, such as *forcecage*, prove exceptionally useful.

However, the best way to face an ethereal night hag is confronting her on equal footing. This makes the ability to become ethereal, as per the *ethereal jaunt* or *etherealness* spell, exceptionally useful, although trapping a hag on the Material Plane, via *dimensional anchor* or *dimensional lock* spells or with *dimensional shackles*, could be an even more potent tactic.

The best way to deal with a night hag's *etherealness* is to take or destroy her *heartstone*. Without it a night hag loses her ability to become ethereal and bonuses to her saves.

Face Your Fears: Many novice hunters turn to the *dismissal* spell as a swift way of dispatching outsider threats—a method fraught with potential for failure when used against a night hag. The primary danger is that *dismissal* forces its target to make a Will save, which the night hag holds the highest chance of succeeding at. Also, even if the spell does work, it only returns the night hag to the Gray Wastes of Hades. Being immortal creatures with a penchant for hatred, cruelty, and revenge, a banished night hag often remembers those who slighted her and might spend the rest of eternity searching for whomever banished her to repay the slight.

Stay Grounded: Although night hags often use it to spy upon and retreat from hunters, their *etherealness* ability provides one of their most threatening attacks. Upon grappling a target, a night hag that shifts to the Ethereal Plane might trap an opponent there, potentially cutting him off from his allies. Knowing that sorcerers and wizards have the highest likelihood of detecting and harming them while ethereal, as well as having the least chance of resisting a full-on assault, night hags watch for chances to ambush and slaughter spellcasters in this manner. Protect your spellcasters from this strategy by giving them a better chance at avoiding and resisting grapple attempts. Spells such as *blur, bull's strength, displacement*, and *grease* might help. Also, keep *scrolls of ethereal jaunt* or *scrolls of etherealness* on hand to allow other characters to come to the trapped character's rescue. You might even cast *dimensional anchor* on yourself and party members if you anticipate an encounter with a night hag.

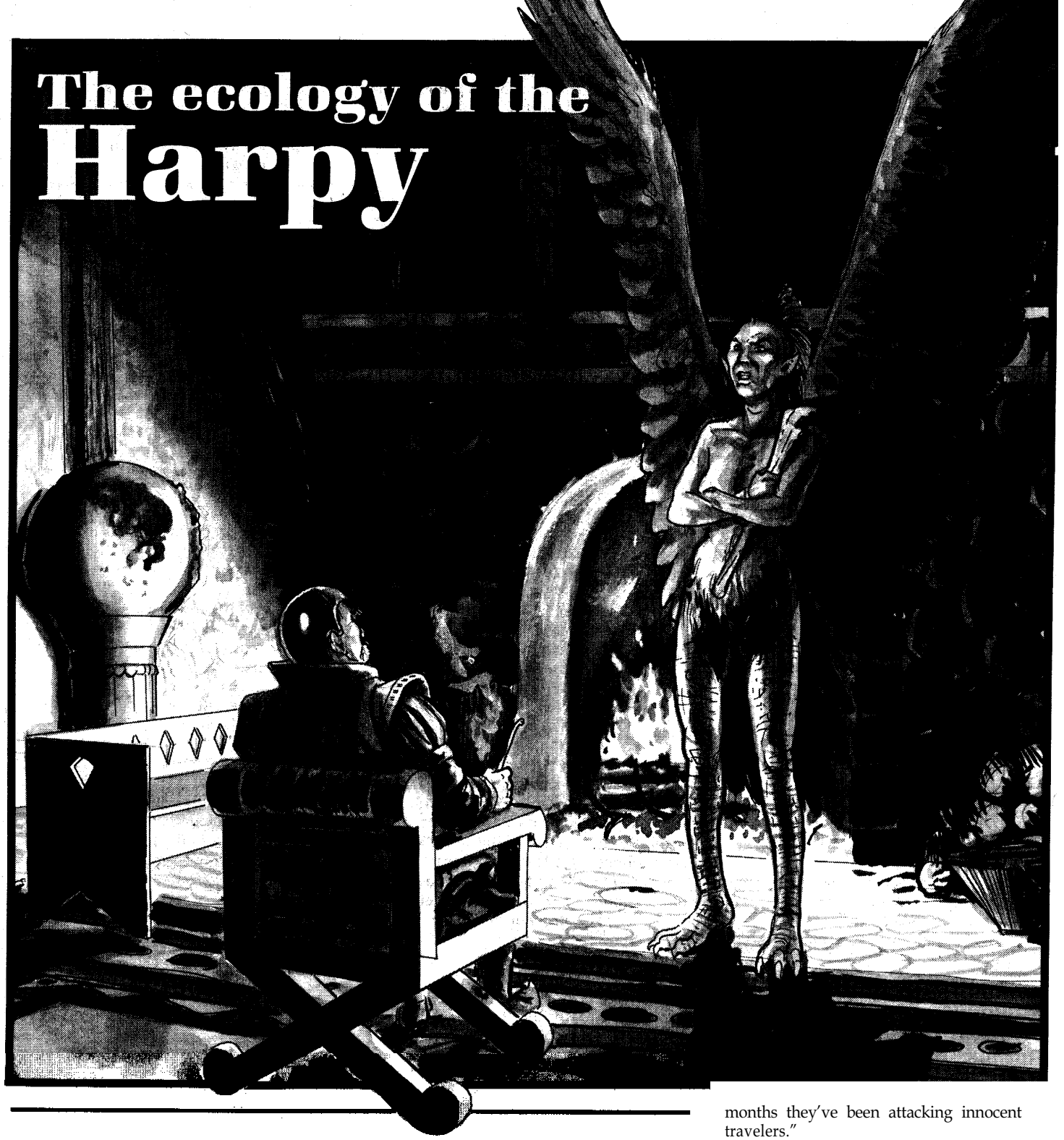
Strike While the Iron is Cold: Only magic cold iron weapons ignore a night hag's damage reduction. Consider owning such a weapon or using the *magic weapon* spell on mundane cold iron.

Protect Hostages: Night hags often hold captives on the Ethereal Plane and use them as bargaining chips to manipulate hunters or others who care about the hostage's safety. Ruthless crones, night hags brook no insolence, and they swiftly shift to the Ethereal Plane to dispatch their prisoners, often taking several captives to allow them to easily make a gory example of one or more. In such cases, your primary concern should be keeping the night hag away from her hostages. The *dimensional anchor* and *forcecage* spells again prove useful, allowing the party to combat the hag without fearing for the safety of innocents.

Beware Waking Nightmares: Night hags often enlist the aid of the fiendish steeds known as nightmares, especially prizing half-fiend cauchemars. With the aid of a creature that is both a plane-shifting mount and a powerful ally in combat, night hags gain all the benefits of mounted combat and the ability to hide not just on the Ethereal Plane, but on any plane connected to the Astral Plane. Your best hopes rely on swiftly dispatching the night hag's nightmare or casting *dimensional anchor* upon either the mount or the rider to limit their planar mobility.

Deal with the Disease: Upon dispatching a night hag, liberally applied Heal checks and *cure disease* spells ward off the effects of demon fever. You should also watch for multiple afflictions contracted from the night hag's allies or traps, as they favor poisoned and diseased guardians.

The ecology of the Harpy



Songs of beauty. . .

by Barbara E. Curtis

"So . . . you seek something from me." The silver-haired sage chuckled to himself as he poured a cup of mulled wine for his guest. "It must be quite important, for I have very few visitors."

I don't doubt that, Colin thought, recalling the long miles of barren wasteland he had crossed to reach the sage's dwelling. It had been hard going even for a ranger. "People from the Northlands say that you've studied animals and their behavior. I need some advice. Some strange creatures have made the main road into my village their home, and for the past three months they've been attacking innocent travelers."

"Do you know what these creatures are called?" D'driand asked, his tone a bit more businesslike as he handed Colin the cup of wine and sat in the carved chair across from him.

"I think someone told me they were called harpies," the ranger said. "I've never actually seen one myself, but those few who have seen them and lived to tell of it after have said that a harpy has the face and upper body of a hideous woman, and the lower body and wings of a vulture."

"Those indeed sound like harpies, my friend," D'driand said. "Three months, you say? You might have more of a problem

than you've bargained for — they probably have claimed that area as their tribal land."

"Tribal land?"

"I had not heard that there were any harpies in the Northlands, but it's possible that they've moved north because their old hunting lands have become depleted," D'driand said, intertwining his fingers thoughtfully. "If the entire tribe has settled there, you have a definite cause for worry. An average tribe consists of fifty to two hundred members. They aren't very bright, but they're smart enough to realize there's safety in numbers."

"Not very encouraging," Colin grunted, staring into his cup. "How do you get rid of harpies?"

"Drive them away," D'driand replied. "It's not easy, but far easier than trying to kill them all off. At this point, you have one of two choices: move your village to a safer location, or show enough power that the harpies will flee. They aren't known for their bravery."

"But I think we're dealing with a very small tribe. I haven't heard of any group larger than a dozen."

"Tribes are rare," D'driand said, "but not unknown. Harpies usually exist in smaller packs, or 'screams,' and almost never hunt in groups larger than twelve. In cases of extreme necessity, however, harpies have been known to band together in small tribes. In fact, unless you had spent as much time as I have studying the harpies, you wouldn't even know they were tribal at all. Since their hunting grounds usually spread over a five- to ten-mile radius, no more than a dozen will ever been seen at one time. Their lairs are grouped together, but that's all."

"Would the village be part of their hunting grounds as well?" Colin asked.

"I'm not sure. Have any of the farmers in your area lost grazing animals?"

"Jarlath, a farmer right on the edge of the village, said that he lost about ten sheep last week."

D'driand nodded. "Just as I thought. Be careful of grazing animals as well. Harpies have voracious appetites and will eat just about anything. The road into your village probably has a lot of travelers on it daily, so it presents an almost constant supply of food. Men, women, children, beasts of burden — nothing is safe." D'driand stretched his feet out in front of him, sighed, and continued. "Harpies are strictly carnivores. Oh, I have heard that in times of famine harpies will eat vegetation, but only when meat has been unavailable for some time. They prefer fresh meat, especially that of humans, humanoids, and demi-humans. Elf is a particularly rare treat, for reasons I shall explain later. However, harpies could hardly be termed fussy eaters and will eat just about anything, including carrion."

"If they have such ravenous appetites and will attack anything to eat it, why don't they attack large groups?" Colin asked. "We have caravans passing through on their way to Rhelmar by that road, but I've never heard of even one harpy attack on them."

"As I mentioned before, harpies are generally quite cowardly and won't get into a fight they don't believe they can win."

"But there are so many females," Colin said. "I've never heard of even *one* male harpy. Do harpies live forever and never need to reproduce?"

"The males look like females; the only difference between them are the actual biological functions of reproduction," D'driand explained, taking Colin's empty cup to refill it. "Despite the fact that all harpies have the appearance of breasts on their upper bodies, that is all it is: an appearance. Harpies do not nurse their young. Instead, young are fed in the same manner as are bird fledglings. Actual roles of males and females in the tribe are identical. Both hunt and both care for the fledglings. And harpies hardly live forever — perhaps twenty-five or thirty years at the most."

"How much bigger will a tribe become?"

"A healthy female becomes fertile by the age of two and may lay as many as twenty eggs in her lifetime, though only an average of three may live to maturity. Many of the eggs simply won't hatch. If a harpy is born with any obvious deformities, its parents kill it shortly after hatching. If there are more than one fledgling in the nest, the stronger of them always kills the weaker ones. The harpies see this as completely natural; the weak have no right to live. This works in the opposite way as well: when a harpy grows too old and feeble to hunt on its own, becomes crippled or sickly, or is in any other way incapable of taking care of itself for any period of time, other tribe members kill it, for it is a burden to the tribe." D'driand handed Colin the refilled cup. "If left to nature, a harpy tribe won't become significantly larger," he added as he sat down again.

"Well, I have a pretty good idea of what they are and why they have been attacking." Colin said, pushing aside a stray wisp of dark hair. "Here's the real question: *how* do they attack?"

"If they had been forced to rely on their teeth, claws, and wits, they never would have survived very long. Whatever evil caused the harpies to be created also saw to it that they were given a unique and terrible attack. A harpy has a song that would put all the birds of the world to shame — a song that makes listeners risk life and limb to find the creature that produces such a beautiful sound. Some do resist the charm, but not many. Once they are under the effect of the harpy's song, the victim seeks out the harpy that charmed him and stays under the effect even when he sees how ugly the harpy actually is. The victim won't actually engage in combat since he does not realize what has happened, but he may try to persuade his companions that the harpy means them no harm."

"Can the charm be broken?"

"Yes; but there are only three ways I know of doing so," D'driand told him. "First, if one of the victim's companions is unaffected by the spell, he might call out to the victim and try to convince him of the harpy's intent, though there is no guarantee that this will work. The second way is for a sorcerer or holy man to cast a spell to rid the victim of the charm or the magic that caused it. The last way is to kill the harpy itself.

"In case the song didn't work, or if the person has broken the song's charm, there is another way that a harpy can charm its victim. More powerful than the song, this way makes the victim see the harpy as a beloved friend worthy of his protection. It is a magical touch that sends a powerful charm through the victim."

"Can you use the same ways to break this type of charm as with the song-charm?"

"The only way to remove this type is to kill the harpy responsible, for this charm puts a stronger hold on the victim than the song does." D'driand picked up a fireplace poker and began to stir the glowing embers. "In this case, the person will physically try to defend the harpy and thwart any attempts to kill it, so this can be a major problem. If you plan on taking a group of people to defeat them, it would be to your benefit to take those with elven blood, for they have a natural resistance to the powers of the harpy. This is why harpies find them to be such a delicacy, for elves are difficult to charm and are therefore a rare treat."

"If a person is under the effect of the song-charm and is touched by a harpy, does this strengthen the spell it has over its victim?"

"No. The power isn't cumulative. The only way for a harpy to strengthen it to that point is to break the song-charm and then touch its victim. Harpies can break the charm immediately — all it takes is for it to physically attack its victim. However, it likes to wait until there is no one around to help its victim and no chance for the victim to escape once the charm has been released. It disarm its prey first, and once its victim is completely vulnerable, it attacks and gains an early advantage."

"If people have broken the charm once, can they do it again later?"

"Not exactly." D'driand replaced the poker and carefully placed another log on the fire. "However, those who have been taken by harpy charm and have broken it themselves seem to be more resistant to it in the future. People cannot be charmed by the same type of charm twice in one battle."

Colin nodded. "Good. I think I have a good idea of how to defeat them." The ranger suddenly looked sad and stared into his cup. "Would that it was not sooner.

More travelers' lives could have been saved. One thing was very odd. A few of us ventured to find some of the missing people; we found a few remains, but apparently none of their belongings were touched."

"That's very typical," D'driand said. "Harpies do not care for treasure for treasure's sake. What use is it to them? They take only one item from each victim back to their lairs as a memento of the kill, for having many items from victims is a sort of status symbol in harpy society.

"If you went to a lair of a harpy, you probably wouldn't find much of value. Most of their victims are wayward travelers and pilgrims — people who would not have much of value in the first place, perhaps a ring or a pouch of coins. Never would you find gold, platinum, jewels, and magical items of any worth or great power. There is no reason for a harpy to prefer a large gem over a tinderbox. A harpy might take a small weapon such as a dagger that it could carry and use in flight, and may even make weapons out of the bones of victims. Most likely what you would find are worthless items: remains of victims, dung, feathers, or whatever the harpy might have dragged in for one reason or another. They aren't the cleanest of creatures."

The old man's gray eyes lit up as he rose to unlock an ornate wooden chest next to him. "I have something that might help you on your most laudable quest. It will help you far more than it will ever help me." He opened the lid and fumbled inside the chest, taking out curious objects that Colin longed to inspect but was polite enough not to touch. D'driand stood and handed the young ranger a bone scroll case. Colin began to work the stopper from the top of the case, but the sage stopped him.

"Not yet," he warned. "Reading the scroll inside will protect you and your companions from the charms of the harpies — but take care! Time your reading well, for the scroll's power does not last forever."

"I'll do that," Colin said with a grin, stuffing the case into his pack. "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your help, and how much my people will appreciate it. But I can't stay any longer — every minute I am away is another minute for the harpies to gain their hold." He slung the pack over one broad shoulder and handed the sage a small pouch of coins. D'driand walked with him in silence to the door. As the ranger disappeared into the light fog that had settled, he waved and called back, "I'll tell everyone what you've done for them. Good-bye, and thank you!"

The sage waved back, but his expression darkened as he turned back into his home. and walked to the parlor. Next to the hearth, a winged humanoid warmed its hands by the fire. It turned and eyed the sage suspiciously, and began to speak in a garbled tongue that was filled with bird cries and twisted human speech. "What did you tell the human about my people?" she asked.

"Doesn't matter," D'driand replied, answering pleasantly in the same odd language. "I gave him a scroll that will make him completely open to your charm, Thanata. Your feathered folk will be able to finish settling in as planned."

. . . *Songs of death*

by Ed Greenwood

"A foul creature, the harp," Elminster said, drawing on his pipe, and made flapping motions with his hands to underline the pun. I groaned obediently (the things I do for the money!) and made sure the tape recorder was on. "It's also called the siren, you know," he added grandly.

"Oh, really?" I replied with feigned astonishment, and passed him the cookies. He took one, bit into it, and thus heartened, covered me with a fine spray of tiny chocolate chip cookie particles (thank goodness it wasn't chip dip) as he began the tale of the bard Melazzar and the harpies of Dark Crag. Here's an edited version (without the cookie spray):

Melazzar of Waterdeep, now old and respected, was once a young wanderer learning his minstrelry about the inns and taverns of the North. One fall, he was traveling with a small caravan in the deep woods betwixt Silverymoon and Triboar, and during a late night around the campfire, he drank far too much and wandered off into the trees by himself, feeling very ill. He was leaning against a tree, sweating and feeling as if he might die, when he heard a soft, unearthly maiden's call from the darkness beyond. Melazaar was astonished and listened intently; it came again, and from the fire he heard some of his companions get up and come to investigate. He crouched very still behind a tree and watched four of his fellows go right past him — and was then very sick.

When he had recovered somewhat, he followed, for the curious, haunting calls continued — from farther off in the forest, it seemed. At length, the moonlight grew stronger ahead, and Melazzar saw that there was a small clearing. About it large creatures seemed to be perched in the trees — it was hard to see exactly what in the darkness — and his companions stood in the clearing looking about, swords out and uncertain. Then a soft, feminine call came from the tree above him, startling Melazzar to no end. He stood immobile as several of his fellows came towards the tree, peering about and calling wary greetings. Then the branches above danced as something large spread wings and glided out into the clearing; and Melazzar saw other things launch themselves from the trees about, angling down towards his comrades.

"Look out!" he yelled, then. "An attack! Brorim! Helmar! They attack from the air!" and he drew the knife from his belt. From the air above came shrieks of anger and a strange snarling, spitting speech — and hurled daggers that flashed in the moonlight as they struck down the luckless Brorim before Melazzar's eyes. Helmar was more fortunate; he got his blade up and got under a tree, and his attackers circled away. Across the clearing, however, one of the merchants — a fat man called Yhelger — was dragged into the air in the grip of two of the flying creatures; Melazzar saw with a shock that he seemed not to want to resist them. Further, he saw that these monsters had the faces and forms of women, with the wings, claws, and tails of birds!

There was a flash of light in the air above the clearing, and another, and Melazzar saw that the senior merchant in the caravan, Crommor the Theurgist, had arrived. The *pyrotechnics* was of his making, and before it the creatures shrieked and flapped away. Yhelger was carried aloft with them, although Crommor was gesturing and muttering like a madman. Before the merchant disappeared above the trees, a globe of radiance grew about him from nothingness to a calm, steady glow. "Follow that light!" Crommor roared. "Head for high ground!" Helmar, Melazzar, and all the others plunged into the trees, crashing through branches and waving their blades and staves.

They soon lost sight of Yhelger, and Crommor rather grimly called off the search. They buried Brorim and returned to the camp to find the fire low. Crommor said only, "You stay up until morning, boy. Helmar, stay with him and see he stays awake. If you hear those calls again, play on your harp loud, and sing, too — anything loud, mind; just make a noise!"

The calls did not come again that night, and in the morning Crommor said, "Now we seek their lair — we faced harpies last night, and Yhelger is a dead man by now. If we do not find the harpies now — and *beware* their touch! — they will follow us and attack by night, taking us a few at a time. Come on!"

The entire band left mounts and wagons and set off into the woods. Crommor directed them towards a row of rocky crags some miles away — for that, he said, is where their lair must be. And he was right; in a rift between Dark Crag and the next one, they found ten of the grotesque

creatures, and what was left of Yhelger. The creatures rose into the air with shrieks, but Crommor's magic and the hurled weapons of the caravaners felled six harpies, and the rest fled. So Melazzar first met harpies, and composed his first ballad, which is generally considered pretty bad — but this is not surprising, considering the difficulty of finding pretty rhymes for "Crommor" and "Yhelger."

When his tale was done, I questioned Elminster closely about harpies in hopes of passing on what I could to you, and this is the result.

Notes

1. Harpy songs draw prey as follows: All creatures who hear a single call are alerted to further calls; they strain to hear more, even if asleep. Such calls are typically audible up to 190" distant; wind and storm lessens or ends their effectiveness. Upon hearing a second such call, creatures must save vs. spells or proceed toward the origin of the call. Creatures who are prevented or restrained seek to win past such restrictions, though they are not "entranced." Any fighting that occurs angers an allured victim, but he listens to warnings; if he manages to investigate the calls further, he will be normally alert. Only one person can be affected by one harpy at any one time, for this is a bond that requires some concentration on the part of the harpy. If the victim breaks the *charm,* the harpy is free to *charm* another victim. Saving throws against the lure of harpy calls are made as follows:

+6 if the allured character is a bard;

+5 if the character is affected by magical *fear* when the call is heard;

+4 if the character is experienced with harpies — having heard such calls before and found out the source;

+1 if the character has, within the last year, made a successful saving throw against a harpy-touch *charm;*

-1 if character has, within the last year, failed to save against a harpy-touch *charm;*

-3 if character is asleep or drowsy; and,

-3 if character is warned about or has never heard of harpies.

All saving throw modifiers are cumulative. Note also that creatures under the influences of *feeblemind, stun, charm,* and *confusion* spells are immune to the effects of harpy calls. This is true also of some forms of insanity; although a kleptomaniac is affected by harpy calls as normal, a catatonic is immune to them. It is up to the DM to decide which forms of insanity and mental disorder are applicable.

If the save vs. spells is unsuccessful against the song-charm, the victim falls under the influence of the *charm* as described above. The victim won't directly aid the harpy, for the spell cannot create that strong a bond. A second save vs. spells at -4 may be given if one of the victim's companions, not affected by the *charm,* tries to convince the victim of the harpy's intent. This can only be done once per individual affected. A *remove charm* or *dispel magic* also work.

Bards instantly realize a harpy call for what it is. A bard may have some suspicions if he has never heard the call before, since it is easy for the bard to distinguish it from human singing or calling. As a result, the bard still maintains his resistance to the call. The musical playing and singing of a bard of any level negates the charming powers of a harpy call for all who are within hearing range of the bard. Any skilled singer can vocally negate harpy calls with a 25% chance of success, since sheer volume is often enough to negate these effects. Such chances of success increase by 5% for each previous occasion upon which the singer has successfully offset the effects of a harpy's call.

In a like manner, the playing of a *lyre of building,* the legendary *Heward's mystical organ,* or any *instrument of the bards* offsets harpy calls (the player need not be a bard in such instances). Thunderclaps or sounds of battle similarly disrupt the lure of harpy calls, as does the deliberate use of items such as a *chime of opening,* any magical *biwa* or *bell,* a *ring of human influence, staff of command, rod of beguiling,* or *rod of rulership.* None of these items, however, prevent *charm* effects from a harpy's touch. A *ring of contrariness* prevents both the lure and the *charm* of a harpy's call from taking effect; a *wand of enemy detection* reveals calling harpies or harpies attempting to *charm* characters by touch. *Oil of disenchantment* breaks a harpy *charm,* but it won't prevent the lure of harpy calls.

Beings who are deafened, comatose, or in a deep sleep or trance are immune to the lure of harpy calls; as previously mentioned, beings already under a *charm* or hypnotic *suggestion* are similarly unaffected. A harpy touch *charm* breaks such existing *charms* or suggestions, but won't be useful in charming the character after that point. Nevertheless, a harpy is allowed a subsequent *charm* attempt in such cases. Use of a *ventriloquism* spell or a *potion of ventriloquism* gives a character capable of imitating a harpy call a 70% chance per round to offset harpy calls by making counter-calls in the opposite direction. This tactic always brings bewildered and furious harpies to investigate. A *silence* spell also prevents the effects of a harpy *song-charm.* Note: harpies are themselves immune to bardic or other magical, musical *charms* or *suggestions,* and their own ability to *charm* gives them a 90% magic resistance to *charm* spells cast upon them.

2. Harpies can cast *charm monster* by touch; this is an act of will and of limited natural magic, and is usable without limi-

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tation. Touch-charm is more powerful than a song-charm, and is therefore much more difficult to accomplish. For a touch-charm to be successful, the harpy must get a firm hold on the intended victim — in other words, it must score a hit on the victim two points over the required "to hit" number. No damage is taken when the intent is to use a touch-charm, and a harpy may make no other attacks or actions while the *charm* is being attempted. All target creatures are allowed a save vs. spells to avoid *charm* effects by touch, and any creature that saves against or throws off a harpy's *charm* becomes immune to all subsequent *charm* attempts (whether by the same harpy or another) for 6-9 turns, as a harpy's *charm* cannot affect an aware, excited, and opposed will.

Harpies typically *charm* prey and get such prey to freely allow the harpies to carry them off to the harpy lair — typically along a circuitous route, involving short "hops" made at low altitudes, so that observers won't be able to follow the harpies to their lair. Once a *charmed* victim is in the lair, the harpy disarm him of all obvious weapons, and there is a 50% chance that it also searches for concealed weapons or other items and removes them as well. Other *charmed* victims, if any are around while this is going on, remain oblivious to the situation. Remember that the *charm* is broken once any harpy makes a physical attack upon the victim. If a person under the touch-charm of a harpy is carried bodily away by his companions before the *charm* is broken, he attempts to escape at the first opportunity to find the harpy again. The only way to remove this type of *charm* is by killing the harpy that touched the victim. If the spell is not broken, it wears off after one week.

Favorite prey among harpies include shepherds or herdsmen: once the handlers are taken care of, the livestock become easy, plentiful prey. Such disappearances are often blamed on bandits or raiding brigands; as a result, searchers and posses never expect to find the harpies actually responsible. Only when the prey is safely in the lair will a harpy attack and torture it, thus breaking the *charm.* Harpies are exceedingly cruel and enjoy inflicting pain, but many activities described as torture by survivors and observers are actually used as training lessons for harpy chicks. Under the guidance of their elders, chicks are taught the various attacks and hunting techniques employed by their species. For example, a favorite tactic demonstrated to chicks to teach them cooperation is the slaying of prey between two harpies, lifting it into midair and pulling it apart by flying in opposite directions. Other tactics include dropping rocks from above while flying and raking prey with weapons captured from earlier prey as they pass over the victim. Large or especially powerful prey is often carried to the lair under the effects of the *charm* and dropped onto the rocks below, to disable the creature before the harpy moves to close combat for its final attacks.

3. In battle, harpies often plummet and rake with their claws, but prefer to drop rocks or hurl weapons at their victims from a safe distance. A harpy lights upon its prey and bites only when the prey appears disabled or weak. A harpy bite does 1-6 hp damage; if a wound causes 2 + hp damage, it has a 3% chance of passing on a blood, cardiovascular-renal, or connective-tissue disease of an acute, severe nature (see the *DMG,* pages 13-14). Contact with harpy filth carries a 6% chance of contracting a parasitic infestation (see the *DMG,* pages 13-14). Harpies befoul only what they cannot take back to their lair; they are sloppy, filthy creatures, but they do not deliberately foul their own lairs.

Harpies always try to cripple the wings of flying prey before making other attacks (they have no desire to fight an aerial creature on equal terms), and usually screech warnings and instructions to each other during battle, secure in the knowledge that their language is obscure and difficult to translate. Harpies are dangerous carnivores, but they are essentially cowards. Many potential victims have escaped their clutches by scaring the harpies with displays of magic or a show of superior force. Harpies overcome this innate cowardice by hunting in packs known as "screams," which number from 2-12 harpies. From this hunting pack, the phrase "a scream of harpies" has been derived. Harpies have poor infravision (4″) and only slightly better ultravision (6″); in daylight, their sight is equal to that of a man, although they notice movements on the ground much more keenly when aloft.

4. Within a scream, female harpies lay eggs if their numbers ever fall to four or less. Within larger tribes, harpies pair off normally, laying eggs when the tribe decreases to fifty or less. If too many young result during hatching, the weaker harpies are slain by the other members of the scream or tribe. When strengthening the numbers of the scream or tribe, harpies lay 1-3 eggs each, once every 40 days. Only 30% of the freshly laid eggs are fertile; these eggs must be sat on to keep them warm (a task shared in rotation by all of the adult members of the scream) for 11-20 days before they hatch. Eggs that do not hatch after a month are devoured by the members of the scream. Young harpies are born with 1+1 HD, no ability to *charm,* attacks of 1/1/1-2 hp damage; and are unable to fly. The young are defended with great ferocity by their parents and are seldom molested by the rest of the scream unless they appear deformed. When harpy young are present, the scream hunts almost endlessly so that the chicks can grow rapidly and assist the scream in hunting. A chick grows to its full size and capacity of attacks, and develops skill in its use of song and power to hold prey under the influence of its *charm,* in 1d4 + 14 days. A month after its birth, the harpy gains the ability to *charm* by touch. When the young harpy finally learns to fly (a process that takes an additional week or so and is characterized by a comical series of hops and tumbles about the lair), it makes its first venture out of the lair. A harpy can always make at least a few short flying hops before it ever leaves the safety of the lair. Harpies are clumsy fliers at best, since their flight is often a matter of heavy flapping, short swoops, and quick exhaustion if forced to fly long distances. Harpies possess maneuverability class C. Young female harpies are able to lay eggs of their own after they are two years of age, and are known to live up to 60 winters in extreme cases, although their dangerous lifestyle usually warrants a longevity of 12 to 20 years. If a scream grows to more than a dozen, the group breaks into two or more units. In these circumstances, the newly formed scream only remains within the territory of the former scream if both are a part of a larger tribe. Otherwise, the weaker scream is driven from the territory to establish its own lair.

5. A harpy lair is frequently found in a chasm, in a series of caves, or in a set of ruins. When establishing a lair, harpies seek a large, sheltered area that is safe from the molestation of men, yet within range of a well-stocked supply of food. The area is usually situated so that it is nearly impossible for prey to escape from it on foot. Also, the lair is usually large enough to allow harpies to fly about inside it and has rock ledges, projections, or tree limbs to provide a perch for each member of a scream or tribe. Harpies tend to stay in the same general area (a circle approximately 30 miles in diameter or a coastal strip approximately 60 miles in length) and learn the lay of the region and its natural features so they can utilize the structure of the land to ambush prey and to escape and hide within in case of trouble.

A harpy lair is strewn with the bones of harpy prey — all sorts of creatures ranging from livestock down to large rats, although smaller prey is uncommon due to the harpy's poor sight and limited dexterity. Medium-sized creatures are a harpy's favorite prey because they are easy enough to *charm* and carry, and because they provide a reasonably filling meal. The discarded treasure of such prey (excluding weapons) are often strewn about the floor of the lair, for harpies have no use for what they cannot eat. Some harpies, however, have come to realize that the presence of large quantities of shiny metals draw more humans and demi-humans to their lairs, and thus use the materials as bait with which to trap the victim. Harpies cannot easily grasp or carry individual coins, or anything smaller than a chest, staff, or statuette. They are fairly adept at plucking at and snagging leather purses, straps, baldrics, and-the like as they flap past. ♏

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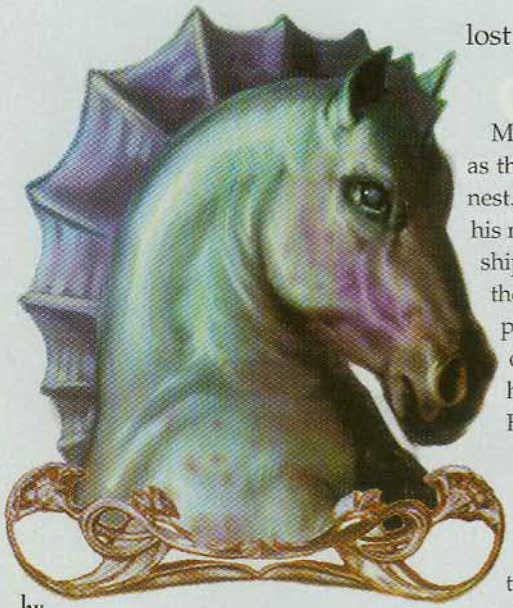


by
Margaret S. Lundock
& Ramsey Lundock

illustrated by
Scott & Teresa Fischer

"Don't dance with the mop, you lame dog!"

The knotted end of the colt lashed across Melchoir's back as he bent harder into his work. He wondered again what had happened to his treasure map, the precious map that was to have changed his life. It didn't matter now. Instead of finding safe passage on a reputable ship, he had fallen prey to Captain Baccar and his hard ruffians, kidnapped to serve for the voyage, ultimately to be sold into slavery in the Delta Towns. His map, his freedom, and his future were lost forever.

Melchoir didn't look up from his work as the whistle sounded from the crow's nest. He didn't stop the steady stroke of his mop as the sails were furled and the ship hove to. He didn't think beyond the swish-plop of his mop as the crew pulled out the nets and threw them out into the dark green sea. Already he was sinking into slave mentality. He did what he was told, and he kept doing it until ordered otherwise.

"You! Leave off there. Spread this overboard."

Melchoir dropped his mop and took the basket of mixed greens and corn.[1] His stomach growled as he threw the succulent vegetables onto the rolling swells of the bottomless ocean. At last the basket was empty. Melchoir turned it over and sat down. They'd find something for him to do soon enough, but no one yelled at him to return to work, and no colt lashed his back.

The ship fell quiet as the crew peered overboard. For over half an hour there was no activity aboard as the ship rocked quietly on the vast ocean. Gradually, Melchoir lapsed into sleep.

A collective gasp from the crew awoke him. Hushed footsteps hurried across the deck. With an ear-splitting screech, the ropes of the nets were hauled up through the pulleys as the entire crew heaved with all their might.

"Grab a rope, boy, and pull!" an old salt yelled as Melchoir bolted to his feet.

Melchoir grabbed a rope and heaved.

A cheer rose from the crew, and Melchoir saw their catch. Two powerful tails whipped and thrashed against the net.

1. Hippocampi are herbivores. Their natural diet consists of various types of seaweed and kelp. Obtaining salt in their diet is not a problem, as they can draw on the sea water. Other minerals are ingested by chewing on coral reefs and underwater limestone formations. Fresh water hippocampi eat water hyacinths, reeds, and water grasses. Hippocampi have epicurean tastes and are always tempted by new and different foods. They enjoy corn, alfalfa, lush greens, apples, carrots, and most grains.

They were not the rubbery smooth tails of dolphins or sharks, but scaled tails like those of a bony fish, with delicate, almost transparent tail fins.[2] The dorsal fin was the same way: rainbowed like a silken veil in the sunlight. Round about the dorsal fin, the scales gave way to fine hair, strong shoulders, and a long neck crested with another lacy fin, held erect by thin spines. The neck tapered to the finely chiseled head of a horse. There before Melchoir, thrashing in the net, was a hippocampus mare and her foal.[3] They shimmered in the afternoon sun, the mare pale as foam, the foal dark green.[4]

"Haul 'em over the deck—hurry before she breaks loose! Assemble the tank!" Baccar ordered. The old Captain's gravelly voice matched his grizzled chin and weather-worn face. "Do you see any scouts or other mares?"[5] he yelled up at the crow's nest.

"All clear!" came the answer.

"Keep your eyes peeled. If you see any, we'll set sail before they mass. If you see any sign of tritons, sound the alarm!"[6]

The crew swung the net over the rail and dropped it unceremoniously onto the deck. Already the mare had chewed a large hole in the netting. As the net fell away, the hippocampi struggled, their tails whipping frantically. But it was no good; the delicate fins at the ends of their front legs were much too fragile to support them on dry land.[7] At last, exhausted and defeated, the mare stopped her battle. Her sides heaved with the unfamiliar task of breathing air.[8] Sweat mixed with sea water dripped from her hair and scales. She curled her long tail about her foal and glared with sullen rage at her captors.

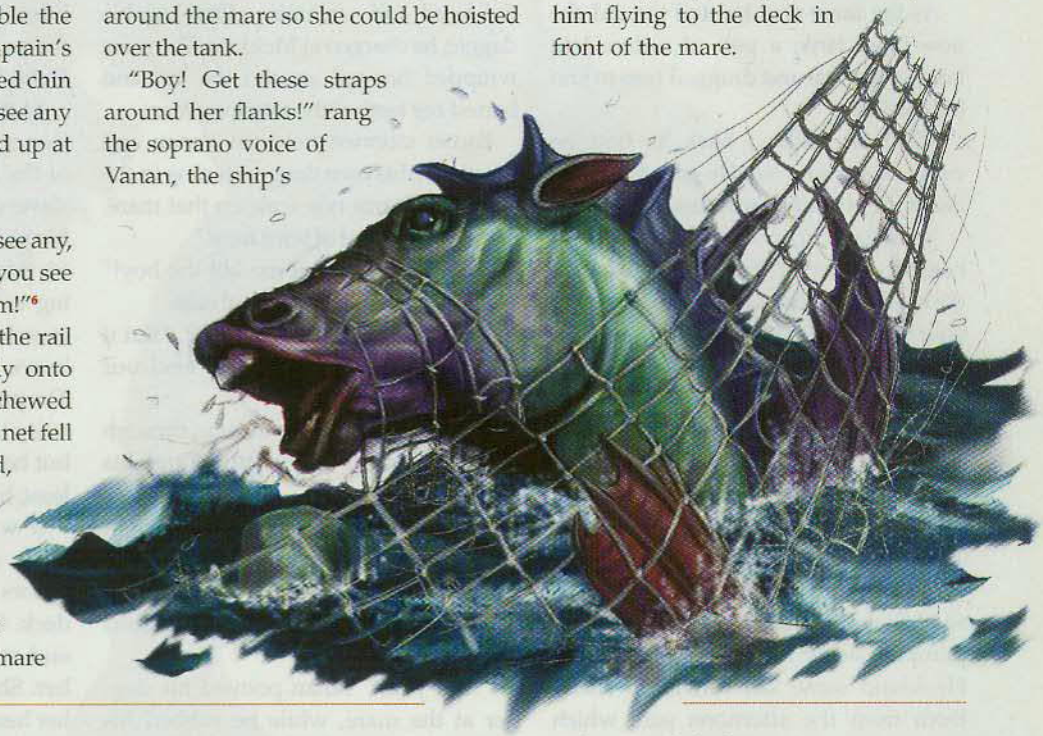
"Get the winch rigged. How's the tank coming?" Baccar barked.

"We're almost ready to start pumping," one of the crew yelled as he fought to jam the top plank into the iron corner support. Beside him another sailor caulked the tight seams between the dovetailed planks.

The crew rigged a winch on a yardarm and manned the pumps, filling the tank. Now came the task of easing the rope around the mare so she could be hoisted over the tank.

"Boy! Get these straps around her flanks!" rang the soprano voice of Vanan, the ship's second-in-command. Few people made the mistake of making fun of the slender man's voice. No one survived to do it a second time.

Vanan threw the strapping at Melchoir to the chortles of the men. As the sailors sat back to enjoy the fun, Melchoir gathered them up. Talking softly and moving slowly, he eased toward the mare's chest. He had heard that hippocampi could bite and butt viciously.[9] The mare certainly wasn't going to ram him as she floundered on the deck, but her teeth were bared and her ears flattened. Melchoir tried to stay well back from the head as he eased toward the mare's side. Suddenly, a lightning-quick tail slap sent him flying to the deck in front of the mare.



2. Hippocampi are a hybrid species combining elements of mammals and fish. Their scales, tails, and fins are fishlike, not dolphinlike. Hippocampi regulate their body temperatures to a large degree but not entirely. They lay eggs but suckle their young. They can breathe air or water.

3. Hippocampi live in pods that usually contain one to three mature stallions, eight to twenty mares, and unweaned foals numbering about three-quarters the number of mares. The pod generally stays together, though there are exceptions, such as mares that stay in one place to protect eggs or hippocampi that are lured away from the pod by curiosity or tempting morsels of food.

The mares are in charge of caring for the young, and they lay one egg at a time. Twins are extremely rare, occurring about 1% of the time. If twins are hatched, either from two eggs or from a double-yolked egg, there is only a 10% chance of both surviving unless there is another nursing mare available to care for one of the foals. Hippocampi young are called foals in general, though males are called colts and females fillies.

A mare will lay her egg in a protected grotto and stay in the vicinity to guard the egg, much like a mother alligator. When the egg hatches after a five-month incubation period, the mare cares for the foal for twelve months, slightly longer than a horse.

4. The colors of the hippocampi are as varied as the hues of the ocean, ranging from the sea-foam white of waves to the azure blue of reefs to the midnight green of the open sea.

5. Hippocampi are intelligent and therefore have a social structure that is more complex than a herd of horses. The stallions in a pod come to an understanding through custom and ritual as to who is the leader. The other stallions perform ancillary tasks such as scouting for food or enemies. Each stallion has a harem, though lead stallions generally have the largest harem. Once a mare chooses to enter a harem, she will usually stay with that stallion for life. If she wishes to leave the harem, she must go through certain formalities and rituals.

6. Hippocampi are often domesticated by tritons, though domesticated is perhaps the wrong word. Their relationship is more one of mutual cooperation and alliance. Hippocampi allied with tritons usually lay their eggs in the lower chambers of the tritons' castle. The eggs are guarded by the tritons and their minions vigilantly.

7. Hippocampi are strictly water animals. The delicate fins on the ends of their front legs, unlike the leathery fins of seals and sea turtles, cannot support their weight. The fragile membranes of the fins are easily torn on dry land.

8. Breathing air is laborious for hippocampi because they are used to filtering water for their oxygen, but they can breathe air for extended periods. A hippocampus's biggest problems on land are dehydration and overheating. For every hour a hippocampus spends on land, add a +1 penalty to its Armor Class. After 5 hours out of the water, they are defenseless and can be hit automatically. Once they are back in enough water to cover them and allow them to regain buoyancy, their Armor Class returns to 5.

9. In the wild, a hippocampus's first instinct is to flee danger. They are extremely fast and can outswim all their natural enemies, which include sharks, killer whales, and squid. If they must fight, their main weapons are their teeth and their ramming attack. A hippocampi bite inflicts 1d4 points of damage, and they are strong enough to break bones or sever fingers.

Ramming attacks inflict 1d8 points of damage and are capable of stunning victims or breaking bones.

Hippocampi have two attacks per round, which can consist of bites, ramming attacks, or a combination of both. A victim of a successful head butt must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation at a +2 bonus or be stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Her head snaked out, teeth flashing. Melchoir scrambled away, but not before the mare's teeth sank into his calf, crushing the muscle before he kicked himself free.

Melchoir grabbed his leg in agony. Released from the drag of the water, the mare's tail whipped and lashed as she glared at him.[10]

The crew hooted, well pleased with their entertainment.

"Help him out, men!" Vanan sneered.

With gleeful brutality the crew jumped on the mare and wrestled the straps under her girth and flanks. Each time her tail sent a hapless victim flying across the deck, jeering laughter erupted from the crew.

As the mare was hoisted toward the now-filled tank, a pair of sailors laid hold of the foal and dragged him to join his mother.

Melchoir hobbled back as best he could on his sore leg. He gazed in wonder at the beautiful creatures.

"Quit gawkin', you lame dog," Baccar barked, cuffing Melchoir on the back of the head with a calloused hand. "They're your charge now, and you'd best take damned good care of 'em."

From that moment, Melchoir's every waking minute was devoted to the hippocampi. The tank was cramped and shallow, barely twelve feet square and five feet deep, and the two animals dirtied it quickly. In the heat of the day, the water grew uncomfortably hot for them, so Melchoir was almost constantly pumping water into or out of the tank. He found some sail canvas to shade them from the afternoon sun, which burned their skin and dried their scales. Instead of the delicacies used to lure them into the net, he was allowed to feed them only dried seaweed. While he tended them, the mare watched him—and she watched as the crew kicked and beat him.

For what seemed the hundredth time that day, Melchoir attached the pump to release the soiled water before pumping fresh, cool water in.

"Can't you keep that tank cleaner? It has the entire aft deck smelling like rotten kelp." Vanan shoved him against the tank.

"Maybe if you gave them a decent sized tank, I could." Melchoir spoke before thinking and immediately regretted it.

Vanan grabbed him and slammed him against the tank. His watery blue eyes blazed. "You sorry little maggot! You just made your last mistake, you ..."

There was a whistling splash as the mare's tail smacked against Vanan's face, sending him flying to the deck. He rose, red-faced and screaming. Drawing his dagger, he charged at Melchoir. The mare wrapped her tail around the lad and barred her teeth at the attacking man.

Baccar stormed between Vanan and his victim, his own dagger shining in the sun. "You harm one scale on that mare, and I'll take it out of your hide!"

"But the boy... Let me kill the boy!" Vanan sputtered in hysterical rage.

"Go ahead," Baccar shrugged. "But if you kill him, you'll have to tend our catch."

Vanan hesitated. Tremors ran through his body as he fought to control his anger.

A cruel smile curled his lips. "All right then, but when we make port, sell him to Quando."

"Suit yourself. Quando pays as good as any dealer."

"And you!" Vanan pointed his dagger at the mare, while he rubbed his red, swollen cheek. "I'll see you go to some rich idiot who'll dye you purple and put you in a bubble bath to amuse his mistress!"

"Don't waste your breath. She can't understand you."

"Oh yes she can," Melchoir thought, this time remembering to keep his thoughts to himself. He stroked the mare's face. She stared back at him, her eyes mirroring his own hopelessness.[11]

Suddenly the foal popped his head out of the water and lobbed a glob of seaweed at Melchoir.

"Oh no you don't, you little snip!" Melchoir laughed as he pulled the seaweed out of his limp, brown hair and lobbed it back at the colt.

As with all children, even in the worst circumstances, the foal managed to find ways to play with his new friend, splashing Melchoir with his tail and flinging wads of seaweed back and forth to him.[12]

For several more days the crew set out the nets and spread the delicacies in the water, but there were no more bites. Finally, Baccar announced that the next day they would set sail for the Delta Towns.

Melchoir lay awake in his hammock that night, unable to sleep as he thought of the fate of the hippocampi. His own slavery was nothing compared to the lives of confined suffering that lay ahead for the mare and foal. He could do nothing to free the mare. Even if he could muscle her out of the tank, he couldn't heave her to the railing and overboard. The pulleys and winches were much too noisy to use. He could not save the mare, but he might be able to save the foal. At least, he had to try.

It was a moonless night, and Melchoir slipped easily past the dozing sailors on watch to the tank on the aft deck. Quietly he reached into the tank and stroked the mare gently to wake her. She did not start but rather lifted her head silently above the surface. Her eyes, used to the dark depths of the ocean, focused easily on Melchoir.[13] He pointed to the sleeping foal and pretended to pick something up, then pantomimed as it plopped on the deck and he started dragging it toward the rail. The mare cocked her head in confusion. Melchoir pointed to himself, then to the foal and repeated his pantomime. The

10. On dry land a hippocampus's tail becomes a deadly weapon, inflicting 1d8 points of damage. Land-bound hippocampi have two attacks per round, which can include bites, tail swings, or one of each. A victim of a tail slap must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation or be stunned for 1d3 rounds.

11. Wild hippocampi have little contact with terrestrial species, so few of them speak terrestrial languages. They have a distinct language of their own and might also understand the languages of tritons, mermen, locathah, and sea elves. Hippocampi that have prolonged contact with terrestrial beings, either willingly or forcibly, learn to understand and speak those languages.

12. Hippocampi develop quickly in the first two years. Four- to five-month old hippocampi have the mentality of ten-year-old children. By the time they are ten to eleven months old, hippocampi have matured physically and mentally to the equivalent of sixteen-year-old humans. At the age of two, they are equivalent to twenty- or twenty-five-year-old humans. Hippocampi live to be approximately fifty years old. From the age of two onward, they have the mentality of adults.

13. Hippocampi have infravision to a range of 90 yards.

mare nodded in understanding. The contradictory emotions of fear and hope for her foal clouded her face. At length she nodded with resolve.

Gently the mare nuzzled her foal to waken him. As she talked to him quietly in their language of murmured nickers and squeaks,[14] the foal's eyes filled with terror. He wrapped his tail about his mother, clinging to her side. Melchoir rubbed the foal's back and tail as the mare continued to nicker in low reassuring tones. They all realized the young foal's chances of making it back to his home pod were slim. The ocean was filled with sharks, squids, and serpents, always on the prowl for young untended hippocampi.[15] Still, it was his only chance at freedom.

Slowly the foal's fear diminished and his determination grew. With a final squeeze and nuzzle, the foal turned away from its mother and floated to the side of the tank. The mare swam beneath him, lifting the foal out of the water to the edge of the tank. As gently and quietly as possible, Melchoir rolled the foal out onto the deck. He staggered under the weight, and the foal landed with a thud on the deck.[16]

Melchoir heard some movement and a few grumbles on the foredeck. With renewed urgency he grabbed the foal's tail and began to drag him toward the rail. The foal pushed and heaved with his front legs, ripping and bloodying his delicate fins on the rough deck.

Angry shouts erupted from the sailors on watch as they leapt to their feet and ran toward the aft deck. Melchoir redoubled his efforts, frantically pulling the colt to the edge of the deck. He dropped the tail over the side, then repositioned himself against the foal's chest, pushing with all his might.

The first sailor came charging by the tank toward the escaping foal. With a mighty smack the mare's tail whipped through the night air, slamming into the sailor, sending him flying back onto the deck where he lay still, not to rise again.

Melchoir gathered the last of his strength, gave a final heave, and sent the foal overboard just beyond the grabbing hands of the crew. Water splashed up onto the deck as the foal gave a triumphant call of freedom. The grasping hands of the crew became pummeling fists on Melchoir's head, beating him into dark unconsciousness.

When Melchoir came to, he found himself chained to the mainmast. Sweat rolled off him as he lay baking in the afternoon sun. His dry throat burned with each attempt to swallow, and his bruised body ached from his beating.

"So you're awake, you scurvy little bilge rat!" Baccar spat, as he heaved his boot into Melchoir's side with brutal force. "Do you know how much you cost me?!"

"Take it out of the treasure you stole from me," Melchoir said sullenly.

Baccar let loose a jeering laugh that rained down on Melchoir with a wave of stale grog and rotten teeth. "There was never any treasure you fool. I knew that the moment I saw the map."

"But I got it off an old sailor who was dying. He said it wouldn't do him any good. He traded it for the price of a hot meal and a few nights in a ..."

"A comfortable inn where he could rest his old bones and die in peace. That was old One-Eyed Willy. He's been hoodwinking landlubbers for ten years. The old sea dog will probably outlive us all!"

"If you knew it was fake, why did you steal it from me?"

"I didn't know it was one of Willy's until I saw it. There are a few real treasures out there, you know. But it was a fake! You're too scrawny to be worth the food to keep you alive until we reach port, and now you turned our prize catch loose!" Baccar punctuated his sentence with another kick.

"That foal was worth twice what the mare'll bring, fifty times more than you'd be worth on your best day." Baccar shook his head. "The old fortune

14. The hippocampus language is designed to be intelligible under or above water. It combines whalelike squeaks with horselike nickers and whinnies.

15. The wild hippocampus's natural enemies are all large aquatic carnivores. Young hippocampi are protected by the pod. If the predator can't be outrun, the pod forms a ring around the immature hippocampi to protect them.

16. Hippocampi have a hatching weight of approximately 90 pounds, slightly smaller than the birth weights of horses. They have 1 Hit Die at birth. They grow quickly, reaching 800 pounds at a year old, when they gain a second Hit Die. At two years of age, hippocampi average about 1,000 pounds and have 3 HD. By the time they reach 3–4 years of age, hippocampi reach mature weight. Stallions average 1,400 pounds and mares average 1,200 pounds. Adult hippocampi in their prime have 4 Hit Dice.

teller at the Fiddling Crab was right. We must have set sail under a bad star. Best to be done with this voyage and start fresh. And you know what else the old hag said?" Baccar leaned close to Melchoir, staring at him with hateful, bloodshot eyes.

Melchoir shook his head meekly.

"She said to be done with whatever I brought on board this voyage, to cast it off and not try to make port with it. Have you ever heard of keel-hauling?"

Despite the hot afternoon sun, Melchoir shivered at the words. He had indeed heard of keel-hauling. He could already imagine the water covering his head as he was dragged around the barnacle-covered hull of the ship, trying not to gasp from pain as the razor sharp shells shredded his back.

Crewmen gleefully threw two ropes overboard and worked them around the hull of the ship. With a cheer, the crew unchained Melchoir and dragged him from the mainmast to the railing. They grabbed his wrists and tied them with the ropes that ran around the hull of the ship. His ankles were tied to two more ropes coiled on deck. Members of the crew argued over who would get to heave at the wrist ropes and who'd hold snug the ankle ropes until the keel-hauling sounded more like a tug of war.

Melchoir shuddered, unable to stand, unable to move, unable to resist. His eyes darted about in desperation until they caught sight of the mare. She had raised herself as high as she could in her tank. She met his gaze with one that mirrored his own horror, but which also thanked him again for saving her child. In that moment he realized that what he had done the night before was worth more than all the treasure he had hoped to find. He had wanted to be recognized, remembered as someone special. Now he would be remembered, if only by a hippocampus and her foal.

Melchoir straightened, prepared to take his last few breaths in this life. As the crew heaved him over the side, the mare gave an ear splitting, trumpeting call. Melchoir dangled upside-down against the ship, the ropes on his wrists were jerked with such force that his joints popped and ached. He heard the cheers and laughter on deck as the men on the ankle ropes slowly fed them out, holding him tight against the ship as he started the torturous trip around the hull.

There came another call from the mare on board ship. Melchoir took one final gasp of air as he was pulled under the water. The sea bubbled and churned around him, he felt tugging at the ropes binding his wrists and ankles, and they went limp. A strong back rose up underneath him, carrying him up toward the surface. As the water parted from his face, Melchoir took a deep, grateful breath. Above him on board he heard the voices of the crew rising in confusion and panic. He heard the mare call once more. The ocean's surface erupted as all about him scores of hippocampi breached, answering her call in a thunderous chorus.[17]

The enraged beasts circled the ship, slapping it with their tails, ramming it with their heads.

Off by himself, a hippocampus in deep concentration rode the rising swells. He raised his head and called to the sky. It answered with a great peel of thunder as storm clouds built over the ship. With a wave of his foreleg he commanded the lightning, sending a crackling bolt into the main mast. The wood split and creaked. The mast swayed, snapping the riggings and ripping the sails as it crashed over the side of the ship. The hippocampus then raised his tail in a circling motion. In concert, a huge wave smashed against the side of the ship.[18]

Melchoir could hear the voices of the crew. They rose in a crescendo from shouts to frantic screams as the crew felt the ship shaking and grinding beneath them, breaking apart under the sustained attack. Echoes of insane rage fringed the shrieks of the doomed crew. Melchoir thought of the mare still trapped in the tank, helpless and alone, vulnerable to the crew's hysteria. He fought through the foaming water to the side of the ship. Grabbing a rope left dangling over the side, he hauled himself up, spurred on by his fear for the mare.

Melchoir pulled himself over the side in time to see the crew picking up bludgeons as they turned toward the tank. The ship was lost, already lugging in the water, the hull breached by the the ramming hippocampi and crashing waves. Nothing could save the crew now, and all they wanted to do was take something down with them, hurt one more thing. Melchoir hesitated, not knowing what he could do against such a mob. The resounding thud of another wave crashed against the port side of the ship. The vessel listed, tilting at a crazy angle as she rode ever lower in the water.

Melchoir saw his opportunity. He grabbed a belaying pin from the pin rail. He then leapt up into the rigging, grabbed a loose stay rope, and swung out over the deck, above the heads of the crew. He dropped down on the aft deck next to the tank and began swinging the pin, whacking the corner angle iron, loosening it from the planks. The ship was listing badly. If he could loose the mare from the tank, she'd practically slide overboard across the tilted deck.

The crew charged. Vanan, in the lead, let out a banshee scream as he leaped at Melchoir. The mare swung her head full into his chest. Bones cracked and crunched as she knocked his lifeless body aside like a rag doll.

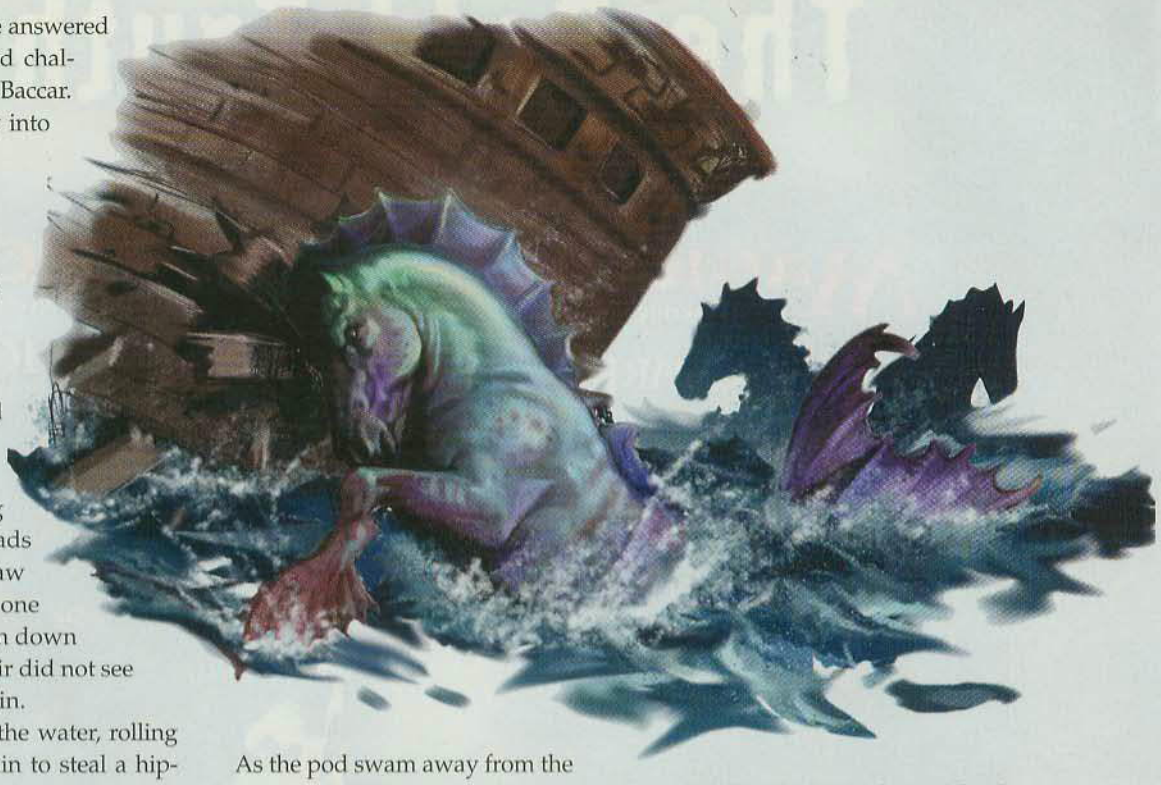
Melchoir broke the last clamp and motioned to the mare. She slammed the side of the tank with her head. The sides split apart, pouring water and the mare out upon the deck. She slid half way to the rail as hapless sailors were washed overboard past her. Like a great sea lion she gathered herself and began to lumber the last few feet to freedom, ripping and shredding her fragile forefins in her struggle. Behind her, Melchoir swung the belaying pin wildly at the remaining crew.

An insane roar rose, and Melchoir turned to see Baccar, legs spread, eyes wild, blocking the mare's path. He raised an evil, wickedly sharp dagger and

17. In times of crisis or battle, several pods often band together in a coordinated effort. Hippocampi tales speak of times when a "Great Herd" of thousands of hippocampi massed.

18. Hippocampi are not intrinsically magical. However, since they are intelligent beings, they can study magic and become mages or clerics. Hippocampi spellcasters generally specialize in water- and weather-based spells.

roared again. The mare answered with her own bellowed challenge and charged into Baccar. The dagger cut deeply into her shoulder as she rammed into the old pirate. Another wave crashed over the listing deck, throwing Baccar, the mare, and Melchoir from the ship.



Melchoir floundered in a sea filled with thrashing, screaming men and the lashing teeth and crushing heads of hippocampi. He saw the mare ram Baccar one more time, driving him down into the water. Melchoir did not see that wretched soul again.

The ship lugged in the water, rolling on her side, never again to steal a hippocampus from its home. As the ship began to disappear under the waves Melchoir could feel her dragging him down with her. He heard the shrieks of the crew caught in the deadly suction. Melchoir struggled against the pull, but he was too weak. Underneath him there was a reassuring nudge, then a strong back as the mare surfaced beneath him. He stroked her shoulder. The vicious gash of Baccar's dagger was already scabbed over.[19] The mare's powerful tail pushed them away from the doomed ship and the nightmare that they had endured together.

Beside them the foal rose, giddy with excitement and joy. He swam around and around his mother, squeezing her again and again with his tail. With a huge leap he landed on top of the mare, squeezing Melchoir with such enthusiasm he almost knocked out the lad. A strong, powerful, azure head rose in the water next to Melchoir. The stallion nuzzled the mare gently, then laid his front fin on Melchoir's thigh and bowed his head in respectful gratitude.

As the pod swam away from the hateful spot, Melchoir settled onto the smooth soft back of the mare and dozed in a secure, restful sleep.

"Hey! Ahoy there! Are you all right?"

The voice roused Melchoir from his sleep. He felt wet sand on his back and the gentle lapping of water on his feet.

"Are you all right, young man?" the sailor asked again as strong concerned hands helped Melchoir to his feet.

"Yes, I'm fine, I guess. Where am I?"

"You're on one of the Outer Islands. You look like you've been through hell," the sailor said, surveying Melchoir's beaten body and ragged clothes.

"I guess I have, and I'd still be there if it weren't for the hippocampi."

"Well blow me down! The Captain said 'twas the hippocampi that led him to this island. He said he knew we'd find some poor soul they'd helped out. You see, the Captain says they saved him once, and he's forever indebted."[20]

"They sure saved me, in more ways than one."

"Well gather your things. The Captain will want to talk to you straight away."

"My things?"

"Your sea chest over there."

Melchoir looked around. The tide was low on the wide sandy beach, and a sea chest lay exposed just at water's edge. Melchoir stumbled to it and opened it in disbelief. Gems, gold, and silver glittered in the morning sun.[21]

"Great jumping sea greets! You're a rich man, my boy. You must have some tale to tell. You'll be able to buy anything you want when we reach port. I'd heard there was treasure in these islands, but I never thought I'd see any of it. Why, people will come from miles just to hear ..."

But Melchoir didn't hear him. His eyes were searching the ocean beyond the waiting ship.

Margaret and Ramsey have persistently and patiently worked toward publication in DRAGON® *Magazine for the past two years ... as Margaret was sure to remind us each* GEN CON® *Game Fair. We look forward to more from them soon.*

19. The blood of hippocampi coagulates very quickly, to protect them from shark attacks. Sharks have only a 20% chance of going into a feeding frenzy from a wounded hippocampus.

20. People saved by hippocampi tend to retain a strong bond of gratitude toward them. They remain respectful of the creatures and become protective of them. These people might attack ships trying to capturehippocampi and their eggs or merchants trying to sell such products, seeing such practices as a form of slavery. Hippocampi are good judges of character, and they do not assist evil beings or those who mean them harm.

21. Hippocampi have no use for treasure. They do not adorn themselves with jewelry and have no currency. They do, however, understand its importance to humans. Hippocampi will rarely, if ever, treasure hunt for humans, but they will present their friends with gifts.

Hobgoblin

"On first glance, they appear as an order of chivalrous knights on parade, making their way through the countryside. The truth, though, is revealed by the swath of destruction left in their path—the fires in the distance and the smoke in the air. For miles around, the air is silent, as if even the hiding beasts and lowly brush feared to move. And when the wind blows just right, the stench of their rotting victims and the pleas of those wretched souls in their hopeless slave train carry on the breeze. They are hobgoblins, and they march to war."

—Unknown, excerpted from **Accounts of the Goblinblood War**

While their goblinoid kin seek only to cause pain and suffering as some sort of perverted sport, hobgoblins possess a greater ambition. They dream of a great hobgoblin empire spanning hundreds, if not thousands, of miles. Fortunately for the rest of the civilized races, no two hobgoblin ideals are the same, and their own bickering and fighting over position keeps them from bringing their dream to fruition.

Overview

Hobgoblins are a race of soldiers and slavers living on the fringes of other civilizations, just beneath the surface. Like parasites, hobgoblins largely depend on taking many of the essentials of society from their neighbors, but whereas goblins sneak and steal what they need, hobgoblins take it by force. They drag captives back to their lairs and work their slaves to death.

Hobgoblins are something of a paradox. As a race, they are powerful, organized, and dangerous; individually they are extremely ambitious, paranoid, and deceitful. While they produce some of the finest soldiers in the

world, the rest of their society barely hangs together and is largely dependent on the skills and abilities of the slaves they capture. On the whole, hobgoblins are incredibly ambitious, and they do not hesitate to use any means at their disposal to advance their positions. For this reason, it is unusual to find hobgoblins in subordinate positions when part of a group of other humanoids. Almost invariably, they either take control of the group or are killed or driven off in the attempt.

Hobgoblins are renowned slavers. To most other races, this is the most terrifying thing about hobgoblins. Their appetite for slaves is almost unquenchable, and they treat their slaves with appalling cruelty. When hobgoblins successfully raid a town, survivors who cannot walk are killed and the rest are taken as slaves.

Hobgoblin Science

As a whole, hobgoblins are extremely distrustful of magic. Much of this distrust can likely be traced to the long association between elves and magic, and the elves' continual use of magic to persecute the hobgoblins during their long wars. One of the few personality traits they share with their goblin progenitors, however, is a love of fire, smoke, and explosions. The combination of nimble fingers, abundant mineral resources, and a healthy dose of pyromania has turned hobgoblins into fairly credible alchemists and engineers. Exactly how much of this flavor you want to introduce into your campaign is left up to you, but it could entail anything from burning oil and rigged mineshafts to explosives strapped to slaves and goblin allies.

Ecology

Hobgoblins were created from goblins, and physically, they still strongly resemble their lesser kin. They have the same gray skin, the same orange eyes, and the same broad heads, wide mouths, and sharply pointed ears. Unfortunately for their enemies, though, the similarities end there. For while goblins are voracious, bloodthirsty killers, in the end they are little more than vermin, crawling through the dregs of civilization and snatching whatever they can get away with. Hobgoblins, on the other hand, not only possess the size, strength, and tenacity necessary to build civilizations of their own, they also have an instinctive need to find their own place within society (preferably one as high as possible). This continual drive for advancement leads them to prove themselves on the field of battle while acquiring as many spoils (and slaves) as possible.

Hobgoblins generally raid in groups of at least 20. While they are capable of campaigning in the field for long periods, they seldom travel more than a few days' journey from their settlements, as they tend to worry about conditions at home in their absence. They relish combat, but what they enjoy best is a sneaky surprise attack that allows them to massacre the guards before the defenders can retaliate. Not known for their patience, hobgoblins nevertheless generally take the time to survey a potential target before they strike. Hobgoblins aren't picky about who they kill, and they nearly always assault poorly defended settlements. In combat, they are bloodthirsty and fanatic, at least where their superiors can see them. They have little stomach for pitched battles, however, and they generally retreat in the face of determined opposition—especially if their leaders are slain.

When it comes to defending their settlements, hobgoblins are extremely tenacious. While most of a settlement tends to be sloppy and patchwork, hobgoblins never cut corners when it comes to their defenses. Assaulting a hobgoblin stronghold is a very dangerous proposition—even for a superior force—especially when placed underground. Once a hobgoblin tribe settles down in an area, it proves very difficult to dislodge.

Mating among hobgoblins generally occurs between two willing hobgoblins of the same rank. Any hobgoblin of any rank might freely mate with a hobgoblin of lower rank, regardless of the willingness of the prospective partner. Despite this, mixed-rank couplings are infrequent, as hobgoblins consider mating with their inferiors to be somewhat distasteful, and those who engage in such activities risk becoming the subject of scorn among their peers. Hobgoblins mate frequently, and monogamy of any type is basically unknown in their society.

While hobgoblins do not breed as quickly as goblins, they nevertheless reproduce at a prodigious rate compared to humans. They also mature much faster: a hobgoblin child is weaned after about 3 weeks and can walk, talk, and generally take care of itself after a mere 6 months. All hobgoblin children, from the scions of officers to the offspring of slaves, are taken from their mothers as soon as they are weaned. From that point on, they are raised communally to produce the finest soldiers possible. This training, notoriously ruthless and cutthroat, starts before the children can even walk. It typically lasts 4 years (but can be shortened if the community is in desperate need of soldiers). During this time, the children are pitted against each other in mock military formations as they learn to fight, plan, march, and forage together. Roughly one hobgoblin in five dies during childhood training, but the rest emerge with sharply honed battle skills and a keen sense of self-preservation. While this upbringing is nearly universal, sometimes a hobgoblin general circumvents the process for his own offspring. Occasionally, this can produce a dynasty, but it's unusual even for this arrangement to last more than a few generations.

Habitat and Society

The military is the backbone of hobgoblin society, and every free member of every hobgoblin community is effectively part of the army. Most hobgoblins take their places in the army upon reaching physical maturity. For the next year, these raw recruits go on a series of ceaseless raids. This is generally known among hobgoblins as the "year of hell." During this time, each hobgoblin recruit must prove to his superior officer that he is a fearless, cunning, and ruthless warrior. Those deemed too weak, cowardly, or unfit to be soldiers are reassigned out of the military and must choose to take up some sort of alternative—and therefore socially inferior—profession. Generally, this fate befalls about two-thirds of the hobgoblin recruits. While they are technically not dismissed from the army, hobgoblin craftsmen and laborers can never rise beyond the rank of common soldier, and so they are destined to spend the rest of their lives serving at the whim of nearly every other hobgoblin in their community. Only through very unusual circumstances is a hobgoblin ever promoted out of the general labor pool and back into the army, and this generally occurs only when that hobgoblin demonstrates incredible skill in battle. Since the common hobgoblin only gets the chance to fight when its settlement is under attack, this means that many hobgoblins actually relish sieges and assaults on their strongholds, as these rare opportunities allow them to prove themselves fit for the army and escape their otherwise dreary existences. Every hobgoblin receives basic military training and most remain eager for the chance at proving themselves, making their settlements dangerous to assault.

Within the military, hobgoblins are obsessed with advancement. Since promotion generally occurs at the whim of a superior officer, most hobgoblins do their best to ingratiate themselves to their betters, hoping to be noticed and remembered when the time comes to make promotions. Another common means to promotion is a duel, known as a *kalech-mar,* in which a junior officer challenges his direct superior with the charge of weakness or incompetence. While the superior is allowed to refuse, this refusal carries with it a loss of respect in the eyes of other hobgoblins and might reduce the officer's favor in the eyes of his superiors. Thus, the duels are rarely refused. For this reason, high-ranking hobgoblins are generally the survivors and victors of dozens of duels (in addition to countless battles), a process that serves both to hone their combat skills and discourage future challengers. Duels are very common among low-ranking officers, but as a hobgoblin advances through the ranks, he becomes less willing to sacrifice an already comfortable position in a battle against a capable superior, so duels between high-ranking officers remain rare.

Hobgoblins pride themselves on order, and although they are perfectly willing to steal or kill for personal gain if they think they can get away with it, they are also eager to dispense justice on those foolish enough to get caught. The general in any settlement is responsible for dispensing justice to all other hobgoblins (although in extremely large settlements, the general often appoints magistrates to take care of the smaller crimes). Hobgoblins practice only four punishments: demotion, exile, slavery, and death. The severity of the punishment is entirely left to the whim of the general. Since hobgoblins always need slaves, enslavement is therefore by far the most common punishment, especially for minor crimes committed by non-soldiers.

Hobgoblins don't usually use typical descriptions like "towns" or "cities" to describe their communities, preferring military designations such as "regiment," "division," "army," or even "horde" (for particularly large settlements). Each settlement, regardless of its size, is under the command of a general, who has absolute authority over everything that happens within the community and answers to no one. Beneath the general are a number of officers, each in command of various subordinates, and like any other military organization, the ranks descend to the lowly grunts, who make up the majority of the population. While the top rank is universal and remains the same for each hobgoblin settlement, the number and titles of the other ranks varies by settlement, so that the ruling general of a small hobgoblin village (or "company") might not have any subordinate officers, while a general who commands a vast horde might also command six colonels, 18 majors, 227 captains, and 1564 lieutenants.

While it is theoretically possible for one ruler to control a vast stretch of territory under this system, in practice, the native ambition present in every hobgoblin prevents such empires from forming. While every hobgoblin understands the concepts of "duty" and "chain of command," the idea of "loyalty" is a foreign concept.

As a result, any powerful hobgoblin out of his superior's immediate view is probably planning to either usurp the superior's position or run off somewhere to make himself general of another settlement. For this reason, even areas with high population densities tend to fall into a collection of separate city-states. These areas often have smaller, satellite communities that—while nominally independent—in practice must follow the commands of their larger neighbors. It also means that while hobgoblins excel at going on raids, it can be impractical for them to undertake extended military campaigns, as a general faces a difficult choice: travel with the army and find his city ruled by someone else upon his return, or send one of his subordinates into the field (who might then turn the army to rebellion or conquer their enemies and found a new, independent nation).

On the other hand, such a campaign can be an excellent way for a general to dispose of a powerful, ambitious subordinate. A successful officer likely takes his followers and leaves to form a new community or perish.

Within their own settlements, hobgoblins have very little to do with other races. With very few exceptions, any non-hobgoblin present within a hobgoblin settlement is a slave. Hobgoblins generally don't trade with outsiders, preferring to take what they need by force rather than barter for it. Trade is rare (and raiding is common) even among different hobgoblin communities. As a race, hobgoblins tend to be an insular bunch, and they generally treat everyone else as lesser beings worthy only of serving as slaves.

While hobgoblins have no place for other humanoids in their own society, exiled hobgoblins occasionally find a place within human societies. Such hobgoblins are usually exiled from their communities for committing crimes. More rarely, a hobgoblin who knows his superiors saw him commit a cowardly act (like fleeing from combat) chooses not to return to face almost-certain slavery. These outcasts generally turn to banditry in an effort to survive, and they occasionally even sneak into human cities to live off the scraps of human society like their goblin cousins. Eventually, these hobgoblins begin to recreate their society in their new surroundings, recruiting other races to serve them and forming outlaw bands and gangs. Over time, these organizations can grow extremely powerful, and its not uncommon to find a hobgoblin warlord at the heart of a criminal enterprise in a large city, leading a vicious pack of bandits across the countryside, or even commanding a crew of bloodthirsty pirates on the high seas.

Campaign Role

Hobgoblins make terrific villains, whether you are talking about a low-level band of slavers, a sinister drug lord, or a massive invasion force poised to rip through an entire kingdom. While hobgoblins are not exactly subtle, they are crafty. Defenders can't always see the hobgoblins coming, but they can always tell where the hobgoblins were. Hobgoblins they are utterly ruthless in the face of weakness.

Of course, hobgoblins can fill other roles too, and it's quite easy to conceive of a situation where the PCs are forced to deal with a hobgoblin as potentially the lesser of two evils. While hobgoblin generals are resistant to offers of alliances, they are not complete fools, and with enough persuasion they do negotiate when the stakes are high. Any such agreement lasts only as long as it is in the general's best interest, and his subordinates don't always see things the same way.

Every dozen generations or so, a leader comes along with the vision, power, and charisma necessary to unite several hobgoblin tribes under one banner. Whenever this happens, it is inevitably the precursor to a bloody invasion, as a unified hobgoblin nation represents a powerhouse of military might equivalent to the combined armed forces of several human kingdoms. Elves generally fare poorly during these invasions. Inevitably though, the leader of the horde perishes and the generals once again fall back into infighting and paranoia.

Treasure

Hobgoblins are practical creatures, and although as greedy as other humanoids, items they treasure tend to favor

Slaves

For a hobgoblin, slaves are the single greatest measure of personal wealth. In a prosperous hobgoblin tribe, all but the poorest laborers have at least one personal slave, and most possess several. Slaves are generally taken as a result of raids, and hobgoblins undertake most raids specifically to acquire slaves, with any other loot recovered being seen as a bonus. Hobgoblins use slaves to perform almost every task imaginable, and they are very good at organizing and motivating slaves. While slaves have basically no personal rights, each has rights as property of its owner. The severity of any crime committed against a slave is determined by how powerful the slave's owner is and how much he values that particular slave. Hobgoblins don't bother to breed their slaves, mainly because most of them don't last long enough to make it worth the trouble. There are exceptions, however, especially among settlements that don't have ready access to other humanoid populations.

For the most part, hobgoblins aren't picky about which humanoid races they take as slaves, but they particularly prize dwarves. The stoutfolk are well suited to underground life, make excellent miners, and tend to stand up well to harsh treatment. While hobgoblins do occasionally enslave halflings, they generally hold the small people in great contempt and don't value them much. For that reason, halfling slaves tend not to last very long. Elves and half-elves are never taken as slaves, and captives of those races are always killed.

function over form and directly apply to what they do best: fighting. The vast majority of hobgoblin officers carry masterwork gear at the very least, and magic weapons and armor are not uncommon. Plain hobgoblin soldiers carry magic as well, when available, but officers tend to confiscate such fineries if revealed. On the other hand, officers attempting to relieve their subordinates of magic items is one of the leading causes of challenges for higher ranks.

Hobgoblins consider anything not directly related to eating, sleeping, or fighting to be something of a waste of time. Thus, such luxuries always come from the raids they make against neighboring humanoid settlements. Since hobgoblins don't trade with outsiders, all of this "useless indolence" is turned over to the general when brought back to their settlements. What happens at that point depends on the general. Some officers view decadence as the province of the hated elves and destroy everything without practical value. Others enjoy demonstrating the power of their rank and position and dress themselves and their concubines in the finery of other civilizations.

Variant Hobgoblins

To outsiders, the hobgoblin race often appears as a single, undifferentiated horde. The reality is that hobgoblins are as diverse as any humanoid species, although they are united by the two things they all share: their ambition and their hated of elves. The military structure of their society encourages conformity, but occasionally even hobgoblins run into a problem they can't solve with brute force. When that happens, they call on their elite troops—small groups of specially trained hobgoblins tasked to carry out unusual assignments. A couple of common examples are presented here.

Hobgoblin Engineers: While the vast military might of a hobgoblin army is feared by all its neighbors, the most dangerous part of any hobgoblin society are its engineers. Of course, they tend to be just as dangerous to the hobgoblins as to their enemies. Obsessed with fire, engines, and explosions, hobgoblin engineers are tireless tinkerers and love nothing more than testing out their creations on slaves. Engineering tends to attract the smartest (if not necessarily the wisest) hobgoblins, and most engineers possess Intelligence scores at the higher limits of normal humanoids (around 18 to 20).

Hobgoblin Infiltrators: These hobgoblins excel at sneaking into places they are not wanted. When a hobgoblin tribe needs to steal a well-guarded treasure or pursue a criminal, it calls on infiltrators to get the job done. Most raiding parties have at least one infiltrator among them, to scout out the target's defenses and sow chaos behind enemy lines. Infiltrators possess high Dexterity scores. Their commanders typically possess a number of levels in assassin or shadowdancer.

Hobgoblins in Golarion

Long ago, before the Age of Darkness and the rise of humanity, elven civilization flourished across Golarion. In those days, powerful magic flowed through the land, and some of the greatest nations the world has ever seen strove to unlock the secrets of creation. It was a time of great wonders, yet not all of the wondrous magic wrought in this age was benign, for among these works was the creation of the hobgoblin race.

Exactly who was responsible for taking the simple, ferocious vermin known as goblins and enhancing their size, physical strength, and intelligence has been lost to time, yet the hobgoblin race certainly has not. The elves certainly had no shortage of enemies capable of engineering an entire new race, and the fact that the hobgoblins have outlived their forgotten creators points to their tremendous skill in this arena.

These forgotten puppeteers bred armies of their new creations at several key locations. Before they could unleash the hobgoblin legions on the unsuspecting elven cities, however, their plans were discovered by a group of elven adventurers. These adventurers discovered a powerful artifact used to create the first hobgoblins, the *Cantorian Spring*, and stole it, freeing hobgoblins from breeding facilities scattered across the world. Before the artifact could be destroyed, though, the creators confronted the band of adventurers. In the resulting battle, the artifact was lost, leaving the hobgoblins free of outside influence but retaining an all-consuming hatred of elvenkind.

Ever since then, hobgoblins have fought elves. While the initial onslaught of the hobgoblins caught the elves unawares and unprepared, elven civilization was at its zenith and the hobgoblins were inexperienced. The wars that followed transformed hobgoblin civilization into what it is today. In order to combat the entrenched and powerful enemy, the hobgoblins based their entire civilization on war. Unable to resist the constant elven attacks, hobgoblins were eventually driven underground to evade their pursuers. Today, hobgoblins barely remember those earliest wars, and only the terrifying legends of the evil elven oppressors survive from that distant past. The elves, for their part, consider the entire episode to be a minor event, a mere footnote in the history of their once-glorious civilization.

Names

Hobgoblin names tend toward short, hard sounds, quick to shout in commands and easily understand over the din of battle.

Male: Arark, Bekri, Cenk, Doga, Doruk, Fethi, Haluk, Kurat, Lemi, Mert, Mevlut, Oktar, Rafet, Saltuk, Turgut

Female: Afet, Ceyda, Ela, Esma, Huri, Kumru, Maral, Masal, Melda, Nisa, Nural, Seda, Sena, Tansu, Vesile

HOBGOBLIN

This powerful humanoid stands slightly shorter than a human. Its muscular arms and stout legs give it a somewhat ape-like appearance, a trait further reinforced by its compact, powerful build. It has a broad head with large, sharply pointed ears, a wide nose, and a gaping mouth full of crude, yellow teeth. Its greenish-gray skin is exactly the color of old phlegm. Its eyes, however, glow with a sinister orange light.

A hobgoblin is never alone. Where you see one, you can bet there's a dozen more, and a dozen dozen more behind them. If you spot one, run, 'cause a whole army of hurt is sure to follow.

HOBGOBLIN, 1ST-LEVEL WARRIOR **CR 1/2**

LE Medium humanoid (goblinoid)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14
(+3 armor, +1 Dex, +1 shield)

hp 6 (1d8+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +1, **Will** –1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee longsword +2 (1d8+1/19–20)

Ranged javelin +2 (1d6+1)

TACTICS

Before Combat Hobgoblins prefer not to give their opponents a fair fight, and they do their best to sneak up on their enemies, attack them while they are sleeping, or use overwhelming force. If none of these are possible, they generally retreat to a defensible position and attempt to hold the line.

During Combat Hobgoblins fight dirty and are quick to take advantage of any perceived weakness. Skilled at fighting in groups, hobgoblins often have well-laid tactics planned in advance. Even if not, the goblinoids excel at creating clever, impromptu battle plans and simply cooperating in battle.

Morale Hobgoblins have a strong sense of self-preservation and do not hesitate to retreat if they see no hope of victory. Their fierce hatred of elves, however, means they seldom retreat if presented with the opportunity to kill pointy-eared foes. Intimidating hobgoblin veterans also often inspire more fear in their troops than any foe, and can terrify their weaker kin into standing against much greater odds.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

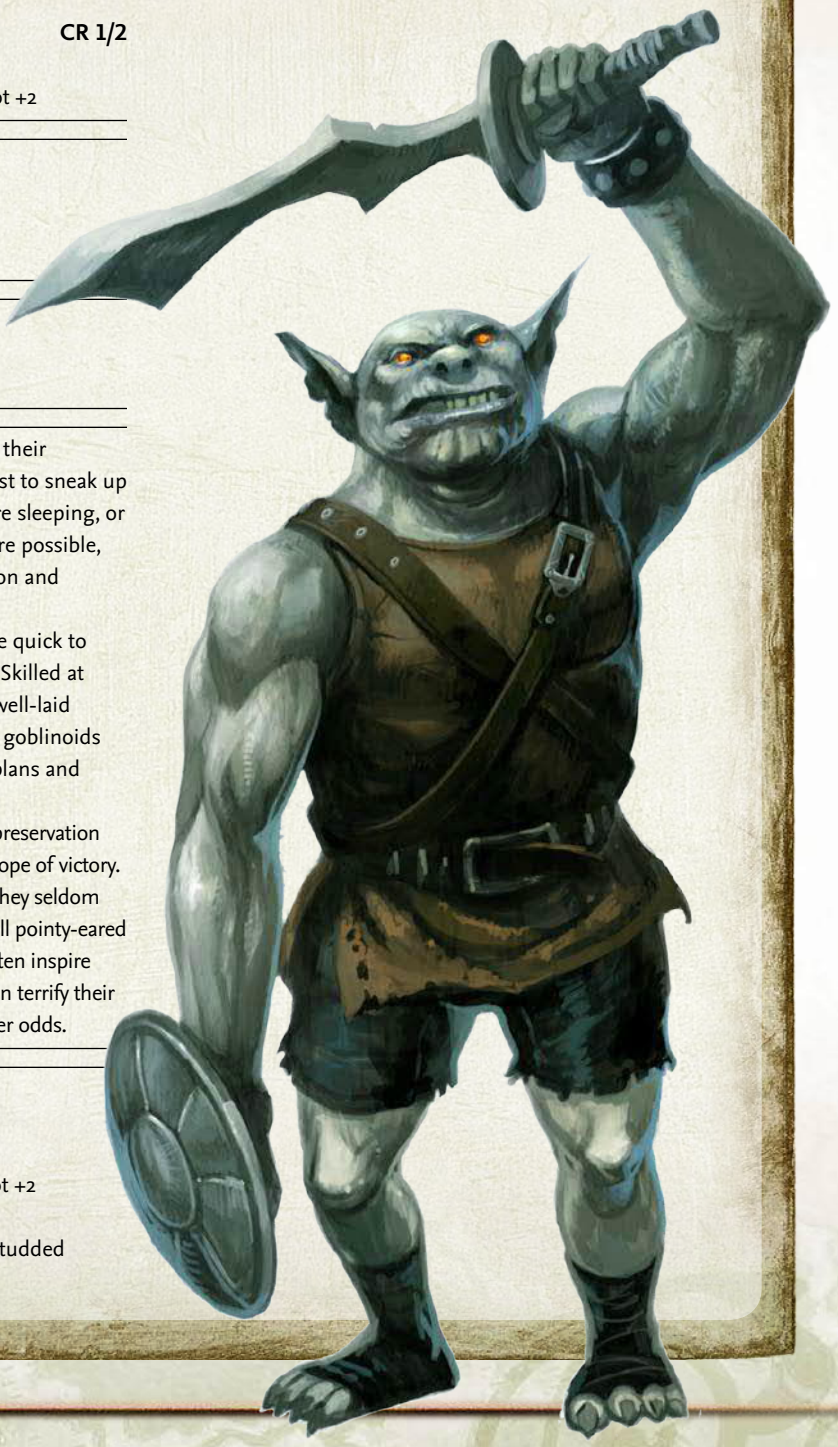
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +2

Feats Alertness

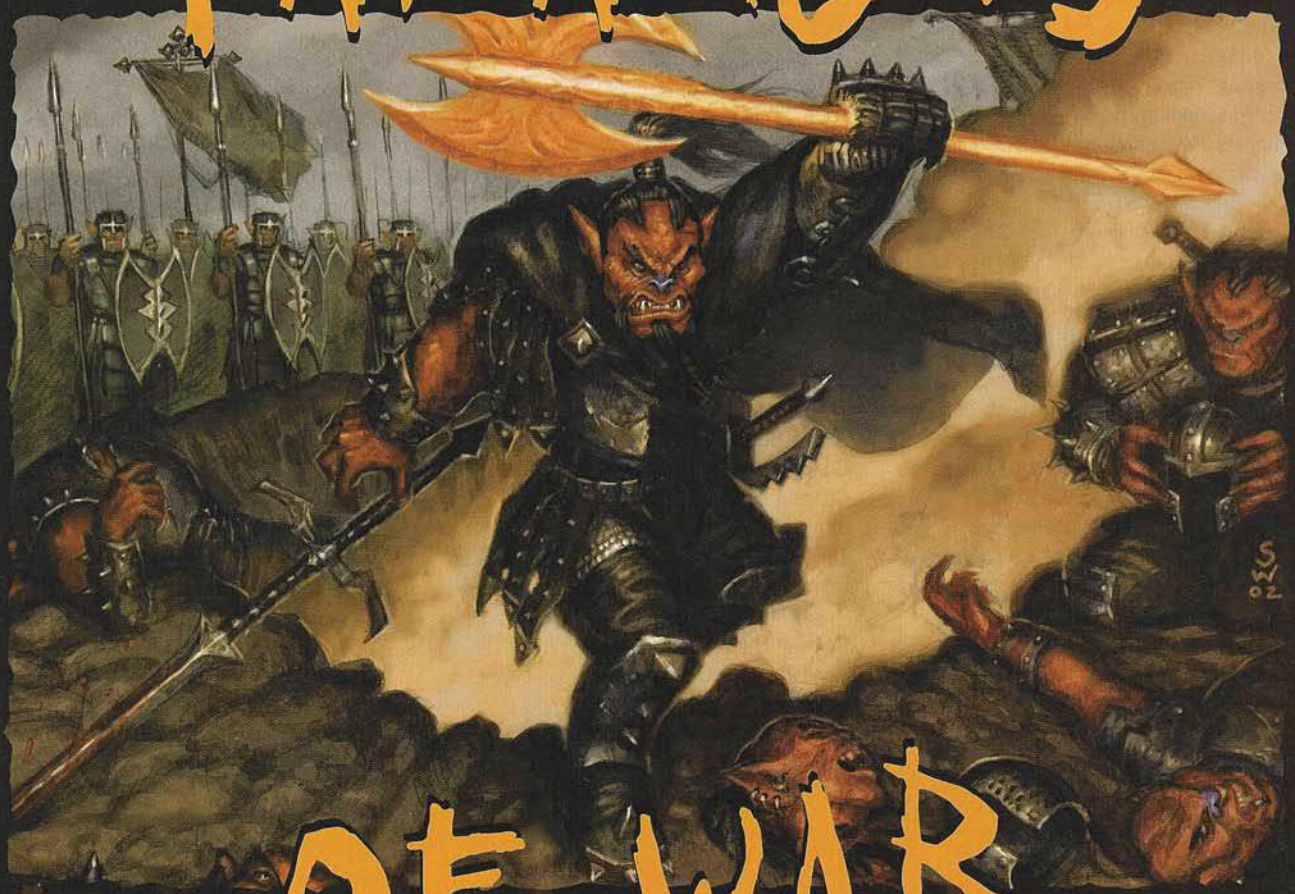
Skills Hide +3, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spot +2

Languages Common, Goblin

Gear 4 javelins, light steel shield, longsword, studded leather armor



PARAGONS OF WAR



The Ecology of the Hobgoblin

by Terry Edwards · illustrated by Sam Wood

Goblins flee the world of light, cursed and wretched in their plight.
Dark dank caves the goblins live in, goblins pray to him who begat them:
Help us take back what's lost to day.
Maglubiyet guide us on the way,
Make a race whose power can end the reign of elves, and dwarves, and men.
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!

Gather now by standards, by swords; come unite the scattered hordes!
By order hobgoblins will reclaim the world that goblins fled in shame.
Bring war, bring strife upon the land!
One tribe in victory will stand!
Guide to war the lesser kin and lend them strength the day to win.
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!

Don the armor of fallen foes and pick the flesh clean from their bones,
Hobgoblin tribes grow strong through war; if they know peace they grow no more.
Shielded lands defended with might will never, never flee from light.
Vengeful conquest now begin. All goblinkind, come join your kin.
Hobgoblin, hobgoblin!

—Verses from hobgoblin creation myth, author unknown

There is a tendency among civilized peoples to classify all the evil humanoid races that populate untamed lands as lawless, savage, and disorganized barbarian hordes. But anyone laboring under such a misconception has obviously never been unfortunate enough to share territory with a hobgoblin tribe.

Hobgoblins represent the antithesis of the common goblinoid stereotype. Highly organized, well trained for battle, and strictly obedient to their military code, they function with a focused efficiency that army commanders of any race would envy. Driven by a simple ethos based on survival through continuous conquest, hobgoblin tribes have spread systematically throughout the inhabited regions of most campaign worlds. To state that these remarkable humanoids are merely survivalists, however, downplays the incredible depth of their culture.

Most players and even many DMs view the evil humanoid races as little more than substitute orcs, but in fact each fills a special niche within the campaign world. In particular, the unique psychology of hobgoblins on both the individual and the societal level serves to distance them from the rest of the humanoid pack. Hobgoblins are definitely not substitute orcs, and they are far more than just big goblins.

PHYSIOLOGY

Hobgoblins are born predators, and this heritage is apparent in their physical shape. A typical hobgoblin is lean and tall, averaging 6 1/2 feet in height and 200 pounds in weight. The muscles of his lithe frame are designed more for agility than strength, enabling him to move with an almost feline grace. Like a tiger, a hobgoblin excels at moving unheard, and his keen yellow eyes can see even in the darkest conditions.

Tattoos often accentuate a hobgoblin's crimson-orange skin, but they are far different from the ink pinprick designs that are sometimes sported by other races. Hobgoblin tattoos are deep scars branded into the flesh to demonstrate the bearer's tolerance for pain. For much the same reason, body piercing—the deeper and more painful the better—is a popular form of adornment among hobgoblins. But while his body might be run through with metal in several places, a hobgoblin always keeps his red (or in some cases, blue) nose unobstructed.

Coarse hair, usually gray or brown in color, covers the hobgoblin's thick hide. The hair on his head is generally worn long in several braids, which are adorned with bone jewelry crafted from the remains of slain foes. In like manner, any other adornments a hobgoblin wears are designed to call attention to either his battle prowess or his high tolerance for physical hardship.

PSYCHOLOGY

To ensure that each hobgoblin's mind remains continually focused on the survival of the tribe, the young are taught the life metaphor of the personal perimeter (see below) as soon as they are old enough to understand spoken words. This concept embodies the central philosophy behind hobgoblin behavior, and its principles influence all aspects of a hobgoblin's life. The personal perimeter means everything to a hobgoblin, and each is proud of the disciplined lifestyle required to maintain it.

The Personal Perimeter

Each hobgoblin learns early in life to establish a personal perimeter of defense. This perimeter represents not the chaotic creature's need for personal space, but a highly lawful creature's portion of the greater tribal perimeter. In the hobgoblin mindset, one hobgoblin controls his own immediate area, two control still more, and so forth. Thus, a whole tribe jointly controls a significant area that it claims for its own use.

The first step in learning to maintain a personal perimeter is rigid mental conditioning designed to expunge the potential weaknesses of debilitating emotion and extraneous thought. A mind free from distraction can give its full attention to maintaining a perimeter.

The methods used to achieve the required mental conditioning process are harsh, to say the least. Abuse, both physical and mental, is a common tool for developing the desired mental state. Combat training is the only emotional outlet allowed to hobgoblins, and learning to defend a space is the most integral part of maintaining a personal perimeter. Years of such extreme programming yield an unquestioningly loyal soldier who desires nothing more than to serve the tribe.

Always on the defensive, hobgoblins constantly evaluate their surroundings for tactical advantages. This tendency is most noticeable when they are outside the protective confines of their own tribal lands. No hobgoblin can be found overimbibing ale in a tavern while seated in front of a window or with his back to a crowd. More likely, he sits in a dark corner of the tavern that provides him with an unobstructed view of the room, nursing one drink throughout his stay.

Morality

The narrow focus of the hobgoblin mind leaves no room for moral questions. Mercy and compassion can only weaken the perimeter and cloud thinking.

371 B.C.E.: The Oblique Order Formation
Arguably the greatest general in the ancient world to date, Epaminondas leads the Theban army against the Spartans. But instead of lining up his phalanx and charging it headlong into the Spartan phalanx, as the Spartans themselves would do, Epaminondas masses his troops heavily to one side and staggers the rest of his line.

When the two phalanxes clash, the heavy side of the Theban phalanx massively overpowers its side of the Spartan phalanx. The weaker, staggered side of the Theban force rotates back slightly, just enough to defend. The broken phalanx of the Spartans is then flanked by the overpowering force of the Theban's heavy end. This arrangement allows the Thebans to assault the Spartan phalanx from its most vulnerable position—the side—while the rest of the Theban line fights defensively. Unable to protect themselves, the Spartans are slaughtered—not through superior training or weaponry but through superior tactics.

Philip II of Macedonia, trained by Epaminondas himself in all manner of warfare (including logistics, tactics, drilling, and the use of multiple field units in addition to infantry), further refines his mentor's so-called "oblique order." Generals throughout the ages will replicate the tactics of Epaminondas, and Philip's son Alexander will master them.

359 B.C.E.: The Complete Army
Philip II of Macedonia conquers Greece with the most tactically advanced army in the world. His force, predictably centered on the Greek phalanx, consists primarily of heavy infantry. Using tactics he learned from Epaminondas, Philip compensates for the inherent weakness of the phalanx by doubling its size and providing auxiliary cavalry, light infantry, skirmishers, and archers to protect its vulnerable flanks. He also extends the length of the lances used by the infantry to more than 12 feet.

Philip II's army is the first to use artillery routinely on the battlefield. His forces employ large dart-throwers capable of killing enemy soldiers at more than 200 yards. (The Greeks never

Individual freedom is meaningless and has no place in hobgoblin society, and respect for the freedom of others never enters a hobgoblin's thoughts.

The hobgoblin survival ethos drives every individual in the tribe and forms the basic rationale for the perimeter concept. Among hobgoblins, survival and security means constant preemptive domination of their surroundings. The land must be tamed to serve the tribe's needs, and enemies must be vanquished before they can become threats.

Other Cultures

Hobgoblins tend not to be social creatures. In fact, creatures of other races usually find them paranoid, insulting, and dismissive. At first meeting and for some time thereafter, hobgoblins usually exhibit all those traits, but only because they consider any creature not of their tribe to be a threat. Then too, a hobgoblin's rude behavior is often an expression of the paranoia that keeps him on his toes, as well as his disdain for the soft lifestyles of others.

Death and Dying

Although hobgoblins are born for combat, most do not actually intend to end their lives on the battlefield. Unlike many warmongering humanoids, hobgoblins do not view death in combat as honorable or glorious. Rather, it is viewed as evidence of failure to maintain a strong enough personal perimeter. Nevertheless, comrades felled in battle are respected and honored for their sacrifices.

A time to die is chosen by (or for) any individual who can no longer contribute anything to the tribe. The choice is a matter of pride, and the method invariably benefits the tribe. Many hobgoblins choose a form of ritual suicide designed to supply adepts with sacrifices.

SOCIETY

The primary concern of a hobgoblin tribe is survival. Survival means effective defense, and effective defense means eradication of all enemies and successful subjugation of all other creatures within the tribal perimeter. Hunting is a preemptive measure that serves both to remove threats from the tribe's ever-expanding area of control and to strengthen its individual members.

Like many humanoid races, hobgoblins maintain a parasitic relationship with the world around them, systematically stripping the land of its resources with no thought for conservation or renewal. Since few ecosystems can long tolerate such a disruptive presence, the tribe must move frequently. Agrarian civilizations are prime targets for hobgoblin raiding, since they boast ready supplies of food and populations unaccustomed to conflict. A hobgoblin incursion on such a territory can be likened to a locust swarm ravaging crops—a swift, overwhelming invasion that leaves nothing behind. Each successful conquest brings food, weapons, and materials into the tribe, which in turn provide the resources to fuel future campaigns.

Social Hierarchy

Unlike their chaotic goblinoid cousins, hobgoblins maintain a highly organized social order that operates with military efficiency. Hobgoblin society is loosely divided into three castes, each of which is further separated into two subcastes. The divisions are: military (command/warrior), religious (priest/instructor), and labor (crafter/worker). Caste assignment is based on both individual affinity for a given task and the tribe's current needs; gender has no bearing on placement. Once given, a caste assignment changes only when an individual is no longer capable of performing the required duties (such as a warrior who has taken a debilitating wound) or when the tribe's needs shift dramatically.

All castes are vital for the continued existence of the tribe, and as such their members receive equal treatment and honor. Although status within the tribe is most often linked with victory in battle, a heroic warrior always recognizes that victory would not be possible without the aid of the other castes. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others within the tribe is a serious indiscretion. Repeated incidents of such neglect can result in the offender being formally ostracized from the tribe.

Military: The largest of a tribe's three social divisions, the military caste consists mostly of warriors and fighters. These individuals receive the best military training and are responsible for the protection of the tribe and the expansion of its perimeter. Ascension to command requires adaptability, cunning, and a keen mind—values often found among rogues. A tribe's leader is almost always a seasoned fighter/rogue from the military caste who is venerated as a hero by the tribe.

Labor: The crafters and workers of the labor caste are respected as the heart of a hobgoblin tribe. Composed primarily of experts and warriors, this caste makes up roughly one-third of the tribe's total adult population. Members of the labor caste are responsible for meeting the tribe's mundane needs. Most specialize in resource management, turning goods seized during conquest into food, arms and armor, housing, clothing, and other needed items. Members of the labor caste often receive military training as

widely adopt the use of artillery, but Philip's son Alexander does in years to come.)

Philip's army is the most flexible and versatile to date. It is capable of fighting in any terrain against any known force of his era. The adaptability of his armed forces allows Philip to conquer all the Greek city-states except Sparta.

350 B.C.E.: The Roman Legion

The Romans, now a rising power on the Italian peninsula, abandon the use of the Greek phalanx. The Italian countryside is ill-suited for the tightly packed formation, and it proves too cumbersome against the more mobile forces of the Gauls.

To replace it, the Romans develop a new formation that becomes known as the legion. Based on small groups of soldiers called maniples (Latin for "handfuls") that are arrayed in three lines, the Roman legion is far more maneuverable than the old Greek phalanx. It can adapt quickly to changes in the tide of battle by switching out its ranks so that fresh troops are always at the forefront. The legion evolves into an extremely fluid and versatile unit. Its long-term use builds the Roman army into the most disciplined and effective fighting force of the ancient world.

334 B.C.E.: The Triumph of Cavalry

In his first battle against the overwhelming forces of the Persians, Alexander the Great achieves the first victory in history to be decided by cavalry. The Persians, whose cavalry forces outnumber Alexander's two to one, are arrayed atop a steep riverbank. Alexander is forced to cross the river to engage. He opens with a feint, ordering a small band of cavalry uphill into the left wing of the Persian force. As Alexander's forces charge, taking horrendous damage from Persian arrows and javelins, the Persian left wing breaks formation and rides forward. Alexander then leads the rest of his right wing into the center of the disorganized Persian line. With speed and ferocity, his cavalry riders punch through and take the riverbank. They are joined by the Thessalian cavalry force of Alexander's left wing, which has outmaneuvered, outfought, and annihilated the numerically superior Persian right wing. Alexander's heavy

well, in case their help is needed to defend the tribe.

Religious: By far the smallest of the three castes, the religious caste is made up of truly outstanding individuals who were chosen for their minds. Most are trained as adepts, although sorcerers, clerics, and even assassins can be found within this caste. The religious caste serves as the tribe's connection to the divine and provides instruction for the youth, but in a very real sense, it is also the tribe's governing body. Although a member of the military caste typically functions as ruler, it is the religious caste that guides the tribe's fate. Tumultuous internal politics are rare in hobgoblin tribes, but if need be, the church can exercise the power of executive veto over a leader's decision.

Upbringing

Life within a hobgoblin tribe is strictly regimented. From the moment of birth, hobgoblin youths are molded, body and mind, in accordance with tribal ideals. Instructors from the religious caste oversee the youngsters' initial development and guide them in building their personal perimeters. Throughout the training process, the instructors assess their charges and choose future roles for them within the tribe. By the time the young hobgoblins reach adolescence, their instructor-based training is finished, and their personal perimeters have been firmly established. After a stint of mandatory military service, each takes up his or her preassigned role within the tribe.

Military Tactics

When a hobgoblin tribe moves into a new area, its first priority is to establish an entrenched base camp and defensive perimeter. Since raids against other humanoid settlements are the most efficient means of supplying the tribe with the resources necessary for survival, the location of the base camp is usually chosen to provide proximity to such a target. The base camp is often built around or within an existing structure, such as a dungeon, natural cavern, or building.

Once a secure camp has been established, expansion can begin. While stealthy scouts venture beyond the perimeter on reconnaissance missions, the hobgoblins in camp transform the landscape into a defensible battle plain. The earth is molded into trenches and ramparts, trees are felled for building material, and streams are rerouted to serve as moats. The outer perimeter of a completed base camp usually consists of a ring of outposts placed a few miles from the center. Depending on its proximity to trade routes and its relative importance, an outpost might be defended by anywhere from four to nine hobgoblin warriors and fighters.

The tribe's perimeter—outposts, moats, and fortifications—is a cooperative extension of each individual's personal perimeter, and it is maintained with the same degree of dedication. Once a hobgoblin tribe digs in, reaching the heart of its base camp requires a long and difficult fight.

Diet

Although hobgoblins are omnivorous, meat is their food of choice. Because of their mobile lifestyle, they have never mastered the techniques of agriculture, but most tribes maintain small herds of livestock. The bulk of a tribe's food, however, is obtained through raids and conquest. Hobgoblins consume the flesh of nearly every farm animal employed by humans and other civilized races, and large hobgoblin tribes and nations often seek to enslave or capture others who are capable of farming.

Reproduction

Hobgoblins reproduce through a selective breeding program that pairs the tribe's elite warriors, crafters, and priests in the hopes of producing superior offspring. Peers generally arrange such couplings during seasonal celebrations, religious holidays, or post-victory feasts. Marriage and monogamous relationships are unheard of in hobgoblin culture, since the emotion evoked by such close ties would only serve to weaken an individual's personal perimeter. Although parents maintain roles of authority in their children's lives, religious instructors raise the young hobgoblins in a communal environment, and their only true family is the tribe.

Industry

Hobgoblin conquests bring a steady supply of weapons and armor into the tribe. Since they rarely work from raw materials, hobgoblin crafters have become masters of repair and recycling. A typical suit of hobgoblin armor usually consists of several pieces of salvaged armor blended by hobgoblin experts into a work of functional art (usually the equivalent of studded leather). Any metal item that cannot be salvaged is melted down and forged anew. A hobgoblin always treats her equipment with respect, ceaselessly polishing and maintaining it, regardless of its origin. Unlike other goblinoids, hobgoblins never wear shoddy armor or wield rusty weapons.

While hobgoblin craftsmanship is at its peak in the reclaiming and manufacture of arms and armor, weaponsmithing is not the race's only creative outlet. The deep, resonant thunder of hobgoblin war

infantry is now in position to engage the Persian forces. History repeats itself, and the Greek heavy infantry destroys the Persian infantry and light cavalry.

Through his feinting maneuver combined with the mobility and skill of his cavalry, Alexander earns a bloody victory. From there, he moves on to conquer the rest of the Persian Empire. In years to come, Alexander conquers lands beyond the borders of the known world, extending the Macedonian Empire from India in the east all the way to Europe in the west.

304 B.C.E.: Multifunction Siege Towers
The Greek engineer Epimachus creates the first multifunctional siege tower, which he calls helepolis, or "city-taker." At 140 feet tall and 150 tons, helepolis is the largest siege tower to date. Just rolling it forward on its eight massive wheels requires the combined might of 3,000 men. Iron scales protect its wooden frame from fire, and its front face has twenty artillery ports, each of which is fitted with wooden shutters covered in leather and stuffed with wool to protect the artillerists from attacks.

The tower sees its first use at the siege of Rhodes. After a prolonged battle, several of the iron scales are dislodged, leaving the tower vulnerable to attacks by fire. Rather than risk losing it, the Greeks pull back.

Despite its mediocre performance, the great tower profoundly changes the way siege warfare is waged. In later periods, the Romans and other cultures will improve upon the design of helepolis, adding hoisted battering rams and more powerful artillery, as well as boarding planks that allow infantry to storm walls.

221 B.C.E.: The Great Wall of China
The Great Wall is erected across northern China by the Qin Dynasty. This immense barrier eventually spans more than 4,000 miles and serves as the primary defense against marauding Huns from the north. Its effectiveness forces the Huns' migrations westward, into Asia and eastern Europe.

drums, called hrun'doums, is well known far beyond tribal lands, and hobgoblin crafters take great pride in building these instruments. They also craft many smaller percussion instruments, including steel drums, kintalas, and unique "talking" drums called p'doums. Hobgoblin drums are often enchanted for use on the battlefield, and many can produce rolling sonic attacks, doleful fear effects, and frenzied activity in their listeners. When a tribe actually needs to trade with another culture, drums and mercenary service are the typical offerings.

Race Relations

While most creatures sharing territory with hobgoblins can expect constant conflict with the tribe, a few cultures actually find hobgoblins to be good neighbors. Perhaps the greatest strength of the hobgoblin race is its ability to unite otherwise scattered goblinoid tribes into cohesive units. Weaker creatures such as goblins are easily conscripted into the fighting ranks of a hobgoblin tribe. Such creatures are typically used either to test enemy defenses or to overwhelm opponents with large numbers. Bugbears, ogres, and trolls that join hobgoblin tribes can occasionally claim leadership roles, but they usually end up serving as frontline muscle in perimeter outposts. Occasionally, hobgoblins can even form mutually beneficial relationships with human settlements. Many a warring king has discovered that a hobgoblin tribe can provide a ready supply of highly skilled mercenaries—for the right price.

While hobgoblins are open to guarded alliances with many other races, they do not tolerate proximity to rival hobgoblin tribes. Other humanoids in hobgoblin lands are seen as resources for the tribe, but another tribe of hobgoblins represents competition for the same resources and thus threatens the tribe's survival. Encounters between tribes always result in fierce battles and the destruction or routing of the weaker tribe. Only an exceptionally powerful hobgoblin leader can end such hostilities and unite multiple tribes.

KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

Hobgoblins recognize the value of allies in strengthening their perimeters, both tribal and personal. If the perceived benefit is sufficiently high, other intelligent creatures might even be accepted into the tribe to ensure the long-term success of joint ventures. The following combinations demonstrate the benefits of common hobgoblin alliances.

Hobgoblin and Worg

Worgs are frequently found within goblinoid societies, and hobgoblin tribes are no exception. In fact, many tribes even breed the foul beasts. Animal handlers within the labor caste often train worgs to serve as sentinels along the perimeter of a tribe's base camp, where their scent ability and racial skill bonuses can be invaluable assets to tribal security. Selective breeding programs can yield Large worgs suitable as mounts, and even exotic (fiendish) breeding is not unheard of in larger tribes. Because worgs are respected and well treated in hobgoblin society, they tend to be quite loyal to the tribes they serve.

A single 2nd-level hobgoblin fighter mounted on an 8-HD advanced worg is an EL 5 encounter.

Hobgoblin and Barghest

Although they are outsiders, barghests blend seamlessly into hobgoblin society, both mentally and physically. A barghest's change shape ability allows it to pose as a goblin or wolf when necessary, although it does not usually bother to disguise its true nature from the tribe. A barghest that joins a hobgoblin tribe typically assumes a leadership role within it and uses its position to push the tribe toward ever more evil behavior. As far as hobgoblins are concerned, the only drawback to allowing a barghest into the tribe is its tendency to eat more than its allotted ration.

When a barghest joins a warband, its spell-like abilities add a new dimension to traditional tactics. *Crushing despair* demoralizes foes, and *dimension door* allows for either a quick retreat or delivery of the barghest to a key battlefield location.

A barghest coupled with a gang of four 1st-level hobgoblin fighters is an EL 6 encounter.

REVISION ALERT

Crushing despair is a new spell available to bards and wizards. The revised barghest can use the spell once per day as a spell-like ability.

Hobgoblin and Bladeling

The infernal battlefield of Acheron is home to a warlike race of outsiders known as bladelings (see *Monster Manual II*). Although these beings dwell in virtual isolation on Ocanthus (Acheron's fourth layer), their warbands sometimes venture elsewhere within the planes, occasionally even joining the eternal war among the cubes. Bladeling mercenaries are welcome additions to Maglubiyet's armies on Avalas and are eagerly recruited.

The goblin deity also occasionally finds use for bladelings on the Material Plane, assigning them to serve as elite warriors within favored hobgoblin tribes.

216 B.C.E.: Double Envelopment Maneuver

The Carthaginian general Hannibal launches a campaign to destroy Rome. His army consists of nearly 45,000 troops, including 11,000 Numidian and Celtic cavalry riders supported by additional Spanish and Celt infantry. On his left wing are the Spanish/Celtic heavy cavalry forces under the leadership of his brother Hasdrubal; on his right wing are the Numidian light cavalry riders. Across from Hannibal, eight legions of Roman soldiers—80,000 troops and 6,000 cavalry—await in a deep Roman battle formation, hoping to crush Hannibal's center with their superior numbers.

Hannibal's heavy cavalry units begin the battle with a charge from the left into the Roman cavalry in front of them. The Roman cavalry force begins to crumble immediately under the onslaught of Hasdrubal's numerically superior and more skillful forces. The Roman legions charge headlong into Hannibal's infantry, which is forced to give ground to the superior numbers of the Romans.

As Hannibal's army is pushed back, its line becomes bowed, so that its outer sections flank the advancing Romans on either side. Rather than pursuing the fleeing Roman cavalry, Hasdrubal's riders swing left and come in behind the Roman legions. Nearly 60,000 Romans are slaughtered at Cannae, but Hannibal loses only 8,000 men.

The Battle of Cannae comes to be regarded as one of the most decisive victories and one of the bloodiest massacres in history. Hannibal's brilliant double envelopment maneuver remains in active use for thousands of years.

200 B.C.E.: The Roman Ballista

The Romans design a new weapon called the ballista. Essentially a massive crossbow mounted on a rolling frame, it launches large stone balls or deadly, iron-tipped spears that are capable of impaling multiple targets. The design is highly adaptable, and many types of ballistae quickly appear, varying greatly in size and purpose. Some fling missiles at enemy soldiers, while

A bladeling's damage reduction, resistances, immunities, and razor storm ability make it an excellent melee fighter and an ideal addition to a warband. While the bladeling takes on opponents in melee, its hobgoblin companions are free to focus on ranged support. Then, after the bladeling has used its razor storm ability, the hobgoblins can join the melee and finish off the enemy.

Two bladelings with four 1st-level hobgoblin warriors constitute an EL 4 encounter.

Hobgoblin and Formian

When the expansionist formians encounter hobgoblins in search of new territory, the typical result is an explosive war that ends only when one side or the other has been utterly destroyed. Nevertheless, examination of each race's social structure reveals many parallels that could be exploited in joint ventures.

Although formians would never accept the rule of a hobgoblin leader, the opposite is possible. A hobgoblin tribe in dire need might allow its members to be conscripted as workers or warriors under the command of formian taskmasters. The taskmasters' telepathic abilities allow them to issue precise yet silent orders, which would prove invaluable to a warband engaged in a covert assault on a nearby area.

A single formian taskmaster with three 2nd-level hobgoblin fighters is an EL 8 encounter.

TACTICS

Because of the hobgoblins' military bent, tactics are an important part of any encounter with them. The following sections examine the tactics that hobgoblins commonly use against their enemies and provide tips for PCs to use in overcoming a hobgoblin threat.

Hobgoblins vs. PCs

The tactics described below are typical for a group of hobgoblins facing a PC party. DMs can adapt these as they see fit or use them as springboards to develop customized tactics for a particular tribe.

Tactical Terrain Advantage: Hobgoblins are always aware of their surroundings and tend to take advantage of terrain benefits, especially high ground, cover, and concealment. Cover and concealment are most useful for ranged attacks, and the +1 bonus on attack rolls granted by higher ground provides a significant asset during melee. If combat occurs on the hobgoblins' home turf, terrain enhancements designed to convey such advantages should already be in place.

Ready the Reserves: While the main tribal force engages the PCs in melee, one or two hobgoblins armed with bows remain in reserve. Their main purpose is to use readied actions to disrupt spellcasters with ranged attacks. The reserves might lose an action or two in this way, but the potential benefit is worth the trade, since a single successfully cast spell can leave a warband asleep, dazed, or just plain dead. Reserves can also help to defend allies during a strategic retreat or hold PCs at bay while their comrades fall back and set up a trap to catch pursuers.

Adept and Overcome: Adepts and other spellcasters from the religious caste often travel with hobgoblin warbands. Although adepts lack the focus and power of wizards and have only a handful of spells to choose from, their effectiveness should not be underestimated. The adept has access to classic arcane spell effects such as *burning hands, invisibility,* and even *lightning bolt* at higher levels. On the divine side, adepts can cast *cure* spells and enhance their comrades' effectiveness on the field via *bless, bull's strength,* and assorted protection effects. Furthermore, adepts can wear armor without fear of spell failure. Even though they are not proficient with its use, armor allows them to blend in with the fighters and gain a substantial degree of protection.

PCs vs. Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins are militant creatures geared toward combat. When your party encounters them, you can expect tactics to play a key role in the outcome of the battle. Below are some tips that might help to turn the tide in your party's favor.

Level the Field: A party balanced with a mix of character classes probably can't trade blow for blow with a hobgoblin gang composed primarily of fighters. Thus, it pays to upgrade your party's combat capability ahead of time if you can. Cast spells such as *bless, bane, aid,* and *protection from evil* to improve the attacks, Armor Class, and other combat capabilities of your allies. *Shield* or *protection from arrows* should also be cast early to foil enemy archers.

Concealment can give you a significant edge. While it won't help you hit, it does reduce the effectiveness of hobgoblin archers. Smokesticks and spells such as *blur, darkness, fog cloud,* and *obscuring mist* are all good sources of concealment.

Hit the Dirt: If hobgoblin archers are giving you a hard time, try kneeling or even lying prone. Such positioning imposes a -2 or -4 penalty, respectively, on ranged attacks against you. While this tactic significantly reduces your melee effectiveness and makes your ranged

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others are designed for siege warfare. Like the artillery of modern armies, ballistae are fired from the rear, over the heads of allied soldiers.

104 B.C.E.: The Professional Soldier
Amid great controversy in the Roman Senate, Marius, Consul of Rome, opens up recruitment to commoners. For the first time, a commoner can receive training and gain an actual profession by taking up arms with the standing army. In this manner, he can earn land and a pension for his family. Under this new program, commoners swell the ranks of the legions. With mandatory training for all, the army becomes a streamlined, uniform order of disciplined soldiers.

53 B.C.E.: Mobile Cavalry Defeats Infantry
Seeking to push the Roman border into Armenia, Marcus Crassus leads more than 30,000 soldiers into Selucia. There they encounter the main force of native Parthians, who are arguably the best cavalry soldiers of their era. The Parthians surround and harass the Romans, forcing them into a defensive square. Relying on their better bows and vastly superior mobility to keep away from the Roman infantry, the Parthians force the invaders to retreat over the course of three days, leaving their wounded behind. The Parthians butcher the stragglers, including Crassus's own son, whose head they place on a pike to taunt the Roman general.

Once the Romans are down to a few thousand men, the Parthians offer to parley with Crassus. In no position to retreat further and unable to engage the Parthians because of their deadly harassing tactics, Crassus agrees. But when he and his command staff enter the enemy command tent, the Parthians slaughter them and then rout the now-leaderless Romans. More than 20,000 Roman soldiers die, and 10,000 more are captured.

300 C.E.: The Catapult
The Romans invent a torsion-based siege device to replace the ballista. Named the onager, or "wild ass," for its kicking recoil, the contraption resembles a classic Hollywood-style catapult

Language: Hobgoblins speak the guttural goblin tongue, which uses the dwarven script, and most also speak Common.

Names: The religious caste names each hobgoblin at birth. The suffix 'ken is added to the given name of a female, and the suffix 'kon to that of a male. This construction is then followed by the mother's and/or father's name, the tribe's name, and the individual's position (for example, a male hobgoblin warrior might be named Maelegym Uluk'kon of Aeltan's Shield, Guard of the First Perimeter). In human lands, a hobgoblin separated from his tribe might use a name that contains references to his past but still identifies himself based on his new role and homeland (for example, Hemelion of Alsheem Merchant Praikos, Caravan Guard).

Adventurers: Finding little acceptance outside their own society, outcast hobgoblins are often attracted to the adventuring life, where they can put their militaristic skills to good use.

Hobgoblin Traits

Hobgoblin characters have the following racial traits.

- **+2 Dexterity, +2 Constitution:** Hobgoblins are naturally agile, and they are capable of enduring great physical hardship.
- **Medium:** As a Medium creature, a hobgoblin has no special bonuses or penalties due to his size.
- **Base Land Speed:** A hobgoblin's base land speed is 30 feet.
- **Darkvision:** A hobgoblin can see in the dark up to 60 feet. Darkvision is black and white only, but it is otherwise like normal sight, and a hobgoblin can function just fine with no light at all.
- **Racial Skill Bonus:** A hobgoblin has a +4 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

combined assault, featuring rapid fire from mounted archers combined with shock attacks from mounted lancers. The military wisdom of the *Strategicon* rivals that of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* from a millennium earlier, and numerous parallels exist between the two works.

600 C.E.: The Iron Stirrup

Greatly impressed by the precision and military prowess that the Huns to the north display on horseback, the Chinese develop the iron stirrup. This device gives cavalry riders unprecedented control and stability, which in turn allows them to fight effectively from horseback with all manner of weapons.

Over the course of several centuries, the stirrup migrates slowly to Europe, where it helps to establish the dominance of cavalry over infantry on the battlefield during the Middle Ages. Its use by mounted knights also serves to reinforce the feudal system. Many military scholars consider the stirrup to be the most significant military invention of the period.

919 C.E.: The Military Use of Gunpowder

The Song Dynasty in China puts gunpowder (invented in 3 C.E.) into military use against the invading barbarians from the Asian steppes. Chinese soldiers drive back the invaders by shooting gunpowder from bamboo-tube flamethrowers. Although it receives little notice at the time, this use of gunpowder sets a precedent that will eventually change the face of warfare.

1,000 C.E.: The Crossbow in Europe

Invented almost 1,500 years before by the Chinese, the crossbow now comes into regular use in medieval armies. Operating a crossbow requires considerably less skill than firing a longbow does, and a crossbow bolt retains enough penetrating power to kill a warrior even after passing through both his shield and the mail armor behind it. And unlike the bow, the crossbow is easy to mass-produce. The wholesale adoption of this weapon by European military forces means that, for the first time, relatively

• **Automatic Languages:** Common, Goblin. Bonus Languages: Draconic, Dwarven, Infernal, Giant, Orc.

• **Level Adjustment:** +1. A hobgoblin has an effective character level (ECL) of 1 + his class levels, so a 6th-level hobgoblin fighter would have an ECL of 7.

• **Favored Class:** Fighter. A multiclass hobgoblin's fighter class does not count when determining whether he takes an experience point penalty.

NPC Hobgoblins

NPC hobgoblins are often attracted to classes that focus on evil activities, particularly rogue, assassin, and blackguard.

Rogue: Within the military caste of hobgoblin society, intelligence separates the commanders from the common warriors. Commanders are experts at utilizing their surroundings and typically incorporate stealth into their defense of their personal perimeters. With their impressive array of skills and abilities, hobgoblin commanders are extremely adaptable and very dangerous.

A hobgoblin's naturally high Dexterity score coupled with his racial bonus on Move Silently checks makes him an excellent candidate for the rogue class. Because of the militaristic social structure of a hobgoblin tribe, however, the typical hobgoblin picks up some levels as a fighter before switching to rogue. The leader of a hobgoblin warband is usually a fighter/rogue.

Assassin: Hobgoblin tribes often need special operatives to manage their dealings with difficult enemies or allies. Such agents must be able to function as diplomats or simply remove inconvenient enemies, as the need presents itself. Thus, they are often trained as assassins. Candidates for assassin training are selected at an early age by the religious caste, which directly oversees even the portions of their education supplied by mentors from other castes.

All hobgoblin assassins are operatives of the church, and the leaders of the religious caste take great pains to ensure their loyalty. Rarely does an assassin ever look beyond her station or question the motives and orders of her religious superiors. Any hobgoblin assassin encountered outside a tribe is likely to be on a mission of "diplomacy" and is always alone.

Blackguard: The presence of a barghest leader within a tribe often leads to the rise of a champion of evil within the hobgoblin ranks. When the barghest relinquishes control of the tribe, through either death or choice, its evil disciple is ready to take over the reins of leadership. The new leader's agenda is frequently even more horrific than that of the barghest.

A blackguard within a hobgoblin tribe is always its leader, unless a barghest is also present. In the latter case, the blackguard might function as the tribe's high priest instead. Charismatic hobgoblin blackguards are often capable of uniting rival hobgoblin tribes and drawing huge armies to their causes.

Blackguard leaders usually command from the front line, inspiring troops with their heroic acts of evil. The momentum of their dark armies builds with each conquest, until only the death of the blackguard himself can stop them.

LAIR OF THE HOBGOBLIN

The map presents a sample hobgoblin lair. This outpost could function as the main launching point for a planned conquest of a nearby human village or serve as the base camp of a small tribe.

1. The Site

The hobgoblins of the Phalanx tribe have converted an abandoned flour mill into a watchtower and fortified the surrounding area. The camp is manned by a standard hobgoblin garrison consisting of twelve 1st-level warriors, eight 1st-level fighters, one 3rd-level fighter sergeant, and one 6th-level fighter/rogue leader (Kehelahna Pegn'Ken of Phalanx, Perimeter Commander).

2. Rock Wall and Ramparts

The hobgoblins have built earthen ramparts averaging 10 to 15 feet in height (Climb DC 15) around the site. Along the tops of the ramparts are several 4-foot-high walls that can provide cover for Medium creatures. These walls can also be collapsed onto anyone attempting to climb the rampart as a standard action, dealing 1d6 points of bludgeoning damage to each climber (DC 15 Reflex save for half).

During any attack from the outside, the sergeant and nine of the warriors defend the ramparts.

3. Trapped Rock Wall (EL 2)

Two 4-foot-tall rock walls stand roughly 30 feet from the first earthen ramparts. Just behind each wall is a spiked pit trap covered with canvas and hidden under bracken and small stones. If anyone falls into the pit, the rock wall collapses into the hole as well, dealing additional damage. These two structures are designed to trap invaders who try to take cover.

Rock Wall Pit Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 10 ft. deep (1d6, fall and 1d6, falling stones); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

4. Loading Deck

A 7-foot-tall wooden wall set with iron spikes now stands in front of what was

poorly trained soldiers can produce ranged fire with excellent killing power.

The widespread use of the crossbow spurs the development of plate armor, but the crossbow evolves right alongside it, maintaining such a level of lethality that the Pope eventually and unsuccessfully bans its use.

1,066 C.E.: Cavalry at the Battle of Hastings

The Battle of Hastings marks the beginning of the cavalry's ascendance on the battlefields of Europe. The defender is Harold Godwinson, backed by his fierce Huscarles—an elite cadre of Anglo-Saxon infantry clad in heavy chainmail, bearing large shields, and wielding axes. A mounted infantry corps of Huscarles is also present, but its soldiers are not trained to work cohesively and are not, strictly speaking, a cavalry force. The attacker is William the Conqueror, who fields a Norman army that includes infantry, cavalry, archers, and spearmen. Although more diverse than Harold's force in both composition and discipline, William's army is inferior in actual prowess.

After a full day, the battle is a stalemate. The phalanx shield wall of the Huscarles remains impenetrable until a feint from William's left cavalry wing tempts Harold's line into breaking. The charging Norman cavalry riders turn away at the last moment as if to flee, and the main body of Harold's army gives chase without orders. The remaining Norman cavalry units then flood into the gap, and Harold is slain. A few bloody minutes later, his army is in full rout.

William's victory in this battle establishes Norman rule in England. Within a century, the Norman Empire is the most powerful nation in Europe.

On the field of battle, cavalry rises to prominence over infantry and becomes the army's primary assault arm. While the infantry remains the backbone of the classical army, the cavalry maintains its place as the army's most tactically powerful unit for centuries to come.

1,100 C.E.: The Trebuchet

The Europeans improve upon an earlier Chinese device that allowed a single soldier to

once the loading deck of the flour mill. Six hobgoblin defenders, each armed with a longspear or halberd, stand on a raised platform affixed to the inside of the wall, ready to defend it. Twenty extra weapons of each type lie on the platform beside them, ready for use. A barred gate in the center of the wall gives access to the outpost.

Each hobgoblin attacking from the wall gains a +1 bonus on melee attack rolls because of high ground. During an attack on the camp, the hobgoblin leader joins the six warriors stationed here.

Wooden Wall: 6 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 60; Break DC 20; Climb DC 21.

5. Barracks

The area that once served as the storage and milling rooms of the flour mill now functions as quarters for the hobgoblin garrison. This portion of the building is set into the hillside and accessible only through the front door or the tower above. Arrow slits have been added to the walls and doors, granting improved cover to the five archers that can man each of the walls. Food and water supplies for the outpost are stored in this area, along with several longbows and a large reserve of arrows.

6. Watchtower

The windmill's blades have been removed to allow construction of an archer loft on top of the mill. This loft can be reached either by ladder from the barracks or through a trapdoor in the ceiling that is accessible via a ladder at the back of the mill. The loft area can provide cover for up to five hobgoblin archers.

During an outside attack, two hobgoblin elite fighters and three hobgoblin warriors man the loft.

7. Tent Sites

Atop the hill are two large holes covered with tents. These makeshift structures are designed to house the outpost's excess population until raiding allows comfortable expansion. The tents are not visible from lower elevations.

Kehelahna Pegn'Ken of Phalanx, Perimeter Commander: Female hobgoblin Fighter 4/Rogue 2; CR 6; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 4d10+16 plus 2d6+8; hp 53; Init +3; Spd 20 ft. in hobgoblin armor; base 30 ft.; AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +5; Grp +6; Atk +9 melee (1d8+5/19-20, *+2 defending longsword*); Full Atk +9 melee (1d8+5/19-20, *+2 defending longsword*) or +6 melee (1d6+1/19-20, short sword) or +8 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SA sneak attack +1d6; SQ darkvision 60 ft., evasion, trapfinding; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +1; Str 13, Dex 16, Con 18, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +3, Escape Artist +5, Handle Animal +7, Hide +5, Jump +3, Move Silently +8, Ride +12; Dodge, Expertise, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword).

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, Kehelahna takes no damage on a successful saving throw.

Trapfinding (Ex): Kehelahna can use Search to find any trap with a Search DC higher than 20. She can also use Disable Device to disarm magic traps and can bypass a trap without disabling it by beating its Disable Device DC by 10 or more.

Possessions: hobgoblin armor (scale mail), small spiked steel shield, *+2 defending longsword,* short sword, longbow, quiver, 20 arrows, *potion of cure moderate wounds,* 2 tanglefoot bags.

Hobgoblin Sergeant: Male hobgoblin Ftr 3; CR 3; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 3d10+9; hp 25; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +3; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d6+1/18-20, scimitar); Full Atk +4 melee (1d6+1/18-20, scimitar) or +8 ranged (1d8+1/x3, composite longbow [+1 Str bonus]); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Move Silently +7, Ride +10; Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (composite longbow).

Possessions: hobgoblin armor (studded leather), scimitar, composite longbow (+1 Str bonus), quiver, 20 arrows, 2 *sleep arrows, potion of cat's grace,* tanglefoot bag.

Hobgoblin Elite (8): Male and female hobgoblin Ftr 1; CR 1; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d10+2; hp 12; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +1; Atk +2 melee (1d8/19-20, longsword); Full Atk +3 melee (1d8/19-20, longsword) or +1 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger), or +4 ranged (1d8/x3, longbow); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +2, Move Silently +4, Ride +6; Dodge, Weapon Focus (longsword).

Possessions: hobgoblin armor (studded leather), small steel shield, masterwork longsword, dagger, masterwork longbow, quiver, 20 arrows.

Hobgoblin Warriors (12): Male and female hobgoblin War 1; see the *Monster Manual.* D

launch small stones great distances. The European version of this trebuchet becomes the ultimate siege weapon, a device of deadly power that can propel a 300-pound boulder more than 300 yards.

Edward "Longshanks" I of England is credited with the creation of a monstrous trebuchet known as the Warwolf. This device, which can blast a hole through a 5-foot-thick wall with a single impact, becomes known in later eras as "the atomic bomb of the medieval age."

The advent of the trebuchet spurs the development of improved fortifications. Many stories of the new weapon's capabilities filter home from the Crusades.

1,196 C.E.: Gunpowder Weaponry

The Chinese develop additional military uses for gunpowder. The first of these is a new weapon—a multichambered bamboo tube that is filled with gunpowder and shrapnel and affixed to an arrow. In mid-flight, the arrow becomes propelled by repeated gunpowder blasts (the first staged rockets). Eventually the missile explodes, sending deadly shrapnel into enemy ranks.

Shortly thereafter, the Chinese also learn to launch ignited casks of gunpowder at their enemies with siege engines.

1,200 C.E.: Plate Armor

The proliferation of deadly piercing weapons spurs the creation of armor that can better resist penetration. The addition of iron plates to common chain armor improves its protective qualities without significantly reducing mobility.

Initially, the chain hauberk of an elite soldier is covered with a gambeson, or quilted coat, that has iron plates sewn into it. The eventual addition of armored sleeves, leggings, and joints produces a full suit of plate armor, which slowly evolves into the famous full plate armor used centuries later.

Because of its weight and expense, few footsoldiers use full plate armor. Such protection becomes the province of mounted warriors, whose steeds can bear the brunt of the armor's weight.

Ecology of the Homunculus

Creatures Born of Alchemy and Hubris

By Joshua Stevens
Art by Pat Loboyko

"I have never given him reason to think me unfaithful. Alas, Jharun's jealousy knows no bounds. I loved him once, until he created that thing to watch over me. They have some dark rapport, him and his precious spy. It makes my skin crawl!

"Naming it 'Chaste' was the worst insult. It is my constant jailer. I dream sometimes that I will run away, but as the candle burns low at night, I know it watches me even in the dark, with its inhuman eyes.

"It goes outside my room and waits in the garden like some wild animal. But it is no animal, for the flowers bend away from it, while it lays in wait for me."

—Diary of Alesa Dain, shortly before her death

Poets say the eyes are the windows to the soul, windows that reveal the spark of humanity. Life recognizes life. Peering into the eyes of a homunculus is like searching for a reflection in a pool of tar; nothing is reflected. These soulless creatures feel no emotion, yet they move and react with such seeming ease; it is only natural to interact with them as if they were living beings.

These abominations are a defiant rejection of the natural order, born of man's arrogance and desire to master the divine. Neither living, dead, nor undead, homunculi are uniquely animated by a shadowy essence that makes them considerably more than mindless constructs but decidedly less than men. Through wondrous alchemy, they are

instilled with a burgeoning sense of identity that serves as a cheap pantomime to the human psyche. A homunculus' blossoming self-awareness, unfettered by the shackles of a soul, can become a great danger to its master.

Myths and Origins

Nearly 800 years ago, the court magician Seb-Gesiret served as a confidant to the Duke of Ismaen. Indeed, Seb-Gesiret had served in that capacity for many years and served the Duke's father before him. To such a powerful man, many things seemed possible that, perhaps, were best left undone.

In his early 60s, Seb-Gesiret fell in love with a local tanner's daughter, a maiden more than 40 years his junior. Forced into marriage by the Duke and her father, the girl and Seb-Gesiret quickly wed. The young bride became pregnant within weeks of marriage, and Seb-Gesiret was overjoyed.

His joy lasted just eight months. Seb-Gesiret's heart broke on the day the couple's daughter was born, her hair and eyes the mirror of the young, philandering Duke. Destroyed by this betrayal, Seb-Gesiret drove the harlot and bastard child from his tower into the street. Determined to have the child that was denied him, Seb-Gesiret stormed into the Duke's private chambers and demanded an apology from the Duke. Having been cuckolded made him dare much more, and he demanded strange changes at the palace.

Fearing the raving but powerful old man at the foot of his bed, the Duke agreed to Seb-Gesiret's odd demands. He granted the court magician complete privacy and a small share of the duchy's annual taxes to fund his secret research. Seb-Gesiret returned to his tower, where he remained for several years.

Servants glimpsed dark shapes moving about Seb-Gesiret's marble tower. Bubbling masses and noxious fumes wafted from its uppermost reaches. Strange minerals, flesh, and hide sculptures were sometimes found at the tower's base, pitched from above and usually smoking in the dawn light.

Obsessed, Seb-Gesiret continued his peculiar work until he mastered black alchemy. He made an alchemical distillation of the soul, fused with purest chaos-stuff, and he funneled it into a small statue of queer design. The lifeless clay doll mewled and coughed up an afterbirth of stinging, acrid chemicals and flailed its limbs spastically. Its ooze-encrusted eyes opened, and it beheld the world. Using an alembic as a surrogate womb, Seb-Gesiret had made an artificial man.

The tiny creature was weaned on Seb-Gesiret's blood, and it matured far faster than any natural child. It learned to read and write and even to fly clumsily with its grafted wings, all within days. Seb-Gesiret discovered that he and his manufactured child could also peer into each other's thoughts as easily as one stares through a clear glass window. In the first few weeks, the oddity aped his every movement and perched itself on his shoulder. Seb-Gesiret was delighted in what he had fabricated, until he realized that the strange little creature, for all its rapid maturation, stopped growing at a mere 18 inches tall. For all his sweat and heartbreak, Seb-Gesiret had crafted only a curious pygmy, not a true heir.

Seb-Gesiret lost interest and kept the thing locked in a birdcage for days on end. He spent long hours staring at the damned thing and often found himself thinking of the Duke's illegitimate daughter, wishing it were more like her. He let it out to fly, to get it out of his sight for a time when he could no longer bear to see it. This gave the homunculus more freedoms than one; it discovered that at a certain distance from the tower, Seb-Gesiret could not access its mind.

In time, the homunculus began to wonder about the world at large. It read Seb-Gesiret's tomes in secret and captured small creatures in traps. It dissected them in a grotesque quest for knowledge. Seb-Gesiret was often annoyed with the bloody messes his homunculus' curiosity wrought, but he did nothing to stop the creature as it left him be. Filled with an insatiable curiosity, the homunculus turned its attention to the one thing that Seb-Gesiret thought of most often—the Duke's illegitimate daughter. It wanted to know why Seb-Gesiret hated it so much and compared it to this girl so often, so it flew to the girl's window and found her sleeping.

The homunculus set about dissecting her in search of the piece that made her so special to Seb-Gesiret. The entire keep was awakened by the girl's screams, and when her chamber door was battered down, the guards saw a coal-eyed, horrific looking creature, fishing around inside the girl's intestines. The homunculus escaped to Seb-Gesiret's tower.

The Duke ordered his guards to burn Seb-Gesiret's tower to the ground, and the court magician barely escaped. He fled the duchy with the clothes on his back and the vile creature clinging to his flapping cloak. The Duke's riders were soon in pursuit. Hunted and desperate, Seb-Gesiret made his way to a small fishing village and hid in an abandoned hut. Daily, he cursed the creature for its wickedness, and finally, attacked it with a fiery poker from the hovel's hearth. To his surprise, when he stabbed the creature and burned it, a searing brand appeared on his own chest. Seb-Gesiret fell back in pain, and the creature quickly fled the hut.

When the Duke's guards cornered Seb-Gesiret several weeks later, his body was rigid in his flea-infested cot, and a taut lute string had cut across his throat. Neither the magician's homunculus nor murderer was ever found. The Duke was told that Seb-Gesiret's hut seemed strangely undisturbed, save for a stinking pool of ichor beneath his bed and corpse.

Seb-Gesiret's journals survived the destruction of his tower. His original formula has been altered over the centuries, and many purported variations exist though most of these lead to hideous failure. A true recipe for creating a homunculus is always difficult to obtain and is usually found as part of a collection of occult oddities. Mages wishing to recreate Seb-Gesiret's design

Table 1: Knowledge of the Homunculus

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (arcana) can learn more about homunculi. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

Knowledge (arcana) DC	Result
10	A homunculus is a small statuette animated by wizards and sorcerers to serve them. A homunculus is crafted from its master's own blood, and its master can see everything the homunculus sees.
14	Homunculi are unique constructs with the ability to reason and are animated by a chaotic essence. When homunculi bite creatures with a soul, a bit of this chaos-matter is transferred to the victim, putting it to sleep for a short time.
18	Because a homunculus and its master are inextricably intertwined, the death of the master usually causes the immediate destruction of the homunculus, which slowly melts into a puddle of muddy ichor. A homunculus' destruction also causes grievous injury to its master.
22	Some homunculi may conspire to destroy their masters if they are mistreated. Some have discovered a ritual that frees them of their master's control.
26	A ritual called the Rite of Thirds allows a homunculus to turn against its master.

must learn directly from one who has created such an aberration or must chase a long trail of lore and notebook ownership to track down a true recipe.

Physiology

Homunculi are crafted, never born. As such, they vary wildly in appearance, and their hair, skin, and form are influenced by the whims of their creators and the particular alchemical recipe used.

Homunculi can be created from stone, wood, pottery, bone, or even assembled pieces of dead creatures. The only constants for homunculi are that they must be between 1 and 2 feet tall and weigh between 1 and 8 pounds. Anything more and the alchemical recipe fails because there is too much gross matter to animate. Anything less and the homunculus simply cannot hold enough chaos-essence to arise abiogenetically.

Additionally, homunculi eyes never have pupils. Many commoners believe this is because homunculi are made without souls, and their inky black eyes are the proof of this. Lastly, homunculi can never speak, although they can make a host of guttural sounds.

Homunculi are constructs and share many basic traits with golems and the like. They lack internal organs but, unlike golems, bleed when injured, seeping viscous, black liquid from wounds. Homunculi cannot be healed with healing spells, but spells that mend objects or repair constructs erase their injuries. Homunculi do not regenerate lost limbs, but severed limbs can be reconnected with a mending spell. Any harm done to a homunculus is exacted simultaneously upon its master with the same type and location of injury (the maximum damage to the creator is equal to the homunculus' total HD).

When created, a homunculus must be fed a few drops of its master's blood every day for one week. Thereafter, a homunculus may eat anything it wishes or nothing at all without any effect, but the only foodstuff that sates its strange hunger is its master's blood. If weaned from its master's blood, a homunculus will "live" for exactly 6 years, 6 months, and 6 days from the time of their last blood-nursing. In the final six days of its life, a homunculus ages rapidly, while its master likewise ages 1 year for each of these final six days. On the sixth day, the homunculus' body deflates, leaving only a shriveled husk with no further ill effects for its creator.

The entropic essence that gives a semblance of life to a homunculus has an odd effect if injected into a creature with a soul. This entropic essence wells up within all homunculi, and it forms a dark, viscous liquid akin to saliva in their mouths. They can transmit it to a victim with their bite, at which time the essence momentarily suppresses the bitten creature's soul, dampening its humors and fire. This suppression causes a catatonic state akin to sleep for several minutes.

Psychology and Society

At creation, a homunculus' personality is a cross between a housecat and a chimpanzee: they are clever and prone to mischief and killing, and they possess a fondness for stalking mice and rats. A homunculus always retains these mannerisms, but this is where any comparison to natural creatures ends.

Within mere days of its "birth," a homunculus can walk, fly, think, and reason. It learns at a preternatural rate and masters skills like reading, writing, and menial tasks seemingly overnight. In these formative days, a homunculus watches its creator very closely and mimics nearly everything he does. After one week, a homunculus turns its single-minded focus from its creator to the world at large and asks an endless string of questions. The telepathic bond between a homunculus and its master cuts both ways, and their constant mental probing is not limited to their master's waking hours. While its master sleeps, a homunculus is fond of delving into its master's subconscious and inspecting long-forgotten memories.

After a few weeks, a homunculus establishes an identity apart from its master's, a mishmash of childlike wonderment and devious cunning. While

a homunculus shares the same basic alignment as its creator, the transparent nature of its identity is always clear. Homunculi never develop morals, and they only come to separate what is right from wrong in a cold and purely logical fashion.

After many trial and error experiences, a homunculus will learn that something is wrong, but it never feels any guilt for its actions. Many will perform indecent acts to sate their curiosity. Lacking true emotions, a homunculus learns roughly how to interact with others, but it is prone to asking its master about inappropriate and sensitive matters through its mental link.

Homunculi by their nature are solitary creatures, save for their symbiotic relationship with their creator, and they never develop any sense of community. These creatures are unnatural in virtually every sense, and most beings feel intensely uneasy around them. Animals find them off-putting and often either attack a homunculus or flee from it.

Conversely, homunculi are quite interested in living creatures and study them closely whenever an opportunity presents itself. On the rare occasion when one homunculus meets another, something very peculiar occurs—the two abominations completely ignore one another. No amount of manipulation changes this strange relationship, for they simply cannot see, hear, or feel one another.

Homunculus Feats

Not all homunculi are the same; each recipe yields variation. Witch's Mark is a feat for homunculus creators, the others are for their creations.

Witch's Mark [General]
You regularly feed your homunculus your own blood, and you have developed an incredibly strong bond with it. You grow a scar on a part of your body of your choosing, which resembles an extra nipple. This scar is known as a "witch's mark," and it is where your homunculus nurses from.

Prerequisites: Must have created a homunculus

Benefit: Your homunculus now stays in contact with you to a range of 3,000 feet. It cannot be dominated (see below), will never turn against you, and gains 10 bonus hit points.

Physical Variant [Monster]
Your homunculus has unusual characteristics.

Prerequisites: Homunculus, can only be taken when created

Benefit: Choose one characteristic from the following list:

Cyclopean: The creature has a large central eye that grants superior low-light vision and can see three times as far as a human can in dim light. Poor depth perception means attack rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

Flightless: The homunculus cannot fly but gains both a climb speed of 40 ft. and a +2 bonus to Strength.

Gaping Maw: An oversized mouth grants the Swallow Whole ability and allows the homunculus to swallow creatures of the same size or smaller. A swallowed creature takes 1d4-1 damage per round. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 5 points of damage (against same AC). If the creature swallowed is the same size as the homunculus, it cannot fly until the creature has escaped or been devoured.

If the creature is one size smaller, the homunculus can only fly at half speed. A homunculus may swallow a maximum of one creature its size, two creatures one size smaller, or 4 creatures two sizes smaller, before it must regurgitate the waste. This process takes 1d6+2 rounds. During this time, the homunculus is denied its Dexterity bonus to its AC.

Multiple Arms: With four arms, the homunculus gains +4 to grapple checks, but its wings are smaller and thinner, and it can glide but not fly. Its wings negate any falling damage, and it can glide 25 horizontal feet for every 5 feet of falling, at a speed of 50 ft.

Oversized Arms: Long arms increase its reach to 5 ft., but its body is spindly, and the homunculus' attack rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

Scorpion's Tail: A large stinger injects poison (instead of the bite) for 1d4 damage, DC 15. However, the large tail reduces fly speed to 30 ft.

Special: Taking the Physical Variant feat replaces Lightning Reflexes for the homunculus; the DC for Craft (pottery) or Craft (sculpting) checks is raised to 13.

Alchemical Variant [Monster]
The variant recipe used in construction has granted your homunculus unusual abilities.

Prerequisites: Homunculus, at least 4 HD, can only be taken when created.

Benefit: Choose one ability from the following list:

Acidic Spittle: The homunculus can spit acid (3/day) in a 20 ft. line against a single target as a ranged touch attack, causing 1d4 acid damage the first round and 2 points of acid damage the following round unless neutralized. The spell *acid arrow* must be cast during the creation.

Ashen Lung: The homunculus can breathe a cloud of thick coal dust (3/day). The effects are identical to *obscuring mist* at a CL equal to the homunculus's HD.

Blind Eye: The homunculus gains *invisibility* at will for 10 rounds +1 round per HD per day.

Dense Hide: The homunculus gains a +2 natural armor bonus to AC. This requires the creator to cast *barkskin* during creation.

Dire Growth: The homunculus grows to Medium size for 10 rounds +1 round per HD, gained from casting *enlarge* during creation.

Screech: The homunculus can emit a piercing scream in a 15 ft. cone (3/day) that causes 1d4 sonic damage (2d4 damage to crystal, glass, ceramic, or porcelain) and deafens for 1d4 rounds. Gained from casting *shatter* during creation.

Special: This feat adds 2,000 gp to the homunculus' creation costs, and the ability is treated as a spell-like ability. In addition, the DC for Craft (pottery) or (sculpting) checks made at creation is raised to 15.

Flaws in the Design

Fabricating a homunculus is never easy. Even with a true recipe and a well-equipped laboratory, the products of this magecraft are never more than a handbreadth from ruin. The smallest impurity in the occult materials required—clay, ashes, mandrake root, spring water, and blood—can destroy the entire effort. Moreover, the statuette used as the frame for the alchemical bindings must be free of flaws, cracks, and abrasions. Any break in the surface of the figure allows the chaos-essence to gush out violently, destroying the model with a torrent of inhuman screams.

Not all flawed homunculi are destroyed at creation. If the DC check fails but is within 2 points of success, the homunculus awakens and appears normal, but it soon attempts to murder its master. Flawed homunculi and those that have been mistreated or neglected often conspire against their masters.

The bond shared between them often makes it impossible for them to emancipate themselves. The Rite of Thirds allows a homunculus to either achieve independence or be bound by another.

The Rite of Thirds is based on the principal that a homunculus comprises three parts: man, earth, and chaos-matter. By subverting these forces, a homunculus may become independent or dominated by another.

Regardless, the Rite of Thirds requires at least three days to complete. The homunculus must convince its master to consume a pint of its entropic essence over three days. On the fourth day, the homunculus must choose a name for itself, scrawl this name in its master's blood on parchment, and consume it. Finally, someone must cast the spell *false life* on the homunculus, at which time it becomes independent of its master.

A freed homunculus lives until destroyed, without fear of its former master's death. Due to the nature of its creation, though, the mental link between a homunculus and its former master remains whenever they are close. Only after a homunculus becomes independent may it attain class levels.

To bind a homunculus, the binder must separate the homunculus and its master for three days. On the fourth day, the homunculus must consume three drops of the binder's blood. The binder must then carve his or her name into an area of the Homunculus that does not usually see daylight, using alchemical reagents worth half of the homunculus' creation costs. The armpit, inside the mouth, and bottoms of feet are all popular areas. Finally, the binder must cast *mirror image* and have his image pass through the homunculus.

When the rite is complete, the homunculus makes a Will save opposed by the binder's Will save. If it fails its save, the binder is treated in all ways as its master. If the original master reestablishes a mental link with the homunculus before the rite is completed, the homunculus uses its original master's Will save. The homunculus retains its telepathic link with its original master, but the binder is secretly privy to this shared bond when all three parties are within telepathic range. The original master can discover this eavesdropping by the same means as discovering scrying through a crystal ball.

History of the Homunculus

"I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion."

—Frankenstein, Mary Shelley

The term *homunculus* is derived from Latin, meaning "little man." The concept of a homunculus was first attributed to the famed Swiss alchemist Paracelsus, who in the early 16th century claimed that he had created an artificial human being that he referred to as "the Homunculus." The creature reputedly stood a mere 12 inches tall and was created to serve Paracelsus. As myth has it however, the homunculus soon turned on Paracelsus and ran away. Tales of the homunculus also occasionally appear in Eastern European folklore, described as a construct made from natural materials such as dirt, roots, insects, feces, blood, and any number of other fetishes.

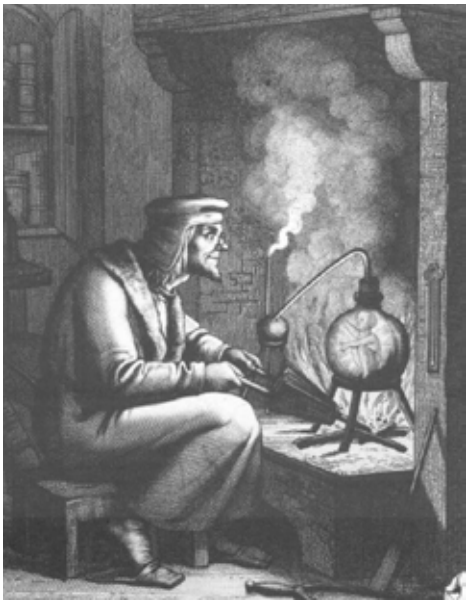
According to legend, there are three ways to create a homunculus. The first method usied a bag of bones, sperm, skin fragments, and hair from any animal for which the homunculus was to be a hybrid. These materials were sealed hermetically in a jar or animal bladder, magnetized, and laid in the ground near horse manure for 40 days, at which point a tiny homunculus would emerge, transparent and without a body. The homunculus then fed daily on human blood and maintained a constant temperature for a period of 40 weeks, after which it grew into a childlike creature (though never larger than 18 inches tall). The homunculus, reputedly, could then be raised and educated like any other child, until it matured and could take care of itself.

A second method says that the fabled mandrake root grows only from the semen ejaculated by hanged men during their final convulsive spasms before death. The root should be picked before dawn on a Friday morning by a black dog, then washed and nourished with milk and honey (or, in some prescriptions, blood), where it would slowly grow into a miniature creature that would resemble the mandrake and protect its creator.

Good-Aligned Homunculi

Though the ecology presented here assumes that most homunculi are trouble-making and even dangerous creatures, the creature may have any alignment. This is largely determined by its maker, though Good-aligned alchemists and wizards are perhaps less likely to create such a servant than evil ones.

The tricks and wiles of such homunculi are more gentle, restricted to teasing cats or painting dogs with ink, but a degree of independence and mischief seems to be a part of all homunculi, perhaps owing to the chaos-matter that animates them.



Building on the work of Paracelsus, Dr. David Christianus taught at the University of Giessen in the 18th century. He wrote that a homunculus could be created by taking an egg laid by a black hen, making a small hole in its shell, and removing a bean-sized portion of the egg white and substituting human sperm. The egg thereafter had to be sealed with virgin parchment, buried in manure on the first day of the March lunar cycle, and in 30 days, a homunculus would be born. This homunculus would protect its creator in exchange for a steady diet of lavender seeds and earthworms.

Interestingly, the German alchemist Johann Konrad Dippel, who lived in Castle Frankenstein and who is widely reputed to be the inspiration for Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, was a student of Dr. Christianus at the University of Geissen. Additionally, the character Dr. Septimus Pretorius in the movie *The Bride of Frankenstein* grew small homunculi from "seeds" and kept them trapped in jars.

The Murderous Homunculus: Qesh

Qesh was constructed by Father Craedus after a bloody battle at Trager's Pass had left many dead, and the rotting bodies had spread the plague to the nearby town. Father Craedus was to be sent there to erect a temple and to aid the villagers. Shortly before leaving, Father Craedus' order confiscated a bag of devouring and Father Craedus was tasked with destroying it.

Rather than destroy an implement with obvious practical uses, Father Craedus put the item to use helping the people of Trager's Pass with the many diseased corpses. To this end, he created a homunculus and hid the *bag of devouring* in the thing's stomach. Craedus' homunculus resembled a small cherub, so as not to scare anyone with its intended gruesome purpose. Its mouth was specially constructed to appear two sizes too small, in a tiny "o" shape, but the inside of its mouth was lined with hundreds of razor-sharp monkfish teeth. Its entire chest cavity, chin, and throat formed a set of interlocking flaps that opened into an overlarge mouth to help the creature devour the many unburied corpses.

The homunculus set to devouring the dead at Craedus' command, and the villagers were overjoyed as the plague began to subside. Knowing nothing about the *bag of devouring*, Craedus had no idea of the danger he courted. The constant influx of rotting bodies awakened the slumbering beast connected to the other side of the bag in the cherub's stomach, and the beast took interest in this orifice that was suddenly providing it more sustenance than all of its other bag mouths combined. Probing outward, the devourer discovered Craedus' homunculus and dominated it using the Rite of Thirds. Soon, Craedus' cherub began exhibiting strange and violent behaviors and adopted the alien moniker, "Qesh."

After several weeks of increasingly deviant behavior, Father Craedus was awakened one night to a rending pain in his leg and saw Qesh, mouth agape, swallowing his leg. All went black a few moments later as Qesh's poison went to work in his veins. By daybreak, not a scrap remained of Father Craedus.

Qesh is now frequently forced to devour creatures to sate its new master's hunger, leaving a trail of mysterious disappearances in his wake. Recently, after devouring a loving farming family that had taken him in, Qesh lost his left hand to the desperate flailing of a farmer's cleaver. Seizing a rusty meat hook from the barn and jamming it into the oozing stump, Qesh fled into the night.

Qesh can be encountered almost anywhere, and few suspect something that stands 2 feet in height, with straw blonde hair, rosey cheeks, porcelain skin and the wings of a swan, to be as devious as it is. Qesh communicates in pleasant coos and whistles, and if its rusty hook-hand is inspected, it pretends sadness and embarrassment. Qesh prefers to surprise creatures, and usually waits to use dire growth and devour them until they are alone and defenseless.

Qesh **CR 3**
Advanced homunculus
NE Tiny construct
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, Listen +5, Spot +5
Languages (understood, but not spoken aloud) Common
AC 16 (14), touch 16 (12), flat-footed 13 (11)
Hp 48 (6d10)
Fort +2, Ref +5 (+3), Will +3
Spd 20 ft. (30 ft.), fly 50 ft. (good)
Melee +3 hook (1d3-1/x2) or
+3 bite (1d4-1 plus poison) or
+3 hook and +1 bite
When medium-sized, Qesh attacks as follows:
Atk +7 hook (1d6+3/x2), or
+7 bite (1d8+3 plus poison), or
+7 hook and +5 bite
Base Atk +4; **Grp** -5 (+7)
Atk Options bite (with poison), dire growth, hook hand, swallow whole,
Spell-Like Abilities
16 rounds per day, Qesh may use dire growth to become a medium-sized creature. (Parentheses show Qesh's statistics using dire growth.)
Abilities Str 8 (16), Dex 16 (12), Con —, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 7
SA poison (DC 13; sleep 1 minute/5d6 minutes), swallow whole
SQ construct traits
Feats Alchemical Variant (dire growth), Physical Variant (gaping maw)
Skills Bluff +2, Hide +15 (+7), Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +5
Possessions *bag of devouring, +1 ring of protection,* rusty meat hook; 96 gp; small diamond worth 340 gp.

The Care and Feeding of Homonculi

by Lloyd Brown III

illustrated by Susan Van Camp

WIZARDS ARE LONERS BY NATURE. Whether young or old, they spend their time studying to become more powerful, learning better spells, and enchanting potent items. They rarely have time for making close friends.

Wizards, as always, have learned to compensate. Many of them keep pets. A dog or cat keeps the tower from being so empty and gives its owner years of devotion and affection. Some wizards go one step further and conjure a familiar with whom they share a special bond. Fear of harm—or even death—in the event of the familiar's death causes many wizards to reconsider this option.

A homonculous is better than a familiar in that the physical trauma inflicted on the master when the creature dies is not as terrible. The homonculous has other advantages, as well. For many wizards, the homonculous is a superior companion.

What is a Homonculous?

A homonculous, often called simply a "companion" by those who have one, is a tiny creature created by a wizard and an alchemist together. A homonculous is vaguely humanoid, with small bat-like wings, greenish scaly skin, and a mouthful of pointy teeth. It stands 18 inches tall and has a lithe, agile body. A full description appears on page 192 of the *MONSTROUS MANUAL®* tome.

The homonculous is most often employed as a spy. Its wings enable it to travel quickly and to escape dangerous situations. If one is caught, its bite can deliver a potent sleep venom that can incapacitate an enemy long enough to allow escape.

Tiny hands allow the companion to serve as a lab assistant, to clean up, or to perform miscellaneous chores around the tower. Although they cannot speak, homonculi can serve as messengers by carrying scrolls or items enchanted with *magic mouth* spells. Aside from these common uses, the tasks to which homonculi are set are as diverse as the wizards who create them.

Creating a Homonculous

Usually a homonculous is created by a wizard and alchemist working together. The wizard first provides a pint of his own blood, which the alchemist uses to form the creature's base. The donated blood must be used within six weeks, usually long enough for the procedure to be completed. The alchemist's services cost 500 gp per week for 1d4 weeks. After the alchemist has finished, the base is brought back to the wizard, who must cast certain spells on the formula within one week of finishing the base formula. *Wizard eye* establishes the bond between the creator and companion, *mirror image* creates a single image that superimposes itself over the base, giving it its roughly humanoid shape, and mending attempts to "repair" the creator's blood, which has since been replaced by natural means, resulting in the creation of an entirely new form—the homonculous.

If the creator (always the wizard who provides the blood and casts the spells, never another character who might provide help) is also an alchemist, he may perform all the steps alone. In this case, the cost is reduced by 25%. The formula for creating homonculi is not widely known, so the creator might need to find another alchemist to teach it to him.

If the creator (or novice alchemist) attempts to learn the procedure on his own, he must have the alchemy nonweapon proficiency and can discover the technique on a successful proficiency check at -4. If his research is successful, the wizard learns the formula after spending 2d4 weeks at a cost of 200 gp per week. An unsuccessful check means that, after 1d4 weeks, the would-be creator realizes that he is on the wrong path and may start over with another check.

Once this knowledge is learned, the process can be repeated as often as desired or taught to others. Once the creator (or alchemist) knows how to make a homonculous, he can research a formula for any of the different companions described later in only 1d6 weeks at the same cost as the original formula (200 gp

The Bond

The mental link between the wizard and his companion is both the most valuable and the most dangerous aspect of having a homonculous. The link allows the creator to control and learn information from the companion. The same link is also the source of great physical and psychic trauma should the homonculous be killed.

When the homonculous is first created, both creator and companion feel or hear a slight tingling, like the almost imperceptible hum of distant machinery. A few individuals report having difficulty sleeping for the first night or two while they become accustomed to this feeling but it soon becomes natural, even welcome. For the companion, this feeling is much more intense, causing great discomfort if the hum is removed, which happens when the link is extended beyond range or when the creator and companion are separated by dimensional or planar barriers. The homonculous will do anything to have the link restored.

Most commonly, the creator and companion share this bond in a passive mode. This establishes the link that damages the creator if the homonculous is killed (and destroys the homonculous upon the creator's death), forces the homonculous to obey any orders, and gives the homonculous the Intelligence, knowledge, and saving throws of its creator.

At will, the creator can call upon the active mode of the link, which allows him to control the movement of the companion, as well as see through its eyes and hear through its ears. The companion never wishes to refuse an active link and has no power to do so, even if charmed. A creator who utilizes the active link must concentrate as if casting a spell. The creator cannot move his own body while controlling the homonculous, nor can he dodge attacks, use magical items, or perform any action not normally available to a character who is casting a spell. Any successful attack on the creator forces the link to become passive, and the creator must re-establish an active link if he wishes to use it again.

In either case—active or passive—the effects of the death of one affects the other normally. If the homonculous dies, the creator suffers 2d10 hp damage. If the DM allows this damage to be reduced by any form of magic (which is not recommended), the damage should be considered necromantic in nature. The death of the wizard usually results in the immediate dissolution of the homonculous.

The bite of the axonan causes hideous dreams.

Multiple Homonculi

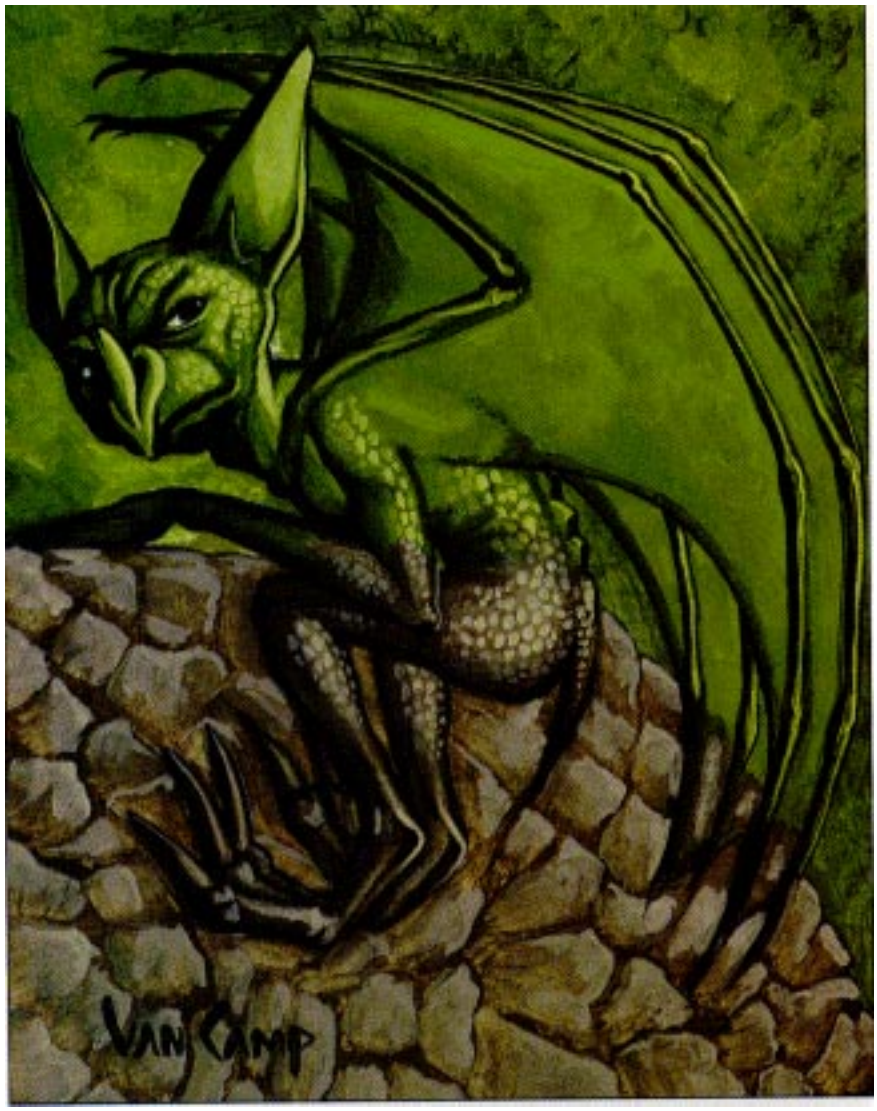
Undoubtedly, some wizard (probably a wild mage) will conclude that if one is good, two are better. Creating more than one homonculous can have disastrous effects. The first to come to mind is the danger to the creator should more than one be killed at the same time or over a brief period of time. Suffering 2d10 hp damage can hurt even high-level creators. Twice or three times as much damage can be fatal to any wizard.

The companions themselves also feel the blow of another homonculous linked to the same creator. In the event that one is killed, each companion linked to the creator suffers damage equal to half that suffered by the creator (1d10 hp), so it is entirely possible, if not probable, that the death of one could very well cause the death of everyone sharing the same bond.

Although some strong wizards have taken this chance, they report that the homonculi work poorly together. Each companion tries to be the center of attention. Pranks must be tolerated, fights arbitrated, and territories clearly marked if one wishes to house more than one companion.

Other Spellcasters and Homonculi

Because the homonculous link connects the life force of the creator and his companion, wizards without a



The bolan is the nearest cousin of the "standard" homonculous.

living spirit—specifically undead—are unable to create a homonculous, even if they are somehow capable of providing the blood for the creature's base. Undead might have many other special servants, including slaves of their own kind, but they may not have homonculi. The one exception to this rule is a lich who, while living, has a homonculous. The process of becoming a lich, while it technically "kills" the wizard, allows the homonculous a chance to survive. The percentage chance that the homonculous lives is equal to four times the wizard's level. Thus, the homonculous of an 18th-level wizard who undergoes the process of becoming a lich has a 72 percent chance of surviving the ordeal.

Bards and other characters who can cast the necessary spells are unable to make a homonculous. The prevailing theory is that the ability to create and control a homonculous is a class-related ability, similar to the use of certain magical items. There have been attempts by bards and others, but these attempts invariably fail, although some few such homonculi have lived for several minutes before collapsing into a vile gel. Dual-classed and multi-classed wizards can make and use a homonculous, although dual-classed characters might suffer an experience point setback (see Dual-Classed Characters in Chapter 3 of the *Player's Handbook).*

While other creatures and character classes can use wizard spells or share some of the abilities of a wizard, the creation and use of a homonculous seems to be truly unique to them. No documented cases of non-wizards with a homonculous companion have been discovered. No restrictions according to race, however, seem to exist. A githyanki mage, for example, is capable of having a homonculous.

Free-Willed Homonculi

The mystery of the free-willed homonculous has been debated for years. When a companion's creator dies of old age, the homonculous does not liquefy immediately but returns to the creator's body for 1d3 turns, presumably to mourn. The creature is not actually free-willed at this point, as it is still devoted to its creator. No homonculous ever seen in this state has ever acted otherwise.

If a creator is placed into any form of suspended animation but is not dead, the homonculous stays alive, as nearby as possible. These conditions include petrification and the wizard spells *feign death, sequester, temporal stasis,* and *imprisonment.* In the case of intentional use of these spells, the companion is intelligent enough to aid in the deception by staying out of sight so as not to give away the ruse (an enemy who sees a live homonculous would know that the wizard using *feign death* is not really dead).

If the creator is petrified, his end of the mental link is blocked off. From the companion's viewpoint, the effect is the same as if the creator were on another plane. The homonculous, no matter how near, feels that the link is broken and wishes it restored. It sits at the feet of the creator, rests on a shoulder, or climbs into a crook of an arm until the creator is restored to flesh.

In any case where the bond between creator and companion is severed for more than a week, the effects begin to show on the creature. Since its life force is dependent on the creator, it suffers reductions in life force when it cannot be renewed regularly. For every week the creator is on another plane or petrified, the companion must make a System Shock roll or have its maximum hit points reduced by 1d4. These hit points are restored instantly when the creator returns and the bond is restored.

Otherwise, the homonculous can take this slow ebbing of his energy for only a short while. After eight weeks, if the homonculous is still alive, the bond is permanently broken and the homonculous is free to act as it wishes. Its hit points begin to return one per day as the homonculous develops its

own life force, free from the creator's yoke. Depending on the companion's alignment and general treatment by its creator, it might attempt to restore or find the creator.

A free-willed homonculous still retains its existing knowledge and proficiencies. By preference and long association, the homonculous often seeks out a wizard, to whom it acts as an assistant and helper, although without the comforting bond. The new wizard does not gain the ability to use the homonculous' senses and does not suffer damage if it dies, but he still gains a valuable, trusted companion.

Other homonculi become thieves, join sprite tribes, explore the world, or tend crops and orchards, or anything else, according to their alignment and personality. The free-willed homonculous could even be played by the creator's player until his character has recovered from whatever unpleasant plight cancelled the bond.

Ability Scores

The homonculous is a small creature, and some of its physical abilities suffer accordingly, especially Strength. The homonculous' Strength is determined by rolling 1d3+3. Its Dexterity is excellent, however, as with many creatures its size (1d8+10). Its Constitution is rolled with 3d6, with bonuses or penalties determined normally. In cases where the homonculous cannot travel as long as the creator, it normally rests on a shoulder or saddle somewhere.

The homonculous' strong point is its Intelligence. The creature's Intelligence is equal to that of its creator, but the creature's Wisdom is often that of a child, determined randomly on 3d4 but never higher than the creator's score. Fortunately, the homonculous learns rapidly from experience.

For some reason, it seems difficult to create an aesthetically pleasing homonculous. Perhaps no alchemist so far has also possessed any artistic skill. Maybe the mix of vile components can only be refined so far. Their lack of speech keeps them from swaying others to favor with eloquence. These traits, along with a magical bond that makes their creator the most important thing in the world, give the homonculous a low Charisma rating. For these creatures, Charisma is determined on 2d4.

The wingless carian is both dextrous and curious.

Proficiencies

The companion has all of the knowledge of the creator, including proficiencies, although the Strength-based proficiencies suffer from the homonculous' weakness. Academic skills such as reading ancient history, or herbalism are more appropriate for homonculi and can be used immediately to full effect.

This duplication of proficiencies is one of the companion's main benefits for the wizard. The spy can identify cast spells or detect the presence of magic in an item if the creator has the spellcraft proficiency. If the creator can read and write, the companion can freely trade notes, minimizing the disadvantage of being mute.

Other knowledge includes general class knowledge available to the creator. The companion can recognize a *glitterdust* spell, is able to gather material components, and easily fetches (small) research books from the library. Multi-classed creators might ask their companions to search a door for traps, identify a holy symbol, or judge the condition of a suit of armor, as their other class skills allow.

Tool Use

Using human-sized tools gives these small creatures a penalty to their chance of success. A -15% penalty should apply to any chance of success or a -3 proficiency check per size difference. Since homonculi are Tiny, using human tools gives them a -6 penalty on whatever task they are attempting.

If capable of performing the task, certain jobs take longer to complete. An 18"-tall person laying bricks, for

The chorasmian has eyesight three times keener than that of a human being.

example, takes a very long time to make a house. If the task is dependent on Dexterity but size helps expedite the chore, time needed should be doubled. If the task requires strength and stamina, the time needed should be trebled or quadrupled.

On the other hand, especially fine sewing work, writing, or engraving might be performed better by a homonculous than by a human. Companions engaged in these tasks might use the appropriate proficiency even more skillfully than their creator, possibly using their skill at +1 or +2.

Other Skills

Where necessary, the DM should use its creator's standard for miscellaneous abilities that a homonculous might call upon. Its chance to climb walls, for example should be 40%, the same as an untrained human. Its chance to hear noise, surprise, and find secret doors, should all be the same as the creator's. Some specific variations have bonuses or penalties to these abilities, and these exceptions are clearly noted.

Care of a Companion

Although the *Monstrous Manual* book states that homonculi perch wherever they can, this treatment is not seemly for a creature of such intelligence. The homonculous has the same tastes as the creator, including standards of living. A creator's treatment of its companion is a matter of self respect. Instead of treating a homonculous as a pet, the creator should treat it as it is: a companion.

While an evil or uncaring creator might order the homonculous to sleep on the floor and give it no space to call its own, even the most insensitive of creators generally give the companion its own place to sleep. At the bare minimum, a comfortable bed and shelter are required. A generous creator gives his companion its own room, complete with scaled-down furniture, some toys or games, and a private door.

A separate housing of some sort serves another purpose as well. While a spot on the floor might be protected somehow, the wizard can easily cast *wizard lock* on the companion's 2'-high door, *fire trap* the secret door that allows for easy exit, and place a *permanent illusion* (about which the companion naturally knows) over the whole thing. Keeping the companion safe from any harm also protects the wizard.

Similarly, throwing scraps to a dog is one matter, but giving leftovers to a companion who shares your deepest secrets is demeaning, to say the least. The homonculous should have its own food prepared for it, which is simply a matter of preparing slightly more than the creator himself normally eats. The companion needs only a small amount of food; a couple of coppers a day should make the difference in price, and the extra time consumed is negligible.

Clothing is another matter of which some wizards are indifferent. Since the companion is a creation, many argue that clothing is unnecessary. The homonculous, the argument goes, is just a tool, and nobody bothers to clothe a hammer or a pick.

Again, the companion's high Intelligence and similarities to its creator should be considered. The homonculous might very well make its own clothes out of materials at hand if none are offered. Rather than let it walk around in a pair of sewn leaves or a giant ratskin cloak, the creator should make some attempt to provide suitable clothing. PC homonculous owners can become quite creative if they wish, making tiny outfits that mimic their own clothing. They might also dress the homonculous up in a jester's suit, deck him out to mock a buffoonish noble, or put him in clothes that look like an enemy's garb to deceive a third party. Care should be taken that any clothes allow for the creature's wings and don't impair movement.

The companion should also be allowed reasonable time for rest and sleep. Since it can't use magic of its own, the homonculous could be allowed to sleep in during the mornings, when wizards generally memorize their spells. Also, when traveling, the homonculous might need to fly occasionally to keep up with the rest of the party, since their walking movement rate is less than a human's. Rest breaks should be planned, or the homonculous should be allowed to ride a pack animal or sit with a mounted character. Most can even sit on someone's shoulder.

Familiar vs. Homonculous

Debates rage about the relative merits of familiars and homonculi. While a wizard may have both, few actually do. In combat, the homonculous is undoubtedly superior. Although hit points and armor class are comparable for most levels, the companion's sleep venom can affect enemies of any level and for a substantial amount of time.

Defensively, the homonculous always gains the creator's saving throws; the familiar receives this benefit only when in direct contact. Although the cost of losing a homonculous might be as little as 2 hp (which can be healed easily), losing a familiar always costs a point of Constitution, which is extremely difficult to replace—and no wizard has Constitution to spare.

At the other extreme, the loss of a homonculous can cost the creator 20 hp, which is admittedly high, but wizards 8th level or higher are likely to have that much when at full health. Statistically, wizards as low as 4th level could survive maximum damage if they have a bonus to hit points for high constitution, are dual-classed or multiclassed, or have their hit points enhanced through priestly magic (like an *aid* spell). The death of a familiar can kill a wizard, regardless of level, hit points, or protection.

The familiar can be slightly more effective at covert observation of enemies, because it looks like a normal animal and might be ignored. The homonculous, on the other hand, with the creator's Intelligence makes far better deductions about what it sees and hears. The familiar's ability to relay information to the wizard is also seriously inferior to that of a homonculous, lessening its overall usefulness as a spy.

A *water breathing* spell gives the gendrasian both gills and a love of swimming.

Those who prefer familiars point out that control range is a mile, while the homonculous can only be controlled up to 480 yards, or about a quarter of a mile. Advocates of homonculi point out that at anything over about 200 yards, the companion is out of an adventuring party's protective umbrella of missile fire and spells anyway. Underground or indoors, the companion is rarely more than a few yards away from the creator.

While the wizards themselves might argue bitterly about which is better, those who both create a homonculous and conjure a familiar sometimes find that the homonculous does not regard the familiar with any animosity at all. In fact, it often takes on the responsibility of taking care of the familiar, adopting it as its own pet. A wizard's companion, moreover, is likely to be the only person other than the wizard himself who can gain the complete trust of the familiar. As for each other, the familiar knows instinctively and the homonculous knows through reason that the death of either one can kill the wizard on whom they are both dependent.

The Other Homonculi

In addition to the standard homonculous, different varieties have been created by wizards who experimented with nonstandard alchemical bases. These changes in materials may include teeth or bones from the creator (which, ideally, are regenerated with magic), the blood of other creatures, or rare and dangerous acids and poisons. A slight addition or variation to the

New Spell: Chameleon

(Illusion/Phantasm)
Level: 1
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M
Duration: 2 rounds/level
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: Creature touched
Saving Throw: None

This spell alters the coloration of the recipient to match that of the surrounding background. When moving through areas where the background changes gradually (such as stepping from the edge of a forest to a green field), the coloration changes automatically. When the background changes abruptly (from forest to gray stone wall), one round is required to effect the change in coloration. The coloration allows the character to blend in with his surroundings, making him difficult to stop and attack. At ranges greater than 100 yards, the affected character cannot be spotted (although he can be seen if pointed out by another standing closer). At closer ranges, the character is treated as if he had a 20% chance to hide in shadows, although he is not required to remain still. In addition, characters who can hide in shadows gain a bonus of 20% to their normal chance of success if they remain still. Missile weapons suffer a -4 penalty on their chances to hit a character affected by a chameleon spell.

The material component for this spell is the shed skin of a small lizard.

standard spell requirements is also necessary, usually something as subtle as the addition of a single spell. Neither of these elements works without the other—alchemy and magic are both required.

Most of the skills of the different homonculi seem to come at the expense of the potent sleep venom possessed by the common version. These variations have other abilities, however, which make them just as useful. Although each individual has the major personality traits of their creator, a homonculous has its own quirks and tendencies. While they can certainly be commanded to act differently, their natural behavior sometimes manifests on embarrassing or untimely occasions.

Axonan

The axonan arose thanks to the spell *ESP.* Their skin is smooth, unscaled, and can appear mauve, ecru, or milky white. Their eyes are flat and black, their heads round, and their mouths set low on their skulls. The loose skin on either side of the mouth segues into a fold that looks like a short tentacle, making their appearance nearly as bizarre as the mervan. Their wings are eerily silent and fold nearly perfectly into their back.

Combat: The venom of the axonan causes sleep but for a much shorter duration than normal—only 1d6 rounds. While the target is asleep, however, it is subjected to horrifying dreams that have been likened to the attack of a *phantasmal killer* or *nightmare* spell. Anyone bitten awakens instantly when the sleep is fought off but believes himself wounded of 25% of his maximum hit points from the imaginary ordeal. If the enemy is wounded for real (either before or after the bite venom takes effect) and believes himself reduced to 0 hit points (and actually has hit points remaining), he falls unconscious for a full hour. After one hour has passed, the victim has had a chance to review the dream sequence mentally and realize its nature, thereby "recovering" the lost hit points.

Personality: The axonan shares the closest mental link with its creator. For short periods of time (1d6 turns) it is willing to move beyond the normal range of telepathy, extending the link with which it and its creator can communicate. It does not (or can not) go beyond telepathic range more than once per day. During this period of time, should the homonculous be killed, the creator takes an additional 1d6 hp damage because he is more closely attuned to the axonan. Conversely, the axonan seems to be the least unnerved by having its link severed. Although it follows the same habits as other homonculi in seeking to restore the link, its behavior is much less frantic and desperate.

Bolan

The most common of the variant companion is made by including the spell *chameleon* (from the *Oriental Adventures* rules, see sidebar) to the basic formula. PCs who wish to use this formula must research it or physically search for a copy of the spell. This close cousin to the standard homonculous is naturally a light brown in color but can camouflage itself almost perfectly in any natural surroundings, whether forest, desert, or underground. The bolan is otherwise similar in appearance and abilities to those described in the *Monstrous Manual* tome.

Combat: When concealed, they have a 7 in 10 chance of surprising opponents and are themselves surprised only on a 1. Their sense of sight is normal for those of its kind, but their hearing is exceptional. Bolans have a 75% chance to hear noises others would miss. When possible, they initiate combat by surprise, using their camouflage cleverly. Like most ambushers, they do not remain in close contact with an enemy. The Bolans' sleep bite venom is weaker than normal, causing the victim to be slowed for normal duration (5d6 rounds).

Personality: With the ability to eavesdrop unseen, bolans make superb spies. They have been called the most playful of the homonculi and have a child-like affinity for simple games, especially physical games. Hide-and-seek, of course, is their favorite.

Carian

A simple *spider climb* added to the formula created a companion that turned out to be one of the most versatile. Carians lack the wings of other homonculi but sport a prehensile tail almost as long as their body, which is about one third smaller than others of its kind. They are unable to fly but compensate by being nearly perfect climbers—they have a 95% chance to climb walls. Should they fail this roll (possibly due to penalties caused by high winds, slippery surfaces, etc.), they suffer only half damage from any fall due to their light build and supple body. They can also jump up to 15 feet forward, or half that upward or backward—truly tremendous jumps, considering their own size. The carians are more agile than any other companion. They determine Dexterity by rolling 1d4+14. Their Strength scores, however, are rolled with 1d3+1, and their Wisdom suffers a -1 penalty.

Combat: Carians alone of the many known variations maintain the

normal bite attack. In combat, they jump or climb to a vantage point, then wait to pounce when a victim's back is turned. They bite once, then scamper away for another surprise attack on a different enemy. When fighting single creatures smaller than themselves, they sometimes attempt to hold on with both hands and tail, then make repeated bite attacks with a bonus (+1 to +3, one bonus point per limb grasping).

Honest wizards usually use the carian's small size and natural dexterity, as well as the added limb, to acquire hard to reach material components or as an aid in the laboratory. Larcenous wizards put them to use pilfering unwatched items, which they do very well. They are light-fingered and can pick pockets with a 50% chance of success.

Personality: The carian is the most eager to investigate new things and often has to be called back lest it set off a trap when a treasure chest or new area is discovered. They like to handle new tools and have been known to discover secret doors by triggering them inadvertently. They do not like to be around dead bodies. Crypts, catacombs, and graveyards make them nervous and irritable. If their creator allows it, they avoid these places no matter what interesting things might lie inside.

Chorasmian

Adding *feather fall* to the recipe creates a pinioned homonculous of different colors. By far the brightest hued of the homonculi, they are often red, orange, blue, green, or even the rare yellow. Their eyesight is superior, and they can see and identify objects at three times the distance of a human (see Chapter 13 in the *Player's Handbook).* They have a thick, sharp beak, thin but strong hands, spindly legs, and quick, jerky movements. Chorasmians often hop rather than walk, and they spend more time in the air than any other homonculi. Their Constitution score suffers a -1 penalty, but their brilliant coloring and affection give them a +1 bonus to their Charisma score.

Combat: Chorasmians can dive any distance and suddenly break their fall, but their hands are not sharp enough to serve as claws or talons, Instead, they usually attempt to grab an item out of an enemy's hands. If they surprise an opponent, they can snatch a small item (10 pounds or less) out of an enemy's grasp if the target fails a save vs. petrification. They attempt to gain this surprise by flying out of sight above their enemy, then diving and snatching in a single round. If they can dive, they surprise as an invisible and silent monster (+4). If they do not achieve surprise, the grab is treated as an opposed roll, which the chorasmian usually fails. Often, they drop the item in a body of water or a chasm or take it to their creator. Chorasmians' venom quickly attacks the part of the victim's brain which controls the senses, causing both deafness and blindness for 5d6 rounds (the target may save vs. each effect separately).

Personality: Chorasmians have an affinity for shiny objects and might take off with unclaimed coins or flashy crystals. They sullenly return items that do not belong to them and return other, possibly unnoticed, items after a few days. They love clean mirrors especially and treasure these fragile items far more than their gold piece value. They shy away from fire and become agitated around larger blazes.

Mervans prefer a vegetarian diet but eat meat when necessary.

Gendrasian

The only gilled companion, the gendrasian, can breathe water or air with equal ease. Fittingly, a *water breathing* spell is needed for its creation. They have a shiny green skin with blue, white, or gold flecks. Both hands and feet are webbed. Although scaly like most of the others, their scales are very fine and perfectly smooth. They can swim at a movement rate of 9

The largest of the homonculi, the mullan can be a bully among creatures its size.

and can swim up to 100 feet below the surface and back with ease. Gendrasian can travel deeper but no better than a human. Gendrasian prefer fresh water but can survive salt water just as well. Their ability to move in another medium gives the creator a considerable advantage, as underwater streams, stagnant pools and wide rivers often contain unknown perils or hidden treasures.

Combat: The gendrasian's bite panics targets, causing fear for 5d6 rounds, but the bite causes only 1d2 hp damage because they have a smaller-than-average mouth. Otherwise, they fight normally, although they prefer underwater combat when facing creatures foreign to that element.

Personality: The gendrasian are not only capable of swimming, they truly enjoy it. Whenever they have no other duties or contrary commands, they prefer to find a pond or pool to splash in. If otters or dolphins are known to be nearby, gendrasian seek them out for play. Although they suffer no ill effects from having being out of water, dry skin is uncomfortable for them. They often have to be pulled from cisterns or wells that humans use as a drinking source.

Mervan

The mervan is the most unique in appearance of any homonculous and requires a summon swarm spell during creation. They are most often white, but can be tan, steel gray, or even ochre. These companions have large, multi-faceted eyes, a hard carapace (AC 5) and thin, transparent wings. The mervan's three-fingered hands are quite similar to the claws of a trilateral creature like a xorn but no less dextrous than others of its kind.

Combat: Mervans have a weak mouth but bite with a strong pair of mandibles, dribbling their venom on their target. The venom from this bite is a real poison that causes 1d6 hp damage (or none if a saving throw is made). This poison is separate from the bite damage itself, of course. This poison loses its potency quickly and cannot be used to coat weapons or poison food or drink. Their odd eyes can detect invisible or hidden objects 25% of the time.

Personality: Mervans are undoubtedly the least curious of their kind. They have an unnerving ability to sit still for hours on end. Their only habit that eases the alien personality they project is their vegetarian diet. They have been known to eat meat, and can survive on it, but given their preference, they leave it alone. Strangers seem to expect to see mervans sucking blood out of a helpless victim and are often visibly relieved to see the homonculous nibbling on an apple instead. Mervans have a Charisma of only 1d4+1, but they are stronger than most. They receive a Strength bonus of +2.

Mullan

This oversized creation was the surprising result of an enlarge spell added to the mix. The mullan is much larger than other companions, topping two feet, nearly as large as a small halfling. The skin, scaly like the standard homonculous, is rough and darker than normal.

Combat: The mullan's bite venom is too weak to inflict damage, but their fierce bite causes 1d4 hp damage and follows two effective claw attacks (for 1d2 hp damage each). They are immensely strong compared to their peers, which means they can use size S weapons without penalty. Whether using natural attacks or weapons, they have the THAC0 of a 4 HD monster (17). If armed with a magical dagger or other weapon, they can be (relatively) fearsome. Mullans are tough, having no fewer than 3 hp per die. Although less graceful than some in the air (movement reduced to 15, MC reduced to C), they are just as adept on the ground or a perch. As mentioned, mullans are stronger than other homonculi, having a Strength score of 1d6+8.

Personality: The mullan's ability to inflict measurable damage makes it ideal for seeking out other homonculi, familiars, gremlins, or sha'irs' gens for combat. The mullan might also be used to drive away certain fairy creatures if the creator is the subject of pranks and lacks a sense of humor. Mullans are terrors among the smaller creatures because of their aggressive personality. If left unchecked by their creator, they bully smaller animals and creatures. They seem to be especially brutal to homonculi who possess a bite venom. Jealousy is the suspected reason for this treatment. They are still not very strong for personal protection and are used sparingly as a guard by a wise wizard.

Thymban

Using a *chill touch* creates a homonculous known as a thymban. The thymban appears almost skeletally thin, with taut, ashen grey skin. The head seems out of proportion to the rest of the body, and the outline of a skull can be readily seen, surrounding two bulbous eyes. The thymban brings to mind the undead and often frightens those who first view it.

Combat: Their bite venom causes fever, sweating, and weakness. Those bitten suffer -1 to attacks and damage in monsters, or -1 to Strength (for characters) per bite. If potential damage or Strength is reduced to 0, the target falls unconscious for 1d6 turns. The thymban have the unique ability to use magical items as a wizard, although they cannot utter command words if that option is used, nor can they use scrolls or any other items that rely on the spoken word. They might, for example, spy on the creator's enemies in a *crystal ball,* or use one of the different devices meant to summon and control elementals. This ability to use magic includes any protective gear normally reserved for wizards, which is useful for keeping the homonculous (and thus its creator!) safe from harm. They can often find these items with their sensitive touch, which allows them to detect the presence of magic 25% of the time in an object if they can handle it for one full turn.

Personality: The thymban, despite the poor reactions of those it meets, tends to be gregarious and often seeks to be in the company of others, as long as it can stay within telepathic range of its creator. If not commanded otherwise, it usually seeks out the largest group of individuals of similar alignment to its creator and follows their conversation or tries to participate in whatever activities they might be undertaking.

Despite its frightening appearance, the thymban is a gregarious creature.

Further Research

Rumors abound about other homonculi, some more successful, some less. A handful of these were predisposed to an evil nature and proved reluctant to follow commands. Some are short-lived and might have failed because of alchemical rather than magical or natural reasons. Tales tell of a vampiric example that drained a person's Intelligence, a charming and beautiful homonculous, a companion with a shape similar to the hybrid form of a werewolf that sported a fearsome bite attack, and a protean variation that did not lend itself well to description. Subsequent investigation into these homonculi by very competent wizards has been unable to duplicate these versions.

This article has seen more incarnations than a Piers Anthony series. Heather deserves much credit and thanks for her help, Dan's suggestion provided the title, and Carol allowed me the time away from chores. Lloyd had the easy job of putting it together into more-or-less coherent words.

The Ecology of the Hook Horror

The dwellers in the darkness

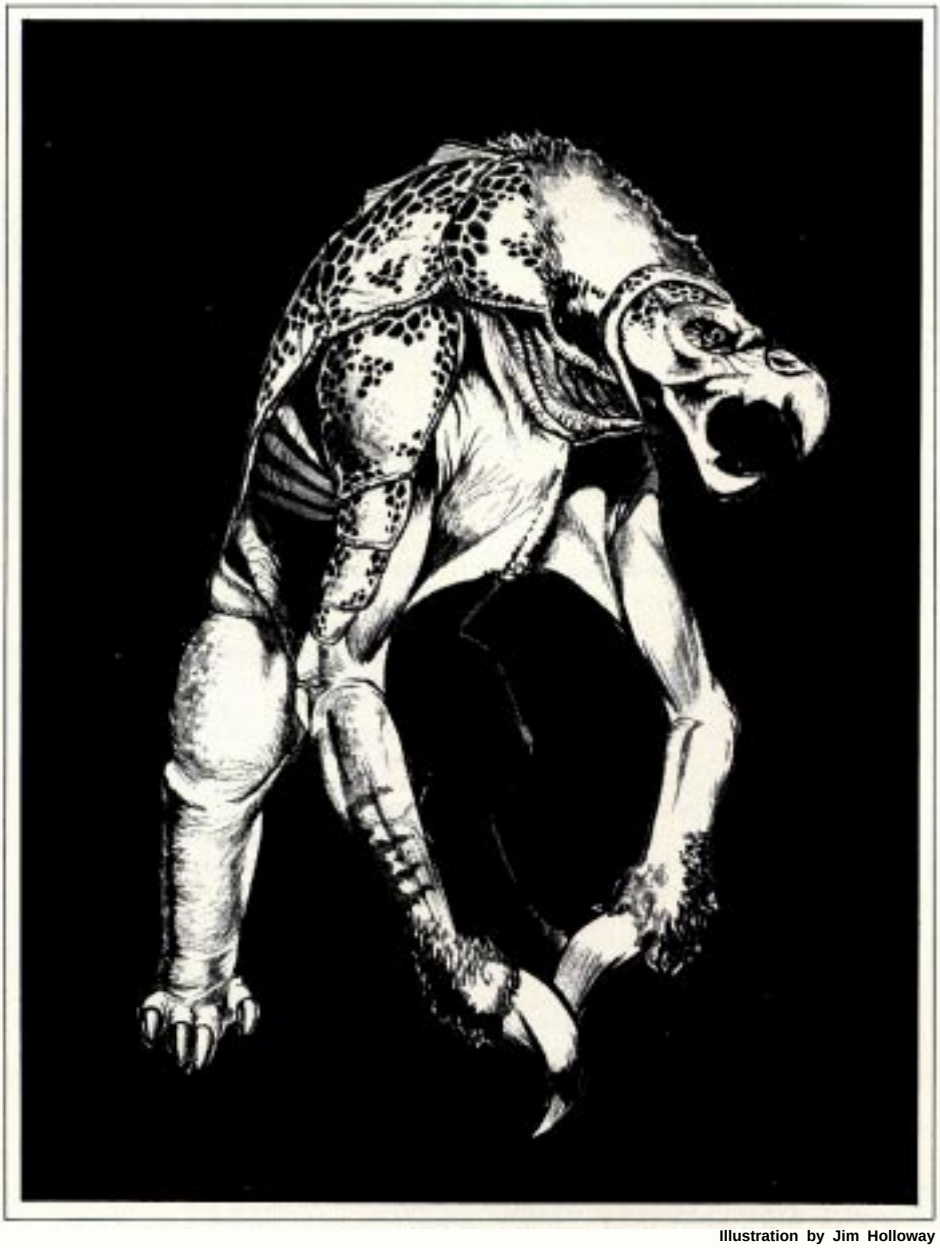


Illustration by Jim Holloway

by Michael Persinger

From an address by the esteemed scholar Ferba to the assembled Guild of Naturalists of Quardolf City:

Understandably, little research has been done on the creature we know as the hook horror. I have spent the last few months laboring to learn all I can of this creature's habits and, as you can see, my colleagues have supplied me with a perfect, albeit dead, fully grown specimen. Take a good look, for few specimens exist in such an excellently preserved state.

The monster is bipedal and of ogre size, this specimen being 9'2" tall. Its head resembles a bony vulture's head with a crest of red feathers at its neck. At each wrist (where one would expect to find a hand) is a large metallic-gray talon and a tuft of red feathers. Its chest and back are protected by thick, natural plating. The beast's arms and legs are covered with a similar material, though of lesser strength.

I would like to call your attention to the armor plating that covers the creature's body. Constructed of chitinous material, these plates function as the hook horror's bones — an exoskeleton similar in many respects to those of the common grasshopper, crab, and most arthropods. This mail-like material becomes exceedingly strong with the buildup of calcium deposits from the creature's diet — deposits that rival dwarven steel for strength — and this armor has deflected many a sword. So powerful is this creature's exoskeleton that a few blacksmiths have experimentally crafted the plates into suits of armor[1], and a few ogres from the great caverns to the north have used crude forms of such suits in battle.

But forgive me; we are a guild of naturalists. Associating with my bodyguards — without them I would not be able to safely carry out my observances — has moved me to think in their perspective. Violence is not our way, and I shall refrain from further military references.

As you all know, the hook horror — also known over the lands as the vulture beak, hacker, cave dweller, and clacker — makes its abode in dark, isolated areas. The hook horror is found exclusively in subterranean surroundings, with natural cavern complexes and abandoned mines ranking as its most favored lairs. Many of these lairs are linked by the vast subterranean network of tunnels we call the Sunless Realm, where dwell the drow and other vile monstrosities. Though the hook horrors certainly migrate through this kingdom of eternal darkness, we may also speculate that the creature comes aboveground during opportune moments, most especially if the surroundings are a dense forest at nightfall. Yet to date, no specimens have been reported outside underground caverns. Whatever the case, the hook horror rarely associates with creatures other than its own kind.

Now, you may wonder how the hook horrors can see, let alone live, down in such dark abodes. Infravision probably comes to your minds. But unlike most other underground dwellers, hook horrors lack infravision completely. The hook horrors are born with very weak eyes and can only see a few feet in front of them. They are, if you will pardon the cliche, blind as bats. So how do they get around?

Fortunately for the hook horrors, nature has compensated for their limited sight by giving them excellent auditory and olfactory senses. They can hear many times better than a normal man, and even possess a limited form of echolocation, as is used by bats. Their scent-detection ability rivals that of certain bloodhounds. In other words, these senses enable the hook horrors to "see" at least as well as you or I would see with our eyes.[2] Actually, their senses are even better than that. During a recent experiment, one hook horror successfully sniffed out an invisible mage. Another one detected a silently moving thief that no one else could hear. Among other things, these senses make it very difficult for enemies to surprise the hook horror[3] and make it easy for the hook horror to search out food.

As for their eating habits, the hook horrors are herbivores. Their diet is rather selective, consisting primarily of subterranean fungi. They have an abrasive tongue to help their feeding, and they commonly eat whatever lichens, moss, and mushrooms they can find. Hook horrors are very large creatures, and therefore (we initially assumed) eat vast quantities of food each day. But there is only so much fungus in any underground area; a hook horror's food supply, as you no doubt guessed, becomes easily depleted. How does a 9'-tall biped sustain itself over prolonged periods of time?

Direct observation of the hook horror by means of scrying reveals it to be very sluggish — much like the giant sloths I lectured about three seasons ago. A hook horror sleeps roughly half the day and moves about little if not disturbed. Hence, it needs little food to keep it going. Its actual food consumption is shockingly low for a creature its size. A full-grown hook horror consumes roughly three-fourths the amount of food necessary to feed a full-grown man.

Despite this, a hook horror's food supply can still dwindle rapidly. Most hook horrors migrate from cavern to cavern every few months to obtain a fresh food supply from new lairs while fungi regrow in the vacated areas. A few hook horrors have advanced intellectually to the point that they may grow and cultivate fungus within their lairs. These hook horrors usually have at least one garden chamber devoted to this "farming" activity.

If the usual foods cannot be found, the hook horror will turn to other sources, lest it starve. More exotic creatures, such as zygoms, violet fungi, phycomids, and shriekers[4] become the hook horror's daily meal. This may strike you as odd, for common knowledge has it that these fungi are deadly to humans and other creatures. But several reliable accounts have emerged of hook horrors eating these queer plants. Apparently, hook horrors are immune to these plants' powers.

Continuous study of these immunities has led me to suspect that this ability originates from the hook horror's endocrine system. This system contains a gland, located here in the abdomen, that secretes a special hormone. This chemical somehow makes the creature immune to the effects of zygom glue, violet fungi rot, and phycomid infestation. My colleagues and I believe that this gland is 100% effective and have taken extra steps to examine it. Our hope is to tap this glands potential and manufacture a protection against the so-called "fatal fungi." I'm sure you all realize the benefits that such a protection would give toward our study of that botanical area. Our best alchemists and wizards have made attempts to exploit the gland, though these have unfortunately ended in failure.[5] Though we are still working with this project, future success appears uncertain.

The hook horror may be immune to harmful fungi, but it also has an uncanny weakness in health. Tests have shown the hook horror to be unusually susceptible to diseases and parasitic infestations from sources other than fungi,[6] which are usually caught early in life and take a toll over the years. The specimen you see here died of tapeworm parasites. Between disease and the continuous problems of food availability, the hook horror rarely lives past the age of 40.

Hook horrors have very few natural enemies. Because of their infestations and great strength, most carnivores shun them. Only certain indiscriminate predators such as carrion crawlers are bold enough to challenge them. Of course, many hook horrors have been killed while attempting to find food — some by the hazards of underground life, and some by frightened or sword-happy adventurers who are fond of killing all in their path.

The hook horror is one of the few bipeds that reproduces through egg-laying, just as kobolds are known to do. Once every year, a female hook horror lays from one to four eggs in the lair, each about 3" in diameter. They are shaped and colored in mimicry of stones — a disguise against predators — and scattered across the hook horror's lair among ordinary rocks.[7] This camouflage is very effective, and most every egg laid will hatch after a six-month period.

The hook horror grows very quickly during its early years. Born a mere 1' in height, this creature doubles its size after three months and reaches 5' of height within one year. The hook horror's growth levels off afterward, with a height of 6' reached during the next year. It then grows another 1-2' over the next five years. The hook horror reaches its full growth of 9' by its 17th birthday.

The young hook horror becomes highly independent during its early years. It remains with its parents for only about one year. Its second year is one of transition, wherein the hook horror begins to set off on its own without straying too far from its home. By its third year of life, the hook horror is out on its own and is totally independent of its parents. The hook horror attains reproductive ability in its sixth year of life. At this point, it searches out a mate.

Like those of the arthropods it resembles, the hook horror's hard shell does not grow with it. Thus, it must periodically molt. The molting process starts out gradually. Old plates begin to flake off in pieces, a process that accelerates over a two-day period with bigger and bigger plates falling off, until the hook horror's entire exoskeleton is shed. Little conscious effort is used in this shedding; the shell simply falls off like an old scab.

Before the old shell falls off, a new exoskeleton has already begun to form. These new plates are just hard enough to support the hook horror's body and allow for adequate movement. This new exoskeleton is much softer than the old plates, however — not developed enough to serve as full-strength armor — and it offers very little protection to the creature. The hook horror's exoskeleton hardens relatively quickly and achieves its full strength after a couple of days. Until then, the hook horror is quite vulnerable to physical attack.[8]

Frequent references have likened hook horrors to humanoids. This is only in the loosest sense, however. Hook horrors are not mammalian, being invertebrate arthropods with a vaguely humanoid form. The behavior of a hook horror differs much from that of a humanoid, too; the creature relies on its instincts, very much like an animal does. For instance, the hook horror is afraid of fire and loud noises. It is not aggressive by nature, though like any animal, it will fight furiously if attacked.

Despite their animalistic intelligence, these monsters are capable of limited communication between each other. Just how much can be communicated, my colleagues and I have been unable to measure, but it is my guess that they convey only the most rudimentary knowledge.[9] They don't speak like you or I — no, the hook horror "talks" by making clacking noises, an action performed by flexing certain portions of its exoskeleton.

At first impression, these noises appear to be nothing more than bothersome gibberish; but repeated listenings show a definite pattern in these sounds. To the hook horror, these noises mean many different things, depending on the sounds' tone and pitch. The location of food, for example, excites the creature, causing it to emit a steady, high-pitched clacking. The

location of an enemy, however, angers or alarms the creature, causing it to send low-pitched, unsteady noises. And, most importantly for us, signals of "friendship" are communicated in soft, steady tones. A language specialist is currently working to translate the hook horror's speech patterns; I will of course inform you on his progress.

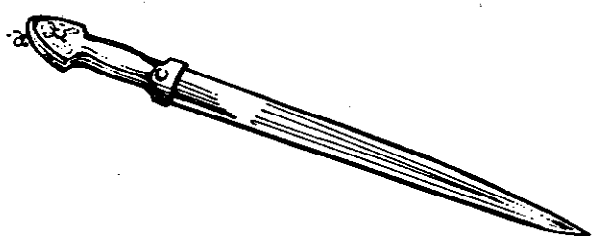
The hook horror prefers the company of small groups, usually no greater than a dozen or so members. These tribes, if you will, do not go out of their way to associate with other subterranean creatures or even with other hook horrors, though hook horrors have been known to form huge "herds" at rare moments, and others have been briefly befriended by humans with gifts of food. However, the hook horror is more of an animal than a rational creature, and it has not yet been truly domesticated. Proper training and rewarding can — and have — brought hook horrors into short service as guards and sentries, but this is a risky business. The hook horror is a primitive creature and has no loyalty or causes to concern it. Past experience with trained hook horrors showed that they follow simple orders, assuming that owners have ways of communicating effectively with them, for proper treatment. But if a situation becomes threatening, hook horrors ignore orders and put self-preservation above all else; a fitting reward for those, I might interject, who exploit the hook horror for making war.

A final note on a curious habit of the hook horror, much reported by adventurers in the Sunless Realms: Hook horrors take some pains to collect silver and electrum when such can be found. Why? Hook horrors eat such coins, which then grind up food in their stomachs much as pebbles in the stomachs of toothless foul. Silver and electrum do not irritate the stomach linings of the hook horrors, and after passing through their digestive systems — no worse for the wear — are deposited in an area near the current lair of the hook-horror tribe. Adventurers have commented on the peculiar, sour odor of such coins, though this has hardly stopped the collection of the same!

And that, my friends, is a summation of the knowledge on the hook horror. Research continues, and new developments are making the study of the hook horror less a mystery. I am eager to inform you of further developments as they come along. Thank you.

Notes

1. To create this armor, a blacksmith or armorer must remove the shell from the hook horror's body. Success is automatic, but if any other person attempts it, the chance of success is only 10% per his



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Hook Horror Statistics (by age)

Age	AC	Move	HD	Damage*	Size
0-3 months	9	3"	½	Nil	1′
3-6 months	8	4"	1-1	1/1	2'
6-12 months	7	6"	1	1-2/1-2	3½'
1-5 years	6	7"	1+1 to 2+2**	1-4/1-4	5'
5-10 years	5	8"	3	1-6/1-6	6'
10-17 years	4	9"	4	1-6/1-6	7½'
17 + years	3	9"	5	1-8/1-8	9'

* From two claw attacks (see the appendix for information on biting attacks).
* * 1 + 1 HD from 1-2 years, 2 HD from 2-3 years, and 2 + 2 HD from 3-5 years.

experience level. This removal is assumed to take one day. Afterward, it takes 30 days for the exoskeleton to be processed into a suit of armor. This armor is AC 3, making its saving throws as bone. Most smiths will buy these exoskeletons for about 100 gp (if still on the body) or 250 gp (if removed). A fully processed suit of armor will sell for about 450 gp. Because hook horrors are 9′ tall, these armor suits are only usable by large creatures (i.e., ogres, large bugbears, verbeeg, etc.).

Note that only the exoskeleton of a full-grown, 5-HD hook horror may be manufactured into a suit of armor. The exoskeleton from a younger hook horror is too soft and weak to be crafted into any armor of worthwhile quality.

2. Because of the hook horror's altered senses, it has saving-throw modifications against certain attacks. Against spells causing blindness (i.e., *light, darkness, color spray, cause blindness,* and *glyph of blindness),* the hook horror receives a +2 saving throw, as its vision is not much used. This bonus is also given against illusions and phantasms that affect only the visual senses. If the hook horror is blinded but wishes to enter combat, it has a penalty of -2 to hit (whereas a normal person would have a -4 to hit). However, against spells that affect the olfactory or auditory senses (i.e., *audible glamer* and high-level phantasms), the hook horror has a -2 saving throw, as its major senses are being affected. A blinded hook horror moves at a maximum rate of 6" unless in familiar territory.

Using echolocation (emitting a high-pitched trill which is picked up by its batlike ears), a hook horror can sense its environment out to 120′ in total darkness, and can detect *invisible* or hidden objects with ease. Anyone trying to silently past a hook horror without using magical *silence* has a -40 penalty to do so, as they hear so well.

3. The FIEND FOLIO® tome states that there is only a 10% chance of surprising a hook horror.

4. Whenever a hook horror's lair is located (usually a temporary affair like a niche in a tunnel), the DM should allow a 50% chance that one of these fungi is located in the general area. There is a 10% chance that the actual lair contain these fungi, kept for nourishment. If a hook horror is met as a wandering monster, chances are that it is searching for food. Allow a 40% chance that one of these plants is within 200′ of the hook horror when the latter is found.

5. Hook horrors are disease and parasite carriers. When encountered, there is a 10% chance that a hook horror has a disease, and another 10% chance that it has 2-5 diseases. The DM must take this into account when determining whether or not the character has caught a disease (as detailed on page 13 of the *DMG).* A hook horror has a +2% chance of catching a random disease or parasitic infestation. Against magical disease attacks (e.g., *cause disease),* it has a -1 saving throw.

6. Ferba's hypothesis is more or less correct: Once a hook horror dies, the gland stops producing this chemical. For game purposes, nothing short of a *wish* will allow PCs to exploit this chemical.

7. When a hook horror lair is discovered, there is a 25% chance that it contains 1-4 eggs, disguised as rocks; only close inspection reveals that they are eggs. Such a lair also contains at least two mated hook horrors.

A hook-horror egg takes six months to hatch, at which time the 1′-tall creature has the following statistics: AC 9; MV 3"; HD ½; #AT nil; AL N. The hook horror remains like this for three months. Afterward, the creature grows in a fairly rapid progression, with subsequent age category beginning with a molting period, as explained in note 8. See the table for details.

8. The hook horror sheds its exoskeleton each time it enters a new age category, as shown in the Hook Horror Statistics table. Once the shell has been removed, the creature is hampered in movement and quite vulnerable to attack. Newly molted hook horrors have temporary penalties of -2 to armor class and -2" to movement rate, and a strong tendency to flee trouble when possible. The new exoskeleton hardens quickly, and the hook horror gains a +1 bonus on armor class and movement for every 12 hours that pass, until the new levels appropriate to its age are reached. Newly hatched hook horrors don't molt immediately after hatching, but are extremely vulnerable anyway and must be protected. Mortality rates for most young hook horrors are high.

9. An *ESP* spell or *telepathy* power gives the user a basic understanding of the hook horror's thoughts, though these only offer the most rudimentary information (usually about food or personal discomfort), and the creature understands only the simplest of data. Hook horrors have a listing of "low" intelligence because they have excellent retention of information, and learn to cope with their environment and neighbors quickly.

Due to the nature of the hook horror's language (only a hook horror can clack; a human's speech originates from his vocal cords), conventional translation spells such as *tongues* and *comprehend languages* will not decipher a hook horror's dialect. The best way to achieve a rudimentary understanding of the hook horror's language is to observe the creature over a long period of time (i.e., PCs won't be able to figure it out). The loudness of a hook horror's clacking is roughly the same as that of a man speaking normally.

Appendix

The hook horror's primary mode of attack is a set of two swordlike talons. Located at the ends of its 4′-long arms, these 1′-long hooks (equal to short swords, backed by 18 strength) are the creature's normal and preferred weapons. The hook horror may also utilize its sharp beak as a secondary weapon, but beak damage is weak, equaling a single claw attack -2 hp (1 hp damage minimum) and with a -2 to hit. A hook horror usually avoids biting, as a damaged beak means the creature's eventual death, as it cannot then eat.

The hook horror is a very sluggish creature by nature and too uncoordinated to successfully direct attacks against three separate opponents. It may try to attack two separate opponents, but it then has a -2 "to hit" penalty on its claws and -4 to hit with its beak. As a result, a double attack is only performed under the most desperate of situations.

If the hook horror is unable to use its claws (occurring only if its arms are broken or severed), it flees combat, biting with its beak in desperation. If only one arm is out of commission, the hook horror may attack with both its beak and free claw with only a -1 "to hit" penalty on the beak. Ω

The Ecology of the Hydra
Heads and Tales

The secrets of a classic monster, now updated for a sneak preview of the 3rd Edition game.

by Johnathan Richards

illustrated by David Day

With a bump and a skid, the flying carpet came to a sudden stop at the top of the cliff embankment, sending the four passengers lurching forward to fall in a tangle of limbs. As the others struggled to their feet with poor grace, Dreelix reached into a pocket of his robes and produced his trusty gavel. Searching around for a reasonably flat rock, he spotted a suitable candidate nearby and snatched it up. Then, tapping the rock three times with his gavel, he announced: "This field session of the Monster Hunters' Association is hereby called to order."

"Hold on, let me get the others," said Grindle the Coin-Counter, reaching into a smoke-blackened pocket and pulling out a portable hole. While he spread it out flat on the ground, Zantoullios extended a bandaged hand to the Conjurer Ablasta, who was having difficulty getting up after Dreelix's rough landing. "I wish he'd learn to fly that blasted thing," she grumbled under her breath.

Dreelix tapped his foot impatiently as Grindle finally got the hole opened up and its passengers began disembarking. The first out was Buntleby, carrying Ozzie, his six-legged osquip familiar. He plopped the osquip down on the ground and griped, "How about a little more fresh air next time, Dreelix? It gets awful stuffy in there, you know!" Then, extending his arm back into the hole, he helped a young woman climb out of the extradimensional space.

The woman was quite a contrast to the bedraggled Monster Hunters. While they were all clad in wizards' robes, she wore a tight-fitting suit of black leather armor and had a large sword strapped to her back. Her auburn hair was tied back in a simple ponytail to keep it out of the way. She accepted Buntleby's extended arm and climbed up out of the portable hole. "Thanks, Bunt," she said with a smile. "So, this is where the hydra got the better of you guys, huh?"

"Down there, yeah," said Buntleby, pointing down the cliff to a cave opening several hundred feet below.[1] "And don't call me 'Bunt.'"

"It did not 'get the better of us,'" corrected Dreelix testily. "We wisely performed a tactical retreat in the face of unexpected obstacles to our meticulous plans. I would think even a simple fighter such as yourself would understand the difference."

1. A hydra prefers to lair in dismal, out-of-the-way places far from civilization. Marshes, swamps, remote mountains, and deep caverns are favored locales for a hydra den.

"Yeah, well, our planning wasn't really all that great this time, Rhionda," admitted Buntleby. "Usually, we have Willowquisp or Spontayne research whatever particular monster we're up against ahead of time. But they're both away at a sage's conference, so we had to wing it."

"Speak for yourself," snapped Dreelix. "I had everything all planned out—I mean, it's just a big, stupid reptile, isn't it? It shouldn't have caused us all the problems it did!"

"Maybe you should tell me just what exactly you guys did, and I can tell you where you went wrong," suggested the young woman. At that remark, the Ablasta's eyes narrowed in disdain.

Dreelix apparently wasn't too thrilled with explaining himself to a simple warrior, either. "You tell her, Buntleby," he said, turning his back on them.

"Well," began Buntleby, "we heard there was a hydra lairing in the gorge down there, so we rounded up a hunting party and went down after it."

"What type of hydra was it?" interrupted Rhionda.

"What do you mean?"

"There are four different kinds of hydras."[2]

"Oh, really? That's the kind of thing it would have been nice to know about beforehand," said Buntleby, frowning in Dreelix's direction. Dreelix, however, was looking out over the gorge, as if the conversation had nothing to do with him. "In any case, it was the fire-breathing kind, although we didn't know that at the time."

"Pyrohydra, then," said Rhionda. "One of the species some people believe proves a common ancestry with the dragon races.[3] Okay, Bunt, go on."

PYROHYDRA

Buntleby almost chided her again for using the nickname, then noticed she was waiting for a reaction out of him and ignored it. "Well," Buntleby continued, "Dreelix took us down to the bottom of the gorge on his flying carpet, and while the others readied their hold monster spells, I polymorphed into a goat to lure the creature out of its cave."

"So far so good," Rhionda commented, smiling. "I'll bet you made a fine goat."

"Sure I did. I approached the cave entrance, gave a couple frightened bleats, and the thing came rushing out at me, snapping its jaws in attack.[4] Dreelix and the others each threw a few hold monster spells at it, and it froze up. Then—"

"Wait a minute, Bunt," interrupted Rhionda. "Why so many spells for just one monster?"

"As a mere warrior, I wouldn't expect you to understand the intricacies of the magical arts," responded Dreelix with his nose in the air. "But a hold monster spell affects only one entity. This creature had eight heads. Therefore, it takes eight hold monster spells just to get all of the heads, and a couple extra spells just in case some of the heads shrugged off the effects. It's as simple as that."

"As simple, and as wrong," Rhionda replied bluntly. "I don't care how many heads a hydra's got; it's still only got one brain. You only needed one spell to affect all of its heads."[5]

2. The four main types of hydra are the common hydra, Lernaean hydra, pyrohydra, and cryohydra. Interbreeding between the species accounts for the Lernaean pyrohydra and the Lernaean cryohydra.

3. If so, the two species diverged long ago, for the hydra lacks the wings of the dragon and is significantly smaller than all known dragon subspecies. Beyond an obvious reptilian ancestry, the greatest links between dragons and hydras are the breath weapons employed by pyrohydras and cryohydras.

4. A hydra has as many Hit Dice as it has heads and attacks once with each head each round. (Pyrohydras and cryohydras can use their breath weapons instead of biting.) The hydra's backward-jutting horns are not used in combat. A hydra can bring up to four heads to bear against a single man-sized opponent.

A hydra's bite damage is determined by the number of heads it has. Hydras with 5–6 heads bite for 1d6 points of damage, those with 7–10 heads bite for 1d8 points of damage, and hydras with 11–12 heads inflict 1d10 points of damage with each bite. (In 3rd Edition, hydras with 5–6 heads bite for 1d6+3 points of damage per head, those with 7–8 heads bite for 1d8+4 points of damage, hydras with 9–10 heads bite for 2d6+5 points of damage, and those with 11–12 heads bite for 2d8+6 points of damage.) Note that this number is fixed at birth and does not change: Even if the hydra loses one or more of its heads, those remaining still bite for regular damage.

5. A hydra can be killed by either slaying its body or severing all of its heads. To slay its body, a hydra's hit point total must be reduced to –10.

To sever a head, an opponent must use a slashing weapon and inflict damage equal to the hydra's original number of heads in a single blow. (Thus, it takes 8 points of damage in a single blow to sever one of an eight-headed hydra's heads.) Excess damage inflicted on an individual head is not carried over to other heads. When all of a hydra's heads have been slain, the creature dies immediately. Some spells that involve slashing weapons—like *Mordenkainen's sword* and *blade barrier*—can also be used to sever a hydra's heads.

Despite having numerous heads, the hydra has but a single brain, located at the base of the necks. Thus, spells such as *charm monster, hold monster*, and *slow* affect the hydra as a whole. Similarly, instant-death spells (such as *disintegrate* or *slay living*) kill a hydra if it fails its saving throw.

Lernaean hydras, which regenerate two heads for every head severed, pose a more difficult problem. Flame or acid must be applied to the wound immediately after severing a head to prevent such regeneration (at least 5 points of fire or acid damage); otherwise, two heads form in 1d4 rounds. A Lernaean hydra's body is immune to all physical attacks, so the would-be slayer must sever and cauterize each of its heads in turn or employ instant-death magic.

"What?" sputtered Dreelix. "That's ridiculous! Nonsense!"

"Believe what you want. It's true, though. Okay, Bunt, sorry for interrupting. So the hydra freezes up ..."

"Right, so it's standing there like a statue, motionless. I resume my human form, and we move in for the kill. Grindle's got this long spear that he's going to stab into the beast's heart—"

Rhionda held up her hand to interrupt Buntleby again. "Another mistake," she said. "Always, always go for the heads. It's much easier chopping a hydra's heads off than it is trying to hack its body to pieces—the darn things are just too tough. And if you're close enough to stab at the creature, you might as well chop off its heads instead, since they're the part of the body that'll be doing you the most harm anyway."

"Who made you the hydra expert?" asked Zantoullios grumpily.

"Simple experience," replied the young woman. "I've fought these things before; killed both a common hydra and a Lernaean."

"What's a Lernaean?" asked the gangly wizard.

"The Lernaean hydra looks just like a common hydra: five to twelve heads, scales ranging from a grayish-brown to a darker brown, with light yellow or tan scales on the underbelly that reach from the bottom of each jaw to the tip of the tail, like a snake. The only real way to differentiate between the two is if you cut the head off a Lernaean hydra, two more grow back in its place."[6]

"Cute," commented Zantoullios, arching his eyebrows in disbelief that this slim young girl could handle such a monster all by herself.

"Well, anyway," continued Buntleby, "Grindle moves in with his spear, and the rest of us move in as well—after all, the thing's immobilized and shouldn't present any danger, right? Then, all of a sudden, a stream of flame comes shooting out of one of the creature's heads, engulfing Grindle in a ball of fire."[7] Grindle winced at the memory and looked down at his robe, now blackened and scorched by the pyrohydra's attack. "This was one of my better robes, too," he complained aloud to nobody in particular. He was right, too: This was his second-favorite robe, the one with only two food stains and armpit sweat-stains that were still imperceptible from distances greater than ten feet.

"So while Grindle's rolling around on the ground and the rest of us are trying to pat out the flames from his robes, Zantoullios stumbles into the range of another one of the creature's breath weapons, and he goes up in flames as well."

"Stupid monster," muttered the gangly wizard, looking down at his bandaged hands with a scowl.

"So anyway," recounted Buntleby, "by the time we manage to get the flames doused on these two, the time limit's expired on the hold monster spells, and the hydra comes waddling after us.[8] Without any more hold monster spells available, we weren't ready to fight the thing off. I think we hit it with a magic missile or two while retreating, but nothing serious. All in all, we were lucky to make it to Dreelix's carpet in time and get out of there in one piece."

"Sounds like you were lucky, all right," agreed Rhionda, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Look! There it is!" cried Dreelix suddenly, pointing down at the gorge. The others crowded over to the ledge and peered down at the multiheaded monster as it emerged from the darkness of its cave, tails twitching behind it.[9]

"Okay, the scale coloration should have tipped you off right away," said Rhionda. "Notice how they've got a reddish tinge to them? The pyrohydra's the only one with scales that color. Kind of helpful to know stuff like that before you go wading into battle."

"You forget your audience," remarked Dreelix haughtily. "Monster Hunters do not 'wade into battle' like mere warriors—it would be undignified."

"Whatever," said Rhionda, unimpressed. "Still, if you ever come across a hydra with a purplish tinge to its scales, it might be helpful to know that it's a cryohydra, capable of blasting streams of frost from its heads like a white dragon.[10] Of course, cryohydras usually live up in the arctic regions or sometimes high up in the mountains, and since they're the only kind of hydra living in those regions, if you meet up with one there you should already have a pretty good idea of what you're up against."

"Are they common?" Zantoullios wanted to know. "I've never heard of them."

"Not really," replied Rhionda. "Obviously, your 'common' hydra's the most common, followed by the pyrohydra, like your little friend down there. Lernaean hydras and cryohydras are the

6. If the Lernaean hydra has recently suffered such abuse, it can often be identified as such by its appearance. A neck severed near the base of the hydra's body grows two new full heads and necks, and appears the same as a common hydra. However, a neck severed near the jawline grows only two heads, each attached to the same neck. In any case, a Lernaean hydra has an "upper limit" of twice as many heads as it initially started with; after reaching that limit, a severed head grows back, but only singly. "Extra" heads shrivel up and fall off the hydra's body within a day after growth. Thus, 24 hours after combat, a Lernaean hydra (including Lernaean pyrohydras and Lernaean cryohydras) will only have as many heads as it originally started out with, or fewer if any of its stumps were cauterized in time.

7. Each of a pyrohydra's heads can breathe a jet of fire 10 feet high, 10 feet wide, and 20 feet long every 1d4 rounds. (Each round that a hydra can employ its breath weapon, it does so with as many heads as it desires.) Each jet inflicts twice as many points of fire damage as the creature's original number of heads. A successful saving throw vs. breath weapon reduces damage by half. (In 3rd Edition, the character would roll a Reflex save. The Difficulty Class [DC] of the roll is 10 + half the pyrohydra's original number of heads [rounded up] + the creature's Constitution modifier. Thus, to avoid a seven-headed pyrohydra's breath weapon, the dodging character must roll 10 + 4 + 5, or 19, on a d20.)

Note that the activation of a breath weapon involves the same muscles used in breathing. Thus, even a magically *held* creature can use its breath weapon as long as its mouth (or mouths) is open.

8. A hydra has a low center of gravity. Its four short legs are spaced widely apart, a result of the hydra's wide body. Because of the hydra's build, it seldom uses its claws against enemies, preferring to attack only with its heads. On the rare occasion that a hydra attacks with its claws (usually only against a prone enemy or as an act of desperation when most of its heads have been slain), it inflicts 1d8 points of damage with one set of front claws.

9. Most hydras sport but a single tail, but it isn't unusual for a hydra to have two or even three tails. The tails are not used in combat, and even Lernaean hydras do not grow back severed tails.

10. Every 1d4 rounds, each of a cryohydra's heads can breathe a jet of frost 10 feet high, 10 feet wide, and 20 feet long. Just as with a pyrohydra, a saving throw vs. breath weapon (or a Reflex save with 3rd Edition rules) halves the damage, which is cold-based in this case.

As arctic creatures, cryohydras are immune to cold-based attacks. Although reptilian, they have an insulating layer of fat below their thick, overlapping scales, and their scales magically deflect cold away from the creature. Touching a cryohydra's scales is like touching a sheet of ice.

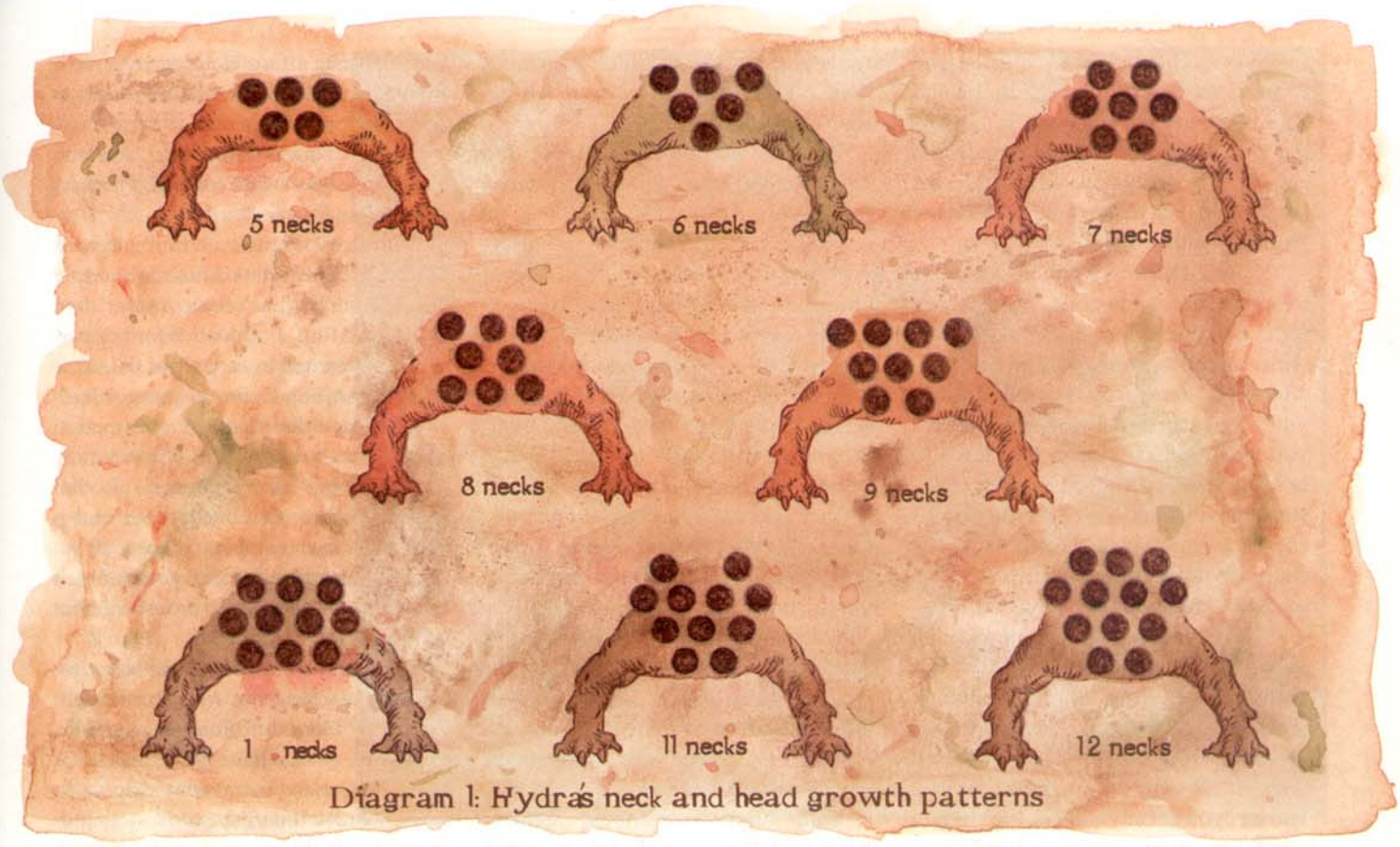


Diagram 1: Hydra's neck and head growth patterns

least-frequently encountered of all. And sometimes you'll come across two different types at once; those are usually a mated pair."

"Different hydras can mate together?" asked Buntleby in amazement.

"Sure. All hydras, regardless of species, are about the same size: thirty feet long or so. They can interbreed at will, although cryohydras usually don't intermingle with the other species, because of their different habitats.[11] Then there's the thessalhydras, which sometimes breed with regular hydras, but they're not true hydras in any real sense of the word.[12] Hey, look at what she's doing!"

"'She?'" repeated Dreelix. "How could you possibly know that?"

"Notice the horns. Females have shorter horns than the males. Not that it matters in combat; the creatures don't use their horns as weapons. But look: She's emerging from the safety of her cave, so what's the first thing she does? Points her heads in all possible directions, that's what. See how she's got her heads situated? She can pretty much see all around her at once that way."

"Probably looking for food," suggested Buntleby.

"Believe it or not, she's mainly concerned with looking out for other predators. Even at thirty feet long, there are plenty of other larger creatures that prey upon hydras—dragons, mostly."[13]

"Do you think it can see us up here?" asked Dreelix, suddenly concerned for his safety. It was obvious that their previous routing had made him jumpy where the hydra was concerned; he ducked his head behind a rock and peered out cautiously like a child peeking out from the covers at the imaginary monsters in his bedroom at night.

"Probably; a hydra's got pretty good eyesight.[14] But so what if she can? We're in no danger all the way up here; we're well out of the range of her breath weapons, and hydras are terrible climbers."

11. Female hydras lay small clutches of 1d4 eggs. In instances of mixed parentage, hydra crossbreeds usually take on aspects of both parents, as shown in the chart below, where H = common hydra, L = Lernaean hydra, P = pyrohydra, and C = cryohydra.

	H	L	P	C
H	H	L	P	C
L	L	L	LP	LC
P	P	LP	P	H
C	C	LC	H	C

Note that when a Lernaean hydra mates with either a pyrohydra or a cryohydra, the offspring have the characteristics of both parents; when a pyrohydra and a cryohydra mate, their "hot" and "cold" aspects cancel each other out, resulting in common hydra offspring.

12. The thessalhydra is a hybrid creature, resulting from the union of a hydra and the genetically unstable thessalmonster. The thessalhydra has eight serpentine heads ringing a large, circular mouth like a lamprey's. Each head has a poisonous bite and can spit acid, and the beast also has a pair of pincers at the end of its long tail. Thessalhydras mate with all manner of other monsters, creating even stranger hybrids like the thessalgorgon, thessaltrice, and thessalmera. Details on all four races of thessalmonster are found in the *Monstrous Compendium® Annual* Volume Three.

13. Dragons find hydras delicious. To take advantage of this, wizards and alchemists have devised a potion of *dragon attraction* made primarily of hydra blood and crushed scales, as well as certain glands from the hydra's body (those involved in the production of subtle pheromones). A single hydra can produce up to five such potions; when poured on the ground, a potion of *dragon attraction* brings any dragon within a mile in search of a tantalizing meal. The effects of this potion wear off in 20 minutes as the liquid evaporates.

If the potion is foolishly consumed, however, the hapless imbiber becomes the target of all dragon gourmands within a two-mile radius for a full hour. During this time, all dragons are convinced of the imbiber's tastiness and concentrate the majority of their attacks upon the delicious morsel before them.

Potions of *dragon attraction* carry a market value of 150 gold pieces. (In 3rd Edition, these potions can be created by a spellcaster of at least 2nd level with the Brew Potion feat.)

14. All hydra species have infravision (darkvision in 3rd Edition) to a range of 60 feet.

"Okay, so how do we kill it?" asked Dreelix, his desire to slay the hydra and gain its valuable body parts outweighing his general dislike for common fighters—even smarty-pants fighters who felt they could teach the mighty Monster Hunters a thing or two.

"That all depends. If you've got access to spells like disintegrate, then hey, go for it. Of course, that doesn't leave you with any body parts to play around with afterward. Personally, I'd rather go in with a sword: You always know where you stand with a sword. You throw a hold monster spell at a creature and it stops moving, but you never know if it's caught in your spell or just faking. But chop a hydra's head off with a sword—well, you know it's not faking that."[15]

"That would be excellent information to pass on to the Association of Hulking, Stupid Brutes With Melee Weapons," remarked Dreelix dryly. "We, however, are the prestigious Monster Hunters! Ours is the way of spell and finesse! Haven't you got anything else to suggest other than 'go stab it with a sword'?"

"Sword or spell, the strategy's pretty much the same," replied Rhionda. "If you'd rather use spells, I'd suggest magic missile, since it automatically strikes its target. Fireballs are good, too, if you've got the room; they're especially effective against Lernaean hydras, since the fire sears the wounds. Of course, multiple fireballs might severely damage the creature's body if you want to harvest it for useful components after slaying it; that's why I recommend magic missile. If you're using magic from a distance, it doesn't matter a whole lot, but if you're attacking with a sword, I'd recommend staying to one side of the hydra and picking off the heads on that side, in order if possible. That way, there are fewer heads within reach to attack you."[16]

"Why not just sever one head, and then let blood loss take its toll?" asked Buntleby.

"Nice strategy, Bunt, but it doesn't work that way. Unfortunately, as soon as a head is severed—I'm talking about all hydras except Lernaean ones now, you understand—the blood vessels close off the entire neck from the rest of the body. This not only stops the bleeding, but it also makes it possible for the hydra to pull its own neck stump from its body. Kind of gruesome to think about, but I guess it's better than dragging a dangling, headless neck around from your body all day."[17]

"Fascinating," remarked Buntleby. "I imagine it's very similar to the process by which many lizards lose their tails—if attacked, the lizard's tail snaps off, distracting the predator with an easy meal while the lizard gets away."

"Yeah, funny you should mention that," said Rhionda. "These discarded neck stumps are often subsequently eaten by the hydra, so everything gets recycled." Lady Ablasta gave Rhionda a look of horror at the mention of such self-cannibalization; she held a perfumed handkerchief to her mouth and looked as if she were about to be sick.

"You know, I've always felt the Association could benefit by opening its membership to more than just wizards and sages," said Buntleby to Dreelix. "Look at how much we've learned about the hydra already. And that's not just something that Rhionda read out of a book; it's practical experience. I'd like to formally sponsor Rhionda for membership into the Monster Hunters!" At that, Lady Ablasta's face clouded over as if she had just discovered half a worm in her cream puff.

"What?" squeaked Dreelix. "Are you insane? We don't want to open our ranks to mindless fighters!"

"Mindless fighters, no," agreed Buntleby. "But I think Rhionda's amply demonstrated that she's more than 'mindless.' Plus, I can vouch for her personally; we used to be part of the same adventuring band a few years ago. She's already provided detailed information on a monster useful to the Association; she's got me as a sponsor; all that remains is her membership fee and a vote by those members present at an Association meeting, and you yourself called this field session to order with that stupid gavel of yours."

"But—but—" sputtered Dreelix, desperately reaching out for a convenient excuse. "Her information remains unproven. All we have is the word of a *fighter*"—Dreelix managed to drip scorn at the word—"that her attack strategies are useful. Until her entrance fee is paid, the matter remains moot in any case."

"Just what do you plan on doing with that hydra if you kill it?" asked Rhionda suddenly.

"We're primarily interested in its blood," said Buntleby. "According to Old Gumphrey, our chief alchemist, it can be used in the production of healing potions of various strengths, hopefully without the wart-producing side-effects we get when using troll's blood."

"Yeah, well, a dead hydra's got lots of other uses," replied Rhionda. "Pyrohydra blood and scales are used in the production of fireball wands, and rings of fire resistance can be carved from pyrohydra bones or teeth. Likewise, you can

15. Obviously, *vorpal swords* and *swords of sharpness* are preferred weapons when going up against a hydra, due to their head-severing abilities. A *flametongue* has obvious uses against a Lernaean hydra, as it cauterizes the wound on any head it severs, thus preventing the growth of new heads; it also inflicts additional damage against cryohydras. Likewise, a *frostbrand* is a favored sword against pyrohydras.

16. Contrary to popular belief, a hydra's heads are not all lined up in a row at the front of the creature's body. Rather, they are staggered, as shown in Diagram 1. Note that the Lernaean hydra is an exception to this; while its original number of heads determines its beginning configuration, any additional heads grown (as a result of having a head severed without subsequent burning of the neck-stump) sprout from the remaining neck. Thus, some necks might sport more than one head, or they might split into a "Y" halfway up their lengths.

Spellcasters would do well to put some thought into a hydra's neck configuration when using certain spells against it. Spells centered on a single point might not affect all of a hydra's heads. For example, if *darkness* is cast upon a central head it should keep all of the heads "in the dark." However, if it is targeted upon an "outer" head, it's possible for the hydra to stretch its heads out far enough for one or two heads on the other side of its body to emerge from the sphere of magical darkness. Pyrohydras and cryohydras can target their breath weapons from any head as long as at least one head (not necessarily the one using the breath weapon) can spot the intended victim.

Similarly, care must be taken when attempting to magically *blind* a hydra. *Blindness*, being an Alteration spell (a Transmutation spell in 3rd Edition), affects all of a hydra's heads if the creature fails its saving throw vs. spell (or Fortitude save in 3rd Edition). On the other hand, *glitterdust* affects all visual organs within a 10-foot radius, so some of a hydra's heads might be within the area of effect while others are not. If at least one head is available to guide the *blinded* heads, the creature bites (and uses its breath weapons, as appropriate) with no penalty to hit.

17. The bones of each of a hydra's necks connect to the spinal column in the torso via a ball-and-socket joint. Once a head is slain, autonomic muscles release the neck bones from the socket, making it easier for the beast to rip off damaged heads.

craft a ring of warmth or a cube of frost resistance from a cryohydra's teeth or bones, and the cryohydra's blood and scales can be used to make ice storm wands. Cured cryohydra skin can be used to create boots of the north, but you end up with garish purple boots.

"Also, with the Lernaean hydra's regeneration abilities, it should come as no surprise that the creature's blood is used in making periapts of wound closure, or that rings of regeneration can be carved from its bones and teeth.

"Finally, there are my favorite magical weapons, the swords. Hydra blood is often introduced to the metal of a magical sword as it's being crafted: pyrohydra blood for flametongues, Lernaean hydra blood for swords used against regenerating creatures, cryohydra blood for frostbrands.[18] Of course, any hydra's blood will do for weapons specially crafted against reptiles."

"A particularly useful beast!" exclaimed Dreelix happily, rubbing his hands together in greed at the thought of so many magical items to be crafted from a slain hydra.[19]

"So, all in all, do you think the value of a hydra carcass would cover the entrance fee to your little organization?" asked Rhionda.

"Most certainly," admitted Grindle the Coin-Counter, who kept track of all monetary matters for the Monster Hunters.

"Good enough, then," said Rhionda and stepped off the edge of the cliff.

The Monster Hunters gasped as one—even Lady Ablasta—and watched in horror as the slim fighter plummeted, feet-first, to almost certain death on the rocks below. As they watched, though, Rhionda slowed her rate of descent and drew the sword from her back as she neared the ground. "Boots of levitation, I'll bet," said Buntleby with a sigh of relief.

Rhionda landed softly on the balls of her feet and raced toward the pyrohydra. The beast caught sight of her approach and hissed like a steam kettle.[20] It swung several heads her way and let loose with a couple jets of flame. Rhionda swerved around the flame-gouts without slowing her pace.

"We've got to help her!" cried Buntleby from the cliff-top. "Dreelix! To the carpet!" He jumped onto Dreelix's flying carpet and looked at the Monster Hunters President expectantly.

"I ... don't think that's a good idea," said Dreelix. "We barely made it out alive last time. And anyway, we don't have any hold monster spells available, and Zantoullios can't cast any spells with his hands all burned like that in any case. This was only supposed to be a reconnaissance mission, so your little friend could point out what we should do the next time we attacked. I never expected her to—"

"Fine, fine, stay here then!" interrupted Buntleby. "Just give me the command words to the carpet, and I'll go down on my own!"

Dreelix crossed his arms and looked stubbornly down at his compatriot. "You know it's my policy never to lend out my personal magical items," he said. Buntleby ground his teeth and growled in frustration.

Meanwhile, down below, Rhionda had reached the pyrohydra and ran right up its left leg, putting her within sword-range of the creature's nearest head. A vicious swing buried the blade of her sword more than halfway through the beast's neck, and thick red blood spilled out from the gash. She pulled a dagger from her boot, slammed it deep into another neck, and used it as a handhold to steady herself as she swung her sword at the nearer of the creature's heads.

18. Rhionda is focusing just on swords; pyrohydra blood can also be used in the creation of any type of flaming weapon, just as cryohydra blood can be used to create any sort of frost weapon.

19. Hydra body parts can be used as alternate material components for several spells as well. The eyes of any hydra's head can be used for the *infravision* spell (the *darkvision* spell in 3rd Edition), but it takes both eyes from a single head, and they are consumed during spellcasting. The finely-ground scales from a hydra's back can be substituted for the granite and diamond dust used in a *stoneskin* spell without any lessening of the spell's efficacy. Finally, because of the fast-growing properties of Lernaean hydra head regeneration, flecks of dried blood from that creature can be used as an alternate material component for the *haste* spell.

20. The hydra's snakelike hisses are its only vocalizations; it cannot roar like dragons or other large reptiles. A hydra's tongues more closely resemble those of lizards than those of snakes.

An idea suddenly leapt into Buntleby's head: He snatched up the portable hole from the ground, held it in front of him with both hands, and took a flying leap over the edge of the cliff. Ozzie squealed in terror and almost leapt off the cliff after his master; only Zantoullios's sudden lunge onto the frantic osquip held him in place.

On the way down, Buntleby managed to scramble completely into the portable hole and pull it shut around him. Safe inside the extradimensional space, Buntleby didn't even feel it when the cloth landed on the stone floor of the hydra's gorge with a soft plop. He opened the portable hole and stepped out, a mere dozen feet from the pyrohydra. From this vantage point, the creature towered over the young wizard, amber eyes blazing with hatred like some fabled beast of legend.[21]

At first, he couldn't see Rhionda at all. Then he spotted her among the creature's writhing necks, weaving a bloody swath of death with her sword. Several of the creature's heads were already severed or dangling by little more than a thread; as he watched, the monster accidentally stepped on one of its drooping heads, and the neck ripped from the body to lie motionless on the ground.

Buntleby released the words to one of the few combat spells he had remaining: a stinking cloud that sent nauseous green vapors roiling toward the heads on the hydra's right side, while avoiding Rhionda, perched among the necks and stumps on the creature's left. That ought to slow it down, he thought.

No such luck; the pyrohydra seemed completely unaffected.[22] "Back off, Bunt!" called Rhionda, slicing deep into another neck with her sword. "I've got everything under contr—UHHN!" Distracted by Buntleby's unexpected appearance, Rhionda took a blast of flame to the side; losing her grip, she plummeted to the ground in front of the lumbering beast. With combat-honed instincts, she rolled quickly to the side, narrowly avoiding being trampled by the creature and extinguishing the flames at the same time. Her sword, dropped during the fall, clattered to the ground near the portable hole.

Buntleby pulled out his dagger, realized how useless it would be against the pyrohydra, and seriously considered turning tail and fleeing for his life now that Rhionda was out of harm's way. A gout of flame at his feet helped him decide: He turned and fled, wizard's robes flapping wildly behind him and the four remaining pairs of hydra jaws snapping at his own head.

Running full out and looking over his shoulder at the beast barreling down at him, Buntleby nearly tripped into the still-open portable hole but managed to dodge at the last moment with a great deal of arm-waving and dancing on tiptoes. The motion sent him off-balance, and he fell to his side with a whoof of expelled air. The hydra, less aware of the workings of magical items, failed to realize that the dark-colored fabric lying out flat like a rug between it and its prey wasn't really quite there; its front left leg fell into the extradimensional hole, and the weight of its body sent it sprawling to the ground.

Rhionda ran to Buntleby's side and pulled him to his feet, seconds before a blast of flame struck the spot where he had just been lying. "My sword!" she cried, pointing at the great beast. "It's pinned under her stupid body! How am I going to kill the silly thing without my sword?"

As if on cue, several magic missiles came screaming down from above, each striking the beast in a random location. Its four remaining mouths hissed in pain as wave after wave of magical energy pierced its body. Looking up, Buntleby and Rhionda saw the other Monster Hunters floating down from the cliff-top on Dreelix's flying carpet like some aerial cavalry. "Observe the mastery of magic over muscle!" called Dreelix, bringing the carpet to a rough landing on the ground. As the hydra dropped lifelessly to the ground, Lady Ablasta replaced her wand of magic missiles in the special holster on her left forearm under her puffy sleeve.

"I shall have the price of recharging my wand added to your first dues payment," she said frostily to Rhionda. "Grindle, make a note of that."

"Then she's in?" asked Buntleby incredulously, as Ozzie bounded up to him and licked his master's ankles in relief.

"Three to two," muttered Dreelix unhappily. "It seems she's convinced Zantoullios and Grindle of her usefulness to the Association." He gave a weary sigh. "Rhionda, I officially welcome you to the Monster Hunters and blah blah blah," he said, waving his hand in the air as if shooing away a particularly irritating horsefly. "Now then, let's get down to the business of chopping up this nasty beast; I want to get the goodies back to Old Gumphrey as soon as possible!"

Buntleby looked at Rhionda and shrugged. Rhionda shrugged back, then turned to pry the yellowish teeth from one of its severed heads.[23]

"It'll be nice working with you again, Bunt," she said with a smile.

"Likewise, replied Buntleby. And then, almost as an afterthought: "And don't call me 'Bunt.'"

Johnathan M. Richards is a big fan of Ray Harryhausen's animation techniques, and he remembers with great fondness the legless hydra from the movie Jason and the Argonauts.

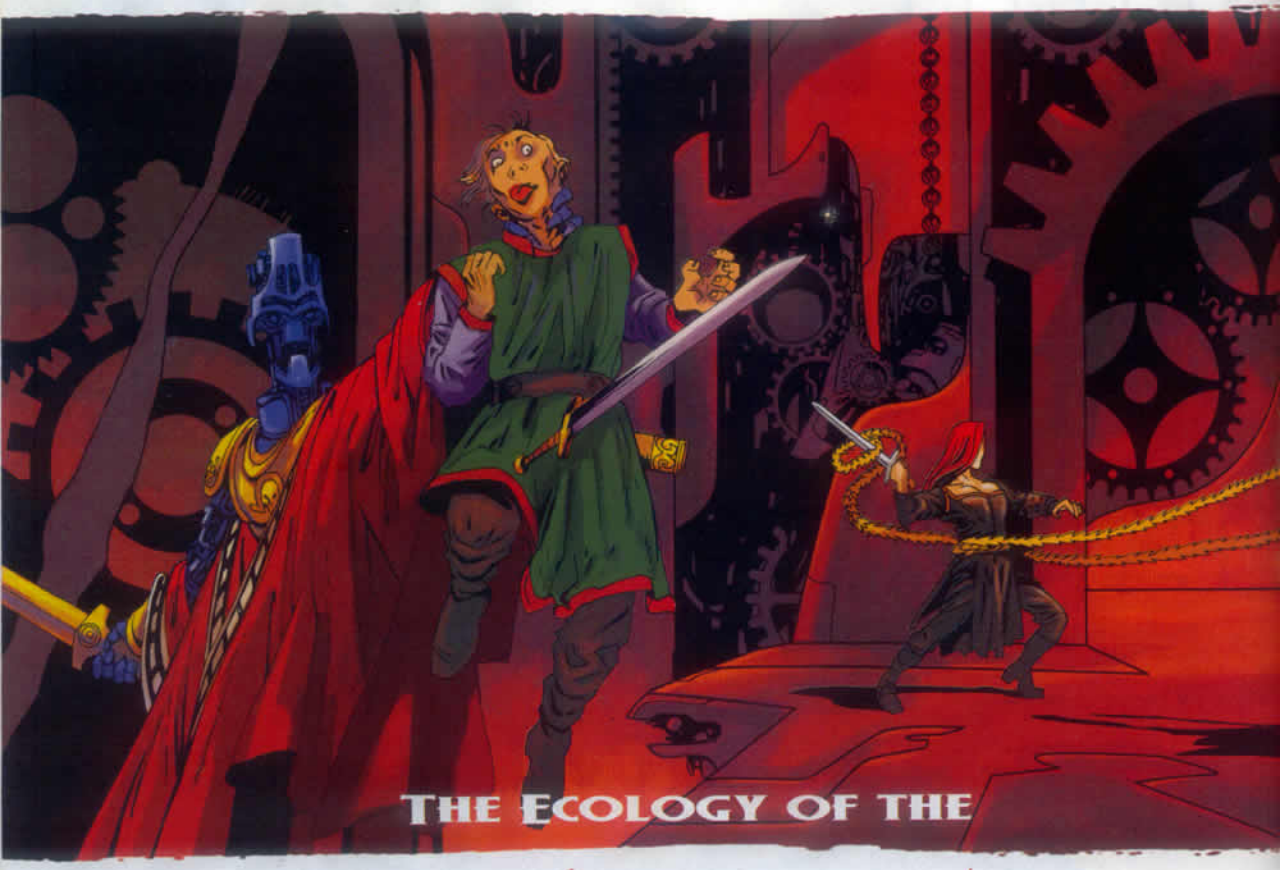
21. The hydra of Greek mythology was a nine-headed Lernaean hydra with poisonous breath and venomous blood whose middle head was immortal. Heracles slew the beast by searing each head with fire as he decapitated it and burying the immortal middle head under a rock.

In a PLANESCAPE® campaign, this archetypal hydra probably still lurks somewhere on the plane of Olympus. Details on this creature are left to the DM's imagination, but suggestions on such mythological archetypes appear in the *PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II*, under the "Monster of Legend" entry.

22. Though it has as many sets of nostrils as it has heads, a hydra has but a single set of lungs. As long as at least one head remains clear of breathing hazards at all times, it can ignore the effects of poisonous gases that must be inhaled to take effect. This ability also allows swamp-dwelling hydras to walk along the bottom of a lake or similar body of water if they keep at least one set of nostrils above the water line.

23. DMs might wish to allow hydra teeth to be enchanted so that, when planted in the ground and the command word spoken, they spring up as either armed and armored warriors (as in traditional Greek mythology) or skeletons (as in the movie *Jason and the Argonauts*). Several excellent ideas for the creation of such magical teeth appear in Gregg Chamberlain's "The Magic of Dragon Teeth," published in *DRAGON® Magazine* #98.

by David Noonan • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE INEVITABLE

Implacable agents of law, the inevitables dispense justice without regard to race, creed, or station. If you have broken one of the natural laws of the multiverse there might be an inevitable on your trail right now.

HISTORY OF THE INEVITABLES

By the standards of the eons-old multiverse, the rise of the inevitables is a relatively recent occurrence. Some historical texts (most notably Ganthros the Elder's *Accounting of the Realms Beyond* and Hannak Lathar's *Verses of the Blood War*) trace their emergence to 10,000 years ago. At that time, angelic creatures called aphanacts called the plane of Mechanus home. Ambitious and obsessed with justice, the aphanacts raised great armies that crusaded on other planes, bringing vast swaths of the multiverse under their rigid code of laws.

Ganthros's writing hints that the deities themselves ended the aphanact crusades, while Lathar posits an alliance of convenience among the fiends of the Lower Planes and the archons, angels, and eladrins of the Upper Planes. In any case, every last aphanact disappeared 10,000 years ago.

In their place rose the first inevitables. Massive, fortresslike crèche-forges appeared amid the spinning gears of Mechanus. For a decade they softly hummed, impervious to any effort to penetrate them or divine their purpose. Then maruts started to emerge from the crèche-forges, striding across the planes. Other sorts of inevitables followed in centuries to come.

Neither Ganthros the Elder nor Hannak Lathar can identify the creators of the crèche-forges (and consequently the inevitables) with any certainty. That doesn't stop them from speculating, of course. The inevitables have no larger society; their application of justice is absolutely an individual one. Each inevitable has a tightly defined purpose and no interest in matters beyond the next target brought to justice. Thus, planar historians speculate that whomever created the inevitables wanted to avoid a repeat of the aphanact crusades. Without broad ambition or the inclination to organize in groups, the inevitables remain individually powerful, but collectively dormant.

Whether one god, many deities, or other powerful denizens of the outer planes created the inevitables remains a mystery. Because inevitables periodically return to their crèche-forge to have their memories removed, even the first inevitables don't remember who created them.

LIFE CYCLE OF THE INEVITABLE

When an inevitable first emerges from a crèche-forge on Mechanus, it seems to possess very little knowledge beyond the identity of its first target and a sense of how its powers work. It speaks little and generally refuses to interact with bystanders unless they directly aid or hinder its current mission of justice. Maruts, quaruts, and varakhuts *plane shift* to the appropriate plane to begin their mission, while zelekhuts and kolyaruts start seeking a natural portal to the relevant plane.

Because *plane shift* is imprecise and portals rarely emerge at a convenient spot, the inevitable often has a long journey ahead of it—even if the first target isn't on the move. During this journey, the inevitable observes its surroundings, recording its observations and soaking up information like a sponge. It starts to interact more with passersby in simple ways, asking for directions and questioning witnesses. An inevitable's first interactions are often awkward, as the inevitable struggles to make itself understood and tries to deal with creatures that don't share its single-minded purpose. Inevitables are reasonably intelligent, so they develop rudimentary conversation skills within a few weeks of travel in populated areas.

When an inevitable's first mission is complete, it uses what it's learned about its surroundings to identify

single-minded pursuit of enforcing a natural law of the universe.

Kolyarut: Both written and oral contracts are the purview of the kolyarut, which regards itself as an impartial "enforcement clause" for that contract. A kolyarut undertakes a mission only when it has a complete understanding of the contract. Sometimes these inevitables study an actual copy of the contract or is present when the oral bargain is made, but more often it acquires a mystical understanding of the terms of the contract in a flash of inspiration. This instinctive understanding of the terms is beyond the control of the kolyarut, but it seems to require a degree of proximity to one of the parties to the contract, oath, or bargain. Thus, a kolyarut in search of its next mission tends to gravitate to royal courts, magistrates' benches, temples, and other places where oaths are frequently sworn and contracts made.

Because it regards itself as part of the contract, a kolyarut is simultaneously the easiest and most difficult kind of inevitable to negotiate with. A kolyarut won't be swayed by an oathbreaker's claim of "extenuating circumstances." The kolyarut, if given to conversation, would reply: "The circumstances are indeed extenuating, but they aren't part of the contract. You are thus in breach." Avoiding a confrontation with a kolyarut is as simple as returning to compliance, or (if it's a two-party contract) providing convincing evidence that the other party has also broken its part of the deal. Kolyaruts simply walk away from situations where both sides have broken a bargain.

Kolyaruts rarely kill except in self-defense; their concept of what constitutes appropriate justice is usually spelled out in the oath, bargain, or contract. They use *suggestion*, *mark of justice*, and *geas/quest* to compel compliance, resorting to violence only if such measures fail or lethal force is part of the bargain to begin with (like an oath on one's life that is subsequently broken).

Marut: Maruts, almost always enforce their natural laws by killing transgressors. They hunt down those who would cheat death by extending their lifespans unnaturally. Some maruts also bring justice to those who engage in large-scale necromancy (raising undead armies, for example), because doing so cheats the inevitability of death for others.

The quarry of a marut is, by definition, powerful enough to keep the grave at bay. The marut's foe is also either immortal or very long-lived. So a marut must be patient itself, spending years or decades on a single foe such as a necromancer, lich, or cult leader seeking immortality.

The target of a marut is often set apart from society by the nature of the transgression, so maruts get little practice interacting with other creatures. Thus, they develop distinctive personalities much more slowly than other inevitables.

Quarut: The target of a quarut is also a potent foe, capable of reordering time and space in dramatic, dangerous ways. A quarut's target list consists of creatures that can stop the flow of time itself or wish a new reality into existence, so it approaches its targets with patience and caution. A quarut is unlikely to stride into the archmage's floating tower, shackles in hand. Instead, the quarut interrogates former associates and minions, seeking out weaknesses. The quarut employs proxies to engage the archmage in battle, using the opportunity to assess the capabilities of its quarry.

While some transgressors are able to defeat the quarut in battle, others are able to reach accommodation with the inevitable by setting aright whatever dramatic change they made to space or time. Simply undoing the change in reality is rarely enough to satisfy a quarut, however. A transgressor eager to be free of a tenacious quarut must rework time itself so that the change in reality was never made in the first place.

Varakhut: Those who seek mere immortality are the province of the maruts, but those who seek godhood are considered transgressors to

ORIGIN OF THE INEVITABLE

"When Jeff Grubb, Bruce Cordell, and I split up the writing duties for the 2001 *Manual of the Planes* sourcebook, I was lucky enough to get the monsters chapter. At the time, the only monsters anyone had were the ones in the *Monster Manual*, because the third edition of the D&D game was less than a year old.

"First, I wanted to check for gaps in the existing supply of monsters to make sure we had at least a starting point for adventures on every plane. Second, I pored through first- and second-edition sources looking for planar monsters that I could "promote" into the new rules set.

"I saw a gap in the available denizens of Mechanus. At the time, the formians were the sole denizens of the plane. They're great monsters, but it strained the imagination to have formians enforcing laws, chasing down criminals, and meting out punishment from within their hives. The same held true with second edition's modrons.

"Eventually, as I was at my desk fliping through the *Planescape Monstrous Compendium Appendix*, looking for good monsters, I came across the marut.

"The marut entry included a bit of fiction that was a riff on Poe's "Masque of the Red Death," so it wasn't much of a stretch to imagine these guys as enforcers of a "don't try to cheat death" natural law. The marut thus became the first example of a class of creatures we eventually called the inevitables.

"The marut was on board, and his natural law was one that would make him a useful ally or a potential opponent. Because the inevitables are lawful neutral, I wanted them to function as enemies or allies. Thus their natural laws had to be laws that you could imagine PCs upholding or breaking, depending on the circumstance. Thus came the kolyarut (don't break a contract) and the zelekhut (don't escape justice), and with the *Fiend Folio* the quarut (don't mess with space and time) and the varakhut (don't mess with the gods)." –*David Noonan*

the varakhuts. A rare type of inevitable, varakhuts hunt down those who make a credible bid for godhood.

To attract the interest of a varakhut, the attempt at godhood must be legitimate. Not every two-bit cult leader and would-be demigod is subject to the justice of a varakhut, only those on the cusp of becoming true deities. In some cases, powerful outsiders or would-be godlings intentionally antagonize varakhuts in an attempt to legitimize their bids for godhood.

Once a varakhut identifies a credible attempt at godhood, it studies its enemies like a quarut does, learning as much as it can about its target before making a direct confrontation. The varakhut prefers to thwart would-be deities by eliminating them directly, but it isn't above destroying artifact-level power sources or wreaking havoc on minions and worshipers if doing so weakens the prospective godling.

Only two ways of forestalling a varakhut exist. The first is obvious: destroying it. The second way is to actually achieve deityhood. Once a creature becomes a demigod, varakhuts regard the new deity as part of the natural order they're charged with enforcing.

While most varakhuts search the cosmos for those trying to join the pantheon of deities, occasionally varakhuts target those attempting the reverse: deicide, the act of killing a deity.

Zelekhut: Because they're charged with hunting down fugitives, zelekhuts spend more time traveling and doing detective work. More so than the targets of other inevitables, the quarry of a zelekhut certainly doesn't want to be found. Zelekhuts thus interact with

ADVANCED INEVITABLE

Inevitables most often advance by Hit Dice, as they forget their classes upon returning to their crèche-forges. Occasionally, kolyaruts become fighters or clerics of deities of order, and zelekhuts sometimes take levels of ranger, choosing humanoid favored enemies. Maruts most rarely take levels in specific classes, their already massive bulks added to with each return to the forge, eventually growing to truely epic proportions.

GANTRENACHT **CR 22**

Advanced marut inevitable
LN Huge construct
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +24, Spot +27

AC 37, touch 9, flat-footed 36
hp 276 (43HD); fast healing 10 **DR** 15/chaotic
Immune construct traits
SR 25
Fort +16, **Ref** +15, **Will** +19

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee 2 slams +25 melee (3d6+43 plus 3d6 sonic or 3d6 electricity)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Base Atk +32; **Grp** +60
Attack Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, fists of thunder and lightning Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Power Attack
Spell-like Abilities (CL 14):
At will—*air walk, dimension door, fear* (DC 19), *greater command* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic, mass inflict light wounds* (DC 20), *locate creature, true seeing*
1/day—*chain lightning* (DC 21), *circle of death* (DC 21), *mark of justice, wall of force*
1/week—*earthquake* (DC 23), *geas/quest, plane shift* (DC 22)

Abilities Str 46, Dex 12, Con –, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 20
Feats Ability Focus (fists), Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Natural Attack, Run
Skills Concentration +18, Diplomacy +16, Knowledge (religion) +21, Listen +24, Search +13, Sense Motive +12, Spot +27, Survival +16 (+18 following tracks)

Fists of Thunder and Lightning (Su): Gantrenacht's left fist deals 3d6 points of sonic damage and deafens the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the deafness). Its right fist deals 3d6 points of electricity damage and blinds the target for 2d6 rounds (Fortitude DC 51 negates the blindness).
* Includes adjustment for 25-point Power Attack.

passersby more than other inevitables and develop distinctive personalities faster. A zelekhut often brings a fugitive back to authorities alive, employing *mark of justice* and *lesser geas* to augment the mundane shackles and other restraints on the prisoner.

A zelekhut often has to interrogate witnesses who might know something about the whereabouts of its quarry. A zelekhut recently emerged from its crèche-forge asks direct questions and might resort to physical violence if it thinks it'll gain better information that way. A more experienced zelekhut is a subtler interrogator, using Sense Motive to ferret out witnesses who are withholding information important to the zelekhut's search.

ORDER OF INEVITABLE JUSTICE

"Some seek to uphold the law or enforce the law. We want to become the law."

—Andrinn d'Vascou, Lord Knight of Serenity Fortress

The knightly Order of Inevitable Justice are mortals who seek to emulate the single-minded tenacity of inevitables, undertaking the cause of enforcing the natural laws of the universe. Members of the order undertake quests to bring justice to places where neither spiritual nor temporal justice can reach.

The order has no ceremonial duties or leisure activities; such idleness has no place in a cosmos crying out for inevitable justice. The order is thus relatively free of internal politicking; even the hint of such things is unlike the constructs that members of the order emulate.

Fortresses: The Order of Inevitable Justice has one or more fortresses on each nonchaotic plane and two or three per continent on the Material Plane. Most are imposing structures, but a few are hidden in lands under the sway of rulers the order considers unjust.

Members of the order and those who can prove that they are devout servants of justice can find aid at any of the group's numerous fortresses. Each fortress is the functional equivalent of a small city for the purpose of buying and selling items, enlists a 13th-level cleric (of a god with the Law domain) who can perform needed spellcasting for 80% of the standard NPC price, and houses order sages and diviners who can provide members with information on known lawbreakers in the general area.

Missions: Each member of the order specializes in a type of justice that corresponds with a particular type of inevitable. Some members, for example, hunt undead as maruts do, while others seek out fugitives as zelekhuts. Just as inevitables undertake missions without regard for how long they'll take to complete, so too do members of the Order of Inevitable Justice leave the fortress for months or even years without consequence. As long as members don't engage in lawbreaking themselves and attempt to uphold the same ideals as the inevitables, they remain members in good standing of the order.

Artwork by David O. Miller

The Mechanics of the IRON COBRA

A mechanical serpent has no ecology

by Spike Y. Jones

"As you can easily hear, Grainne, our own crwth is much gentler in tone than the quayteros of the worshipers of Ishtar the Dancer. Now, compare my telyn with this other harp called a kissar. It's made from the skull of a minotaur that has had strings attached to its horns by—"

"Look at Aidan! Look at Aidan!" cried Fiona, interrupting the bard in midlesson.

"If you're trying to look like a fool, Aidan, you're doing a good job of it," muttered the children's older sister.

"I'm trying to get this horn to blow, Grainne, but it just won't work,"

"That 'horn' is actually a very rare instrument in this country," said the bard, "for I found it in a land beyond the Imbran Mountains and, indeed, beyond the deserts on their nether side. It is a 'naganai.' "

"A what?" asked the red-headed boy.

"A 'snake-flute,' in the language of a man named Gawara Hawara."

"It doesn't look like a flute," observed Grainne.

"Or a snake," added Fiona.

"And it doesn't sound like either," added Aidan with a grin as he handed the tube of wood and metal to its owner, who took it in his right (and only) hand.

"That's a part of its special magic," said the bard.

"Magic? Like in the stories?"

"Yes, Fiona, magic like in the stories."

"And was there magic when you got the flute?"

"Yes, Aidan, there was magic in the 'nai, and there was magic all around it, and there is magic in it still."

"And will you please tell us about it, Mr. Farwanderer?"

"I wonder how it was that I knew what the next question asked of me would be? Yes, Grainne, I will tell you this story, but only as I can see that otherwise our music lesson will go no farther this day. Fiona, bring me the other naganai, the polished wooden one, from my instrument satchel. Aidan, you get me a drink to wet my lips—but only water, mind you; it's hardly past dusk. And Grainne, you merely make yourself comfortable here while the others are about their tasks, for you shall have a task of your own—a musical task—to perform later."

There had been a sound, and from close by. It was not a proper command and had been nothing at all intelligible, but it was the first time in untold years and miles that there had been a sound. The listener hesitated in the near darkness—then moved in that direction. It was so close.

"Years ago when I was still earning the title 'Farwanderer,' for I had yet to see many of the faraway places that by now I have, I arrived in the city of Mangala on the banks of the Porah River. I was traveling in those eastern lands looking for an education of sorts and the means to sup port myself until the education was through. In Mangala I found what I thought was a way to combine the two.

"The average person of that place is much the same as those of Mardukan to our south, but their magicians are of a different sort entirely. While Mardukanian spell-casters use their elaborate rituals to ensure good harvests and to protect their people from barbarian and monster attacks, Mangalan wizards use their magicks to fabricate items of power for their personal profit. And I had heard of one such magical creation, rumored to be unique in the world.

"This thing, called the Light of Surya, was a flawless diamond that had been magically engraved with the words to a number of spells of great power. Fortunately, those spells could be cast only by one strong of will and pure of heart, and the mage who possessed the diamond, Gawara Hawara, had neither, having gained the periapt by way of a poisonous snake, as he was both a coward and a scoundrel. While I myself had not the . . . magical aptitude to use such a device, I thought that retrieving and returning it to the rightful owners would be beneficial to all involved—including myself," he added hastily before Aidan could say the same. "I was younger then, and willing to lay aside my greatest talent for a bit of glory and a chance at being killed." He hefted the strange flute in his hand.

"Did you sneak in and grab it?" asked Fiona.

"Or did you break in and fight for it?" countered Aidan.

"Being not as rash as many another young adventurer," the bard continued blithely, "I did not present myself at the mage's door and demand the return of the periapt. Instead, remembering such sage phrases as 'ignorance breeds indigence' and 'over hurried, soon buried,' I decided to first learn as much as I could concerning Gawara Hawara's security measures.

"The first thing I was told by those I approached was that he guarded himself and his treasures with snakes—mind you, not just any snakes, but magical creatures with scales of steel and blood of oil.[1]

"These 'iron cobras,' for such were they called, he constructed for himself in his apartments and released to prowl the courtyards and recesses of his mansion. It

was one such device as this that he sent to slay the mage-priest of Surya to gain the magical gemstone I sought, one of many such stolen articles said to litter his quarters. Many a prospective pilferer had died in the clutches of these cobras, and only one, Asman, called 'the Lucky' after his one encounter with the snakes, had survived their attacks to tell me of their effectiveness.

"But the theft and subsequent protection of his ill-gotten gains were not all for which Gawara Hawara used the cobras. He would sometimes hire them out as relentless assassins, even offering them to high officials for legitimate purposes if the price tendered was exorbitant enough. Whereas a man being hunted by another man could hope to use trickery or speed to escape his pursuer, or could hope to defeat him in combat if finally cornered, the same could not be said of the man chased by the iron cobras. The iron serpents were unceasing and never lost a trail once they'd found it.[2] I was told that they were invincible in combat. Worse still, they often struck at night or when their victim was unable to defend himself, making maximum use of their stealth and deadly poison.

"The cobras were not alive and did not think for themselves. Instead, they followed the commands given them by Gawara Hawara. To ensure that the commands could not be overheard and then spoken by other men, he constructed his serpents in such a way that they would respond only to commands issued by way of his flute, his naganai.[3] No one I spoke with in Mangala knew. the songs he played to command his snakes, as he refrained from playing where he could be overheard, unless the audience was not expected to survive to pass on the tune.

"So," said the bard, setting aside the wood and metal 'nai and taking the plain wooden one, "I first had to learn how to play this instrument. Luckily, it being one of the more popular of those played in Mangala, I had my choice of many capable tutors, and I quickly mastered its techniques of play. Aidan, you can try to play this 'nai."

Aidan took the proffered instrument and proceeded to produce two or three audible but painfully bad notes before passing it back to the bard.

"Now, give it to Grainne and we'll see what sort of impression my chwibanogl lessons have made on your sister."

The older girl accepted the 'nai, took a few seconds to nervously adjust her finger-holds, then played a halting but recognizable scale on it.

"That's better, Grainne, especially as the 'nai can play notes quite different from the chwibanogl you're used to. You will both get the chance to continue with your lessons while I continue with this story. You'll play the tunes I show you, as it is not easy for me," he said, raising his left arm but not letting the concealing folds of his sleeve drop away from its stumped end. "Grainne shall play on the audible 'nai, while Aidan will follow along silently with the other."

Aidan's expression fell for a moment as he took the silent 'nai. Perhaps Mr. Farwanderer had given him the quiet instrument to keep him from playing badly again. But the barest hint of a smirk tickled the corners of the bards mouth, and the boy realized that there might be other reasons for the choice of instruments. His usual smile resurfaced.

"Now, as I was saying," the bard resumed, his face regaining the serious expression he wore during instruction, "having learned to play the naganai, I next went to discover the tunes Gawara Hawara used. Mangala being a city of magicks, I visited a guild of magicians and asked if to borrow a scrying device."

"Scrying?" asked Fiona.

"That's like spying," replied Aidan, looking up from his fingering of the 'nai, "but it's magic."

"By paying them a fair price, leaving the rest of my instruments in their care as collateral, and promising them further payment if I was successful, I procured the loan of a pair of magical eyepieces known as 'eyes of the eagle.' Equipped with these crystals, I rented a room on a hill overlooking Gawara Hawara's house. Although it was some distance away, with the crystal eyepieces I could see the mage as if he were but feet away from me. Every time he came into my sight, I watched him in hopes that he would give some command to his cobras.

"A few times a day, he did make rounds of his yards, inquiring of his constructs if there had been any disturbances, then replaying their original orders or changing them if anything noteworthy had occurred.

"It took me a fortnight and more before I felt confident that I had learned all of the tunes I would need. I watched closely and mastered the fingerings for a half-dozen different commands." He reached for Grainne with his one hand. "This," he said, carefully raising and lowering her fingers over the holes of the wooden naganai to a simple beat, "was the command to attack intruders. And this," he said, moving her fingers through an identical pattern, "was the command to report to Gawara Hawara."

"But they're the same," Grainne complained.

"Ah, the fingerings are the same, but are the songs?"

"If they were loud or quiet . . . " said Grainne after a thoughtful pause.

"Or if they were notes with the same fingerings but different sounds . . . " pondered Aidan.

"... with different pitches, then the songs would differ," finished the bard. "Both good answers, and both correct. I watched Gawara Hawara even more closely for the next week to notice any signs of intonation changes or octave jumps. And by way of movements of his cheeks and lips, the way he shifted his head, and the way the muscles of his throat and mouth tightened at certain points, I was sure I had been able to determine what all of the notes were and how the songs were to be played. Now, try blowing the tune the easiest way."

When Grainne played a passable version of the song, giggling erupted from Fiona.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Farwand'rer," the child protested before the bard could chastise her, "Aidan was blowin', too!"

"I thought you meant for both of us to try it," Aidan answered as his teacher turned toward him, a look of purest mischief belying his avowed innocence.

"Be that as it may, it would be to the advantage of all involved if you merely fingered along with your older sister and left the cheek puffing to another time. Now, Grainne," the bard continued, "if you were to blow doubly hard when you reach the third note, and only just whisper the last, you will find that you can play notes of different pitch at those two places, one an octave above, and one an octave below the normal pitch."

Grainne now played a tune quite similar to the first with only the two requested modifications.

"Very good! That first tune you played, that Aidan tried to echo, was 'attack,' and the second was 'report.' Of course, even if properly played on the naganai in Aidan's care, neither variation would be audible, but the method would be the same, and I assumed the result would be, too."

Once in a great while, the naganai's slave would pass some of its smaller brethren along its journey, lying damaged beyond repair in the wastes of the desert or at the bottom of mountain defiles, or even lying rusted beneath the surfaces of still lakes and slow rivers. All had tried to carry out their last orders, and all had failed in their attempts. But now the servant had a new order, an order that would last until canceled.[4] It moved quickly to fulfill its command, iron fangs parting in anticipation.

"And then you got the thing?" asked Fiona, attempting to steer the story firmly away from the music lesson.

"Yes, dear, it was time to make my try for the Light of Surya. I had watched the mage until I had determined just these sorts of differences between the tunes he played regularly. There were slight variations to some tunes played on different days or in different places that apparently made the commands more precise, but I was confident that the general commands I'd learned were sufficient.

"I readied myself in my least conspicuous clothing, secured my all-important naganai and a few other tools of value, belted on my smallsword, and made my way through the dark of the night to his mansion's outer walls.

"As I began my ascent, I thought for a moment that I spotted movement farther

along the garden wall. But when I paused to look more intently, I saw nothing. I told myself that it was just nervousness and finished the climb. From the walls top, I looked for any sign of cobras in the yard but saw none. One of the reasons real cobras are dangerous is that they can disappear in the darkness and undergrowth as effectively as a skilled thief; apparently, this is one of the reasons cobras were chosen to model for these constructs.

"I crept toward the manse across the compound, headed for a small door that I'd seen Gawara Hawara use but rarely— and I was almost discovered. One of his mechanical minions approached me along the path, but apparently I saw it before it saw me. I immediately stopped and attempted to blend silently into the same shadows the cobras were using for concealment, as I did not want to betray my presence by playing my 'nai too soon. The silvery snake-stopped short of my concealment and spread its hood out about its head, turning in all directions as a human would turn with a hand cupped to his ear.[5] Luckily, although it looked directly at me for a time that felt like hours, it finally refolded its hood and glided swiftly past. Evidently, it was intent on finding something or someone else.

"Shaken but not unnerved by this good fortune, I waited until the iron serpent was well gone, then made for the door. It had been locked, but the device was a simple one, the mage putting trust in the abilities of his iron guardians to protect him. I left the door ajar behind me, in case I had no time later for a leisurely exit, and I proceeded cautiously forward.

"It was not dark inside, for the mage had attached some small globes to the ceiling at intervals that cast magical light bright enough to allow navigation of the corridors without fear of bumping against walls or breaking crockery. I had no sure idea where the periapt was secured, but I assumed that it would be in the center of the building, away from entrances as vulnerable as the one I had come through, and that it would be close to the rooms Gawara Hawara occupied, mages and misers often surrounding themselves with their treasures. So, I made my way upward and inward.

"Stealing through the mage's apartments was a nerve-wracking experience, as I paused and hid at every imagined sound. Although everything was sized for humans, there were small holes cut into the walls and doors to allow easy access for the snakes, a fact demonstrated when another inattentive iron sentinel emerged from one of these channels a short distance ahead of me and departed across the hall.

"I eventually ascended a flight of stairs and arrived at a room that appeared to be Gawara Hawara's personal quarters, and hopefully of the Light of Surya. Gathering my courage, I opened the last door and entered the chamber. As I'd guessed, the room contained a mass of treasure; silver, gold, gems, jewelled arms and armor, and beautiful works of art, all illuminated by the magical light-globes fixed in the doubly high ceiling. And nowhere could a cobra be seen. Made bold by this wealth of wealth and dearth of protection, I stepped in and made for an alabaster pedestal in the room's center, upon which shone the gem I sought.

"And it was at this moment I learned that it is never wise to assume the unlikely. For there I was in the most important room of the mage's lair, and it did not enter my mind that he would have guarded that room more effectively than the rest of his demesne. Before I could traverse half the distance to my goal, something that I had previously taken to be a rolled carpet[6] unfurled, showing itself to be a shockingly huge iron cobra that raised its head more than my own height above the floor.[7]

"Guessing that it would not be wise to attempt to bluff this monster, I grabbed my naganai and played the command song for it to 'stand fast and report,' the tune I was most sure of. Now, Grainne, if you remember it. . . ." he said expectantly. Grainne raised the 'nai to her lips and complied, and the bard returned to his narration when she had completed a halting rendition of the command. "To my chagrin, the monstrous snake failed to pause, continuing its measured advance. Thinking that I'd mistaken the tune, I played another song" —at which point Grainne played "return to patrols" unbidden— "but it did me no better. The cobra approached still.

"Realizing that there had somehow been an error in my preparations, I drew my smallsword and took a defensive stance. Much faster than its stately stalking of me, the automaton lashed out. Desperation more than skill enabled me to jump aside at the last possible moment. As I dodged, I stabbed my blade at the automation, only to have the weapon clang and shatter against a surface stronger than my swords cheap steel.[8] That action was my last against the periapt's final warder. Before I could even think of another attack to make, it reared up once more and, with,a lightning lunge, thrust its fangs into my shoulder and poisoned me."

Years of silence had been broken less than an hour before by meaningless noise, then again minutes later by an actual command: the command to attack all but the holder of the naganai. It should have made no difference to the serpent, but it seemed to move a trifle faster through the darkness than it had before, as if to fulfil this latest order before the holder of the naganai could pick up and move away It was the greatest of its kind. It would not fail now.

"But you couldn't have been poisoned! You're still alive! "

"The sting of a bee needn't kill to frighten away a curious boy, Aidan, and not all poisons need be fatal in order to be effective.[9] In this case, it was enough for the venom to leave me paralyzed, lying on the flagstones until Gawara Hawara could investigate the clamor we had made; after that, my death would be assured.

"I was too distraught to judge the interval, but I imagine Gawara Hawara was not long in coming. He was a tall man with a shaven pate, and he was wrapped entirely in many-layered green robes. A jewelled dagger hung at his hip, and he had in his hand the same silvered naganai that Aidan now holds. With a most evil look on his face, he approached to question me before having me disposed of. But before he could ask his first question, we both heard a clinking sound from somewhere across the room.

"Whirling about, Gawara Hawara saw nothing. Only momentarily puzzled, he lifted the naganai to his lips and began to play. At first I thought the poison of the cobra had deafened me, for I heard no sound from the 'nai, but I soon realized that it must be something else for I could still hear the rustling of his robes. Immediately after this realization, a normal-size iron cobra appeared from one of the perforations in the walls. Moments later, another appeared, then a third. When they'd halted before him, Gawara Hawara played another silent tune and they opened their fans, 'looking' for the unseen intruder. I discovered then that part of the magic of this naganai was that it could be heard only by his iron legions.

"Of a sudden, one of the snakes ceased its rotations and a whispering sound like wind through dry leaves came from it.[10] Hearing this, Gawara Hawara played yet another soundless song. Immediately, all of his small charges made for the shadows behind one treasure pile.

"Realizing that he'd been found out, a man dressed all in black leapt from behind an urn of coins and landed beside the leading snake. Swinging downward with a glowing sword, he struck its head off with one blow, then grabbed its fallen body and slung it about him, spraying the floor between himself and the other snakes with its ichor. Then, with extraordinary calm, he took a handful of slim darts from his belt and dipped their tips in the venom dripping from the downed cobra's fangs.

"Not at all dismayed by this apparently senseless act, the other snakes continued forward, but once they arrived at the pool of fluid their progress stopped. Writhe and twitch as they might, they could neither move forward nor retreat from the blood of the fallen one.[11] That being the case, the brazen thief walked up to the plinth and plucked the Light of Surya that sat there.

"This I thought was the man's only mistake, for he'd apparently forgotten about the enraged Gawara Hawara. After the mage recovered from his shock at the scene, he uttered an oath in his foreign

tongue and desperately played the command to attack once more.

"At this last command, the immense serpent whose head had hung over me now started after the thief. Audacious and unafraid to the end, the man in black stood his ground, selected an envenomed dart, and calmly blew it through his dart-tube at the mage. Not being interested in watching his adversary fall dead to the floor, he turned to where I lay on the floor and removed the scarves he had worn to hide his face.

"To my surprise, the man was familiar, but it was not until he spoke that I recognized him. 'Thank you,' Asman the Lucky said, 'for showing me the way into Gawara Hawara's lair, and for showing me the Light that I have sought all these years.' Then he turned and ran down the stairs, barely eluding the monstrous cobra that followed in slow but determined pursuit.

"It took me some while to get up from where I lay. Surprisingly, I was not attacked in that time. The snakes that had been stranded in the oily puddle had evidently escaped and joined the pursuit of Asman, and unless they caught him, they're probably pursuing to this day. Only the gods know where they've all gone now."

On a chilly night like this, a human would call the light streaming from the windows of the two-storied building friendly. To the long, sinuous figure in the black street outside, the light was merely a signpost that its mission was coming to a close. With mechanical precision unhampered by the dents and scratches it had collected on its years-long journey, the serpentine machine advanced on the inn's front door to carry out the first order it had received since it had left the tower in Mangala. Its head lowered to serve as a ram. The door would not hold beyond the first blow.

"I was too weak from the lingering effects of the poison to make much use of the treasures piled around me, so I selected a few choice and expensive pieces to make up for the loss of the prime treasure and limped out of the room. As I passed the body that had been Gawara Hawara, a cautious thought struck me and I took from his hands the magical naganai with which he had commanded his crawling weapons. Then, knowing full well that the rest of the booty would be long pillaged before I could heal and return, I painfully made my way back to my room on the other side of Mangala. Through all the intervening years, I have kept the naganai here, just in case I should happen to meet one of his iron snakes, still intent on punishing the thief and I."

"Mr. Farwanderer, you can't play the 'nai anymore, so why do you still keep it around?"

"Ah, Aidan, while no one can play a song on it, nor can I play many of the cobra's commands, it might still be useful." He took the instrument from the boy and quickly, almost carelessly, fingering a short flurry of soundless notes. "In an emergency, I need only remember that the tune to make the snakes resume their normal patrols, as if no enemy had been encountered, needs but a single hand to play."

The serpent paused, head drawn back and flattened for the blow. Yet another new command had been given: "Resume patrols in the compound in Mangala." Clockwork eyes gleamed in the moonlight as it appeared to considered the order and reach a decision Then, in unhurried silence, the cobra turned its 18' of iron power from its target and began the return trip across the mountains, the deserts, and the rivers to home.

Footnotes

Iron cobras are described in the AD&D® 1st Edition FIEND FOLIO® tome, pages 52-53. It is assumed herein that these creations can be made by high-level wizards, and that they are more common than generally believed (they are certainly far less powerful than iron golems). Iron cobras have a 50% chance to hide in shadows (the FIEND FOLIO tome says they hide as well as 8th-level thieves, but this chance is 49%).

1. While they exhibit some signs of life, iron cobras are merely cunningly designed magical constructs. Rare and expensive materials, powerful spells, and secret crafting techniques are required to build them, with different combinations of these creating iron cobras with different capabilities, Still, many components are held in common by all such devices: mithral, adamantite, or meteoritic iron; a vial of *oil of slipperiness;* and many gemstones crafted into gears and bits of machinery. The cost of constructing even the smallest of these automatons is 2,000 gp.

A mage owning a manual describing the methods of constructing iron cobras will protect it dearly, as it can fetch a price in the hundreds of gold pieces—thousands if it contains special directions such as those for creating giant iron cobras.

As an aside, while these constructs are the sort of thing that the tinker gnomes of Krynn might manufacture, an iron cobra appearing in a DRAGONLANCE® setting would likely have come from some other universe, as the cost for tinkers to make an iron cobra would be well above 20,000 steel pieces. But if confronted with an iron cobra or the remains of one, a tinker would have to make a check vs. wisdom on 2d12 in order to tear himself away from the fascinating device.

2. Iron cobras are not alive, so they do not need food, water, or sleep, nor will they ever forget a command or be distracted from a task. Thus they make excellent servitors and, because of their combination of tracking and lethal combat capabilities, are sometimes used by bounty hunters or even respectable legal authorities.

3. Iron cobras can be commanded in many ways, the means being decided upon during creation. While most iron cobras obey voice commands, some respond only to coded messages, hand signals, nonverbal sounds (such as musical instruments) or other exotic or long-range modes of communications. The manual used to create an iron cobra includes a list of possible command devices, so that a person possessing a deactivated iron cobra and the manual from which it was created could, through trial and error, determine the one method of controlling it.

The commands themselves can be of any sort the creator desires, from such simple things as "attack," to complicated orders such as "attack, targeting spell-casters first, followed by elves, then by all others." Whatever the commands, they must be selected at the time of the cobra's creation; it will answer to no commands not built into it after that.

Whatever the commands and command method decided upon, they must be individually programmed into each iron cobra created. Thus the creator could use similar but subtly different commands for each of his constructs, so that determining the commands for one might not help an attacker use them against others. This would also allow the controller greater subtlety in issuing commands.

4. Many iron cobras are created with a built-in "fail-safe" command that comes into effect if the cobra spends a considerable length of time without receiving orders. Typical fail-safes include commands to return to the cobra's creator, to its owner, or to a specific place after a period of time has elapsed (up to one year). Iron cobras designed to be left alone for unlimited periods of time, such as guardians of a tomb, sometimes use other fail-safes, such as commands to slay all intruders, to prevent the theft of the treasures in the lair, or to hide and await further instructions.

5. Every iron cobra can detect a single specific property by spreading its hood and orienting it on that quality. Typical properties detected for are covered by existing divination spells (e.g., good, evil, magic, undead, invisibility, etc.); the ranges and areas of effects are as if those spells were cast by a 12th-level human mage, with the divinatory ability being usable as many times each day as desired. Other divinatory properties can be used, but the mage must have cast on the near-completed construction a spell designed by him for this purpose (for example:, a spell that detects those who worship a particular god, for one who plans to use his iron cobra against the worshipers of an opposed deity).

The iron cobra's construction manual will list specific materials that must be varied according to the detection spell bestowed on the serpent (e.g., an iron cobra designed to detect poison would include eyes glazed with celadon, pur-

ported to locate such substances, while one designed to detect magic might replace those eyes with eyes of magic-sensing star sapphires).

While an iron cobra is almost infallible at detecting the property for which it was constructed, it cannot serve every purpose. If a mage built an iron cobra to detect evil, for use as a guardian of his treasures, a neutral-good thief would elude his precautions. Thus, owners of more than one iron cobra often have them constructed to detect different properties such as evil, magic, and poison, in hopes that intruders and victims will be revealed by at least one of these traits.

Without its outspread hood, an iron cobra is incapable of sensing anything beyond that which is mundanely presented to it by way of sight, sound, or touch (unlike a real snake, it has no sense of taste or smell). The hood has the same armor class as the rest of the cobra, but attacks specifically aimed at the hood can damage it without destroying the cobra itself. The hood has the equivalent of one-fifth of the cobra's normal hit points (never less than one point), but these points are in addition to those listed for the iron cobra and are not calculated into its hit-point total for purposes of destroying the machine or for experience-point calculations.

6. The normal construction of an iron cobra is such that it obviously appears to be a machine. If its creator adds 10% to its cost and construction time, the cobra can be made to have some other outward appearance, the most common of these being the appearance of an actual cobra (or other type of snake, if the hood and its detection abilities are eliminated).

7. Most iron cobras are of the small and inexpensive sort, but some are giants as large as six times standard size. The cost of manufacturing huge cobras is considerably more than six times that needed to make normal iron cobras, running as high as 50,000 gp depending on what "special features" are included. Some mages would spend those thousands on having many normal iron cobras, but some consider it a fair price for a huge serpent's capabilities and its effect on enemy morale.

The giant iron cobra is identical in all ways with the smaller version of the same monster except as shown in the Iron Cobra Table and in other notes here. Both are unaffected by spells such as snake charm. Although some think that cold or lightning spells should have a special effect on them, they are insulated so that they suffer no more than any living creature caught in one of these spells. Thus, an *ice storm* cast on one would still do damage, but it would have no extra effects due to the nature of the target.

8. As iron cobras are made of exotic and strong metals, laced together by powerful enchantments, normal weapons used against them do only half damage on a hit. In the case of giant iron cobras, the metals used are as much as six times as thick, and the enchantments similarly stronger. Because of this, the giant iron cobra's skin is much tougher than that of the small version and a nonmagical weapon (which will do the giant cobra no harm) has a possibility of breaking against it. If the attacker misses with a roll high enough to have hit armor class 10, his weapon has struck the snake's skin and, if it fails a saving throw vs. crushing blow, it will shatter. Additionally, for every bonus point of damage done due to the attacker's strength, the saving throw for the weapon will be one point worse because such forceful blows are more likely to break the weapon. Thus, if the sword of a character with a 16 strength was forced to make a save, it would have a worse chance of making its save than the weapon of a weaker character due to the stronger's +1 damage bonus.

9. Just as the iron cobra can have any sort of detection spell centered on its hood, it also can be equipped with any type of poison in its fangs. Poison can be changed by the controller of the cobra whenever desired by merely draining out the old poison and replacing it with a new one. Typical toxins include those that cause damage or death, those causing special effects such as paralysis, sleep, or various discomforts (disease, allergies, rashes, etc), and other, more exotic, substances that can incapacitate or cause insanity in victims.

Whatever the substance injected into the victim on a successful hit, an iron cobra is equipped with only 3-8 (1d6 +2) doses of it, and they cannot withhold poison at will; whenever they bite, if they still contain poison, it will be delivered into their victim.

While giant iron cobras would appear to have capacity for more poison than normal ones, they still carry only 3-8 doses of their poison, but have larger and more potent doses. Thus, if the same poison is used by both small and giant iron cobras, that of the larger mechanism is 10% more effective (save vs. poison at -2 beyond any adjustments vs. the poison of the smaller machine).

10. While iron cobras are usually given instructions that preclude the need for return communication ('kill all intruders"), some mages consider it useful to allow their charges to communicate information as well as perform other tasks. The most common method of doing this is to program certain movements of the cobra's body to correspond to specific reports it is likely to make. If this is done, a reporting iron cobra will look very much like a live snake as it sways its body and bobs its head to convey a message to its master.

Although they are not normally constructed for it, iron cobras can also be built that have the capacity for rudimentary speech. Without lungs, lips, and other sound-generating devices, they can be made to "speak" by rasping together some of the gears in their mouths and the plates on their backs or hoods in code (so a short mouth rasp might mean "intruders have been detected," while a repeated scraping sound might mean something as mundane as "tea is being served in the library"). In no case can an untrained person interpret these noises or movements,

11. Most of the iron cobra's components are reduced to useless scrap if it is destroyed, making its resale value after destruction less than 10% of its intact value, but some substances within it retain their use if separated quickly from the rest to prevent contamination. These include the *oil of slipperiness* lubricating its gears, which acts as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for 1-4 hours after being removed from the cobra; and its poison, which maintains its full effects for 1-4 turns after removal. Ω

Iron Cobra Table

	Normal	Giant
CLIMATE/TERRAIN	Any	Any
FREQUENCY	Very rare	Very rare
ORGANIZATION	None	None
ACTIVITY CYCLE	Any	Any
DIET	Nil	Nil
INTELLIGENCE	Non (0)	Non (0)
TREASURE TYPE	2,000+ gp	25,000+gp
ALIGNMENT	Neutral	Neutral
NO. APPEARING	1(1-6)	1
ARMOR CLASS	0	- 2
MOVEMENT	12	9
HIT DICE	1	5
THAC0	19	15
NO. OF ATTACKS	1	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK	1-3	1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS	Poison	Poison
SPECIAL DEFENSES	See text	See text
MAGIC RESISTANCE	Nil	Nil
SIZE	Small (3'long)	Huge (18'long)
MORALE	20	20
XP VALUE	270	1,400

DEMON FORESTS

THE ECOLOGY OF THE IRONMAW

By Skip Williams · illustrated by David Walhstrom

Adventurers and sages familiar with the denizens of the Outer Planes have long been aware of the deadly ironmaw, an insatiable predatory plant from the Infinite Layers of the Abyss. The creature gets its name from its most ghastly feature: a gaping maw capable of engulfing an ogre in one gulp and crushing the victim in an inexorable grip, like a massive iron vise.

The ironmaw remained virtually unknown on the Material Plane until recent decades, when it managed to establish itself in the forests of the Material Plane, probably from seeds unwittingly carried out of the Abyss by adventurers. Although it remains fairly rare, an ironmaw can turn the most idyllic-looking glade into a sinister and dangerous place.

An ironmaw has a certain low cunning and the ability to speak Abyssal, but it usually concerns itself with securing a steady supply of food and thinks of little else. It has no taste for vegetable matter or carrion but otherwise will eat virtually anything—and it is always hungry. Anyone who attempts to parley with an ironmaw had best stay alert. Although simple-minded, it is fully capable of lying to draw a potential meal within reach of its grasping tendrils.

IRONMAWS IN THE WORLD

Today, ironmaws can lurk in almost any locale on the Material Plane where trees grow. Although they can withstand arctic cold, they prefer temperate or tropical climes, where prey is more plentiful and where they can pose innocuously as the broadleaf trees they resemble. Although primarily a forest dweller, the ironmaw can also be found in swamps, hills, and even mountain valleys, always in the company of tall trees.

Travelers returning from the Abyss relate tales of dense stands containing dozens or even hundreds of the monsters. Ironmaws living under these conditions stay on the move almost constantly, each one trying to shuffle to the edge of the stand, the only position from which it has any real hope of capturing prey. Thus they creep across the Abyssal landscape like great, dark amoebas flowing in ever-changing shapes and occasionally splitting into smaller masses. Any creature unfortunate enough to stumble into one of these awful groves usually dies within

seconds to sudden deadly strikes by the ironmaws' tendrils. The creatures then squabble over the corpse, literally tearing it to bits as each tries to obtain a morsel of flesh for itself.

On the Material Plane, ironmaws are largely solitary, although they can be found in pairs or small stands of up to half a dozen trees. They usually gather to mate or to take advantage of a rich hunting area. Once a stand contains about six individuals, however, one or more shuffle off in search of better opportunities.

Because of its insatiable appetite and evil nature, an ironmaw is seldom a welcome addition to any sylvan neighborhood. Nearby elves who become aware of its presence quickly mount an expedition to eradicate it. Druids often react the same way, despite their live-and-let-live mindset—an ironmaw can quickly drive off or kill an area's game, thus disrupting the natural cycles of the forest. Centaurs, dryads, nymphs, and even the usually playful and carefree sprites are similarly hostile, although they often lack the magical power needed to defeat the creature. They usually keep a close watch on the ironmaw lest it approach a settlement, then either attempt to discourage it or seek help. One effective tactic is to throw a cordon around the slow-moving plant and drive off all the local animals, thus depriving the ironmaw of prey and encouraging it to move elsewhere.

Green dragons also resent the presence of such capable predators in their territories, but occasionally one forges an alliance of sorts with an ironmaw. Protected by its mobility, breath weapon, and magical power—not to mention its sheer size—the dragon can sometimes intimidate or bribe the creature into serving as a guardian for its lair. The ironmaw is content to serve so long as the dragon brings it food regularly (very few beings willingly approach a dragon's lair, and they are even less likely to do so with a voracious ironmaw around). Such arrangements seldom last long, since the dragon eventually grows tired of fetching live prey for its servant. Even if a dragon does not press an ironmaw into service, it often keeps close tabs on the creature. Ironmaws have little interest in treasure, and most dragons aren't above picking up any baubles left behind as the ravenous tree roams about the forest.

THE IRONMAW DEVELOPED ITS TASTE FOR FLESH IN THE ABYSS, WHERE SUNLIGHT IS UNRELIABLE AT BEST AND SOILS ARE NOTORIOUSLY POOR.

LIFE CYCLE

The ironmaw developed its taste for flesh in the Abyss, where sunlight is unreliable at best and soils are notoriously poor. Even when growing in a fertile zone on the Material Plane, an ironmaw craves flesh, bone, and blood for sustenance and reproduction. Although often able to survive on good soil and sun alone, it is insatiably hungry by nature and needs an extra energy boost to produce fruit and seeds.

Ironmaws produce hanging clusters of dark brown flowers that give off a stink like that of carrion. Every ironmaw has both male and female flowers and is capable of reproducing on its own, but stands often gather to cross-pollinate. An ironmaw transfers pollen from flower to flower using its tendrils. Once pollinated, the blooms develop into clusters of dark brown fruit resembling acorns, retaining their foul odor. The fruit tastes just as bad as it smells, and it is too acrid for humans to eat unless first cured in lye. Even then it tastes like rotten meat.

When cast on the ground and watered with blood, a fruit sprouts within a few weeks. An ironmaw seedling resembles an adult but is dangerous only to Fine and Diminutive creatures. A seedling can take anywhere from a few months to a few years to reach adult size, depending on how much food it gets.

NATURAL WEAPONRY

An ironmaw possesses a mighty arsenal of natural weaponry, which includes its tendrils and powerful maw.

Tendrils: An ironmaw's four thorny tendrils are formidable weapons. The creature wields them like very long whips or flails. A full-grown ironmaw's tendrils can grow to 120 feet long (1d6 x 10 + 60 feet); however, the creature can only manage attacks with lengths of tendril up to 60 feet. The excess coils remain hidden in its upper branches, allowing the ironmaw to pay out extra length when making a melee attack, should a tendril be severed. This gives it a natural reach of 60 feet.

A tendril deals an average of 17 points of damage (2d6+10) on a hit, and that alone makes it dangerous to many creatures. Its many thorns and barbs deal piercing and bludgeoning damage, and it threatens a critical hit on an attack roll of 19 or 20. However, an ironmaw's tendril delivers more than mere damage. It also digs into the flesh, becoming attached like a burr in a dog's fur. Sticky sap adheres to clothing and equipment, anchoring the tendril all the more securely. Whenever an ironmaw begins its turn with a tendril attached to an opponent, it automatically deals tendril damage and drags that creature 10 feet closer to itself, possibly drawing the opponent into its crushing maw (see below).

The moment the tendril strikes and attaches, specialized spines inject virulent spores into the opponent's bloodstream. These spores have a powerful anticoagulant effect, causing the wound to bleed profusely and dealing an additional 3 points of damage each subsequent turn. This damage occurs at the beginning of the ironmaw's turn in the initiative order and continues each round until the wounded creature dies or the wound is treated. The bleeding can be stopped only by a Heal check (DC 10) or the application of any *cure* spell or other healing magic (*heal, healing circle,* or the like). Each hit by a tendril causes another wound. The ironmaw's blows also have a sickening effect on the victim, dealing 1d6 points of Constitution damage as the ironmaw feasts on its blood. Severing a blood-filled tendril releases a gory spray of crimson from the cut. This doesn't do any extra harm to the ironmaw, but it looks impressive.

Breaking free from a tendril is difficult. To do so, the opponent must make an Escape Artist check (DC 25) or a Strength check (DC 26), or deal 13 points of damage to the tendril with a single blow from a slashing weapon

(AC 22). Use the procedure for sundering a weapon (see Chapter 8: Combat in the *Player's Handbook*) to resolve the attempt.

Maw: An ironmaw can use its namesake feature to deliver bite attacks. The creature's bite isn't nearly as formidable as its tendrils, but it deals a respectable 9 points of damage on average (1d8+5). The real danger comes when the ironmaw manages to drag a foe into bite range with a tendril. When it tries to bite a creature that has at least one tendril attached, it gets a +4 bonus on its attack roll.

If the ironmaw drags a Large or smaller foe into its own space, it attempts to engulf the creature. The foe is allowed a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid the maw. If the save succeeds, the foe is pushed either back to where it began the turn or into any space adjacent to the ironmaw (the ironmaw chooses the space). Any tendrils attached to the foe remain attached. If it fails the save, the foe is deposited in the crushing maw, where it is forced into the ironmaw's hollow, fluid-filled trunk. The ironmaw detaches any tendrils attached to the engulfed foe.

The tree's digestive juices are too weak to cause any immediate harm to an engulfed foe, but the victim must hold its breath or begin to drown. The trunk, however, acts like an enormous gizzard, grinding up the ironmaw's food and dealing 2d6+10 points of bludgeoning damage each round to the creature within.

An ironmaw's trunk can hold one Large, two Medium, four Small, eight Tiny, sixteen Diminutive, or thirty-two Fine creatures. Creatures killed inside the trunk are completely consumed after about an hour, at which time the ironmaw expels any indigestible matter.

The ironmaw might also engulf creatures it has killed with its tendrils, storing them for several days until it can "plant" them around an ironmaw seed. About a week after planting, the seeds sprout into ironmaw saplings, which feed off the corpses planted with them and reach maturity within a month.

IRONMAWS IN COMBAT

Because it is virtually immobile, an ironmaw hunts by ambush. Despite being fairly stupid and always hungry, the creature exhibits considerable guile and patience. It first chooses a locale where prey is likely to approach: Springs, fords, game trails, salt licks, and areas of young, tender growth all attract wildlife and make prime hunting grounds for ironmaws. More daring specimens lurk near roadsides, bridges, and campsites, hoping to ambush unwary people.

An ideal spot has many broadleaf trees of about the ironmaw's height (20 to 30 feet for a mature individual) and a clear area nearby. The ironmaw hides among the trees and uses its tendrils to attack anything that enters the clear area. The edge of a woodland meadow serves its purposes well.

Given its lack of mobility, an ironmaw would seem to have few options in combat. Its incredible reach, however, gives it flexibility. It threatens everything within 60 feet and can make attacks of opportunity within that area, and it can easily attack multiple foes even when they are scattered.

An inexperienced ironmaw lashes out whenever anything comes within range. An older, more crafty specimen usually waits until prey gets closer, usually about 40 feet away, especially when several opponents approach in a group. This ensures that the ironmaw can attack any of its foes and makes it more difficult for them to withdraw out of reach.

In either case, the ironmaw tries to attack before its opponents can spot it. If it manages to get surprise (quite likely given its excellent ability to hide among the trees) the ironmaw makes its single attack against the closest foe. This generally assures it of a clear line of sight and also forces the foe's companions (if any) to move closer if they want to help free their comrade from an attached tendril.

When an using its first full attack action against a group, an ironmaw usually lashes at three or four different foes, starting with the creatures closest to itself. Although this tactic dilutes the ironmaw's offensive power, it also blunts any countermeasures, since each opponent struck has to deal with a bleeding wound and an attached tendril. On subsequent rounds, with one or more foes so occupied, the creature uses its free tendrils against any who are still free, starting with those who are trying to assist their comrades.

If reduced to less than 25% of its original hit points, an ironmaw often switches tactics and directs all its free tendrils against the foe that has hurt it the most. This tactic works well, since the Constitution loss from multiple tendril hits can kill a single creature outright.

Whenever a foe succumbs to an ironmaw's tendril attack, its Great Cleave feat comes into play. It detaches the tendril to make another melee attack, usually against the closest foe who does not already have a tendril attached.

An ironmaw seldom tries to flee from combat, knowing that it cannot outrun anything with its land speed of 10 feet. But if it is being harried from beyond its reach by ranged weapons or spells, it has sense enough to withdraw or at least seek cover.

ALTHOUGH IT REMAINS FAIRLY RARE, AN IRONMAW CAN TURN THE MOST IDYLLIC-LOOKING GLADE INTO A SINISTER AND DANGEROUS PLACE.

Ironmaw Group Tactics

When a pair or stand of ironmaws fight together, they usually do not bother to coordinate. Instead, they stand 5 to 10 feet apart in a circle with a diameter of 40 to 50 feet. The creatures usually hold their attacks until they are spotted or until opponents come within reach of at least two individuals. Once the battle commences, each ironmaw generally follows the tactics described above.

Frequently, tendrils from two or more ironmaws become attached to the same foe. When this occurs, all of them try to drag the creature toward themselves. To decide which one wins the resulting tug-of-war, first look for a space that is 10 feet closer to all the ironmaws involved. If no such space is available, find a space 10 feet closer to at least one of the competing ironmaws

and not farther away from any other. If there still is no such space, all the ironmaws make opposed Strength checks (if any individual has more than one tendril attached, it gains a +2 circumstance bonus on the check for each extra tendril). The loser must detach its tendrils, and the remaining ironmaws repeat the process until there is a legal space to move the creature or until only one ironmaw has tendrils attached to it.

IRONMAWS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO ERADICATE, BUT WITH SMART PRECAUTIONS AND CAREFUL TACTICS, A PARTY CAN DEAL WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY.

FIGHTING AN IRONMAW

Often, the best way to deal with an ironmaw is to avoid the creature.

In theory, a trained observer can easily recognize an ironmaw's territory. This is true, to an extent. When an ironmaw has remained in one place for a while, the area becomes littered with indigestible bits from its previous victims, such as scraps of fur. If the ironmaw has battled intelligent creatures, it leaves behind pieces of their equipment, particularly metal and wooden items, coins, gems, cloth, and leather, which the ironmaw either cannot digest or does not care to eat. However, all this detritus is easily overlooked among the natural litter and brush that covers most forest floors.

The Spot DC to notice telltale debris in an ironmaw's vicinity is 20. Even if successful, the check merely reveals its presence, not its significance. A Survival check (DC 15) allows the observer not only to notice the refuse but also to realize that some predatory creature has fed and left it behind. A character who successfully spots the debris can attempt a Knowledge (nature) check (DC 15) to come to the same conclusion.

Even when scanning the area upon noting the debris, a party might overlook the ironmaw's presence. They must make Spot checks opposed by the ironmaw's Hide (which is excellent within a wooded area) to actually see the creature. Even then, it resembles an oak tree distinguished only by blood-red splotches on the leaves. A druid can immediately recognize the ironmaw as an unnatural plant. A Knowledge (planes) (DC 20), Knowledge (nature) (DC 15), or bardic knowledge (DC 25) check confirms its true nature—and, of course, characters might recognize it from their own experience.

The wary might loose an arrow or other ranged attack at the odd-looking tree. This usually motivates it to strike if there is a foe within reach, even if the ranged attack misses or fails to overcome the ironmaw's damage reduction. If no foes are within reach, the creature waits a round or two, hoping someone will move in for a closer look.

Stay Back If You Can

Given an ironmaw's extremely slow speed, an obvious combat tactic is simply to stay out of reach and hurl spells and ranged attacks. However, this is easier said than done.

An ironmaw has impressive damage reduction, rendering it all but immune to ranged weapons with less than +3 magical enhancement. Since most characters focus on melee combat, sufficiently powerful ranged weapons are seldom available. A *greater magic weapon* spell can make up for this lack nicely. Even so, expect to spend a long time pumping arrows into an ironmaw before it succumbs. If you are in a thickly overgrown area, chances are the ironmaw can gain cover from the surrounding trees, making the task of bringing it down with ranged attacks even more laborious. Also keep in mind that the creature is not completely immobile. It can cover 20 feet a round with a double move, or 40 feet if it runs, requiring a minimum distance of 105 feet to be entirely safe from an ironmaw's attacks. While it is difficult to run through a forest, an open space is much easier—ironmaws lurk near clearings and meadows for a reason.

When playing cat-and-mouse with an ironmaw, keep an eye out for others lurking nearby. If you allow one ironmaw to occupy your attention, another just might creep into range unnoticed.

Going Toe to Root

Defeating an ironmaw with melee attacks usually takes much less time than a ranged assault, but it entails far more risk.

It doesn't pay to be timid in close combat with an ironmaw. Move in quickly so that it gets few chances to use its tendrils. Also, send in as many attackers as possible so that no one opponent faces all the creature's tendrils. Should the ironmaw manage to attach a tendril to a comrade, don't be in too great a hurry to free the character unless you intend to flee. Constitution damage occurs only when a tendril first hits and attaches. Breaking free only invites another tendril attack along with another bleeding wound and more Constitution damage. If a party member is snared within 15 feet of the ironmaw, however, try to sever every tendril as soon as it attaches. You don't want anyone engulfed.

Once you get close enough for melee, plan to stay there until you get the job done. Almost anyone can outrun an ironmaw, but there's no escaping those tendrils when you're within 60 feet of the monster.

Spellslinging

A typical party's ability to strike effectively at a distance usually rests with its spellcasters. However, an ironmaw's spell resistance of 30 makes it all but immune to most magical assaults, even from casters with the Spell Penetration feat. Spells that employ cold or electricity are a waste of time: Ironmaws are immune to these energy types. They are also resistant to acid and sonics, so use fire and force effects if you must cast spells against an ironmaw. It is best to stick with spells that enhance your party, such as *greater magic weapon*.

Spells that create or conjure allies, such as the various *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells, and *animate objects*, get around an ironmaw's spell resistance. Such allies, however, often cannot overcome the creature's damage reduction and thus can only block or delay its movement. But sending in a first wave of summoned creatures floods the area with

more targets than the ironmaw can deal with, allowing the PCs to get within melee range without drawing tendril attacks. Most ironmaws are cagey enough to redirect their tendrils against more dangerous opponents, but this tactic might still buy combatants a little time.

Being evil and extraplanar, an ironmaw is vulnerable to banishing spells such as *dispel evil* and *holy word* (even if it grew from a seed planted on the Material Plane). These spells still have to get through its formidable spell resistance, but the battle is over if they work—and the +4 deflection bonus to AC from *dispel evil* doesn't hurt either. Comrades who have been engulfed or who have tendrils attached stay behind when the ironmaw is banished back to the Abyss. The *banishment* spell, of course, is the most effective means of sending an ironmaw packing. Items repellent to an ironmaw include: a pound or more of salt, a pound or more of silver, hairs from a celestial creature or good outsider, fire, and an axe blade. Each extra element improves your ability to overcome the ironmaw's spell resistance by +1 and also raises the spell's save DC by 2, so try to use as many as you can.

ALTERNATE STATISTICS

The statistics below represent a juvenile ironmaw. The standard monster description can be found in the *Fiend Folio*.

Ironmaw Seedling: CR 10; Large plant (Extraplanar); HD 8d8+32; hp 68; Init -1; Spd 10 ft.; AC 21, touch 9, flat-footed 21; BAB +6; Grap +16; Atk +12 melee (1d8+6 4 tendrils/crit 19-20) and +7 bite (1d6+3); Face/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft. (40-foot reach with tendrils); SA Attach, engulf, illness, tendrils, wounding; SQ Acid resistance 10, cold immunity, DR 10/+2, electricity immunity, plant traits, sonic resistance 5, SR 20; SV Fort +10, Ref +1, Will +3; Str 22, Dex 9, Con 19, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 14.

Skills: Hide +5*, Spot +12, Listen +12; *Feats:* Alertness, Power Attack, Cleave.

Attach (Ex): If an ironmaw hits with a tendril attack, the tendril, in addition to dealing normal damage, attaches to the opponent's body. A tendril draws a stuck opponent 10 feet closer in each subsequent round (no attack of opportunity) unless the opponent breaks free, which requires an Escape Artist check (DC 21) or a Strength check (DC 21). An ironmaw can draw in a creature within 10 feet of itself and bite with a +4 attack bonus in that round. An ironmaw can draw a creature into its space and attempt to engulf it as well. A tendril can be severed by a single attack with a slashing weapon (made as an attempt to sunder a weapon) dealing at least 7 points of damage. Severing a tendril does not shorten the ironmaw's reach; it simply plays out more tendril from its trunk.

Engulf (Ex): As a standard action, an ironmaw can attempt to engulf a Large or smaller creature that enters its space. The victim of the attack can make an attack of opportunity, but if it does, it is not entitled to a saving throw. A victim that does not attempt an attack of opportunity must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or be engulfed; on a success, the victim is pushed back or aside (but not freed from attached tendrils). An engulfed creature takes 1d8+6 points of bludgeoning damage within an ironmaw's trunk each round and must hold its breath or begin to suffocate.

Illness (Ex): An ironmaw's tendrils can sap an opponent's health. Anyone caught by a tendril must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 18) or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage.

Tendrils (Ex): An ironmaw can attack with its four tendrils from up to 40 feet away. Anyone struck by a tendril can take damage, lose blood, suffer illness, and be drawn toward the ironmaw's trunk.

Wounding (Ex): A wound resulting from an ironmaw's tendril attack bleeds for an additional 3 points of damage per round thereafter. Multiple wounds from such attacks result in cumulative bleeding loss (two wounds for 6 points of damage per round, and so on). The bleeding can be stopped only by a Heal check (DC 10) or the application of any cure spell or other healing spell (*heal, healing circle*, or the like).

Plant Traits (Ex): An ironmaw is immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. It is not subject to critical hits or mind-affecting effects. An ironmaw also has low-light vision.

Skills: Ironmaws receive skills as fey. An ironmaw has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks. *In wooded areas, an ironmaw has a +15 racial bonus on Hide checks.

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The Ecology of the Isle of Dread

The Journal of Larissa Vanderboren

Today I leave the safety of the colony for the village of Tanaroa. We've been here for several months on the Isle of Temute, establishing the Farshore colony and attempting relations with the local Olman villages. While these proceedings are important for our family's—and, indeed, all of Sasserine's—designs on these far-flung shores, I find them rather tiresome. Thus, I've convinced my husband Verik, who leads the expedition, of the value in exploring and documenting the mainland of this, the Isle of Dread. While obviously concerned for my safety, he knows that my magic and experience as an adventurer will keep me from harm.

Within the Fangs of Zotzilaha

6th of Wealsun, 593 CY

I have returned from a journey with the Tanaroan natives to the volcano Nextepeua, one of the twin volcanoes known as the Fangs of Zotzilaha. The Tanaroans make annual pilgrimages to offer appeasements to their bat-god Camazotz. I had agreed to the trip to display our good intentions to our Olman neighbors, hoping to help Verik's goal of establishing mutual trade with them.

The Fangs are an imposing sight, rising up to dizzying heights and dwarfing the scenery around them. From their heights billow pillars of black, acrid smoke visible for many miles, polluting the air with ash and debris. Muffled rumbles growl from deep beneath the peaks, suggesting the incredible activity of the world's bowels. The fields surrounding the Fangs steam with slag and knee-deep ash, while the grounds closer to the peaks are riddled with lava tubes. Some evidence of flowing magma colliding with underground water exists, as poisonous gas belches from deep vents and fissures. It's no wonder the natives fear this place—they live under constant threat of an explosive eruption.

The Tanaroans explained that we must wait until nightfall, when the volcanoes' sacred baboon guardians retreat to their caves. The baboons—omnivorous and dangerously ravenous—live out a pitiful existence, surviving off sparse vegetation and huddling together around the few pools of stagnant rainwater.

When twilight fell, hordes of great bats swept out from the lava tubes and fissures, blacking out the smoke-clouded sky. I was startled by the creatures' physical size, some with wingspans up to 15 feet. In spite of their mass, they exhibited surprising maneuverability, both in the air and on the ground. The sight of so many of them, a colony several thousand strong, instilled a primal fear within me. Although they drove the baboons hooting back to their caves, the bats

SAVAGE TIDE

Larissa Vanderboren's journal appears in the Vanderboren vault in the first adventure of the Savage Tide Adventure Path, "There is No Honor," from *Dungeon* #139. This work contains her research notes on the Isle of Dread's ecosystem, along with maps and sketches of the creatures of the island. Presented here are selected entries and sketches from that research, translated from Sylvan. The player's map of the Isle of Dread, included with this issue, can also be employed as part of Larissa's observations.

ignored us completely, enabling us to approach unchallenged—an event that, to the Tanaroans, was a sign Camazotz himself had granted safe passage.

Once inside Nextepeua, the shaman leading the pilgrimage began repeating a tribal, rhythmic chant. Whatever incantation he worked upon us proved sufficient, for we withstood the heat emanating from the walls and the occasional blasts of scorching air. The searing volcanic fumes made breathing difficult, even with the cloth masks we used, and the muffled rumbles heard outside were deafening this close to the volcanic core. The smoke and heat waves also made navigation nearly impossible. I would have surely been lost within those hellish depths forever had not the Tanaroans been so familiar with the way, seemingly capable of making the trek without the need for sight.

After what seemed an eternity, we arrived at the Shrine of Camazotz. We hurriedly placed our offerings at a soot-covered carving of a bat in the far wall. Within the shrine I placed a memento my daughter Lavinia had made for me when she was a child, offering something near to my heart as the Tanaroans suggested. I am hopeful that through my obeisance I have earned at least a marginal respect from the Olman natives.

Ecology of the Phanaton

24th of Wealsun, 593 CY

While wandering the central jungle, stubbornly classifying the island's endless varieties of flora, I caught sight of a strange, diminutive primate. Carrying a spear, it had a satchel slung across its shoulders and appeared to be rummaging for mushrooms on the spongy ground. It hadn't noticed me so I approached for a closer look.

Little more than 2 feet tall, the creature looked like a raccoon, with dark fur around its eyes and ringed stripes on its tail. It also had primate-distinguishing features, such as opposable thumbs and a prehensile tail, but displayed a thin membrane of skin stretched between its front and back legs (later I would observe its use for gliding between trees).

Its eyes suddenly met mine, and for a brief moment, I thought the creature looked inquisitive, but then it started shrieking in a shrill, warbling cry. Almost instantly, more of the creatures came rushing through the bushes and dropping from the trees—too many to count. Before I could act, a primitive net made from vines ensnared me, and the creatures began pummeling me with their clubs and the butt-ends of their spears until I lost consciousness.

I awoke with my hands tied behind my back, lying on a wooden platform supported by the boughs of an ancient deklo tree. I could sense that I was high up in the jungle canopy, and I noticed my provisions and research notes dumped out next to me. As I looked around, I could see more platforms in the surrounding trees, connected by treacherous-looking bridges made of knotted vines and strewn with simple wooden huts. These creatures had built an entire village among the trees. Scores of the small creatures watched from nearby platforms, through tiny hut windows, and from the foliage of branches above, spying on me curiously as I came to my senses.

As I composed myself, one of the tiny creatures, their leader by the look of his unique, brightly feathered adornments, approached me and untied my hands. He shocked me by speaking a crude sort of Sylvan—distinguishable phrases interspersed with soft hoots and odd clicks of the tongue. He apologized for the inconvenience and explained that I had surprised a group of his people while they gathered medicinal herbs from the forest floor below. He had looked through my journal, discovered my druidic beliefs, and was very apologetic for the misunderstanding. He invited me to a village feast and the following grooming session that evening as a token of their good will.

I stayed with the creatures—who I came to know as phanatons—for three days thereafter, learning of their society and culture. When I left, the one that I had spied on the jungle floor, named Hatoi, offered to join me as a guide—a sort of peace offering from these creatures. At first, Hatoi was shy, but with

time I began to connect with him by letting him look at my journal. He is fond of my sketches, particularly of the island's plant life, and he will no doubt prove invaluable in classifying the jungle flora.

The Effects of Loco Weed

7th of Richfest, 593 CY

For the past several days, I've been observing a herd of ankylosaurs that graze near an inland lake in the northwestern reaches of the isle. Within this group, one male in particular has been exhibiting very curious behavior, of hostile and unsocial bearing. I've come to blame this comportment on his consumption of a toxic weed that grows in patches along the lake's eastern banks.

Several minutes after eating the weed, the ankylosaur begins taking short, shallow breaths, and seems a bit unsteady on his feet. Once the drug fully takes hold, he exhibits an increased blood flow—evidenced by his overall pinkish hue—and begins to drool. Other effects of the plant are rapid eye movement, loss of balance, occasional vomiting, and highly aggressive behavior.

The amount of weed consumed has a proportional effect on the ankylosaur's belligerence. On a normal day, he eats only a small quantity—enough to become easily agitated. The rest of the herd has learned to avoid him during these episodes, as he swings his tail at anything that approaches. Even when docile and not under the influence of the plant, the herd and other local herbivores give him plenty of space, not wishing to incur his wrath. A bruised shin is apparently enough to make even the largest diplodocus wary of him.

Larger meals of the plant have a more powerful effect on the giant reptile, causing him to become extremely aggressive and attack anything he sees. His depth perception seems altered during these episodes, as yesterday I observed him charging into the jungle only to run headlong into a tree trunk. He became so enraged that he smashed down nearly thirty trees before disappearing into the jungle.

After about two hours, the drug begins to wear off. The specimen exhibits loss of hunger, lethargy, and impotent irritability; usually collapsing wherever he finds himself after the plant's effects have run their course. Once he is fast asleep, the herd resumes its daily grazing.

The ankylosaur shows signs of physical addiction to the plant, refusing to let any members of his herd near a patch. When he can't find sources of the weed, he goes through stages of extreme depression, although social rejection might account for this behavior, as he is an outcast among the group.

When I asked the Panitube natives about the weed, they smiled and laughed to themselves as if privy to some private joke, which I take to mean that they are indeed familiar with it. I overheard one of them call it "cualoco zacatl," which roughly translates from Olman to "angry grass." The few natives who speak the trade tongue, however, have made a broken translation, calling it "loco weed."

Territorial Behavior of Terror Birds

10th of Reaping, 593 CY

Concerning the flock of terror birds that I have been studying near the isle's eastern peninsula, today I witnessed a pack of males force a dimetrodon away from its kill. The creature had wandered into the high grasses of the flock's territory and brought down a giant scorpion, an easy catch with little signs of struggle. This was soon to change, though, for the terror bird scavengers can be very persistent when it comes to robbing meals.

The tall birds slowly encircled the predator, assessing the situation. At first, the dimetrodon seemed indifferent to their presence, continuing to eat while only occasionally snapping at birds that got too close. As the flightless avians gained confidence, they began flaunting—rising up to their full

Terror birds of the northern Peninsula

height and fluffing their head plumes. They strutted back and forth, low resonating grunts emanating from deep within their chests. When their displays failed to intimidate the feeding predator, some of them began turning their hindquarters toward it and kicking dirt into its face. This immediately garnered the reptile's full attention.

Unwilling to give up its kill, the dimetrodon flushed the sail on its back, bared its teeth, and began bellowing at its attackers. This show of force came too late, though, as the birds had worked themselves into a frenzy. The flanking terror birds nipped at its tail, hitting and running, much to their target's frustration. While doing little harm, it made the dimetrodon spin around to snap at them. Taking advantage of this momentary distraction, the other birds rushed in for quick strikes, butting and quickly biting with their powerful beaks. At one point, the dimetrodon actually staggered to keep its balance. Finally having had enough, the giant lizard abandoned its meal and fled at a waddling gait. The birds gave pursuit, screeching as they drove the creature from their territory. Once the threat of the predator was gone, they dragged the half-eaten scorpion back to the waiting chicks and females of their flock.

In other parts of the Flanaess, these flightless birds are top predators of their habitats, but here they are clearly bottom-feeding scavengers. If it were not for their strength of numbers, they would certainly be ill equipped at defending their nests and might have long ago disappeared from the island. They have adapted quite well to their situation and exhibit a remarkable ability to drive off most predators that threaten their nesting grounds.

Tyrannosaurus Rex!

22nd of Reaping, 593 CY

In gathering data for my documentation of the island's food chains, Hatoi and I witnessed a tyrannosaur consume a lesser theropod in the northeastern grasslands. The prey was too small to sate the giant beast's hunger, and once it caught our scent and spotted us, it charged—frighteningly fast for a creature of such size. Terrified, and against all instinct, I held my ground, knowing that fleeing would certainly be my last act.

I attempted to speak to it to try to calm the massive beast, but it ignored me, slowing its advance only slightly. My heart pounding, I redoubled my efforts and the rex came to a reluctant halt. I have heard tales of druids who consort with these beasts, but that seemed a dangerous proposition. Verik would surely scold me if he knew I had even attempted it.

The titan lowered its head to sniff me with one great nostril, its scimitar-sized teeth scant inches away. Fascinated, I reached out a trembling hand to touch it, and just then, Hatoi jumped from his tree and landed squarely on the top of the tyrant's skull. I yelled at him to stop, but it was too late. The tyrannosaur raised its mighty head and let out a deafening roar. It began thrashing and spinning its body to shake off the small nuisance, snapping its great jaws in anticipation of the morsel. As Hatoi raised his spear, I cried out to prevent what was to occur, but too late. He plunged his spear deep into one of the tyrannosaur's eyes, blinding the giant and sending it into an uncontrollable rage. Between roars, it swung its tail wildly while clawing impotently at its face, unable to remove the tiny spear.

The last I saw of the rex, it was bullying its way into the jungle to the west, splintering the innocent trees as it ran. The sound of its flight turned to sounds of intense struggle, the trees began shaking violently and a shocked reptilian roar reverberated through the jungle. Reappearing from the undergrowth, Hatoi began frantically waving his hands as if warding off some perceived evil. When the tyrannosaur abruptly became quiet, choked off in mid-roar, and the tops of the trees stopped moving, wide-eyed Hatoi started making loud, agitated ticking sounds. He wanted very desperately to leave the area, pulling my hand to lead me away from the mysterious and disturbing sounds.

Not questioning my native guide's obvious urgency, we quickly journeyed back to the village. Later, when I asked, Hatoi refused to speak of his actions, becoming frightened and emotional. For the first time, I've come to realize the phanaton is keeping certain truths pertaining to the isle a secret from me.

Ecology of the Masher

5th of Goodmonth, 593 CY

My interactions with the natives are beginning to bear fruit, as they have begun trading with Farshore, eager to exchange pearls harvested from oysters that live around the coral reefs of the island. Following rumors of

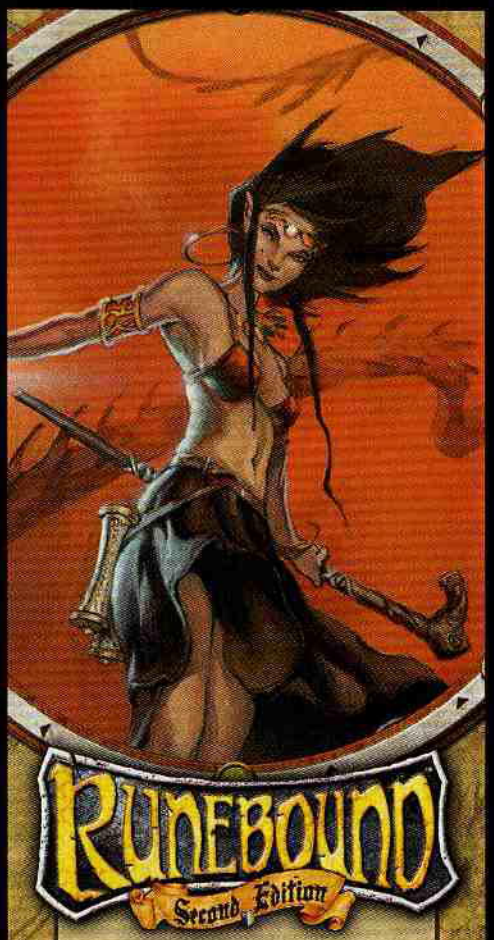
All creatures fear the isle's terrible thunder lizards

huge pearls, we've bartered two canoes with the fishermen of Burowao, the easternmost peninsula village, in exchange for guides to lead a Far-shore expedition to a reef where they claim giant oysters make their homes. I went along with the explorers to investigate the reports of such giant mollusks and learn more about the isle's aquatic inhabitants.

We anchored at a reef off the north-eastern shores of the island. Our guides spoke of monstrous, territorial eels that feed on the coral there—a trait that has since earned them the name "mashers." With the help of the fishermen, we devised a strategy for stealing the pearls from their homes.

Approaching the reef in outriggers, we maneuvered into the shallow water over the reef—less than 2 feet deep—and disembarked. Walking on the reef proved difficult—if you weren't careful, you could easily break an ankle. Our mission was to attract the attention of the mashers by dislodging chunks of the reef with long poles, hoping to provoke a feeding frenzy, giving our divers the necessary distraction to gather the pearl-bearing oysters.

Within moments of breaking off the first coral chunks the mashers responded. Several sets of the eels' wicked black spines broke from the water, serpentine in their movements as they approached. Some looked



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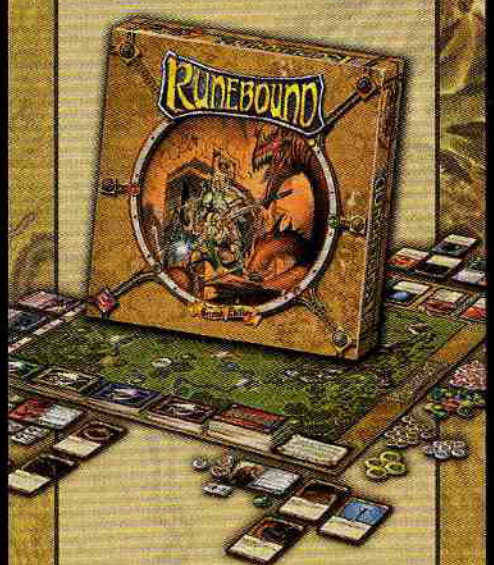

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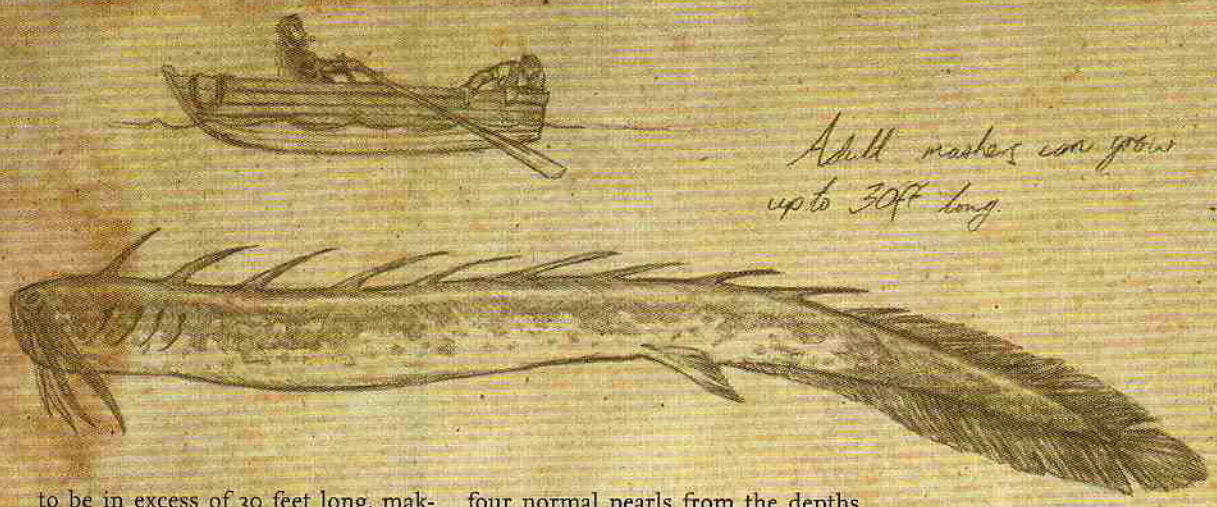


to be in excess of 30 feet long, making them more than a match for the aquatic reptiles lurking in these foggy waters. As the monstrous eels gained speed, I realized their intentions and began yelling for my comrades to retreat. The mashers' skulls bear thick growths of bone, with which they began relentlessly ramming the reef, sending jarring shockwaves through it, knocking us from our feet. A great schism opened in the coral we stood on, and the solid surface beneath us was suddenly gone, sunk into the lower underwater mazes, leaving us treading water that was now deep enough for the mashers to navigate. Two of our men who chose to swim to the canoe are no longer with us. One moment they were there and the next they were simply gone, nothing marking their presence other than a cloud of turbulent bubbles of blood.

As we emerged onto the standing reef, I noticed one of the native's arms hanging limp at his side, quickly turning black—he had brushed against one of the poisonous spines on the mashers' backs. Cursing myself for lacking the vital spell, I tried to treat the poison but was unsuccessful—the black discoloration quickly spread to the rest of his body, coursing across his skin. He began shivering and babbling incoherently with dementia. Finally going into shock, fits of vomiting and convulsions took over. When his eyes bulged, I knew it was too late, for inflammation of the brain is fatal. The poison had killed him within moments.

We had suffered three fatalities and our divers managed to bring up only four normal pearls from the depths. Appalled, Verik has decided that further risk outweighs the value of the still-rumored giant pearls and has forbidden all future diving expeditions.

Physiology of the Greenvise

19th of Goodmonth, 593 CY

Today I came upon a clearing where it seemed a herd of dinosaurs had recently stampeded. The footprints were massive and the devastation to the area immense—likely caused by a herd of diplodocuses or other large herbivores. There were no signs of an attacker's footprints, leading me to believe that the panic's source had come from the sky.

As I was studying the ruined landscape, I discovered a large plant, a greenvise once nearly 15 feet tall, fatally trampled into the ground. Its still huge, flytraplike mouths twitched violently—seemingly hungry even in death—and spasms ran down the length of its main stalk, causing the plant's tendrils to flutter and make a sound like someone shaking a tree.

About halfway down the stalk that served as the greenvise's throat a pulsing bulge appeared to be the source of the plant's post-death contractions. Whatever was inside the carnivorous weed was still alive, struggling to escape. When I sliced open the stalk to try to free whatever was trapped within, I encountered some resistance—the greenvise's thick stem proving tougher to carve than a ripe melon. Viscous froth spewed from the incision and

oozed its way to the ground, reminding me of the saliva of a fleshy creature—except that this reeked of sap.

Lining the inside of the stalk ran rows of dense thorns protruding down toward the plant's gut, arrayed in such a fashion as to prevent captured prey from escaping back up to the maw. I could see a sizable frog peering up at me through the thorns, desperately trying to push past the barbs to reach the opening I had created. I spoke to it in an attempt to calm it, but the traumatized thing was fully intent on escape. The frog must have kicked one of the rooty organs that once guided the greenvise's locomotion, for one of the plant's tendrils convulsed, knocking me off my feet and pinning me to the ground.

Struggling to free myself, I heard the flap of powerful wings and stilled myself at the sight of a pair of wyverns scouring the carnage. These creatures were likely the culprits behind the stampede, returning to pick over the devastation. Instinctively, I shifted myself into a small snake and slowly slithered away from the remains of the man-eating bush, seeking a hiding place where I could wait for the predators to depart. Behind me, I heard the lesser dragons tearing into the greenvise, not discriminating between frog and plant. At least the poor creature did not suffer long.

Aranea Habitat

15th of Harvester, 593 CY

I cannot put to words the sense of grief and guilt that consumes me. By now, Hatoi is surely dead, a victim of an unspeakable fate I unwittingly had a hand in weaving. If only I had heeded his warnings, he would still be here with me as I write this. For the thousandth time I ask why I ignored him, foolishly venturing into a darkened hollow in the eastern jungle where I noticed even the thunder lizards feared to tread. There, my curiosity cost me and my friend dearly.

As we entered the vale, made eternally dark by the dense jungle canopy, I immediately felt something was

An unlucky victim of the Aranea.

watching us. At first, I shrugged it off as nerves, but it became increasingly difficult to keep Hatoi calm. When he suddenly stopped and started hissing, staring intently into the darkness, I halted in deference to his keener senses. It was then that I became aware that we had been walking beneath a floating maze of spider webs strung through the trees above. Disgusting corpse husks dangled from the rope-thick strands like macabre Midwinter ornaments. Yet, even more terrifyingly, something had purposefully positioned the carcasses, forming rotting shelters as sickening as they were crude.

All of the hairs on my body stood on end when I caught a glimpse of movement. Praying for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, I could barely see them: giant, horrifying spiders slowly descending from their webs, seemingly hovering in mid-air and gesturing with their front appendages—disgustingly elongated arms with multi-knuckled hands. Although I had never seen one, I took these creatures for aranea—rare and rumored spiderlike beings storied to carry ill-mannered children off to their evil forest kingdom.

I didn't have the opportunity to look closer or attempt to speak to the creatures as the surrounding jungle suddenly came alive with indistinct, sinister shadows and the sounds of slinking things. Despite the activity, I could sense nothing other than Hatoi, the spider things, and myself. Even now, I don't know if something was actually there, or if those images and noises were mere figments meant to drive us to some deadlier trap.

Regardless, an overwhelming need to flee consumed me, and I prayed to Ehlonna to steel my nerve. I don't know what came over poor Hatoi, though, because he bolted, heading deeper into the hollow as if charging one of the spiders, a terrified but determined look on his face. I can't help but wonder if he was trying to defend me. I had scarcely a moment to call out before I saw his peril, each bound into the undergrowth covering him more and more in thick strands of webbing, ghostly ropes slipping around him like wet nooses. The sounds of him calling out to me as he was hefted into the silken nightmare above still ring in my ears, and through my own screams I thought I heard a chittering arachnid laughter that will ever torture my nightmares.

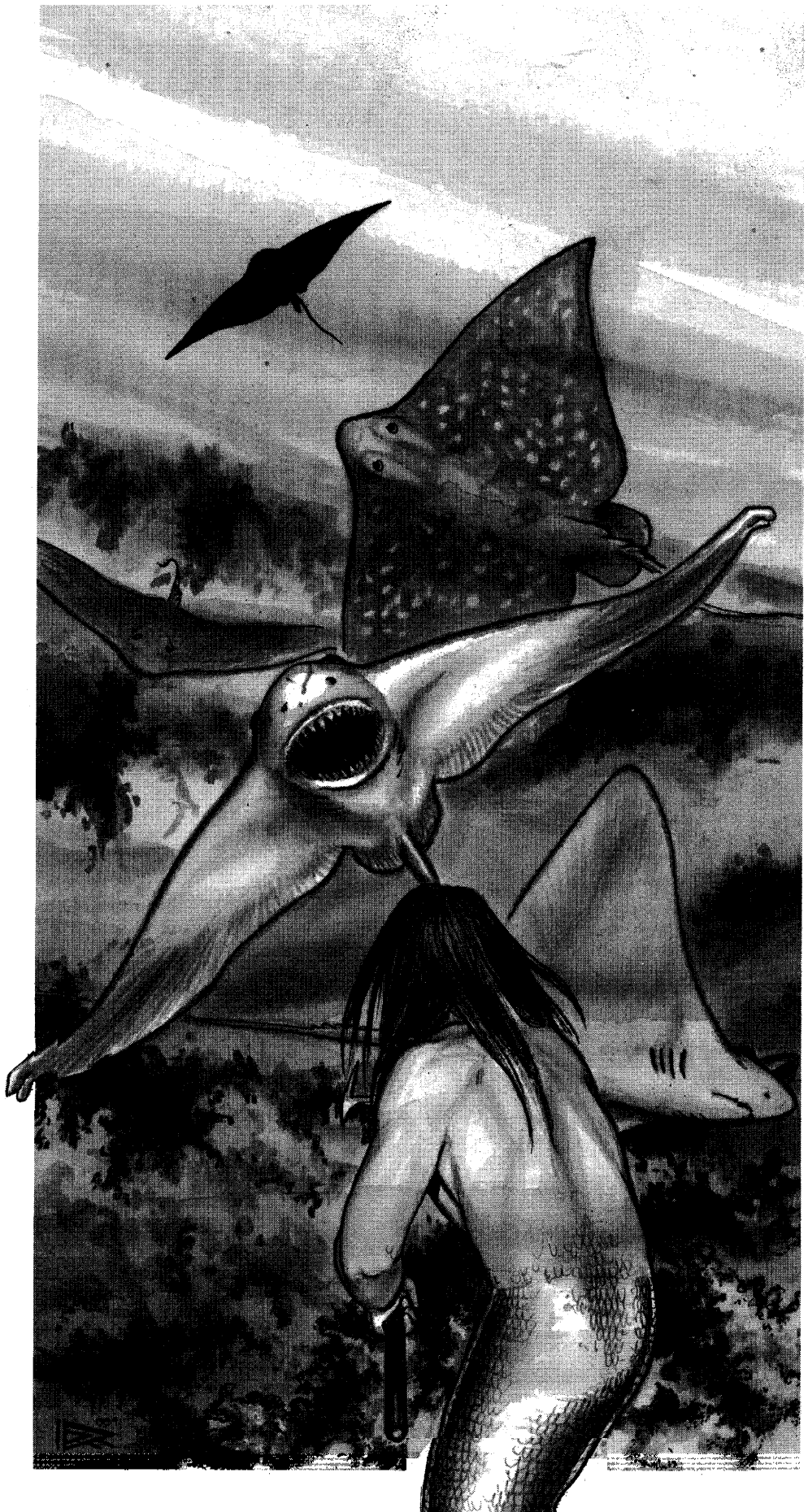
Conclusion

1st of Sunsebb, 593 CY

Some time has passed since I left Farshore and—in light of the recent tragedy—this is likely to be my last entry. When we return to Sasserine, I shall deposit the bulk of this work into the family vault for safekeeping until such a time that I can organize my notes and publish a full dissertation of the island's ecosystem. Whatever final form my observations take, though, I plan to dedicate the work to those souls who lost their lives in that unforgiving land. I hope their sacrifices might serve as a warning of the savage nature and primal ferocity that epitomizes the aptly named Isle of Dread.

The ecology of the ixitxachitl

by Ed Greenwood



From the *Ramblings, Volume V,* of the sage Nenemith:

A curious creature indeed, the ixitxachitl. Found in colonies of sometimes as many as a hundred or more in shallow, tropical seas, ixitxachitl typically lair in well-concealed grottos or tunnels in the midst of coral reefs. They worship the Prince of Demons, Demogorgon, and from him gain the use of clerical spells, with some creatures rising in ability to the equal of a Patriarch.[1]

Although they are very seldom encountered by humans and humanoids who travel in or on the seas, the ixitxachitl are a numerous race and rule large areas of the coastal salt waters of our world, relying on their aggressive nature and their magical powers to build an undersea empire of sorts.

Ixitxachitl are carnivorous and prey on all marine life that they can kill and devour, this even extending at times (when they attack in huge hunting packs) to giant octopi, whales, and — on at least one documented occasion — a dragon turtle. The creatures range far from their lairs in search of food, and often battle sahuagin, locathah, and especially tritons and mermen. The superior organization and tactics of these opponents have earned them victory over the ixitxachitl often enough to keep these magically endowed rays from destroying all resistance and mastering the oceans. But, at the same time, the ixitxachitl have certainly made their presence felt; in some areas of our world, they have all but eradicated aquatic elves in warm seas, and the tritons have largely found it easier to make their abodes in deeper waters, and only venture in armed bands into shallower areas as a result of ixitxachitl activities therein.

Because of the enmity between Orcus and Demogorgon, intelligent marine undead (lacedons, juju zombies, and so forth) will not aid — and sometimes will actively oppose — the rays. Ixitxachitl, for their part, devour such prey whenever it can be found, and so the undead largely avoid ixitxachitl. Those rays with especially powerful cleric abilities can raise additional "recruits" for their armies[2] by use of the *animate dead* spell, but are unable to Magically control or influence undead because the influence of Orcus against them offers too much resistance.

In battle, ixitxachitl swoop rapidly at opponents from opposing directions and levels, seeking to confuse prey by striking at it from two or more sides at once. In this maneuver, they are often led by any ixitxachitl present of the so-called "vampire" variety, which are envied and personally powerful war leaders and influential individuals in ixitxachitl society.[3] The most

powerfully endowed of the servants of Demogorgon (which are the social leaders of ixitxachitl society) hang back until the single most powerful opponents are identified, whereupon they attack with spells.[4] These powerful spell-users typically swoop together with two or more other ixitxachitl, so that the target will find it difficult to escape their attacks.

Sometimes ixitxachitl burrow into bottom-sand, leaving only their eyes uncovered, to escape dangerous foes; but more often they do this to lie in wait for speedy prey, which they then ambush.

In a manner similar to the way that sharks do, ixitxachitl can sense vibrations for great distances underwater, by means of receptors on their backs and tails — the shock waves of explosions, for instance, they can "hear" from miles away.[5] They have a form of speech by which they can communicate openly with one another, and with some sahuagin that have learned at least the rudiments of their strange tongue, and those ixitxachitl with access to the proper spells can also communicate magically with other creatures. Ixitxachitl have a second form of language that they use among themselves (and with some other marine creatures, such as sahuagin), which is best described as "touch-telepathy." This is a form of limited mental exchange possible only between creatures the ixitxachitl are actually touching, usually with their tails. Groups of ixitxachitl sometimes swim in "stacks," fins beating in unison, one atop another, belly to back. This is believed to be a form of this mental communication (transmitting emotions or general thoughts), and not mating or courting behavior.

The "devil rays" (as they are sometimes mistakenly called) all appear externally identical to other creatures, but ixitxachitl can apparently distinguish sexes and individuals readily at a distance. Each creature mates once a year, at varying times (there are no "seasons" as we know them beneath the surface of the tropical seas). The process is initiated by a female, which chooses — sometimes aggressively — a male partner. By this method, some sages argue, the females deliberately attempt to breed to improve the race.[6]

Certain ixitxachitl continue to grow in strength and power upon becoming adults. It is from this group that a colony's leaders and decision-makers come — but only those that are accepted by their fellows are allowed to live long enough to attain this status. Potential leaders that are deemed unsatisfactory, by whatever standards the ixitxachitl use (perhaps disrespect or disloyalty for Demogorgon is a factor), are set upon by the group and slain before they have a chance to force themselves into positions of influence and power. This "weeding-out" process that destroys many of these special ixitxachitl helps to explain why the creatures have not risen to a position of absolute domination of the seas. At the same time, this process seems to help insure the unity of purpose that binds the members of an ixitxachitl colony together and keeps them, as a group, strongly loyal to Demogorgon. In fact, it is said (by those who should know) that ixitxachitl as a species are more fervently attached to Demogorgon's wishes and aims than any other species of creature on this plane of existence we occupy.[7]

Vampiric ixitxachitl are more feared by other creatures than even the most powerful of the non-vampiric ixitxachitl leaders, because of their lethal bite which saps a victim's very life force, and because of their ability to heal wounds that they suffer. On very rare occasions, vampiric ixitxachitl become leaders or lieutenants of a colony, and such creatures are said by many to be the most dangerous undersea denizens of their size.[8]

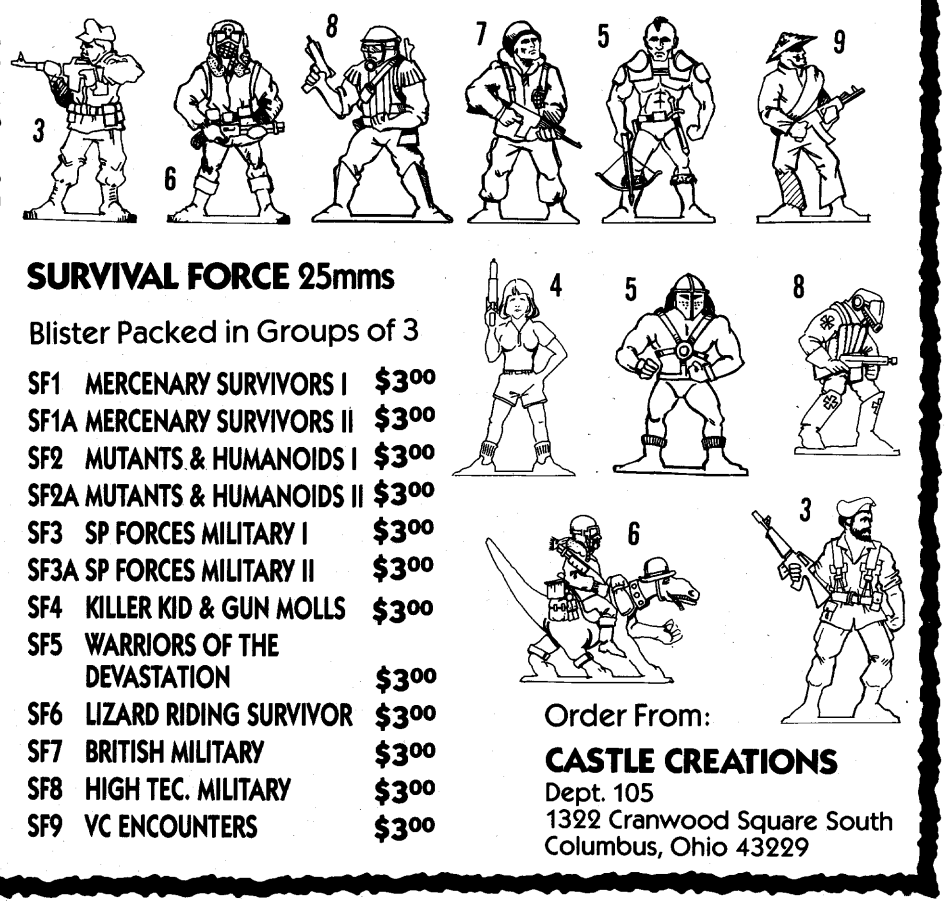
Fiercely independent, ixitxachitl cannot be subdued and will fight to the death if not stunned or otherwise immobilized. They are fearless in behavior (but not reckless or imprudent), cunning in battle, and prone to collect treasure of all sorts, to bargain with and in hopes of finding items of magic, which the leaders take possession of. They value most highly those magic items which they can employ; ixitxachitl have been seen wearing rings on their tails and wielding rods, staves, and the like that they hold in their clenched jaws. If they come across items of magic that they cannot themselves use, they will hide them away, to keep them from the grasp of other creatures and possibly to use as a bargaining tool.

Sometimes ixitxachitl will cooperate with other aquatic creatures such as sea hags, or even sahuagin or locathah, for mutual gain, and have been known to hire or train creatures (such as sea lions) to work for them. Sharks can seldom be thus used by their cousins the ixitxachitl, for sahuagin have long employed sharks in their battles against the rays, and sharks seem to have acquired a dislike for the "dark rays" — or perhaps they merely recall ixitxachitl flesh as tasty.

More details of ixitxachitl life are few, not well documented, and understandably difficult to augment, but research on this subject, notably by my esteemed colleagues Ramazith, of Baldur's Gate, and Alauthym, of the Moonshae Isles, continues.

Notes

1. Ixitxachitl gain spell bonuses for wisdom just as clerical spell-casters of other races do, and can use any magic items not specifically prohibited to clerics that can be worn and operated without hands. Most such items either have, or can be modified to operate through, mental commands rather than audible command words. An opponent using *ESP* could learn such commands from the mind of an ixitxachitl while the commands were actually being made, but not at any other time, since the commands would not then be part of the conscious surface thoughts of the creature. Note also that ixitxachitl can employ their clerical spell powers without components of



any sort (although verbal and/or somatic components may well be part of some rituals); these spell powers are considered innate once they are bestowed by Demogorgon, and do not need to be triggered by an external object or force. However, "innate" does not mean unlimited; as with normal clerics, ixitxachitl can use each of their spells no more frequently than once per day.

2. Any ixitxachitl with the spell ability of a 5th-level cleric (or higher) can use *animate dead* and will prefer to do so upon creatures of its own type. Ixitxachitl do not have skeletons like humans, humanoids, and other higher vertebrates do; their "bones" are unconnected pieces of cartilage that cannot be animated like a human skeleton can be. The bodies of dead ixitxachitl can be animated as zombies, however; these creatures have AC 7, MV 6", 2 HD, and the normal 3-12 bite damage. These zombies do not have cleric spell ability and cannot employ magic items or take independent action of any sort; their principal function is to add numbers to an ixitxachitl attacking force. As specified in the *animate dead* spell description, these zombies are subject to the commands of the ixitxachitl that cast the spell — but ixitxachitl do not have any other power over undead of any sort. Ixitxachitl zombies can be turned or destroyed by other clerics as usual, and any cleric attempting to affect them gets a +1 bonus to the die roll for turning.

3. Nenemith refers to them as "so-called" vampires because this variety of ixitxachitl does not have all the attributes commonly associated with vampires; for one thing, vampiric ixitxachitl are obviously not harmed by immersion in running water. Their only similarities to true vampires are the characteristics mentioned in the Monster Manual: level draining and regeneration. They do not assume gaseous (or any other) form, and they do not infect their victims with vampirism. In an environment that is already watery, it is reasonable to assume that they are not affected by holy water, since the holy water cannot be "splashed" on them; if an attacker releases holy water in the vicinity of a vampiric ixitxachitl, the fluid would disperse into the surrounding sea water and be diluted immediately anyway.

4. If an attacking ixitxachitl employs a touch-effect spell (such as *cause light wounds),* the spell will only take effect if a normal bite attack succeeds. If the bite attack does not hit, the *cause wounds* spell (or whatever) is not dissipated and remains "stored up" until a hit is scored. Once an ixitxachitl has decided to use such a spell, its effects will be felt by the first eligible victim; the creature cannot withhold the spell when it does score a hit, with the intent of using it against a different target in a later attack.

5. Ixitxachitl also have 9" infravision and seem to be able to smell other creatures at a distance of 1" or less. They can smell blood, lamp oil, or other foreign substances released into the water at up to 4" distant from the source, depending upon water currents. The normal, color-sensitive vision of an ixitxachitl extends to the limit of comparable (average) humanvision in the same circumstances, being governed by water conditions — in pitch darkness, or the murk of disturbed sediments, visibility can be reduced to zero, and it can range up to half a mile or more in clear, calm water lit by a bright sun.

6. The life cycle of ixitxachitl is still poorly understood, but can be summarized as follows: Six months after mating, a female gives birth to a single young, of 1-1 HD. It is born in full control of its physical faculties (including regeneration, if it is vampiric), but does not acquire spell ability (or level-draining ability, if vampiric) until reaching adult size in 1-3 months thereafter. The speed with which it grows to maturity depends upon available food; a young ixitxachitl in a relatively small colony with an adequate food supply will mature (1+1 or 2+2 HD and full powers) in 1 month. Increases in spell capability and hit dice, for those rare individuals able to attain them, come at the rate of 1 level of spell use every six months and/or 1 hit die every year thereafter, so that it takes an additional three years for a leader type (8th level spell ability, 4+4 HD) to reach full maturity. The

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characteristics that produce vampiric or leader-type ixitxachitl are apparently not hereditary (else there would be a greater abundance of such creatures), but are passed on randomly and infrequently. Most ixitxachitl live for 30 years or so, but some are known to have lived for 10 times that long.

7. All ixitxachitl have an appreciation (partly inborn, partly learned) for their race's allegiance to Demogorgon. Each of them has at least the spell ability of a 1st-level cleric, and they give Demogorgon full credit for endowing them with this special power. Their actions will be governed by Demogorgon's wishes and orders — or what the ixitxachitl believe these to be. They are oblivious to fear (of the non-magical sort) and fanatical, but not personally foolhardy. Those that attain higher levels of spell ability prefer to let lesser ixitxachitl do the dirty work — and perish, should matters come to that — instead of themselves. These special types will always "run away to fight another day" rather than impetuously put their lives on the line, and they often pass grudges on to young members of a colony, so that certain individuals, heraldic devices, and types of creatures will be recognized and attacked with particular savagery, or pursued tirelessly, by encountered ixitxachitl.

8. Whenever a colony of ixitxachitl contains 100 or more individuals, one of them will be a leader type with vampiric powers (8+8 HD, 8th-level cleric spell ability, and usually wearing or possessing at least one type U magic item, as per the Monster Manual). If a colony contains at least 80 individuals, one or two of them will be guard types with vampiric powers (6+6 HD, 6th-level cleric spell ability), but the leader of the group will still be "only" a normal (non-vampiric) ixitxachitl with 4+4 HD and 8th-level spell ability.

Appendix

A. The suggested experience point values for ixitxachitl, as given in Appendix E of the Dungeon Masters Guide, can be amended and expanded as follows if more detail is desired or needed. In these calculations, the use of minor spells (lst, 2nd, or 3rd level cleric ability) and the ability of regeneration are counted as *special abilities.* The use of major spells (5th, 6th, or 8th level cleric ability) and the ability of energy level drain are *exceptional abilities.*

HD	Max. cleric spell ability	XP value
Normal ixitxachitl:		
1+1	1st	28 + 2/hp
1+1	2nd	28 + 2/hp
1+1	3rd	28 + 2/hp
1+1	5th	65 + 2/hp
Leader types:		
3+3	6th	125 + 4/hp
4+4	8th	165 + 5/hp
Vampiric ixitxachitl:		
2+2	1st	105 +3/hp
2+2	2nd	120 + 3/hp
2+2	3rd	120 + 3/hp
2+2	5th	160 + 3/hp
6+6	6th	700 + 8/hp
8+8	8th	1700 + 12/hp

B. As put forth in Note 1 above, ixitxachitl with exceptional wisdom are entitled to bonuses in the number of cleric spells they can acquire and use. Those members of a colony that have high intelligence will possess wisdom scores ranging from 4-16 (DMG, p.79), and any creature with wisdom of 13 or higher will get at least one bonus spell (PH, p. 11). Thus, a leader type with 8th level cleric spell ability and wisdom of 16 would have spells usable amounting to five 1st level, five 2nd level, three 3rd level, and two 4th level spells.

C. As noted in the Monster Manual, ixitxachitl use "evil clerical spells." Following is a suggested list of spells from which to choose, including some which are reversed forms of "good" spells:

1st level	2nd level
1 Cause fear	*Chant*
2 *Cause 1. w.*	*Find traps*
3 *Curse*	*Hold person*
4 Darkness	*Silence 15' r.*
5 Detect good	*Speak w/animals*
6 Detect magic	*Spiritual hammer*
7 Prot. from good	
8 Putrefy food & drink	

3rd level	4th level
1 *Animate dead*	*Cause s. w.*
2 *Bestow curse*	*Poison*
3 Cause blindness	*Prot. f. good 10' r.*
4 Cause disease	*Tongues*
5 Continual darkness	
6 Dispel magic	

D. In the vast majority of cases, ixitxachitl make saving throws as clerics. The only exceptions to this are for creatures of 4+4 HD or more, when a save vs. breath weapon is called for — and that doesn't happen very often underwater. In those instances, the creatures save as fighters, since the saving throw vs. that attack form at the level in question is lower for fighters than for clerics. The appropriate saving throws are as follows:

HD	Level for s.t.	Saving throws				
1+1	2nd	10	13	14	16	15
2+2	3rd	10	13	14	16	15
3+3	4th	9	12	13	15	14
4+4	5th	9	12	13	13	14
6+6	8th	7	10	11	12	12
8+8	10th	6	9	10	9	11

E. Ixitxachitl cannot function or survive in a waterless environment. As with other aquatic creatures, they can be effectively kept at bay by an *airy water* spell or similar magic. Except under the conditions outlined on page 75 of the DMG, they cannot hit characters or creatures able to be struck only by magic weapons.

F. The generally accepted pronunciation of the name is "ick- *zit* -sah-chittle."

8

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THE ECOLOGY OF THE JERMLAINE

The Best Laid Plans

When in Rome ... don't get caught impersonating a centurion.

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Terry Dykstra

"WELL, IF THERE ARE NO OTHER STUPID QUESTIONS," said Dreelix with a look of scorn in Buntleby's direction, "I hereby close this meeting of the Monster Hunters Association." He gave a single bang on the table with his gavel to make it official. The various wizards and sages of the exalted Association gathered their things and prepared to exit the meeting hall.

"Well, that was interesting," remarked Willowquisp.

"Yes, Dreelix was once again in fine form," agreed Buntleby with a sigh of exasperation. "You'd think we'd have learned to expect it by now."

"So, any plans for this weekend?" asked the elderly sage.

"As a matter of fact, yes," replied Buntleby. "Some field research on the jermlaine that live in the tunnels underneath my house.[1] Say, why don't you come with me?"

"I don't know ... I rather prefer to leave that wizardly stuff to the experts."

"No, no, I've worked out a way for you to come without having to be polymorphed. I guarantee it—there's no chance of you being stuck in jermlaine form."

"Really? How?"

"Remember Azurielle the nymph?"

"How could I not?"

"Well, I'll arrange to borrow her hat of disguise. You slap the hat on your head, I shrink you down to one foot tall, and presto! Off we go!"

"I don't know ... Any chance of my being stuck at one foot high?"

"None at all—the reduce spell isn't like polymorph other."

"What about you?"

"I'll use polymorph self. It's perfectly safe—I've done it dozens of times before. In fact, the jermlaine community know me as one of their own, a wandering traveler."[2]

"I don't know ..."

"Oh, c'mon, it'll be fun! A chance to broaden your horizons! An opportunity to study some of nature's creatures up close! How can you resist?"

1. Jermlaine communities are nearly always found underground. They lair in tiny caves connected by passageways scaled to their own 1'-tall frames, making entry into a jermlaine dwelling all but impossible for most adventurers without the aid of magic (usually by either shrinking, *polymorphing* into a small creature, or assuming gaseous form). Typically, jermlaine lairs connect to a large central cavern, which is often accessed by larger passageways allowing human-sized creatures to enter.

On rarer occasions, jermlaine lair in a human-made dwelling, but only after its former occupants have departed. Jermlaine don't mind living in abandoned houses, but they refuse to share their living space with the "giant races" (anyone taller than themselves).

2. Most jermlaine remain in their underground communities, seldom if ever straying far from the twisted tunnels and corridors that make up their homes. For this reason, the lone traveling jermlaine, or rover, is a beloved member of all jermlaine communities. The rover fills much the same niche as a human bard (without the singing—jermlaine detest music), passing on bits of news, gossip, and items of interest from one jermlaine community to another. Often, he is used to transport goods between jermlaine clans, lugging a coil of rope from Clan A to Clan B, then taking some stolen hard candy from Clan B to Clan A in return. Rovers are almost always skilled rat-riders, using the rodents both as riding mounts and beasts of burden during these trading missions.

"Well," said the sage hesitantly, "if you put it like that ..."

"That's the spirit," said Buntleby, slapping his elder friend on the arm. "I'll meet you at my place at ... shall we say sundown tomorrow?"

"Hrrrm," agreed Willowquisp, and they went their separate ways.

❖❖❖

The next day, Willowquisp strode up the path to Buntleby's dwelling in the Western Grove, the plot of land the young wizard had inherited a little over a year ago and more or less transformed into an osquip farm since. The place looked much the same as it did before coming into Buntleby's possession—he had caretakers to oversee the mundane chores of running the place. Buntleby might now own the land, but he was much more interested in pursuing his own wizardly affairs and raising the multi-legged osquips that he loved so much.

"Ah, there you are, right on time!" greeted Buntleby as he caught sight of Willowquisp. "Ready to go?"

"I suppose. This won't be dangerous, will it?"

"Not overly so. We'll both appear to be jermlaine, but if anything goes wrong I've got a few combat spells memorized. Plus, Ozzie will protect us, won't you, Ozzie?" The wizard bent down and scratched his six-legged familiar on the head. Ozzie wrapped his rat-like tail around Buntleby's leg and purred contentedly.

"Do you have the hat?" asked Willowquisp.

"Right here," responded Buntleby, plopping the hat of disguise onto his older friend's head.

"How does it work?"

"Just concentrate on what you want to look like, and the hat does the rest."

"I've never seen a jermlaine up close before," said Willowquisp. "What if I don't get it right?"

Jermlaine are almost totally bald from birth, remaining so throughout their lives.

"Tell you what—I have, so I'll change first, and then you can pattern yourself after me. How's that?"

"Okay."

"All right then. Here, put this on first." Buntleby offered his friend an amulet on a slender chain. The amulet was made of silver, and depicted an open mouth with a protruding tongue.

"What is it?" asked the sage, looking at the item with mild distaste.

"An amulet of tongues. I admit, not very fashionable, but you'll need it to make sense of the jermlaine speech.[3] I'll be wearing one too, if it makes you feel any better."

The two of them put the chains over their heads. "Ready then? Prepare to get small!" Buntleby rattled off the words to the reduce spell, and before the elderly sage knew it, he was about a foot tall and looking up at his enormous friend.

"My turn," boomed the giant Buntleby from above. Arcane words spilled from his lips, and he shrunk to the same size as Willowquisp.

He was, however, no longer the young wizard that Willowquisp had come to know over the course of the last year. Where once he had light brown hair, Buntleby now had a pointed, mostly bald head with only a few sparse wisps of gray hair flowing in the breeze. His blue robe was gone, replaced by a filthy-looking loincloth. Thick, dirty nails grew from nimble fingers and toes. And his

3. Jermlaine speech is comprised of high-pitched squeaks and twitters, easily mistaken for the sounds of a rat or bat. This isn't coincidental, for jermlaine are also able to converse with rats of all types (including normal rats, giant rats, vapor rats, and osquips). The "rat language" is simple, but through long association with the creatures, jermlaine can converse with rats as per the 2nd-level priest spell *speak with animals*.

In addition to these two languages, each jermlaine has a 10% chance of understanding common, dwarvish, gnomish, goblin, or orc—a separate roll is made for each language. Jermlaine have excellent memories and are likely to understand a few words from each language they've heard spoken aloud. However, their vocal abilities being what they are, the creatures cannot speak such languages aloud.

4. Although from a distance a jermlaine appears to be wearing baggy clothing and a leather helmet, the creature's odd appearance is actually the result of having about 50% more skin than necessary. Their skin is warty and grayish tan, allowing them to blend in well with their subterranean environment. Because excessive clothing might hamper this camouflage ability, most jermlaine make do with filthy scraps of clothing the same general color as their skin. Others go naked, and because of the loose flaps of skin hanging from their bodies, it's often difficult to tell which are clothed and which are not (especially at a distance).

Some sages believe that jermlaine are actually distant relatives of the gnomes and speculate that their appearance is the result of a magical accident that somehow shrunk their bones but not their skin. If true, it does little to explain the jermlaine's hairlessness—they are almost totally bald from birth, remaining so throughout their lives, and males do not grow facial hair.

skin was now a leathery, grayish-tan, sagging in lumps and clumps around his lower arms and legs and dangling over a visible paunch.[4]

"How do I look?" asked the wizard, smiling a wide smile full of crooked teeth.

"Good heavens," said Willowquisp. "Must I really look like that?"

"C'mon, it's all part of the fun," chuckled Buntleby. "And we'd best not tarry—these spells last only so long, you know. I extended your reduce spell, but even so we've got maybe two hours."

Sighing in resignation, Willowquisp closed his eyes and concentrated. His features melted like wax, reshaping themselves into the resemblance of a saggy-skinned jinxkin.[5] "How's that?" he asked.

"Good, good," commented Buntleby. "I don't like the hat, though—jermlaine don't usually wear hats. See if you can make it a kerchief."

"A kerchief?"

"Y'know, like a pirate would wear. Good, but that's too colorful. Make it gray. Okay, perfect. Now roll around in the dirt."

"What?"

"It's for your own protection. Jermlaine don't see all that well,[6] but they've got an uncanny sense of smell. You wouldn't want to enter their den smelling like a human, would you?"

"Buntleby, I'm liking this less and less."

"Oh, just do it. Look, I'm doing it, see?" Reluctantly, Willowquisp followed suit, rolling around in the dust and dirt of Buntleby's farm. He sneezed violently several times.

"All right then, looks like we're ready. C'mere, Ozzie, there's a good boy." The osquip skittered up, now seemingly the size of a large horse. Buntleby grabbed a few small items and stuffed them into a tiny sack, then climbed upon Ozzie's back, settling himself between the osquip's first and second sets of limbs. He pulled Willowquisp up behind him, and off they went down a narrow tunnel into the earth.

"This is an osquip tunnel, one of a huge network that my little pets have dug in the past year or so. As their network expanded, they tapped into a similar one made by the osquips of the jermlaine clan we're going to visit."[7]

"So what's the plan?" Willowquisp wanted to know.

"We ride into their lair, announce ourselves, and chat with the clan. I'll do most of the talking, but chime in every once in a while to make it look good."

"What's our cover story?"

"I'm a jermlaine rover, a traveler between distant clans. I usually provide them with 'information' from these 'distant clans'—actually, I make stuff up, but they never leave their own burrows anyway, so they don't know the difference. You are, let's see, you're an apprentice rover from another clan far away, and I'm giving you hands-on training before you venture out on your own."[8]

"Say, uh, it's getting dark in here."

"Oh, yeah, sorry about that. I've got infravision in this form, but I don't have any way of providing you the same. Don't worry, though, there's light at the jermlaine community—it's part of one of their traps."[9]

"Wonderful."

Ozzie pressed on down the lightless, winding tunnel. Before too long, the Monster Hunters became aware of a large, open space ahead of them. The glimmerings of light up ahead teased their eyes; as they advanced, they could see it was the result of a glowing coin lying on the stone floor of an immense cavern.

"I gave them that coin the first time I visited them," whispered Buntleby. "They use it as a kind of lure to attract adventurers into this cavern—the coin is sitting on top of a pit trap. The place is riddled with hidden pits and snares—look, there's another one there."

"Ozzie knows to avoid them?"

"Sure, we've been here plenty of times before. Ozzie even helped carve out a pit or two for the clan with those teeth of his."

"Where exactly are we?"

"I'm not sure exactly. At least a mile from my place, south or southeast, I think." Buntleby looked around the empty cavern. "Funny, nobody's here. Jermlaine usually keep a lookout or two around, especially this close to their home dwellings."

"Maybe nobody's home," suggested Willowquisp.

"Somebody's always home," corrected Buntleby. "Even when the adults are out ambushing victims, the women, children, and guard rodents stay in the lair.[10] Let's announce ourselves."

Buntleby dropped down from Ozzie's back and landed gracefully on the stone floor of the cavern. Picking up two stone pebbles, he clacked them together

5. Jermlaine are commonly known by a wide variety of names: jinxkin, bane-midges, atomites, and minimi (singular: minimus). Other, lesser-used names for these creatures include: dinkos, globbos, scrabblers, rat-brothers, flappies, flabbies, squeakies, squinties, verminites, trapsters, point-heads, mouselings, minimen, tiny terrors, miniscules, manikins, rodent-riders, peewees, diminumen, and jermies—among others.

6. Jermlaine have weak eyes, disliking bright lights and squinting often. They do have infravision to a distance of 30 yards, however—a useful adaptation to an underground environment. Furthermore, their keen senses of smell and hearing grant jermlaine a 50% chance to detect invisible creatures in their vicinity.

7. There is a 75% chance that any jermlaine encountered is accompanied by 1–6 rats (25%) or 1–6 giant rats (50%). Furthermore, there is a 50% chance that any given jermlaine colony shares its lair with the creatures. On top of this, there is an overall 10% chance that the "giant rats" encountered are actually multi-limbed osquips. Regardless of type, these creatures are used as riding mounts, lair guardians, and trusted equals. Many jermlaine clans name themselves after the type of rodent with which they share their lives.

8. That's actually how jermlaine rovers get their start. Any above-ground encounter with one or two jermlaine is likely to be a rover with or without an apprentice, and their rodent mount or mounts.

9. Being so short and relatively powerless, jermlaine depend heavily on traps to capture victims. They rely mostly on pit traps, trip wires, and nets—the latter two usually being made from the shaved hair of former victims. Once a victim is down, the jermlaine warriors swarm all over him or her, pummeling the individual with crudely made blackjacks. There is a 2% cumulative chance that a jermlaine attack knocks the victim unconscious, unless the victim wears splint, banded, or platemail. These heavily armored unfortunates are usually attacked with flaming oil or acid, then devoured by the clan once slain; others are merely stripped, robbed, shaved completely bald, and left tied up in a nearby passageway.

Jermlaine only occasionally attack victims without first "softening them up" in one of their traps—and then only when there's no serious opposition. Injured, ill, or sleeping victims are preferred targets.

10. The role of the female in jermlaine society changes over the course of time. Female children are treated the same as the males: noncombatants who must learn from their elders. As adults, they are trained for combat and take part in raids and ambushes along with the males. Once a female becomes pregnant, however, she removes herself from such combat roles and devotes herself exclusively to the birthing and raising of her children. As the children mature, she takes them on practice attacks, allowing them to participate in the humiliation of captured victims. Once they are old enough to fend for themselves (around age ten—the jermlaine life span is only about sixty years), the female often resumes combat roles within her clan. Of course, this assumes that she hasn't become pregnant again during the child-rearing years.

Jermlaine women give birth to one or two children after a three-month gestation period. Seventy-five percent of those born are male, but by adulthood, the male/female ratio has evened out due to attrition of the older males.

noisily in a repetitive pattern. Willowquisp crawled down off of the osquip somewhat less gracefully, landing on his bottom with a whoof of air.

"That's done it," whispered Buntleby, dropping the pebbles as Willowquisp regained his feet and dusted himself off. "Here they come."

Emerging silently from the shadows,[11] several humanoid figures crept into view. Each carried a thin, wooden pole to which a bladed weapon was affixed. In addition, many wore a crude quiver over their shoulder, filled with what looked to be oversized darts,[12] and most carried a crudely fashioned blackjack as well. They slid out of various tunnel holes into the cavern, surrounding the two disguised Monster Hunters and their osquip mount.

"Greetings to you and your clan," said Buntleby, his words coming out as squeaks and twitters as a result of his tongue-shaped magical amulet. "I have come from afar with news of other tribes."

A hunched, old jermlaine approached. "Ah, the famed rover returns," he cackled. "And who is this?" he asked, indicating Willowquisp.

"This is Queesp,[13] an apprentice rover from the Black Rat Clan, many days' ride to the north. I am taking him on a tour of the neighboring communities, allowing him to meet with the other clans. Queesp, may I present Skeeble, the clan elder[14] of the Stonebiter Clan."

Skeeble grinned a crooked grin and, grabbing the flaps of skin around his belly, vigorously shook them up and down. Willowquisp stared at the ritual in puzzlement, trying to determine the reason for such a strange display: Was the chief fanning himself, or Willowquisp? Was he showing off his "sagginess"—was that a sign of importance, virility, perhaps? In any case, a quick glance around him showed that the other jermlaine were flapping their belly-skin at him as well; taking a wild guess, he grabbed his own illusory flaps of skin and began shaking them up and down as well. That seemed to be the right response; Buntleby gave him a quick smile and the chief beckoned them to enter the jermlaine habitat.[15]

"So, tell us of the neighboring clans," said Skeeble as they sat around a common area. "How is the Long-tail Clan? Did they enjoy the hardtack we sent them?"

"They did indeed, and send this gift in return," replied Buntleby, pulling a chunk of taffy from the tiny sack he carried. The jermlaine smacked their lips and made appreciative noises.

"We will share this after our meal," said Skeeble, setting it aside. "I hope you are both hungry; our hunters gathered a bundle of fresh grubs the other day, and they have finally decayed sufficiently."[16] The clan leader grinned wickedly at Willowquisp. "Do you like grubs, Queesp?"

"Me? Uh, yes, yes, I love them!" sputtered Willowquisp, all the while giving Buntleby a dirty look. "But, uh, I'm afraid we have both eaten recently, and, uh ..."

"Nonetheless, we are honored to join you at your meal," interjected Buntleby quickly. "I'm sure your grubs will be as delicious as they sound. I, for one, look forward with anticipation to a marvelous repast."

"Me too," added Willowquisp dejectedly.

"So, tell me, what of the Sewer Clan?" asked Skeeble. "Have they adapted well to their new home?"

"They seem to be doing well for themselves," answered Buntleby, making up the news on the spot. "Most have gotten used to the smell, and there is certainly an abundance of rats, but it's often difficult for them to find prey."[17]

"And the Fieldmouse Clan? How do they fare?"

"They've been having trouble with moles recently. Lost two of their number, poor things."

"And the White Rat Clan?"

"Oddly enough, they've begun breeding their rats for some of the giant races, trading them to wizards and alchemists for use in their laboratories. A strange practice, one I don't pretend to understand or condone."

"Ah, I see," said Skeeble mysteriously.

"So, what have you been up to?" asked Buntleby.

"Oh, you know, this and that. Breekee had her babies—twins, Skwee and Skwee-Skwee, a boy and a girl. One of our osquips was recently wounded on the surface by some tentacled horror that dripped acid on it from above." At that, Buntleby and Willowquisp stared at each other, each silently sending a signal of recognition: flumph! "Oh, and we caught

11. Although only 1 foot tall, jermlaine move at an exceptionally quick rate (movement 15). Because of their eerie silence while moving, they impose a –5 penalty to opponents' surprise rolls, and are 75% undetectable in an underground environment. In addition, their nimbleness allows them to save as 4-HD creatures, and they suffer no damage from an attack that would normally inflict half damage on a successful saving throw.

12. The miniature pike is a preferred jermlaine weapon, inflicting 1–4 points of damage. They are also proficient in the dart, causing 1–2 points of damage. These needle-sharp darts can be hurled accurately up to 120 feet. (*Not* 120 yards, as erroneously noted in the *Monstrous Manual*™ book—these humanoids are only 1 foot tall. A human can throw a dart only 120 feet [or 40 yards; see Table 45: Missile Weapon Ranges in the *Player's Handbook*]. It's one thing to allow the diminutive jermlaine a missile range equal to that of a human, but another to believe they can hurl darts three times farther.)

Other, less common weapons employed by jermlaine are the lasso (used to ensnare victims from above) and the grappling hook—usually comprised of a fishhook attached to a length of hair-rope.

13. Most jermlaine names sound like something a rat might say if it tried to speak. Long "e" sounds are therefore very popular, as are the "squ" or "skw" clusters. Many names use a single, repeated syllable. (This is especially common with twins: the first-born might be named Squee, and the second named Squee-Squee.) Oddly, jermlaine names are not gender-specific, as is the case in most languages—any name can be used by individuals of either sex. Common names include Squeewee, Skeek, Jee-Jee, Weeble, Skitter, Kee, Chee, and Fleenkie.

14. Groups of thirty-five or more jermlaine are liable to have an elder among them. The elder can be male or female, but is always at least sixty years old. At that age, the jermlaine magic-draining power often begins to manifest: By simply handling a magical item for 1–4 minutes, the elder can permanently drain it of all magic. Artifacts and relics are immune to such attacks.

The strongest or cleverest elder often serves as the clan leader, or chief. This does not mean that all jermlaine chiefs have such magic-draining abilities, or that only the chief can develop such powers. Smaller clans of younger jermlaine may not have any elders, while larger clans might boast several.

15. The belly-flapping routine is the jermlaine equivalent to the human handshake. Both developed for the same reason—to show a stranger that you are unarmed. Humans clasp hands as a sign that they are holding no weapons; jermlaine take this a step further and reveal that they have no hidden weapons concealed within the folds of their loose skin. (This is not as absurd as it seems, for the jinxkin routinely keep small items tucked into their skin folds, using them the way we use pockets.)

16. The jermlaine diet consists primarily of insects, carrion, fungi, and molds. They eat meat when they can get it—mostly lizards and their own rodents (but only when they die in battle or from natural causes; jermlaine respect their rodent companions too much to carve them up for food otherwise), plus the occasional adventurer. They don't mind eating carrion, often dining on whatever carcasses they come across. Jermlaine have a special fondness for surface foods, especially sugar, candy, and fruit. Adventurers can occasionally bribe jermlaine communities with such goodies.

17. Buntleby might be making up stuff as he goes along, but some jermlaine clans have been known to dwell in the sewers of major cities. There they often form alliances with the local Thieves Guild (especially those with wererat members), exchanging information for food and treasure. Jermlaine, with their quickness and ability to blend into the background, make excellent spies (and their ability to speak with rats doesn't hurt, either).

some intruders recently that—ah, here come the grubs!"

Skeeble's discourse was interrupted by a pair of female jermlaine dragging in two smelly insect larvae impaled on pikes. They plopped the grubs in the center of the room, then sat down on the cave floor among the warriors.

"By all means, guests first," motioned Skeeble.

Buntleby reached out and ripped off a hunk of flesh. He popped a bite into his mouth and chewed vigorously. Hesitantly, Willowquisp followed suit, taking only a small portion and saying a silent prayer that he wouldn't vomit it all back up.

"Excellent," replied Buntleby. Willowquisp decided that his friend was either an excellent actor or had an iron stomach. He kept his own piece of grub in his hand and pretended to take tiny bites from it, unable to actually put another piece into his mouth. The jermlaine, on the other hand, ripped off great slabs of grub meat and popped them into their mouths with gusto.

"So, you were saying something about intruders," prompted Buntleby. "What were they? Mites? Pesties?"[18]

"No, humans, actually," responded Skeeble. "Foolish humans who thought they could disguise themselves as jermlaine and walk right in here with us none the wiser."

Buntleby looked at Willowquisp. "Uh-oh," he said.

As if on cue, the jermlaine hunters all grabbed up their pikes and leveled them at the two intruders, surrounding them. "So, how long have you known?" asked Buntleby nonchalantly.

"We've had our suspicions from the first," replied Skeeble.

"So what finally tipped you off?"

"Skee-Skee."

"Skee-Skee?"

A lone figure emerged from a nearby entrance tunnel. His lumpy, rock-colored flesh identified him as a jermlaine immediately. However, he was somewhat different in appearance from the members of the Stonebiter Clan. For one thing, he wore a fur wrap around his loins—rat-fur, Buntleby realized. A pointed cap of the same material graced his head. And strolling up behind him was a giant rat, not an osquip.

"Allow me to introduce Skee-Skee, a rover—a real one—from the Whitebelly Clan. He recently stumbled across our clan in his travels, and he's covered quite a bit of the territory around here. According to Skee-Skee, there is no Long-tail Clan, no Sewer Clan, and no Fieldmouse Clan that he's aware of. It would seem you've been feeding us a bunch of tales these past few months."

"So it would seem," said Buntleby. "May I ask what your intentions are for the two of us?"

"First of all, let's get rid of this," said a scratchy voice from behind Willowquisp. Quick as a wink, the wrinkled old jermlaine that had sidled up behind the elderly sage snatched the kerchief from his head. Immediately, it returned to its natural shape—the nymph Azurielle's hat of disguise—as did Willowquisp himself. While still only one foot tall, he was nonetheless recognizably human.

"Oh dear," said the sage. "This is not going well at all."

"Just as I suspected," said Skeeble, nodding in confirmation to himself. "Well, we all know what happens to human intruders, don't we?"

"All too well," said Buntleby, putting his fingers to his mouth and letting loose with a piercing whistle. Then, spouting off a few words in an arcane tongue, he called forth a stinking cloud in the center of the cave.

With jermlaine warriors staggering and coughing around him, Buntleby grabbed Willowquisp by the arm and led him to an exit corridor. There they were met by a large, looming shape—through eyes streaming with tears, Willowquisp recognized Ozzie, summoned to their side by his master's whistle.

Buntleby shoved the sage up onto his familiar, then yelled "Home, Ozzie! I'm right behind!" Ozzie bounded down the corridor, into the large cavern lit with the glowing coin. He sniffed around, found his bearings, and headed for the osquip tunnel that led to his master's farm.

Buntleby ran directly behind his familiar, legs pumping furiously to keep up. Several sets of glowing red eyes appeared around the perimeter of the cavern, moving forward to pen in their prey.

The wizard stopped and spoke the words to another spell, and Ozzie shot off at the speed of a cannonball, easily outdistancing his pursuers. Buntleby saw that they were safe, then turned and worried about his own predicament.

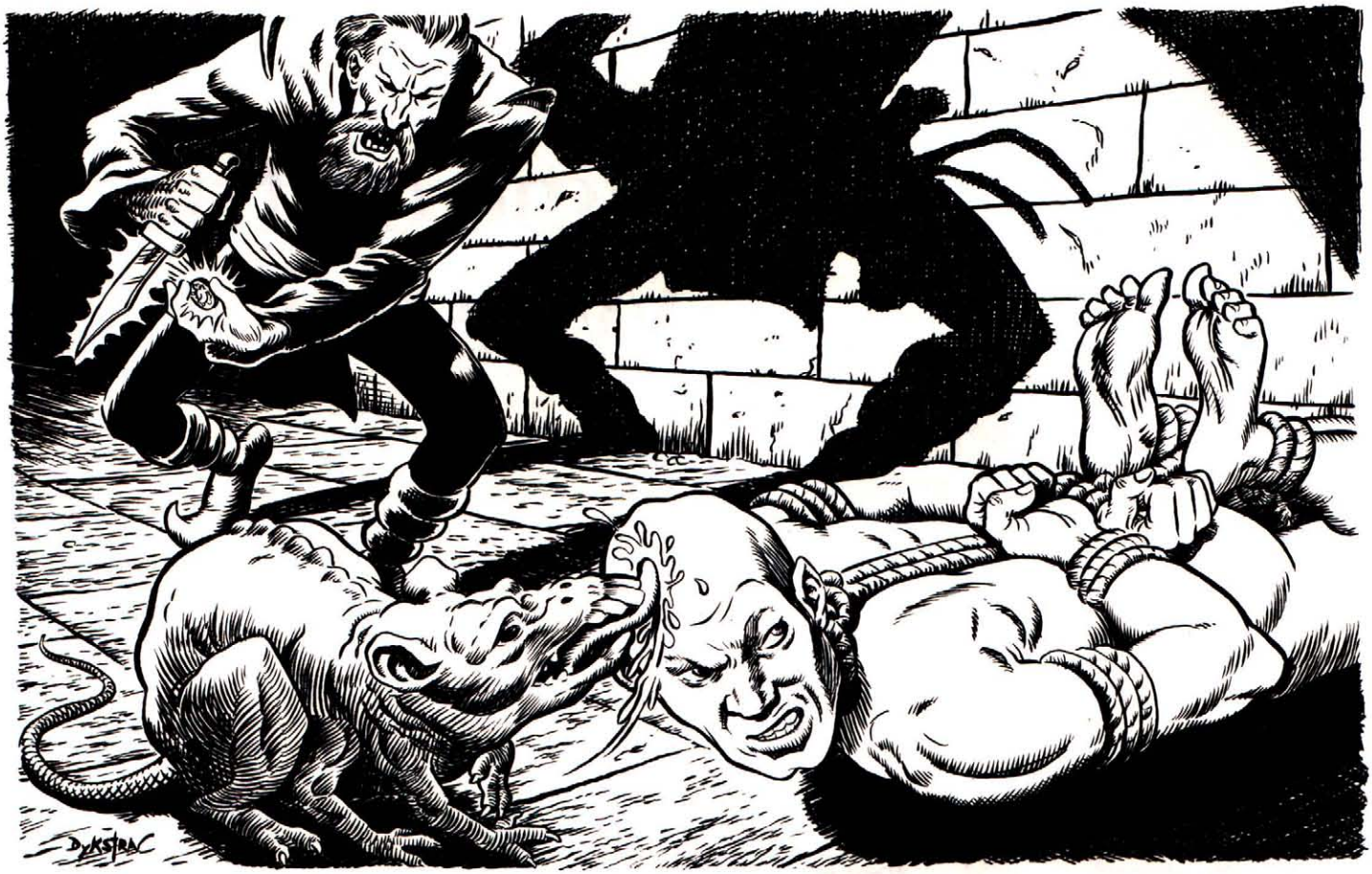
He was surrounded, both by armed jermlaine and their osquip companions. A few darts dashed past his head, narrowly missing him. The jermlaine were staying back out of reach, using their ranged weapons while they sent their osquips in for close combat. Still, there was an easy way to counter that ...

Buntleby concentrated and shifted form. His jinxkin features melted and reformed into a circular disk sprouting eyestalks from one end and tentacles from the other. Flexing his tentacles, he pounced at the nearest osquip. The creature, recognizing a natural enemy, skidded to a stop and fled in the other direction. The other osquips slowed as well, fearful to attack a fearsome, acid-spitting flumph.

However, the jermlaine had no such qualms. Several darts found their marks, buried in Buntleby's flumph-flank. Enough of this, he thought, and tried flying down the cavern. Unfortunately, his polymorph spell provided him only with physical motive abilities, not the flumph's innate anti-gravity. He flopped on his side in the middle of the cavern floor.

He spent a moment's indecisiveness deciding on another form before finally shifting to a bat. As his features melted into their new configuration, he was amazed to see a dozen jermlaine warriors pop up out of the cavern floor around him. Wielding blackjacks, they pounced on Buntleby's prone bat-form, pummeling him into unconsciousness. As his vision went black, Buntleby's last thought was: How did they?—Of course,

18. While the genetic link between jermlaine and gnomes is still unproven, there is a greater body of evidence linking jermlaine to several other types of gremlin, specifically mites and snyads (or pesties). Mites share many jermlaine traits: small size; mischievousness; hairless, warty skin; high-pitched, twittery voices; a penchant for pit traps, nets, and trip wires; and subterranean lairs. Snyads are even taller and, while sharing many jermlaine traits, differ from them by having heads full of shaggy hair. This leads some sages to speculate that the two races are stages in the regression from gnome to jermlaine.



Buntleby was naked, shaved totally bald, lying face-down with his hands hog-tied to his ankles behind him.

osquip dung! Should have thought of that myself ...[19]

Grindle was the first to spot Buntleby's prone form in the cavern, illuminated not only by the glowing coin but by Grindle's own lantern. Buntleby was naked, shaved totally bald, lying face-down with his hands hog-tied to his ankles behind him. His eyes were closed and his body covered in bruises, but Grindle could see the tell-tale movement of his chest as he breathed.

"Buntleby!" cried Willowquisp, running to his friend's side. Ozzie skittered to Buntleby's face and licked him with a raspy tongue. Buntleby groaned.

Grindle cut the wizard's bonds with a dagger, as Zantoullios and Dreelix stood on guard, ready to let fly with any of a dozen magical spells at the slightest hint of movement from the darkness. Willowquisp took the lantern as Grindle wrapped Buntleby in a blanket and hefted him over his shoulder.

"He was right where you said he'd be," commented the gangly Zantoullios. "Good thing, too, or we wouldn't have found him so quickly."

"It was stupid of him to have come here in the first place," groused Dreelix. "We've got better things to do than rescue him in the middle of the night."

"So what should we do about the jermlaine?" asked Zantoullios. "Torch the place with a few fireballs?"

"No," whispered Buntleby feebly. "Leave them be. This is entirely my own fault. Let's ... let's just go home."

The Monster Hunters turned to go, back the way they came. Ozzie trotted at Willowquisp's heel.

"Wow, Buntleby, they did a good job on you," commented Dreelix as the group departed the cavern for the surface. "You know you don't even have any eyebrows, don't you?"[20]

From the silence of the cavern came the sounds of quiet chuckling and twittering, and then an eerie silence.

Johnathan M. Richards says his oldest son, Stuart, has a deep hatred for jermlaine, ever since they shaved his female elven thief/mage's head and eyebrows bald. She went so far as to burn the building they had been infesting down to the ground after being rescued by her party members. Which just goes to prove—"Hell hath no fury like a woman shorn."

19. Those jermlaine fortunate enough to lair with osquips have the added advantage of being able to work fresh osquip dung into a variety of useful forms before it hardens to stone-like consistency. The dung forms trapdoor covers that can conceal jermlaine warriors in tiny foxholes strategically placed around a large cavern. For more properties and uses of osquip dung, see "The Ecology of the Osquip" in *DRAGON® Magazine* #227.

20. The jermlaine have a fierce dislike for the "giant races" and like nothing better than to humiliate them whenever possible. While shaving a human's hair actually serves a useful purpose (providing the clan with the raw materials needed to fashion their ropes and nets), shaving their eyebrows does nothing but amuse the little tormentors. Other favored tricks, once the helpless captive has been securely bound, include rubbing their naked bodies with poison ivy or poison oak, destroying a favorite item in front of them (or handing a magical item to a jermlaine elder, who drains the item of all magic), and smearing finger-paint graffiti on them (these are rude, simplistic pictures, as the jermlaine have no written language).

by James Jacobs • illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE KAORTI

"I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and drawn down daemons from the stars... I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to world to sow death and madness... Space belongs to me, do you hear?"

—H. P. Lovecraft, "From Beyond"

The world as we know it is a poison to some, a canker whose very existence is a constant irritant to something larger, more vast than anything sane mortal minds can comprehend. What we take to be order and nature is in fact the aberration, for the Far Realm is vast beyond all concept. It is what lies beyond the infinite of possibility. It is the infinite of impossibility. And that which dwells beyond where man was meant to travel does not react well to our timid intrusions.

HISTORY OF THE KAORTI

The Far Realm predates existence and life on the Material Plane—in fact, life might have begun on the Material Plane when one of the Elder Evils from the Far Realm brushed against it, and what leaked into our world became the aboleth race. Yet beyond the aboleths, few even guessed that there lay beyond our world a more ancient and insane realm. At some point after the collapse of the aboleth empire, the Elder Elves

became the first mortal race to discover the Far Realm when, quite by accident, they created the Vast Gate, a portal they hoped could bridge all distance and push "outside" creation. What they discovered undid everything the Elder Elves strived for, and when what dwelt beyond noticed the pinhole the elves had punctured into the outer madness, they invaded reality. Although the Vast Gate was eventually closed, the link between the Far Realm and the Material Plane, a link the multiverse never intended, remained and grew.

In ancient Imaskar, long before Martek came to rule and yet long after the Elder Elves pierced the veils between reality and unreality, a sect of proud and elite wizards who called themselves the Quin (after the Imaskari word for "entitled") discovered ancient tablets bearing fragments of the Elder Elves' magic. Working from these fragments, the Quin became

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KAORTI

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to kaortis. As kaortis are rare and alien creatures, all DCs to reveal details about them are 10 higher than normal. Information about kaortis is most likely to come from their escaped victims, experienced planewalkers, and those who glimpsed the malign insanity of the Far Realm. The kaorti appears on page 108 of the *Fiend Folio*.

Knowledge (the planes)

DC	Result
21	This creature is a kaorti, a creature humanoid in shape only. It is an alien to the Material Plane, hostile as much due to its sheer wrongness as due to its inherent cruelty and evil.
26	The kaortis are adept at manipulating arcane magic, and while not all kaortis are sorcerers or wizards, they do all possess spell-like abilities that allow them, among other things, to disguise their appearance with illusions, sap the strength of their foes, and unleash blasts of sickening color to stun or blind their victims.
31	Kaortis are immune to poison, yet ironically, the natural world itself is poisonous to them. Druidic magic is particularly effective against them.
36	Those captured alive by a kaorti are advised to seek death at their own hand, for these monsters can infuse beasts they captivate with their own alien taint, transforming prisoners into monstrously deformed and insane thralls. Humanoids subjected to this procedure instead become kaortis themselves.

obsessed with the concept of reality beyond reality and wondered what great magic might lie hidden in such a realm. Eager to be hailed for what they felt would be a great discovery but wary about repeating the Elder Elves' mistake, they constructed a structure that would transport them to the Far Realm rather than bring the Far Realm to them.

Their work was highly publicized, and as they neared the end of ten years of toil in creating what had come to be known as the Quinspire, the entire nation watched expectantly, hoping the Quin would return with fabulous resources and powers to elevate their proud nation even higher. The Quin made bold promises, and even started work on projects to be finished after their return, but when the time came and the Quin activated their tower, they simply vanished. All that remained were the tower's lowest foundation stones. Eventually, Imaskar forgot the Quin, and then Imaskar itself crumbled and was all but forgotten.

Yet the doom triggered so long ago by the Quin has only now begun. For their experiment had been a success. They arrived safely on the Far Realm, yet they did not remain safe for long—they had vastly underestimated the sheer hostility and alien nature of the Far Realm, and their tiny mote of Material Plane matter was like a beacon. Within minutes of their arrival, a vast and ancient entity called Zurguth, one of those whom the aboleths know as the Elder Evils, came to investigate the disturbance. Yet so potent was Zurguth's existence that its very proximity changed the Quin and their works. They were transformed into something new, and when Zurguth arrived and turned its mind to them, it found nothing to see, for nothing remained of the Quin but their warped Far Realm translation. They had become the first of the kaortis.

For untold eons, the kaortis dwelt within the Far Realm, yet deep within their now-alien minds remained a seed of memory. When their alien curiosity finally drove them to investigate this memory, they found traces of the Material Plane too minute for Zurguth to notice, but not quite so small to escape the kaortis' own investigations. When they used their magic to trace these fragments back to their source, they discovered what, to them, was a new realm—a realm so inimical to them that they could have but one reaction: a consuming urge to overwhelm and transform. When the kaortis finish with our world, the Far Realm will be all that remains.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KAORTI

Although the kaorti might appear to be humanoid, they are not. The shape of their forms is little more than an accident, just as one might be able to coax mold to grow in artificial paths, so did the presence of Zurguth use the Quin's human frames as a matrix.

A kaorti's resemblance to a human breaks down quickly once viewed in detail. Their bodies are painfully thin and wet with alien excretions that serve more as blood than sweat. Hands and feet are long and distended, with digits that seem connected not by rigid bone but flexible strips of resin and cartilage, allowing their fingers to bend in unnatural directions. Yet it is in the kaorti's face where one can see the greatest echo of Zurguth's alien presence, for the shiny black spheres that serve them as eyes and the bony ridges of ivory-colored hardened resin that serve them as teeth give the viewer a tiny hint of the appearance of what forged them from sane flesh.

Kaortis have no need to eat or sleep, for these are diversions mortals use to replenish their bodies and minds. Rather, kaortis exist from the outside in. A kaorti's body is in a state of constant self-consumption and replenishment, as the ooze that coats their bodies gathers unknown resources from the environment and then hardens into a shell-like but flexible "skin." This shell is slowly drawn into their cores by strange and hideous sucking and chewing organs

KAORTI 3.5

The kaorti detailed on pages 108–110 of the *Fiend Folio* are, for the most part, usable with the 3.5 rules. The one major disconnect between revisions, though, is in their spell-like abilities; spells like *alter self* and *reduce* no longer affect outsiders. When running an encounter with kaortis in a 3.5 game, you should substitute their spell-like abilities with the following:

1/day—*color spray, comprehend languages, disguise self, feather fall, ray of enfeeblement, spider climb.*

Disguise self lets kaortis continue to masquerade as humans while harvesting thralls, while replacing *reduce* with *comprehend languages* gives them the capacity to understand languages spoken or written by their prey; kaortis have little interest in communicating with their victims until they become kaortis themselves, but they find the ability to understand things like road signs or directions helpful.

designed to cannibalize and recreate the green fluid that serves them as blood. Deep within the kaorti's torso is a pressurized reservoir of this reeking fluid (an organ mistaken by some scholars as a heart). Tangles of arteries run along their arms to pores along the inner surface of their fingers so they might secrete their blood as tools. It might be easiest to think of the kaorti's "heart" as a forge that transforms its outer body into the resinous "building blocks" of Far Realm matter, stuff the kaorti use to not only create their armor and weapons but to build their cysts.

The resin also serves an important role for kaorti invaders, for the Material Plane is poison to them. An unprotected kaorti can survive only for a few hours or days on the Material Plane before the non-resin parts of its physiology are scoured away. The first kaortis to invade the Material Plane learned this weakness the hard way and their deaths served as an object lesson for those who came later. On the Material Plane, kaorti explorers wear chitinous bodysuits made of resin, often sculpting horns, ridges, and spikes upon their shoulders, faces, and torsos to make their appearance all the more horrific.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KAORTI

Little is known of how the kaortis exist in the Far Realm, but on the Material Plane their society is brutally simple and efficient. Little interests the kaortis other than the transformation of what is natural into what is theirs—everything in a kaorti-held region exists in some way to perpetuate this one driving urge.

An initial group of kaortis invading the Material Plane is known as a cyst pilgrimage; this exploratory band consists of 10–20 kaorti and 1–3 thralls (typically pseudonatural creatures harvested from a similar Material Plane region to the one they are invading). The goal of a cyst pilgrimage is to establish a beachhead on the Material Plane, to create a cyst of kaortis resin that blocks out the harmful effects of the Material Plane and gives their kin a safe fortress to stage further colonization and transformation efforts. Kaorti resin suits are costly and time consuming to create, so typically a cyst pilgrimage only consists of a few kaortis who seek out a remote or hidden area to begin their work. Pilgrimages lucky enough to have access to urquirshs (see Minions of the Kaorti) can establish large cysts in a relatively short time, but most pilgrimages must make do with what they can secrete on their own.

When a kaorti pilgrimage is sent into the Material Plane, the trip is one-way; there's no return portal for them to retreat to if things turn sour. This is to prevent their enemies on the Material Plane from being able to strike at their unknown fortresses just on the other side as much as it is to prevent the Material Plane from leaking into their world. Yet the kaortis do not view this as a disadvantage, for their method of procreation is as swift as it is horrifying.

Once a cyst is established (typically a network of cavelike tubes and chambers deep underground or in remote wildernesses, but rarely in areas close to urban regions), the kaortis begin their harvest. Their spell-like abilities allow them to cloak themselves in illusions, allowing them to walk among humanity, where they can pick and choose their victims. Initially, they choose their victims from the dregs of society: vagabonds, prostitutes, scoundrels, and street urchins—those whose vanishing won't be noted. They return to their cyst, where after 8 hours of surgery and injection of kaortic fluids (typically delivered through 8-hour bites, but sometimes through tools like wrist lancets), their abductees become new kaortis, immediately capable of capturing and transforming others. Left unchecked, a kaortic incursion can very rapidly become a major invasion.

Kaortis take to arcane magic, especially sorcery, and many become rogues or fighters with ease (although their natural weakness make them poor melee combatants), but to date, no kaorti clerics, druids, rangers, or other divine casters have been encountered. This is likely a psychological issue, for the kaortis have no concept of faith in anything but themselves.

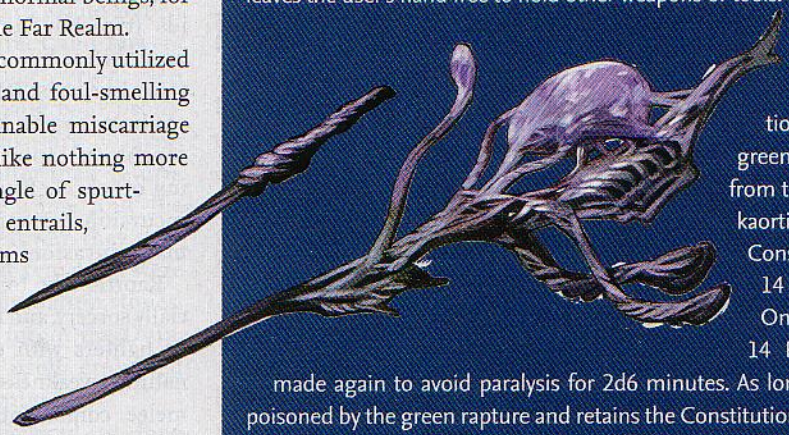
MINIONS OF THE KAORTI

Where kaortis are found, so too are their monstrous minions. While creatures transformed into pseudonatural thralls are far and above the most common of kaorti minions, they frequently create other monsters to serve as mounts or guardians as well, shaping and sculpting the warped flesh of several creatures at once, using them as clay to form more powerful minions than might be achieved by a simple kaortic transformation alone. These transformations take place in bubbling pools of raw resin deep within kaortic cysts and generally take several days to complete. The three most commonly created minions are the destructive insectoid rukanyrs (used as living siege engines and tanks in large conflicts;

Fiend Folio, 144), the alien and horrific skybleeders (used as mounts and magical support; *Fiend Folio*, 156), and the savage and ruinous kaortic hulks (used as shock troops; DRAGON #330).

Yet not all of the monstrous minions of the kaorti are their creations—many are denizens of the Far Realm, brought along on their initial forays or called in through portals deep within a kaortic cyst. These creatures, such as half-farspawn (*Lords of Madness*, 151), amoebic crawlers (DRAGON #330), and nightseeds (DRAGON #330) are, if anything, even more alien than creatures sculpted from once-normal beings, for they are wholly of the Far Realm.

Perhaps the most commonly utilized creature is the vile and foul-smelling urquirsh, an abominable miscarriage of flesh that looks like nothing more than a writhing tangle of spurting tubes, greasy entrails, and dangling arms held aloft by three long spidery legs. These horrific monsters are notable not just for their detestable shape and smell, but for the fact that when they are brought to places outside of the Far Realm, their alien cores implode, creating a tiny but mobile rift between realities back to the Far Realm. These rifts always lead to the tidal washes of the Amoebic Sea, providing the urquirsh with an endless supply of resin that the kaorti can use to coat large regions, altering the environment so they can exist within with relative ease.



KAORTI EQUIPMENT

Kaortis are masters at using their resin to create organic tools, weapons, and armor. Kaorti resin items appear alien and horrific, and their use is sometimes not readilly apparent from their appearance. The resin suit and the ribbon dagger (*Fiend Folio*, 110) are the two most common kaorti items, but others like those detailed here exist as well.

Wristlancet: This purple device is worn on the wrist and triggered by a flexible stalk that protrudes from its midsection. At one end, a flexible resin sac can store poison or disease-laced fluid, while protruding from the other end is a rigid hollow spine. When triggered as a standard action, the spine shoots out to a distance of up to 2 feet and the fluid within is dispensed reflexively. A kaorti can use this device to inject a target with whatever fluid is stored inside by successfully hitting a target with the device. A wristlancet is an exotic light weapon that deals 1d2 points of piercing damage on a hit, with a critical multiplier of ×3. Its wrist-mounted straps make it difficult to disarm, granting the wielder a +4 bonus on checks made to resist being disarmed. Likewise, it leaves the user's hand free to hold other weapons or tools. *Cost:* 100 gp. *Weight:* 1 lb.

Green Rapture: Introduced to a creature via consumption or injection, a dose of this pale green poison (which is distilled from the resin of newly created kaortis) deals 1d2 points of Constitution damage if a DC 14 Fortitude save is failed. One minute later, the DC 14 Fortitude save must be made again to avoid paralysis for 2d6 minutes. As long as a creature remains poisoned by the green rapture and retains the Constitution damage or is paralyzed, the poison acts as a catalyst for kaortic transformations. Such a victim subjected to a kaorti's vile transformation ability makes the change into kaorti or pseudonatural creature after only 2d6 rounds of contact. *Cost* 300 gp. *Weight:* 1 lb.

URQUIRSH **CR 4**

Always NE Small aberration (extraplanar)

Init +10; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft., sightless; Listen +3, Spot +3

Aura stench (20 ft.)

Languages Kaorti (cannot speak)

AC 17, touch 17, flat-footed 11 (+1 size, +6 Dex)

hp 39 (6 HD)

Immune acid, disease, poison

Fort +4, **Ref** +10, **Will** +8

Weakness vulnerability to electricity

Spd 60 ft., climb 60 ft.

Melee 3 claws +11 (1d6–1)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** –1

Atk Options vile spray

Special Actions acid bomb

Abilities Str 8, Dex 22, Con 15, Int 5, Wis 16, Cha 13

SQ death burst, freedom of movement, internal rift

Feats Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse

Skills Climb +17, Jump +21, Use Magic Device +20

Environment any (near kaortic cysts)

Organization solitary, pair, or wash (3–9)

Treasure none

Advancement 7–12 HD (Medium), 13–18 HD (Large), 19–24 HD (Huge), 25–30 HD (Gargantuan), 31+ HD (Colossal)

Acid Bomb (Su) Once every 1d4 rounds, an urquirsh can generate a small globe of concentrated acid extracted from its planar rift. This globe has a range of 90 feet and explodes in a burst of rancid acid, filling a 20-foot-radius burst and inflicting 4d6 points of acid damage to every target in the area. A DC 15 Reflex save halves the damage, but if this save is failed, the creature is also nauseated by the horrific stink for 1d4 rounds if he fails a DC 15 Fortitude save. An advanced urquirsh's acid bomb deals an additional +1d6 points of acid damage for every 2 Hit Dice it possesses. The save DCs are Constitution-based.

Death Burst (Su) When an urquirsh is slain, its internal rift to the Far Realm bursts before it closes. Any creature caught within this 10-foot-radius spray must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be nauseated

ZURGUTH, THE FEASTING VAST

The Far Realm is home to ancient entities of vast power. Although not technically deities themselves, their powers approach and might even eclipse the gods. They existed before divinity, and will likely do so beyond the advent of the last deity's death. Respect for these entities is as close to religion as the aboleths come—saner scholars whisper of them collectively as the Elder Evils.

As with the majority of these cosmic entities, Zurguth does not dwell on the Material Plane. His influence is felt there, though, primarily through the actions of his accidental creations, the kaortis. The kaortis do not count divine spellcasters among their ilk, nor do they erect temples in Zurguth's image, yet those who escape the vile transformation of a kaortic embrace speak of memories that are not theirs. Memories of drowning in a sea whose water can think, of fluids thicker than flesh that still run like mud, of vast islands heaving out of an endless bulk only to open eyes and split open into bottomless tooth-lined throats, of mountains of parasitic creatures heaving along a landscape of shuddering mobility too huge to be a planet and too mobile to be something dead or dying. Few who escape the kaortic transformation sleep well ever again, for many fear that when they die, it is not the afterlife that waits for them, but the infinite wet embrace of Zurguth, the Feasting Vast.

for 1d4 rounds. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell removes the effect from a nauseated creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. Worse, the death burst has a 50% chance of summoning another urquirsh into the spot previously occupied by the first urquirsh. A summoned urquirsh does not generate a death burst when it is slain, nor can its death trigger the summoning of a third urquirsh. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Freedom of Movement (Su) An urquirsh is constantly affected by a *freedom of movement* effect that cannot be dispelled.

Internal Rift (Su) An urquirsh that enters an area that blocks extraplanar travel is cut off from its internal planar rift to the Far Realm and takes a –4 penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks as long as this condition persists. It cannot use its acid bomb, death burst, or vile spray abilities while within such an area.

Sightless (Ex) An urquirsh has no eyes, and is thus immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

Stench (Ex) An urquirsh's odor is abominably offensive to all creatures not of the Far Realm. Any such creature within 20 feet of an urquirsh must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or be sickened for 1d6+4 minutes. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same urquirsh's stench for 24 hours. A *delay poison* or *neutralize poison* spell removes the effect from a sickened creature. Creatures with immunity to poison are unaffected, and creatures resistant to poison receive their normal bonus on their saving throws. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Vile Spray (Ex) An urquirsh spews a relentless spray of vile otherworldly ooze, channeled in through its internal rift to the Far Realm. This foul-smelling ooze coats everything within 20 feet of the urquirsh, quickly hardening to a flexible, rubbery texture. Creatures in its area must make a DC 15 Reflex save or take a –4 conditional penalty to their Dexterity. Being hit by and failing multiple Reflex saves does not result in a higher penalty. The ooze is permeable and can be breathed through and does not hamper speech. The stuff can be peeled off of a creature with 1d4+1 rounds of work, though one covered in the slime cannot effectively remove it from his own body. The ooze hardens slowly, with the imparted Dexterity penalty increasing by 4 points every hour. A creature who accumulates a penalty equal to or in excess of his Dexterity score is rendered immobile as the stuff dries completely; further Dexterity penalties do not accrue, but without external help, the victim can only escape the resin cage with a DC 22 Strength or Escape Artist check. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills An urquirsh has a +18 racial bonus on Climb checks and a +10 racial bonus on Jump and Use Magic Device checks.

Illustration by Jim Holloway

The Ecology of the Kappa

Little things should not be taken lightly

by David R. Knowles

From the Complete Bestiary of the Reaches of Kara-Tur, *of which one copy survives in the city of Waterdeep:*

The Kappa

Appearance

Certainly, one of the most bizarre and dangerous of local beasts is the kappa, whose appearance is like that of a tiny, ugly boy with a distended stomach and slippery skin. Often thought to be a type of monkey because of its stance and posture while moving, the kappa is an amphibian with magical powers. An upright kappa stands, on the average, 2′ tall, though a few larger ones have been seen. Female kappa are generally 6″ shorter than males. Both females and males have pot bellies, each with a pouch in the abdomen similar to that of a kangaroo. Their feet look like those of a snapping turtle, having three webbed toes, and their hands are webbed and clawed. Indeed, most kappa are known to have hard shells like those of small turtles [1], and almost all kappa have scaled bodies, though occasionally they have been seen with smooth skin. Their skin is very tough and is normally green, often with yellow tinges, and is clammy, slimy, and cold to the touch because they are cold-blooded. A few are able to change the color of their skin to match their surroundings in the same manner as a chameleon, adjusting to almost any color to enable them to hide or stalk successfully[2].

Clothing irritates their, skin, and they never wear garments, finding them silly and pointless. They have a thick layer of fat under their skin for both buoyancy and warmth, and some kappa have a small amount of body hair. They smell vaguely fishlike. Their boyish heads are fairly chubby and flat.

On the top of each kappa's head is a saucerlike depression filled with water from the kappa's home body of water. This water is the source of that kappa's strength. The kappa will lose vitality and other abilities in proportion to any amount of this water spilled from the bowl in its head, and it will die within minutes if all the water is lost and the kappa is unable to replenish this vital fluid with fresh water from any source (though "home" water is preferred).

Around this bowl, most kappa have hair that is usually cut short, though some scholarly or artistic kappa wear it long. Kappa have large eyes with humanlike tear ducts, and though most have large beaks, some have long noses instead. All kappa are able to breathe comfortably underwater or in air; however, they have only lungs and do not have gills, taking the water in through their mouths. Their lungs filter oxygen out of the water.

There are two types of kappa: the common kappa, which is bad enough, and the vampiric kappa, whose bite drains vitality. The vampiric kappa is usually a solitary creature, preying upon all who fall within its grasp (even other kappa).

Common kappa weigh, on average, approximately 20 lbs. Vampiric kappa usually weigh slightly more. Huge kappa have been known to stand 5′ tall and weigh up to 150 lbs.; these are believed to have once been experimental subjects of a wu jen[3].

Abilities

Kappa are extremely strong despite their small size, and some have been known to wreck bridges, hurl rocks, and tear flesh from their opponents with their clawed hands. Kappa prefer not to use weapons, but they can throw daggers and darts if given the chance.

Kappa have lithe, supple bodies and are fluid movers, allowing them to climb and swim with great ease and grace. This grace, combined with their thick skin, makes them difficult to strike in hand-to-hand combat, adding to the dangers of fighting them in close quarters.

Additionally, each community of kappa has developed its own style of martial arts, and the kappa have become masters of their own styles. Often, these styles are based upon basic wrestling techniques in which the kappa are highly skilled. Kappa martial-arts styles usually contain many grappling moves and maneuvers designed to throw their opponents off balance.

All kappa regenerate wounds that they have received; even their limbs can regrow quickly. Kappa may reconnect severed limbs if they are able to spend time undisturbed to allow their regenerative and recuperative powers to work. They are reputed to be masters of *koppo*, which is the knowledge of bone structures and the art of setting or breaking bones. This art may well be included in the martial combat styles of some kappa[4].

Vampiric kappa differ from their common brethren in a number of ways. They are not undead, but they are more powerful and deadly than their kin. Their eyes are blood red but dead looking, giving little indication of emotion or intent. Their skin is more like hide, being tougher and more resilient than that of normal kappa. They are as strong and powerful as the other types of kappa, but they are more agile and much hardier. This difference in physique and stamina allows vampiric kappa to move nearly as quickly as a human on dry land and gives them excellent endurance. Vampiric kappa are slightly more intelligent than normal kappa; this difference in mental power only worsens the naturally crafty and malicious attitude that kappa seem to harbor.

In addition to normal attacks, vampiric kappa also attack their prey by biting. Once this kappa has successfully bitten its victim, it will lock its jaws and not release until the victim is dead or the kappa is forced to disengage. This bite causes both physical damage and a loss of strength, and may also inflict a dreadful disease that drains strength. This disease lasts approximately six days before killing its carrier.

Folktales tell of spell-casting kappa, but nothing else is known of such matters.[5]

Habitat & Diet

Kappa most often live in rivers but also inhabit deep streams, lakes, and large ponds—almost any suitably large body of fresh water. Kappa die from extended exposure to saltwater, being unable to tolerate it for longer than a few hours". Often making their lairs around rocky outcrops and bridges, they use these areas as solid, defensible bases from which to scavenge. On occasion, these lairs may contain magical items and treasures such as gold and jewelry, all gained from the demise of their victims. In fact, kappa are a major cause of drownings in fresh water in Kara-Tur, as they delight in dragging unsuspecting human and animal victims into their waterways. Kappa can see perfectly underwater, having strong transparent protective coverings over their eyes.

All kappa consider themselves gourmets. They normally live on fish, but they are especially fond of cucumbers and melons such as cantaloupes, muskmelons, and the like. Some kappa have a special taste for fruits such as oranges or grapes, but some hate sweet fruits with a passion. (No one has yet tried to feed pickles to a kappa.) They are also very fond of horse, cow, and human flesh. Their normal method of

eating slain animals is to suck out the entrails of their victims. Kappa have been known to indulge in *sake* (rice wine) or plum brandy; such beverages have been used to bribe even the destructive kappa into temporary truces.

Society

A group of kappa usually has two to six members, though larger groups do exist. What little society kappa share works much as an extended family whose members are bound to one another by social obligations more than by blood. These bonds, however, do not interfere with each kappa's independent, ruthless, and predatory behavior. (Vampiric kappa almost never live in groups, preferring solitude or living with a mate only.)

Courting among kappa is initiated by the females, who chase their chosen males vigorously until the former's advances are accepted. Once established, partnerships are usually permanent. Males outnumber females, though only by a small margin, and the females are equal to the males in their abilities, strengths, and aggressive natures. Young are hatched from tiny eggs that are kept hidden within the pouches of their parents (males, however, sometimes eat the eggs they carry).

Kappa are believed to have a lifespan similar to humans, although they develop their skills and abilities at a younger age in comparison to humans[8]. The most obvious example is that their babies can walk and talk at hatching and very quickly learn to swim well.

Almost all kappa have, even from a very early age, full literacy in their own language and usually in those tongues spoken commonly in their lands. They are able to speak, read, and write with great eloquence in "kappanese," although they are somewhat less capable in other languages. The script of the kappa is very spindly and spiral; it is not aesthetically pleasing but rather is disturbing to the human eye and difficult to read by nonkappa.

As a race; kappa are inventive and clever within their own lifestyle, but they are no more intelligent than human beings, often exhibiting lesser intelligence., As with any intelligent creature, there are exceptions to this, and a few intelligent (even brilliant) kappa have been discovered. These kappa use brain-power to manipulate others to achieve their goals.

Kappa are self-centered and self-motivated to the exclusion of the opinions and ideals of others. One unexpected aspect of their personalities comes to light when they are in trouble or somehow compromised. They fawn on the people who have cornered them, and nothing is too much trouble for a kappa in this situation. Rumors exist of captured, grateful, or indebted kappa teaching some or all of their skills to whomever controlled them. All kappa thoroughly enjoy the pain and discomfort of others and are great practical jokers, especially if the joke ends in disaster for their victims. Kappa sometimes assault lone travelers for no reason other than to cause them misery, greeting the victim with great formality just before the attack. This malicious streak stems from a kappa's complete and utter disregard for anyone or anything else.

Travelers and local inhabitants attempt to appease kappa by throwing food into kappa waters. Village folk write the names of their family members on these gifts so the kappa know who should not be attacked. Another way to pass the lair of a kappa without being attacked is to offer to wrestle the kappa for the right of passage. As all kappa are skilled wrestlers, they will often agree to this. However, if a kappa defeats his opponent, he will almost always drag the victim into his lair to be eaten at his leisure.

Kappa are extremely polite, even to their prey, but they make their intentions well known. If treated with great respect, a kappa might be swayed from slaying and eating its victim, but it will certainly demand immediate payment of money or valuable belongings in return for sparing the victim's life.

Given to such exhibitions of extreme behavior, all kappa regard odd and seemingly meaningless acts as perfectly normal. To a human being, a kappa's lifestyle would appear random, thoughtless, and devoid of almost anything other than self-gratification. This is perfectly true, and kappa not only admit to this but take pride in it. Their rarity is, perhaps, their only blessing.

Footnotes

1. About 10% of all common kappa lack shells, having a base armor class of 3. Such kappa are always solitary, being bullied by other kappa.

2. Assume that 5% of all kappa have this chameleon power, which gives them a 75% chance to hide in natural terrain.

3. Assume that there is a 5% chance that a particular kappa is a huge one; double its hit dice, movement rates, damage (giving it a strength of 19 with huge claws), and height (4-5'). These huge kappa are always solitary and extremely rare. Huge vampiric kappa are, as one would imagine, incredibly dangerous; these specimens drain two strength points per round that they can bite.

4. The special maneuvers Crushing Blow and Eagle Claw come to mind here.

5. Spell-casting ability exists in approximately 10% of all male kappa. Each may cast as many spells per day as a wu jen with as many levels as the kappa has hit dice. For example, a vampiric kappa would be able to cast four first-, three second-, two third-, and one fourth-level wu jen spells. These spells need not be chosen at the beginning of a day, nor do they have to be learned from a scroll or book, since they come from the kappa's elemental sympathy with water. A kappa may cast spells only within one mile of his own waterway. Spells should be chosen as needed. If a kappa has lost any water from the bowl in his head, his spells' durations and effects are reduced by the same degree as the amount of water lost. Spell-casting kappa may choose any spell listed as "Water" or "All" from page 73 of the *Oriental Adventures* tome.

6. Nonvampiric kappa lose 1-4 hp per turn they are immersed in saltwater; vampiric kappa lose only 1 hp per turn. Furthermore, if the water in the bowl on their heads is filled with saltwater, they gain no special strength, though they can still *regenerate* wounds and do not lose 2 hp per round, as per *Oriental Adventures,* page 124.

7. If six individuals are indicated by a die roll, allow a 50% chance that there are another 1-6 individuals present. If another six is rolled, allow another 50% chance for 1-6 more kappa, and so forth.

8. Common kappa typically live to an age of 100 years, and vampiric ones live to 130. From birth, kappa gain 1 HD per year until they reach adulthood.

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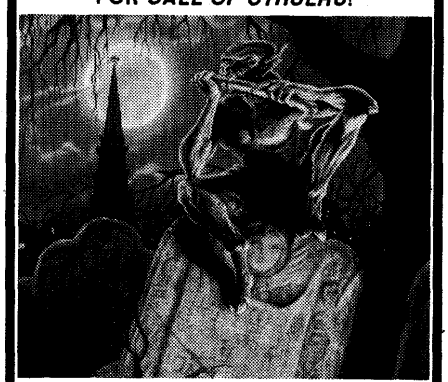

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by Tony Jones

The Ecology of the Kech

What evil lurks in the heart of the forest?

Taken from a lecture series given by the esteemed naturalist and sage Oparin, on the subject of dangerous creatures of the woodlands:

The kech is another of the foul fiends that make the woods a dangerous place for inexperienced adventurers and travelers. The physical appearance of the kech is perfectly suited to an arboreal life. Its leathery skin is green, ranging from a light, silvery green similar in hue to the underside of a leaf to the deep green of oak leaves, and this coloration makes it possible for a kech to remain unnoticed in the trees. A kech also possesses long arms and legs, complete with handlike feet, which make it easy for it to move from tree to tree as does a monkey.

Male and female keches are similar in appearance, although the female is smaller and lighter in color. Adult males are 5-6′ in height and weigh 120-150 lbs. Adult females stand upright at 5′ and weigh close to 100 lbs. Both genders are lithe and well muscled, and can walk upright as well as race on all fours. A kech's face is very humanlike (perhaps keches are some accursed offshoot of the human race that became adapted to living in the trees), but the eyes are blood-red in color and pupilless, and the mouth is filled with many blood-letting fangs. Also, the nose of the kech is smaller than a normal human's – almost unnoticeable – and the ears can only be distinguished from the rest of the head by close scrutiny. Although mammalian, a kech has only a few traces of hair on its body.

Keches are wily creatures made infamous by the many snares and traps they set to capture careless and unsuspecting prey, much like those human trappers use to catch the small fur-bearers on which the trappers make their living. These snares are nearly impossible to detect by any but skilled woodsmen and druids.' A kech often covers its hunting territory – an area of indeterminate size which

Illustrations by David Zenz

includes several well-traveled paths, roads, and animal trails – with as many as a half-dozen of these traps. And the more kech found in the same area (for these creatures are commonly found in groups), the larger the hunting area and the greater the number of pitfalls present.[2]

However, keches do not fully rely on the various traps and snares they set to catch all their prey. They actively patrol their hunting areas looking for suitable prey (of the human variety) most of the day and night, resting only in the heat of the day and the middle of the night. Keches never attack a group of four or more individuals unless the group looks particularly weak, unobservant, or careless. If the keches possess two-to-one odds in their favor, they may attack any human gathering. Keches will try to separate larger parties into smaller ones by various means, attacking the smaller parties separately. Their hunting territories are always heavily forested, for keches are excellent climbers and stay in the trees as much as possible.

One of the keches' favorite ways to separate larger groups is to mimic the sounds of a human in trouble – a ploy that some companions and I learned about firsthand during an expedition to investigate these beings. A kech will call for help in a local human tongue, seeking to lure victims into traps and ambushes. These cries are remarkably realistic but can be distinguished from actual human voices by careful listening and attention. While studying these creatures, our party witnessed the death of one of our retainers, who fell into a covered pit when he rushed to aid another retainer whom he believed was screaming in distress. The crier turned out to be one of a pair of keches. While I cannot urge that cries for help be ignored, travelers must use the utmost caution when these creatures are known to be about an area.[3]

Keches can stalk prey silently in the deep forests (although they can still be heard by thieves and elves if an attempt is made to listen closely). In addition, keches are difficult to track as they leave false tracks and use other such ploys to avoid being followed. Because of their leaflike skin and silence, keches often succeed in attacking their victims with surprise.[4] By hiding in the branches of trees, a kech can drop on an opponent from above, knock him off his feet, and bite and claw at him; this is the keches' favorite method of assault.[5] Keches also use their prehensile toes to hang from limbs, using their claws as victims pass underneath. Keches sometimes rush victims on the ground in an effort to kill or disable one or two of them, fleeing with their prey before the victims' allies have a chance to retaliate.

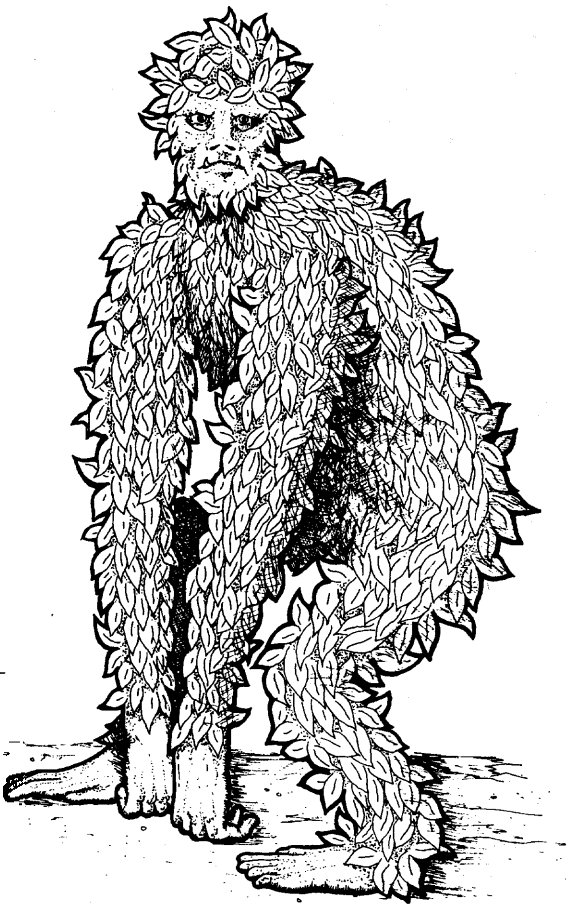
Keches normally choose to disable prey, clawing and biting at the faces and necks of victims rather than killing them outright. This is especially true of attacks against humans, whom kech prefer to torture before killing and devouring.[6] Once an opponent is disabled, the kech moves on to attack another foe, returning to kill the incapacitated one after other victims present are also incapacitated. Keches rarely kill more prey than necessary for survival, but their hatred for humans is so great that they kill as many humans as possible without endangering themselves.

Keches are extremely evil and rapacious creatures who view nearly all other creatures as food – especially humans, whom they seek to kill, maim, and destroy without restraint. The reason for this hatred can only be speculated upon; perhaps it has something to do with man's disregard for the forests or with some ancient feud between man and kech. The only creatures keches are known to associate with are su-monsters. These associations rarely last more than a week or two because of the chaotic nature of the su-monsters, but during this time the number of raids on human settlements nearby increases greatly. Whole villages have been destroyed by the combined might of the two.[7]

Although intelligent, keches hardly ever use tools or weapons of any sort, preferring instead to use subtlety and brute strength to kill prey. Keches speak a language that seems totally incomprehensible to outsiders. The language of the kech is a tongue filled with much chittering and whistling, sounding for all the world like squirrel's chatter. Scholars have spent many years studying captive keches in an effort to understand them, but have managed to translate only a few words thus far. Keches can also speak a few words of Common learned from those they have captured or overheard previously. Being intelligent creatures, keches never continue fighting if the odds turn against them or if they are sorely wounded. They will even flee their lairs if attacked by overwhelming numbers, leaving behind all their treasure.

Small groups of keches sometimes band together for mutual protection and for greater ease in dispatching foes. Such groups are led by the largest male, who decides where the traps are placed and which victims the group attacks. The group contains an equal ratio of females to males, with only a slight male plurality in some cases. These groups infrequently raid forest settlements of humans for victims. These raids are lightning-quick forays in which the keches quickly kill up to a dozen victims and carry them back to their lairs deep in the woods. Because these raids always take place in the depths of the night, it is even harder to avenge those carried away.

The lair of a band of keches is always deep in the forest and surrounded by many traps and places for ambushes. Those foolish enough to follow a kech back to its lair rarely return. The lair itself is a crude structure made of tree limbs lashed together with vines to provide



protection from the elements. Keches remain in the same general area and use the same home for no more than a year; this reduces the chances of both overhunting the surrounding area and being discovered in their lair. The treasure found in a kech lair is gained mainly from that kechs' previous victims and is scattered about the lair along with the bones, clothing, and other belongings of their victims. Keches do not value treasure as such, although they use it in their traps to catch greedy humans.

Keches are not prolific creatures, thankfully. Male and female keches mate about once every three years in the spring; permanent mating pairs are not formed. The young, usually one but sometimes two, are born the following spring. All females help care for the young, but the males provide only protection for them and do not help in any other way. Young keches grow very slowly; it takes 20 to 25 years for them to grow to full size, whereupon they become capable of reproduction themselves. According to the records of several adventurers, no more than four young keches have ever been found in the lair at one time, regardless of the number of adults also present.[8] Keches are long-lived creatures, however, which is one of the few things that saves them from eventual extinction. Females average about 150 years, while males often live to be 175 years old. With age comes cunning and cleverness, making the older keches the most dangerous of all.

In summary, keches can be dangerous

foes, especially for unwary and inexperienced adventurers. Even seasoned adventurers respect these foes for their cunning and cleverness. And it is doubtful they will ever cease to trouble mankind as long as there are forests for them to inhabit.

Footnotes

[1]The snares set by a kech should be treated as those created by the third-level druid spell snare. Also, the other types of traps used by keches are 90% undetectable by most characters. Druids and rangers, however, subtract 5% for each level they have when trying to detect traps set by a kech.

[2]A single kech covers as many as 20 square miles of forest a day when searching for prey. For every other kech in addition to the first, add another 10 square miles of forest covered, though the kech will travel together in a single group and will not cover the whole area every day.

[3] Keches are good mimics, being extensively familiar with the sounds humans in trouble make. Using this talent, they often succeed in luring victims to their deaths. The base chance for a kech to successfully mimic a cry for help is 90% minus 5% per intelligence point of the-victim. If the kech is successful, NPC victims are attracted to the direction of the voice, believing that some human is in trouble. Otherwise, the victim simply hears creature screaming.

[4] Thieves may detect the approach of keches on a successful listening roll; elves have a 15% chance to hear them, and gnomes (so rare that they are often forgotten about, even by sages) have a 20% chance. A kech's base chance of surprise is about 83%, but if the attack takes place at night, it becomes 95% (surprising 19 out of 20 times). The reduction by half of all chances of tracking a kech applies only to those with tracking skills (rangers, barbarians, etc.). All others have only a 10% chance to successfully track a kech.

[5] Unsurprised characters must make a successful dexterity check on 1d20 to avoid being struck by a falling kech, which makes a single "to hit" roll at +2 for the attack. Surprised characters are not allowed a dexterity check. Any character fallen upon is immediately knocked to the ground, with the kech automatically clawing and biting the victim (no "to hit" roll required). In addition, the character must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation or be stunned for 1-2 rounds more; a successful saving throw means the character can scramble back to his feet the following round. Failure also means the character remains prone and is at –4 to hit and damage. The attacker, on the other hand, is at +4 to hit for the number of rounds determined above. This applies only to keches attacking from above and not to keches surprising opponents while on the ground. Falling attacks are made from a height of 5-30'.

[6] Whenever the kech's modified "to hit" roll is four or greater than the number required, or when a natural 20 is rolled, there is a 40% chance the kech has hit its opponent in the face or throat for the following effects (roll 1d20):

1d20	Effect
1-3	Both eyes blinded
4-7	Left eye blinded
8-11	Right eye blinded
12-17	Face hit
18-20	Throat torn open

Blindness caused by an attack is-permanent unless healed by magic. A damaged throat causes the loss of 1-6 hp per round until the blood loss is stopped or until the character dies. A face hit leaves scars that permanently reduce the victim's comeliness by one.

[7] There is a 15% chance that 2d4 sumonsters are also found any encounter with four or more keches.

[8] Kech young are born with 1 HD and are about 1' tall. For every six years following birth, a kech gains 1 HD and grows 1'. Keches with less than 4 HD are agile and fast, but are unable to attack opponents. After that time and until they reach adulthood, they can claw for 1-2 hp damage and bite for 1-4 hp damage. Otherwise, kech young are exactly like adults in appearance and (unless they are less than one year old) have the same innate abilities. There will rarelv be more four young in a kech lair at any one time. Ω

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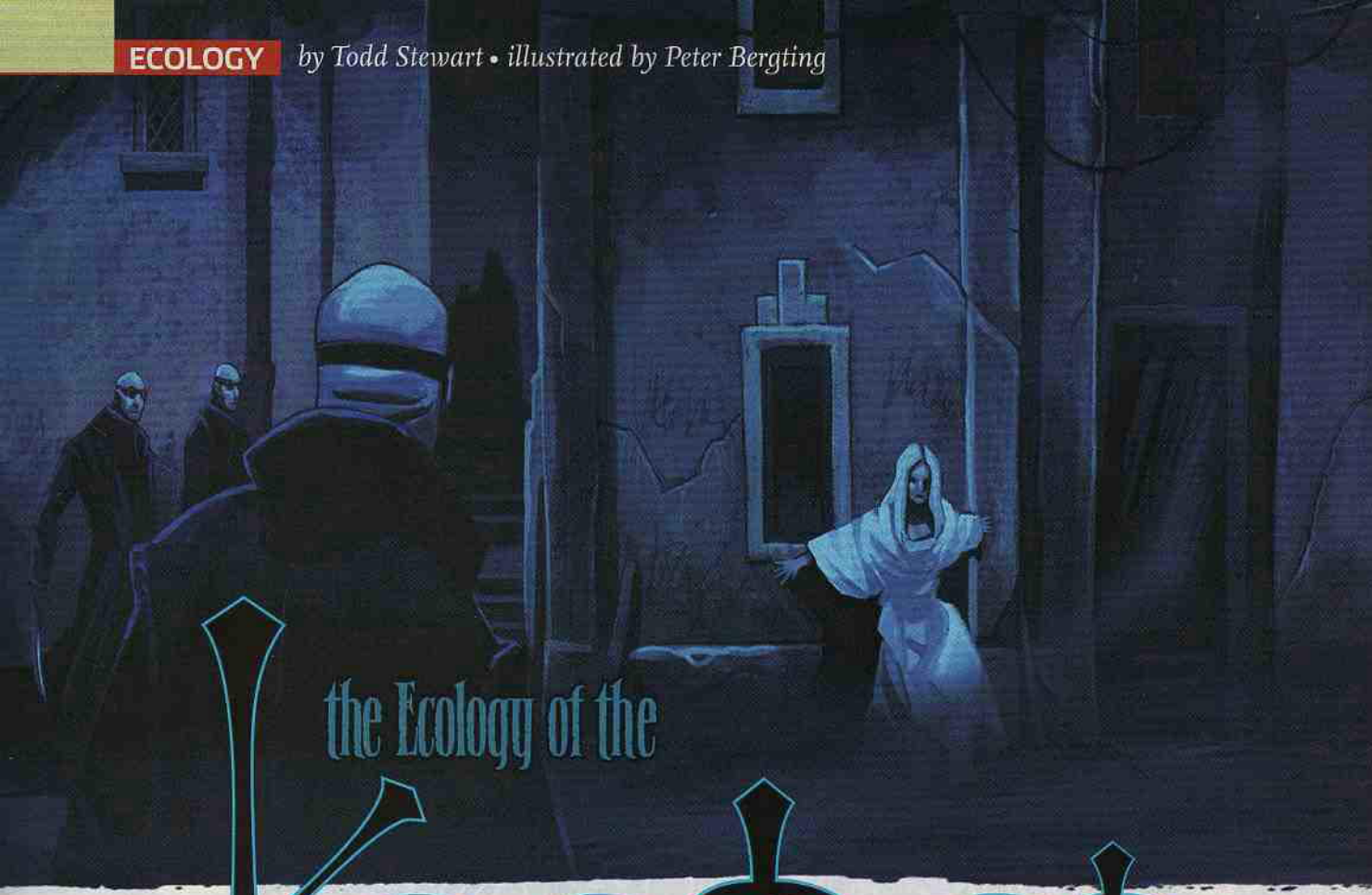


the Ecology of the Keeper

They appear without warning, demanding answers and enforcing silence. Their expressions grim, their mannerisms inhuman, their very presence unsettling and unnatural—the few who dare speak of these men in black know them only by their unnerving moniker: the keepers. A faceless collective of questionable intentions and dreaded methods, they seek information and secrets while offering none in return. Their very nature is ever shrouded in mystery—be they the lingering demons of an overzealous creator, servants of a dead god, or beings from another reality altogether? As with every detail of their existence, the truth is yet another of the secrets they keep.

History of the Keeper

Keepers fixate on secrets and secrecy, especially in regards to their own origins, holding their race's past among the darkest of the lore they hide. While scholars disseminate stories and legends about them, the veracity of such myths proves difficult to judge—just the way the keepers like it, of course.

Of the stories told about the keepers, perhaps the most compelling tale puts their creation roughly thirteen hundred years ago at the hands of a singularly talented wizard, alternately placing him in the Fortress of Enlightened Discipline on the plane of Mechanus or within Sigil, the City of Doors. Hungrier for secrets than power, this fanatical scholar obsessed over scattered bits of obscure and hidden lore. Through his work he hoped to gather a palette of secrets, step back, and gain some profound insight into the very nature of reality.

Covetous of knowledge as he was, he was only one man, and he lacked any sort of followers or apprentices upon whom he could rely to further his pursuits. Of course, had he either, his secretive nature would have precluded granting them any trust. So he solved his problems in a most elaborate way: he created the keepers, a wholly unique and specially suited race of like-minded servants.

From there, the tale grows muddied, as some tellings claim the keepers were found, rather than made. These versions claim the wizard called them into the world from

"He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret." —Sigmund Freud

somewhere else, some alternate reality of bizarre and alien law that he either discovered or created from nothing. Whatever the specifics, if he found the keepers already extant, or created them from a malleable void of potential, the legends agree that when he called out the keepers responded.

Ultimately, though, after the wizard had gathered hundreds, maybe even thousands of blank-faced keepers, his obsession turned to paranoia and began to gnaw at him. Concerned that his enemies, real or perceived, might come to understand the secret process by which he had found the keepers and bound them to his will, he instructed them to destroy or silence any source of that knowledge.

Of course, given their nature, they dispassionately complied by immediately killing him.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KEEPER

The first thing most people notice about a keeper's physical appearance is a contrast of pale flesh and dark clothing. Looking closer, though, one begins to notice the incongruities—the things that stand out as disturbing, and hint at something terribly amiss.

The typical keeper dresses to cover as much of its body as possible, usually only showing its face and hands, obscuring the rest beneath heavy cloaks or greatcoats, boots, and opaque goggles or dark spectacles. And all for good reason. Devoid of its heavy clothing, a keeper seems like less a living being than a half-completed artist's model given life by some fickle demiurge. The gray, glossy flesh of a keeper is smooth, hairless, and lacks any sense of musculature beneath the surface. When a keeper moves, it displays

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KEEPER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to keepers. Loremasters, planar scholars, and those who study obscure magical lore might possess this information. Keepers appear on page 111 of the *Fiend Folio*.

Knowledge (the planes)

DC	Result
17	Keepers are humanoid creatures about which little is known. They are supposedly obsessed with finding and suppressing obscure knowledge.
22	Keepers lack normal humanoid anatomy. They have no eyes yet seem to see perfectly and can alter their limbs to form weapons. Keepers sometimes perform rude, repulsive, or comical acts in an attempt to blend in with society.
27	The bizarre physiology of keepers' bodies provides them with immunities typical of unliving creatures. When killed, keepers completely dissolve into puddles of poisonous, foul-smelling toxins. They are known for murdering those who possess secrets they either desire or seek to erase.
32	Keepers share a telepathic hive mind that places them in constant communication. They are capable of bending space in order to instantly physically switch positions with other nearby keepers.

none of the hallmarks of typical humanoid motion. The joints seem far too flexible, sometimes flexing in wholly wrong directions, and its limbs show a disturbingly amorphous, liquid ripple, as though the creature's body was nothing but a thin, rubbery membrane barely containing a volume of homogenous protoplasm.

Their odd, rubbery flesh can congeal and shift form into myriad simple shapes. If pressed into combat, rather than drawing a weapon a keeper forms one from its own flesh. When it does so, its hand seems to melt away, hardening, and reforming into knots of dense, heavy bone for a club, or elongating to fashion a blade.

Most disturbingly, though, keepers lack eyes. Hidden beneath their ubiquitous dark eyewear is naught but the smooth, gray sheen of their skin stretched over shallow, empty depressions. Despite this defect, though, their vision seems unimpeded, suggesting that they utilize either some form of quasi-telepathic mindsight or navigate by a combination of vibration, smell, and an enhanced sense of touch.

While all of these traits hint toward some complex, alien internal structure, the specifics of keeper anatomy prove impossible to determine through normal dissection. When a keeper dies, becomes magically imprisoned, or succumbs to any other situation that would leave it vulnerable to revealing its secrets, it undergoes a process of dissolution, melting into a poisonous biological slurry. Some have been known to vomit gouts of the disgusting stuff, using it to debilitate prey. Those covered in the reeking, alien humor are typically disgusted, while some exposed to heavy doses are mortally poisoned.

With alien thoughts swimming within the anomalous hollows where their brains should reside, keepers instead possess some powerful telepathic cells. Allowing them to communicate telepathically over a range of approximately a tenth of a mile, the shared thoughts provide individuals with details of the activities, needs, and experiences of their nearby brethren. This intimate mental connection seems to be fundamentally tied to another unusual trait, the ability of mentally linked keepers to simultaneously teleport, spontaneously swapping places with one another. With each keeper serving as a destination for the teleportation, wounded or hindered keepers can retreat, filling their position with a healthy reinforcement or sacrificing a mortally wounded peer. Often, groups of keepers assault foes one at a time, exchanging places as their resources are expended, their victim possibly not even aware that his opponent has been replaced.

In addition, keepers seem to lack gender, or any differentiation based on age or maturity, so the question of keeper procreation has lingered in the minds of scholars for centuries. Keepers might be unable to form more of their kind, but other theories suggest that once a group of keepers arrives at some critical mass of knowledge, the group gathers to pool what it learned and, through some alien processes, summons another of its kind into being. Many scholars discount this theory, lending popularity to the idea that keepers are a dying—or at the very least, stranded—race, and one of the secrets they hope to collect in their endless searching is for a way to reproduce.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KEEPER

Keepers organize within hundreds, possibly thousands of distinct, intensely compartmentalized groups. Assuming truth in the tales of their original creation, each group of keepers was collectively spawned or summoned and subsequently tasked to a specific goal, seeded with instructions still being processed after centuries. While none can know how many keepers exist, they are most commonly encountered in groups of three to thirteen members, although larger groups (or "conspiracies") with twenty-three or more members are known to exist. In every case, the number of keepers in a group consists of an odd number of individuals and seems to directly relate to the importance or obscurity of the knowledge they seek.

Each small, cloistered sect of keepers has no males or females, no old or young, and no apparent hierarchy. In these groups, each keeper functions as a limb or extension of the group, each being an interchangeable fraction of a shared hive mind. Because of this, keepers have extreme difficulty functioning outside of their groups. The concept of a solitary existence seems to terrify them, and if a group of keepers befalls some harm, leaving only one left alive, the survivor almost inevitably dissolves, unwilling or unable to exist in the absence of its fellows.

Linked by their own group mind, keepers fail to truly understand normal society and socialization. They go about the motions of normality and fitting in—as they perceive such—acting as if they belong, but their horribly superficial efforts betray a frightening, puppetlike lack of empathy or cultural knowledge. A group of nine keepers might purchase food in a marketplace and later eat raw, uncleaned fish while drinking flasks of lamp oil in the common room of a tavern, silent and

unaware of the incongruity they present to their surroundings.

The keeper mental organization seems to preclude individuality in the sense that most mortals possess. Keepers distinguish one another by some set order, seemingly unrelated to age or accomplishments. As such, while they do not have names, per se, they are called "First" or "Second," or another numerical designation. Within a group, there is no need for any further suffix to this, but when groups of keepers gather, or refer to keepers of groups other than their own, they use very specific titles for those other groups that invariably refer to the type of secrets they were originally tasked to discover. For example, a keeper known as "Twenty-Three" to those of its group might be "Twenty-Three of the Darkened Sun" to others. A few noted names of keeper groups include: the Apotheosis, the Draeden, the Final Gate, the Iron Flask, the Maze, the Mists, the Gray Path, the Seven Parts, the Ur-Fiend, and the Unliving God.

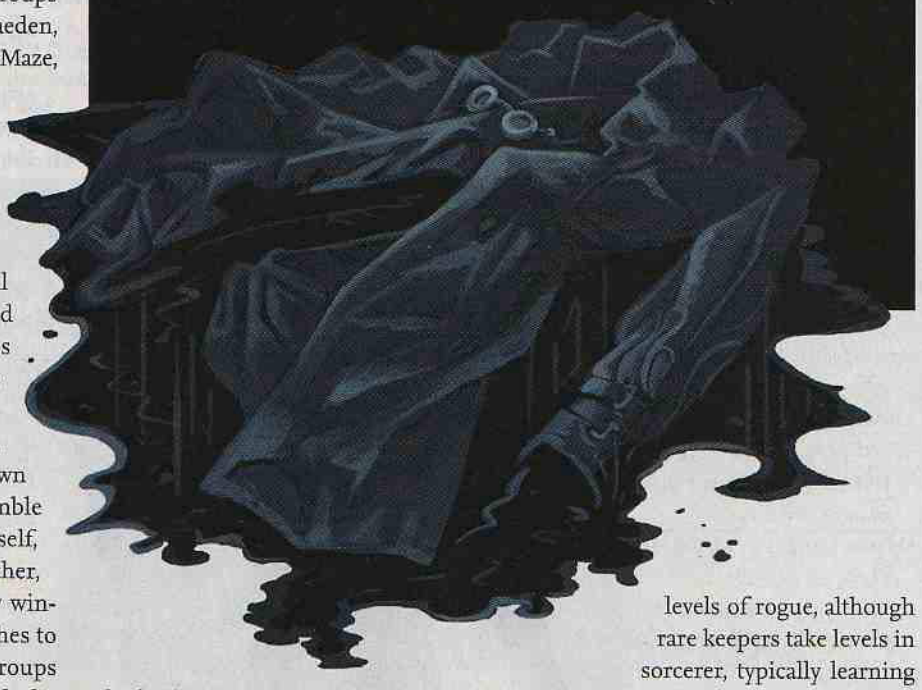
The only time keepers are found away from their typical pursuit of others' knowledge is in the depths of the Ethereal Plane. Although normally isolated from one another, multiple groups of keepers irregularly congregate and converse in the most remote portions of the Ethereal Plane, gathering around features known as ether gaps. These gaps resemble holes in the fabric of the plane itself, wounds in the essence of the ether, places where the raw probability winnows down to nothing and vanishes to some unknowable elsewhere. Groups of keepers float silently around the margins of these ether gaps, just outside of the reach of the tidal forces. They linger there for days or weeks on end, unmoving, deep in meditation and mental conversation, filling the ether with a material hum from their telepathic banter, speaking with one another, and possibly with something from beyond the ether gap speaking back to them. The purpose of these strange gatherings, the schedule on which they occur, and their connection to the ether gaps are simply more secrets these strange collectors keep.

ENCOUNTERING THE KEEPERS

Few ever go looking for keepers, as these men in black never share the secrets they protect. Rather, keepers typically seek out individuals for their own predictable, but nonetheless enigmatic, reasons.

- **Knowledge:** A person who discovers some mystery of the Multiverse—the existence of a parallel dimension, the key to a banished race's prison, a weakness of all deities—might be visited by the keepers. Somehow innately knowing of the discovery, a lone keeper typically approaches to verify that its target actually knows the secret. Once this suspicion is confirmed, a group of keepers hunts its prey and silences him for good.
- **Association:** Sometimes one doesn't even need to know a secret to attract the attention of the keepers. Someone closely associated with an individual who makes some forbidden discovery might, for seemingly no reason, be shadowed by keepers who seek to determine exactly what he knows—or to permanently silence him just in case.
- **Guidance:** For all their mystery and seemingly preternatural knowledge, sometimes keepers simply lose track of their prey. In such cases, an individual or whole group of keepers might approach those associated with their person of interest and conduct roundabout interrogations or blunt intimidations. Keepers sometimes stalk wholly unwitting individuals for weeks in the hopes of gaining a lead to their true prey.

Of course, those few who do dare seek out the keepers run the risk of discovering some secret truth about these enigmatic strangers, and so risk becoming their next target.



ADVANCED KEEPER

As keepers age, gaining further exposure to various mortal and immortal cultures and societies, their normally rigid minds become more adaptable to new situations, allowing them to advance by character class. Most often, as to best aide their subterfuge, they take levels of rogue, although rare keepers take levels in sorcerer, typically learning spells that benefit and support their group as a whole.

Third of the Colorless Pool has hunted for various secrets revolving around a legendary and unique color pool on the Astral Plane for more than six hundred years. As the oldest surviving member of his cloister, he has increasingly concentrated upon the practice of interrogation through intimidation and the often-bloody erasure of secrets once they've been gained.

THIRD OF THE COLORLESS POOL **CR 12**

Keeper rogue 5, assassin 3
NE Medium outsider (extraplanar)
Fiend Folio 111

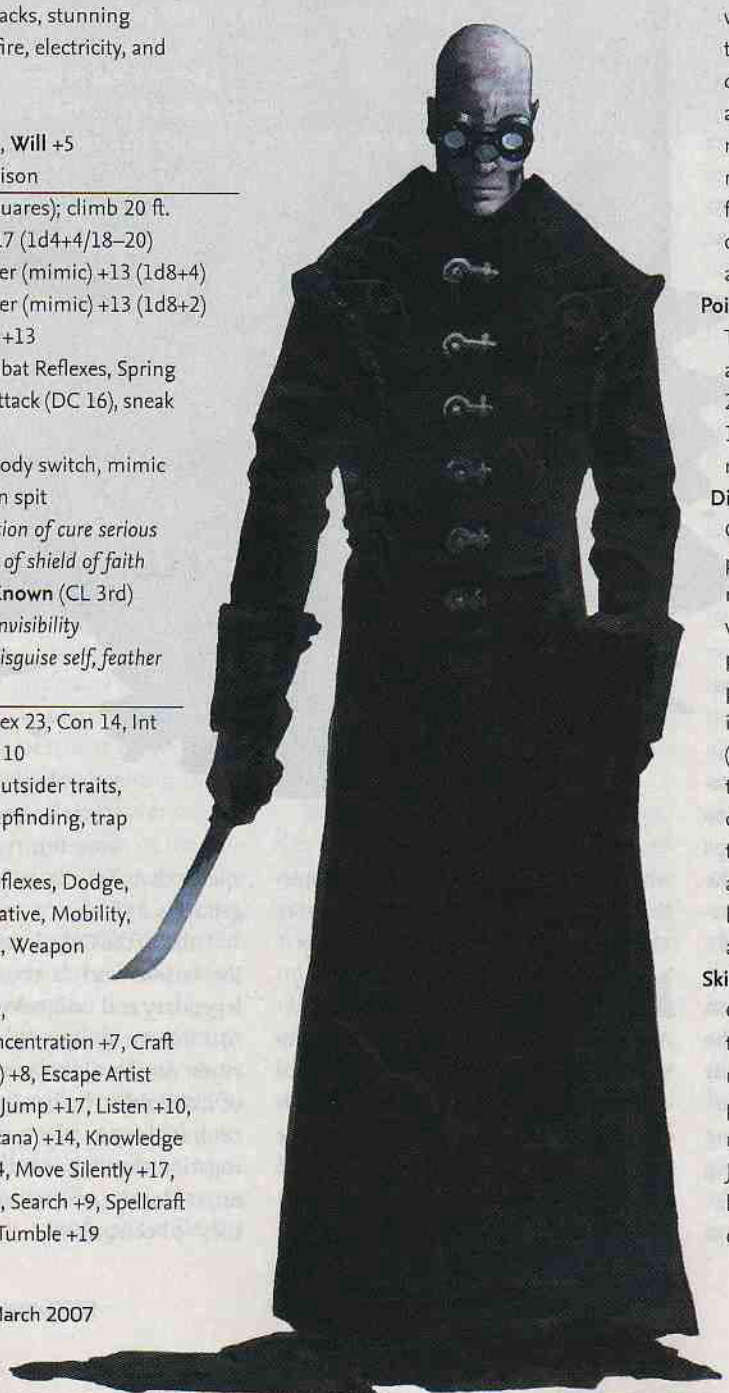
Init +10; **Senses** blindsight 200 ft., hive mind 500 ft., scent; Listen +10, Spot +15
Languages Celestial, Common, Infernal

AC 25, touch 16, flat-footed 19; Dodge, Mobility evasion, uncanny dodge
hp 70 hp (12 HD); **DR** 10/+1
Immune ability damage, ability drain, critical hits, death effects, death from massive damage, disease, energy drain, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, nonlethal damage *sleep*, sneak attacks, stunning
Resist acid, cold, fire, electricity, and sonic 10
SR 13
Fort +8*, **Ref** +17, **Will** +5
*+1 against poison

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); climb 20 ft.
Melee +2 *kukri* +17 (1d4+4/18–20)
Melee warhammer (mimic) +13 (1d8+4) and warhammer (mimic) +13 (1d8+2)
Base Atk +9; Grp +13
Atk Options Combat Reflexes, Spring Attack, death attack (DC 16), sneak attack +5d6
Special Actions body switch, mimic weapon, poison spit
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds, potion of shield of faith*
Assassin Spells Known (CL 3rd)
2nd (1/day)—*invisibility*
1st (3/day)— *disguise self, feather fall, true strike*

Abilities Str 18, Dex 23, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 8, Cha 10
SQ dissolution, outsider traits, poison use, trapfinding, trap sense +1
Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack[B], Weapon Finesse
Skills Balance +19, Climb +23, Concentration +7, Craft (poisonmaking) +8, Escape Artist +17, Hide +17, Jump +17, Listen +10, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (the planes) +14, Move Silently +17, Open Lock +17, Search +9, Spellcraft +10, Spot +15, Tumble +19
Possessions +3 *leather armor, +2 kukri, eyes of the eagle*

Blindsight (Ex) Keepers possess a special, non-visual way of sensing their surroundings. The spell *silence* negates this ability and effectively blinds a keeper.
Hive Mind (Ex) All keepers within 500 feet of each other are in constant communication. If one is aware of a particular danger, they all are. In one in the group is not flat-footed, none of them are. No keeper within range is considered flanked unless they all are.
Body Switch (Su) As a standard action, Third of the Colorless Pool can change places with any other keeper within 500 feet as per the spell *teleport without error*. The other keeper is instantaneously moved to the space Third of the Colorless Pool occupied before using this ability.
Mimic Weapon (Ex) Third of the Colorless Pool can form its arms into any melee weapon (even an exotic weapon) it has witnessed in use and then wield the weapon with proficiency. It can form either arm into any Medium melee weapon, or fuse both arms into a Large or double-weapon. A keeper cannot form weapons larger than it could normally wield. A mimicked weapon has all the properties of a standard weapon of that type. A keeper's attacks with a mimicked weapon are treated as natural weapons; thus a keeper does not incur the normal penalties for fighting with two weapons, cannot be disarmed, and does not gain iterative attacks with its mimicked weapons.
Poison Spit (Ex) Once every 1d4 rounds, Third of the Colorless Pool can spit a nauseating contact poison in a 20-foot cone. Contact, Fortitude DC 14, initial damage nauseated for 2d6 rounds; secondary damage 2d6 Con.
Dissolution (Ex) When Third of the Colorless Pool dies or is captured, pinned, or held helpless for 10 rounds, it dissolves into a 5-foot-wide puddle of the same contact poison it spits. The puddle and any poison taken from its evaporates in 4 rounds—a DC 20 Craft (poisonmaking) check made during that time preserves one dose. Any creature that touches the puddle or the dissolving keeper (such as with a natural attack that dealt the death blow) must make a Fortitude save to avoid the poison's effects.
Skills Keepers have a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks and can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened. Their malleable physiology also grants keepers a +8 racial bonus on Escape Artist and Jump checks. *Keepers are not limited by their heights when determining the distance they can jump.



by Eric Cagle • illustrated by Peter Bergtig

THE ECOLOGY OF THE KENKU

In the dark places of many cities, hidden by the refuse of those who walk the streets by day, stretch ominous markings, scores in the stone left by the unseen passage of powerful talons. Although dark figures lurk within the alleys of any city, in some skulk deadlier avian intruders. These interlopers are kenkus, a vagrant people akin to crows and other filthy avian scavengers. Hidden by shadows and tattered rags, they plot in larcenous flocks, taking what they please and preying off their unsuspecting neighbors. Without homes of their own, these greedy, cruel beings scheme against their enemies from within, thieving and murdering for even the most trifling copper. Yet, beneath the guise of murderous vagabonds kenkus hide far darker secrets and ties to powers both ancient and foul.

History of Kenkus

Secretive and reclusive, kenkus reveal little about their true origins—if indeed their scattered communities even know them. Scholars who delve into their history find that for centuries kenkus have existed as a ubiquitous part of most large urban areas—the largest cities always having aeries of kenku lurking in the darkest parts of town.

What few details the eldest and most learned kenkus let slip to outsiders indicate that their race came into existence as the result of tragedy piled upon tragedy. Long ago, kenkus existed as a race of large, intelligent ravens that lived in the shadows of other races. During a time of strife, a great plague spread among their hosts. In desperation, these proto-kenku resorted to theft and blatant raids, and in doing so spread their disease among the neighboring peoples. Infuriated, many races took up hunting these sentient birds and destroying their mountainous nests—almost universally aided by giant eagles, who bore a long-standing rivalry with the massive ravens. Driven nearly to extinction through assaults on their homes, the ravens' various aeries came together into a single massive flock. Their numbers blackening the sky, they squawked and cried out to something, anything, to save them from their unrelenting enemies and seemingly incurable disease.

The answer came in the form of an enormous raven, its unnaturally white feathers soaked and stained red with gore. Descending from the moonless sky and speaking in all the languages of the world, this raven agreed to grant the petitioners their wish; but at a price. In that single night, the ravens' plague was miraculously cured and all giant eagles and their eggs within 100 miles were laid to bloody ruin—a nightmare that race vengefully remembers to this day. In exchange, the cruel birds agreed to call one lord, Pazuzu, their true master and spread his name among the creatures of the world.

Yet even in those times, the creatures that would be kenkus were a fickle, deceitful lot. Their proselytizing in honor of the Prince of the Lower Aerial Kingdom proved to be short lived as their attentions were drawn to the treasures of those to whom they preached. Within a generation the ravens grew bored with their piety, some even turning to the worship of humanoid deities promising greater wealth and power. Enraged, the demon prince Pazuzu returned, slaughtering many of the ravens and cursing the survivors with an affliction far greater than that which he removed. From that day on, the giant ravens' fledglings hatched without wings, instead possessing scaly arms and legs, forever exiled from the skies for their betrayal. Thus, kenkus were born.

KNOWLEDGE OF KENKUS

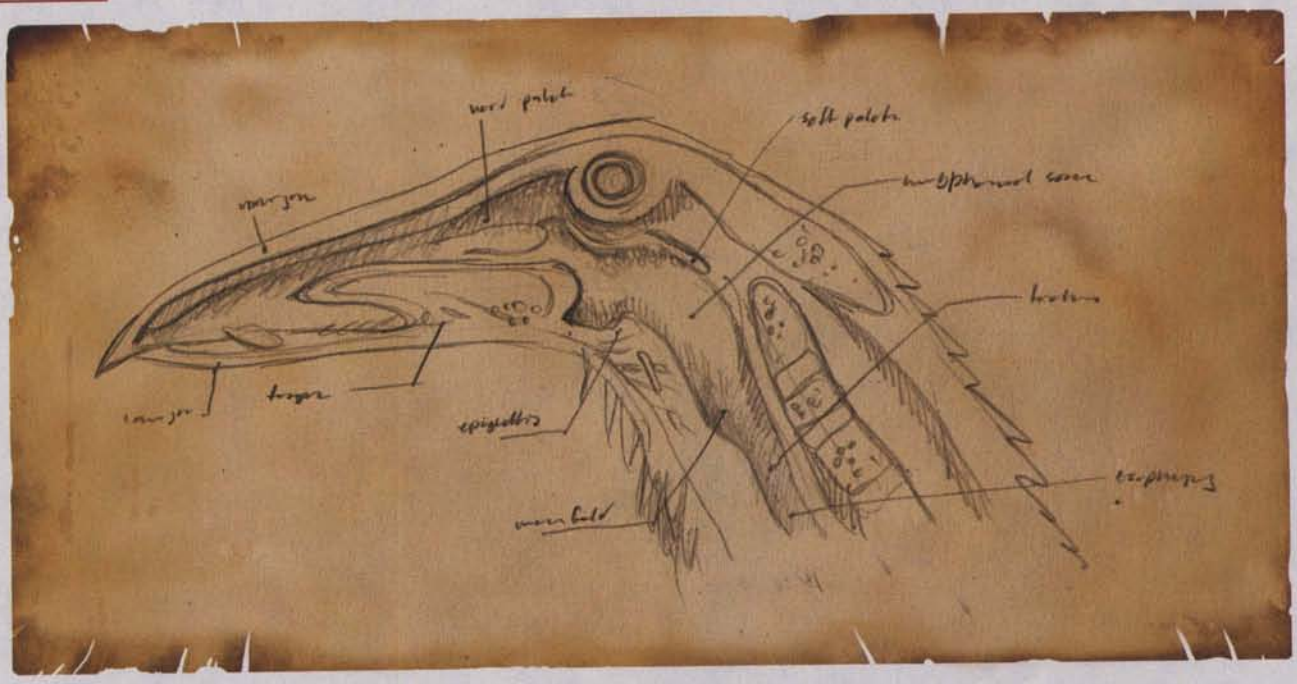
The following table shows the results of Knowledge (history) checks related to kenkus. Those who inhabit large cities most often learn this information, commonly from victims of the insidious plots of these avian humanoids.

Knowledge (history)

DC	Result
10	Kenkus are birdike humanoids who skulk in the back alleys and abandoned areas of most major cities.
15	Kenkus are extremely greedy, vicious beings, but work closely with each other. They prove deadly in groups, but are often cowardly if caught alone. It's extremely difficult to force a kenku to turn against its kin.
20	Kenkus can mimic almost any sound they hear and use this ability to sow lies and mistrust among their enemies. Their aeries are most commonly found at heights of tall abandoned buildings or within sewers.
25	Kenkus are consummate assassins, often hired by other races to do their dirty work. Being that they fill a similar niche in a city's underworld, kenkus and thieves guilds often fight ongoing criminal wars for territory.

Physiology of Kenkus

Although humanoid, kenkus clearly come from avian stock and retain many features common to birds. Kenkus average 5 feet in height, but because of their partially hollow bones, commonly weigh a mere 75 pounds. Their heads are the most distinctive part of their bodies—resembling those of oversized ravens or crows—complete with large, inquisitive black eyes and short beaks. Lacking wings, kenkus possess scrawny arms that end in powerful claws and legs supported by taloned feet. (As a result, kenkus are unable to don normal shoes or other footwear, magical or otherwise, unless such items were created to fit taloned wearers.) Born from large eggs, young kenkus naturally have soft, dark feathers, typically a



shiny black in color, which cover their heads and torsos, although variations do occur in certain individuals. As kenkus age, their feathers—beginning on their heads and slowly extending to the rest of their bodies—turn a pure, ivory white. These aging creatures typically retain their intellect and cunning until the moment of their death, becoming true masterminds and pulling the strings of entire aeries from afar. Despite their kin's superficial loyalty, however, the competitive nature of kenkus requires elders to maintain a constant vigil as there is always a potential rival or ambitious child plotting to take over.

Kenkus are omnivores perfectly adapted to eating the abundant scraps found on and under city streets. They enjoy carrion intermixed with the occasional bit of rotting vegetable or fruit.

Although they possess beaks like birds, the throat and tongue of kenkus resemble elongated humanoid structures, granting them the ability to mimic almost any sound, voice, and even accent that they overhear. Kenkus might not understand the meaning of the words they mimic, but they do so with astounding accuracy. They typically use this ability to guide unsuspecting victims into ambushes, frequently by tempting victims with the voices of allies or threatening them with monstrous growls. Kenkus speak flawless Common, but possess their own language filled with squawks, caws, and other sounds similar to crows and ravens. An angry or excited kenku sometimes slips, interspersing these sounds with the Common tongue.

Light does not harm kenkus, but they commonly only venture onto the streets at night, where their black coloration and natural stealth suit them well. Kenkus seriously dislike traveling in sunlight and garb themselves in dark, tattered clothing to shield themselves from the sun's rays, in addition to helping them blend into surrounding throngs of people. Regardless, only the most elaborate disguises allow kenkus to hide their prodigious beaks.

Psychology and Society of Kenkus

Unlike many fractious evil humanoids, kenkus get along well and work best with others of their own kind. This tight-knit attitude ensures that they never lack for allies to assist them in their sinister schemes.

Kenku society resembles that of some birds, with several family units dwelling together in communities called aeries located in or near large cities. Like other avians, kenkus prefer creating lairs on the highest ground possible in order to keep an eye out for attacks—towers and minarets proving the most valuable real estate in their minds. Failing to find a tall place to make their lair, kenkus go the opposite route, squatting in sewers and long-forgotten basements. Because they never announce their presence unless sorely pressed, kenkus have secretly migrated into such places for millennia, with the original occupants none the wiser. Despite the efforts of law-enforcement and other power groups, kenkus excel at getting into places they aren't wanted. Once an aerie establishes itself, it's extremely difficult to root out.

Even in these communities, kenkus stick close together and spend most of their time interacting with their immediate family or in coteries of like-minded individuals. Kenkus rarely travel anywhere alone, preferring multiple eyes to warn each other of danger or to watch for opportunity.

Kenkus greatly desire wealth, and much like crows and ravens they become obsessed with collecting shiny things. Status within kenku society is measured almost exclusively by ostentatious displays of wealth, regardless of how it was amassed. Theft is perfectly acceptable among kenkus and most aeries are rife with petty bickering as the result of one kenku stealing from another. Kenkus desire knowledge almost as much, particularly the dark secrets

of individuals that they can use for blackmail and extortion.

Ever mindful of their duty to the aerie, even the most selfish kenkus offer a portion of what they find or pilfer to the rest of the flock. Such distributions of food and treasure become true tests of the kenku pecking order, as elder kenkus squawk, squabble, and fight for the finest scraps, while the young and weak look on greedily until their chance to clean up anything that remains. Unsurprisingly, even in a city filled with garbage and abandoned food, starvation proves the primary cause of death among kenkus, followed closely by disease and death by violence. While many races might seek to change their ways in the face of such pointless deaths, kenkus have no sympathy for their brethren who lack the cunning and skill to survive.

Reproduction and child rearing is an odd dichotomy of protectiveness and negligence in kenku society. Kenku females lay eggs like regular birds, but leave the protection of their group's aerie to do so. Creating nests in high, hidden places, mothers seek to avoid scheming eyes and hungry mouths, especially those of their own race. Commonly laid in clutches of three to seven, these eggs hatch after only a month. Once the eggs hatch, the nest is abandoned and the newborns are introduced to the rest of the aerie. Staying close to the communal nests for nearly nine years, the young kenku learn the valuable skills of hiding, taunting others, and stealing unattended objects, all the while forced to fight for even the most meager scraps of food. Attrition is high among young kenku: typically only half survive the first month.

Kenkus commonly show little remorse for the dead. The bodies of young kenkus who have not yet proven themselves valuable to the community are dumped in some lonely, forgotten spot or given to the aerie's clerics for unspeakable purposes. However, older kenkus who die undergo an elaborate ceremony in which the corpse is placed upon a significant height for winged scavengers to feed on and carry the remains aloft. In this way, all kenkus hope to regain their lost ability to fly after death. The height at which a kenku is placed is directly proportional to its usefulness and respect within the community, with most kenku corpses being placed upon tall hills or castle spires. Particularly honored elders might have their bones borne all the way to a mountain top, while the greatest insult is for a body to be deposited merely on the street, left for the dogs and other land-bound scavengers. In all cases, of course, the bodies of the dead are thoroughly stripped of valuables first. Pious kenkus are a rare sight and few feel the desire or inclination to become clerics. Those who do find themselves drawn to darker deities, most notably Vecna, the god of secrets, whose dogma parallels the kenku lust for the forbidden. Some particularly sinister kenku—hoping to garner his favor and return to the skies—turn to the worship of Pazuzu (see page 56 of this issue). The demon prince has not forgotten the kenkus' ancestors' betrayal, however, demanding far more of these cults who in turn seek to placate him with grotesquely elaborate and creative sacrifices. Among kenkus, such demon cults are known as "murders."

Versus Kenkus

Kenkus possess a well-deserved reputation as devious, dangerous opponents who work extremely well with one another. They prefer to attack only when the chance for victory sits squarely on their side. Although not particularly strong or dangerous as individuals, kenkus congregate and attack in groups, posing a serious threat to those who fail to keep an eye out for danger or consider them beneath attention.

It should also be noted that kenku have a level adjustment of +0. Thus, players and DMs might want to consider

BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Kenkus were first introduced to the Dungeons & Dragons game as part of the original Advanced Dungeons & Dragons *Fiend Folio*. These original kenkus were telepathic, hawk-headed kidnappers who commonly wielded quarterstaffs or samurai swords. Related to tengus, shapeshifting birdmen of Japanese myth, kenku have appeared in numerous adventures throughout D&D's history, as well as being memorably featured in the popular D&D computer adventure *Eye of the Beholder*. The kenku's current statistics appear in the *Monster Manual 3*, and these flightless pilferers make appearances in the *Deathknell* expansion for *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* and the *Dungeon* adventure, "Forsaken Arch," both of which release this month.

TALONS OF REKROK—A KENKU THIEVES' GUILD

The Talons of Rekrok is a band of kenku thieves, assassins, and information brokers typical to most large cities. Named after its leader, the white-feathered elder rogue Rekrok, the Talons maintain a low profile, but are willing to use their impressive skills for anyone willing to pay their exorbitant prices. Primarily focusing on breaking-and-entering, theft, and murder for hire, this group has garnered a well-deserved reputation for efficiency and a lack of scruples.

In order to employ the Talons, the prospective client must meet one of their agents atop a high place—a castle spire, a watchtower roof, or some other place uncomfortably high off the ground and largely inaccessible. With little chance of escape should things go awry, the client must offer, up front, a combination of treasure (the shinier the better) and tidbits of information. Once the kenku operative—usually one of Rekrok's lieutenants—feels the gesture is made in good faith, the client must offer additional loot, serving as the true heart of the deal. While expensive, the client gains the skills of a dedicated band of murderers, thieves, and other unsavory types for whatever job necessary. However, as might be expected, the Talons are perfectly willing to sell out a potential client for a better deal, especially if the risk proves low.

As with any band of kenkus, the Talons of Rekrok work best together, forming small teams composed of specialists who augment each other's skills. A typical band for a common breaking-and-entering job is comprised of two rogues, two warriors, and an assassin/rogue.

kenkus as a player race in addition to those presented in the *Players Handbook*.

Sneaky Foes: When kenkus fight, they do so with stealth and cunning. Kenkus prefer ambushing opponents and despise a direct fight unless they outnumber their enemies by at least two to one. They choose dark alleys, sewer grates, and other cover from which to strike, using it to protect them from harm and provide them with an escape route if things turn sour. Thanks to their Hide and Move Silently bonuses, kenku slink through most areas without concern.

Beware Allies: Kenkus work best together, as most notably shown by their great ally ability. This ability works with any ally, so a kenku fighting with other types of creatures gets this bonus too. Those fighting kenkus and their allies should keep their backs against walls or some other cover to minimize the chance of getting flanked by more than two kenkus. When fighting kenkus, it's best to find one individual and isolate it from its aerie mates, thus denying it this ability. Also, a lone kenku is much more likely to crack from fear and surrender when cornered rather than face death.

Cowardly Combatants: Kenkus possess a deep cowardly streak and flee or surrender as soon as things turn against them. If captured, a kenku offers up almost anything for its release, but always with the thought of treachery in the back of its mind. Non-kenkus who deal with kenkus should never accept their word at face value, as kenkus lie and bend the meanings of agreements without hesitation.

Skilled Sneaks: The strength of a kenku can never be judged based on its race alone. Kenkus are often skilled warriors or rogues, and some might even have levels in fighter or cleric. Older kenkus often multiclass between these roles and might even take up the assassin or shadow dancer prestige class.

Don't Believe What You Hear: The remarkable tongue and throat of a kenku allow it to mimic familiar sounds, voices, and accents. As this ability isn't magical in nature, magic often fails to detect this falsehood. In addition, the untrustworthy and duplicitous nature of a kenku virtually guarantees that anything coming out of its beak is a lie. Those forced to make a deal with a kenku should use treasure as an equalizer, as a kenku's natural tendency to lie fails in the face of serious material gain.

KENKU MIMICRY

One of kenkus' most distinctive abilities is their power of mimicry. While imitating familiar voices to lure victims into ambushes is a tested staple of their strategy, these cunning birdmen have been know to use this ability to many other devious effects.

City Code: On the bustling streets of any large urban center, no one pays any attention to the whiney of horses, the creaking of wagon wheels, or the tolling of distant bells. Yet if such sounds are part of an elaborate kenku code, they might foreshadow some elaborate concerted crime.

Distractions: The sounds of a battle, breaking glass, or a watch whistle are all sure ways to call attention to an area. Or in the case of kenku using these sounds as distractions might serve to divert even the most attentive eyes.

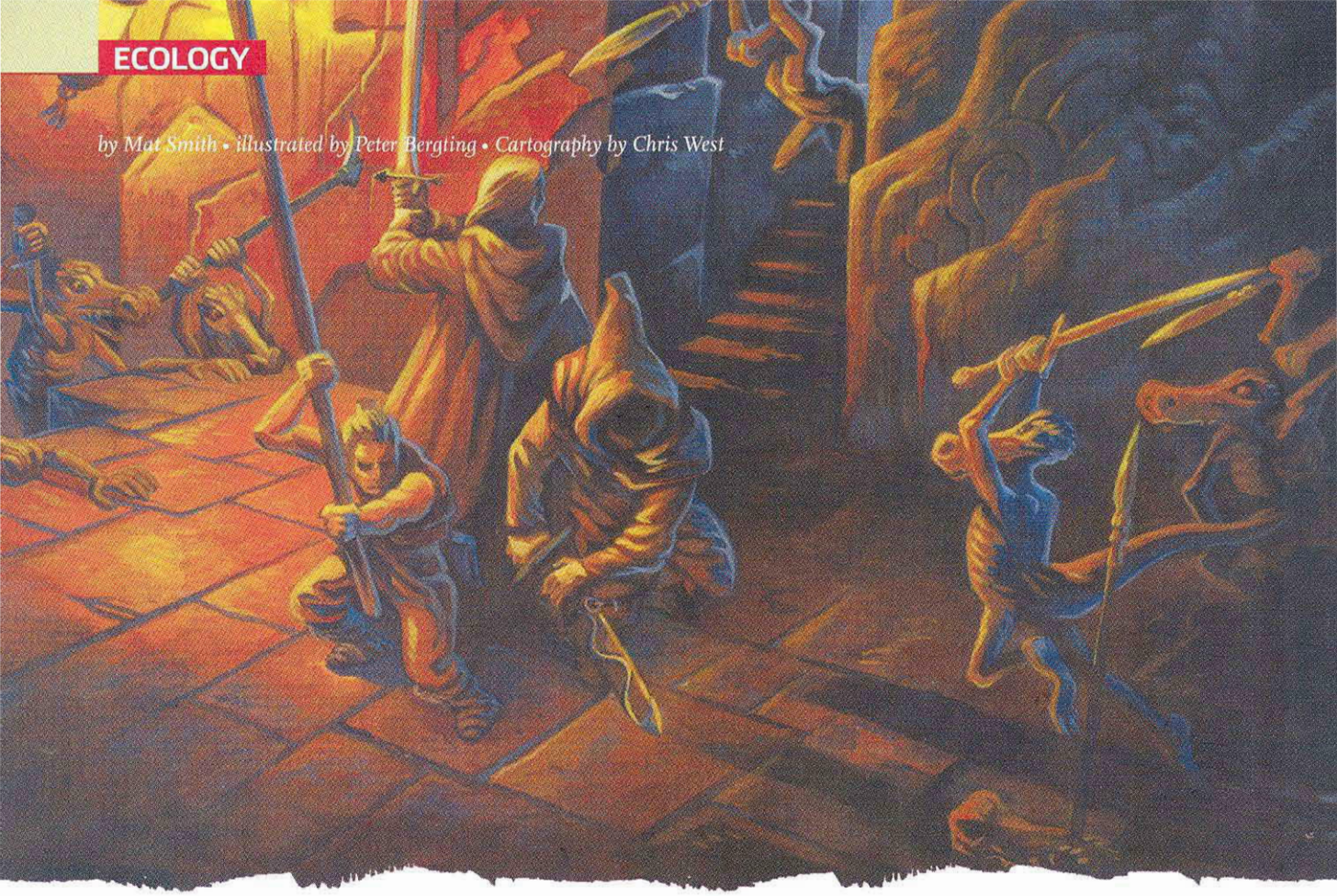
Gaslighting: Blindfolded and trapped, surrounded by the sound of sharpening metal, monstrous snarls, and pain-filled screams, a victim might reveal anything—never realizing he is actually being held by only a single kenku.

Performance: No sound is too complex for a kenku to mimic, not even those of elaborate musical instruments. Kenkus might use their mimicking ability as a means of performance or to weave elaborate musical illusions.

Pseudo Spellcaster: Hooded and cloaked, a kenku might perfectly mimic the chanting prayers and arcane sounds of spellcasters. Although their words hold no magic, those they're trying to intimidate probably don't know that.

Sow Dissension: Another way for kenkus to use voices they overhear is to try to pass themselves off as the original. If the kenku can convince—or even just confuse—a party into thinking that one of their allies is a doppelganger or shape-shifting spellcaster, such dissension might be turned to their advantage.

by Mat Smith • illustrated by Peter Bergting • Cartography by Chris West



THE ECOLOGY OF THE KOBOLD

Never has a race of creatures been so perilously underestimated.

Countless adventurers' tales describe kobolds as cowardly weaklings easily dismissed by any who encounter them. If kobolds were truly such a pitiful race, however, they would have been exterminated ages ago. Those few survivors of an actual kobold attack tell of devious warriors emerging from the darkness—sometimes through the very walls—in relentless waves of sadistic ferocity and lethal ingenuity.

Brethren of dragons, kobolds are one of the most resourceful, industrious, and tenacious races to ever plumb the reaches of the Underdark. Hidden away beyond labyrinthine tunnels and countless traps, kobolds manage to do more than just survive in the deadliest realms known to explorers, they thrive.

HISTORY OF KOBOLDS

While not organized enough as a culture to have constructed a common history, kobolds do share a great deal of folklore and a number of heroic stories, most of which vary slightly from tribe to tribe. Not surprisingly, kobold culture lays claim to a few impressive creation myths, including one that traces back through the ages to the earliest times—back

to the cavernous lair of the goddess of evil dragons, Tiamat.

Shortly after the Queen of Dragons laid her first clutch of eggs, an army of thieves invaded her lair. Enraged by the intrusion, Tiamat sprung from her mountainous nest of gold and gemstones to crush the interlopers. Her merciless teeth and claws tore through scores of intruders while her terrible breath weapons destroyed hundreds at a time. The attackers hurled countless swords, spears, and arrows against the Chromatic Dragon. Most of the weapons shattered harmlessly against her formidable hide, but as the battle wore on, those few that hit their mark began to take their toll on the mighty goddess.

Amid the chaos of the frenzied attack, the swiftest of the bandits snatched up fistfuls of treasure and attempted to flee. The boldest of these struggled under the burden of even the smallest of Tiamat's magnificent eggs. Upon noticing the violation of her nest, Tiamat let forth a thunderous roar that brought down the ceiling of her lair and its connecting tunnels, crushing her attackers and trapping the escaping thieves.

Weakened by innumerable wounds, Tiamat crawled through the rubble of her lair and collapsed upon her nest. Needing time to recover from her injuries and unable to adequately protect her incubating brood, Tiamat used the last of her strength to cause the first of her precious eggs to hatch early. Punching his way out of his still-hardening shell with a stinger-tipped tail like that of his mother, Kurtulmak entered the world.

Infused with a fraction of Tiamat's divine power, Kurtulmak understood his situation and immediately set about clearing the fallen rock from his mother's lair. As he worked, he concocted a way to single-handedly defend the entire cavern from further intrusion. Collecting the weapons strewn about the lair, Kurtulmak constructed hundreds of devious traps to riddle the floor, walls, and ceiling of the vast chamber. Satisfied with the impenetrable perimeter of deadly mechanisms and pitfalls forming around her nest, Tiamat charged Kurtulmak with reopening the tunnels connecting her lair to the planes and then fell into a deep slumber.

In order to foil further intrusions, Kurtulmak began carving a twisting mazelike network of passages, unfathomable to any but himself. After cutting through miles and miles of rubble, earth, and stone, Kurtulmak eventually came across a niche filled with a small portion of his mother's stolen treasure. As he collected the gold and gems that had become fused in the living rock, intending to return them to Tiamat's lair, he also discovered one of her pilfered eggs. Knowing that the egg had been away from the nest for too long and deciding that his immense task would be easier with help, Kurtulmak caused the egg to hatch, creating miniature incarnations of himself. Thus the first of the kobold race was born.

Working alongside their creator, the kobolds quickly learned the art of mining through the earth and soon had discovered other caches of treasure and wayward eggs (which

KOBOLD KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to kobolds. Gnomes and those who dwell in or explore the Underdark (or the other dark places kobolds thrive) also might possess this information.

Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
10	Kobolds are small, weak, cowardly reptilian humanoids who live underground.
15	Kobolds attack in overwhelming numbers using ambush tactics. They foster an intense hatred of gnomes and are highly sensitive to bright light.
20	Kobolds protect their lairs and their narrow connecting tunnels with deadly traps. They often employ poisons (favoring Strength-draining toxins) and guardian creatures, particularly when fighting larger enemies.
25	A kobold tribe usually hoards its treasure deep inside a temple dedicated to its god, Kurtulmak. Filled with the deadliest traps imaginable, these temples are usually rigged to collapse.

Kurtulmak also caused to hatch, further proliferating the kobold race.) Kurtulmak also showed his people how to construct wily traps and various defenses in order to secure the newly carved tunnels. As creatures began to discover and explore the passageways, Kurtulmak taught the kobolds the art of ambushing enemies and the wisdom of entering battle only with the advantage of superior numbers.

As the kobolds grew in number, they continued digging an ever-expanding network of tunnels, eventually reaching every corner of the Material Plane, where they established lairs of their own and began to flourish.

PHYSIOLOGY OF KOBOLDS

Standing just over 2 feet tall and weighing around 40 pounds, average kobolds are physically weak but fast and agile. Their thin and wiry frames make kobolds well suited to moving quickly and fighting within the cramped tunnels of their lairs.

After hatching from its egg, a kobold grows quickly, reaching maturity around the age of six. While the lifespan of an average kobold might be shortened by violence, accident, or disease (in that order), particularly wise and wily kobolds can live up to an astonishing 120 to 140 years (owing to their draconic heritage).

Kobold skulls are often described as being doglike due to their long snouts and sharp teeth. However, many of the characteristics of a kobold's head are more accurately defined as displaying rudimentary features of dragonkind: forward-facing nostrils, ear holes, a forked tongue, and two short, keratinous horns sprouting from the top of the skull.

Kobolds' remarkably sensitive, glowing red eyes allow them to pick out the smallest details from their surroundings, even in pitch-black caverns. However, intense light (such as bright sunlight or that created by a *daylight* spell) is difficult for kobolds to tolerate and causes discomfort and disorientation (resulting in the dazzled condition). Kobolds also rely on their acute sense of hearing to detect approaching danger and to pick out familiar sounds that help them navigate the confusing maze of tunnels surrounding their tribe's lair.

Ranging in color from dark, rusty brown to reddish black, the toothy scales that cover kobolds' tough hides are similar to those of an iguana or other large lizard. The scales that cover kobolds' short tails are very fine and slightly lighter than the rest of their mottled hides, giving them a smooth, "naked" appearance. While primarily used for balance, kobolds often use their highly flexible yet nonprehensile tails to wield specialized weapons (see the tail blade and tail club in *Savage Species*).

Kobolds can eat just about anything—plants, animals, and even intelligent humanoids (cannibalistic kobold tribes are common). Despite an omnivorous diet, kobolds do not possess differentiated teeth—they are all short and pointed. Interestingly, a kobold loses and grows new teeth throughout its entire life, taking anywhere from two to three years to completely replace an entire set of fifty-four. Kobolds often save their teeth, strung on necklaces or other adornments, as an impressive demonstration of their age.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF KOBOLDS

As a relatively small and physically weak race, kobold society revolves around survival. Virtually every aspect of all kobolds' activities contribute toward the tribe's survival in one way or another. As such, all kobolds serve their tribes by filling at least one of several predictable roles.

Kobold trapmakers not only create deadly devices that guard against intruders, they also design contraptions to catch or kill animals for food. Farmers cultivate mushrooms and edible plants as well as carnivorous, poisonous, or dangerous vegetation that serve as barriers or deterrents against invasion. Miners extract precious metals, minerals, and gemstones from the earth while carving the intricate tunnels and chambers that form the tribe's lair, its outlying defense, and mazelike escape passages. Animal handlers capture, raise, and train the tribe's guardian creatures while also tending small herds of lizards, centipedes, or other domesticated animals and vermin.

The warriors of a kobold tribe, of course, play the most proactive roles in the tribe's collective effort to survive. Kobold warriors constantly remain active and alert—verging on paranoia. The need for constant watchfulness is such that a warrior caught sleeping or distracted while on duty faces a death sentence.

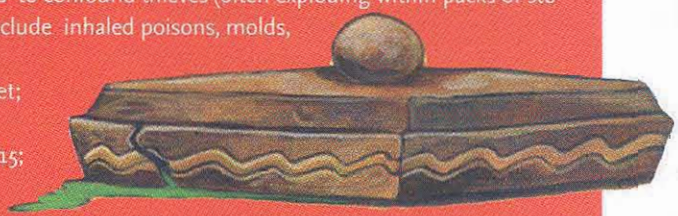
KOBOLD TRAPS

For miles around and throughout every kobold lair are set a dizzying number of traps. Kobolds make use of materials from their surroundings and use weapons and armor from fallen enemies. They fill clay pots with vermin, oozes, and other deadly substances. They lace corpses with vermin eggs, ready to burst into swarms, and cultivate deadly plants, mold, and fungi. They dig pits lined with disease-ridden spikes or containing deadly creatures. Kobold trapmakers are renowned for their enviable skills but feared for their innovation—they're always devising something new.

Ceramic Mines

Commonly fashioned as shallow ceramic bowls, ceramic mines are filled with any of a variety of alchemically prepared substances and then sealed. The creation process, which involves firing the ceramic vessel in a kiln, creates a fragile vessel filled with a pressurized gas or liquid that explodes outward when the mine is broken (Hardness 2, 2 hp).

Usually buried in a passageway so that a passing creature treads upon them, some ceramic mines are concealed in walls or ceilings to be targeted with a crossbow bolt or sling stone during a fight. Others are fashioned to appear like rock formations (usually stalactites or stalagmites) or even decorative sculptures. Sculpted ceramic mines are commonly placed where they can be dropped on opponents or hidden among kobold treasure hordes to confound thieves (often exploding within packs of stolen loot). Substances often used in the creation of ceramic mines include inhaled poisons, molds, oozes, slimes, vermin eggs, or other alchemical substances.



Ceramic Mine (Basic): CR 1; mechanical; touch trigger; no reset; DC 11 Reflex save half damage; 2d6 points of acid, cold, or fire energy damage; single target; Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 15; Market Price: 600 gp.

Ceramic Mine (Green Slime-filled Stalactite): CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; no reset; Atk +15 (2d6, stalactite; see note); single target; Search DC 15; Disable Device DC 15; Note: When targeted square is entered, this stalactite drops from the ceiling, possibly striking the character. Upon impact, the stalactite shatters, covering everything within the target square with a veneer of green slime (see page 76 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for effects); Market Price: 2,500 gp.

Kobold executions usually take the nerve-wracking form of forcing the condemned to test the effectiveness of newly created traps. The execution continues until either the condemned kobold is killed or he has sprung or avoided three traps. At that point, the kobold emerges either as a corpse or an exonerated hero worthy of praise and respect from the tribe.

While survival of the tribe is paramount, for an individual kobold self-preservation remains top-of-mind. Because of this "better you than me" mentality, patrols and warbands actively recruit even the weakest, most incompetent, and dull-witted kobolds. That way, when encountering a superior enemy, the clever, swift, and strong kobolds can safely retreat while encouraging their less-apt companions to "hold them off while reinforcements move up." (This explains why the caricature of the bumbling kobold remains so prevalent—those are the ones most adventurers actually see.)

As Kurtulmak teaches, fleeing from certain, probable, possible, or perceived danger is acceptable, intelligent behavior. Most kobolds quickly come to the realization that "I don't have to outrun a dire bear, I just have to outrun another kobold." Particularly clever kobolds discover that tripping or incapacitating another kobold often makes it even easier to get away. Survivors of these when-push-comes-to-shove situations become envied by their more fleet-footed peers for their ingenuity and superior escape tactics.

The only exception to this cowardly trend arises when a kobold warband encounters a group of gnomes. All kobolds share a vitriolic hatred of gnomes and (unless outnumbered) ferociously ambush them on sight, fleeing only if the tide of battle turns tragically against them.

TRIBAL STRUCTURE

Most kobold tribes form caste-based gerontocracies—where the oldest individual kobold leads the others. Often, this leader is a powerful sorcerer, but occasionally a highly skilled warrior or another particularly talented kobold outlives his contemporaries to assume the leadership of a tribe. Change in leadership usually happens when a leader dies, although some are usurped when the tribe determines that the mere fact that he continues to draw breath no longer warrants his position of power.

Tribal laws come and go as each leader of a tribe changes rules to suit his personal ideas and vision. Regardless, a constabulary force enforces even the newest laws as if they had always existed, often causing problems for kobolds away from the tribe during a change in leadership. Devious kobolds who come to power occasionally institute laws that enable them to eliminate rivals or make other personal gains.

Clerics of Kurtulmak (known as Eyes of Kurtulmak) rarely live long enough to become chieftains. However, they

do possess a great deal of power and influence within the tribe, as their place rests at the center of every important endeavor. The installation of traps and construction of other tribal defenses are always blessed by a cleric of Kurtulmak. Additionally, they oversee a tribe's tunneling and mining efforts, directing new excavations toward "divinely inspired" goals, such as one of the fabled Lost Eggs of Tiamat. Whether exploring new areas, facilitating a trade of commodities, or probing for weaknesses in nearby gnome or dwarf settlements, an Eye of Kurtulmak leads all expeditions. Every warband, hunting party, and raiding party includes at least one cleric, whose presence and prayers draw the favor of their deity down upon them.

While worship of Kurtulmak is prevalent in kobold societies, organized religious services are virtually nonexistent. However, all kobolds utter small prayers and makes observations to their deity regularly throughout the day. This is largely because Kurtulmak takes a very active interest in his people, to the point that he regularly sends an aspect of himself to assist in particularly important raids, battles, or other crucial undertakings.

A kobold tribe's activity continues around the clock, with each kobold's work, rest, and recreation time broken into shifts based on the amount of time it takes a patrol to make one or more tours of the tribe's longest patrol route. (Kobolds keep track of time in "watches," rather than "hours," making each tribe's unit of measure different.) This perpetual activity keeps a tribe extremely vigilant.

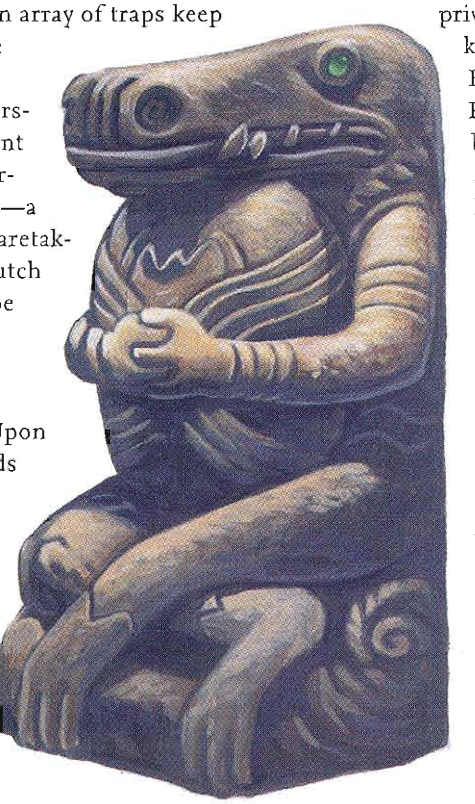
As a caste-based society, certain occupations afford greater privileges. Each caste, in turn, forms a sort of pecking order that determines leadership and differentiates a master from an apprentice. (Positions in this chain of command shift with regularity, as talented and determined kobolds supplant those above them.) Gender has no bearing on the structure of kobold society—roles and responsibilities fall upon the most suitable or convenient individual.

The most coveted and privileged roles for a tribe member are trapmaker, sorcerer, caretaker, and warrior. Clerics, farmers, and miners make up the bulk of the tribe's second-class. Animal handlers, craftsfolk, and those with other abilities usually fill the lowest rank in a kobold tribe, as their contribution to the welfare of the tribe doesn't immediately impact its survival.

NEST TO PYRE: GROWING UP KOBOLD

Kobolds rarely mate for life. Typically, a romantic bond between an adult male and female lasts no more than a few months, often culminating in the female laying a single egg. Kobolds of both genders remain fertile throughout their adult lives, with females capable of laying around a half dozen eggs over the course of a year.

Kobolds are partially ovoviviparous—the embryonic kobold develops inside its egg for two months before its mother lays the egg and another two months before hatching. Once laid, each egg is carefully collected in a central nursery where caretakers and an array of traps keep them safe. (Once an egg has been moved to the nursery, neither parent takes much interest in its welfare—a task left to the caretakers.) A typical clutch of eggs for a tribe of two hundred kobolds ranges anywhere from twenty to fifty. Upon hatching, kobolds are fully formed and somewhat self-sufficient (able to derive nutrition from just about anything they can chew), but aren't strong enough to fend for themselves against predators.



During the first six months of life, hatchlings form powerful emotional bonds with their clutch mates—other kobolds who hatch within a month of one another. The intense rivalries and friendships developed between clutch mates are the strongest in kobold culture.

Hatchlings quickly develop motor skills and a rudimentary understanding of the Draconic language. Also among the first things taught to hatchlings are fundamental survival skills—ranging from rock throwing and digging holes to running away and hiding. Kobolds' natural talents for trapmaking are also fostered at an early age. Kobolds learn to use simple weapons, such as slings and spears, as soon as they're coordinated enough to survive the learning process. Caretakers note each hatchling's particular skills and aptitudes (or lack thereof), watching for that first spark of sorcery, gift for trapmaking, skill with a weapon, or any other trait that could pigeonhole where a kobold might fit into the tribe.

By age two, a kobold may petition to leave the nursery by enduring a private ceremony known as the Blessing of the Pit. Presided over by a caretaker and an Eye of Kurtulmak, the simple ritual requires the kobold to cross a 10-foot-wide pit constructed with a variety of hazards. Pit dimensions and contents vary from ritual to ritual as determined by the presiding priest. How the young kobold leaps over, climbs around, drops

LAIR of the BLACKTONGUE TRIBE
3a
C
3b
6
2
1
C
6
8
4
5b
C
4
5a
4
7
6
1. Main Cavern & Living Quarters
2. Temple of Kurtulmak
3a. Nursery
3b. Hatchery
4. Mushroom, Lichen, and Moss Farms
5a. Giant Cave Cricket Corral
5b. Giant Centipede Corral
6. Food & Supply Storage
7. Secondary Cavern & Living Quarters
8. Craftsfolk Workspace
Trapped Areas
Concealed Doors
C
Vertical Passages
Rubble
1 square = 10 feet
WEST

down to navigate through, or otherwise circumvents the danger is irrelevant—the end result being what's important. By successfully reaching the far side, a clever or capable kobold earns the Blessing of the Pit and the right to join the rest of the tribe as a juvenile. Failure to cross the pit invariably results in the unremarkable death of a particularly clumsy or dull-witted kobold.

The Eye of Kurtulmak who presides over the ceremony assigns the young kobold her first role in the tribe. The assignment usually follows the suggestions of the nursery's caretakers, but might differ depending on the presiding cleric's whim or the immediate need of the tribe. (If an entire warband has recently been slaughtered, the nursery produces a surprising number of new warriors.)

Non-warriors aggressively seek out apprenticeships in accordance with their assigned roles, trying to impress would-be mentors with demonstrations of talent or capacity for a chosen vocation. An apprenticeship might last anywhere from six months to several years, terminating when the student demonstrates a higher degree of skill than the master (at which point, their roles are reversed).

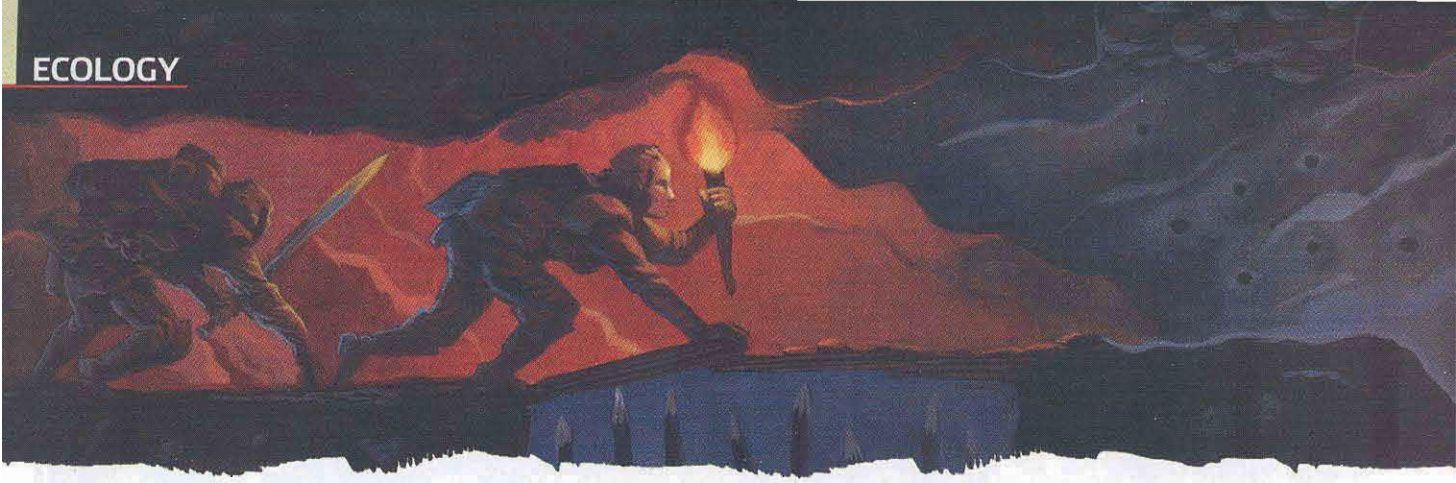
A significant number of kobolds (often those without any noteworthy talents or ambitions) become miners. Fortunately, few races possess a greater inborn proclivity for mining than kobolds. The unrivaled industry and skill of a kobold workforce produces a remarkable amount of gold, iron, coal, and other valued substances in a stunningly short time. Governments and crafts guilds often secretly employ kobolds for just this reason.

Kobolds most commonly mine in one of two ways, as dictated by threats within those regions and the ambitions of their leader. Some skittish kobold miners venture far from their lairs, yet avoid lingering around large deposits of precious metals and gemstones for very long, as too many other races seek such treasures. When encountered, these miners usually extract a few cartloads of these valuable substances and then hurry back to their lair. Alternatively, more ambitious kobold tribes covetously guard precious deposits and mine them until depleted. Rather than hoarding such wealth, such tribes usually turn their treasures toward currying the favor of more powerful allies, like derro, troglodytes, and deep-dwelling dragons.

Working in tandem with miners, tunneling crews are charged with exploration and crafting defensive mazes around a tribe's lair. They often employ trained or magically controlled burrowing creatures, such as dire badgers or thoqquas, to speed their efforts.

Budding warriors are assigned to the tribe's constabulary, the least-respected role in the warrior caste, where they gain additional training with weapons and simple tactics. By the time a kobold outgrows her first set of teeth, she is considered old enough to join a patrol. (Some kobolds, eager to see action before their third year, attempt to collect or claim other kobolds' teeth as their own.) In order to join, a kobold must prove herself worthy by defeating and taking the place of a superior. Such challenges rarely prove fatal, but the grudges they often produce frequently end in *accidents* in the field.

By the onset of adulthood, a kobold usually settles upon a vocation, although this role commonly changes several times over the years depending on the fluctuating needs of the tribe. At this point, a kobold focuses on honing her skills in order to increase her standing in her caste and value to the tribe. Age and ability are the two most attractive qualities a kobold can possess, warranting larger shares of food, safer sleeping arrangements, better weapons and



gear, and increased interest from the opposite gender. An adult kobold's life consists of perpetual jockeying to gain more of all of these.

Kobolds usually meet their end in combat, during a cave-in, or in a messy accident involving a newly installed trap. In order to avoid attracting scavengers, and not wanting to waste perfectly good meat, the remains of a slain kobold are usually cooked and eaten. Hunting parties use the bodies of kobolds who died of disease or poison as bait. Tribal heroes and those few kobolds who live long enough to die of old age receive the honor of being burned on a funeral pyre (after they've been stripped of particularly valuable items and gear).

KOBOLD LAIRS

Kobolds have been encountered in just about every location that is suitably dark and restricts the movement of Medium or larger creatures, such as heavily overgrown forests, jungles, and swamps. However, most kobold lairs are located underground, formed by series of interconnected caves surrounded by a snarl of trap-laden tunnels and shafts that might span several miles. Innumerable intersections, unexplained dead-ends, and concealed passages make navigating the labyrinthine network all but impossible for any outsider. While even the largest tunnels usually hamper the movement of anything much bigger than a kobold, some narrow to a point so that even

THE ORIGIN OF KURTULMAK'S RIVALRY WITH GARL GLITTERGOLD

From a young age all kobolds learn to hate gnomes and crave to confound all their efforts. This rivalry amounts to far more than ingrained racial hatred, however. Rather—as kobold priests often relate—there is a very specific reason for this centuries-long blood feud, which traces back to their very gods.

The Kobold Myth

Long ago, Kurtulmak set about carving an immense cavern, the grandeur of which soon rivaled the audience chambers of any of the other deities. Kurtulmak intended to use the magnificent grotto as the setting for the greatest prank ever played—he planned to invite all the other deities to dinner, and as entertainment he would tell the tale of "The Violation of Tiamat's Lair," ending when he dropped the cavern on their heads.

As a miner without equal, Kurtulmak skillfully cut from the roof and walls ponderously large slabs of rock and held them in place with a complex, interconnected series of cunningly wrought and artfully concealed beams. The entire devious construction, which ranged over the whole cavern, would collapse in rapid succession after the removal of a single golden keystone.

One day, while looking for shiny gemstones, Garl Glittergold passed near Kurtulmak's cavern and heard the toil within. Ever curious about Kurtulmak's activities, Garl crept nearer in order to spy upon the kobold god, as he so often did. As he caught sight of the grand cavern, the gnome god stopped to observe Kurtulmak's breathtaking endeavor.

While puzzling over the intricately crafted stonework, Garl's eye was caught by the twinkle of a small, gold-colored stone wedged tightly into a nearby wall. Greedily, he tugged and tugged on the sparkly stone, but it wouldn't come loose. Frustrated, Garl gave up his struggle in order to further marvel at the work that sprawled overhead. Slowly, the nature of Kurtulmak's construction dawned upon the gnome god who then guessed at the keystone's purpose, becoming awed by Kurtulmak's incredible skill.

Stricken with jealousy, Garl became intent on destroying Kurtulmak's brilliant creation before anyone else witnessed its subtle majesty. He seized the keystone once more, twisting and turning it every possible way until he finally wrested it free from its socket. As Garl dropped the golden prize in his pocket, a sudden rumbling noise filled the enormous cave. Frightened, he fled down a nearby passage and hid from the catastrophic cave-in that followed. As a souvenir of his harrowing experience, Garl pierced the stone and hung it on a chain around his neck, adopting it as his own holy symbol.

Kurtulmak, furious at the cavern's impossibly premature collapse, quickly dug his way out from under countless tons of stone. Soon afterward, the kobold deity discovered the culprit responsible for the calamitous event when he noticed Garl wearing his keystone like a trophy around his neck. Kurtulmak confronted the gnome god, who nervously chuckled, dismissed his disastrous act as an

Small creatures must squeeze in order to pass.

At least one section of virtually every kobold tunnel is rigged to collapse, enabling a tribe to quickly and easily seal off a passage in the event of an invasion or other imminent danger. To prevent accidents, these areas are usually constructed with two or three fail-safes (requiring the removal of multiple bypasses before triggering the cave in), although some function as particularly deadly traps.

The actual inhabited area of a tribe's territory consists of an anthill-like combination of natural and kobold-made chambers often adorned with simple carvings, murals, and totemlike trophies. Aside from these rudimentary decorations, most kobold lairs are fairly Spartan, as individual kobolds keep all of their personal possessions with them at all times. Usually shared by several kobolds at a time, in shifts as each day progresses, living and sleeping quarters take the form of ledges, nooks, and small caves fashioned to conceal their occupants from casual observers (Spot DC 14). Kobold lairs are very clean and sanitary; waste is disposed of by dumping it down a deep shaft or by feeding it to a captive creature that subsists on refuse, such as an otyugh or gelatinous cube.

Every kobold community contains a temple or shrine to Kurtulmak carved from solid rock and accessed through twisting, trap-filled tunnels. The skulls

episode he'd long forgotten, and hastily excused himself.

His legendary stunt spoiled, Kurtulmak vowed to exact a slow and terrible revenge upon the gnome god. Kurtulmak's intense hatred for Garl Glittergold sparked a feud between the two that spread across the planes, touching the races created by each of the deities, which explains why kobolds and gnomes hate one another.

Gnomish Revisions

While the basic points of the story of how Garl Glittergold collapsed Kurtulmak's cavern remain irrefutable, most gnomes point out a few misconceptions about Garl's intent and involvement with the kobold god's schemes.

Never having taken any real interest in Kurtulmak, Garl found himself at the entrance to the kobold god's cavern only because of the tremendous racket echoing from within. Having followed the cacophony of hammer, pick, and chisel, Garl became somewhat curious about the work going on inside. Renowned for his masterful execution of countless practical jokes, The Joker quickly surmised what Kurtulmak was up to. When the twinkling keystone caught his eye, Garl smiled as he instantly understood its function and decided to put Kurtulmak's work to the ultimate test—just to see if it would work. The gnome deity was pleasantly surprised when the entire cavern actually did collapse, toppling Kurtulmak from his ladder and burying him under enormous slabs of stone. The gnome god decided to keep the nugget-shaped keystone both since it so closely resembled his long-held holy symbol and as a souvenir of his quickly forgotten little joke.

As Garl has greater cosmic concerns and distractions, the conflict between he and Kurtulmak continues, for the most part, to be a one-sided battle. However, as kobolds developed a deity-fueled hatred for gnomes, they came to pose a very real danger to his people. Because of this, Garl keeps a casual eye on his self-proclaimed "archenemy" and warns his followers to never underestimate the threat posed by Kurtulmak's vicious spawn.

of all the gnomes slain by the tribe festoon the interior of the temple. Deep within the structure, the accumulated wealth of the tribe lies secured within a heavily trapped vault. (Reliable sources report that kobold temples are always constructed in such a way that they collapse when triggered purposefully by attendant clergy or accidentally by unwitting thieves.) Few kobolds, aside from the clerics who know the secrets to the temple's many traps, actually ever set foot inside the temple. Instead, kobolds offer prayers at its entrance with the belief that Kurtulmak hears them.

While the temple to Kurtulmak is a lair's dominant edifice, the most important structure to a kobold tribe is its well-concealed and trapped nursery, with hatchlings raised in a secured cavern and eggs locked away in a well-protected hatchery. Safe passage into and through the nursery requires admittance and guidance by one of its caretakers.

Other structures commonly found within a kobold tribe's lair include a small forge, an oven or kiln, a well or cistern, and a chamber that serves as a storage locker for food gathered by the tribe's farmers, foragers, and hunters. Large caverns nearby are often reserved for cultivating foodstuffs and raising livestock. Located throughout a kobold lair, particularly at every entrance and major intersection, signal devices such as gongs, drums, or horns contribute to the tribe's collective vigilance.

The layout of a kobold tribe's lair is extremely fluid—workers regularly collapse or seal off tunnels and caves as they carve new ones. This makes any information about the layout or location of areas inhabited by kobolds progressively less reliable over time. In fact, a kobold lair actually migrates slowly through the Underdark as its miners and priests cautiously search for a defensible, safe area in which to establish a more permanent kobold settlement.

VS. KOBOLDS

Because of their physical weaknesses, kobolds rely on a combination of ambush tactics, ranged attacks, traps, and overwhelming numbers to defeat their enemies. Never underestimate the viciousness of a kobold force and always remember the veteran explorers adage: "For every kobold you see, there's a dozen more hiding in the walls."

Watch for Traps: Walk slowly and carry a 10-foot pole. Kobolds protect their lairs and a vast area surrounding them (reaching miles in all directions) with all manner of traps. Use caution when moving through kobold territory, making liberal use of Listen, Search, and Spot checks along with tracking and stone cunning abilities if available. The Disable Device skill also proves invaluable. Keep in mind that by the time a party actually sees a kobold, they've probably already stumbled deep inside a tribe's trap-laden province.

Be Suspicious: A kobold holding its ground is probably bait, daring an attacker into moving within range of an undetected trap or other threat (such as a roper or darkmantle). Taking the time to make a Sense Motive check on any enemy is never a bad idea.

Beware Divine and Arcane Magic: Fear the wrath of Kurtulmak and the blood of Tiamat, as a kobold warband always counts a cleric and often at least one sorcerer among its number. Commonly used spells include those that bolster the effectiveness of a warband's members, such as *bear's endurance, bless, cat's grace,* and *haste,* as well as spells that add to the warband's numbers and strength, such as monster summoning and *planar ally* spells. Spells such as *confusion* and *suggestion* are also often used to reduce the effectiveness of an enemy force.

Light 'Em Up: Kobolds prefer to fight in darkness, where they retain an advantage over light-dependent enemies. Extinguishing light sources is among the first actions taken during a kobold ambush. Like many underground-dwelling creatures, kobolds become dazzled in bright sunlight. Well-prepared explorers of any subterranean realm should possess at least one *daylight* spell, although scrolls and wands of this spell might prove even more valuable.

Fire Bad: Kobolds always try to use a party's already-lit torches and lanterns to ignite combustibles—such as oil, flammable gas, or other alchemical substances. Using magic light sources, such as magic weapons or sunrods, avoids inadvertently contributing to the kobold war machine.

Poison: Kobolds often employ poison on their weapons and traps, favoring Strength-sapping toxins harvested from domesticated vermin (most commonly Medium spiders and Large scorpions).

Don't Start a Fight You Can't Finish: Encounters with kobolds are often cut short as they flee into the darkness. Their hit-and-run style of fighting usually lead adventurers to mistakenly claim victory. As Kurtulmak teaches, no fight is truly over if even one kobold survives. Surviving kobolds regroup, gather reinforcements, and patiently tail a party with the intention of springing another ambush. This follow-up attack likely occurs after the party has been weakened by another threat, is incapacitated or distracted in some way (such as by climbing a wall), or has settled down to camp.

MINIATURE MULTITUDES

Along with D&D staples and fan favorites like orcs, goblins, and drow, *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures* provides a host of miniature kobolds, each meticulously crafted to 32mm scale. Starting with the Kobold Warrior in the *Harbinger* set, kobold reinforcements have since appeared in *Dragoneye* (with the Kobold Skirmisher) and *Aberrations* (featuring the Kobold Champion and the Kobold Sorcerer). This trend continues next month with the release of *Angelfire* and the new Kobold Soldier.

Kobold Champion *Kobold Sorcerer* *Kobold Soldier*

Kobold

"Clink. Clink. Clink. All night we heard their damn picks and hammers, prying the earth apart one seam at a time. At night, we saw their eyes and heard the rustles in the bushes, and even the creak of the small carts they used to carry ore. Each morning, when we went to the quarry, our tools were missing, and their clawed footsteps showed us where they had been. But we left them alone, and they left us alone, until that damn fool dwarf Hedras decided he should stay after sunset, as a night watchman, and drive them away.

"We found Hedras the next morning, his beard and bits of his bones sticking out from under a deadfall they rigged over the quarry trail. We never did see a kobold, and I hope I never do."

—Darath Fellmin, Mine Manager

Kobolds are creatures of the deep, dark places of the world. They are masters of digging, setting traps, and engineering the earth, making them the lesser cousins of dwarves in many ways. They are cowards individually, but they always come in large numbers, and usually by night. Kobolds never fight fair—traps and poison, subterfuge and diabolism are their tools and pride. Kobolds hate goblins, gnomes, dwarves, and a long list of other creatures. They are false friends and schemers.

Overview

Kobolds are among the weakest humanoids, yet their hatred of all other races makes them fight as fiercely as creatures six times their size. They are small but cunning, channeling their evil into traps, schemes, and plans that never seem to quite bring them the respect they are certain they deserve.

Long ago, kobold legends claim, kobolds were the true-blooded sons and daughters of dragons. They were the first to learn magic (which they foolishly shared with the elves), the first to make tools and dig metal from the earth

(which they foolishly showed to the dwarves), and the first to herd animals and keep their meat, milk, eggs and leather (again, foolishly shared with humans). In fact, according to kobolds, they did everything first, as their dragon mothers and fathers loved them above all others.

No one else believes in this version of events, and it makes kobolds furious. They enjoy raiding and capturing the "lesser races" to show their superiority, and they have a strong evil streak, apparently also inherited from draconic forebearers. Dragons themselves find this all a little embarrassing, but chromatics indulge the "wingless wyrms" like favored pets.

Kobolds know they are weak, and so seek to ally themselves to strength: strong animals, strong patron gods, strong traps, and strongholds. They dig to hide themselves, then set traps and alarms all around their lairs just in case someone does enter their territory.

Despite their conflicting ego and fear, kobolds make good servants, as long as they understand the hierarchy. They respect strength, keep their word, and bow down to "the big ones" as long as they are in arm's reach. Once they are left to themselves, things often go missing or break mysteriously.

Kobold combat is a bit of a contradiction. Their tactics focus on retreats and ambushes, although they willingly follow a strong dragon or bulette's charge on a battlefield. They grow bold only in defense of their eggs and underground homes.

Ecology

Kobolds are hatched, not born, although few ever see this happen. Their nesting tunnels are the deepest and most secure, lined in feathers and soft grasses and kept warm by the earth's natural warmth and heat from smoldering charcoal and heated stones. A kobold's early years are spent entirely underground, away from the harsh sun.

Young kobolds mature and are sent raiding or mining by the age of 10. They grow to a little more than 3 feet tall and weigh about 35 pounds fully grown. In the rare cases when they do not die violent deaths at the hands of larger creatures, kobolds can easily live to 130 or 140 years.

Elderly kobolds are rare on the surface, but are quite common hidden deep underground. Kobold matriarchs, in particular, become more fertile with age. A kobold egg-mother who reaches the age of 40 or more can lay as many as 50 or 60 eggs per year. An egg-mother who reaches the age of 80 can lay 100 eggs per year. These numbers help explain kobold survival in an uncaring and hostile world.

It also explains why they are so determined in defense of their lairs. A relatively small number of egg-laying elderly matriarchs can breed an entire tribe, but only when nesting and brooding. If they are disturbed, their egg laying tapers off and, given kobold losses to natural causes and predation, any decline in the hatching rate is dangerous to a small tribe. As such, elder matriarchs are hidden in heavily trapped mazes and fiercely defended. The only time kobolds show serious physical bravery is in defense of their nesting grounds.

Kobold eyes are invariably red, but their scale color varies. The scales of kobolds often match the colors of the chromatic dragons: red and black are common, while green, white, and blue are less so. Wild or mongrel kobolds sometimes have brown, gray, or rust-orange scales. They have small tails and blunt snouts, somewhat like lizards, and their voices are a bit rough, like a barking dog. Their clawed hands are large proportional to their size.

Kobolds are never farmers and are rarely great hunters (their nobles practice it as sport, but not for sustenance). Instead, their skills at mining, extortion, and trapmaking generally make them useful to larger and more powerful races that see to their feeding. They gather plants from the forests, trap small animals, and eat most creatures smaller than themselves. They take considerable delight in torturing fey, gnomes, and goblins.

Kobolds are fairly good at animal husbandry: they keep dire weasels as guard animals and dire boars as pack animals and war beasts. These are by no means the strangest creatures found among kobold tribes. Kobold scouts and raiding parties generally prefer boar mounts and weasels as tracking and harrying animals, a bit like hounds are for humans. The boars, in particular, are often outfitted with panniers and baggage saddles to carry the maximum amount of plunder from a raid. In underground environs close to dwarven ruins, kobolds rely on slurks, a form of slime-covered toad (see GameMastery Module *D1: Crown of the Kobold King*). These hopping mounts are ideal for crossing large ditches and moats, and they give kobolds the ability to retreat quickly from an ambush.

In addition, advanced kobold tribes train bats as messenger animals. Clouds of bats keep these kobold tribes in close communication. When tribes gather in huge numbers to raid racial foes, their gatherings are only possible because of their swarms of homing bats.

Kobolds frequently tame bulettes as mining machines. Few people have ever seen the ones that kobolds just call mine diggers, but they can tear through stone at a kobold's command and are trained to follow a vein through rock. Kobolds treat these as their best and favorite animals, and show remarkable ferocity when they are fighting beside one of these beasts. Kobolds seem to think that bulettes simply cannot be defeated; if one is slain, kobold morale within sight of this disaster always collapses utterly.

Kobolds understand the principles of breeding to type, backcrosses, and other elements of animal husbandry, but

Staring Box

Many kobold sorcerers make a magical trap called a staring box, which resembles a treasure chest or an ivory or rare wooden coffer, such as a merchant might use to transport jewels. When a staring box is opened, however, a *hypnotic pattern* spell is unleashed, affecting all those within a 10-foot radius who fail a DC 14 Will save. The pattern remains for 1d6 x 10 minutes. Kobolds are entitled to a +4 racial bonus on this save, as they often use such boxes as a form of entertainment, staring slackjawed at their glittering light patterns for hours.

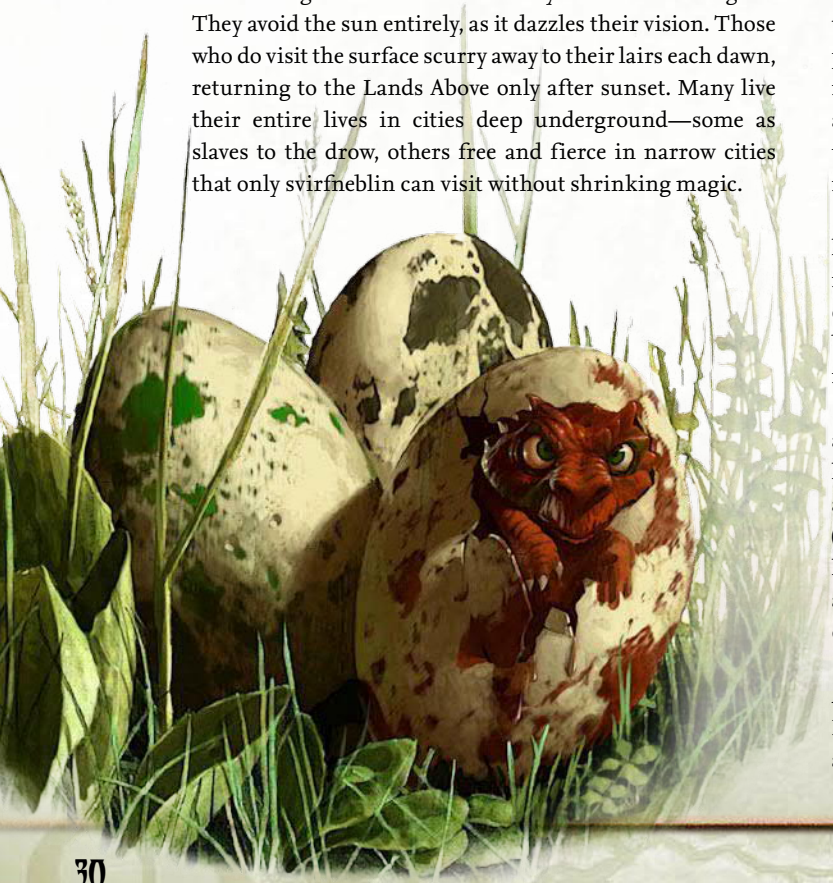
Smoke Bullets

It's unclear whether these sling stones are the product of kobold alchemy, sorcery, or both, but they are fairly effective weapons. They can be hurled as sling stones with normal range, but require only a touch attack to succeed. When they strike a target they release a cloud of gas that requires a DC 13 Fortitude save. If the saving throw succeeds, the target is unaffected. If the save fails, the target is nauseated for 2 rounds.

they lack a standard. Different tribes prize different sizes, patterns, and colors of domesticated animals, and they are cruel masters. Animals that fail kobolds are either quickly sold or eaten—usually eaten.

Habitat & Society

Kobolds live in dark, deep forests with heavy undergrowth, and underground in mines in any mineral-rich region. They avoid the sun entirely, as it dazzles their vision. Those who do visit the surface scurry away to their lairs each dawn, returning to the Lands Above only after sunset. Many live their entire lives in cities deep underground—some as slaves to the drow, others free and fierce in narrow cities that only svirfneblin can visit without shrinking magic.



Kobolds are good miners and many of them love work. These miner kobolds cheerfully spend all day in the mines or at the smelter, sleep, and then wake up to do it again. Unlike many humanoid races, their work ethic is astounding. Perhaps they feel an urge to compensate for their small size with relentless persistence.

While their numbers and industry make it possible for them to earn their keep entirely from hard labor and the rich rewards of toil, many kobolds do not live as miners. Their innate cowardice and cruelty impel them to prove themselves by capturing and tormenting other creatures, claiming that their noble draconic blood entitles them to far more respect than they receive. This insecurity makes kobolds very susceptible to flattery.

Kobolds make good spies in underground societies, as they are small and rarely noticed. Most underground races consider them slaves or servants, and speak in front of them without care. Kobold spies use this to their advantage. Their ability to hide in small spaces for long hours also helps them. Like reptiles, they seem able to doze in a form of torpor that is not quite sleep, but simply very low activity.

Kobolds are surprisingly competent with math, masonry, carpentry, smelting, metalworking, and mining. They never create masterwork items, but the sheer size and volume of their warrens is rarely appreciated (because they are too small for larger races to visit—even dwarves have a tough time in tight kobold tunnels). Their largest cities stretch for miles, unsuspected by those living above.

Finally, kobolds often work with mechanisms other than traps, such as locks, clockworks, constructs, and even large public clocks or bells. Although they lack strength, their nimble fingers are often in demand for fine metalwork among jewelers, so long as they are never trusted with unsupervised access to valuables. Most kobolds employed in this way are kept locked inside the jeweler's shop.

Not all kobolds are valued for their skill. Wild forest kobolds are barely literate, barbaric creatures who live merely to hunt and kill and feast on their enemies (that is, everyone non-reptilian). These kobolds live short lives but breed prodigiously to make up their losses, and are often involved in blood cults and child kidnappings.

Most kobolds venerate the gods of their draconic ancestors or, in some rare cases, an actual dragon who happens to live nearby. To them, these are living gods and ancestral gods, and are addressed as family. Food, gold (which dragons love, but kobolds seem less keen on), and livestock are typical offerings. Kobolds are quite practical, and they know that dragons don't really appreciate traps, clockwork devices, or well-trained bats.

Some kobolds take to diabolism and worship Asmodeus, the Prince of Devils and Master of Witches. In this sense, they are the perfect pawns: willing to do anything in the hope of power—even selling their souls,

sacrificing their children, or killing indiscriminately when ordered to.

Kobolds also worship Lamashtu, mother of monsters, offering her frequent blood sacrifices and even (it is said) the unhatched eggs of their young. Other stories claim that Lamashtu is the patron goddess of the kobolds, and that she watches over the race to ensure it thrives and multiplies.

Kobold priests tend to emphasize the glories of the afterlife in an effort to instill courage in their followers. Most kobolds are too canny or cowardly to believe that the afterlife is any better than their current existence, and exhortations to sacrifice themselves are usually ignored unless the kobolds' lair or fellows are threatened.

Kobolds have an unhealthy fascination with traps and deadly devices of all kinds: blades, spikes, spears, darts, fire jets, crushing stones, and acid baths are all popular ways for them to defend their homes against bigger and stronger creatures. Although all kobolds are adept at trapmaking, the elders are usually the ones asked to build the deepest pits or the deadliest poison needletraps. Different clans tend to use different styles of devices, and especially successful trap designs are passed down in family lines.

Traps themselves are often combined with ambushes, as no kobold wants to fight an unbloodied foe. Deadfalls, rolling logs or boulders that knock opponents prone, and bear traps that hold a foe in place are the typical traps used in quick ambushes. The last of these is always combined with ranged weapons—while the bear trap holds a leg, kobold slingers finish off the prey.

With more time to prepare, kobolds set up pits with stakes, hidden nets, and oil-slicked fire zones at ambush sites. The traps around a matriarch's nesting ground tend to be layered with poison needles protecting spear traps, pit traps at the end of corridors that release poison gas, falling stones that push foes into spike pits, and so on.

Campaign Role

Kobolds are best played either as skulking, annoying menaces who never fight fair or as comic relief—a race of creatures with a bit of the buffoon about them, always shooting for the moon.

As skulkers and diabolists, they are best never seen immediately, but serve as masterminds buried deep in tunnels and operating through more physically powerful intermediaries. A kobold works through others both because he is weak and because he is a coward.

As comic relief, they make good but completely unreliable minions and servants, scraping and bowing before the obviously more powerful big people, but quick to run off in the night if it suits them. Kobolds are an excellent source of rumors and information, because they are weasely little snitches who try to ingratiate themselves with anyone. They can keep a secret, certainly, but once they decide to spill the beans, they usually seek out someone else who they think might take action.

Kobolds play on their weakness. Most good people hesitate to kill a lone kobold out of hand (considering them not worth the time or otherwise too pitiable), and might even attempt to "reform" the creature. Kobolds know this and use it to manipulate good-aligned characters. They make their weakness into a virtue (although it fuels their impotent rage even further), and they make themselves seem as pathetic and "safe" as possible.

Kobold Slang

Kobolds speak with a high-pitched chatter, and babble on with frequent repetitions. Their version of Common contains many pidgin words and bits of slang, such as the following.

Beards: Dwarves.
Bigfeet: Medium or larger humanoids
Blackeye: Any non-reptilian creature or humanoid.
Eggsucker: A vile insult.
Digger: A bulette.
Ears and Arrows: Elves.
Fight-Fight: An ambush and retreat.
Goldfever: Greed or excessive bravado.
Good-Good: Warmth or thanks
Hatchwit: Young, green, inexperienced
Mother-egg!: An expression of alarm or fear
Redgut: Hunger. "Me have redgut."
Run-Run: Retreat.
Shiny-Shiny: Any treasure.
Slow Fang: A trap.
Snout-Stinks: Orcs.
Stink-Stink: Carrion, or sometimes poison.
Sunmeat: Mammals or prey.
True-Trueblood: A dragon.

Treasure

Kobold treasure tends to include silver, platinum, and mithral coins and jewelry, even more than gold. No one knows why, but they love shining silver and prize it and other silvery metals. Some believe it is used in their magic or religious practices. Others believe that it is simply more beautiful by moonlight or starlight than gold, which looks best in the sun. Their real treasures are tomes of draconic lore written down by kobold scribes who revere every word that patron wyrms speak. Some of these writings go back to ancient times, and much is drivel. Kobolds keep all of it as holy writ and recite the best bits of any day's utterings among themselves. This drives dragons crazy.

In addition, kobolds have good tools and mechanisms for mining, pumping, smelting, and carrying. Occasionally, a suit of bulette armor (as hide armor, but granting a +4 armor bonus), made from a particularly beloved bulette, can be found in a kobold lair. Kobolds also make exceptional fire- and lightning-proof dragon-scale armor, made from a tribe's "god" who dies before its time, but more often from a metallic dragon instead.

Finally, kobolds make excellent traps and devices, such as timers, clockworks, and even constructs. These devices rely on very small gears and springs that kobold claws and fingers can manipulate much more readily than the fat fingers of humans and dwarves.

Variants

While most kobolds are red, green, blue, or black in coloration, a few among them exhibit powerful abilities based on the color of their scales. These truly exceptional specimens are admired by their kin and often rise to positions of power and authority in the tribe. None of these exceptional kobolds are powerful enough to have higher CRs, but they are slightly superior to their kin nonetheless.

Black: Widely dispersed in forests, swamps, and underground, the black-scaled kobolds are better swimmers than their brethren and gain a +4 racial bonus on Swim checks.

Blue: The blue variant of kobolds appears most often within tribes dominated by other scale colors. They are said to be among the best diabolists and schemers, and gain a +1 inherent bonus to their Wisdom. Many are powerful clerics of Asmodeus.

Green: These are the standard forest kobolds, well camouflaged in leafy undergrowth. They gain an additional +4 racial bonus on Hide checks.

Red: These kobolds are pyromaniacs and make extensive use of fire, especially the alchemical and magical kinds. These kobolds gain a +2 bonus to the DC of any spell they cast with the fire subtype and a +2 bonus on saves made against fear effects. Most are a bit more arrogant than average kobolds.

White: Like the blues, white-scaled kobolds are a little less frequent than other types. They are often powerful sorcerers, gaining a +1 bonus to the DC of any spell they cast with the cold subtype and a +1 inherent bonus to their Charisma.

In addition to these, the kobolds of Golarion sometimes hatch out a throwback to their draconic ancestors. These are the dragonbreath kobolds, who share the ability of the chromatic dragons to breathe acid, cold, electricity, fire, or poisonous gas. They can breathe in 15-foot lines or 10-foot cones once per round as a move action, forcing a DC 13 Reflex save for half damage. Those who fail the saving throw take 1d8 points of damage. After using their breath weapons, dragonbreath kobolds must wait 1d4 rounds before using them again. These kobolds are CR 1.

As sneaky nocturnal creatures with a huge streak of cowardice, kobolds make decent rogues and assassins. A society of such assassins exists in Golarion; the call themselves the Dragonblood Circle and serve the will of Zon-Kuthon. This group of kobolds communicates by bat messenger and travels by boar from settlement to settlement, carrying messages and news between the larger tribes and hiring itself out to take revenge on those who oppose the rulership of dragons and their kin. Dragonblood Circle members typically disguise themselves as gnomes or halflings to spread the blame for their acts of arson, murder, or extortion to others.

Kobolds in Golarion

In Golarion, kobolds are scavengers, miners, and minions for more powerful creatures. They spy out rich caravans for the plucking, they dig to steal the ore and ingots from dwarven mines, and they are generally pests. Their numbers and quick rate of reproduction help them survive.

Most Golarion kobolds fall into two categories: the wild forest kobolds who plague every deep woodland, and the deep-mining kobolds who live in (or rather under) every area of rich mineral wealth. In both groups, infighting is constant and harmony elusive.

The surface regions where kobolds are found in the greatest numbers include the forests near the Five Kings Mountains and within the Lands of the Linnorm Kings. The kobolds with the largest mines and the largest numbers of bulette are those under western Andoran and eastern Cheliax. Many of the River Kingdoms suffer from kobold problems as well, where they are often called "river kobolds" for their habit of burrowing in riverbanks and in hills with a view or overlook.

As for cities beneath the earth, it's anyone's guess where they might be, although the number of raiders suggests that at least one lies beneath northern Osirion. Some stories there do tell of a time when the pharaohs enslaved kobolds by the tens of thousands, and a breed of desert kobolds that can walk fearlessly under the sun is part of that region's legends.

Names

Kobolds tend to take names that sound dragon-like or draw sounds from impressive-sounding Draconic words.

Male: Andrek, Arzhun, Eepo, Franj, Kander, Kapmek, Kerrack, Kerrdremak, Koner, Lekmek, Mandrek, Merlokrep, Mipo, Sinder, Yagrik

Female: Alloneek, Epina, Feshto, Feepwin, Greska, Grusta, Gwelly, Kally, Kapmeek, Kissgo, Lemmeek, Mekapa, Mollish, Shondra, Sindra, Vreggma

Kobold

Their eyes are red, and that's all that most people see of kobolds. Their large hands and blunt reptilian snouts are revealed only at night, usually hidden deep below the earth, or concealed underneath folds of clothing to avoid the sun. Their scales vary from black to reddish and even white or green. Their voices bark and chatter, and their footfalls are silent in the dark.

KOBOLD **CR 1/4**

Male kobold warrior 1

Usually LE Small humanoid (reptilian)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 14
(+2 armor, +1 Dex, +1 natural, +1 size)

hp 4 (1d8)

Fort +2, **Ref** +1, **Will** –1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee spear +1 (1d6–1/×3)

Ranged sling +3 (1d3–1)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

Before Combat Kobolds begin a fight by slinging bullets, closing only when they can see that their foes have been weakened. Whenever they can, kobolds set up ambushes near trapped areas.

During Combat Kobolds fight from behind traps, cover, small tunnels, and larger monsters—anything that might help them survive. They are not brave except in large numbers.

Morale Kobolds like to attack with overwhelming odds—at least two to one—or trickery; should the odds fall below this threshold, they usually flee. They attack gnomes on sight, however, even if their numbers are equal.

STATISTICS

Str 9, **Dex** 13, **Con** 10, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +1; **Grp** –4

Feats Alertness

Skills Craft (trapmaking) +2, Hide +6, Listen +2, Move Silently +2, Profession (miner) +2, Search +2, Spot +2

Languages Common, Draconic

SQ daylight weakness

Gear leather armor, sling, spear, trapmaking tools

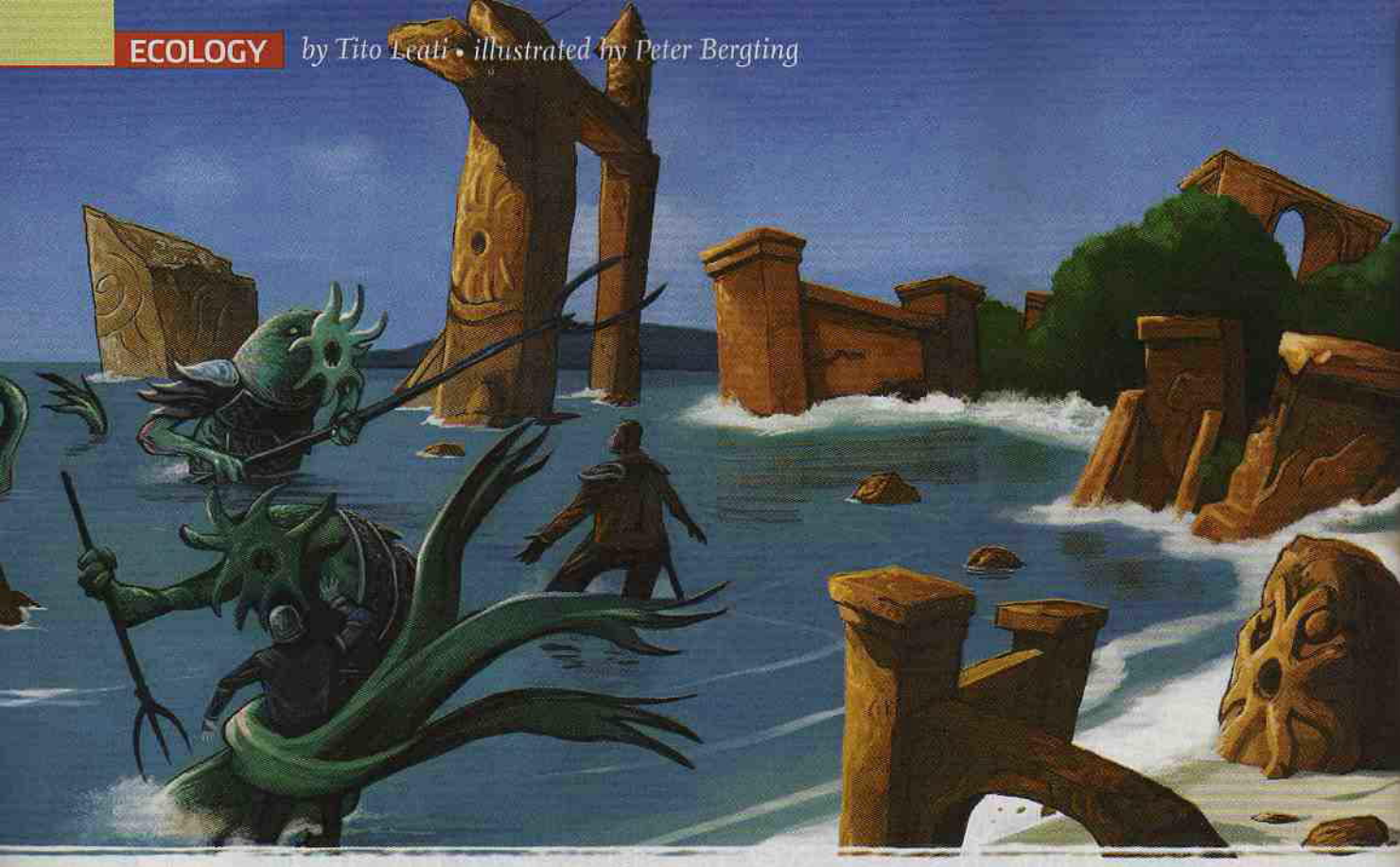
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Light Sensitivity (Ex) Kobolds are dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Skills Kobolds have a +2 racial bonus on Craft (trapmaking), Profession (miner), and Search checks.

The deadfall was the first sign. Then the pits of sharpened stone, the floors caked in ooze, and that swinging contraption made from our missing pickaxes. And that was all before we even saw the first kobold. And he just laughed.

by Tito Leati • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE KOPRU

"Who can fathom the depths of the abyss?"
—Ecclesiastes

A monstrous mix of human, eel, squid, and lamprey, koprus are deep-dwelling amphibians of evil disposition and appearance. Uncivilized and savage, koprus dwell under the sea, roaming submerged caverns and ruins. They are rarely seen above the surface, but sometimes they emerge from the watery depths and saltwater pits of ancient coastal cities to prey on the local population. Whether these creatures have goals beyond their hunger for live flesh is a mystery. It is rumored, though, that koprus were once a civilized and powerful race ruled by a caste of sorceress-matrons and fanatically devoted to Demogorgon, the Prince of Demons.

HISTORY OF THE KOPRU

Although they have regressed to a primitive state, koprus were once part of a great civilization comprised of a multitude of city-states across the oceans of the world. More than three thousand years ago, these twisted, aquatic cities were founded at the time of a great proliferation of the kopru race, which coincided with an abundant growth of their basic food source, a particular species of clam mollusk called kopura. At that time, the largest of the kopura were imbued with demonic magic by early kopru shamans, who cultivated a fiendish specimen sacred to Demogorgon. These fiendish clams invariably produced black pearls of great size and value, used by the kopru shamans to work dark magic. The shamans founded a class of ruling nobility, and kopru power swiftly

spread throughout the oceans with the rise of thousands of city-states in the following centuries.

Although the first kopru nobles were male shamans, the physically stronger and sorcery-attuned females soon took charge, and the government of the city-states developed as a form of matriarchate, an oligarchy of noble families headed by the eldest female member. Wherever they ruled, koprus enslaved masses of primitive sahuagin, locathah, and sea elves, which they captured in hunting raids and subjugated with their domination ability. The kopru forged occasional alliances with kuo-toas but were almost always in conflict with ixitxachitls. They fought ritual wars with neighboring city-states and periodically sacrificed slaves to two supernatural entities, which they believed to be the creators of their race: Prukal, the Dark Globe, and Shothotugg, the Great Whirlpool.

About two thousand years ago, the kopru were at the peak of their civilization and were among the most powerful marine races of the world—exceeded only by the deeper-dwelling aboleths. A sudden, unexplained disease caused the koprus' kopura food source to diminish, resulting in a severe shortage. This famine, coupled with the depletion of other marine resources, marked the beginning of their decline.

The kopru grew increasingly greedy and angry, and they developed cruel eating habits. To survive the famine, they killed and devoured their slaves, and in some cases members of the nobility practiced cannibalism on lesser kopru. Wars erupted among bordering city-states, and strife grew between kopru nobles and commoners, until a great rebellion of slaves finally caused the destruction of most of the undersea city-states about fifteen-hundred years ago. Nobles were hunted and mercilessly

KNOWLEDGE OF THE KOPRU

The following table shows the result of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to koprus. Members of aquatic races, veteran sailors, and natives of remote islands most commonly possess this information. The kopru appears on page 134 of *Monster Manual II*.

Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
16	Koprus are deep-dwelling monsters with eel-like bodies and humanoid torsos. They are savage, cunning, and terrible to behold.
21	Koprus are mainly driven by hunger and the will to survive. Aside from powerful claws and tails, their gazes can bend others to do their will.
26	Koprus are the descendants of a fallen ancient civilization that once spanned the oceans. The fall of that culture has left them scattered and largely disorganized.
31	Rumors exist of koprus with deformed skulls, five-digit talons, and exceptionally large eyes. These koprus comprise a special caste of highly intelligent specimens that once ruled their ancient civilization.
36	Koprus actively worship Demogorgon. As servants of the Prince of Demons, they often have demonic allies and fiendish weapons.

slain by both their rebellious slaves and vindictive subjects. Kopru society fell to ruins. As other marine races occupied their territories, the few surviving kopru went into hiding in remote depths.

Today, kopru ruins are remembered as drowned places of great woe and slaughter, and have been abandoned and shunned ever since. Only the savage descendants of the kopru of old return to the places of their former glory, both to seek refuge from their enemies and to relieve the insane melancholia that constantly torments them.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE KOPRU

The serpentine body of the average kopru is 9 feet long and weighs 300 pounds. A humanlike torso with a large, anguilliform head and two muscular, spine-covered arms extends down into a powerful tail that splits into three flexible tentacles. Kopru hands have four webbed and clawed fingers, useful for swimming but as dexterous as any landdweller's—perhaps even more so. Their skin varies from tones of gray to blue, green, and orange, and is thick and oily like a whale's, providing excellent protection from the elements. Upon their forward-jutting heads, koprus' bulging eyes resemble polished orbs of mother-of-pearl protected by heavy, wrinkled lids. Below, the mouth is a fanged orifice surrounded by four to eight prehensile tentacles, a number that differs depending on breeding and regional variation. An average specimen lives for fifty years.

Once a year, female koprus lay three to five eggs, which need a very warm environment to hatch. For this reason, koprus usually mate in tropical regions, and the females look for hot springs or sulfuric waters to lay their fecundated eggs. Koprus enjoy bathing in such hot water and can tolerate boiling temperatures without harm, sealing their eyes, nostrils, and gills if fully immersed. Koprus have both gills and lungs, although these organs are atrophied in some regional breeds (see the Amphibious Kopru sidebar). They are excellent swimmers but are extremely clumsy out of the water, where they must slither and crawl using their tail and hands.

KOPRU MAGIC

Koprus practice strange magic drawing upon the powers of their fiendish patrons.

KOPRU SKULL DEFORMATION

The young of kopru nobles were once deformed in order to enhance their strength and intellect, making them so-called "high skull" kopru. Although forgotten by most of the race, a few surviving nobles still engage in this practice. The effects of skull deformation result in the following traits (in addition to their modifiers for size and advancement) and related changes to a kopru's statistics. Only a kopru who underwent the proper rituals soon after birth can benefit from these alterations.

Size: Large.
Hit Dice: 12 HD.
Abilities: +2 Dexterity, +4 Intelligence, +4 Charisma.
CR: 9.

KOPURA SHELLS

Large, black clams filled with bitter, Hell-red meat, many kopru spellcasters employ kopura shells in their magic. Any spell with the evil descriptor cast using a koprua shell as an additional material component has its effective caster level increased by +2. The shell is destroyed in the spell's casting. Koprua shells are exceeding rare and cost upward of 100 gp.

In ancient times, kopru nobles customarily practiced skull deformation as a sign of noble status, enhancing newborns both physically and mentally. The deformation allowed the newborn to grow bigger through a program of hypernutrition. Being more intelligent and stronger than their lesser brethren, noble, or "high skull," koprus were natural leaders and ruled without opposition for more than a thousand years.

Koprus are capable of speech, but infrequently do so. On the rare occasions they do vocalize, their words are ugly strings of halting gasps, hisses, and belches. Among their own kind they communicate through their gazes—an eerie, completely silent form of communication. Noble koprus, thanks to their skull deformation and larger eyes, seem able to perform more elaborate communication.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE KOPRU

Their ancient civilization shattered, most kopru live alone or in small bands, caring only about survival. While dangerous predators and fearsome combatants, melancholia has become a common problem among koprus, which show a distinctive maniacal-depressive behavioral pattern. When not pushed by hunger, most koprus lie inactive in their lairs for weeks, a factor that contributes to their inability to rebuild anything of their past splendor. Koprus almost never wear clothing or jewelry, but practice tattooing and piercing with bone instruments and ornaments. They can wield weapons but rarely do so.

At the time of the city-states, kopru commoners, the so-called "low skulls," lived under the strict regulations ruled out by their dominating caste, the "high skulls." The matriarchal oligarchy of the koprus was a trapezoidal-pyramidal scheme of ruling families, with a small group at the top and a much larger number near the bottom. The "high skulls" had different levels of influence and prestige, depending on the number of individuals in their service and on their degree of affiliation to the colleges of shamans and sorcerers. "Low skulls," on the other hand, were all the same, with little influence and voice.

Kopru commoners built houses, palaces, and temples, tended the kopura vats, and fought in slave raids and ritual wars between city-states—mock wars where every death was considered a sacrifice to Demogorgon. They were allowed to mate and reproduce, but they could not form named families on their own and could typically only earn respect through combat in ritual warfare.

In kopru noble families, the matriarchs ruled as ruthless tyrants, constantly fomenting strife among their subjects to divide and rule them more easily. Their prestige in kopru society was the highest, and they were chosen among the females of a house for their might as sorceresses. The exclusively male college of shamans was the other, equally potent power in the city-state. Although they had a great degree of freedom in their matters, the shamans were considered the voices of Demogorgon and, when organized, could cow even the matriarchs.

At the bottom of the social ladder were the masses of nonkopru slaves, who had no rights whatsoever and were doomed to lifelong exploitation.

Koprus were very observant of the superstitious practices linked to Prukal and Shothotugg, the Dark Globe and the Great Whirlpool of their mythology. More than "real" deities, Prukal and Shothotugg represented darkness and water, or the "qualities" of the Abyss, and were believed to be the parents of Demogorgon. According to kopru legends, Prukal manifests at sunset above the sky, enclosing the entire world in darkness for the night. The stars are holes punched through Prukal when it was wounded by the light beyond. This happened the day land emerged from the sea-covered world, confining the power of the koprus to just a portion of the world. The matter that once filled the holes fell unto the world as dark dust, which transformed the kopura. Since then, fiendish kopura have supplied the kopru with powerful black pearls made of Prukal's own substance, which are capable of incredible dark magic. As such, koprus love the darkness of the ocean depths and hate any form of skylight. They are almost never seen above the surface during the day, and they prefer moonless, starless nights to emerge for any reason. Koprus consider starlight a cursed element and mark themselves with special, star-shaped tattoos to neutralize its influence.

The other primeval deity of the kopru, Shothotugg, symbolizes both their favorite element and their greatest supernatural faculty. Koprus believe that Shothotugg lives in large underground basins and the deepest of pits. Shothotugg's chaotic whirling is where everything originates and where everything must return. The day the first kopru city state of Shotho'Kopur was founded, the shamans performed a massive sacrifice, dropping tons of treasure and hundreds of victims into a great chasm on the bottom of the sea. In return, Shothotugg granted the koprus their ability to dominate sentient beings with their hypnotic gaze. Nowadays, koprus still make similar sacrifices on much smaller scales and out of sheer superstition.

Although the vast majority of koprus seen today are round-headed "low skulls," a few surviving nobles are rumored to live under the ruins of some cities, where they have renewed the traditions of their race and rediscovered many secrets of their ancestors. Having shaken off their racial melancholia, these "high skulls" even dream of restoring the might of their ancient civilization. Regardless of caste, all koprus revere Demogorgon and, if called to his service, answer with the fervor of true fanatics.

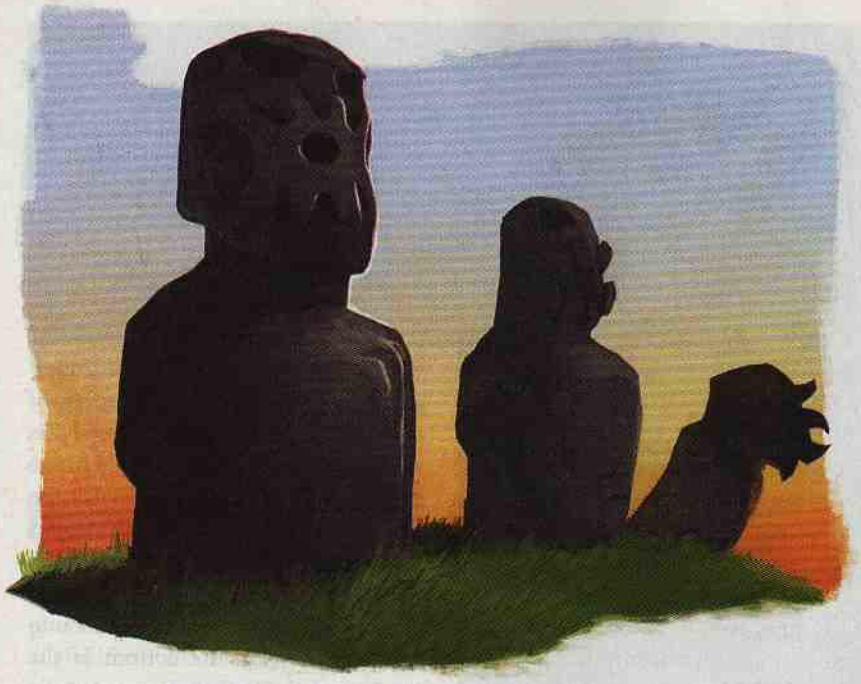
AMPHIBIOUS KOPRU

Koprus are a disparate race, with wide regional variations in color, number of tentacles, and ability to function on land. While some deep-dwelling koprus live their whole lives beneath the surface (like those presented in *Monster Manual II*), those who lurk near islands, in marshes, or underground might make regular forays out of the water. Such coastal koprus usually possess the amphibious trait, although it makes them no more adept at moving on land. This addition does not change a kopru's CR or any other abilities.

Amphibious (Ex): Although koprus are aquatic, they can survive indefinitely on land.

KOPRU RUINS

Kopru ruins lie in many places at the bottom of the oceans. They are huge complexes of palaces, pyramidal temples, lesser houses, and large squares, now reduced to heaps of salt-encrusted rubble covered with seaweed, coral, and anemones. A decorative theme common to all kopru architecture is the depiction of the kopru head. Kopru heads were sometimes carved into colossal proportions, like the 40-foot-tall ones sometimes found on coastlines near areas of kopru influence. Sometimes heads are carved in ivory, coral, and amber, or



have details in mother-of-pearl, jade, and other semiprecious materials. These heads are often larger than life-size, and can have incredible value as art objects.

THE CULT OF DEMOGORGON

In ancient times, koprus worshiped Demogorgon extensively, and their shamans formed an organized clergy at the service of the Prince of Demons and his supposed progenitors. The adepts were invariably male, and the most powerful among them were able to summon the Prince of Demons in a way that their body merged with Demogorgon's essence. When this happened, the kopru shamans permanently transformed into hideous, two-headed mutants who were actually aspects of Demogorgon himself (see "City of Broken Idols" in *Dungeon* #145).

Sacrifices in the name of Prukal—Demogorgon's mother in kopru mythology—took place on special occasions, such as celebrations, the conclusion of a successful slave raid, the end of ritual war between two city-states, or the annual laying of eggs by a matriarch. The sacrifices were held atop great basalt pyramids, which were invariably topped by apparatuses used to crush the victims. The apparatus looked like a large amber cylinder with a descending stone piston, which pushed down the millstone on creatures trapped inside. After the death of the victims, the millstone was raised and the shamans would foresee the future through the bloodstains on the calendar stone's surface.

The pyramids were usually built over a deep undersea pit, where weekly sacrifices were done in the name of Shothotugg—Demogorgon's other mother. These pits were connected to nearly bottomless undersea rifts. The treasure cast into the pits was considered taboo, and whomever tried to recover it was immediately put to death, be it a noble, commoner, slave, or foreigner.

ADVANCED KOPRU

Oleklan is the priestess of a group of koprus who rediscovered the traditions of their race in the labyrinths under Shotho'Kopur. Her skull was deformed at birth by an incredibly old kopru, probably an undead survivor of the original kopru civilization. During her life, Oleklan has ritually deformed the skull of about thirty other koprus, effectively creating a new noble family, whose female members are already showing sorcerous talent. Oleklan has also recruited about two-hundred normal koprus, forming one of the largest organized groups since the fall of the city-states. Up until now, the aging Oleklan has cared only about the survival and prosperity of her family, but her sons have resumed active worship of Demogorgon and might be planning some greater evil already.

KOPRU PROPHECIES

Kopru writing was a clumsy, loose, and rarely used ideographic code with hundreds of thousands of complex symbols spread throughout the various city-states across the world. This writing system is today undecipherable without the help of magic, and has been long forgotten by the kopru themselves. Numbers, on the other hand, were strictly codified in handy ciphers by kopru law. These numbers were engraved on the calendar millstones used by the shamans to crush sacrifice victims and perform divinations. The way the victim's blood stained the numbers on the stone's surface was the omen the shamans needed to foresee the future.

Having a strong oracular tradition, kopru shamans often recorded their perceptions of the future in the same way other civilizations might recount the past. Thus, much of kopru artwork—mostly being elaborate bas-reliefs and heads—have dates, either in the past or future, incorporated into them. As the kopru calendar begins with the founding of their first and greatest city-state, Shotho'Kopur (nearly 13,600 years ago), every date measures from that time. For example, a massive onyx relief drug from kopru ruins off the coast of Keoland and now hanging in the Gradsul library shows horrible twin serpents breaking from an egg covered in continents and screaming humanoids. Symbols depicting the number 13,597 circle the work.

OLEKLAN **CR 12**

Female advanced kopru sorcerer 7
CE Large monstrous humanoid (aquatic)
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +5, Spot +10
Languages Aquan, Common

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15
hp 134 hp (17 HD)
Fort +9, **Ref** +16, **Will** +15

Speed 5 ft. (1 square); swim 40 ft.

ARABIC	ROMAN	KOPRU
0	none	kopru's skull
1	I	black pearl
2	II	eyes
3	III	tail
4	IV	mouth
5	V	noble hand
10	X	bowed pearl
50	L	bowed hand
100	C	bobbled pearl
500	D	bobbled hand
1,000	M	whirlpool
/	none	slash

SAMPLE NUMBERS	
11	
24	
1,142	
4,898	
27,753	
1,456,027	
2,562,253,151	

KOPRU NUMBERS

The kopru numerical system is a hybrid of Roman (prevalent) and Arabic. Numbers are written as the Roman ones with the following exceptions:

1) A "zero" symbol exists, although it is used only to indicate "0" and multiples of thousands, millions, and billions (see below).
2) Special symbols for "2," "3," and "4" exist. They are used only as the unit digits when a number (or prefix, see below) ends with them (i.e., "234" or "13," but not "16" or "39").
3) To make unit digits from "6" to "9," the symbols for 1" and "5" are used as in the Roman system.
4) When more than one "M" symbol is needed, multiple thousands are showed by a prefix number separated by a slash, which represents thousands, millions, and billions.
5) Multiple thousands, millions, and billions are written in a Roman/Arabic way, putting the "zero" symbol after a normal number for thousands, millions, and billions each in the prefix before the slash (in much the same way as a comma is used).

Melee tail slap +22 (1d8+8), and 2 claws +20 (1d6+4), and bite +20 (1d6+4)
Base Atk +15; Grp +27
Atk Options constrict 4d6+12, improved grab
Special Actions dominate person
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds, wand of magic missile* (5th)
Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 7th)
3rd—(5/day) *haste, hold person* (DC 19)
2nd—(7/day) *detect thoughts* (DC 16), *invisibility, Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 18)
1st—(7/day) *charm person* (DC 17), *identify, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement* (DC 15), *shield*
0—(6/day) *dancing lights, detect poison, detect magic, light, ghost sound, mage hand, prestidigitation*

Abilities Str 26, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 19
SQ amphibious
Feats Ability Focus (dominate person), Combat Reflexes, Greater Spell Focus (enchantment), Iron Will, Multiattack, Spell Focus (enchantment)
Skills Bluff +14, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +18, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +8, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Search +13, Spellcraft +20, Spot +10 Swim +18
Possessions combat gear plus *ring of Dexterity +4* (as *gloves of Dexterity*), *ring of protection +2*

Constrict (Ex) With a successful grapple check, Oleklan can constrict a grabbed opponent, dealing 4d6+12 points of bludgeoning damage.
Improved Grab (Ex) If Oleklan hits an opponent of her own size or smaller, she deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If she wins the grapple check, she establishes a hold and con constrict.
Dominate Person (Su) Once per day, Oleklan can produce an effect like that of a *dominate person* spell (caster level 10th, Will save DC 16), except that the range is 180 feet and the duration is eight days.
Amphibious (Ex) Although koprus are aquatic, they can survive indefinitely on land.

The Ecology of the Korred

The wild lives of the Dancing Folk

by Ed Greenwood

In the northern Realms, the tale of Olithard's Tune is well-known and often heard around a taproom hearth or barracks-board, when the night is old and the drink running low. Elminster tells me he lacks the proper storyteller's flair, and I can't even come close to *his* melodious voice and the perfect mimicry of various beast calls and accents he used, so here's a bare-bones summary of the tale:

Olithard was an indifferent bladesman and a capable but half-hearted thief — who longed to become a bard. His tongue was nimble, his wits quick, he could carry a tune, and he loved to pipe airs on his flute. Often, he sat in gardens or woody glades and piped for hours, lost in thought, barely noticing the occasional curious stare, copper piece, or kick aimed his way, He dreamed of entrancing courts and serenading ladies by moonlight with a magical harp, being called on by kings to write the lays of their lives, being looked up to by other harpists, and having his name writ in the Roll of the Remembered after he was gone. "That song was written by the great Olithard," he often said to an imaginary audience as he set down his flute. Yes. He would be a bard, and a great one.

When he at length scraped together a fistful of gems (enough, he hoped), he set out from Silverymoon south into the vast forests, seeking a college of bards that he had heard of, determined to learn all the old songs and how to play the harp. He walked alone, awed by the beauty of the woods but unfamiliar with their ways — and was soon hopelessly lost. Weeks passed as he wandered in the unending shade, until he lost track of his journey days.

One night he sat playing his flute while he pondered (for he was too naive to fear attracting attention to himself), when he found his song answered. He was playing along, working harmony, before he fully realized that another flute was being played nearby!

He trilled, and the other flute answered, echoing his own. Then it piped short, sharp, rapid calls, like an anxious bird — followed by silence. Olithard matched the piping, and was answered again, a little faster. He stayed with the unknown piper this time, faster and faster, falling into a rapid, swirling rhythm of little runs and slurs. The tempo picked up again, and another piper joined in. Olithard thought with leaping hope that he had stumbled upon the bards he sought, and played on like a man possessed, as more pipers joined in and the music rushed its crazy tune to pounding speed. Olithard's head swam, he breathed in hoots and gasps, and his fingers hurt and yearned to fall off — then the music rose into one eerie shriek and ended. Panting, Olithard let fall

his flute, head spinning, exhausted — too exhausted to run when suddenly he was surrounded by bearded, grinning faces — belonging to cloven-hooved creatures no higher than his belt, with blue-black hair hanging in wild manes all about their heads. He groaned as the weird creatures loomed over him, cudgels in hand, and fell into darkness.

When he awoke, with a splitting headache, it was morning. Of the horrible creatures there was no sign — but in front of his nose was a pile of gleaming gold shears, daggers, bowls, and coins. Atop the pile was his flute. And scratched in the dirt was an arrow and the words: "Silvery-moon — go."

It is generally agreed that Olithard (who went on to become a respected and skilled songsmith and bard) met with a band of dancing korreds, the strange "dancing folk" of the forests. Little is known of them, but I put Elminster to work and have boiled his findings down to the notes below.

Korreds are curious folk indeed to humans, who tend to lump them together with the fey, dangerous creatures of the woods and wilderlands (like satyrs, grugach, leprechauns, and pixies) that are best avoided. This is wise policy, for korreds dislike and fear intruders, and entrap them (usually in deadfalls, pits, and snares, but sometimes in ambushes — then, korreds favor rocky places where they may use stones as both weapons and shields through use of their spell-like powers over stone). Intruders who are favored, who are considered dangerous to harm because of retaliatory consequences, or who are obviously harmless are carried away to some lost, remote place and set free (usually separated from captured companions, if any). Captives are always shorn of their hair, which the korreds use to make ropes (see below).

Korreds prefer to live in woodlands or rolling, rocky, forested country, and dwell in well-hidden underground caverns and lairs, which they can literally seal off whenever intruders come near. If intruders persist, the korreds magically dig themselves away from the area without ever emerging aboveground. It is very rare for the precise location of such a lair to be divined, because there are always guards posted to watch for intruders. Korreds may dwell in colonies of up to a hundred, but almost always a hunting band of 1-4 adults is encountered, for these range far afield in search of food. Female korreds, like female dwarves, are bearded and maned with hair, and are difficult to distinguish from the males (although a korred can readily tell the difference). Korreds trap small game with animated hair-snares and club it to death, and slay bigger game by animating rocks as weapons. Korreds pair to have a child and remain together until birth is imminent, whereupon the mother-to-be literally "goes to earth." There she is fed by the hunting of others as she rests underground until the child is born. In large communities, elders take care of the young korreds and educate them, and the mothers return to hunting. Korreds may pair with several other korreds over the years to produce various children, or remain together in a stable pair. Korreds often do not hunt or live directly with their chosen mates.

Korreds are primarily hunters and fishermen, using magical nets of woven hair in lakes, coastal waters, and rivers or mountain streams. They also collect the edible fungi of the deep caverns as a staple, and gather woodland berries of all sorts to mash and ferment (in large stone vats) into a potent red wine.

Korreds are independent, but all obey without question the commands of their god, Tapann (see below) and his servitors — Jambul, Hrressek, Tishlun and Bresk are four of the most famous of these. They also respect and revere the thoughts and advice of community elders, but are only punished for disobedience to elders if such disobedience seriously and willfully endangers other korreds.

Korreds worship Tapann, the eldest and wisest of korreds — Tapann the Undying, the Father of the Dance — but they do not have an organized priesthood with shamans, clerics, or spells granted by Tapann. Instead, once every seven days (or more often in times of gratitude or need), communities of korreds worship Tapann together through dance.

Korreds dance in solitude as a form of self-calming and relaxation, or in asking Tapann for a sign to guide them in making a decision or plan, but once a week they gather with all other korreds in the vicinity and join in a religious, magical "circle dance." Korreds unable to dance due to infancy or infirmity are carried along to observe.

A circle dance is performed in a woodland glade, clearing, or hilltop, or where there are none to be found, in circles created by raising stones of great size to stand in an open circle. The circle may be of any size, depending upon the number of korreds, and the dance is performed to the music of the slap-drum (an instrument of hide stretched over a circular frame, struck with a fist or open hand) and bone flute (hollow bones holed so as to produce a variety of tones when differing combinations of holes are covered with the fingers), and the humming and exultant wailing of the korreds themselves (the korred musicians always dance unless physically unable). The dance begins casually and builds as more korreds join in and the tempo and noise increase. Elder korreds of a community serve as leaders, and after casual, free-form beginnings to the dance, the dancers begin to move in unison, following the leader's movements with (to human eyes) uncanny precision, building to a wild frenzy that always ends with a unison shout (often heard echoing across wastelands at night by travelers) and a collapse to the ground. After a time of rest, the dancers usually dine on berry

Contents of a korred pouch

Item	Chance of finding in pouch
Hair (of various creatures and differing quantities)	80%
Shears* (of iron, steel, bronze, or silver-plated iron)	70%
Dagger* (varying quality and makes)	30%
Whetstone* (rough, irregular)	90%
Skin of water, 1 quart	96%
Skin of berry wine, 1 quart	40%
Berries, 2-6 cups	50%
Berry bowl, wood or stone*	99%**
Meat (various sorts)	30%
Cheese (goat's or cow's)	10%
Coins* seized from captives (1-20, all types possible, usually mixed types)	10%
Gems* (cut, 1-6, all types possible, seized from captives)	3%
Gemstones* (uncut, 1-12, all types possible, found in rock by korreds)	35%
Slap-drum (circular wooden hoop covered with stretched hide)	52%
Bone flute (hollow bone pierced with finger-holes)	73%
Leather thongs, 1-4 in number, up to 3' long	62%
Hide (cured or uncured, one large beast, uncut)	22%
Hide (cured, small scraps or complete hides of small creatures	53%
Bone needles, 1-6 in number	19%

* Potentially of alunrum (33% chance)
** (100% if berries carried)

wine and the roasted flesh of livestock or forest creatures such as bear, deer, and wolf, slain by bands of korreds hunting or animating rocks as deadfalls.

The circle dance drains vitality from korreds; indeed, aged or mortally injured korreds strive to "dance to death," considering it an honor. Each turn a korred dances, 1 hp is lost — and even more is lost (1 hp/round) from non-korreds who join the dance (including captives). This life-force is used to raise a *sending* to Tapann, who may appear to aid his people by healing the sick, advising korreds, fighting for them, or working with them. (Forest folk such as satyrs, pixies, brownies, and the like are drained by a circle dance as korreds are, not at the greater rate suffered by non-woodland creatures.) There is a base 4% chance that Tapann will appear at the "shout" of a circle dance (8% if more than 66 korreds are dancing in unison). If a korred is slain while in a circle dance, Tapann is 33% likely to appear; destruction of the circle by moving or destroying a stone or stones (or causing a tree to fall into the glade) adds a further 5% probability of his appearance. Unless prevented from doing so, korreds always bury any korreds who die or are slain at a circle dance.

Korreds speak their alignment tongue, common speech, and usually a smattering of other woodland tongues (brownie, centaur, dryad, satyr, sprite, sylph) and dwarvish or gnome. Tapann and his servitors can employ *tongues* at will. Korred have an average strength range of 19-21 (typically 20); elders have a strength of 19. Their intelligence range is 11-12 (elders usually have 13).

TAPANN ***("The Horned Dancer" or "The Horned Leaper")***

Lesser *god*

ARMOR CLASS: *-4*
MOVE: *16"*
HIT POINTS: *260*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*
DAMAGE/ATTACKS: *2-12 (plus strength bonus) or by weapon (plus strength bonus)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Laugh, rock throwing*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *50%*
SIZE: *M (6' tall)*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic neutral*
WORSHIPERS ALIGN: *Chaotic neutral (korreds)*
SYMBOL: *Laughing mouth*
PLANE: *Limbo*
CLERIC/DRUID: *30th-level cleric/ 16th-level druid*
FIGHTER: *15th-level fighter*
MAGIC-USER/ILLUSIONIST: *16th-level illusionist*
THIEF/ASSASSIN: *Nil*
MONK/BARD: *Nil*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *II*
S: 22 (+4, +10) I: 20 W: 17
D: 25 C: 25 CH: 19 (25 to korreds)

Tappan appears as a 6'-tall male korred, bearing a cudgel. He wears a rough tunic of bearskin or owlbear hide, a belt, and a pouch containing locks of his own hair, a pair of silver shears (damage 1d8, plus strength bonus if wielded by Tapann), and 2-6 steel vials of *holy water.*

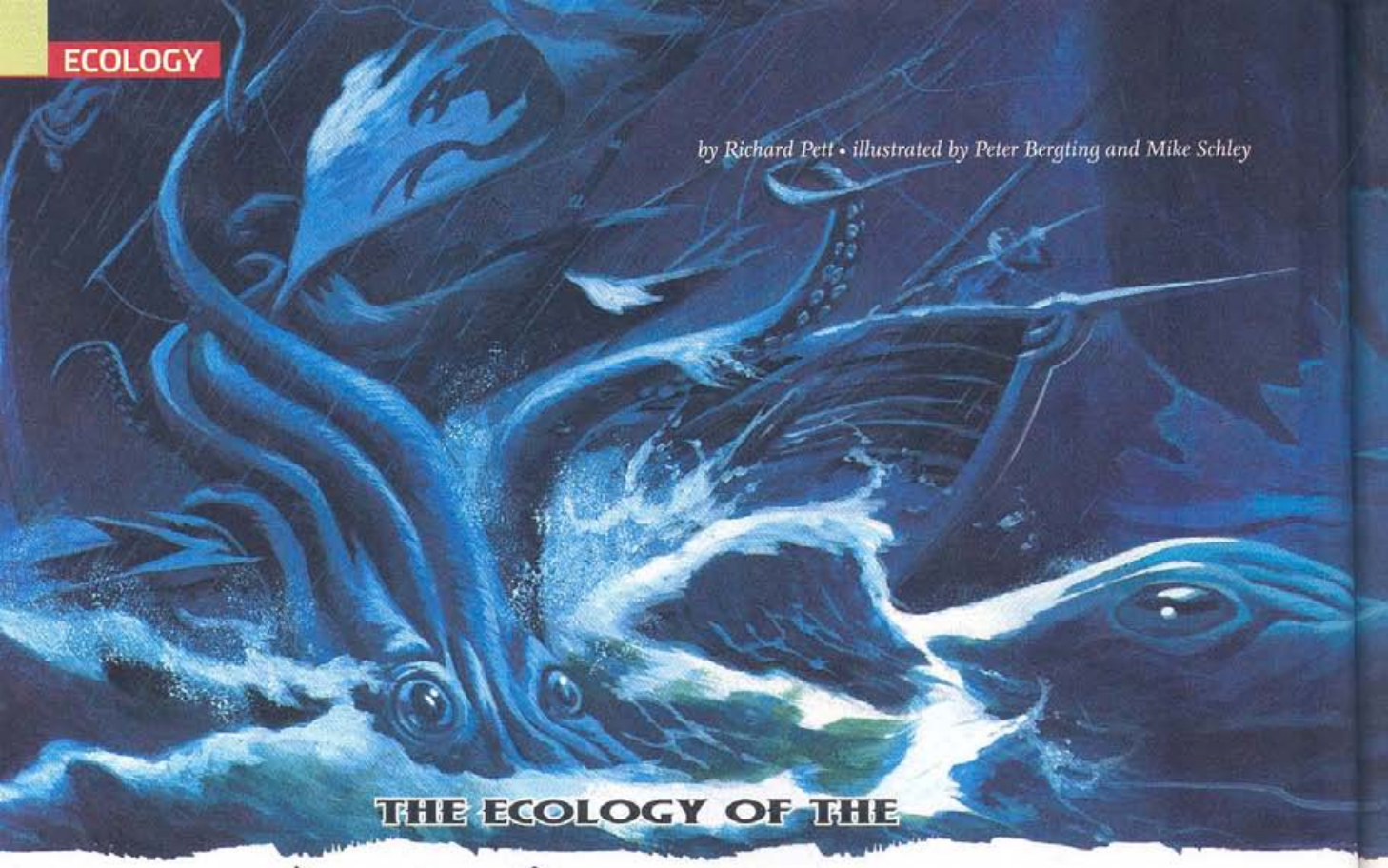
Although his abode is a hill studded with standing stones in Limbo, Tapann spends much of his time on the Prime Material Plane, for he may journey thence whenever he hears the hooves and music of korreds dancing in worship. He actively aids his people on many occasions and may fight with his shears, his cudgel (damage 1d12, plus strength bonus), or bare hands to aid them — although he prefers to utilize certain magical powers, primarily his *laugh* (usable at will, but Tapann can never *laugh* on successive rounds, so that each *laugh* is preceeded and followed by a round in which he does not *laugh),* which causes creatures within 9" to be *stunned* (0l-60%), *feebleminded* (61-71%), affected by *reverse gravity* lasting two rounds (72-82%), or (83-00%) as if by an *Otto's irresistable dance* spell for 3-8 rounds (save vs. breath weapon at -6 to avoid these effects). Creatures caused to dance by Tapann's *laugh* cannot move about but are forced to remain, dancing, within 1" of their location when affected. Tapann may also weave any strands of hair not attached to a living creature into a rope, and animate such a rope, within one round. All animated ropes obey his will, even if they are enchanted ropes normally under the command of another creature, and he may command any number at once. If Tappan so wills, the touch of a rope can cause a creature to suffer effects identical to *Otto's irresistable dance* for 2-5 rounds. Beings who save vs. spells at -3 may avoid this effect. Note that Tapann can employ such ropes to trip, constrict (cf. *rope of constriction),* entangle (cf. *rope of entanglement),* whip (cf. *Quaal's feather token: whip),* bind, or otherwise hinder opponents.

At will and by touch, Tapann can *consecrate* water and cause *faerie fire.* He can also use the following abilities at will, one at a time and only once per round: *stone shape, animate rock, stone door* (unlimited teleportation and intraplanar if desired; up to a dozen living creatures can accompany Tappan unharmed on such a journey if he wishes), *shatter rock, vanish* (up to 666,000 gp weight) rock (stone is transported to the Ethereal Plane and replaced by air), *transmute rock to mud,* and *stone tell.* Tapann regenerates 2 hp damage/round, and can (by touch) *heal* himself or another creature once every two turns. He can also transmute all non-organic matter to "alunrum," a substance which becomes gold at the touch of *holy water,* and does this as a matter of course to all items left in the centre of a circle-dance ring if he appears. (Creatures to be healed are also placed by korreds in the center of the dance circle.) Korreds use this gold to trade with dwarves, sprites, and other such creatures to obtain clothes (used as dancing finery), shears, some foods, and certain services — or, in a pinch, to bargain for their lives. Such *transmutation* is usable by Tappan once per turn, and affects up to 666 gp weight of non-organic matter (such as metal). Tappan or his servitors can *enchant hair* at will, so that it obeys the will of the last korred to touch it, for 1-6 rounds after activation (being magically consumed at that time). The hair of any creature suffices, and the hair can be carried for decades, if need be, before a korred weaves it and works his or her will on it to bring it to animation.

Korreds of unusual bravery, strength, and loyalty to their people are *raised* or taken by Tappan to Limbo to be his personal servants. Such korreds (usually 6-14 of them) gain the ability to *laugh* seven times per day and regenerate 1 hp of damage suffered, every second round. They guard Tapann's abode in his absence, and he may bring up to a dozen of them with him when he appears on the Prime Material Plane, to aid him in battle or in assisting korreds. Tapann is immune to the effects of a *laugh* by one of his servitors, and can strip all powers at will from servitors who misuse them. If physically threatened, he can also shift his anima (self or spirit) to one of these servitors and possess it, adding its life-force (hp), memories, and intelligence to his own, so that it becomes Tapann. He can do this despite intervening distance or planar separation.

Tapann glories in the natural rhythms of living things, their celebration in dance, and both admires and cherishes skilled and acrobatic dancing on the part of any creature. Ω

by Richard Pett • illustrated by Peter Bergting and Mike Schley



THE ECOLOGY OF THE KRAKEN

"Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep..."

—H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu"

They rule the mightiest kingdoms, lightless trenches of crushing pressures where the sun never touches, unreachable seas that writhe in anger, jagged depths under sheer black cliffs. Their home is alien, elemental, and unforgiving. And here they are masters. Cruel geniuses possessing vast strength, they wait in the dark, weaving their plots, slowly considering their next abomination, their next move in an endless evil game of vast complexity. Not merely hulking mindless brutes nor cathedrals of flesh given fury, but sadists, torturers, and unspeakable terrors, thinking goliaths of calculating hate. So many places exist where the sea touches the land and sky, so many places where krakens—the unseen masters of the oceans—might reach out their cruel tentacles to afflict the lives of men.

HISTORY OF KRAKENS

Festering within the depths of vast watery abysses lie the lightless domains of the mercifully elusive krakens. Only the foolhardy or insane try to learn more of these terrible leviathans, as even the mere rumor of a kraken can turn back a fishing vessel or force a captain to hastily beach his ship. Those who learn much of krakens speak of scattered island communities or remote coastal villages that worship these tentacled horrors, even supplicating them with slave offerings to stave off their fury. Yet the most terrible reports arise only occasionally, ever so rarely, when some insane escapee emerges from decades in the dark to tell of air-filled prisons far below where there is no hope. These escapees never live long in the light.

Some whisper that evil gods made krakens so the creatures of the land would never dare stray far from their homes. Others argue—primarily against those who posit the opposite—that aboleths created krakens. Regardless, scant knowledge leads to conjecture, as krakens share nothing, least of all their secrets. Most laymen accept that there are fathoms where the ocean is blackest and the sea most elemental, and from these trenches of primordial fluids and infinite darkness krakens first emerged.

Krakens themselves believe they came from the mouth of the Great Unbeheld, a kraken of impossible size who sleeps within the deepest ocean abyss and whose great tentacles thread through the depths of the entire world. Only by claiming all oceans as their own and enslaving every other sea-bound race might the Great Unbeheld rise and flood the world, giving them dominion over all. Although krakens don't worship the Great Unbeheld as a god, it is treated as a communal ancestor and is often touted as a favored child of Panzuriel or even as the guard of his severed limb (see the Panzuriel sidebar).

KNOWLEDGE OF KRAKENS

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (arcana) check related to krakens. Any sailor, port-town tavern owner, or scholar of the seas might know varied pieces of the following information. However, as every deckhand and dockside drunkard weaves tales of sea monsters, truths about krakens are often garbled by the fictions of the uninformed, superstitious, and wildly imaginative. As such, some of the information provided at low DCs (15 and lower) is blatantly false. However, higher DC results (20 or greater) contradict such yarns with actual facts.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10	Krakens are brutish gigantic squids that plunder ships and costal communities in search of food and wealth, which they collect in vast coral palaces deep underwater.
15	Krakens can snatch sailors off the decks of their ships with two massive, barbed tentacles. A ship might ward off a kraken attack by hauling five dead bodies and a chest of copper behind it.
20	Krakens are loners with an astonishing sense of their own importance and a hard and cruel intelligence. They can also dominate native animals and often press intelligent undersea creatures into their service.
25	Krakens can shoot clouds of murky black ink and jet through the water with near-unparalleled speed. Their lairs deep below the waves often hold huge air-filled caverns to keep and breed hopeless generations of slaves but rarely any substantial material wealth.
30	Krakens possess the ability to control the weather and winds. Rumors persist of islands and ports where whole populations worship an indvidual kraken. These locals make living sacrifices to the kraken and act as its eyes and ears on land.

THE CALL OF THE KRAKEN

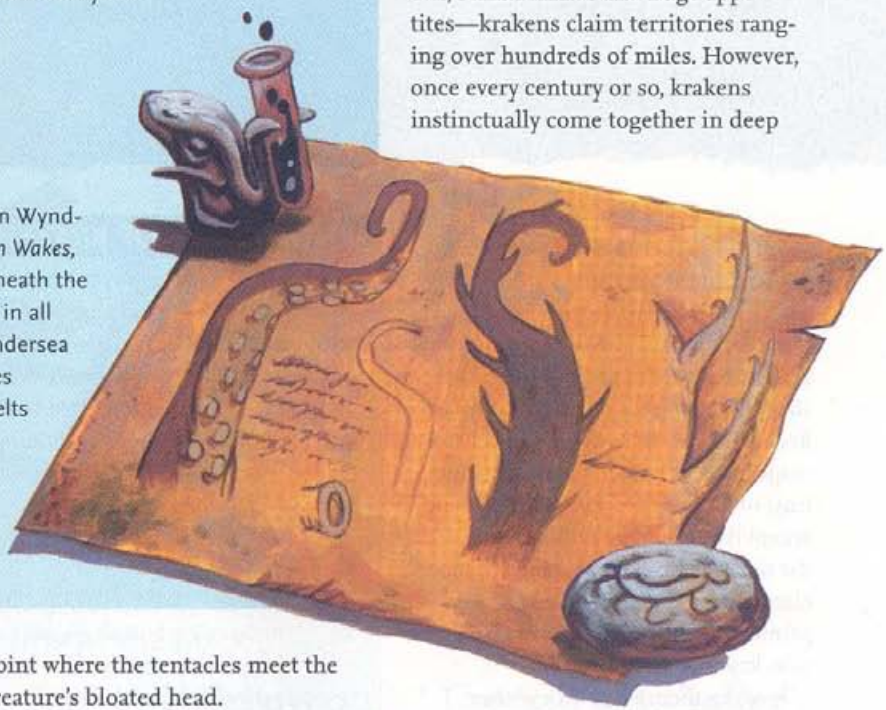
Krakens first appeared in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS as part of the 1983 *Monster Manual 2*, by Gary Gygax, and have remained a part of the game ever since. However, they bear a far deeper history than merely their appearances in D&D bestiaries.

For centuries, krakens have lurked as legendary terrors of the sea. Erik Pontoppidan, a Norwegian bishop, first described a kraken in his *Natural History of Norway* (1752), noting it as a "floating island" one and a half miles across. Also known as a krabben, sciucrak, or hafgufe, the tales of numerous cultures detail krakenlike creatures. Such tales even provided the inspiration for the poem "The Kraken," by Alfred Lord Tennyson:

"Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep,
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee..."

In more recent years, British novelist John Wyndham's novel, *Out of the Deeps*, or *The Kraken Wakes*, presents a perfectly insidious plot from beneath the sea (although it is devoid of actual krakens in all but its title). In this tale, an invulnerable undersea intelligence terrorizes shipping lanes, leaves islands and ports empty, and eventually melts the polar-ice caps, flooding the land.

For D&D's most recent encounters with krakens, scour "The Styes" in DUNGEON #121 or dare alien depths in "Seekers of the Silver Forge" in DUNGEON #125.



PHYSIOLOGY OF KRAKENS

Essentially huge intelligent squids, krakens never stop growing. The average kraken measures around 100 feet long. However, the near-immortality of these creatures leads to tales of staggeringly huge beasts that sailors mistake for small islands.

Average krakens possess a distinctive head, bilateral symmetry, and tentacles with suckers and hooks. Six of the beasts' tentacles stretch to merely 30 feet in length, while the remaining two, covered in cruel barbs, writhe to nearly 60 feet long. A huge beak, curved and capable of tearing apart whales, nestles at the point where the tentacles meet the creature's bloated head.

Krakens have huge eyes, which give them formidable sight and the ability to hunt in total darkness. Most krakens spend their lives at incredible ocean depths, but some make lairs near the lands of men where there are plentiful supplies of food and slaves. Voracious carnivores, krakens need vast territories in which to feed, the greatest whale constituting little more than a fair meal to a kraken.

Despite their formidable shapes, krakens do not view their own forms as sacred and willingly alter themselves if they believe it might benefit them in any way, whether it be with increased power or simply a more threatening appearance (grafts, templates, and prestige classes—especially those in *Lords of Madness*—see regular adoption by krakens).

Krakens lay cylindrical membranous eggs, but these are rarely seen. Indeed, krakens seem to mate only every century or so in a ritual known to them as the Hateful Compulsion, where the seas churn as though in the grip of some dreadful storm.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF KRAKENS

Loners—primarily because of their evil, selfish minds and huge appetites—krakens claim territories ranging over hundreds of miles. However, once every century or so, krakens instinctually come together in deep ocean trenches to mate. This fleshy, feeling ritual is abhorrent to the coldly calculating minds of krakens and is known to them as the Hateful Compulsion. Krakens from vast areas of the ocean gather, both fearful of the danger in doing so but unable to control their lustful compulsions. Males frequently get torn to pieces by the less numerous females in their insane desire to be fertilized, turning the sea black with kraken blood and causing parts of limbs and heads to wash ashore in oily froths. (This black rotting flesh has an appalling odor

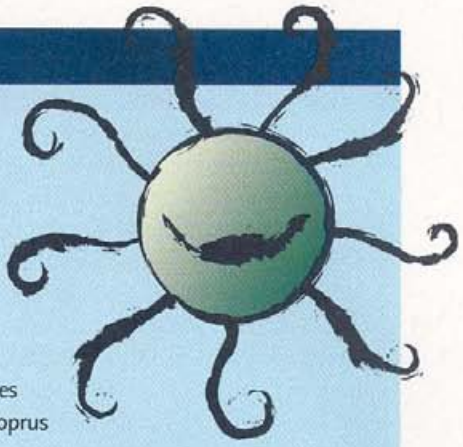
and is avoided by living animals.) In their coitus-fuelled madness krakens involuntarily create cataclysmic storms (see page 94 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), leading to horrifically sized whirlpools and waves, which might rage for months or even years. The Hateful Compulsion continues until all the assembled females are impregnated, an act that forces a male to struggle for life within his mate's grip, a lustful battle capable of lasting for months. Fearing such eventualities, some krakens have risked the most extreme measures—including self surgery and undeath—to avoid these spawning moots.

After mating, great black eggs soon fill deep oceanic trenches. Kraken young take a decade to hatch, and—mercifully—over this time even the brood-mothers who watch their spawn lose many of their eggs to daring predators. Occasionally, and for reasons even krakens cannot understand, some brood-mothers devour their whole clutch, an act that always leads to the loss of the kraken's sanity. Such an insane kraken is a terrible foe indeed, as its calamitous psychosis menaces anything that lives in or near the sea. Some suggest that this madness is connected with the insane god, Tharizdun, as part of some unfathomable plot he weaves from his prison. The few krakens who don't worship Panzuriel often turn to Tharizdun, usually after witnessing a brood-mother consume her young.

All krakens believe themselves to be divine creatures and the rightful rulers of the deep. As such they cannot conceive of a sea without their presence. Thus, they never knowingly put themselves at physical risk and always plan a hundred cunning escapes. Krakens possess cruel, calculating intelligences and use them to move events to their own advantage. Effectively immortal, krakens patiently plot over centuries to concoct elaborate escapes, hatch fearful schemes, and breed loyal servants in their sightless lairs deep below the waves. While nearly all krakens keep slaves or dupe worshipers, kraken elders often manipulate the younger of their kind, sacrificing them to enemies or duping them into performing dangerous undertakings. The prevalence of such trickery causes krakens to wisely avoid others of their kind and hold them in constant suspicion.

Many krakens—but by no means all—keep lairs in caves deep below the waves. These dens often serve as little more than hiding places, both for the kraken and the useful treasures it might collect. To krakens, prime among such exploitable valuables

PANZURIEL



Intermediate God (Neutral Evil)

The god of the seas' foulest evils, Panzuriel ever seeks twisted minds and abominable visionaries to carry out his will both below and above the waves. The Writhing One welcomes all evil ocean-dwelling creatures into his crushing fold with sahuagin, sea hags, scrags, and kuo-toas (heretics against Bildoolpoolp) proving particularly prevalent. However, Panzuriel prefers creatures warped of body as well as of mind, making koprus and krakens his favored children.

Panzuriel bears an ancient hatred for Deep Sashelas, patron of aquatic elves. In aeons long lost, Panzuriel sought to make the darkened lands below the sea his exclusive dominion, perverting them into roiling oceans of fluid horrors. An alliance of opposed gods, led by Deep Sashelas, rose to resist the Writhing One, driving his corruptive ambition from the Material Plane and cutting off his left foot. The god's massive, gnarled appendage fell into the ocean but was never found. Thus, Panzuriel retains his link to the mortal world and, through his favored minions, seeks to corrupt the seas and avenge his ancient exile.

Symbol: A left footprint, kraken head, or squid eye surrounded by nine tentacles.

Portfolio: Confusion, murder, subversion, and evil aquatic creatures.

Domains: Corruption[1], Darkness, Evil, Water.

Favored Weapon: Whip (for land-dwelling worshipers) or net (for use underwater).

Clerical Training: Worshipers must sacrifice a sea elf in a ceremony known as the Endless Revenging.

Quests: Panzuriel sends visions to his servants to destroy specific ships, raid undersea and coastal communities, and defile the temples of all other aquatic deities.

Prayers: Hugely complex low tonal chants, usually conducted in vast groups, the echoing songs of Panzuriel's worshipers are sometimes heard even on the surface, where mariners refer to the doleful droning as the "Wail of the Severed God."

Temples: Huge cave complexes deep underwater or simple stone circles centered around tentacled idols serve as Panzuriel's temples. Krakens often force slaves to toil for centuries, digging unholy trenches deep enough to reveal portals leading to the Pool of Panzuriel (said to fester somewhere in Carceri).

Rites: Panzuriel regards the sea as a battleground between himself and the hated sea elves, making raiding and slaughter the only rites he demands.

Herald and Allies: Panzuriel's herald is a 50 HD pseudonatural[2] kraken known as Tirbitus. Corrupted by Panzuriel's maddened will, Tirbitus hardly resembles a kraken anymore, appearing more like the Writhing One's symbol made flesh: a swollen red eye surrounded by countless flailing tentacles. Panzuriel's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are callers from the deeps[3], half-fiend krakens, and scyllans[3].

1 Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

2 Detailed in *Lords of Madness*.

3 Detailed in *Stormwrack*.

KRAKEN CULT: THE BROOD OF WORSHIPFUL K'THURALL

For centuries, the people of remote St. Telers island have kept a deadly secret. Their religion, on the exterior nothing more than a quaint island tradition of worshiping spirits of the sea, in fact reveres the depths-spawned abomination they know as Worshipful K'thurall.

Having lived below the island for countless ages, Worshipful K'thurall claims St. Telers and the seas around it as his personal dominion. In the centuries since worshipers came to his island, K'thurall has styled himself as their patron deity and the sole source of either their prosperity or annihilation. Fearful and reverent toward their worldly god, all the people of St. Telers devotedly serve the kraken—whispering frequent prayers and decorating their structures with countless ichthyoidal shapes—dreading his anger and the storms and droughts it incurs.

Worshipful K'thurall forces two obligations upon his cultists: sacrifice and service. Sacrifice to K'thurall is conducted in a yearly ceremony known as the Drowning Man. In this ritual a dozen men and women are imprisoned within the belly of a gigantic man-shaped wicker cage, then slowly lowered off a vast cliff known to the locals as the Despair of Salvation. K'thurall accepts the drowning victims and dines not only upon their flesh, but their very souls, as the rite has long since transformed him into a soul eater (see page 66 of the *Book of Vile Darkness*). Some sacrifices he lets drown, transforming them into drowned undead (see page 46 of the *Monster Manual III*), which he then sends to attack ships and bring him more victims.

Even as a yearly offering, the Drowning Man ceremony threatens to deplete the adult population of St. Telers. Thus, many of Worshipful K'thurall's cultists travel to distant lands, telling of their home as either an island paradise or an oppressed slave-state in need of a savior, all in hopes of luring victims to the Drowning Man.

For their life-long service, Worshipful K'thurall blesses his most pious followers with his touch: a "gift" his cultists claim brings them "closer to the sea," but in fact begins the transformation into a deep thrall (a kraken monster cultist prestige class from "The Minions of Darkness" in DRAGON #300). The island elders exhibit the most obvious changes, as they are afflicted with huge bulbous eyes, tentaclelike limbs, gasping breath, and innumerable skinless abscesses—marks from the touch of K'thurall's powerful suckered arms. Once these cultists complete their apotheosis into creatures more kraken than humanoid, Worshipful K'thurall accepts their leap from the Despair of Salvation. Upon taking this final step, K'thurall welcomes his deluded children into the ranks of an aberrant generation of cultists that he sequesters beneath the island in a hellish, tentacular mockery of life above.

are slaves, and as such a kraken's lair might hold several leaking air-filled chambers. Egotists of the highest degree, krakens never deign to sully their tentacles with simple chores. Whether its desires entail carving its lair to meet its whims or spying upon land-dwelling creatures, a kraken's slaves serve out of fear and the knowledge that escape means only a crushing death miles below the surface. Regardless of their uses, to krakens, the word "slave" and "meal" often prove interchangeable.

Those krakens truly devoted to keeping slaves might house whole degraded societies within their lairs, as generation after generation of servants are born, serve, and die, never knowing a world of light and open air. Even if liberated, such slaves rarely flourish if brought to the surface, as all their minds know are the horrors of worshiping a living god and its foul experiments. This is to say nothing of the scars, grafts, and other manipulations krakens regularly inflict upon their servants to better serve their needs.

Besides slaves, krakens often maintain relationships with groups of other underwater-dwelling evil creatures. While such associations are rarely equal, creatures like sahuagin, scrags, and sea hags frequently worship krakens or pay them tribute in return for aid or protection. To a kraken, such arrangements serve merely as preliminaries to it claiming an entire tribe, society, or race as its slaves.

VS KRAKENS

Krakens possess an astonishing sense of self-preservation and, if ever victory seems unlikely, retreat always remains an option. Easily embittered and possessing lengthy memories, a defeated kraken might calculate its revenge for decades, inflicting brutal retribution upon foes who have long forgotten their victories.

Watch the Weather: Krakens use their *control weather* and *control winds* spell-like abilities to bring foes to them or sink vessels without ever rising above the water. Despite these powers, many krakens relish the chance to personally splinter ship masts and drown weaker creatures. Many seafarers know to rightly fear gales that seemingly arise from nowhere, as these might prove to be the work of a kraken.

The Terrible Embrace: A kraken possesses a monstrous grapple modifier: +44 at the very least. Its constrict attack deals automatic damage every round, which might wear down even the mightiest foe and could prove impossible to break. With such a significant modifier, a kraken might opt to take a –20 penalty on its grapple check to use only one tentacle and retain its ability to make attacks and threaten an area (see the description of the improved grapple ability on page 310 of the *Monster Manual*). With merely a second opposed grapple check a kraken might move with its victim, dragging it underwater to a terrible, gurgling end (see the descriptions of moving while grappling on page 156 of the *Player's Handbook* and drowning on page 304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). Thus, magic items like *helms of underwater action* or *potions of water breathing* might help those fighting krakens stay alive for a time, but only treasures

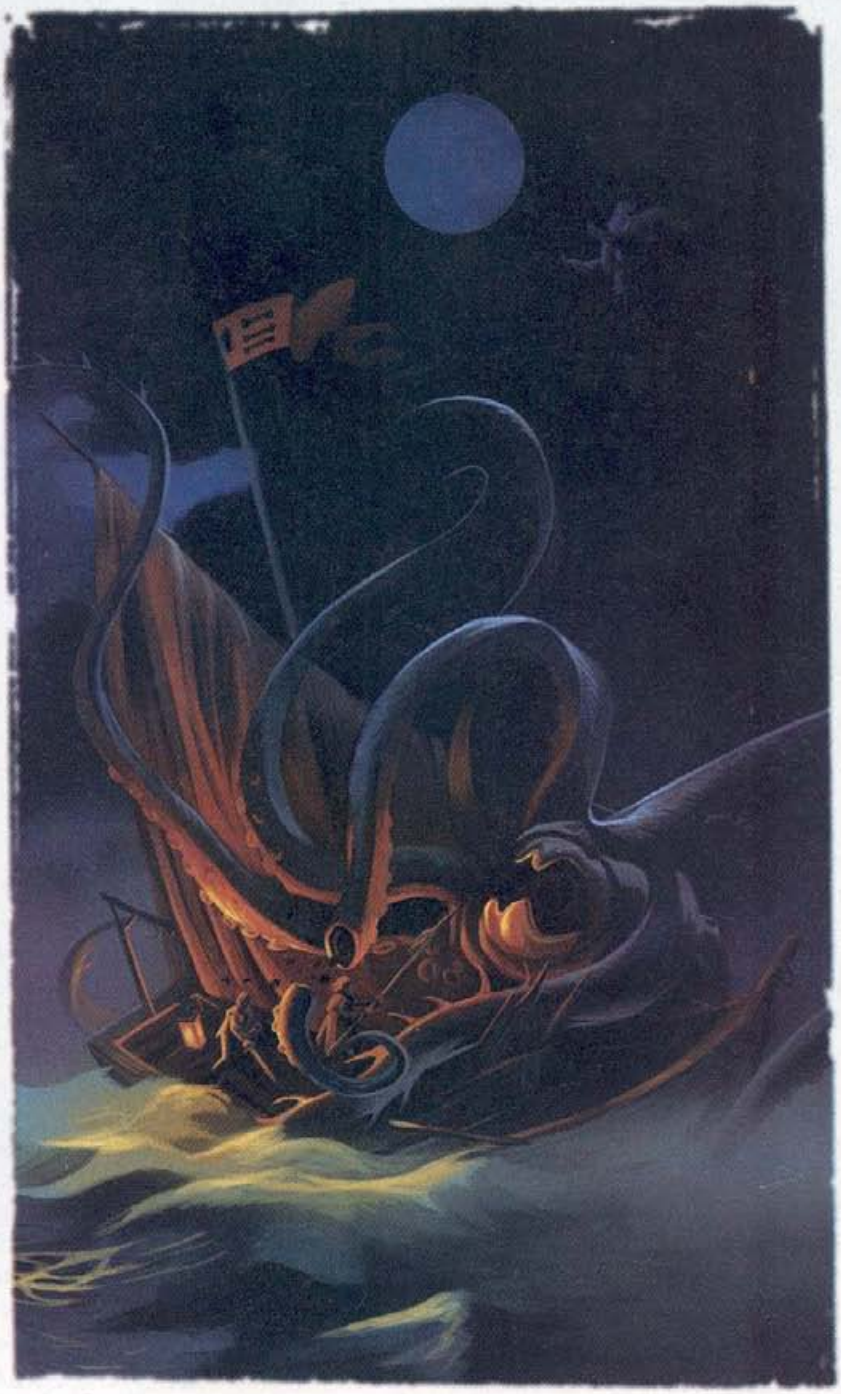
like a *cape of the montebank, cloak of etherealness, ring of freedom of movement,* or armor with the slick special ability might save a kraken hunter's life.

Tentacle Attacks: When facing a kraken, sundering the creature's tentacles proves the most effective way to avoid being grappled. A kraken's tentacles can be specifically targeted with sunder attempts as per the rules on page 162 of the *Monster Manual.* Attacks upon the tentacles, however, deal less damage to the kraken as a whole. Thus, those combating krakens should stay cautious when making such targeted attacks.

Water Reliant: Krakens are most confident and deadly within the expanses of the seas. However, those somehow removed from such an environment prove a far less significant threat. If a kraken can be lured into a port or other costal inlet, spells like *control water,* various *wall* spells, and creative uses of *transmute rock to mud* or *move earth* might trap the creature inland. Even more effectively, if such traps dispose of the water, leaving the kraken beached, the monstrosity cannot breathe and thus swiftly suffocates. Krakens are keenly aware of their reliance on water, however, making such traps incredibly difficult to spring.

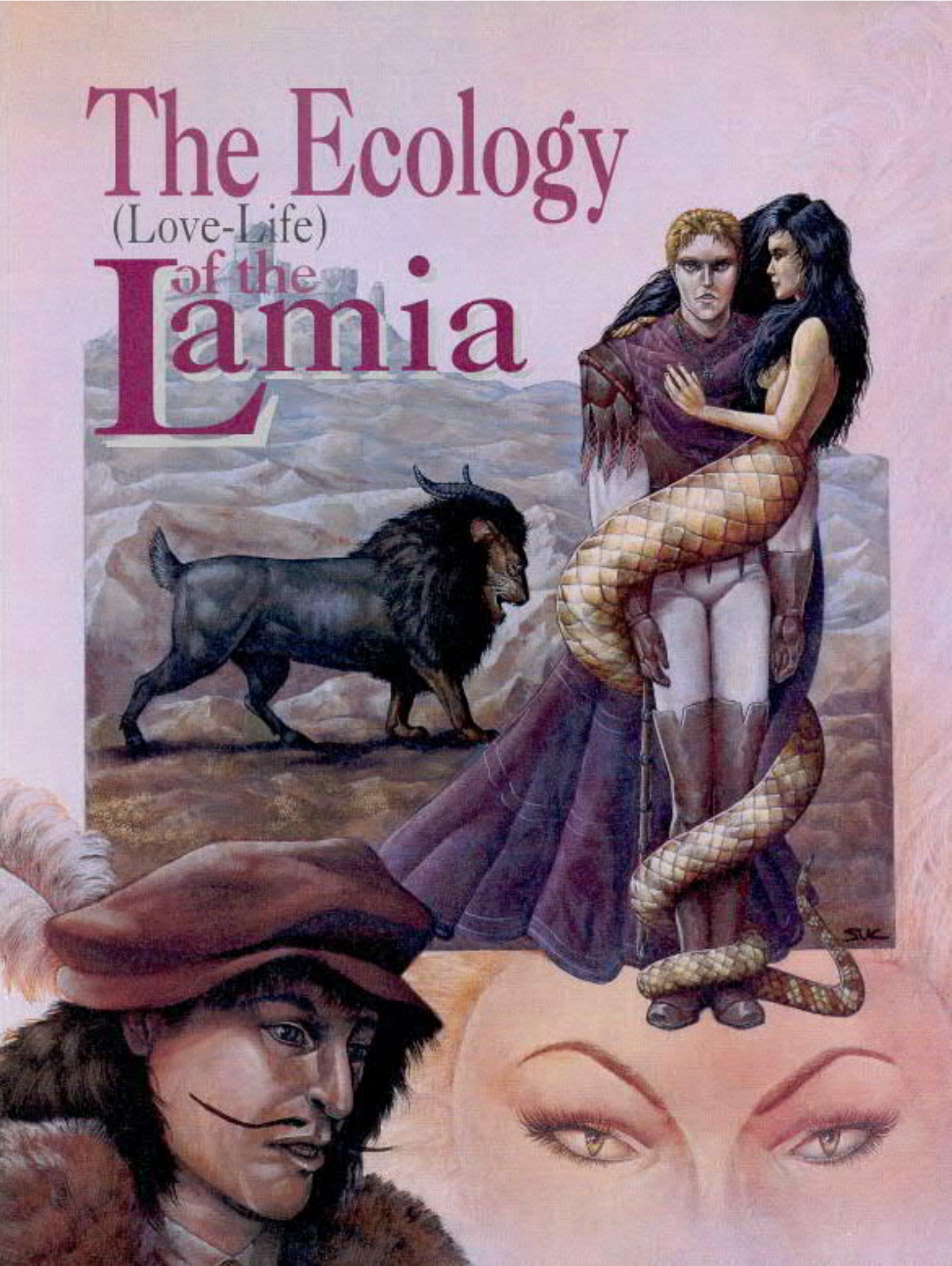
Defensive Defilers: In keeping with their extreme senses of self-preservation, krakens often protect themselves within layers of magical defenses. At the most basic level, this means making use of their *resist energy* spell-like ability (usually cast to resist electricity). Krakens with slaves might also have spellcasters cast long-lasting defensive spells like *mage armor, protection from arrows,* or *shield other.* The most twisted and ambitious krakens might even seek out creatures capable of giving them grafts or research ways to adopt a variety of acquired templates.

Minions and Worshipers: Commonly encountered alone, krakens usually prefer solitude as they hunt or attack choice targets. Despite these tendencies, krakens regularly have access to a horde of allies, whether these minions be deluded worshipers, slaves, monstrous allies, or sea creatures they control through the use of their *dominate animal* spell-like ability. Those hunting a kraken should remain exceptionally wary, as any person or beast might secretly be a kraken's servant.



Retreat and Revenge: Krakens willingly use their jet ability to escape at rapid speeds, covering such retreats with clouds of ink. Once out of direct danger, a kraken invariably begins plotting its revenge, relying on its minions to extend its reach far beyond the sea. However, even with armies of minions at their disposal, krakens favor ending such standing debts themselves. Thus, a kraken's servants often merely lure prey within reach, letting their master take revenge at his leisure.

The Ecology (Love-Life) of the Lamia



A story told after the kids were sent upstairs

by Spike Y. Jones

Artwork by Susan Van Camp

"Brendan," the innkeeper began, "you've sent my children to bed with their faerie story. Now earn your keep. Tell us a tale."

"And make it a good one," a patron said, "with lots of adventure."

"Yeah, fightin'!" specified a more inebriated patron.

"And women," suggested a quiet young man.

"Big, lusty women!" clarified the less-restrained drunk.

"Wantons and weaponry, the measures of good entertainment as far as the outspoken Kennan is concerned," sighed Brendan. "Yes, I must know at least one such tale. So, if Iain fulfills his obligations as innkeeper" —he glanced at his empty beer mug— "I shall fulfil mine as housebard.

"I'm sure that those of you beyond your first beards have heard of the pyromancer, Taircon Firesoul, who alternately seduced the women and looted the villages of Delitan for many a year some half a century past. But, while you have *heard* of the man, I was an intimate of his for a time, and I was one of the few men privileged enough to see him die."

Brendan Farwanderer took a deep draught from his refilled mug, then leaned back to pull out a pipe, carefully fill it, and light it from the candle on his table. He looked up and noticed the circle of anxiously waiting men, and seemed only then to recall that he had been telling a story.

"Actually," he continued, "I overstate the case. Last I was to see him, but as for the 'man', I was only a lad the age of our host's son Aidan. After being wrongly accused of a number of improprieties" — here he paused for the chuckles of his audience— "exorbitant fines were set. When I could not pay, I was declared the bondsman of the first who would pay my fines. This happened to be Firesoul.

"I was an imaginative boy, and I wove wondrous tales to amuse my fellow servants. Taircon heard of this and demanded that I tell my tales to him, to amuse him and distract him from worldly concerns. I did this gladly, thankful for an appreciative audience."

"To get yourself out of doing real work is more like it," muttered the innkeeper.

"To improve my storytelling from Taircon's point of view, I was made to accompany the pyromancer on a number of his adventures,' in which he and his cutthroats burst upon sleeping hamlets, emptying them of valuables faster than a purse dropped in Cassard. After each ride, I was required to retell the events for my master's entertainment, attempting to make the litany of atrocities more palatable and less boring in its repetitiveness.

"This continued for some months until Firesoul's band happened to set upon an inn much like this one in a village some days travel from the cities of the western coast. As usual, their attack was hardly opposed, but Firesoul was incensed to discover that one of his men was killed and another two were severely injured in capturing a young man who had attempted to flee the scene.

"An examination of the youth's armor, weapons, and decorations revealed to his captors that he was a paladin serving one of the major temples of far-off Mardukan, and his other accoutrements and the quality of his steed suggested-that he was a messenger of some sort. While religion was not a subject of any importance to Taircon Firesoul, he had had more than one encounter with paladins set on capturing him before and had developed a distaste for the whole breed. Moreover, he was interested in discovering what important message had cost the life of one of his henchmen. Firesoul inquired politely of the young paladin the nature of his mission, and when the boy refused to mouth even a single word, the wizards temper flared.

"At first the paladin resisted Firesoul's attempts at interrogation, refusing to utter a syllable while the pyromancer danced finger-fires within inches of his captive's eyes, then burned him lightly upon the cheeks and hands. This torture grew more intense until the young man was clearly and gravely injured, but he still refused to speak. Firesoul was frustrated until he thought to use subterfuge to break the paladin's resistance. After casting *fire charm* spell, the wizard suggested to his captive that his spells not only singed the flesh, but also subjected the soul to the fires of damnation; if the paladin were to die as a result of these flames, his soul would similarly perish.

"Under this magical persuasion, the paladin finally broke his silence. He was a courier, carrying a message from a small temple in Varga to the north, describing the story of a merchant from that place who had recently attempted to navigate the eastern deserts by a northerly course through the Desolation of Ptarn, bypassing the taxation of the central Rama-Resh oasis. This merchant had later been found by some pilgrims on the outskirts of the Desolation, ragged, near starvation, and half-mad.

"Much of the merchant's story was incomplete—for example, the fate of the other members of his caravan. But the central episode, concerning a desert citadel festooned with gold, littered with jewels, and graced by most intriguing occupants—namely women of surpassing beauty—was fully described.

"While it had obviously been the treasures of the citadel that had sparked the temple's interest in the story, the references to the beautiful but isolated women intrigued Firesoul. Abandoning the tortured and dying paladin to his fate, the band made its way northward to the way-city of Pa-Dedun, and thence to the wild.

"After seven uneventful days of travel across the Desolation, we advanced over one of an endless series of rolling hills and saw in the distance a squat border-fort, long in need of repair, with a small group of what looked like wild goats grazing where they would on the surrounding plain. This little outpost matched the fabulous citadel described in no respect but its anticipated location, and Taircon Firesoul's dour mood turned suddenly foul as he made for it.

"The goat-creatures hardly took notice of us as we advanced through their field, but once we were in the approximate center of their foraging formation, their nature changed. Of a sudden, they sprang at our camels, with one camel and its rider falling immediately under the onslaught.[1]

"In a similar change of demeanor, the dust-coated riders of the surviving camels burst into action, throwing aside desert cloaks to reveal gleaming weapons and armor. The goat-beasts had no more success in the end than the villagers these same raiders had fought in the past. Little could stand up to the savagery these thugs had penned up during the crushing boredom of the journey. Without Firesoul having to cast a single spell, all the goatbeasts soon lay dead or dying on the waste, with no further loss to the reavers. The men quickly stripped the valuables from their fallen comrade and, leaving his body to the wind, turned back to the fort."

"That's it? That's all the fighting? What kinda story is it when the . . ." began the drunken Kennan, before someone put another mug in his hand to occupy his mouth.

"Somehow," continued Brendan unper-

turbed, "the caer looked different now than it had before. The gates hung straight on their hinges, the walls appeared taller and firmer than they had from a distance, and the whole seemed to have exchanged its image of disuse for that of a strong, competently cared-for citadel—the very thing we had sought from the first.

"While this seemed to me very strange, Taircon Firesoul appeared to take it easily in stride as he hailed the fortress and was answered by the opening of the gates. Fearlessly, he led the band into the grounds, dismounted, and strode imperiously towards the solid-looking keep, leaving his camel to wander the courtyard.

"Once through the keep's door, the a powerful fortress gave way to private apartments. We followed a corridor decorated with flamboyant frescoes, passing by numerous side chambers furnished with soft beds and couches strewn with cushions and partially curtained with hanging sheets of cloth-of-gold. Shortly, we arrived at the heart of the keep.

"The audience hall was of such dimensions that it seemed larger than the outside walls could have held. Moreover, it was decorated more sumptuously than the alcoves had been. Every inch of the walls was covered with gold and silver-woven tapestries, with gem-laden ornaments hanging from the rafters like bundles of drying herbs. Jewels lay scattered like so much sawdust on the carpeted floors. As with the other rooms, there were couches and cushions scattered about the hall; all was, soft, padded, comfortable, and inviting."

"The women, bard, tell us about the women!"

"Ah, thank you, Kennan, for reminding me of the crux of this tale. At my age I sometimes digress from my topic, then have difficulty finding my way back without assistance.

"As I was saying, all was soft, padded, comfortable, and inviting, and that included the occupants of the hall. Arrayed about the room were almost a dozen young women. At that age, I was only beginning to gain an appreciation of the fair sex, but even I recognized that these women could have commanded the attention of princes, let alone any other man they desired.[2]

"One of the maids was so beautiful as to make the others seem like the lowest harlots of Plinth. She lounged across a throne at the hall's far end, looking regal and alluring at the same time. When the pyromancer strode towards her, his mage's robes fluttering behind him, she took notice and properly took her seat to meet him. There followed the niceties of introduction, during which we all were invited to a grand banquet, but it was obvious throughout that the mistress of the citadel had her eyes set upon the pyromancer.[3]

"Crusted with the grime of our week-long journey, our party took gladly to the bathing chamber. When all were refreshed, we found our trail clothing now as fresh as ourselves. We returned to the audience hall and found platters of exotic meats and fruits and fluted bottles of strange liquors placed about the floor. The women reclined next to the refreshments, while their mistress sat at a table set with two chairs.

"Our party needed no urging, and all set upon the food, drink, and women with equal energy—excepting Firesoul, who strode to the chair opposite the mistress's to engage her in conversation. I was ignored by all, including the guard charged with keeping me from escaping, although there was nowhere I was likely to wander on my own in the middle of that waste. I walked about, admiring everything and partaking of the viands as I wished.

"As the supper continued, some of the men drifted out of the hall, accompanied by the young ladies.[4] I eventually ate, drank, and admired my fill, but when I looked for one of the ladies to talk to, I found myself alone but for the pyromancer and our hostess. I wandered up to their table and broke into their conversation.

"Before I could complete even half a sentence, Firesoul casually slapped me across the face and, without even looking my way, ordered me out of the hall. Tears streaming down my face, I ran out into the courtyard and cried myself dry.

"That done, I sulked as a hurt child will, rehearsing complaints about how unfair my life was and concocting various schemes for revenge. I know not how long I sat there, but as I did, a strange transformation came gradually over the caer, and I quickly forgot my own small troubles.

"Slowly at first, but then more rapidly, pieces of the walls and buildings began to disappear from sight. I do not mean that the parapets crumbled to the ground, or that something blocked the outbuildings from my view. One moment the parapets were full and strong, and the next they were gone, the wall itself a tumbled pile of ruins. Again, a few moments later, one of the outbuildings vanished, to be replaced by the remnants of its corner-posts and a few wooden slats, enabling me to see where some of our camels had wandered.[5]

"Of more dire concern, if that could be possible, I saw through a newly vanished wall a great cloud of dust in the distance. While it might have been sign of a storm or other natural phenomenon, seeing it combined with the magical deterioration of the caer caused me to fear for the worst, and I ran back into the transformed keep to warn someone of the army I felt sure was approaching. I first attempted to alert my assigned guardian, but as I looked into the sumptuous chamber the man had entered some hours before, I saw only a shabby cell. As for the raider, he and one of the . . . young women were there, in some disarray. Shocked anew by what I saw there, I ran to the next chamber along the hall."

"A bit new you were to the ways of men and women, eh bard?" Kennan quipped.

Brendan paused for a moment, as if trying to craft a proper reply to Kennan's comment, but then continued. "Seeing a variation on the same thing in the next chamber, I was sure this scene was repeated in the other niches. I abandoned hope of alerting the men, and I stumbled to the audience hall where last I had seen my master.

"When finally I arrived, I was relieved to see that this chamber at least had not lost its opulent appearance, and Firesoul had not succumbed to the temptations that had claimed all of the others. He was sitting at a table while the citadel's queen stroked his forehead and shoulders, attempting to force him to relax.

"Rushing in, I attempted to warn Firesoul of the strange occurrences piling one upon the other. Before I could get more than half of my words out of my mouth, my speech was befuddled by some spell cast by the caer's mistress.

" 'Taircon, darling,' she cooed in his ear, attempting to turn his attention away from me, 'why do we not go to the couch? It is late, and all of your companions are already abed.'

" 'Later,' the mage gasped. He seemed half asleep and struggling for both air and full consciousness. 'The boy said something about attackers approaching the fortress. While he isn't above lying to interrupt my pleasures, I think he's telling the truth this once. If the outpost is being attacked, we'll have to quickly set up some ambushes, and then—'

" 'That can wait,' she said, nuzzling the back of his neck. 'I have been patient and more than patient. Kiss me again.'

" 'Later, I say,' he barked, suddenly shrugging away from her.

" 'Now, I say,' she almost screamed. Showing a passion I have never seen matched, she clasped him to her and began to hungrily kiss."

"At first, the pyromancer struggled in her supernatural embrace, but after a time a change came over both of them. He relaxed and finally seemed to be enjoying her attentions. Silently I watched, engrossed and repelled by what I saw, and I knew then that Taircon was doomed.

"I stated earlier that the bandits and women were in some disarray when I came upon them, the women suffering the most in this regard. When unclothed, the upper half of the woman my guardian had embraced was unchanged from that of a beautiful woman, but below her waist she resembled a lioness; the whole was not unlike a grotesque centaur. In the sec-

ond room had been a woman with a goat's'body parts, and I had no stomach to discover the horrors of the other side-rooms.[7] Before me, however, I watched a greater horror unfold.

"Once the woman had Firesoul securely in her embrace, the illusion that had been dissolving elsewhere about the fortress disappeared from there as well. The elegant fixtures of the room vanished in an instant, as did sections of the hall's roof and walls. As the room changed to join the rest of the fort in appearance, so too did its mistress become as bestial as her sisters. While her upper half retained most of the beauty of her previous form, this was now joined to the body of an immense and horrible serpent whose tail lashed like a living whip.

"Oblivious to this change and to the urgency of the situation all around them, Firesoul and she continued their activities for a time. When that was finally done, she spoke again.

" 'We've disposed of the essentials,' she said, loosely uncurling her serpent's body around his waist and pulling her long, pointed nails from his throat. 'Now, slave, defend me.'

"She must then have released him from a part of the spell she'd held him under, for I heard him gasp in horror. His eyes cast desperately round the room, looking for salvation, and he squirmed in her light embrace. He saw me then, and for a moment his eyes beseeched me, calling for me to do something that he could not. But then she caressed him casually on the cheek, and a crazed smile spread across his face and his struggles ceased.[8]

"Firesoul leaped up and rushed from the room, followed by his mistress-monster, who had resumed her human form. Drawn as much by despair as by fascination, I too followed the rushing pyromancer. From room to crumbled room throughout the ruin he ran, commanding his men to arms, an order that each followed only after the monster's queen commanded *her* subjects to release their prey for the moment.

"Soon Firesoul had his entire command assembled in the debris-strewn courtyard to see the approach of a company of men sitting upright on their horses in gleaming armor. At another time, I would have laughed at how inappropriate horses and heavy armor were in the desert, but this was not that time. The knights carried a number of banners proclaiming to all that they served the same god as that paladin the reavers had tortured and abandoned weeks before, and they were but moments away.

"Being supremely confident of his men's abilities, as much from his own ego as from the compulsion to defend his 'lady,' Firesoul ordered those men who could find their camels to charge headlong against the holy attackers, while those who were stranded, including the pyromancer, would lend their support from what few of the battlements still stood. The monster-women seemed content to merely watch their 'lovers' fight, while I thought it best to seek a sheltered corner where I could watch and yet remain protected from the brunt of what was to come."

"This should be a laugh," chortled Kennan, "ev'ryone knows that paladins fight fair. That's why Firesoul lasted so long before."

"The battle was a spectacular thing to behold," Farwanderer continued, his eyes bright, 'with Firesoul's cavalry harassing the paladins from all sides as those other raiders rained arrows on the knights from above. When the pyromancer began to lend his own arm to the struggle, throwing spears of flame and clouds of burning gnats at the armored attackers, I thought at first that the raiders had won again. But to my surprise, for all their energy the thugs seemed to have lost all the skill at slaughter they had exhibited earlier in the day against the goat-beasts.[9]

"Within minutes the paladins had fought their way into the courtyard and were engaging the last of the human defenders on foot. When finally Taircon Firesoul was the sole reaver left in the fight, engaging the leader of the paladins in melee with a sword of solid fire, the ladies of the fortress stepped forward to end the battle.

"While I could see the monsters for what they were, apparently they had resumed their guises as human maidens to the eyes of those others, for the paladins neither bolted nor attacked at the sight of them. After their queen ordered Firesoul to put up his arms, they all came forward and attempted to beguile the paladins in much the same way as they had the raiders in their turn. For a moment all seemed to go as before. I was about to cry out in despair when a look of instant revulsion appeared on the face of one of the gallants, and he slashed at the creature nearest him with his sword.[10] Within seconds, all of the holy fighters had freed themselves from the grip of illusion. In less time than they had spent on Firesoul's men, the paladins slew the beast-women, cutting off their heads to ensure that these apparent demons would not return form the grave.

"The last of the group to be defeated was their queen, for once it was obvious that her plot had failed, she commanded Firesoul to defend her anew. Again he fought in the lacklustre manner of the possessed, but this time there was no armistice to save him, and he fell but moments before the leader of the monsters was slain. But even in death her bond was strong, for the last action of the seducer of the most beautiful women of Delitan was to crawl the few feet it took to expire in the same bloody pool as his 'lady-love'."

Silence fell across the room. Brendan Farwanderer looked around to see most of his audience confused, not knowing how to react to the strange tale. Taking pity on them, he added a postscript. "Finally, I stepped from my shadowed vantage and strode toward the commander of the paladin's company. It took some quick thinking and smooth words on my part to convince them that I was not another trick of the ruins heaped around us; but once I'd accomplished this they gladly welcomed me to their troop, giving me a horse and such equipment as I desired from among that lying about. I rode away with them to start my new career—as a paladin-in-training."

Again, the audience was stunned, but only for a moment. Once Kennan began to roar with laughter at the thought of Brendan Farwanderer, paladin, the rest of the taverners were not long to follow.

Footnotes

1. Lamias come in three varieties: lamia nobles, common lamias, and sa'ir. Solely because of the appearance of sa'ir and common lamias, there is conjecture that chimerae and wemics are also part of this family.

While no one knows how lamia nobles came to be (the curses of both demons and gods have been cited in explanations of the lamia's origins, but the truth could be something different from either), they are now produced only as the offspring of matings between other lamia nobles and humans. Common lamias are produced either as a result of noble-noble pairings or by human-common lamia matings. The purely animal sa'ir are only produced by the mating of common lamia pairs, as they are unable to propagate their own sub-race.

Lamias and sa'ir go into heat annually, a week-long period when the urge to reproduce outweighs almost all other desires and at which time they are the most fertile. The intelligent lamia types prefer to mate with humans in order to produce offspring of their own sort, but if none are available they will mate with their own kind. If they encounter a human outside of the summer mating season, the human's presence may cause them to come into heat out of season.

Common lamias are hermaphrodites; any two of them can mate, with either of the pair being impregnated in the process. This also means that they can mate with both male and female humans. If a common lamia mates with a male human, the lamia can be impregnated, but if the lamia mates with a female human, the unfortunate woman bears the cubs. Noble lamias, having differentiated sexes, mate only with humans of the

opposite sex, and they kill humans of the same sex without a second thought.

Lamias produce litters of 1-4 cubs eight months after a successful mating. Most cubs will not reach maturity (at age four years) because of the deadly competition among the young and the fickle emotions and hair-trigger temper of its parents, who are likely to claw a cub to death if it so much as playfully bites the tip of a parent's tail. The lamia's mating urge is strong but its maternal instinct is not, thus the lamia population is never large.

Sa'ir

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Arid plains and hills
FREQUENCY: Very rare (common near lamias)
ORGANIZATION: Small groups
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day
DIET: Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE: Animal
TREASURE TYPE: Nil
ALIGNMENT: Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 1-6
ARMOR CLASS: 5/6
MOVE:12
HIT DICE: 4+1
THAC0:16
NO. OF ATTACKS: 5
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-3/1-3/1-3/1-3/1-6 (two claws, two horns, one bite)
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Surprises prey
SPECIAL DEFENSES: -2 to be surprised
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: M (4'-5' long)
MORALE: Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE: 420

Prowling deserts, ruins and other desolate wastes, sa'ir are the offspring of common lamias, almost always found in the vicinity of their parents although they have no ties of affection to their sires.

A sa'ir has the hindquarters of a goat and the foreparts of a lion, including a male lion's mane for both sexes of sa'ir. Its head is leonine with the addition of a goat's horns and dangling beard.

Sa'ir understand simple commands in the common tongue but are unlikely to obey if they issue from any but a lamia. Their own speech capabilities do not go beyond an odd, bleating roar.

Combat: The sa'ir hunting style takes full advantage of their dual goat and lion natures. Sa'ir stalk prey in the guise of a grazing herbivore until they get within pouncing range of 20'. This tactic is very effective, and as a result the prey get a penalty of -1 on its surprise roll.

When attacking, it strikes with its two lion paws and two goat horns and its bite. Its armor class is 6 overall, but the thick mane protecting its-neck and forequarters make those areas AC 5.

Habitat/Society: Although not directly related to lions and goats, sa'ir behave in some ways like these creatures. They live in small groups structured like lion prides, but no sa'ir has ever been seen to give birth (they are believed to be sterile). They are territorial in nature, attempting to kill or chase away other predators that

encroach on their hunting grounds.

Sa'ir are omnivores, able to survive by eating plants as easily as animals. They do have a strong preference for meat, turning down fresh vegetation even for day-old carrion. A group of sa'ir would try to take down a large creature like an elephant if one were presented to them, but the areas they inhabit usually present smaller game. This means that they must forage daily for meat or vegetation, but if they make a big kill they will gorge, then bask in the sunlight for a few days while digesting their meal.

Ecology: Few sa'ir are ever found far from the lamias that sired them. While they are *de facto* protectors of the lamia's lair, they cannot be trained to serve as watchdogs for the lamias. Thus, the population of sa'ir is as much controlled by the mating habits of the local lamias as it is by their own success.

2. Lamias do not usually form stable groups, but roam over a broad territory as individuals, overcoming their hatred of their own kind only to exploit a rich find (such as an entire caravan of humans) or when they enter into heat and must mate. The urgency of heat temporarily assuages the lamia's murderous tendencies, so lamia pairs break up immediately after heat leaves them (captured human mates are rarely as lucky).

If a region provides only limited resources, such as a single watering hole or a solitary pass through a mountain range, then lamias will be crowded more closely together there. But when even living and hunting together in the same area, it takes the influence of a stronger creature, such as a lamia noble, to force any form of peace on them and coordinate group efforts.

3. Lamias possess four spells they can cast once each daily: *charm person, illusion* (as per the wand), *mirror image* and *suggestion.* In addition, noble lamias can cast 1d6 (if male) or 2d4 (if female) levels of wizard spells, with two restrictions on what spells they can use: availability and suitability.

Lamia nobles can neither make spell books nor copy spells from one spell book onto a blank page in another. Thus the spells they can choose from each day are limited by the spell books they have at hand. For this reason, human wizards are considered valuable prizes by nobles; two encountering a magic-user would fight over him, possibly to the death.

As lamia nobles are naturally competent in the casting of illusory and mind-control spells, and reticent about using high-damage spells such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt* on potential human mates, they tend to select only deceptive spells from those available to them. Their preferences include most illusion/phantasm and enchantment/charm spells, but those of other schools are also chosen, even those not available to illusionists and enchanters such as the necromantic *feign death* and the invocation/evocation *wall of fog.*

Against nonhumans or in an emergency, lamia nobles are willing to use

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destructive spells if they have any in their spell books. Their lack of skill with this type of spell gives victims a bonus of +2 on saving throws vs. non-deceptive spells.

4. Lamias of all sorts prefer not to engage in combat, as it is dangerous and provides only food; subtle snares can gain them information, treasure, and mates who can serve as food when they've outlived their other uses. To accomplish this, lamias use their illusion-creating powers to lure victims into situations where they can employ their Wisdom-draining power.

The draining of Wisdom can't be accomplished by the stab of a knife or the slash of a claw. The lingering touch of a lamia's hand against the victim's bare skin for most of a minute will drain 1 Wisdom point. This is difficult to do during battle, but is not as hard to accomplish in non-combat settings such as seduction or a wrestling match.

If forced into combat, common lamias can use the hooves or claws of their lower bodies, and all lamias can use hand-held weapons. Weapon choice is partially dictated by whatever they have at hand, but male nobles tend to use swords while common lamias and female nobles prefer daggers. If their treasure trove contains magical weapons, these will probably be used.

5. Lamias usually disguise themselves as humans in order to lure real humans into their traps. Common lamias cast *illusion* for their disguises, while noble lamias have the ability to actually change to human form and back to lamia noble form at will and as often as they desire, saving their own *illusion* spells for such things as decorating their lair and hiding the remains of previous victims.

The *illusion* spell requires constant concentration to remain in effect. Minor activities such as moving or talking are possible, but the greater the activity level of the caster or the more distracted she is, the more difficult it is to maintain the spell. As the amount of attention given the maintenance of the spell drops, its effects are similarly reduced: Intricate details disappear from scenes, the radius of effect decreases, and patches of reality can "shine through" the layer of illusion covering them.

6. One of the greatest difficulties a lamia is likely to have during the Wisdom-draining procedure is impatience. If the lamia was unlucky or uncreative enough to only make occasional short draining attempts spread out over a period of hours or days, it would be likely to lose its temper and force the issue by seizing the victim or otherwise attempting to enforce contact, which would probably alert the victim. Every hour that a lamia spends attempting to drain a victim, it must make an Ability Check on 1d20 against its Intelligence; if it fails the check, it loses its temper. A threat to its carefully laid plans is another reason for a lamia to abandon subtlety in favor of speed.

7. While the upper body of a common lamia is that of a human woman, its lower body can resemble a lion, goat, deer, antelope, or other creature. As to sex, it's hermaphroditic—each common lamia is both male and female. What beast makes up the lower body at birth is random. As each body has advantages or disadvantages, the least powerful types, deer and antelope, are rare among adults, while the lion form is quite common. Fully 60% of all adult lamia are of the lion-type, with 25% goat-type and only 15% of deer/antelope-type.

Lamias prefer to avoid pitched combat. If forced into melee because of a threat or their chaotic natures, they can attack with spells, weapons, and the armaments of their animal halves. Lion-type lamias make two claw attacks per round for 1-4 hp each; if both of these attacks hit, they can rake with their hind claws for two attacks of 1-6 hp each. Goat- and deer-type lamias can make two hoof attacks for 1-3 hp each, but deer lamias are somewhat frailer than the others (only 5 HD, compared to the 9 of the lion and 7 of the goat lamias). Deer lamias are fleet of foot (MV 24), but in combat their bloodthirsty nature usually prevents them from fleeing, so they tend to be slain young by other lamia types. Experience points for defeating lamias are: 650 XP for deer-, 1,400 XP for goat-, and 4,000 XP for lion-type lamias.

8. A victim fully drained of Wisdom loses his self-control and judgment, forming an irrational emotional bond to the lamia who drained him. He doesn't lose his other faculties, which can lead to a horrible torture. In the control of the lamia, a victim can be conscious of his slavery (if the lamia doesn't take pains to maintain its illusions once the prey has been snared) and can frantically cast about for a means of escape. However, even if given a chance to leave, he will be unable to take advantage of it. As with an addiction, the thought of escape might be appealing, but the thought of leaving his "beloved" would be almost unthinkable.

This torture is usually short-lived unless the victim has been taken by a lamia noble who has other needs besides mating and eating, including the desire for more and stronger spells, the urge to rule over others, and even a longing for companionship. A common lamia usually kills a human mate immediately after its period of heat ends, but a lamia noble keeps its catch as a play-toy for as long as the prey pleases it.

While it is unlikely a lamia noble's prey could survive for long without being killed for some imagined slight, some rare victims are eventually released unharmed if they have been witty, charming, and "good company" for the duration of their imprisonment. While this is the result of the lamia noble's lingering affection for its prey, it must be remembered that all lamias are somewhat insane, and such gentle treatment is not to be relied upon.

9. Because Wisdom includes one's judgment, guile, and common sense, draining someone of these capacities does more than make him a slave of a lamia. A man with no common sense or ability to make sound judgments finds it difficult to perform in a hectic situation such as combat (including commanding one), and thus will suffer a penalty of -6 on all "to hit" and saving-throw rolls (including but not limited to saving throws against mind-affecting spells). Because of this, a man controlled by a lamia and sent into combat is often little more than cannon-fodder designed to weaken the lamia's opponents before the lamia makes its own attack.

10. No matter what spell was used to create it, a lamia's human disguise can be penetrated either by the very experienced or the very young. Adventurers have a chance of 5% per level above 6th (e.g., 5% at 7th level, 10% at 8th) of spotting inconsistencies in the disguise, such as forgetting to create adequate illusory clothing when playing a role that would normally require it.

Lamias adopt a number of forms, such as those of children, confused peasants, foreigners, or the like, so that they'll have a ready excuse to cover up any minor errors they make in their disguise. Erotic guises are also quite effective and often used. Persons untempted by this sort of illusion have a bonus to their chance of seeing through it, ranging from 15% for paladins and some clerics to 90% for the very young, for whom these illusions would hold no attraction.

Lamia nobles are more adept at illusion generating (-10% to the chance of spotting them), and because of this are more successful at infiltrating human society. They will sometimes be found in crowded cities as opposed to barren wastes, gaining the simple companionship they tragically desire along with a greater supply of prey.

The author would like to thank Phil Masters for his many suggestions during the writing of this article and for creating the lamia noble (in the FIEND FOLIO® tome) in the first place.

Here it comes!

Wondering what TSR is about to do next? Turn to "TSR Previews" in this issue and find out!

A Visit With Powerful Protectors of Law and Good

THE ECOLOGY OF The Lammasu

by Belinda G. Ashley

Artwork by Tom Baxa

We were known as the Company of Singing Soldiers. We had traveled a great distance to reach the foothills of the Roaring Mountains, wherein lay the temple of my forefathers, an ancient stronghold against evil but one long forgotten to song and tale. At first, our journey went easily, but as we climbed higher into the mountains, the way became more difficult, With each step our muscles ached and our backs strained under our load.

On the 15th day of our journey, we spotted orc tracks, As fate would have it, the weather grew foul we were pelted by wind and rain.

On the 21st night, before dawn, we were attacked. After a fierce battle, those that remained of us made for the heights. Half way up, our path was suddenly blocked by boulders and felled trees. An ambush. The orcs flew over them with mad glee, outnumbering us ten to one. We ran, fighting as we fled, but were lost; our strength was waning, and the last of our arrows was spent. No amount of valor could hold off so numerous an enemy for long. One by one we fell; there were just the three of us now, the other four unmoving at our feet. I, too, finally began to give in to the pain, to the exhaustion.

As I fell, a crack of light slammed into the orcs. They cried in sudden shock and panic. Another bolt of light flashed before me; the scent of sulfur and burnt flesh filled my nostrils. Again and again lightning exploded in the orcish ranks, and they fell back. In the sky appeared winged lion-beasts who dove at the orcs with flames and lightning leaping from their massive paws.[1] My head throbbed horribly, and as my thoughts faded into darkness, in my delerium, I could have sworn that I was flying over the battlefield, watching orcs squirm in the grasps of trees.[2]

We awoke to find ourselves lying on piles of fresh rushes in a bare room with no windows and only one heavy wooden door, We were in the temple. My limbs ached and my mouth felt parched, but I was otherwise in good health; though we still wore our tattered and stained garb, our wounds were healed, and our hands and faces were clean of blood.

"What were those beasts?" I asked. "What do they want from us?"

"They're manticores," said Lorien. "They've brought us here to eat us at their leisure."

"I don't think so," Sharyllon said. "I've never seen a manticore cast a lightning bolt."

"Manticores wouldn't bother healing us just to turn around and eat us," Bromar added. "Maybe we can reason with them."

As we slowly, painfully, rose to our feet, the bolt on the door pull back. The doorway was at once filled with the body of one of the winged lion-beasts. Though its mane and eyes were that of a lion, the face was human and wore an amused expression.

"Well, warriors," it said, humor in the bariton voice, "I'm glad to see that you're awake. My name is Raliendar of the Krondak Pride and I am to be your advisor."[3]

I introduced our company and—with more than a bit of apprehension—asked what he planned to do with us.

He gave a deep chuckle. "What do you think? Eat you?" Then he laughed a great laugh that made our chests rumble with the sound. "Are the songs so old and forgotten that none know of the Rewarrien, Harwei nak Grwellin? In your language we are called *lammasu*." When we didn't answer, he shook his shaggy head and sighed. "You have much to learn. Well, I would imagine you are all hungry. Dinner is waiting, if you'll follow me please."

We followed Raliendar through ancient marble halls, occasionally catching glimpses inside the rooms. In several, the lion-beasts—lammasu, did he say?—lay sprawled across the stone floor, leisurely cleaning their tawny coats and feathered wings. In others, adults supervised playful cubs as they swatted each other with their paws. Many of the rooms, however, were empty. Raliendar told us that most of the pride had gone to the war council.

"The Defenders and Enlightened are making battle plans to rout the enemy." Raliendar explained.[4] "We were aware of the orc's army but were waiting for the gathering of Whitemoon to hear from the elders and the Pride Lords.' All the prides have now gathered here in preparation of war."

I asked him how many prides there were.

"There are six within the area you call the Wilderlands. Each one is responsible for keeping a lookout for such evils as this. Come, let me show you something." He stopped in front of two ornately carved doors and opened them for us to see within. On the floor of the room, drawn in chalk, was a detailed map of the area. A dozen or more stern faced lammasu bent their heads over the map, speaking in tense tones.

"They look different from you somehow," I whispered.

"These arc the Pride Lords; they are the greater lammasu." See the tall one to the far right? That is Krondak, our Lord," said Raliendar proudly.

Raliendar told us that each pride's Defenders, Enlightened, and Pride Lords were here discussing tactics for the upcoming battle. "The Enlightened are informers and surveyors. They give the Defenders the needed information to lay battle plans. The Defenders are our protectors; they use strategy and spells to drive back and defeat our enemies."

He turned and motioned us to follow. We passed from the war room into a brightly lit hall. In the center of the room stood a large table with heavy oak chairs. Arranged on the table was an assortment of fresh vegetables and melons. "Ah! Your meals are ready," said Raliendar. "I am sorry that we do not have utensils for you; we have little need of such items."

Bromar looked at the food hesitantly, "Will you be serving any meat by chance?"

Raliendar frowned, "We do not eat the flesh of animals with whom we share our homes. We are not the only ones to live under the sanctuary of the Temple. There are many here who help us in our cause and deserve protection."

"Of whom else do you speak?" I asked. "I've seen no one here but you lammasu."

"Well, there are the forest creatures that help us keep an eye on things. And then, of course, there are the brownies."[7]

"Brownies!" we said in unison.

Dalisyn looked shocked. "Brownies up here? In this rocky area?"

Raliendar chuckled softly. "Of course! They help us tend the gardens. Beyond the ridge is a green valley in which we grow our food. It is not cultivated like the gardens of man, and to the uneducated eye it looks like an overgrown meadow. But with the brownies' help we've more than enough food to keep everyone happy. Enough questions. Eat! I must see how the council fares. Wander around as you please; I shall join you later."

After eating, we strolled around the buildings and headed for the temple. We had not actually seen it as yet; we had only wandered through the outlying halls and living quarters. Climbing the well-worn steps, we came to a level courtyard, and there, across the uneven stones, it stood.

I trembled with excitement. The building glowed with the setting rays of sunlight and from within floated the beautiful sound of voices. We entered solemnly. Before us stood dozens of lammasu singing before a golden altar. Amber light poured through stained glass windows, bathing their tawny bodies in a holy radiance. Though their words were unknown to me, the purity of the song overwhelmed my heart with peace.

Raliendar later joined us and asked if we would come with him. We passed from the temple through a tiled foyer and entered a small chapel called the Tomb of Souls. "Beneath these marble stones," he said, "Lie your forefathers. We have kept these tombs sacred for many an age against the dark rulers who would defile this holy place."

He spent most of the night telling us about his kind. We discovered he was a Healer and one of those who had rescued us from the orcs. Healers, he told us, weren't just for healing wounds of the body but for healing the soul as well. They dedicate their lives to teach the pride the sacred songs of the First Elders. "Song worship is how we keep our history and faith in our gods."[8]

"First Elders?'

"The Illuminated Ones. The first pair to have walked upon the world and breathed life into our kind. Rhamaldrig the Father, Lord Protector, and Chareah the Mother, Queen of Knowledge."[9]

After our wounds healed, our company lent a hand in the great battle against the orcs for which our hosts had been planning. We were amazed at the organization of the lammasu. Every member, except the cubs and den mothers, helped in the conflict against the orcs.[10] An entire pride would make themselves invisible, split into three units, and set up an attack. We joined them on the second day of battle as part of the second line of attackers.

The morning sun had not yet risen, and the sky was still a misty grey. Rain fell on leaves with a soft pitter-patter, muffling our footsteps through the woods. The lammasu had spotted a small group of orcs that had become separated from the main army; this was our target. The Enlightened positioned themselves on the orc's left and right flanks as we positioned ourselves in the center. Silently we drew our swords and bows and tensed ourselves for the moment of battle.

Without warning, the Enlightened hurled their first attack. Bushes and small pines grasped the enemy in leafy boughs. Orcs yelped in surprise, struggling with their woody opponents. Lightning leapt into their ranks and sent those not yet entangled running for their lives.

The Lords and Defenders descended from the air, sending bursts of flames among the orcs. We rushed forward, keeping clear of the entangling plants, and set upon the retreating enemy. The Healers, who were hidden at the rear of the orc army, cast a wall of spiked plants to prevent escape. No orc escaped their wrath. After a week, the orc army dispersed and scattered across the great Wilderlands.

Months went by; heavy rains held us within the mountain's grasp. Yet the Temple was dry and comfortable, and so we spent a peaceful season within its halls. But alas, with the coming of summer our spirits once more yearned for adventure, and we readied ourselves for the long march ahead. We gave heartfelt farewells to our new friends and set ourselves on the path homeward.

Several years have passed, and I can still recall the beauty and splendor of the lammasu and their great love of song. Most of all I remember their cunning and courage against their enemies. And now, on every Fallfest, I raise a toast: To the lammasu, for bravery, wisdom, and justice, I salute you. May the gods' breath be always under your wings.

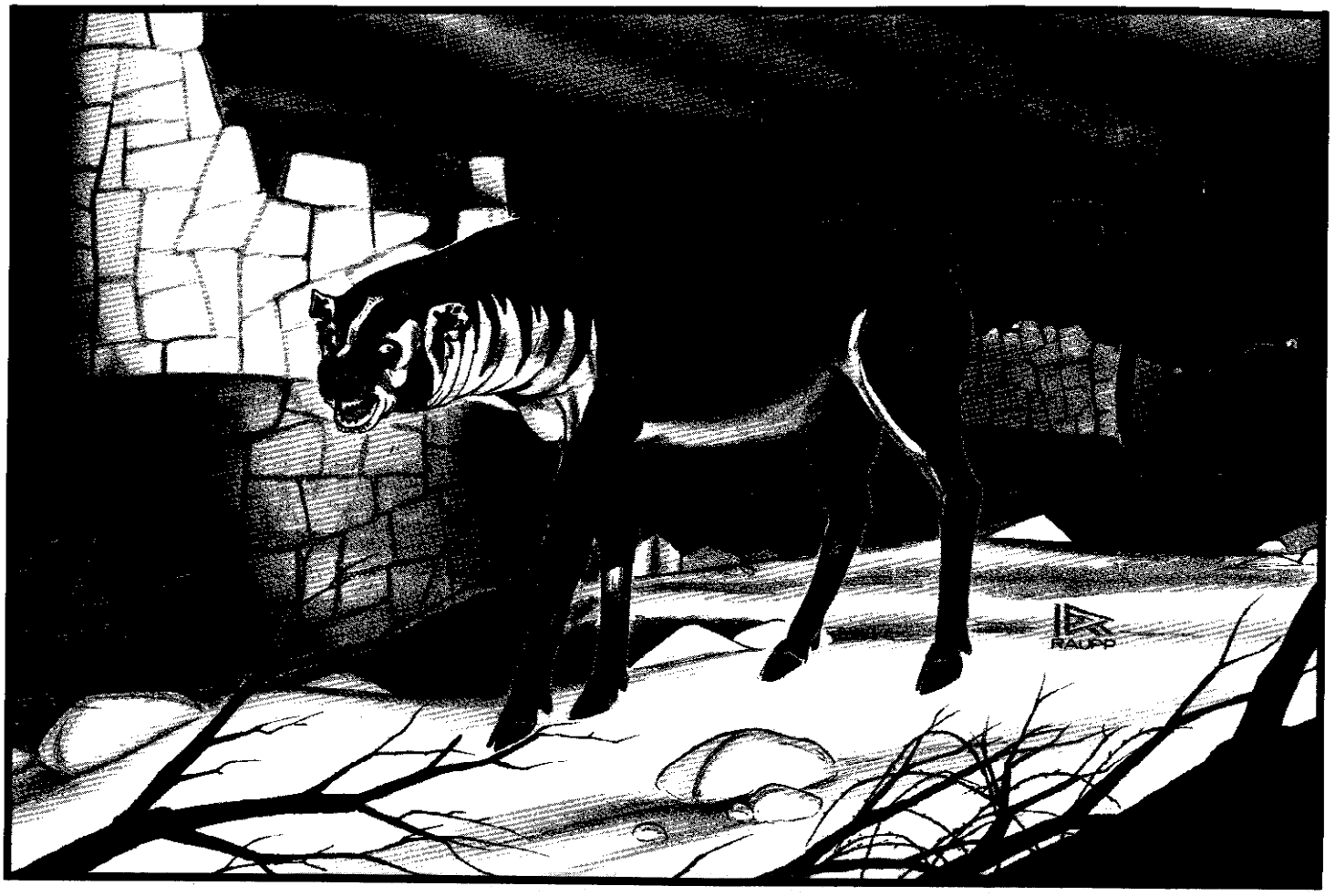
1. Common spells that the lammasu use in combat are, *lightning bolt*, *produce flame*, *entangle*, *plant growth*, and *spike growth*.
2. Lammasu will seldom allow any to ride upon their backs except in dire need, and the being carried must be small-sized or smaller. They can, however, carry large items grasped in their great forelimbs for short distances. Their maneuverability class in this case would be two levels lower than normal.
3. A pride consists of 10—35 members and takes the name of its lord. All members of the pride are responsible for foraging for food, raising the young, and keeping their dens clean and orderly.
4. The lammasu have a strict hierarchy. Each member of a pride belongs to one of three groups: Defenders, Enlightened, or Healers. Each of the three groups is commanded by an elder. Though all lammasu can cast spells, each group memorizes spells that benefit his group. For example, the Enlightened would take *detect* spells, *endure cold/heat*, *pass without trace*, *know alignment*, and *messenger* as typical spells to have for surveillance.
5. The Pride Lord is not of any one group but is representative of all groups. The elder of each group chooses the Pride Lord; these four, elders and lord, will always be greater lammasu unless there are none available for these positions. The Pride Lord is always a male.
6. Greater lammasu have black tipped manes, tails, and wing feathers.
7. Lammasu get along well with most sylvan creatures, but they are especially fond (and protective) of brownies, who are also lawful good. Brownies will always show up when lammasu are near, no matter the area, and will offer their help in tending the gardens and doing any occasional writing needing to be done (as lammasu can not hold pens with their massive paws).
8. The lammasu keep no written records of their histories; however, they have excellent memories and use song and stories to pass on the knowledge of one generation to another.
9. Rhamaldrig and Chareah are celestial lammasu. (See *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®* tome 8.)
10. "Den mother" is a term used to denote those responsible for the young and does not refer to gender.

Other Notes

The lammasu do not have infravision but have eyesight as keen as a cat and can see well even on a moonless night. They also have sensitive hearing.

Lammasu mate for life and live to be approximately 150 years old. Greater lammasu can live to be as old as 200. During their life they will only have two or three breeding periods, giving birth to one to two cubs per period.

Of the three groups, the Enlightened are the most likely to run into PCs, as they are often out scouting their terrain for trouble. Ω



The ecology of the leucrotta

A familiar-sounding but fiendish-looking beast

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Pseudobiblia* of Edygulph Eremmore, naturalist and sage:

One of the ugliest and most cruel of all creatures is the leucrotta, a loathsome carnivorous beast that inhabits wastelands in the wilderness. On its cloven hooves it runs as fast as a medium-sized warhorse, and it savages prey with its jagged, bony jaws rather as sharks do. Humans are its favorite prey, and the "ugly killer" is one of the most dangerous and most feared predators of the wastes because of its cunning and its strange talent for mimicry.

Whether acting individually or in a small group, leucrotta are sly and enterprising. They can develop simple but effective tricks to take advantage of their ability to mimic the human voice, and are often able to lure large groups of travelers to their doom.

One group of leucrotta, for example, came upon and devoured a few pilgrims on the road, took brands from their fire, and carried these for miles along the road to a long-deserted keep, where the creatures lit many torches and brushpiles along the walls to make it appear inhabited. Then, with their human-like speech, they called out (while in seclusion) to a passing caravan, luring the group inside to rest for the night. The leucrotta slew many of the party as the members split up to explore the dimly lit interior of the stronghold, bounding out of the darkness to bite at faces and necks. The monsters returned later to devour the bodies — after harrying the fleeing survivors and chasing them down the road until dawn.

Leucrotta often lurk along roads and near habitations by night, learning information about humans who live in the area or are passing through the wilderness. They take note of expressions often heard in Common Tongue speech, so as to improve their mimicry. One leucrotta ventured abnormally close to civilization and took to prowling a glen where thieves would come to meet in the night. With the vocabulary it overheard there, it was soon able to begin devouring thieves who fell into its trap. The creature returned to the glen every few weeks for several years before it was discovered, trapped, and slain.

Those who, for some reason, must dwell near the known haunts of leucrotta are prepared for a raid at any time, and they quickly learn not to engage in conversation with anyone whose face they cannot see. They begin to expect an assault when their dogs start to disappear; leucrotta hate these noisy, persistent trackers and alarm-raisers.

Leucrotta almost always use concealing darkness or terrain cover to draw near to prey (or to remain concealed while the prey comes closer). Then they rush out with great speed, attacking furiously and tearing with their powerful jaws. They will always disable one victim and turn to another, rather than finishing off one at a time, more out of cruelty than voraciousness. The

creatures are skillful at tracking, and exult in the gaining of food as much as in the devouring of it.

The appearance of the leucrotta is not utterly horrifying, but certainly repulsive, nonetheless. Its bare, ragged-edged jawbones give its face and head a ghoulish, skeletal look. It has the body shape of a large deer, but without even a close-cropped coat of fur or hair; its trunk, legs, and cloven hooves seem mismatched with its head, which resembles that of a giant badger or similar burrowing animal, and its tail, which is thin and slightly tufted at the end like that of a lion. If the creature had a more pleasant demeanor, its appearance might be tolerable or even humorous — but such is not the case.

Leucrotta have been known to cooperate with other creatures, such as lamia or even evil naga, for mutual gain, but most prefer to hunt alone or with two or three others of their own kind. Most other creatures shun them, for even those stronger than a leucrotta can never let their guard down near one of them. Leucrotta will attack anything that is at a disadvantage or that they think they can defeat, whether or not the prey is preferred or even edible. Leucrotta will serve only evil creatures more powerful and vicious than themselves, and then only when promised enough reward. They have been occasionally reported to consort with and aid demons, and at least two observers (the adventurer Ironbars of Elcathra and the wizard Gulgath of Mulmaster), who encountered the demon lord Kostchtchie many years (and planes) apart, reported that the demon was accompanied by two astoundingly large leucrotta of exceptionally vicious temperaments, which apparently serve him as bodyguards.

Although they have no personal use for it, leucrotta will gather treasure to bargain with, or to lure prey into traps with. (Experienced travelers know enough not to hastily approach any hoard found in a cave or grotto in the wilderness, for a leucrotta may be planning to take greedy discoverers from behind while they pore over their riches.) If one of a group of leucrotta is captured or injured in battle, the others will not aid it or attempt to rescue it. On rare occasions leucrotta will team up for a short time (perhaps only one assault) with more powerful creatures of like alignment in a hunting group.

Male and female leucrotta (or "leucrottas"; either term is accepted) tend to be of equal size, and appear identical to casual scrutiny. They do not take permanent mates, and the father does not usually aid in the raising of young. Calves are born six months after mating, live and in full control of themselves. They follow their mother for at least four months, learning trickery and hunting skills, and always go off on their own at the age of eight months, or shortly before the mother is about to give birth again. During the first two months after giving birth, the mother goes into a killing frenzy to provide her offspring with sufficient food. The lifespan of a leucrotta is not known, but is thought to be shorter than that of a human.

Leucrotta tend to wander, following food, and although they like to frequent a "territory" they know well (so as to readily escape pursuit, arrange ambushes, and the like), they do not fight off other predators to defend such an area, and will leave it without hesitation if threatened by very strong foes, lack of food, or natural disaster.

Avoid this creature, travelers and even warriors, unless you are prepared to fight — and do not expect to win. Even some strong bands of men who have gone forth to slay leucrotta have not returned, and most creatures give the "ugly killers" a wide berth whenever possible.

Appendix

1. Leucrotta track as well as rangers do, and try to make this task easier by savaging prey so that it is weakened and slowed, and perhaps leaves a bloody trail when fleeing. In battle leucrotta bite, slash, and tear with their ridged, bony jaws for 3-18 points of damage. They have a chance of disabling or killing prey with a strike to the throat, determined as for the devil dog (see the FIEND FOLIO® Tome): If the leucrotta's modified "to hit" roll is 4 or more greater than the number required, or a natural 20 in any case, the victim has been hit in the throat. Damage from the bite is the normal amount, but the victim is rendered unconscious from the strike. This comatose condition will last for 2-8 turns, and at the end of this time the victim will die if not revived beforehand by the application of *cure serious* wounds or some similarly strong healing magic.

A leucrotta can kick backwards with its rear legs, even when fleeing, and still retain its full movement rate in that round. The hooves each do 1-6 points of damage (roll "to hit" separately for each hoof) to anyone standing directly to the rear of the creature, or anyone in close pursuit of it. If pressed, a leucrotta can rear up and lash out with its front hooves (for 1-6 damage each), but it cannot do this and kick with its rear hooves in the same round. It can combine a bite attack with either kind of hoof kick in the same round, providing that victims are in a position to be hit by both forms of damage.

The monster can stamp on or trample any target that is lower than itself (on lower ground, fallen, crouching, etc.), striking with both sets of hooves together and crashing down with the full weight of its body, for 4-16 points of damage. If this stamping attack hits, all hoof and bite attacks against the fallen victim in subsequent rounds are made at +2 "to hit," unless and until the victim avoids being hit for one round and is able to get to his feet. When engaging a fallen opponent, the leucrotta has a better chance of scoring a hit to the throat (see above) because of the +2 bonus "to hit." If other opponents are nearby, the leucrotta will break off its attack against a fallen foe as soon as it scores a hit to the target's throat or when the victim is reduced to one-third or less of his hit points.

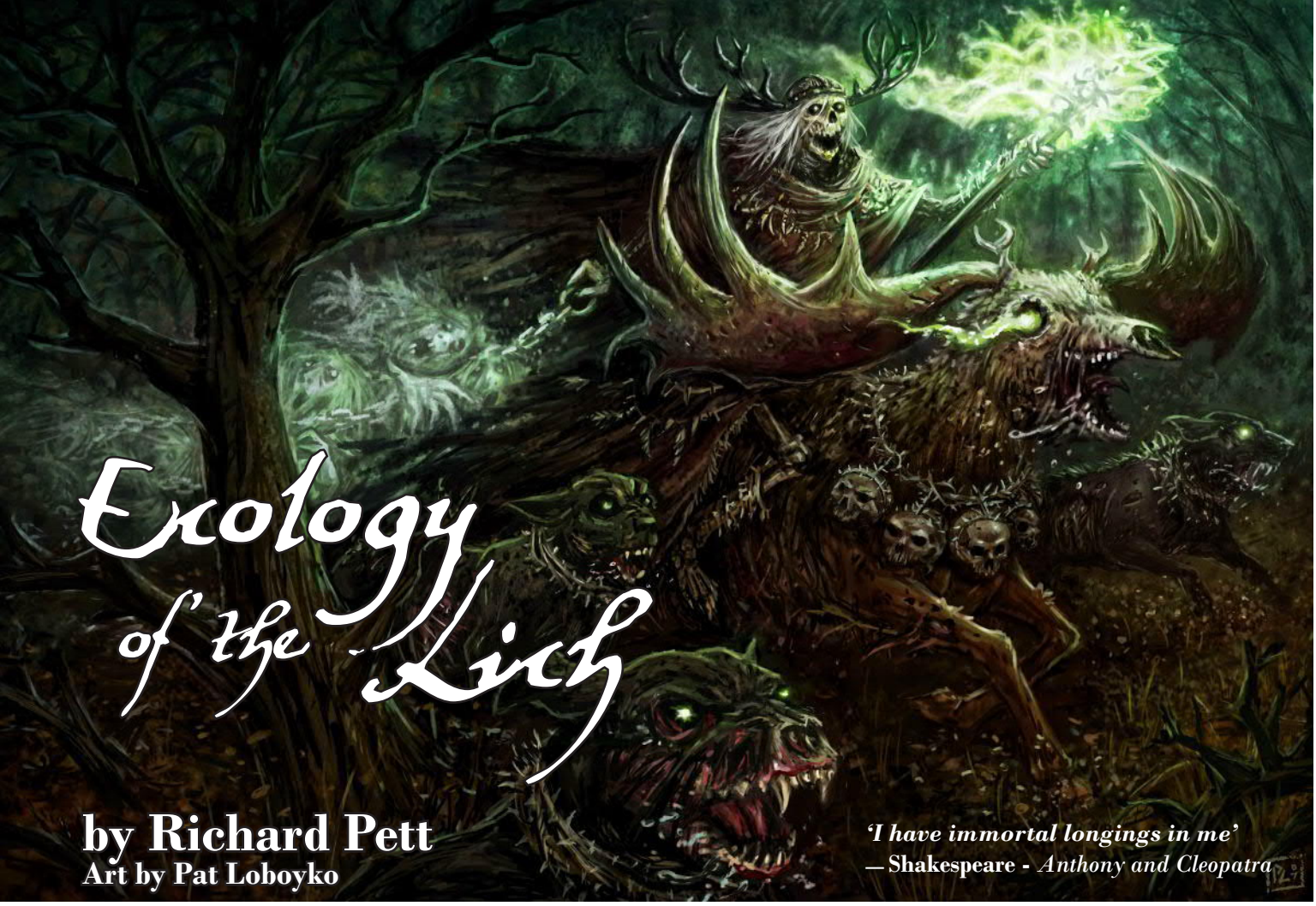
2. Leucrotta have hardy constitutions; the climate of the creature's habitat ranges from subarctic to subtropical. Those encountered in cold regions have a layer of body fat which increases their ability to endure physical attacks; opponents take a -1 penalty to damage inflicted on any successful hit with a non-magical weapon (minimum damage of 1 point per hit). All leucrotta gain a +4 bonus on saving throws vs. disease or poison.

3. All full-grown leucrotta can mimic the human voice with the same degree of skill. Any character within earshot who can understand the common tongue will believe that the voice is that of a human if the character fails to roll less than his intelligence or wisdom (whichever is higher) on d20. Thus, a character with 16 intelligence and 18 wisdom has a 3 in 20 chance of being fooled by the mimicry — on a roll of 18, 19, or 20. A character who is not fooled will recognize the voice as an impersonation, but will not know who or what is doing the mimicry, and may well still decide to approach and investigate. A character who is fooled will not rush forward blindly; he will assume that the voice is that of a human, but may still be cautious about approaching an unseen "person."

4. Young leucrotta are size M and have 3+1 HD when born. They gain 1 hit die every two months thereafter until at full 6+1 HD and size L status at the age of six months. The bite of a young leucrotta (less than six months old) does 2-12 points of damage, and each kicking hoof does 1-4 points of damage. They are able to mimic the human voice at two months of age, and characters receive a +2 bonus on their attempts to "disbelieve" the mimicry. This bonus decreases to +l when the young leucrotta reaches four months of age, and is eliminated altogether at six months of age.

5. If two leucrotta are encountered at once, there is a 50% chance that they are a mated pair (a male accompanying a female who is carrying young). The male will go into a frenzy if either he or the female is attacked, gaining a +2 bonus "to hit" and on damage. If a solitary leucrotta is encountered, there is a 50% chance that it is a single adult of either sex, a 25% chance that it is a female on a hunting spree for her young, and a 25% chance that it is a female accompanied by young (85% chance of one offspring, 15% chance of two) of between 1-8 (d8) months of age.

6. A leucrotta is not overwhelmingly intelligent, but its innate evilness lends it a slyness and cunning not usually found in non-evil creatures of average intelligence. The tricks a leucrotta uses to lure its prey are not overly complex or sophisticated, but are often all the more effective because of their simplicity. One ploy that all leucrotta use from time to time is to imitate the voice of a wounded or diseased character crying out for help — a plea that most good-aligned characters find difficult to ignore.



Ecology of the Lich

by Richard Pett
Art by Pat Loboyko

'I have immortal longings in me'
— Shakespeare - *Anthony and Cleopatra*

'Will it be the throat or the heart?'

The phylactery is made, the container waits for just one more thing. My immortal soul.

So now comes the moment of my glory, when I become whole. Never to age, never to sicken, never to wither. Greatness awaits me and but one cut remains – yet now I quiver, now I doubt, now I fear.

One final act for the man – one final moment before life begins anew, and forever. I have chosen…'

– Last mortal words of the Great Druid Croglin, the lich of the Mire

The sorcerer or wizard with an unnatural lifespan has been the subject of tales and fables throughout the ages; a thousand, thousand stories hint at their dark beginnings. One of the best known tales tells the story of the Cabal of Unsleep – a cabal of wizards who worked towards the single goal of immortality.

The Cabal ruled kingdoms eons ago, and all its members were tyrants of renowned cruelty. While they waged war with each other on the surface – they secretly held true as a brotherhood, using their squabbles to gain influence in other lands until, at last, no part of the world was untouched by their icy fingers. This cabal, it is rumored, were among the first to discover the Dreadful Pact and thus were the first liches.

However, unlife can breed insanity, and the liches had barely achieved undeath before they began turning upon each other. The present day Knights who hunt by Sunset are descendants of an ancient holy order intent upon killing all the Cabal of Unsleep – a task they have yet to complete.

Physiology

Liches are created, not born, and their only method of reproduction is the creation of a new lich. Undead liches do not eat, sleep, or breath, and the pattern of a lich's life generally follows a set route, commencing with the Becoming.

The Becoming

The lich monster description casually mentions that the process of becoming a lich is *unspeakably evil,* and that it can only be undertaken by a willing character. In his great work *Arcanum*, Manse Hoff describes three methods through which a lich can be created, although he hints that some three dozen methods were once catalogued in the great *Monstorum Sorcerus*. The three known to most

are the Dreadful Pact, the Hideous Sacrifice, and the Ripping.

The Dreadful Pact – in this method, the would-be-lich's soul is ripped from the body and placed into the phylactery by the self-destruction of the spell caster. The caster creates the phylactery and takes his own life, hoping that the magic that he has used to make the phylactery is strong enough to draw the soul into it.

This method is quick but has the drawback that unless the phylactery has been prepared perfectly, the soul of the caster is simply drawn away. Some surmise that souls drawn in this way do not simply pass onwards, but move to some unspeakable nether place where they spend eternity wandering in madness.

The Hideous Sacrifice – this method draws the soul into the phylactery through a variant of the *magic jar* spell. However, the lich-initiate must cast the spell at the precise moment of his death, and this requires extraordinary timing on behalf of the spellcaster.

As a consequence, this method is the one most fraught with the chance for mishap - the soul can be drawn before death, trapping the caster in his own spell; the caster can fail to complete the spell and die prematurely, or (in the worst case) the caster's soul is drawn into entirely the wrong place. In this last case, the lich might end up trapped within a nearby creature or object, such as an accomplice, building, or item.

The Ripping – the most dreadful method requires a trustworthy and willing volunteer. The ripping is spiritual warfare; the soul is driven from the body into the phylactery through force of pain inflicted on the spellcaster.

This method is the most sure of success, but it is also the longest and most painful, and requires extraordinary determination on the part of the spellcaster.

Once the transformation from lich-initiate has been withstood, three further stages remain in the life cycle of a lich: the Journey, the Fading, and the Corruption.

The Journey

Only some lich-initiates complete the Beginning and become liches. Those that are lost are variously referred to in arcane works as *NetherLiches, the Lost* or simply *Fallen*. Those who do survive acquire the lich template and can look forward to eternal life – and eternal waking. The spellcaster knows well that near eternity could be a curse beyond measure, but few are truly prepared for what eternity means for their minds. A certain group of newly-made liches go mad moments or days after their creation.

Those few who survive have gained eternity to plot and weave. If their ego is great enough, newly-formed liches welcome undeath, and these liches undergo a transformation almost immediately called the Glory. Glorified Liches are so overjoyed at the prospect of undeath that their abilities are enhanced, and all DCs against their special abilities are permanently increased by 2.

Once the Journey truly begins, so do the liches prepare for and ready themselves for their great quests. These quests are known among other intelligent undead, but they are more common and indeed essential to keep the active minds of the spellcasters amused and distracted.

Each lich will pursue at least one great quest, but some have dozens of plots and plans – from simple vengeance to the discovery of the answers to ultimate questions. As the months turn into years their flesh corrupts and falls away, leaving only bleached bones and red eyes of hate.

The Fading and Great Search

In time, no matter what the distraction, age and wear takes their toll on the physical form of the lich, and the Fading begins. Subtly at first, then with increasing forcefulness, the body and bones begin to decay, and the lich must find an alternative home for its soul.

A variation of *trap the soul* offers the lich one direct option to continue, by securing a suitably impressive gem in which to store his soul. This invariably requires the lich to search places unknown to even the wisest sages – the mere value of the gem alone is not enough to enable life to be stored within. Gems that allow liches to live on are rare indeed, and the search for them can take centuries.

Often the moment of Corruption concludes with the lich becoming a demi-lich, although occasionally something goes wrong and the soul is lost, in a similar way to the Dreadful Pact.

The Corruption and the Demi-Lich

While the special gems a lich finds may enables it to keep its soul safe, at this stage it is a creature with little physical being. It spends most of its time wandering the planes of existence on quests beyond the comprehension of man.

Generally only physically disturbing its remains will make a demi-lich return, although any lich will also leave at least one method for its followers to summon it. So ancient is the creature by now that any followers are likely to be less than dust, but the lich still harbors a hidden need to connect to the physical world and so will find the compulsion to be drawn back almost impossible to overcome.

When even the last fragment of skull is crumbled and gone, the lich exists only through the gems that remain and has almost entirely left the physical world. Although an aura of lingering corruption and hate may remain on the gems, the lich is seldom brought back, unless through some calamitous event or powerful summoning.

…and Beyond

Liches believe a path to enlightenment and pure mind is possible to those who pursue the far path. Some

Table 1: Knowledge of the Lich

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (the Planes) or (religion) may know about the lich. Characters making a successful skill check know all the information up to and including the DC check.

DC	Result
10	A lich is a vile undead spellcaster with a life prolonged by arcane horrors.
15	The touch of a lich can paralyze; its appearance causes fright.
20	Each lich is bound to a phylactery – a magical box into which the creature has placed its life. Destroy the phylactery, and the lich can also be destroyed. A lich with an intact phylactery reappears after death and cannot be destroyed.
25	Some liches reappear after death more quickly than others, and with centuries to plot, they are formidable foes, well prepared for any threat.
30	Even liches die, and over eons their bones wear away. Some become demi-liches – ghostly creatures that suck souls.

say the undead being becomes pure hate and is cursed by the gods with some horrific fate as a lesson. Others say that ultimately the lich develops into a being of pure enlightenment, able to atone for its corruption at last. Still others hint that the gods will only allow this enlightenment to occur in the seconds before the end of all things…

Psychology and Society

Their paranoid nature leads liches into solitary lives, although occasionally need or necessity can bring some together. Such alliances exist in an atmosphere of indescribable unease. They form alliances with vampires, some ghouls, and vampire spawn, generally using the ally to do their dirty work out in the worlds of men.

The life of a lich is one of long, slow decay, and to a lich, the passing of decades seems the blinking of an eye. By necessity, they occupy themselves with plots and intrigues, quests and machinations, and so they are encountered with surprising frequency, considering the appalling methods of their 'birth'.

Characters encountering a lich should do so cautiously, their enemy may have had several hundred years to plan for such an event and is quite likely to be much smarter than the PCs. Liches can be killed only by the destruction of their phylactery, and while chances are that the phylactery is somewhere at hand, only a foolish adventurer attacks first and seeks the phylactery later.

Unless its phylactery is found and destroyed, a lich reappears 1d10 days after its destruction. This reborn lich will seek vengeance; though it may fear its enemy, it seeks to deal with them immediately.

Lich Feats

Rapid Rebirth [Monster]
This feat allows liches to reappear much more quickly than usual. Taking the feat once allows the lich to reappear 1d10 hours after its physical death, taking the feat twice allows it to reappear in 1d10 minutes. The feat may not be taken more than twice.

Undeath Familiar [Monster]
This feat allows liches to retain an ageless familiar: the familiar gains the undead type but can be destroyed by normal means. Other than the alterations listed above, the familiar remains unchanged.

Lich Wrought Magic

With eternity at its command, the lich does not merely seek to create idle objects and mundane equipment; even the most powerful magic seems trite to the more ancient and powerful liches. When liches create magic, they create *magic*. Working in solitude for decades on a single item is but a short span when you almost have forever.

As a result, many items created by liches are tremendously powerful, rivalling those created by the gods themselves. Dabbling in such infernal arcana is risky, however, and many lich items cause disaster to those who seek to use them. The Maw of Gales, the Black Orb of Torm, and the Darkness in the Sandstorm are three such lich-spawned items.

The Maw of Gales - This infernal cave mouth resembles the mouth of a great whale carved at the foot of the mountain. A beaten copper door of great size warns intruders to leave the occupant in peace or face the consequences.

The Maw is, in fact, an elaborate trap created by the Whorl, a lich-hierophant who spent ten centuries covering its own tracks with traps, rumor and false leads. After destroying an empire, the Whorl had so many enemies in so many countries and planes of existence that flight was the only option. It spends its whole existence on the run, never spending more than a few days in one place before moving on. It resembles a wanderer in ragged robes leaning on a bent staff.

The Maw is an advanced *censer of controlling air elementals*; when the valve is opened, elder air elementals arrive at a rate of one per day. These elementals faultlessly pursue those who broke open the doorway. They appear until the violators of the door are slain or a *wish* or *miracle* spell prevents any more appearing.

Caster Level 20th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster IX*; Market Place 360,000gp

The Black Orb of Torm – this black sphere reflects no light and is cold to the touch. It was created by the Archlich Torm for her followers as weapons in the quest to discover the the Garden of Unending Beauty.

When activated, the Orb replicates an *implosion* spell cast by a 20th level wizard. Occasionally, Torm traps the orbs to turn on those who use them.

Caster Level 20th; Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, *implosion*; Market Place 9,000 gp

The Darkness in the Sandstorm - What happened with the Darkness no one knows, save the great lich Kov was somehow responsible for its creation.

The Darkness is a storm of black desert fury, a dark hole that rolls across the sands causing appalling sandstorms. Its heart is a huge *sphere of annihilation*.

Some say the Darkness contains the lich Kov itself, and is guided by his hate. They whisper that one day it may find its way across the desert and enter the Caliphate.

The Phylactery

Generally phylacteries are sealed metal boxes containing strips of parchment inscribed with magical phrases. However, the tiny box is only one option; others are available.

The Iron Mirror – a black mirror in which no reflection can be seen.

The Black Diamond – a diamond so dark it appears as night, its surface etched with runes that look like stars.

The Grey Tooth – the tooth of a great ice tiger fully two feet long and covered in curious writings.

The Great Lintel – a huge beam many feet thick, the surface must be examined closely to see the finest of runes – writings that have worn to nothing over eons.

The Mithral Valve – a vast door depicting demons devouring angels.

The Great Bell – a green copper bell covered in vile sigils and images.

Many liches study puzzle boxes – complex interlocking objects within which the phylactery is stored. These boxes are of varying complexity. Some require many Intelligence checks (DC 25 upwards), some may be opened in only one way, and the puzzles must be unwrapped in order, while others are horribly trapped.

In each case the phylactery has the same statistics – Tiny, 40 hit points, hardness 20, break DC 40.

History of the Lich

Lich.*lych*. n. Corpse (obs):-*gate*, roofed gateway of churchyard where coffin is placed to await clergyman's arrival; - *owl*, screech-owl

Liches as generic animated corpses are mentioned in Clark Ashton Smith's "Empire of the Necromancers," a short story full of marvelously disturbing and evocative imagery:

'Dead laborers made their palace-gardens to bloom with long perished flowers; liches and skeletons toiled for them in the mines, or reared superb, fantastic towers to the dying sun. … Those that were the fairest, whom the plague and the worm had not ravaged overmuch, they took for their lemans and made to serve their necrophiliac lust.'

The idea of storing one's soul in an object to permit life after death is an image prevalent in many mythologies. Eluding death through sorcery or black magic is also a common theme in folklore.

Sample Liches

The lich's motivation is an important way for the DM to judge how to run both the lich and its followers. Here are a few samples:

The Scholar: The scholar has entered undeath to allow it to continue its research, what great quest can captivate a thousand lifetimes?

The Hater: The Hater wishes only one thing – the extermination of all things so that at last, it may find peace.

The Hermit: always whispered, never seen, there is something out there that wishes to be left undisturbed. Why do men continually seek its treasure?

The Paranoiac: The Maze they say fills the whole mountain roots – a catacomb of traps and protections, doorways to death impossible drops and endless fear. At the heart of the maze dwells the lich, its only fear – its own death.

The Enlightened One: beyond all thought of hate, beyond the need for avarice and corruption, even a lich may find a path to enlightenment. These liches become something new, a creature of joy and peace; some even surmise that all liches wish for contentment, and that their dark souls crave only one thing – happiness. Could this lich have found it, and will anyone countenance dealings with this creature – no matter how good its intentions seem?

Rare Liches

Fell-lych: The Fell-lych, or the *Lych Born of Madness* is a lich that uses an aberration as a base creature. These beings have twisted dreams and goals that humans find hard to fathom.

The Dead Kings: The Race of Dead Kings began as a cult of storm giants, twisted by some fell magic in ages past. The Dead Kings have spread to other giants, but their ancient rulers are still fallen storm giants. They are both beautiful and appalling to behold – towering masses of pale ragged flesh with deep eyes of black fire.

The Thing at the Soul of the Mire

'I sprang to my feet, my mind paralyzed by the thing that appeared through the mist. It was something dead, yet hateful life stirred in its skull, a fire the color of blood and misery. This lich held aloft a great scythe, light dancing on its blade even in the darkness of this dreadful cloying mire. The antlers of a great stag rested on its brow like a crown – and this king of old still wore his rags of office – a cloak and robe stained with a thousand winters.'

—The final moments of Joshua Cane, Poacher

'Stay off the moors lads'

—Motto of the Severed Ram, Grimward Edge

They say the Grimward is alive – a moor with a soul. From the Shepherd's Meeting Stones in the north to

the Bleakfalls to the south, all avoid its misery – no track or road or even shepherd's trail crosses the Grimward, and even in summer it is the color of rotting autumn leaves. The moor is alive with biting insects and strange calls, baying hounds and living mists. The weather is odd, and the mire has disappeared behind mist for months on end.

Once the moor was a great kingdom, the ruins of which still dot the landscape. What horrific event caused the land to fall into a great mire is unknown, but the little life remaining there is twisted and pitiable. A few balding, mangy wolves scratch out a life feasting on diseased sheep with white eyes. Crows are fond of the mire, but other birds avoid it.

The Thing at the Soul of the Mire is a lich, and his dabbling is responsible for the fall of the kingdom. By tampering with the spirits of nature, he robbed the land of life and sucked its soul. Packs of dead hounds bay in the night, and the moors are dotted with harmless-looking expanses of gray and russet that become mires. The bog itself is scores of yards deep.

The land grows ever more dreary as travelers approach its heart. The mire covers over 60,000 acres that are almost impossible to cross, a place of thorns and quicksand and death. At its heart lies Grimward Tor, which seems to be little more than a curious rocky spot. The tor contains the ruins of a great tower which once stood at the heart of this dead kingdom. The Soul, a druid lich of incredible age, broods at the summit of the tor, sending its hounds and flocks of birds to be its eyes and ears in the land. Perhaps it waits for some omen before it reawakens the kingdom.

Adventure Hooks

- The Mire is spreading year on year – what dark heart drives its remorseless advance? Can it be stopped?
- Strange lights are seen on the mire, will-o'-wisps have entered the towns around the moor by night, seemingly searching for something.
- The Soul of the Mire sends a voice to the folk of Grimward Edge warning them that unless they aid it, something terrible will happen. The townsfolk cannot side with evil, yet as the next day dawns, impossible monsters are seen on the outskirts of the town.

Other Sample Liches

Here are a few liches you may wish to hint at in your own campaign world. Perhaps their deeds are little more than stories in the books of children, or perhaps they are neighbors – rather nasty neighbors who cannot be ignored.

S'sssssaf Thay
Female Locathah Cleric 14 Lich

It has never seen the sun, never felt the rain on its brow or the wind between its fingers, yet it hates all these things, hates and fears the world above. Its children are krakens that scour the seas of men intent on recovering some vast object that, to human eyes, more closely resembles an island than something made in ancient days. Why does she seek this sinking land, and does it signify the flooding of the world?

The LichGate

Created by the minions of **Belphegor,** the Prince of Laziness (see Kobold Quarterly #2), this colossal arched gate holds the bodies of 13 bound liches and stands guard on the baron's domain. Belphegor finds the binding of the liches to the site particularly amusing; the passing of eons has driven the liches into a madness of enforced torpidity.

The Mad King
Male human bar6/sor12 lich

The Mad King, they say, never rests. His kingdom, called the Web of Spears, is perpetually on the move, the gypsy king's hordes spreading across the world to blacken all lands. Great iron towers move with the army, which is more akin to a moving city than a gathering of warriors. Stories say a barbarian horde mounted on black elephants is approaching: are they his allies, or his downfall?

The Queen of Dark Whimsy
Female elf bard16 lich

The EbonWood lies on the edges of the kingdom, and tales of horror whisper through the trees from its dark heart. They say the fey within have grown depraved, that they run and consort with beasts, and their wives have birthed things that should not walk or stand.

As the PCs arrive in town a hunting party returns with a horrifically deformed animal in their net. What does the capture of the Beast of Thorns signify? The Queen of Dark Whimsy grows angrier with every passing moment it remains in human hands.

Other Possibilities

Imagine a triad run by liches, crimelords whose sway over an entire kingdom is purely for the acquisition of magic. This trio controls the gangs within the city by drugs and *suggestion* spells, perpetrating gang wars to hide their activities. What do the liches seek?

Master Cuper is a lich who hides within society as the master of the Great University of Hane. While on the surface his funding of archaeological expeditions seems benevolent, he is really seeking prodigies to uncover a type of magic only hinted at. The ancients called this new arcana "Unmaking".

Could Master Cuper sponsor your own party this way? Must liches be villains or could the enemy they are tryng to thwart be a thousand times worse than the lich itself – could the future of the world rest on the bony shoulders and deep knowledge of a lich?

Thing at the Soul of the Mire CR 19

Male Human Lich Druid 15
NE medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +35, Spot +25

Defense

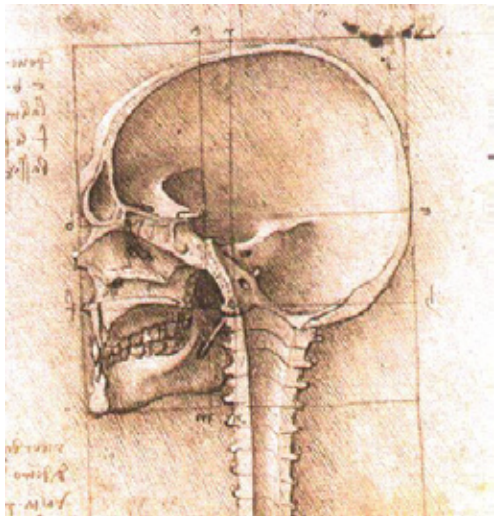
AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 19
(*+4 bracers of armor*, +5 natural)
hp 108 (15d12)
Fort +11, **Ref** +7, **Will** +18
Immune cold, electricity; polymorph and mind-affecting attacks

Offense

Spd 30 ft., 50 ft. mounted on dire elk zombie
Melee +1 vorpal wounding scythe +15/+10/+5 (2d4+4/×4 plus 1 Con) or touch +14/+9/+4 (1d8+5 negative energy plus paralysis)
Spells Known (CL 15th, +11 ranged touch)
8th (2/day) (DC 27) *earthquake, finger of death*
7th (3/day) (DC 26) *control weather, creeping doom, fire storm*
6th (4/day) (DC 25) *antilife shell, greater dispel magic, move earth, transport via plants*
5th (6/day) (DC 24) *baleful polymorph, call lightning storm, control winds, insect plague, transmute mud to rock, wall of thorns*
4th (6/day) (DC 23) *air walk, control water, dispel magic, flame strike, repel vermin, spike stones*
3rd (7/day) (DC 22) *call lightning, contagion, poison, protection from energy, quench, spike growth, wind wall*
2nd (7/day) (DC 21) *barkskin, chill metal, fire trap, flaming sphere, fog cloud, heat metal, spider climb*
1st (8/day) (DC 20) *calm animals, endure elements, entangle, faerie fire, jump, magic stone, obscuring mist, produce flame*
0 (6/day) (DC 19) *create water, detect magic, flare, know direction, read magic, virtue*

Tactics

Before Combat With so many eyes and ears across its vast moorland home, the Soul is almost always alerted to intruders. It will prepare its hounds, which it will send out to meet visitors soon after they step onto the great mire. It will aid the hounds by covering their attack with a great storm, called by *control weather.*
During Combat It uses its lightning spells to aid its hounds, and casts its *earthquake* spell to turn the mire into a quicksand hell. If half the hounds are slain, it will attack with f*ire storm, finger of death* and *creeping doom* before returning into its lair, preparing *antilife shell* and from which it will cast its final attack spells before moving into attack with the scythe it calls "*harvest becomes midnight".* It takes the form of a great tendriculos if badly injured (less than half hp left).
Morale The liches' *phylactery* lies buried 100 yards below the mire, in a box of lead within a box of gold within a box of adamantite. It is confident no one can locate it and enjoys combat accordingly, certain it will always rise from the mire.



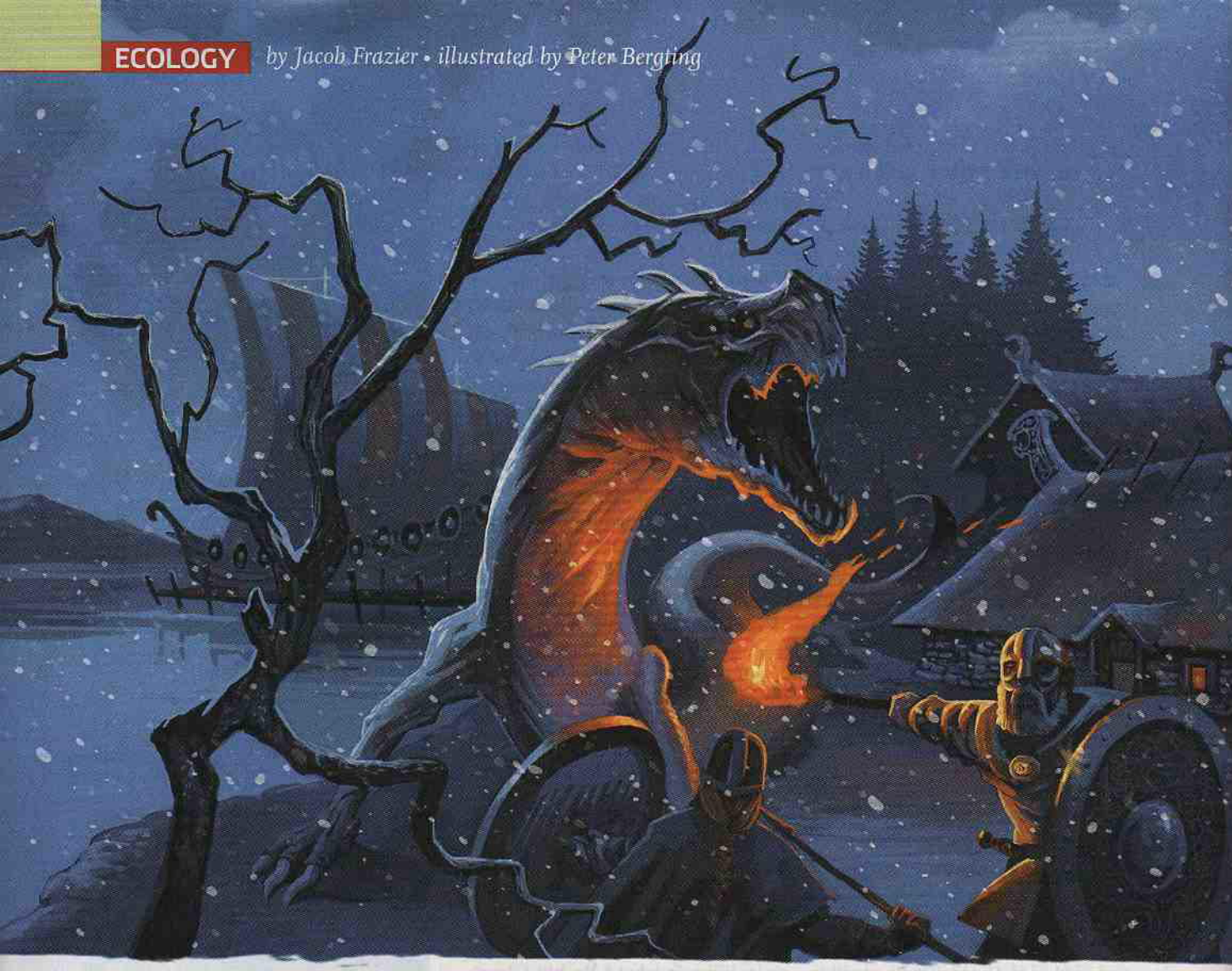
Special Abilities

Animal Companion (Ex) The Soul has a dire elk animal companion (AC 14, Spd 50 feet, hp 54, +8 horns for 1d10+3).
A Thousand Faces (Su) The Soul can change its appearance at will, as if using an *alter self* spell. This effect only works while the Soul is in its normal form.
Fear Aura (Su) The Soul is surrounded in a dreadful aura of death and evil. Creatures of less than 5HD in a 60-foot radius that look upon the Soul must make a will save (DC 20) or be affected as though by a fear spell as if cast by a 15th level sorcerer.
Nature Sense (Su) The Soul gains +2 bonus on Knowledge (Nature) and Survival checks.
Paralyzing Touch (Su) Any living creature the Soul hits must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or be permanently paralyzed.
Resist Nature's Lure (Ex) The Soul gains +4 to saves against spell like abilities of fey.
Trackless Step (Ex) The Soul leaves no tracks.
Turn Resistance (Su) The Soul has +4 turn resistance.
Venom Immunity (Ex) The Soul is immune to all poisons.
Wild Empathy (Ex) The Soul can improve the attitude of an animal by making a wild empathy check with a +20 (results determined as a Diplomacy check).
Wild Shape (Su) Five times per day the Soul can take the form of a tendriculos. The effect lasts 15 hours or until the Soul choose to revert to its original form.
Woodland Stride (Ex) The Soul can move through any sort of undergrowth at normal speed.
Skills the Soul gains +8 bonus to Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive and Spot checks.

Statistics

Str 16, **Dex** 10, Con -, Int 18, Wis 28, Cha 16
Base Atk +11; Grp +14
Feats Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Items, Eschew Materials, Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, Natural Spell
Skills Concentration +18, Craft (trapmaking) +22, Craft (gemcutting) +22, Craft (calligraphy) +14, Handle Animal +21, Hide +8, Knowledge (nature) +24, Listen +35, Ride +18, Sense Motive +17, Spellcraft +22, Spot +25, Survival +11
Languages Common, infernal
SQ turn reduction +4, DC 15/bludgeoning, undead traits
Other Gear *potion of displacement, potion of barkskin +5, scroll of repel metal or stone.*

by Jacob Frazier • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE LINNORM

"Thor shall put to death the Midgard Serpent, and shall stride away nine paces from that spot; then shall he fall dead to the earth, because of the venom which the Snake has blown at him."

—Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda* (Brodeur translation)

Although many true dragons are storied to be covetous, deadly creatures, there are those who balance the depravity of their evil brethren, wyrms who exemplify the virtues of honor, charity, and self-sacrifice. Yet not all breeds of dragonkind possess such balancing agents. Born of dark legends and apocalyptic myths, linnorms are dragons of ruin, covetous monstrosities that care nothing for their kin, the world, or the devastation they bring to all things.

HISTORY OF THE LINNORM

Scholars believe linnorms are evolutionary members of the dragon family—lesser serpents evolved from a common ancestor of dragons. The physical anatomy and behavioral characteristics of a linnorm are similar enough to a dragon's that this is widely accepted among the scholarly population. Researchers also claim linnorms are on the precipice of extinction, and the fact that younger linnorm sightings occur infrequently adds weight to the hypothesis.

Some sages tell a different story, though, declaring these theories pure drivel—pretexts manufactured to keep the heritage of these god-defying creatures hidden. These sages assert that linnorms instead originated from the far side of the Corpse Gate in Niflheim, the layer of the Gray Waste of Hades where the goddess Hel courts the dead. There, in the boiling spring of Hvergelmir, the primeval ancestors of linnorms bred among themselves in an orgy of debauchery and incest.

Chief among them was Nidhoggr the Dread Biter, the vile corpse-sucker who gnaws one of the roots of Yggdrasil, forcing the great ashen World Tree to know true suffering. Nidhoggr is not alone in Hvergelmir—other serpents thrive there and help the great corpse-tearer rot away the roots of the World Tree. There are the serpent brothers Goin and Moin and their father Grafvitner the Gnawing Wolf. There live Grabak the Gray-Back, Grafvollud the Field Gnawer, Ofnir the Entangler, Svafnir the Sleep-Bringer, and countless others

How the linnorms broke free of their vile breeding nest and into the realm of mortals remains a point of contention. The popular theory speculates that the World Tree's roots have decayed enough so that a twig has fallen away, allowing the lesser serpents to wriggle through to the Material Plane. A more radical view claims that Odin's cataclysmic imprisonment of Hel's older brother Jormungandr, the immense World Serpent, created a planar rift that allowed the linnorms to extend their uncle's hatred to the Material Plane. Either way, what was thought to be locked away by the deities themselves have found a way to envenom the realms of mortals.

Whether they are draconic stepchildren or godly progenies, linnorms are among the most despicable of all dragonkind. Rumors of their capacity for meting out destruction precede them, and most who encounter these dread wyrms dearly hope the scholars—those who proselytize the coming end of the linnorm race—are right.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LINNORM

Although linnorms draw frequent comparisons to dragons, their anatomies are more suggestive of serpents, with elongated bodies that lack wings and rear legs. Linnorms live longer than dragons and never stop growing, reaching ages of 4,000 years, lengths of 70 feet, and masses of 2 tons. Unlike dragons, however, they do not gain new abilities and powers as they age.

Sporting a flexible skeleton containing hundreds of vertebrae, a

KNOWLEDGE OF THE LINNORM

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to linnorms. Dwellers of the frigid Northlands, dragon hunters, and worshipers of the Norse pantheon most often possess this information. Linnorms appear on page 140 of the *Monster Manual II*.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
10 + CR	Many different breeds of linnorms exist and you have enough passing familiarity to identify this one's name and behavior. This result reveals dragon traits and the special qualities of linnorms.
15 + CR	All linnorms are cunning creatures with a variety of magical abilities, the gray and corpse tearer varieties even cast spells as clerics do. Linnorms can speak Abyssal and Draconic, though some know other tongues.
20 + CR	Linnorms are fiercely territorial and tolerate no other intelligent creatures in their domains, including other linnorms. They defend their habitats using their imposing size, powerful physical attacks, and deadly breath weapons (this result reveals information about the linnorm's breath weapons).
25 + CR	Linnorms are cold and calculating, never entering battle before studying their foes and formulating a plan. When they do strike, it is quick and deadly. This result reveals all the linnorm's spell-like abilities.
30 + CR	The oldest linnorms are insane, made so by centuries of solitude and the obcessive gathering of power and wealth. They keep and aggressively defend sizable treasure hoards. This result reveals all the linnorm's unmentioned special attacks.

linnorm grows large trunk muscles that allow for rectilinear locomotion—digging into the ground with the scales of its underbelly and pushing forward with its ribs. Only two front legs facilitate movement as its hind limbs, or anal claws, have been lost to atrophy due to elongation of the body. The forelegs end in sharp, razorlike claws.

A narrow skull with locked jawbones contains roughly three-dozen teeth that curve back toward the throat, making escape difficult once it bites into its prey. Unusually long saliva glands in its upper jaw store an enormous amount of toxins or other compounds, which many linnorms utilize to poison their enemies or create their deadly breath weapons.

A linnorm has a central nervous system and a developed brain. Its internal organs are compact—it is missing its left lung and has the ability to shift its three-chambered heart to one side, allowing it to swallow food within the narrow confinement of its body. During digestion, by-products pass to the cloaca, where the body reabsorbs water and excretes the rest through an opening at the base of the tail near the internalized reproductive organs.

Cold-blooded, a linnorm can survive for a full year without sustenance by allowing its body temperature to drop. This efficiency has proven serendipitous, as a linnorm often depletes the food supply of its surroundings. In warmer climates, a linnorm pants so that the water in its mouth evaporates, which causes a cooling effect that helps to regulate its overall body temperature.

A linnorm interacts with its environment using superior sensory systems. It lacks external ears but has eardrums below its eyes that allow it to pick up low frequencies and vibrations. It constantly flicks its tongue to gather information about its surroundings, as it has highly developed taste buds that intercept airborne chemicals and a specialized organ in the roof of its mouth that processes this information. A linnorm's head bears small pits that contain heat-sensing cells that convert the infrared spectrum to nerve impulses that transmit to the brain, allowing the linnorm to detect creatures in even total darkness.

Rough, dry scales serve to retain body moisture and prevent the linnorm's internal organs from drying out due to loss of water. The underlying skin determines these scales' pigment and varies among the many different linnorm breeds, ranging from dull grays to bright oranges. Once a year, a linnorm's eyes gloss over, indicating that it is ready to shed—a new layer of skin growing beneath the old causing the scales' color to become dull. Eventually, the linnorm hooks its lip on a tree or rock and squirms out of its old, dead skin. Many scholars and trophy hunters prize the cast-off skins of linnorms and might pay up to 12,000 gp for an intact find.

Out of the many different breeds of linnorms, the gray linnorm, dread linnorm, and corpse tearer are the three most extensively documented.

Gray Linnorm: Grays are the smallest of the linnorms, reaching lengths of only 20 feet. They use their trunk muscles exclusively for locomotion without the aid of their front legs. At birth, their scales are jet black and fade to dull gray with age. Unique to gray linnorms are a rear poison gland and curved stinger at the tip of their tails that drip with deadly venom.

Sleeker than most of its brethren, a gray linnorm must take care when swallowing its food. To this end, its saliva glands store a black corrosive fluid that it can breathe as a deadly weapon, allowing the gray to begin the digestion process before swallowing to lessen its chances of choking.

Dread Linnorm: Not only are these linnorms unique in that they sport two separate heads, they are also the largest of their kind, reaching lengths of up to 70 feet. Two serpentine necks extend from the main trunk of their bodies, each ending in a massive head adorned with a blotchy, rancid mane that hangs below the jaw. Their scales are pitch-black upon hatching but seem to rot with age, turning a variety of sickly gray and brown shades. A dread linnorm reflexively flushes its

ORIGIN OF THE LINNORM

The lindworm, or lindwurm, has Germanic linguistic roots, meaning "dragon" or "wingless dragon." Norse mythology contains numerous references to these serpents in the *Codex Regius* of the *Poetic Edda*. The Vikings believed lindworms feasted upon their dead, inherent in their creation myth, *Völuspá*, regarding the corpse tearer Nídhögg. Jörmungand, the linnormlike Midgard Serpent that encircles the world consuming his own tail, is one of the centerpieces of Ragnarök, the end of the world, when he and Thor are fated to kill one another. Another tale gives the account of Fáfnir, the giant who murdered his brother and then turned himself into a great serpent to hoard his stolen gold.

The introduction of lindworms into DUNGEONS & DRAGONS came in 1991 with the release of the *Vikings Campaign Sourcebook*. Although rather concise and containing few game mechanics, the linnorm entry set the tone for Jean Rabe's compelling two-part article, "The Vikings' Dragons," that appeared in the pages of DRAGON 15 years ago in DRAGON #182 and DRAGON #183. These articles greatly expanded the linnorm by detailing ten different breeds and were the basis for all material that was to come thereafter.

scales depending on its mood, causing them to darken as its temper sours.

Two volatile compounds are stored in a dread linnorm's saliva glands, which combust with explosive force when they make contact with air. The first compound bursts into flame and the second freezes instantly. Using their enormous lungs, a dread linnorm's two heads can blow forth either compound with sustained force.

Corpse Tearer: Corpse tearers are the most revolting of all linnorms, exuding a stench of death so overwhelming it is impossible to ignore. Having a splotched, brownish hue, corpse tearers sprout patches of hair seemingly at random, giving them the appearance that they were once covered in hair but large clumps of it have since fallen out. Moss and slime hang from their scales, which they use to camouflage themselves, making them resemble enormous dead trees while still. Their claws are broken off at the ends, with nothing remaining but soiled shards that are jagged and deadly.

These horrific serpents can spit two deadly toxins. The first is a magic-infused venom that can paralyze any living creature and the other is an airborne disease called linnorm fever that attacks the central nervous system.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE LINNORM

There is no empathy or compassion in linnorms' spiteful hearts. They care nothing for the life or death of other intelligent races and would not even lift a claw to save their own race if threatened. The attitude of a linnorm boils down to very basic terms: it is the linnorm against the world. This single-mindedness results from abandonment as a hatchling, centuries of solitary living, selfishly putting its own agenda before all others, and refusing to trust anyone—especially other linnorms. This ultimately takes its toll on the minds of linnorms and once they reach their venerable ages they are quite insane with rampant paranoia.

A linnorm has one sole purpose in life, driven by instinct: to amass wealth and power at all costs. They are loners, usually refusing to ally with any living thing. When they do, they turn upon their collaborator as soon as they achieve their goals. They make their lairs in deep tunnels and outfit them with elaborate traps so they can stash their hoards away from the world. A linnorm spends long, forlorn centuries coveting and guarding its treasure, calculating its value and memorizing its contents.

Linnorms have no societal structure to speak of and do their best to ensure that their territories do not encroach upon one another—an unusual event in most regions considering these creatures' rarity. The only contact among the species occurs during mating. Once every decade, a female linnorm releases pheromones tuned to the heightened senses of a male, indicating that she is ready to breed. Potentially, the breeding of linnorms is a repulsive sight, as they engage in a "mating ball," entangling each other with their long bodies until observers cannot determine where each begins or ends. More often than not, though, this instinctual call goes unanswered.

Should mating occur, soon after, the female lays her clutch of eggs and cares for them until they hatch, abandoning the young to their fates immediately thereafter. The life of a hatchling is often short and cruel, with the weakest perishing from exposure or the predations of its kin. This is ultimately the cause of the race's scarcity and aggressive behavior.

A linnorm doesn't hesitate to raze the landscape out of spite, and intruding upon linnorm territory is the quickest way to draw its attention. Linnorms study their foes from a distance to plot their attacks, which are often quick and decisive. They exploit their strengths to the utmost advantage, raining destruction down upon their enemies while targeting the strongest foes, moving in close when they deplete their magical and long-range attacks. Even then, linnorms only directly engage in battle when they have a clear and decisive advantage. A wounded linnorm usually retreats, as none are gallant enough to have pride.

Gray Linnorm: Grays are the most spiteful and hostile of all the linnorm breeds, reveling in deception. They make their lairs in elevated locations so they can see any fool who dares approach. Paranoid to an extreme, grays assume any intruder to be after their hoard and attack on sight.

Grays love to kill with their claws and tail stingers, and frequently close with enemies after initial batteries of long-range attacks, preferring improvisation to planning. They often take a wounded foe into the deep tunnels of their lairs, where they play a cruel game of "escape the dragon" before finishing off the poor soul.

Exceptions to their species, gray linnorm parents remain together until their hatchlings can fend for themselves, pairing to mate again in another 30 years.

Dread Linnorm: None of the linnorms bear more of an irrational hatred for humanity than dread linnorms. These linnorms make their lairs as far from human settlements as they can, typically in dangerous and barren climates. Nevertheless, history has recorded several incidents of dread linnorms completely annihilating towns or villages and making their lairs in the resulting devastation. Thankfully, these occurrences are few due to the rarity of the breed.

A dread linnorm considers everything around its lair to be under its rule, which usually consists of laying everything to waste so it can plunder the spoils. It spends much of its time afterwards surveying the devastation, scanning for intruders. If someone does encroach upon its domain, or worse, steals some of its treasure, the linnorm stops at nothing to locate the trespassers and exact horrific retribution.

A dread linnorm accumulates wealth solely from instinct and does not feel the stir to catalog its hoard or put it to use. While other linnorms might alter their combat strategies so that no harm comes to their foes' loot, a dread linnorm thinks nothing of unleashing the full force of its fury. On the other hand, this lack of regard does not extend far—like all linnorms, a dread linnorm spends most of its days defending its hoard.

Corpse Tearer: Thought by some to be direct descendants of Nidhoggr, corpse tearers are the most feared of the linnorms, and rightly so, as few other serpents or dragons are powerful enough to oppose them. Having developed a taste for rotting flesh, these linnorms make their lairs deep beneath ancient burial sites and battlefields, leaving the surface to the desecrations of other linnorms. Defending their underground lair are countless undead minions, stirred from their eternal sleep by corpse tearers' excavations or the remains of fallen adventurers brave or foolish enough to have once challenged the linnorms.

Always striving to increase their wealth, corpse tearers send their minions out to raid graveyards and human settlements, the undead invaders returning with ever-increasing numbers and more treasure. All manner of undead form the morbid society of a corpse tearer's abode—skeletons, wraiths, wights, banshees, vampires, and even the animated corpses of dragons and other linnorms.

OTHER LINNORMS

Aside from the commonly described linnorms, at least seven others are storied to exist.

Flame Linnorm: Radiant, fire-breathing beasts, these linnorms lair in deep caverns and dote over massive treasure hoards.

Forest Linnorm: Like gigantic snakes, these linnorms possess no limbs, slithering through the wildness and tricking prey with their ability to mimic noises.

Frost Linnorm: Incredibly territorial, these furred, blue-white linnorms employ strange magics and attempt to freeze any creature that ventures into their domains.

Land Linnorm: Greedy in the extreme, these hill-dwelling linnorms are the most likely to manipulate humanoids into their service.

Midgard Linnorm: The direct offspring of Jormungandr, the Midgard Sepent, this powerful, elusive linnorm—possibly the only of its kind—has incredible control over water and lairs upon the ocean floor.

Rain Linnorm: Arrogant land and swamp-dwelling dragons, these weather-manipulating linnorms exhibit incredible greed, even for members of their covetous race.

Sea Linnorms: Cold and vicious, sea linnorms terrorize the waves of the deep ocean, seeking to keep sentient creatures confined to their tiny continental homes.

SEA LINNORM

A massive snake, finned and frilled in all the colors of the angry sea, splits the waves in a spray of stinging salt water. From above a mouth full of sharklike fangs, a pair of pupilless, ruby eyes narrow menacingly.

SEA LINNORM **CR 21**

Always LE Gargantuan dragon (aquatic)

Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 120 ft., keen senses; Listen +23, Spot +23

Languages Aquan, Draconic, Infernal

AC 42, touch 6, flat-footed 42 (+36 natural, –4 size)

hp 403 (26 HD); **DR** 30/magic

Immune all enchantment spells, paralysis, sleep

SR 36

Fort +24, **Ref** +15, **Will** +20

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 80 ft.

Melee bite +36 each (4d6+14) and 2 slams +34 (2d8+7) and tail slam +34 (2d8+21)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +26; **Grp** +52

Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Snatch; breath weapon, capsize, tail sweep (2d6+21)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th):
At will—*fog cloud, water breathing*
3/day—*control water, gust of wind* (DC 17), *reverse gravity, solid fog*
1/day—*shapechange*

Abilities Str 38, Dex 10, Con 29, Int 14, Wis 20, Cha 21

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Multiattack, Power Attack, Snatch

Skills Appraise +11, Bluff +23, Diplomacy +27, Gather Information +23, Hide +6*, Intimidate +25, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (geography) +20, Listen +23, Sense Motive +21, Spellcraft +22, Spot +23, Swim +51

Advancement 27–40 HD (Gargantuan); 40–53 HD (Colossal)

Keen Senses (Ex) A sea linnorm sees four times as well as a human in low light conditions and twice as well in normal light.

Breath Weapon (Su) 60-foot cone of caustic acid droplets, once every 1d4 rounds; damage 24d6 acid, Reflex DC 32 half; only effective above water. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Capsize (Ex) A submerged sea linnorm that surfaces under a boat or ship less than 30 feet long capsizes the vessel 95% of the time. It has a 50% chance to capsize a vessel from 30 to 70 feet long and a 20% chance to capsize one more than 70 feet long.

Tail Sweep (Ex) This special attack allows a sea linnorm to sweep with its tail as a standard action. The sweep affects a half-circle with a radius of 30 feet, extending from an intersection on the edge of the linnorm's space in any direction. Creatures within the swept area are affected if they are four or more size categories smaller than the linnorm (Small size or smaller for a sea linnorm). A tail sweep automatically deals the indicated damage plus 1-1/2 times the linnorm's Strength bonus (round down). Affected creatures can attempt DC 32 Reflex saves to take half damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills A sea linnorm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

*Sea linnorms have a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when submerged.

Maritime tales speak of mighty sea serpents that are large enough to capsize galleys. These seafaring linnorms are exceedingly vindictive and seek retribution for the harm done to the ocean's marine life. The sea linnorm traverses both land and sea with ease, terrorizing shipping lanes and fishing villages. Accounts told from shell-shocked survivors tell of a whirlwind fury of dreadful fogs, crushing fins, and a haze of acid lingering behind the barely glimpsed form of a terrible serpent slithering back out to sea.

Sea linnorms speak Aquan, Draconic, and Infernal, although some have been known to learn Common.

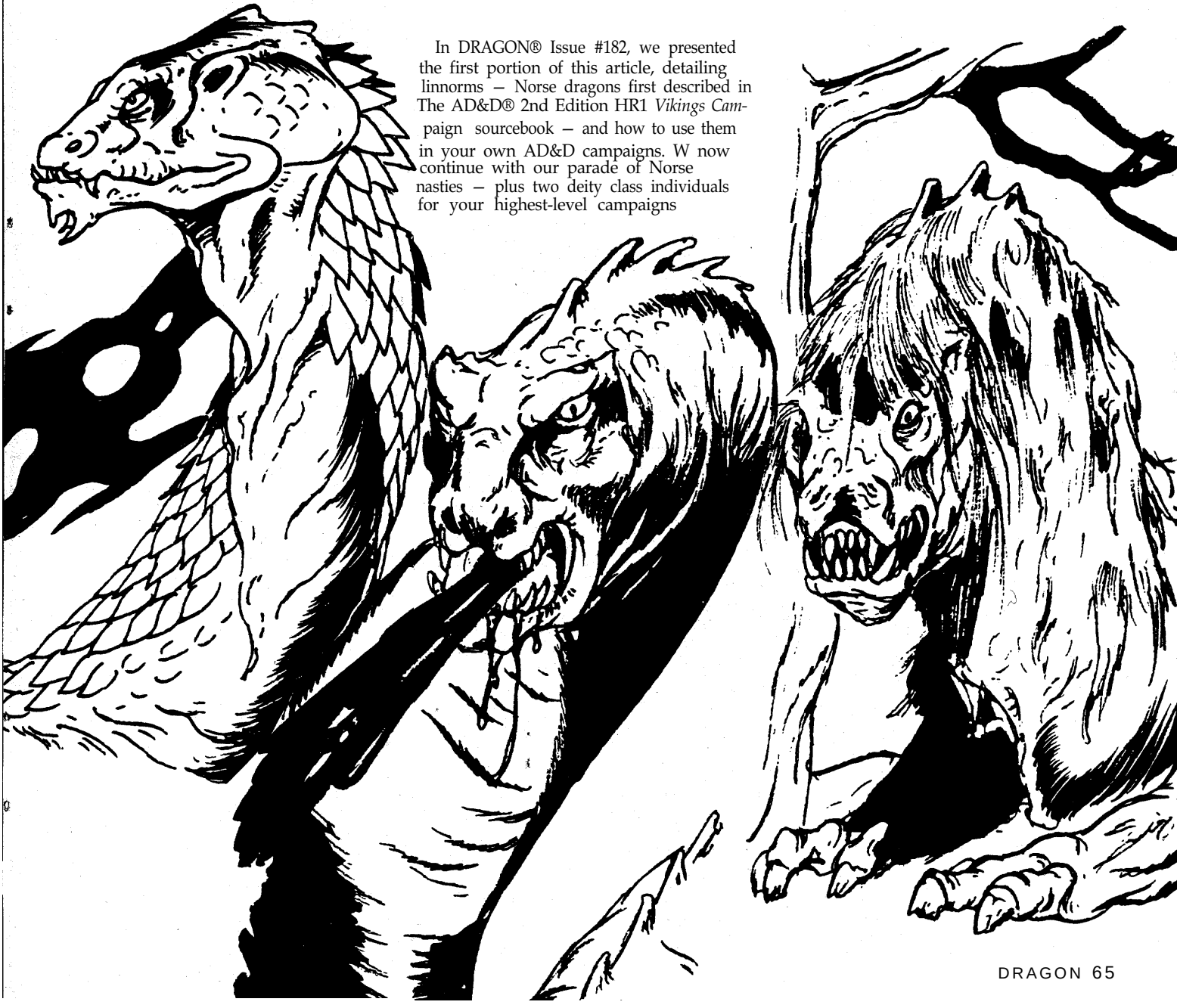
The Vikings' Dragons

by Jean Rabe

Artwork by Jim Holloway

An overview of the Norse lands' great serpents, part 2

In DRAGON® Issue #182, we presented the first portion of this article, detailing linnorms – Norse dragons first described in The AD&D® 2nd Edition HR1 *Vikings Campaign* sourcebook – and how to use them in your own AD&D campaigns. W now continue with our parade of Norse nasties – plus two deity class individuals for your highest-level campaigns



Linnorm, Flame

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15-16)
TREASURE:	Special
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-4 (base)
MOVEMENT:	24, Fl 40 (B)
HIT DICE:	20 (base)
THAC0:	4 (at 20 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	3d6/3d6/3d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Variable
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Variable
SIZE:	G (40′ at base)
MORALE:	Fanatic (17-18)
XP VALUE:	Variable

Flame linnorms are the most beautiful of the Norse dragons and perhaps the most rare. They live to bend others to their will and to accumulate wealth. Adept at magic, even the youngest of the flame linnorms can master spells.

Upon hatching, the scales of a flame linnorm are as black as unused coals. By the time a linnorm reaches the juvenile stage, the scales have faded to a soft, dull gray, the shade of ash. At this stage the linnorm is sometimes confused with gray linnorms. However, when the linnorm reaches adulthood, its scales become vibrant, starting with a glowing orange in the young adult stage and reaching a pulsing scarlet by the time it is a wyrm. Adult and older linnorms appear as a mass of fire when they walk, their scales shifting, seeming like flames lapping over the creature's body. Great wyrms are said to look like living fireballs.

Flame linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons. In addition, a very young linnorm has a 20% chance to pick up human tongues. The percentage chance to gain this ability increases 10% per age category of the linnorm until the wyrm stage, when it is certain to possess this skill.

Combat: Flame linnorms attack nonintelligent creatures only for food, These great dragons reserve their full fury for Viking ships, castles, and bands of adventurers laden down with chests and bundles. In combat, a flame linnorm prefers to attack from above where it has a good vantage point and a better chance to escape a dangerous situation. It almost always attacks first with its spells, hoping to take down its targets without damaging any valuables. If, however, its adversaries prove too staunch, the linnorm continues with its breath weapon and magical fire abilities. It fights with its claws and bite only if it has no choice, as the linnorm fears close combat could harm its beautiful scales.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: A flame linnorm has two breath weapons that cause equal damage. One is a cloud of hot ashes 90′ long, 70′ wide, and 40′ deep. The second is a stream of flame 5′ wide at the linnorm's mouth and 110′ long. The flame linnorm casts spells and uses magical abilities at 9th level, plus any combat modifier.

From birth, a flame linnorm is immune to nonmagical fire. As the linnorm ages, it gains other abilities: very young—immune to magical fire-based attacks, plus *heat metal* (three times a day); juvenile— *pyrotechnics* and *produce fire* (three times each a day); *adult*—*fireball* (at will every three rounds); old— *fire charm* and *fire trap* (three times each a day); venerable— *flame strike* and *wall of fire* (twice each a day); great wyrm— *fire seeds* and *firestorm* (once each a day).

Habitat/Society: Flame linnorms are loners, making their homes as deep within the earth as possible in caverns that can accommodate their huge forms and even larger piles of treasure. The linnorms do not hate other flame linnorms or other breeds of linnorms. However, they choose to isolate themselves, not wanting to risk the chance that other linnorms might steal their wealth. The linnorms frequently inventory their treasure to make sure every piece is accounted for. Magical treasures are especially prized, and the linnorms will spend long hours try ing to discover what those treasures do. Flame linnorms that master the use of magical items use those items in battle or to *charm* or enslave humans and demihumans. These captives help the linnorm acquire more treasure.

Flame linnorms memorize every inch of their territory and guard it zealously. There is a 25% chance for a flame linnorm that has attained venerable age or greater to have 1-4 fire elementals guarding its lair. Sages are uncertain whether the elementals are summoned by magic the linnorms have acquired or whether they willingly serve the linnorm in exchange for treasure.

Flame linnorms mate every 30 years, then separate. The female is left to lay its eggs on its own, and she abandons them as soon as the young linnorms hatch.

Ecology: Flame linnorms have been known to eat herd animals, trees, and the very earth. However, their favorite food is in the form of any object on fire. These linnorms sometimes set sections of a forest ablaze just to dine.

Age	Body Lgt.(')	Tail Lgt.(')	AC	Breath Weapon	Wizard Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	3-24	3-24	- 1	2d8+1	1	40%	½E	14,000
2	25-42	25-42	- 2	4 d 8 + 2	2	45%	E	18,000
3	43-57	43-57	- 3	6d8+3	3	50%	E,G	21,000
4	58-76	58-76	- 4	8d8+4	3 1	55%	E,G	22,000
5	77-96	77-96	- 5	10d8 + 5	3 2 1	60%	E,G,H	24,000
6	97-107	97-107	- 6	12d8 + 6	4 3 2	65%	E,G,H,I	25,000
7	108-129	108-129	- 7	14d8 + 7	5 3 3 1	70%	E,G,H,I × 2	26,000
8	130-156	130-156	- 8	16d8 + 8	5 4 3 2	75%	E,G,H,I × 2	27,000
9	157-186	157-186	- 9	18d8 + 9	6 4 4 3	80%	E,G,H,I × 2	28,000
10	187-217	187-217	-10	20d8 + 10	6 4 4 4 1	85%	E,G,H,I × 3	29,000
11	218-237	218-237	-11	22d8 + 11	7 5 4 4 2	90%	E,G,H,I × 3	30,000
12	238-265	238-265	-12	24d10 + 12	7 5 5 4 3	95%	E,G,H,I × 3	31,000

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Linnorm, Gray

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (11-12)
TREASURE:	Special
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1 (5% of 1-4)
ARMOR CLASS:	-1 (base)
MOVEMENT:	12, Fl 36 (C), Sw 12
HIT DICE:	13 (base)
THAC0:	7 (at 13 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite/1 tail strike + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	4d6/4d6/4d10/2d6
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, poison tail, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Variable
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Variable
SIZE:	H (18' at base)
MORALE:	Fearless (19-20)
XP VALUE:	Variable

Gray linnorms are ruthless to a fault and revel in deceiving and harming all other intelligent creatures, especially humans and demihumans. While they have the smallest bodies of all Norse dragons, they have long, whiplike tails that they are quick to employ in combat.

At birth, a gray linnorm has shiny black scales so small they appear as smooth skin. The black scales remain, although they grow larger and thicker until the linnorm reaches the juvenile stage. Sometime during this growth stage, the scales' color begins to fade. By the time the linnorm has reached the mature adult stage, the scales are normally a dull gray, the color of lead. While the linnorm can alter the appearance of its scales by concentrating, it is limited to changing the shades of gray and making the scales appear shinier or duller.

Gray linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons. They also have a propensity for learning other languages. A hatchling gray linnorm has a 40% chance of being able to speak with any other intelligent creature. The chance to gain this ability increases 15% for each age category up to the young adult stage (100%).

Combat: Gray linnorms spend little time plotting their attacks, usually adopting a plan on the spur of the moment. They prefer to initially strike from a height, from where they have a better vantage point. However, unlike some of the other linnorms, they do not attempt to kill their victims only using spells and their breath weapon; they use these abilities only to weaken their foes (of course, their foes are often not hardy enough to stand up to a breath weapon attack). Gray linnorms relish killing their foes with their foreclaws and whiplike tail. Especially malicious gray linnorms capture humans and demihumans, taking them to their lair where they toy with them before eventually finishing them off.

Gray linnorms of the adult stage and older will often use their shape *change* ability to appear as a different type of linnorm (especially if another Norse dragon is in the area) in an attempt to blame that other linnorm for the attack.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: The breath weapon of a gray linnorm is a jet of black slime 3' wide and 60' long. It is a corrosive substance that, in addition to causing physical harm to creatures, will rust or corrode any metal in 3-12 rounds unless washed off. The metal is allowed a saving throw vs. acid to avoid this effect (magical bonuses may be applied).

The tail of a gray linnorm oozes a poisonous substance that is the equivalent of poison type B. Creatures struck by the tail suffer 2d6 hp damage from the physical blow, plus 20 additional hp damage from the venom unless they save vs. poison.

Unlike other linnorms, a gray linnorm is not born with any special abilities. However, it gains abilities as it ages: very young— *protection from normal missiles* (constant); juvenile —*contagion* (three times a day); adult— *shape change* (at will, three times a day); old— *wraithform* (three times a day); venerable-- *distance distortion* (three times a day); great wyrm— *sink* (twice a day).

Its clerical spells come from the spheres of All, Charm, Elemental, Protection, and Weather. A gray linnorm casts spells and uses its magical abilities at 7th level, plus its combat modifier.

Habitat/Society: Gray linnorms usually are found on mountains, hills, ridges, and other places that overlook the land. They place themselves on these earthly pedestals and consider their territory everything within their lines of sight. Their lairs are usually tunnels into hillsides, the entrances of which are carefully concealed and trapped.

Gray linnorms mate once every 20-30 years, with the parents staying with their offspring until they have passed from the young stage. After that time, the parents separate, meeting again in another 20-30 years.

While gray linnorms are solitary, they have been known to join forces with others of their kind to raid a settlement or ship, particularly if they can place the blame through their *shape change* on another linnorm, particularly the frost linnorm, whom they hate above all other dragons.

Gray linnorms will immediately attack any intelligent creature that encroaches upon its territory, as it fears that the creature might be after its wealth. A gray linnorm hordes its wealth deep within its tunnels. While it will collect virtually anything (including cloth, furniture, and ship gear), it is especially fond of coins of all types.

Ecology: Gray linnorms can digest nearly anything. However, they have acquired a taste for deer, cattle, and sheep, and they are a terror to farmers.

While these linnorms have no natural predators, they are sometimes hunted by adventurers who use their scales for armor and their poison and other body parts in potions and for spell components.

Age	Body Lgt.(')	Tail Lgt.(')	AC	Breath Weapon	Cleric Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	1-4	4-10	2	4d4+1	1	10%	C	7,000
2	5-9	11-20	1	6d4+2	1 1	15%	C	9,000
3	10-15	21-32	1	8d4+3	1 1 1	20%	C,E	10,000
4	16-25	33-52	0	10d4 +4	2 1 1	25%	C,E	11,000
5	26-35	53-73	- 1	12d4 + 5	2 2 1	30%	C,Ex2	13,000
6	36-47	74-96	- 2	14d4 + 6	2 2 2 1	35%	C,Ex2	15,000
7	48-59	97-121	- 3	16d4 + 7	3 2 2 2	40%	C,E,F × 2	16,000
8	60-72	122-150	- 4	18d4 + 8	3 3 2 2 1	45%	C,E,F × 2	17,000
9	73-87	151-178	- 5	20d4 + 9	3 3 3 2 1	50%	C,E,F × 3	18,000
10	88-116	179-235	- 6	22d4 + 10	3 3 3 3 2	55%	C,E,F × 3	20,000
11	117-136	236-277	- 7	24d4+11	4 3 3 3 3	60%	C,E,F × 4	21,000
12	137-157	278-325	- 8	26d4 + 12	4 4 3 3 3 1	65%	C,E,F × 4	22,000

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Linnorm, Rain

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	Special
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1 (5% of 1-6)
ARMOR CLASS:	3 (base)
MOVEMENT:	18, Fl 40 (B), Sw 9
HIT DICE:	10 (base)
THAC0:	11 (at 10 HD)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	1d12/1d12/3d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Variable
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Variable
SIZE:	H (20' at base)
MORALE:	Fanatic (17-18)
XP VALUE:	Variable

Rain linnorms are the most vain of the Norse dragons, and will go out of their way to destroy communities and harm the land in the area of other dragons. However, unlike gray linnorms, the rain linnorms do not attempt to place the blame for the attacks elsewhere. The rain linnorms demand credit for their atrocities. The more heinous the act, the more powerful the rain linnorm considers itself. Further, the rain linnorms seek to gain vast amounts of treasure, more than they believe other dragons could possibly accumulate.

When rain linnorms hatch, their teardrop-shaped scales appear shiny and white. As the linnorm ages, the scales retain their shape, but they become larger, thicker, and are able to become gray, blue, green, or white at the creature's whim.

Linnorms speak their own language and can communicate with all other Norse dragons, although they rarely lower themselves to do so. In addition, a hatchling linnorm has a 5% chance of being able to communicate with all animals. The chance to possess this ability increases 5% per age category of the linnorm.

Combat: Young and juvenile rain linnorms are quick to rush into battles that will net them treasure. This includes attacking traveling merchants, wandering adventurers, and small communities. The linnorms attack first with their breath weapon and any magical abilities they possess. A favorite strategy of juvenile rain linnorms is to *call lightning* on a target, then breathe on anything left standing. However, if the target appears small and nonthreatening, the linnorm will combat the victim with its claws and bite in an effort to keep any valuables intact. As the linnorm ages, its tactics change. Adult and older rain linnorms hate to sully their claws with physical combat. The older linnorms always attack first with their weather-related spells, to show their superiority even over the elements. Then they assault their targets with their breath weapons.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: A rain linnorm's breath is a stream of boiling water 3' wide at the linnorm's mouth and 90' long. Creatures struck must save vs. breath for half damage. A rain linnorm casts spells at 8th level, adjusted by combat modifiers.

Rain linnorms are born invulnerable to electrical attacks. As they age, they gain additional abilities: very young— *create food and water* (twice a day); young— *plant growth* and *entangle* (each three times a day); juvenile— *call lightning* (twice a day); young adult —*lightning bolt* (twice a day), *water breathing* (at will); adult— *control winds* (twice a day); mature *adult*—*moonbeam* and *rainbow* (each three times a day); old—immune to missile weapons and *transmute dust to water* (three times a day); very old—immune to nonmagical blunt weapons, *weather summoning* (twice a day); venerable—immune to nonmagical edged weapons, *conjure water elemental* (twice a day); wyrm—regenerate 10 hp/round, *control weather* (once a day); great wyrm: regenerate 20 hp/round, *wind walk* (once a day).

Habitat/Society: Rain linnorms live on hills where they can be comfortably buffeted by the winds and rain. Their lairs are usually deep within the hills, and their treasure hidden inside the many chambers. A linnorm usually stays in its lair only when the weather is pleasant. Wyrms and great wyrms have been known to *control weather* around their domains when the land has been too long without inclement weather.

Rain linnorms consider all others-including other rain linnorms—to be beneath them, and therefore improper company. The only time more than one rain linnorm will be encountered is when a pair has mated. The pair separate when the eggs hatch, abandoning the baby linnorms to their own devices.

Rain linnorms attempt to kill all intelligent creatures that come too near their lairs. If a linnorm believes the location of its lair is known, it will painstakingly move every piece of treasure to a new lair.

Ecology: Rain linnorms are able to subsist on almost anything. However, their favorite sustenance is lightning bolts, which they attempt to catch in evening storms. They have no known predators except human adventurers.

Age	Body Lgt.(')	Tail Lgt.(')	AC	Breath Weapon	Wizard Spells	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	1-4	1-8	6	3 d 6 + 1	Nil	Nil	½B	2,000
2	5-10	9-20	5	5 d 6 + 2	Nil	Nil	B	7,000
3	11-17	21-34	4	7d6+3	Nil	Nil	B	10,000
4	18-24	35-48	3	9d6 +4	Nil	Nil	B×	11,000
5	25-32	49-64	2	11d6 +5	Nil	Nil	B×	12,000
6	33-41	65-62	1	13d6 + 6	Nil	Nil	B,Z ×	13,000
7	42-51	83-102	0	15d6 + 7	Nil	Nil	C,Z × 3	14,000
8	52-62	103-106	- 1	17d6 +8	1	25%	C,Z × 3	18,000
9	63-75	107-109	- 2	19d6 + 9	2 1	35%	C,Z × 4	20,000
10	76-91	110-112	- 3	21d6 + 10	3 2	45%	D,Z×4	22,000
11	92-108	113-115	- 4	23d6 + 11	4 3	55%	D,Z×5	24,000
12	109-130	116-118	- 5	25d6 + 12	5 4	65%	E,Z × 5	25,000

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Corpse Tearer

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Genius (18)
TREASURE:	A × 3,B × 3,C × ,H × 3,I
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-10
MOVEMENT:	24, F140 (C), Sw 18, Br 18, Jp 18
HIT DICE:	28 (170 hp)
THACO:	2
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	3d12/3d12/4d10
SPECLAL ATTACKS:	Spells, level drain, breath weapon
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+ 1 or better weapon to hit, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%
SIZE:	G (330' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	35,000

The linnorm called Corpse Tearer is the most hideous of the Norse drag ons and one of the most feared. The only offspring of the godlike linnorm of the same name, this mottled-brown dragon has long front legs that end in broken but deadly claws. It has no rear legs. The creature's slime-covered scales are small and weathered, and when the linnorm is at rest it looks more like a fallen, dead tree than a serpent. The linnorm's snakelike head is ringed with matted brown and gray hair. Tufts of the hair appear at random intervals over his body, in places so matted it resembles loose, rotting flesh.

Despite its ragged appearance, the linnorm is very much alive, moving and striking quickly. Corpse Tearer is ancient, and because it has traveled greatly it has become fluent in nearly all human and demihuman tongues. Further, it is able to converse will all linnorms and many evil, intelligent monsters.

Combat: Unlike many other of the great dragons, Corpse Tearer enjoys fighting and will not often let lackeys do battle for it. This ancient linnorm is not quick to fight, however. It watches foes carefully and from a distance, noting their abilities, potential weaknesses, and determining if it can gain something by defeating them.

When it is ready, it strikes, flying above its victims and beginning with its paralyzing breath weapon, followed by its disease breath and spell-like abilities. If its victims survive the first onslaught, Corpse Tearer lands on top of the strongest ones in an attempt to crush them, then fights with its energy-draining claws and powerful bite to finish them off. Each successful claw attack drains one life level automatically from its victim. If Corpse Tearer suffers more than 170 hp damage, it flees, flying away if possible or using its *dimension door* ability to escape.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: Corpse Tearer's breath weapon is a cone of *paralyzation force* 10' wide at his mouth, 300' long, and 50' wide at its apex. Creatures of less than 4 HD caught in the cone are automatically paralyzed for 4d4 turns. Creatures of greater than 4 HD are allowed a saving throw vs. breath weapons to avoid the effects. This breath weapon causes no physical damage. Corpse Tearer's second breath weapon is another matter, however. The disease breath is a cloud 100' long, 80' wide, and 80' thick. All creatures trapped within the cloud suffer 8d12 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). Further, the creatures are subjected to a magical disease that slowly weakens them. The disease manifests itself within 1d6 rounds by cutting a creature's strength score in half. Every three turns, the strength score is halved again until the creature's strength drops to 1. A *cure disease* will stop the strength loss. However, a *wish* or *limited wish* is needed to restore all lost strength points.

Corpse Tearer can breathe twice before needing to rest two rounds before it can breathe again. It can breathe as many times as it wishes within this restriction.

This linnorm has the following permanent abilities, useable at will: *fly water breathing, continual darkness 100' radius, feign death, polymorph self,* and *speak with dead.* In addition, he is able to use the following once a day at will: *protection from good, spectral hand, delude, vampiric touch, wraithform, enervation, dimension door, animate dead,* and *control undead.* Corpse Rarer uses all magical abilities at 15th level.

Habitat/society: Corpse Tearer's lair is in a vast chamber beneath an ancient Viking burial cave on the Vikings' home world. His lair is guarded by a pair of *controlled* vampires and the corpses of dead linnorms and Vikings. This lair is almost impossible to find because it is so deep beneath the earth. The few creatures that found their way there are now helping to guard it.

The lair is dank, stinks of rotting flesh, and is filled with Corpse Tearer's considerable wealth. The linnorm is obsessed with garnering an ever-increasing amount of gems, magic, art objects, and coins, and uses his animated corpses to dig through graves to obtain more. Further, the linnorm raids human and demihuman communities and Viking ships to gain more treasure.

Corpse Tearer claims little territory, only its sepulcher-like lair. It enjoys the closed-in feeling of the chamber walls and the darkness, willingly leaving the above ground to other linnorms. Because Corpse Tearer spends an extraordinary amount of time cataloguing his wealth, he rarely leaves its home.

Ecology: Corpse Tearer does not need sustenance when inside his lair. Outside, he is able to eat virtually anything, although he prefers rotting carcasses. This linnorm has no known predators, as the men and demihumans who hate him so are wise enough not to pursue him.

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Linnorm, Midgard

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	Supra-genius (20)
TREASURE:	S,T,U,V,W,X (all × 5)
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	-12
MOVEMENT:	18, Sw 40
HIT DICE:	25 (200 hp)
THACO:	2
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 claws/1 bite/1 tail strike + special
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	3d10/3d10/2d12/4d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells, breath weapons, constriction
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+ 2 or better weapon to hit, spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	70%
SIZE:	G (500' long)
MORALE:	Fearless (19)
XP VALUE:	31,000

The Midgard linnorm is said to be the sole offspring of the Midgard Serpent, child of Loki. The Midgard linnorm, of which sages believe (and hope) there is only one, is the most magnificent of the Norse dragons and rivals Bahamut and Tiamat in power (see FOR1 *Draconomicon,* pages 57-59). Sages think that this great wingless serpent may be as immortal as his sire. Their flamboyant and frightening stories claim the Midgard linnorm lives at the bottom of the ocean. Few have actually seen the Midgard linnorm, and fewer still have lived to tell of it. They say the creature is so long they could not see the end of it.

The giant linnorm's body is covered with massive blue, green, and silver scales that glisten like opals. When it moves, the shifting colors make it look like a stream of running water. Its head, filled with a double row of pale-blue teeth, is said to stretch 50′ wide and twice that long. Its emerald-green, lidless and pupil-less eyes are perfectly round and mirror whatever is looking into them. While the Midgard linnorm has no horns, its head is topped with a ridge of coarse midnight blue hair that looks like a horse's mane. The hair extends partway down its massive neck where it becomes a lighter blue spinal ruff that runs to the tip of its barbed tail.

The Midgard linnorm's rear legs are short and stumpy for its massive form, and appear as if they are not strong enough to support it. Its front legs are longer and end in razor-sharp claws. The linnorm uses its legs primarily to aid its maneuverability as it slithers along in the water and across the land.

The Midgard linnorm speaks the languages of all Norse dragons and can telepathically communicate with all other intelligent creatures. This is the only linnorm with this extensive telepathic ability.

Combat: Despite its malicious nature, the Midgard linnorm avoids battles, considering physical struggles beneath it. It prefers to meddle in the affairs of other linnorms, humans, and demihumans through its spells and abilities, keeping its distance yet maintaining control of the situation. The Midgard linnorm has entered few fights in its centuries-long existence. It relies on guards to fight for it.

However, if a threat is menacing enough, the Midgard linnorm breathes on the targets. Those left standing are next subjected to its spells and further breath weapons. The Midgard linnorm will only attack with its bite, claws, and tail slash if there is no other recourse.

Breath Weapon/Special Abilities: The Midgard linnorm possesses three breath weapons. The first is a spray of boiling water 10′ wide and 200′ long. Creatures of fewer than 4 HD struck by the spray automatically drown unless they are capable of breathing water. Creatures of 5-7 HD drown only if they fail their saving throws vs. breath weapon. Creatures of greater than 7 HD are not subject to the drowning attack. Further, all those struck by the water spray suffer 20d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half), and they are propelled 100′ back. The second breath weapon is a cloud of dust 200′ long, 80′ wide, and 60′ deep. Those caught within the cloud suffer 16d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). All those who fail their saving throws are affected as if they were subject to *dust of sneezing and choking.* The final breath weapon is a cone of wind 20′ wide at his mouth, 200′ long, and 50′ wide at the base. All those caught within the cone suffer 12d20 + 12 hp damage (save vs. breath weapon for half). Further, they are automatically propelled backwards 200′ from their starting position. The Midgard linnorm is able to breathe every other round as often as it wishes. Creatures struck by a breath weapon save at -3 because of this linnorm's awesome power.

Another deadly attack is its ability to constrict creatures by wrapping its tail about them and squeezing. Those caught in this grip suffer 20 hp damage per round until dead. A successful bend-bars attempt at one-half normal chances is needed to wriggle free.

In addition, this great linnorm has the following permanent abilities, useable at will: *water breathing, ESP, telepathy, create water,* and *protection from fire.* At will, he can perform the following, once a day: *charm person, charm monster, wall of fog, detect invisibility, hypnotic pattern, whispering wind, improved invisibility, solid fog, wizard eye, airy water telekinesis, death fog, raise water, veil, power word stun, teleport without error, power word blind,* and *shape change.* The Midgard linnorm uses his magical abilities at 14th level.

Habitat/Society: The Midgard linnorm lives at the bottom of the ocean on the world of the Vikings, and there spends most of its time. The serpent is a solitary creature, believing the company of others largely inconsequential. Still, the linnorm recognizes the value in keeping others nearby as guards. The serpent's lair is a huge underwater sea cave, so deep beneath the surface of the water that no light filters down. In this lair, the Midgard linnorm is guarded by a quartet of venerable sea linnorms of maximum hit points (see DRAGON® issue 182). The Midgard linnorm stores his wealth within the deepest chambers. Discarding coins and gems, the serpent elects to keep primarily magical treasure, and he employs some of that magic when venturing out of his lair. Also in his lair are remnants from visits to the surface-prows of Viking ships, statues from villages, large shields, and other trinkets.

The Midgard linnorm considers all of the sea floor his domain and is quick to dispatch any creatures that claim territory in his presence.

Ecology: The Midgard linnorm requires very little sustenance, dining once every four or five decades. During this time, the linnorm consumes vast amounts, of sea foam—and whatever is floating on it.

The Midgard linnorm has no known predators but many enemies in human and demihuman communities. Occasionally, bands of humans and demihumans who have heard of the Midgard linnorm foolishly band together in an attempt to hunt it; they are never heard from again. All normal linnorms bow to the Midgard linnorm, never daring to challenge it. Ω

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by Amber E. Scott and F. Wesley Schneider
illustrated by Peter Bergting and Mike Schley

THE ECOLOGY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

Hidden behind walls of tangled vines, towers of primordial willows, and moats of slow-moving waters brimming with a thousand different deaths, lizardfolk claw out their savage domains. From the hearts of the deadliest swamps, dark places where sinister things crawl and forgotten evils lurk, these reptilian primitives thrive in savage solitude. Often numbered among the evils that stalk such wetland wilds, lizardfolk are far more than simple-minded raiders and territorial murderers—although they are exactly those things too.

HISTORY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

Lizardfolk have a strong oral tradition, and the story of how they came to exist is the first legend taught to hatchlings.

Semuanya, the breeder of all lizardfolk, had a mate in the long ago times. Kecuala and Semuanya lived in harmony together, neither one dominant. Each of them was a Watcher who prowled the primordial jungles, seeking out their enemies, a Survivor who plucked edible things from the ground and slew wild beasts for their flesh, and a Breeder who bore clutches of soft eggs and buried them in the ground to keep them warm and safe.

While Semuanya settled contentedly into its life, Kecuala did not. Kecuala worked its soft, gray brain with pointless questions. It made no decisions, squatting and thinking while life went on around it. When Semuanya chided Kecuala, Kecuala cried, "How can I watch or hunt or breed without first thinking? The decisions are so many and so great! What if my actions bring trouble? I must be cautious, must be careful, must think things through!"

Semuanya shook its head and went out to hunt, and when it returned it found Kecuala gone. Unable to conquer its indecisiveness, it had split in half and left two smaller Kecualas behind. One of the small new lizardfolk waved its sharp claws in the air, growling its desire to fight

and hunt. The other hid behind its partner, hissing its will to stay home and breed, and to cover its clutch with earth to keep it warm and safe.

Semuanya in its wisdom called the aggressive Kecuala "male" and the passive Kecuala "female" and helped them to build a place to live and breed. Semuanya watched over the Kecualas—which lizardfolk still call themselves to this day—and continues to guard their progeny, hoping that one day Kecuala will stop thinking so much and join its halves together again so it can watch and hunt and breed with Semuanya once more.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

While at first glance lizardfolk bodies seem as straightforward as their culture, in reality they are much more complex. Lizardfok weigh from 200 to 280 pounds and possess powerful builds. Their stout frames stand 6 to 7 feet tall—in addition to 3-to-4-foot-long nonprehensile tails that they use for balance.

Lizardfolk skin is a thin white membrane that grows hard scales ranging in color from onyx black to olive green to mud brown, sometimes with mottled or even striped patterns. As their eggs have porous shells, the pigmentation of mud and water seeps in during development, determining a hatchling's coloration. This means that if lizardfolk move from one area to another, new hatchlings might possess different colorations than their parents, although body size, eye color, and the number of serrations on their crests are inherited traits.

The jaws of lizardfolk bear a unique construction of solid bone plates with a serrated front edge. The sharp edge of the jawbone protrudes through the gum line, functioning as canines for ripping meat while molarlike ridges run along the rear of the jawbone.

KNOWLEDGE OF LIZARDFOLK

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (local) check as it relates to lizardfolk. Those who live in or near swamps, hunt the marshes, or have dealings with lizardfolk communities might possess this information.

Knowledge (local)

DC	Result
10	Lizardfolk are monstrous scaled humanoids that stalk swamps and live in small, primitive tribes.
15	As skilled warriors, lizardfolk respect strength and martial prowess, but most seek peaceful existences. Many settlements of lizardfolk live harmoniously alongside communities of other humanoids.
20	Lizardfolk are not amphibious, but they can remain underwater for long periods of time. Separate lizardfolk tribes vary greatly in technological advancement, alignment, physical stature, and racial abilities.
25	Lizardfolk revere an androgynous deity named Semuanya. Their tribal leaders are commonly the most powerful of the tribe's warriors. Lizardfolk almost never count arcane spellcasters among their ranks.

Crests are another distinctive physiological trait of lizardfolk. Males possess large crests that run from the tops of their heads down between their shoulder blades, while females have two smaller crests running parallel along their heads down to the backs of their necks.

Lizardfolk reproduce sexually. A female lizardfolk lays a clutch of one to three eggs several weeks after mating and buries them in mud and composted plant matter. These eggs, each just larger than a foot in diameter, absorb water and plant matter to feed the growing embryo inside. The fetus does not develop genitalia until approximately a week before it hatches, which develop in response to the type and amount of nutrients the fetus receives. A prosperous tribe that has an abundance of compost hatches an equal number of males and females. A less well-off tribe that has few scraps to bury its eggs in produces mostly males. This adds valuable hunters to the tribe while reducing the number of needy offspring the next generation hatches. Irregularly, lizardfolk

SEMUANYA

Lesser God (Neutral)

The dualistic deity of the lizardfolk, Semuanya embodies the chief facets of lizardfolk life: hunting and breeding. During times of peace and plenty they speak of Semuanya as "she" and worship her as the Breeder. During times of strife and hardship they speak of Semuanya as "he" and offer sacrifices to him as the Watcher or the Seeker.

Symbol: A reptile egg.

Portfolio: Fertility, the hunt, lizardfolk, swamps.

Domains: Animal, Plant, Water.

Favored Weapon: Greatclub.

Clerical Training: New shamans learn at the feet of the previous generation's healers, replacing them when they can no longer fulfill their duties.

Quests: Semuanya instructs its worshipers to serve where needed, frequently questing them to aid warbands or recover a tribe's lost eggs.

Prayers: In times of war, prayers to Semuanya take the form of short hisses and reptilian barks made before battle. When a tribe is at peace there is time for longer chants and epic songs intoned in Draconic.

Temples: Semuanya's only temples are in the hearts and minds of its worshipers. Only the occasional symbol or idol is made as a physical representation of its worship.

Rites: Breeding and battle as they benefit lizardfolk tribes.

Herald and Allies: Semuanya's herald is an 18th-level albino lizardfolk druid called Spirit Scale. Semuanya's allies and those it most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are celestial or fiendish dinosaurs, giant crocodiles, hydras, or tendriculoses.

hatchlings are born with both male and female sex organs—neither set functional. Such sterile offspring often possess female crests, unusually complex brains, and correspondingly greater intellects.

Several atypical varieties of lizardfolk exist, the most common being brutish blackscales and the cunning pygmy poison dusks (see the *Monster Manual III*). Each breed exhibits traits suited to the lands it inhabits, as well as customs and practices that vary radically from tribe to tribe. As such, it proves as difficult to predict the temperament and actions of lizardfolk as it would be to do so for humans or elves. Varying breeds of lizardfolk rarely occupy the same areas, but when they do, tribal conflicts prove just as likely as unified societies.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE LIZARDFOLK

The societies of most lizardfolk tribes seem simple by the standards of nonlizardfolk, but this simplicity has developed as a reflection of their deep-rooted faith. The story of their origins has led most lizardfolk to condemn intelligence as pointless and wasteful. Lizardfolk believe, like their deity Semuanya, that life is meant to be lived and that hunting, fighting, and breeding matter most. Intelligence leads to overthinking situations and to the corruption of their straightforward culture.

The exception to this philosophy comes in the form of the occasional sterile, hermaphroditic lizardfolk hatched with superior intelligence. Often taking up the mantle of shaman, lizardfolk of this uncommon breed advise the tribe but rarely rise to positions of true power. Lizardfolk revere such shamans as touched by the divinity of Semuanya—paragons closer to returning the broken halves of Kecuala to a unified state. As these shamans cannot breed, and lizardfolk females reject mates who display above-average intellects, lizardfolk technology rarely advances.

Survival is of key importance to lizardfolk society, and so the tribe treats the strongest and hardiest males and females with the greatest respect. The most powerful male warrior takes command of the tribe and selects the healthiest and strongest females to mate with. Although exceptional intelligence is disdained, cunning and tactics in battle are highly respected, especially when combined with the prowess to implement such strategies. Thus, many lizardfolk leaders show exceptional canniness in leading their people, both on and off the battlefield. When multiple lizardfolk lay claim to the position of leader—or there is any dispute within the tribe—the feuding parties fight to the death, the victor proving that Semuanya favors him.

Due to their martial culture, most other humanoids view lizardfolk as a violent, cannibalistic, savage race, but in reality lizardfolk tribes vary in their methods of dealing with outlanders. Lizardfolk as a whole have no strong leaning toward any extreme alignment or particular ruling philosophy other than survival of the fittest. They defend their territories ferociously, but when approached respectfully most tribes trade and negotiate with other races willingly. Some tribes, however, attack strangers on sight—especially those of the primal blackscale tribes—but such aggression usually results from years of fighting off invading races.

Lizardfolk disdain intricate deceptions and politics. If they desire something another race possesses, they might try to trade for it or take it by force. A few nomadic tribes—largely among the poison dusk—prefer stealth and theft over diplomacy or aggression. Each tribe differs, but most broadcast their intentions straightforwardly and openly.

In general, lizardfolk make permanent homes in temperate, swampy lands, although the differing breeds prefer some variations. Some of the more advanced tribes build crude huts, but most find natural shelters in underwater caves containing air pockets or large copses of swamp trees with canopies big enough to shield the tribe from the elements.

DOGON TO DUNWATER

References to lizardlike people exist in the mythology of many different cultures. The Dogon tribe of Africa believes that human beings are descended from a race of reptilian aliens called the Nummo. The Hopi tribe supposedly has legends about a race of lizard people who lived on the earth five thousand years ago, and who all died in a rain of fire. In D&D, lizardfolk (formerly lizard men) made their first appearance in 1976's *Supplement I: Greyhawk*. They are also prominently featured in the first edition adventure *U2: Danger at Dunwater* and more recently in Chapter 4: Saltmarsh of the *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. Check out the most recent lizardfolk incursion in the Age of Worms Adventure Path adventure, "Encounter at Blackwall Keep," in *Dungeon* #125.

ADVANCED LIZARDFOLK

Most lizardfolk tribes adhere to proud warrior traditions. As such, advanced lizardfolk regularly take levels in barbarian, fighter, or ranger. Lizardfolk following the path of the shaman might instead take levels of adept, cleric, druid, or—rarely—sorcerer.

Whether the guard of a tribe's chieftain or the leader of a scout party, the swamp stalker presented here is an advanced version of the lizardfolk presented on page 169 of the *Monster Manual*. The scaled horror prestige class and its example Saebeohrt Rippling Death on page 84 of *Savage Species* presents an even deadlier lizardfolk foe.

SWAMP STALKER CHAKSHAEL CR5
Lizardfolk barbarian 2/fighter 2
LN Medium humanoid (reptilian)
Monster Manual 169
Init +0; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1
Languages Draconic

AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 20; uncanny dodge
hp 45 (6 HD)
Fort +8, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee 2 claws +7 melee (1d4+2) and bite +5 (1d4+1); or mwk trident +9 (1d8+2) and bite +5 (1d4+1)
Ranged: javelin +7 (1d6+1)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7
Special Attack Rage 1/day
Combat Gear *Oil of bless weapon, potion of bear's endurance*

Abilities Str 15, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10
Feats Multiattack, Point Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (trident)
Skills Balance +6, Handle Animal +2, Intimidate +5, Listen +5, Jump +6, Ride +3, Survival +3, Swim +8
Possessions combat gear, masterwork studded leather armor, spiked heavy wooden shield, masterwork trident, 4 javelins, 2 *potions of pass without trace*, 39 gp.
Rage (Ex): When he rages, Chakshael has the following changed statistics:
AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 18
hp 55 (5 HD)
Fort +10 **Will** +3
Melee 2 claws +9 melee (1d4+4) and bite +7 melee (1d4+3); or mwk trident +10 (1d8+4) and bite +7 melee (1d4+3)
Grp +9
Abilities Str 19, Con 18
Skills Climb +4, Jump +10, Swim +7

Females and children guard the settlement and gather edible roots and plants for the tribe. Males serve as scouts, hunters, and warriors.

LIZARDFOLK IN EBERRON

The best-known lizardfolk in EBERRON are the blackscales, poison dusk pygmies, and twenty-four Cold Sun Tribes of normal lizardfolk living in Q'barra. All three varieties are extremely dangerous, although some of the Cold Sun Tribes have made peaceful overtures toward nonlizardfolk. Many of the Q'barra lizardfolk serve the great black dragon Rhashaak and seek to protect their lands and holy grounds from outsider settlers new to the region. Lately, blackscale raiders have captured numerous residents of Newthrone's outlying lands and even Cold Sun lizardfolk to sacrifice to Rhashaak in the great volcano-city of Haka'torvhak. This especially disturbs the Cold Sun lizardfolk as they fear some dark plot on the part of Rhashaak. In addition, the agents they dispatched to investigate the blackscales' plots have returned with broken minds and terrible mutations.

LIZARDFOLK IN FAERÛN

Large lizardfolk tribes exist in the southernmost reaches of Faerûn, mainly in the swampy areas of the jungles of Chult and Rethild, the Great Swamp, between Halruaa and Dambrath. Rumor has it that a ruined city in the heart of Rethild has had a corrupting influence on the lizardfolk tribes, spawning demonic lizard kings and queens. These half-fiends have united many tribes of their weaker kin and are slowly conquering the enormous swamp (see *Serpent Kingdoms*).

Lizardfolk also populate the warm marshes of the Western Heartlands, most notably the Lizard Marsh and the Marsh of Chelimber. Some lizardfolk have recently started singling out and attacking Zhentarim caravans that pass too close to the Marsh of Chelimber. In response, the Zhents now spread rumors of lizardfolk assaulting and devouring innocent travelers, hoping that someone eliminates the reptilian threat for them.

LIZARDFOLK FEATS

The new feats presented here are frequently used by lizardfolk but might be suited to any creature that meets the prerequisites.

DEEP BREATHER [GENERAL]

You can hold your breath much longer than normal.

Prerequisites: Con 16.

Benefit: You can hold your breath for double the normal number of rounds before you risk drowning (see page 304 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*). For example, a human with this feat can hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to four times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

Normal: A human can normally only hold his breath for a number of rounds equal to two times his Constitution score before he risks drowning.

CHAMELEON BLOOD

Lizardfolk with this feat can slightly shift the color of their scales, aiding them in blending in with dense vegetation.

Prerequisites: Lizardfolk, Cha 14.

Benefit: Lizardfolk with this feat gain a +6 racial bonus on Hide checks made in forested or swampy environments.

REPTILIAN HEALING

Lizardfolk with this feat heal at an increased rate, much like many lesser reptilian creatures.

Prerequisites: Lizardfolk, Con 16, Great Fortitude.

Benefit: Lizardfolk with this feat regain hit points from normal healing at double the normal rate. For example, a full night's rest allows a lizardfolk with this feat to regain 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest restores 4 hit points per character level or Hit Die. This ability does not allow a lizardfolk to regenerate or reattach lost limbs.

Normal: A full night's rest normally only restores 1 hit point per character level or Hit Die, while complete bed rest usually only restores 2 hit points per character level or Hit Die.

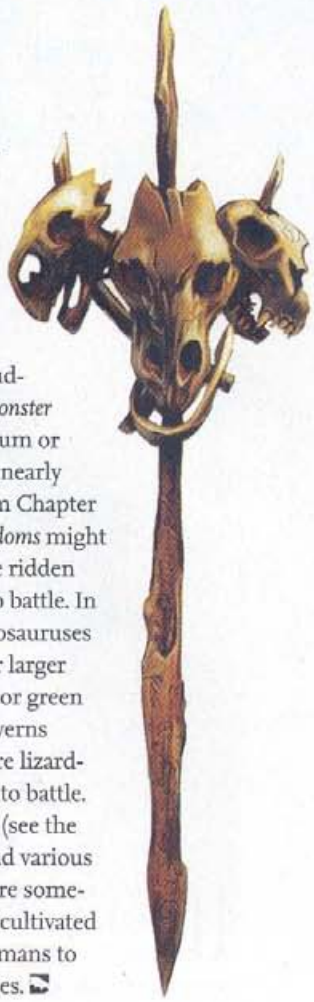
LIZARDFOLK TACTICS

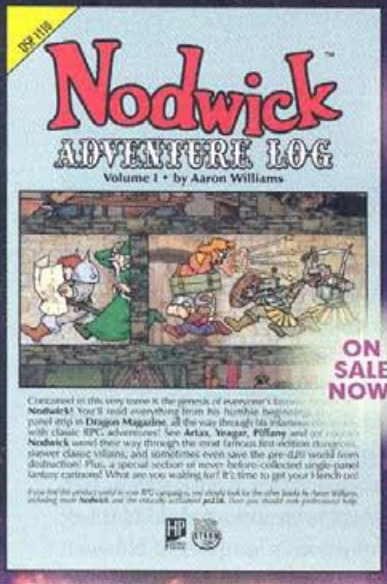
Skilled guerilla combatants, lizardfolk warriors are experienced at fighting in small hunting parties or warbands. In such groups they make use of a variety of tactics effective against prey, whatever shape it might take.

Scaled Squads: Obedient to powerful leaders, warbands of six to ten lizardfolk commonly follow commanders with barbarian or ranger levels. Skilled ambushers, frequently only half of a lizardfolk warband charges from cover into melee, leaving a reserve group to attack from range and cover the vanguard's retreat. Lizardfolk rarely fight to the death and commonly withdraw once reduced to half their hit points.

Deep Divers: Lizardfolk prefer to engage enemies in or near water. Using their hold breath ability to hide or retreat underwater, they regularly take advantage of the improved cover wading in water provides (see page 93 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Heavily armed lizardfolk often drop their shields to fight underwater, as shields hamper their swimming abilities.

Swamp Stalkers: While the dense vegetation of their swampy homes makes the mounts of other humanoids impractical, lizardfolk frequently domesticate animals for their cunning in battle. Creatures like crocodiles, deinonychuses, megaraptors, mudmaws (see the *Monster Manual II*), Medium or larger snakes, or nearly any creature from Chapter 6 of *Serpent Kingdoms* might follow or even be ridden by lizardfolk into battle. In addition, tyrannosauruses or other Huge or larger dinosaurs, black or green dragons, and wyverns might carry entire lizardfolk warbands into battle. Skeletal dragons (see the *Draconomicon*) and various plant creatures are sometimes created or cultivated by lizardfolk shamans to protect their tribes.





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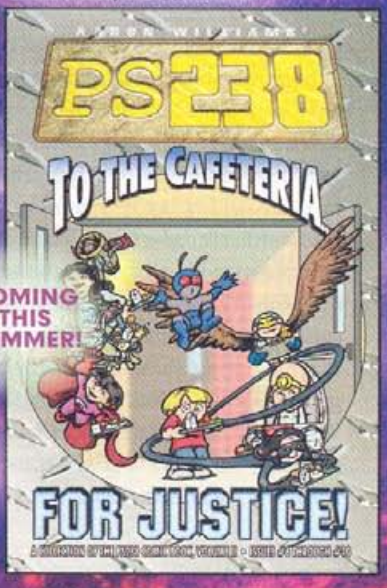

COMING THIS SUMMER!

Lizardfolk

"From out of the swamp they come, reptilian faces barely above the water, powerful crocodilian tails pumping lazily. Then they reach the shore and stand, water and milfoil trailing down thick-muscled limbs covered in glistening scales. They come bearing massive clubs adorned with stones and the teeth of great swamp predators, and with their free hands they clutch crude wooden shields. Around their necks they wear animal skulls and strange fetishes, and their cold, lizard eyes gaze without emotion on the scene before them. One of them, larger than the others, advances with a long javelin bearing a human skull, which he thrusts into the muck at his feet—a clear warning. This is their ground."

—Jensen Bakri, **A Walk in the Swamp**

Proud remnants of a once-vast civilization, the powerful reptilian predators known as lizardfolk exist now only in scattered swamp communities, their isolated settlements the last marshy redoubts against the mammalian hordes.

Overview

Lizardfolk are bipedal, reptilian humanoids that stand roughly 6 to 7 feet tall and weigh between 200 and 250 pounds, with scales of gray, green, or brown. Many breeds have short dorsal spikes or brightly colored frills on the backs of their heads or following their spines. Although they swim well and can frequently be found moving silently through their native swamps with alligator-like flicks of their powerful, 4-foot-long tails, lizardfolk are not actually aquatic, and return to land in order to eat, sleep, and reproduce. While they are tool users of average human intelligence, lizardfolk rarely see fit to advance their technology past Neolithic designs that have served them for millennia. Their omnivorous diet contains everything from vegetation to insects to the flesh of intelligent races.

To humans, lizardfolk often seem harsh and strange—standoffish savages and bloodthirsty cannibals. Yet while all of these descriptors are true, those few members of other races who are allowed to permeate the borders of lizardfolk settlements quickly see that this is only one side of their society—among their own kind, they are a vibrant and passionate people. With literacy a relatively rare quality, lizardfolk have an extensive oral tradition, with even the fiercest warriors able to recount rumbling epic poems around the fire pits, passing tribal lore down through millennia. In cold winter months, these storytellings can sometimes last for days, with new tellers taking over as the old ones grow weary. Dancing and ritualistic battles reenacting key scenes are common, and frequently involve elaborate costumes.

Lizardfolk society is extremely communal, and while within it individual lizardfolk might contest for honor and standing, the welfare of the tribe always comes first. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the raising of children. While lizardfolk courtship is fierce and passionate, they do not mate for life, and pregnant females are cared for by the tribe as a whole. Once the eggs hatch, the birth mother often defers to the senior dam, and the entire tribe acts in concert to teach the young their race's history and the skills they need to survive. All adults, no matter how gruff or bloodthirsty, understand the importance of rearing strong young, and go to any length to ensure the wellbeing of the next generation.

Ecology

Temperature regulation is a major factor of lizardfolk life, and begins even before birth. As with many species of reptiles, lizardfolk gender is determined by the temperature of the egg during a critical period of incubation. Like the crocodiles and alligators they resemble, lizardfolk eggs subjected to both high and low temperatures during this period result in female offspring, and lizardfolk dams must carefully regulate the heat of the nest to ensure a viable next generation. Since eggs are so delicate and rare—eggs are laid singly, and few females lay more than once per a year—it's easy for the gender balance to be upset. Indeed, lizardfolk mythology is full of tales of all-female warrior tribes raiding other settlements in a desperate search for eggs and breeding stock. Lizardfolk mate year-round, and the average settlement contains one well-defended egg for every 10 adults.

Lizardfolk have difficulty regulating their body temperature, and become sluggish and irritable if subjected to temperatures below the standards for their native environments. As a result, they tend to live in temperate swamps and moors, where the verdant plant life and decaying organic matter produce and trap heat. It's undoubtedly for this reason as well that lizardfolk have evolved to be one of the swamp's few diurnal predators, soaking up the sun's heat during the day and spending the nights holed up in easily defensible positions, where their lack of low-light vision is less of a liability.

Lizardfolk naturally live to be between 60 and 80 years old, although war and the hardships of the swamp tend to claim most of them well before then. Unlike humans, lizardfolk never quit growing—after the initial sprouting during puberty, which occurs in roughly their 10th year, lizardfolk continue to slowly increase in size and mass until their deaths, gaining perhaps an additional foot of height over the intervening years. For this reason, lizardfolk elders are extremely respected, and those who live the longest also tend to be those most suited to leadership.

While the actual evolutionary ancestors of lizardfolk remain a mystery, many believe themselves to be the direct descendents of dinosaurs, and they maintain a certain affection bordering on reverence for these massive, savage creatures. In areas where such animals are common, lizardfolk tribes are likely to contain at least a few dinosaurs, usually kept under control by the village shaman. These trained dinosaurs are either treated as beasts of war and burden or else revered and allowed to roam free and sacred about the settlement, fed and petitioned for favors as a direct embodiment of the tribe's ancestors.

In battle, lizardfolk prefer simplicity, and they rarely wear armor but do wield wooden shields. Clubs and javelins are the weapons of choice, but many are the lizardfolk who drop their weapons and attack ferociously with their teeth and claws once the scent of blood gets in their nostrils. In places where conflict with other races is common, it's not unusual to find lizardfolk wielding the metal weapons of their enemies, particularly large swords, but these are kept as trophies as much as actual instruments of war.

Habitat & Society

Long before humans walked upright, lizardfolk society thrived across the globe. Yet while their racial history reaches back into the dim mists of time, theirs was never an expansive style—uninterested in colonizing the dry land beyond their swamps and riverbeds, lizardfolk tribes remained isolated and closed-off from each other, content to live as they always had. Their only physical legacy, beyond what construction was necessary to survive, was subtle diversions of rivers and streams to flood more land—although few realize it today, many of the great swamps in Avistan and Garund are the results of their ancient work. With the arrival of humans, however, lizardfolk found themselves unable to keep up with the breakneck speed of mammalian reproduction, and instead retreated farther into their swamps, where with each generation, they watch their numbers dwindle.

Lizardfolk Funerals

In lizardfolk society, death is not looked on as something to be feared, but rather as an inescapable fact of life, and this practicality carries over into their funeral practices. Almost all lizardfolk tribes celebrate a fallen member's life with an elaborate wake in which the deceased's body is laid out to view and his friends and kin gather to tell stories of his life and reenact triumphant moments from his past. What happens afterward, however, varies wildly from tribe to tribe. Since the swamp is hardly ideal ground for burying bodies, many tribes choose to place their dead in "tree boxes," wooden coffins that are then propped in the upper boughs of trees. Others dispense with the box and simply hang their dead, inverted, from the tree's branches, possibly choosing to embalm them first. In areas where peat bogs are common, lizardfolk sometimes weight their dead and sink them, allowing the bodies to eventually mummify naturally. If times are particularly tough for a tribe, the dead might even be consumed in a ritualistic meal, and to feed a tribe in this manner after death is considered a great honor, albeit one that is seldom claimed except by necessity.

Lizardfolk society is patriarchal, with the strongest and most warlike male in the tribe invariably becoming its leader. Due to their continued growth into old age, this leader is frequently one of the oldest and most experienced members as well. Shamans are treated as respected advisors, but are rarely leaders themselves. While females share equally in the hunting and fighting, their slightly smaller size and relative delicacy during pregnancy make them less likely to hold positions of leadership, as the ultimate goal of any lizardfolk tribe is the continuation of its line. For this reason, female leaders are likely sterile. This emphasis placed on male leadership, combined with the tendency of eggs to hatch females unless carefully tended, only perpetuates the gender imbalance.

For all their apparent barbarism, lizardfolk tend to build thoughtfully designed, well-defended settlements in the swamps—the better to protect themselves during the sluggish night hours when other predators are more active. While hunting camps might consist of little more than mud wallows and reed huts, easily left or taken down, permanent lizardfolk structures are more elaborate. The standard tribal home for lizardfolk is usually positioned on a hillock or island rising out of the marsh, with rings of outward-pointing stakes creating a sharp hedge capable of deterring all but the most determined animal life. Within, the settlement is generally lit with soft rush-lights hung from trees, and clusters of small mud and swamp-grass mounds dot the landscape. A mound has a single entrance, covered with a leather flap to keep out the elements and trap warmth, and a small chimney hole to vent smoke. As many as a dozen lizardfolk share a mound, setting coals at the center to warm them on cold nights. Lizardfolk have little concern for personal privacy, and numerous family groups live inside a mound with only reed screens to separate them, telling stories and basking in each other's warmth and company.

Survival is the central theme of lizardfolk life—both that of the individual, and that of the race. A starving tribe, or one that feels threatened, has no qualms about going to great and bloody lengths to ensure its survival. While this has a tendency to make them unpopular with neighbors, lizardfolk are naturally no more evil than humans. Rather, they are fierce and proud, loyal and sober, and if they are quick to anger, they are also quick to forgive—long-standing grudges are rarely worth the energy to lizardfolk. Eminently practical, a lizardfolk's life in the swamp teaches him to waste nothing, and from this philosophy stem some of the race's more disturbing tendencies, such as the practice of blatantly snacking on one's fallen foes. After all, say the lizardfolk, meat is meat, and squeamishness is a quality best left for the softer races.

As a whole, lizardfolk prefer to keep to their own, interacting with humans and other races only as much as needed to trade for items they can't manufacture themselves. When found venturing into civilized lands, it's usually for a very specific purpose, and the lizardfolk in question are likely to be viewed as reserved by those they encounter. They inherently distrust humans, who seem determined to expand into every untouched patch of land, and their legends hint at a great betrayal by elves sometime in the past. Dwarves are rarely encountered, although they are regarded as excellent trading partners for stone and goods, and gnomes are considered flighty and capricious but generally acceptable, as the near-fey creatures leave little mark on any swamplands they inhabit. Of all the races, lizardfolk are most likely to be found following dragons or nagas, whom they view as reptilian brethren. Those lizardfolk residing in saltwater marshes sometimes band together with neighboring locathahs as well. They hold a particular hatred of boggards (see *Pathfinder* #2), whose similar physiology and vicious and capricious society they see as a degenerate mockery of their own honorable traditions.

Laws within lizardfolk society are generally informal and are restricted to such basic ideas as the right to autonomy and personal property. Disputes are regularly settled through personal combat, although if one party is significantly weaker, he might ask someone else to represent his claim, up to and including the tribe's leader. These fights are almost always

nonlethal, and once a matter is decided it is considered bad form to press the issue. Conflicts between tribes are resolved in a similar manner, with each side championed by its leader, but overall lizardfolk tend to cooperate, seeing their kindred as allies in the fight against a harsh world. Exile is considered the worst punishment in lizardfolk society, but in those rare cases where a lizardfolk murders another or commits some equally heinous action, a tribe's reptilian practicality often leads it to simply tear the offender to shreds and be done with it.

The predominant religion among lizardfolk is a loose form of animism. Within its bounds, practitioners might invoke any powers from established gods like Gozren to the spirits of their ancestors and the natural world. While extremely individualized and varied in their techniques, the druids and shamans within lizardfolk society are quite effective. Many of their practices, such as curing diseases by transferring them to animals which can then be ritualistically slaughtered, are viewed as needlessly barbaric by "civilized" societies. Their close connection to both the natural world and the spirits of the past lead many shamans to dress in elaborate costumes of bark and furs, feathers and reeds. In addition, it's common for shamans to have extensive piercings, using bones from animals or even deceased lizardfolk, with the physical mingling of their bodies representing their connection to that spirit or beast. When traveling abroad, lizardfolk shamans are particularly fond of casting *resist elements*, the better to avoid the discomfort inherent in colder climes.

Campaign Role

Lizardfolk have often been seen as bloodthirsty savages, ready to emerge from the swamp and overrun unwary travelers, but it's precisely this stereotype that makes them so interesting to use in campaigns. In a world where other civilized races view them as dangerous and bestial, lizardfolk manage to remain neutral—aloof and defensive, but hardly evil. From the lizardfolk point of view, they ask only to be left alone to rebuild their race, yet they constantly find themselves beset by swarms of humanoids intent on taking their land.

In this clash of cultures, there are ripe opportunities for adventure. How much better is a crusade against the lizardfolk harassing a local settlement if the party realizes halfway through that the lizardfolk have a more legitimate grievance? Lizardfolk law is also equally alien to most of the civilized races, and misunderstandings abound, particularly where theft is concerned. To lizardfolk, anything you can't keep by force was never yours to begin with, but a lizardfolk practicing this philosophy while passing through a human town might quickly find himself the impetus for a boiling race war. Yet not all lizardfolk interaction need be negative—when presented with a whole world of advanced technology, some lizardfolk let go of tradition, and it's not unheard of for curious young lizardfolk to make their way into human and elven lands in the pursuit of knowledge.

Mating Rituals

Courtship in lizardfolk society is a loud and flashy affair, but the exact details depend on which gender is doing the wooing. Lizardfolk mate year-round, but each female generally has only one month-long period of "heat" each year, in which she is actively fertile. In tribes where males are more populous, they might attract the favor of chosen females through feats of strength, battle prowess, epic poetry (anything less than 12 hours is a poor showing, and it helps to be attacked during the performance), or merely possessing an extra-powerful build or bright frill. More often, however, it is the females who do the courting, showing off their talent at fighting, singing, cooking, and weapon-crafting. Although lizardfolk sometimes form strong bonds with other individuals in a tribe, these are almost always in the vein of "brothers in arms" rather than lovers, and pairings for the sake of reproduction rarely last beyond the female's pregnancy, with males sometimes impregnating multiple females in a given year.

Treasure

Lizardfolk live close to the earth, and on the whole they rarely amass much material wealth. Most weaponry is made of wood and stone, and even when their spellcasters see fit to create powerful magic items, these are usually fashioned with the same aesthetic—rings of baked clay or wood, enchanted clubs and macuahuitl, and so on. Due to their scarcity in the swamp, coins and other items of metal are highly prized and tend to come to rest in the hands of the chieftains, and steel is generally valued higher than gold or gems due to its utility. Rings of *resist elements* and *water breathing* are common, as they assist lizardfolk who range beyond the tribe's normal territory, and potions are by far the most numerous magic items produced. In tribes where druids are scarce, hunting and war parties might also carry *rings of animal friendship* to assist in calling game, handling mounts and attack beasts, or using local creatures as messengers.

Variants

While the swamp-dwelling lizardfolk presented here are the most common breed, they are hardly the only one. Presented below are several variants, both intentionally created and the natural result of divergent evolution between tribes.

Lizard Kings: Lizardfolk continue to grow throughout their lives, and once every few generations, a tribe is blessed with a lizard king—an individual who for unknown

Parthenogenesis

As with many other species of lizards, lizardfolk are occasionally capable of reproducing via parthenogenesis, in which a female lays a viable egg without fertilization from a male. In addition to being relatively rare—generally only found in situations where a sudden environmental change has rendered all the young of a generation female—this process is viewed as highly taboo among most tribes. Children born in this manner are not treated as individuals and given their own names, but rather assigned their parent's name with a prefix meaning "second." Depending on the tribe, these individuals might be treated as divine blessings, extensions of their parent, or embarrassing monstrosities. Tribes that have undergone several generations of this "mother-birth" often bear physical signs of it, as this form of asexual reproduction greatly increases the potential for mutation.

reasons has a lifespan twice the length of his fellows, as well as the strength of arms to keep it. Due to their vastly superior size and experience, these individuals inevitably become chieftains and warriors of the highest caliber. Lizard kings are usually size Large and have 5 hit dice.

Upon his 100th birthday, a lizard king's status is officially acknowledged, and he is honored with the presentation of a special weapon, the war trident, reserved exclusively for the use of his kind. These large, two-handed tridents are much heavier than normal (12 pounds) in order to take advantage of their wielders' great strength, and as a result they lose their range increment but deal 1d10 points of damage and have a ×3 critical hit multiplier. In addition, extensive ritualistic practice with this weapon gives the lizard king the Improved Critical (war trident) feat as a bonus feat. A war trident is worth 20 gp, although most are masterwork and many are inlaid with precious metals and fetch higher prices.

Sandfolk: Not all lizardfolk have been content to sit idly by and watch as their swamps retreat and mammalian humanoids take over the continents. Thousands of years ago, several tribes of lizardfolk gathered together their greatest shamans and created an answer: a new breed of lizardfolk capable of surviving comfortably in the harshest of dryland conditions and carrying on the tribal lore, should the swamps be wiped out completely. These sandfolk, as they're known, are covered in thick, horny scales, and also bear the unique ability to squirt poison from their mouths as a ranged attack. Treat them as lizardfolk, but trade the hold breath special ability for the ability to squirt poison (range 10 ft.; Fort save DC 13; initial 1 Con and secondary 1d4 Con).

Cliffborn: In the mountainous rainforests of Garund, many tribes of lizardfolk have adapted the ability to climb agilely on walls like geckos, although whether this was the result of chance or magical alteration in the distant past remains unknown. Treat cliffborn as standard lizardfolk with a climb speed of 30.

The Unseen: The Unseen are lizardfolk with the ability to change their skin color instantly and at will, allowing them to blend into their surroundings. This ability gives them a +10 racial bonus on Hide checks. While this mutation occasionally crops up in all tribes, it's most prevalent in lizardfolk from eastern Avistan and Garund. sometimes resulting in entire tribes of color-shifting warriors.

Lizardfolk in Golarion

No one on Golarion knows exactly how old lizardfolk are as a race, but primitive records and cave paintings indicate that when the first humans arose on Avistan and Garund, lizardfolk society already existed in something close to its current form. Possibly one of the first land-dwelling races to achieve sentience, lizardfolk once inhabited almost every swamp and fen on Golarion.

Then came the Great Darkness, the mighty meteor strike that brought an end to Azlant, carved out the Inner Sea, and wiped entire species from the planet's face. Although the lizardfolk survived, the following age of darkness proved particularly grueling. Whole generations of eggs were lost to the unpredictable weather and cold snaps, and even now, 10,000 years later, their numbers have not recovered to near what they once were.

The lizardfolk of modern Golarion are a culture in decline, a reclusive race of staunch traditionalists uninterested in the fast-moving pace of human society. Those of other races who seek out lizardfolk find them a curious paradox—intelligent but uneducated, honorable yet ferocious. Outside of their marshy homes, lizardfolk are rarely seen, and those who are tend to be either on missions of great tribal importance or else misfits and exiles—lizardfolk with too much curiosity to remain in the swamps. Yet despite their obvious desire to live and let live, lizardfolk across Golarion frequently find their sovereignty impugned by overeager governments or greedy logging concerns. When this happens, the image of the noble savage is quickly shed for one of bestial fury, and the nearby camps and towns run red in the light of burning buildings as the lizardfolk conduct masterfully orchestrated guerilla raids, torching and consuming their foes until the fields are scraped clean of human infringement.

Names

Lizardfolk take distinctly reptilian sounding names, full of sharp clicks and sibilant hisses.

Male names: Ayamet, Dresdak, Garut, Goroket, Graunk, Kassmak, Kopep, Litak, Myrkek, Rokek, Vesk

Female names: Dara, Grael, Hass, Jekraa, Keretch, Laress, Moratai, Ness, Rossake, Saas, Sarakek, Yssala

Lizardfolk

This six-foot-tall creature resembles a cross between a powerfully muscled human and an iguana, with leathery scales, a short reptilian snout filled with teeth, and a thick tail like that of an alligator.

LIZARDFOLK **CR 1**

N Medium humanoid (reptilian)

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17
(+5 natural, +2 shield)

hp 11 (2d8+2)

Fort +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee club +2 (1d6+1) and bite +0 (1d4)

Melee 2 claws +2 (1d4+1) and bite +0 (1d4)

Ranged javelin +1 (1d6+1)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

Before Combat Lizardfolk are fond of scouting out the battlefield ahead of time when possible, laying traps and preparing elaborate ambushes that use the natural environment to their advantage.

During Combat Lizardfolk prefer to begin combat with a volley of javelins, from concealment if possible, before charging in with clubs and teeth bared. If facing dryland races, they sometimes attempt to grapple and pull their opponents into the water, where their hold breath ability gives them the advantage. While lizardfolk are capable of careful tactical planning ahead of time, once combat is joined, only proper leadership keeps them from going wild with the heady rush of bloodletting.

Morale Lizardfolk are bold and unafraid of death, yet still practical enough to retreat if they feel doing so best serves the tribe.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 10, **Con** 13, **Int** 9, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +2

Feats Multiattack

Skills Balance +4, Jump +5, Swim +2

Language Draconic

SQ hold breath

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Hold Breath (Ex) A lizardfolk can hold its breath for a number of rounds equal to four times its Constitution score before it risks drowning.

Skills Because of their tails, lizardfolk have a +4 racial bonus on Balance, Jump, and Swim checks. The skill modifiers given in the statistics includes a –2 armor check penalty (–4 on Swim checks) for carrying a heavy shield.

Fiercely territorial and unfriendly to any race without scales, lizardfolk claim all the swamp as their own... and they can have it!

The ecology of the maedar

Medusa's male counterpart does what she doesn't

by Ed Greenwood

The hearthfire flickered in the tavern known as The Leaning Post. The evening was old, and the few tipplers left in the taproom were crouched close around the fire. Tongues were wagging with tales of fell keeps and grim adventures, and monsters most strange. Old Urvan, a grizzled warrior of scars and reputation most grim, rubbed his bald pate and disagreed with a younger man.

"Nay," he rumbled, wagging a cold grey eye, "men die like cattle, for all their armor; I've fought a dozen, on horseback, and slain them all, and me a lone man with but my fists. But the woman-monster, the medusa, the maiden who turns ye to stone, is far the worse."

From his dark corner, Elminster coughed. "Oh? Think ye so?" he said casually. Everyone fell silent at the sage's words. He spoke seldom, but his tales were not soon forgotten. Old Urvan fixed the sage with a colder grey eye and emitted a grunt that urged Elminster to speak.

"The medusa is a fearsome thing, true," Elminster said slowly, looking around the firelit circle of faces. "But as bad or worse is the male, the stealer-through-stone, the maedar. Medusae, ye see, have mates. An' they're by far the deadlier sex. . . ."

Elminster then unburdened himself of the tale of Ilguld the illusionist and the Walking Stone of Yarech. It is a long tale, full of mimes and bawdy jests and local jokes, and unless one is the raconteur Elminster is, 'tis better to paraphrase, thus:

Ilguld was an adventurer, the youngest and least powerful of a proud and reckless band who rode out of Waterdeep often, combing the caverns of the wild North. On one jaunt, the group met a medusa, whose gaze turned two brawny warriors to unmoving stone. The survivors withdrew hastily and thought of a plan. Ilguld had with him a small mirror, and this he tied across his eyes so that, peering down, he could see only the ground before his toes. He covered himself in his storm cloak, the cowl thrown forward to conceal his face.

Thus prepared, Ilguld advanced into the monster's lair, shuffling like an old man and leaning on a staff. The medusa rushed him to bite and slay. As he tried to fend her off with his staff, she tore open his cowl — and, gazing into the mirror, turned herself to stone while she still clutched him.[1]

Ilguld tugged himself free of the stony grasp, ran from the lair, and called his comrades out of hiding. They rushed forward heedlessly to seek the medusa's trea-

sure, waving aside Ilguld's stammered warnings, and were soon deep within the maze of small caverns that made up the medusa's lair. Ilguld followed more cautiously, and was scared badly when he saw his comrades at the other end of a long cavern — coming back toward him as fast as they could run with their bags of coins and coffers of gems. The illusionist noticed immediately that two of the band were missing. As he watched, a part of the wall seemed to move, reaching out to fell the rearmost adventurer. At that, Ilguld cast a spell of invisibility on himself and fled until he was just inside the entrance to the lair.

Seconds later he again heard the weapon-clanking and curses of his comrades. They had dropped their treasure and were running hard. The men, now without two more of their number, burst past him and out of the cave. Ilguld remained frozen as he beheld what had chased them out — a muscular, bald-headed man clad only in breeches, who came behind the group at a fast trot[2].

Ilguld dared to leave the cave entrance after this strange man passed, taking care not to stumble or make undue noise. He turned in the direction his friends had gone, and just ahead he saw them — statues, all, frozen forever in the midst of their flight. Beyond the statues stood the medusa, stone no more, her arms raised in triumph.[3]

As he watched the bald man approach the medusa, Ilguld realized that she must have somehow been restored to life and had left the lair by another route so as to lie in wait for the intruders to exit. The medusa and the man embraced, and she spoke to him in loving tones.[4] Ilguld was amazed again by what happened next. He saw the man shatter the stone form of his fellow mage and then touch some of the fragments, which turned from stone rubble to bloody flesh. The bald man and his mate, the medusa, sat down to eat as Ilguld tore his gaze away from the scene and stole away as softly as he could.

"A likely story," Urvan scoffed. "One man, weaponless, defeating an entire band?"

"Why, Urvan," Elminster replied mildly, lifting his tankard, "I hear from your own lips that such a feat — defeating a dozen armed men, and their horses too — is easy, if one has but the use of both fists. Is it then not so?"

"Phauugh," Urvan replied eloquently.

Notes

1. The gaze of a medusa can turn itself or any other medusa to stone. Such petrification is permanent unless reversed by spell or special ability (see note 3 below).

2. Maedar are the male counterparts of the medusae. (Singular and plural forms of "maedar" are the same; the name can be used to refer to both genders collectively, or to the male alone. The latter usage is employed in this text.) The maedar are far rarer and more reclusive than their mates, and are seldom seen. Many men do not even know, or believe, that they exist. They dwell in the depths of caverns, guarding the pair's hoard of treasure (and food) while their mates hunt.

Maedar appear as bald-headed (in fact, completely hairless) muscular human males. In all statistics they are identical to medusae, except that they have two attacks per round, doing 2-8 points of damage with each blow of their mighty fists. Maedar cannot petrify other creatures and are themselves immune to petrification and paralyzation (including related magics such as *slow* and *hold* spells) from any source whatsoever, although they can be confined by *webs, forcecages,* and the like.

3. Maedar have the ability to turn *stone to flesh* by touch, once every three turns. Thus, one can free a medusa who has gaze-trapped herself to stone — or, by smashing petrified prey to rubble and then turning it to stone, gain an easy meal for himself and his mate from a creature petrified earlier by the medusa. Like medusae, maedar can see into the Astral Plane and the Ethereal Plane, and they can use their *stone to flesh* ability into those planes as well.

Maedar possess the ability to *pass through stone* as xorn and xaren do, at normal movement rate. A maedar requires one round of concentration to adjust his molecular structure before entering rock and after leaving it again; no other activity may be undertaken during this round. If struck by a *phase door* spell while *passing through stone,* a maedar is killed. If a mated maedar and medusa are confronted by a stronger creature in their lair, the male will abandon the female to her fate without hesitation, escaping through the rock walls of the cavern. However, a maedar will never neglect to unpetrify a medusa when it is safe to do so.

The treasure of a medusa and maedar is usually concealed (behind loose stones, in crevices, etc.) in addition to being guarded by the maedar. The males monitor the treasure continuously and frequently move it from place to place within the lair, particularly to discourage thievery by other creatures able to pass through stone. Males and females alike will flee from strong attackers, abandoning whatever treasure they cannot carry, rather than defend a hoard to the death. The treasure hoard of a medusa and maedar will almost always contain a selection of feminine garb that doubles as the medusa's wardrobe.

4. All maedar and medusae speak and understand the language of lawful evil, the common tongue, and any other languages spoken often by creatures in the vicinity. Details of the courtship of a mated pair are unknown, but they do pair for life (one choosing another partner only if a mate is slain), and live and hunt together at all times. The female produces 1-3 live young every 10 years or so. Young have the same abilities as their parents, but no physical attacks and only 1-2 HD. (A young female can petrify, and a young male can *pass through stone* and turn *stone to flesh;* however, the asplike, poisonous "hair" growth of a medusa develops only in maturity, and young maedar lack the strength for damaging blows.) Offspring gradually gain hit dice as they approach maturity and adulthood, a process that typically takes four or five years. When they reach maturity and gain the ability to physically attack, the young are roughly encouraged to strike out on their own; no more than one adult medusa and one adult maedar will ever be found in the same lair. If a medusa is slain but her mate survives, the male will search tirelessly for the killer(s) to take revenge, sometimes pursuing such quarry for years. A maedar can track as a ranger does, but this does not include the ability to follow the trail of a creature that has passed through stone. All maedar and medusae are immune to the poison of (their own and other) medusa hair growths.

Medusae and maedar respect, but do not worship, Skoraeus the Living Rock (see *Legends & Lore,* Nonhuman Deities), and have a like attitude toward lawful evil deities and creatures. They will cooperate with lawful evil creatures such as orcs, kobolds, or even devils, for reward or security or (rarely) under duress. If forced to aid or serve another, they will always seek revenge. Meader and medusae cannot be trusted by other creature except of their ilk. Occasionally they will bargain with, or purchase information or services with, their treasure.

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Ecology of the Maenad

Calm Above the Storm

By Matthew Hanson
Art by Leon Bakst

"Is there some kind of problem?" Lokesh asked.

A huddle of guards whispered around Lokesh's papers. "You're not from around here, are ye?"

Of course not, you moron. *The voice within Lokesh seethed.* Do I look like I'm from around here? You waste my time. I should bash in your skull and waltze through this flimsy excuse for a gate. I should sack this town. Slaughter you all.

Breathe. Rise Above. "No. Not from around here."

Finally, the guards returned Lokesh's papers. "Well... everything seems to be in order. We don't want any trouble in town."

Trouble? Fire, destruction, blood, I bring you death. The screams of your women, the cries of your children.

Breathe. Ride the wave. "No trouble. Good day."

Lokesh strode into town. A bite to eat, a glass of water, and a good night's sleep. Tomorrow he would be on his way. Rise above. Ride the wave. Just another small town.

Maenads are a people of contradictions. Rumors and legends describe them as raving lunatics, but most who meet maenads find them stoic and reserved. In reality, they unite these extremes. Maenads must maintain constant discipline to contain the wild rage that brews within. Some maenads have learned to channel this rage, and they are terrible to behold.

In the Beginning

The origin of the maenads is shrouded in myth. Many philosophers hypothesize that they were once humans, altered by exposure to powerful mystical energies.

The maenads tell a different story. Long ago, a crazed god of drink and revelry created the maenads as his favored children. Those ancient maenads lived in a state of constant mania, intoxication, fear, and lust. Only when the god slept, one day each year, did the maenads' minds clear.

On one such morning, a maenad named Evaga awoke with blood on her hands. While in a mad frenzy the night before, she had torn her own son limb from limb. In grief, Evaga threw herself from a cliff and crashed into the sea below. She did not die, though; instead, Evaga awoke in a far off realm, sheltered from the influence of her mad god. Here, her thoughts turned to revenge. For one year, she honed her mind and learned to control the rage within. She spent the next year compiling her techniques into a text for other maenads to study. In the third year, she traveled the strange land, finding allies to aid her.

Three years to the day after throwing herself from the cliffs, Evaga returned home, and while her god slept, she led armies of maenads and foreigners against those loyal to the deity. In the end, Evaga forced her way into the chambers of the mad god. She took up a flail and bashed in the god's skull.

With her people liberated from their madness, Evaga got into a small fishing vessel and departed into the waves. She was never seen again, but she left behind her text, which her followers called *The Way Above*.

While many maenads believe this myth is the literal truth, scholars and theologians debate its accuracy, especially the claim that a mortal could slay a god so easily. Some see it as a metaphor of how the maenads turned away from their god, while others consider it nothing but a fairy tale.

Overthrowing their creator god re-

New Feat

Lucid Moment (Psionic)
You experience a flash of clarity during your rage.
Prerequisite: rage class ability
Benefit: By expending your psionic focus, you may take one action normally prohibited while raging, such as manifesting a psionic power or using an Intelligence-based skill.

moved the worst of the maenads' rage, but turmoil is permanently ingrained into their soul. They cannot completely quell the rage, so the maenads seek to rise above it. Their rage is a powerful tsunami, impossible to contain. However, as a boat on the ocean, the maenads train to ride above their emotions.

Maenad Physiology

Physically, maenads are largely similar to humans (lending some credence to the view that they are an offshoot of humanity). Strikingly different, however, are the flecks of living crystal covering their skin. The crystals can be any color of the rainbow, from red to violet, and the pattern and size of the crystals differ from maenad to maenad—a unique fingerprint for each. The crystals form just below the skin and slowly rise to the surface and slough off just as normal skin does. Many natural philosophers believe these crystals help the maenad focus their psychic energy.

The differences between males and females are less pronounced in maenads that in humans. Both genders are of similar height and weight, and neither have any body hair. Combined with the maenads' utilitarian dress, this often leads humans to perceive maenads as androgynous.

Though it rarely happens for social reasons, a maenad and human can mate and produce young. These children are essentially human but they are more likely to manifest psionic powers.

Maenad Society

Most maenad settlements are small coastal villages. Here they subsist primarily as fisher folk and farmers, favoring orchards of olives and figs. Maenads rarely have their own nations, but instead, they try to live peacefully within the kingdoms of other races. A significant minority of maenads live among other races, particularly among humans. Even here, maenads often live in secluded enclaves within cities.

Maenads typically incorporate and blend the styles and customs of their neighbors but with an austere sensibility. They may take on typical fabrics, colors, and cuts used in the clothes of the more populous races living nearby, but they eliminate ornamentation, embroidery, frills, and ruffles. They seldom wear jewelry, and men and women often dress the same.

In times of peace, most maenad villages are directed by a council of elders. There are generally no set rules for membership in these councils, and each council selects its own new members, inviting the wisest and most experienced.

Maenad settlements also typically have a war leader, who may or may not be a member of the elder council. These individuals have almost unquestioned power in times of war, though particularly incompetent or power-hungry war leaders are quickly disposed of.

Early Life & the Way Above

As children, maenads show only a glimmer of the emotional turmoil that haunts the rest of their lives; they soon must learn to tame the emerging fury that will consume their adulthood. This training is referred to as the Way Above, an allusion to Evaga's teachings.

The first stage of the Way Above is often indirect and disguised as games. In one favorite game, called wave standing, each player stands on a wooden barrel floating in a large body of water, trying to be the last one standing. Nearly anything is allowed as long as a player does not touch his opponent.

The true test of a maenad's training begins at puberty, as the floodgates within their souls open and a torrent of emotions bursts through. Though most maenads control their anger most of the time, some maenads lose their focus during adolescence. They might run screaming through the streets, only to recover hours later feeling intense shame.

Toward the end of adolescence, a young maenad's training becomes more stringent and resembles a rigorous military regimen, including training in the maenads' signature weapon, the flail. After completing this training, maenads become adults.

The Way Above teaches maenads to control their rage. Maenads understand that the rage is more than a mere curse; when properly channeled, it can serve as a powerful weapon. Those who learn to channel their rage must follow one of two primary paths—the Churning Mind or the Storming Fist.

The path of the Churning Mind channels the emotional turmoil into pure psychic energy that psionic manifesters use to augment their psychic abilities. The path of the Storming Fist teaches maenads to enter a state of heightened physical power, similar to berserkers in less advanced cultures. Though rare, a few maenads, called masters of storms, have learned to combine the paths of the Churning Mind and the Storming Fist.

The Churning Mind and the Storming Fist are both fraught with danger. More than once, those trained to harness their rage have turned to the Nameless King, returning to the madness that plagued the early maenads. Thus, only the most disciplined maenads train to use their rage in this fashion.

People of the Sea

For as long as they can remember, maenads have lived on islands and in coastal villages. Thus, it is natural that they have become adept at seafaring. For centuries, the maenads lived primarily as subsistence fishers. As contact with other races increased, many maenads became sailors on trading vessels. Their maritime skills also spawned crews of mercenaries, and a few maenads have hoisted the black flag and terrorized the seas as pirates.

Because they are so involved with the sea, water motifs find their way into many other parts of maenad life. Maenad art often features the ocean, and wave patterns are a common motif in decorations. Many of the most popular maenad songs began as sea shanties.

Sea imagery is also an integral part of the training that maenads undergo to control their emotions. Life as a maenad is like being caught at sea in a perpetual storm. Only through discipline can the maenads learn to ride the waves of their rage and prevent themselves from drowning in their own emotions.

People of War

Because the Way Above includes military-style training, a martial attitude permeates many aspects of maenad daily life.

All adult maenads are trained to use the flail, and the flail serves as a symbol as well as a tool. The flail takes skill to wield, and an untrained wielder is just as like to hurt himself as his enemy. In the hands of a master, the flail is used not only to crush skulls, but also to control the battle by stripping a foe of weapons and footing alike. Advancing their military craft, maenads have further developed a specialized longflail and a martial art to go with it. In the right hands, this style looks more like a dance than a form of combat.

While maenad communities are frequently small, nearly every adult serves in the militia. This, combined with the strange rumors surrounding the race, mean that bandits and conquerors usually leave maenad villages alone.

Despite their training and innate powers, very few maenad settlements hold aspirations of conquest. However, individual maenads living within a kingdom often join the military, and small mercenary companies comprised of maenads frequently hire themselves out to nations at war.

People of Music

Maenads have long musical tradition and, much of their oral history is contained in song. Group singing is seldom in unison. Maenad music often features tight harmonies and layers of counter melodies. Maenads favor an eclectic range of instruments, including drums, woodwinds, crystal singing bowls, and song staffs.

Unique to maenads, the song staff is a wooden tube attached to a short length of rope. When a maenad holds the rope and spins the tube, air is forced through the tube to create an eerie tone. By spinning the tube at different speeds, singing tubes produce a range of notes (similar to those made by bugles).

The song staff's similarity to the flail is no coincidence. Maenad elders use the instrument to train young maenads to use the flail without the children realizing it. The two have even been unified, in the form of the singing flail, a flail whose head has been modified to produce a tone as it spins. The singing flail is a favorite of many adventuring maenad bards.

Religion

Many who hear the maenad's story of destroying their creator god expect them to eschew religion completely, but this is not the case. Indeed, many maenads adopt benevolent deities as another tool to rise above their anger and thwart the will of their creator.

Maenads follow whatever gods are prominent in their region. If a diverse pantheon exists, they gravitate to gods of the sea, lawful gods, and those that focus on discipline or self improvement. Many revere the god-slayer Evaga in a form of hero worship, though only a few fringe cults claim that she has ascended to godhood.

The Great Taboo

Traditional maenad culture holds a powerful taboo against drinking alcohol. Many believe this is purely because of the way that intoxication impairs a maenad's rigid emotional discipline. However, others believe that the Nameless King was also a patron of drunkenness and that this taboo is a further act of rebellion.

Maenad Flails

Martial Melee

Weapon	Cost	Dmg (s)	Dmg (m)	Critical	Weight	Type
Flail, Light	6 gp	1d4	1d6	x2	4 lbs.	bludgeoning
Exotic Melee Weapon						
Maenad Longflail	25 gp	1d6	1d8	x2	8 lbs.	bludgeoning

Flail, Light: With a light flail, you get a +2 bonus on opposed attack rolls made to disarm an enemy (including the roll to avoid being disarmed if such an attempt fails).

You can also use this weapon to make trip attacks. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you can drop the flail to avoid being tripped.

Maenad Longflail: With a maenad longflail, you get a +2 bonus on opposed attack rolls made to disarm an enemy (including the roll to avoid being disarmed if such an attempt fails).

You can also use this weapon to make trip attacks. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you can drop the flail to avoid being tripped.

A maenad longflail is a reach weapon. If you wield a maenad longflail in one hand and nothing in the other, you can threaten adjacent enemies as well as those 10 ft. away.

Flail, Maenad Singing: This specialized flail head can be built into any kind of masterwork quality flail. Singing flails can be used as musical instruments, even as the wielder attacks with it in battle.

Singing flails adds 150 gp to the price of the flail.

The Nameless King

The true name of the maenads' creator god is lost at the dawn of time. He is known by many epithets, such as the Lord of Madness and He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, but most commonly, he is called the Nameless King. According to legend, the Nameless King was killed by his own children. After the god-slaying, the maenad leaders destroyed all holy books dedicated to him, purged references to him from all written texts, and even forbade any maenad from uttering his true name, under penalty of having their tongue cut out.

Despite all their efforts to destroy their lord, some shred of the Nameless King's essence survived, and over the millennia, he has secretly gained strength. Originally, the Nameless King was a less malevolent god as a patron of wine, decadence, and madness. In the ages that he drifted in darkness, the Nameless King evolved into something far more terrible. Once the patron of madness, he became mad himself, and his portfolio took on chaos and destruction.

The Revelry

As the Nameless King's power rises, a small but growing segment of the maenad population has embraced a cult called the Revelry. The Revelry teaches maenads to embrace their inner rage as a gift from the Nameless King. They may kiss you one moment and feast on your still-beating heart the next.

Except for a few maenads living in the wild lands, most Revelers cannot follow all these teachings in daily life. Instead they meet in seclusion once each month to engage in an orgy of alcohol, lust, and violence. Frequently, enemies of the Revelry are captured alive only to be executed at the next gathering, and any who stumble upon a meeting suffer a similar fate.

Maenads in the Real World

In Greek mythology, the maenads were the frenzied female followers of Dionysus (called Bacchus by the Romans), the god of wine and madness. The maenads were wild, intoxicated, violent, and promiscuous. After Orpheus refused their advances, a group of maenads tore the legendary poet to pieces.

Maenads were known to the Romans as bacchae and were the subject of Euripides' play of the same name. In *The Bacchae*, King Pentheus forbids worshiping Bacchus, and as punishment, raving women, including his own mother, rip him apart.

The maenads of mythology baer the most resemblance to fantasy maenads before destroying the Nameless King. If your campaign world bears a connection to earth mythologies, Dionysus may be the true identity of the Nameless King.

Maenad Adventurers

Despite their small population, maenads produce a surprisingly large number of adventurers. Maenads who have completed the Way Above commonly go on a journey of exploration. After spending several years adventuring, most return to their native home or another maenad village to settle down and raise a family.

The adventuring life is popular because it provides an outlet for maenads to channel their racial anger. In the heat of battle against orcs and trolls, their rage can be a powerful asset, and praised by their allies.

Though most maenads return after their period of wandering, not all are so fortunate. A handful perish or simply disappear, and some maenads acquire what is called the "thirst of war." While the danger of combat first serves as a release for the maenad, over time it becomes a necessity. They lose their ability to rise above their rage, and only through battle can they tame it. These unfortunate maenads are doomed to fight at very oppurtunity. Like any addict, these maenads build up a tolerance, so they seek greater and greater battles to give them the feeling of control they desperately need. Inevitably, these maenads find foes too great, and their rage is ended by the sword.

Worse, some turn to evil on their adventures. They succumb to the darkness in their heart. Those with the thirst of war still pick their battles, but those who have turned to darkness, however, are wild and impulsive. They take what they want, and woe to those who get in their way. Many take up worship of the Nameless King—in spirit and in name.

Maenads in Golarion

In the Pathfinder RPG world of Golarion, maenads live primarily on the continent of Casmaron, particularly on the coast of Vudra and the archipelagos off its shore. Because of their natural talent as sailors, maenads often serve on the sailing vessels of Vudra, including those that travel to the colony of Jalmeray. Nearly 1,000 maenads live on the island of Jalmeray, and some of them have ventured off the island to explore the rest of the inner sea region.

Pathfinder Beta Maenad

The following variant maenad is compatible with the Pathfinder *Roleplaying Game* Beta Edition.

+2 to one ability score: Maenads gain a +2 bonus to one ability score chosen at creation, to represent their varied nature.

Medium: Maenads are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.

Normal Speed: Maenads have a base speed of 30 ft.

Energy Ray: Maenads know the power *energy ray* but may only deal sonic damage with this power. It is accompanied by a tremendous scream of rage. Maenads use their character level as the manifester level for this power.

Naturally Psionic: Maenads begin with 2 bonus power points at 1st level and gain an additional power point at every odd level. They can use these power points to fuel their *energy ray* or any powers gained through a psionic class.

Sonic Affinity: Maenads add a +1 to

the DC of any spell or power with the sonic descriptor.

Outburst: Maenads can dampen their mental processes for an increase in raw power called an outburst. As a result, they take a –2 penalty to Intelligence and Wisdom but gain a +2 bonus to Strength. The character must spend one power point at the beginning of each round during an outburst and may stop an outburst at any time.

Inner Rage: Maenads begin play with one rage point and gain an additional point at every even level. In addition to using these points for barbarian abilities, characters may use them to fuel their outburst ability, instead of using power points.

Ordered Rage: Maenads may take levels in the barbarian class even if they are of the lawful alignment.

Natural Sailors: Maenads have a +2 bonus to Swim and Profession (sailor) checks. In addition, they gain a +2 bonus to Acrobatics and Climb checks made on sailing ships.

Weapon Familiarity: Maenads are proficient with flails. Maenads treat any weapon with the word "maenad" in the name as a martial weapon rather than an exotic one.

Languages: Maenads begin play speaking Common and Maenad. Maenads with high Intelligence scores can choose any of the following: Aquan, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, and Goblin.

Favored Class: The favored class of a maenad is either barbarian or the wilder psionic class. This choice must be made at 1st level and cannot be changed.

Energy Ray

If you do not use psionics in your campaign, replace the maenad's energy ray with the following spell-like ability, useable once per day. The maenad's character level equals the caster level.

Energy Ray (Sp) You create a ray of sonic energy that shoots forth from your mouth and strikes a target within close range (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels). If you succeed on a ranged touch attack with the ray, it deals 1d6-1 points of sonic damage per level. The ray ignores an object's hardness.

4E Maenad Racial Traits

Average Height 6 ft. 3 in.
Average Weight 220 lb.

Ability Scores +2 Constitution, +2 Charisma
Size Medium
Speed 6 squares
Vision Normal

Languages Common, Maenad
Skill Bonus +2 Athletics, +2 Intimidate
Maenad Weapon Proficiency You gain proficiency with the flail.
Unleash Fury Once per day you can unleash the emotional rage within you. Each time you use this ability, you may choose to release this fury either as a primal scream or an outburst.

Racial Powers

While 4th Edition does not have complete psionics rules, these powers create the desired effects for maenads.

Unleash Fury: Primal Scream

Maenad Racial Power
You release a scream that shatters the bones of your enemies.

Daily • Sonic
Minor Action
Close blast 3 (6 at 11th level, 9 at 21st level)
Targets all creatures in area
Attack Charisma vs. Fortitude

Hit 2d6 + Charisma modifier thunder damage, and targets are dazed and deafened (save ends both)
Increase damage to 4d6 at 11th level, and 6d6 at 21st level.
Miss half damage, targets are deafened until the end of your next turn

Unleash Fury: Outburst

Maenad Racial Power
You channel the anger inside you to deliver a powerful strike. The rage remains within your blood as you fight on.
Daily
Standard Action Melee weapon
Targets one creature
Attack Strength vs. AC

Hit 2[W] + Strength modifier damage
Increase to 3[W] + Strength modifier damage at 11th level, and 4[W] +Strength modifier damage at 21st level.

Effect You gain a +2 power bonus equal to melee attack and damage rolls for the rest of the encounter.
Increase power bonus to +3 at 11th level, and +4 at 21st level.

4E Maenad Monsters

To see the maenad as a monster visit koboldquarterly.com. New monsters posted every Monday!

Illustration by Thomas Baxa

The Ecology of the Manticore

Manticore lessons—up close and personal

by Spike & Jones

". . . Then, praying to all of the gods in the Heavenly City, Yi drew back on the bowstring, shut his eyes, and with his last remaining shaft he slew the ninth burning sun, saving the Five Seas and Four Corners from a fiery doom. In peace, Yi married his love and they settled down together, interrupted only by the occasional thankful peasant or nobleman."

His tale finished, the bard propped his feet on the bench and looked toward the hearth in the corner of the common room, where he would mull his customary flagon of wine before the entertainments of the night began. But before he could either move toward the poker or sink deeper into his chair, a tiny voice burst out from the children gathered on the rush-strewn floor before him.

"Please, Mister Farwanderer, please tell us another story!"

"And make it a real one this time," cried a second shrill voice.

"A 'real one,' little Aidan? And what was it about my last tale that failed your tests of realism?"

"Well . . . it didn't happen to anybody real. It was only about Yi the Bowman and shooting suns out of the sky. That never really happened! Tell us another story about when you weren't so old."

"He means when you weren't yet a bard, Mr. Far-wanderer."

"Ah, back in the old days., eh, Grainne? Well, then, I do recall one occurrence of some interest from my youth. If one of you would be so kind as to stoke the fire to mull my wine—" he eyed Aidan from beneath his bushy brows "—I'll recount my adventures in the hills of Bitu.

"As you may know, Bitu is a town that calls itself a city but behaves more like a village. It lies in the foothills of the Imbran Mountains. Now, unlike gloried Mardukan, Bitu has none of the great culture of that civilization; in fact, its name means only 'house' in the language of those shave-headed priests.

"I was in Bitu earning a living at a trade that I found most profitable, long before I was forced by circumstance to change careers—"

"You mean—" cried Aidan, before feeling his older sister's elbow in his side. Sullenly, he merely stared at the stump at the end of the bards left arm, wondering what circumstance might have caused such a career change.

"As I was saying, I was contributing to the economy of Bitu by stimulating the boring lives of the populace and providing distraction for the authorities of the community from the day-to-day routine with which they dealt. However—"

"I know!" yelped Aidan, not to be put off for long. "You were a thief!"

"It is not polite to interrupt one who is speaking to you, Aidan, and it is rarely prudent if that is to be the content of your outburst. The details of my exploits in that venture I shall leave until such time as you are able to properly understand them. Suffice it to say that I was not as proficient as I had thought myself to be. In due course, I was apprehended by those same authorities and put on trial for some small number of minor indiscretions. Being quite parochial in their attitudes—"

"It means they didn't believe him," Aidan whispered to his younger sister, Fiona.

"—they had to decide upon a suitable recompense beyond simple financial restitution. One hothead on the council called for my execution, and another would have deprived me of both hands at a time when I had yet to lose the first. Luckily, I suppose, a voice from the gallery intruded with another suggestion.

"The newcomer was a hunter of some sort who was in Bitu assembling supplies for a safari—and that, dear Fiona, means a hunting trip," the bard said in a stage whisper while he gave a sidelong glance at Aidan's reddening face.

"He and his band had all of the equipment they needed to hunt their game—except a suitable lure. And this man, Hengist y Helwr, he called himself . . ."

"I know that one," cried Aidan, "that's Hengist the Hunter!"

"It's heartening to see you've paid attention to some part of my lessons, Aidan. Now, as I was saying, this Hengist suggested that I would be eminently qualified for the job of manticore bait.

"The town council debated for a short time but eventually decided that it would be best to leave my fate in the hands of an outsider who was willing to part with a small sum of gold for what they called a transferment fee.

"Having read the standard treatises on the manticore, the hunters took me to a barren hillside near a frequently used trade path.[1] There they arranged themselves behind rocks and small trees after leaving me tied to stakes in the center of the clearing, stripped of all but a short kilt covered with an odious mixture they had brought with them, a mixture of which human blood must have formed a substantial portion. Their plan, you see, was to attract a passing manticore by way of the scent I now emanated, hoping the beast would recognize the smell of the blood of its 'favorite prey.' Then, as the beast gorged itself on my helpless body, they would ambush it in a hail of arrows while using their stones and trees to guard against retaliation from the beast's missiles. If I should perish by way of the monster's claws or a misguided shaft, it would be of no concern to them.

"I stank there on that hilltop for all that day and night, and it was high onto noon the next day before I'd managed to work one hand free from its bonds. But, as the fates often have it, it was at that time that my luck seemed to reverse directions.

"A shadow crossing my face caused me to look away from my accomplishment to see what I first mistook for a dragon—but which eventually revealed itself to be the dreaded manticore.

"It landed a few feet from me and proceeded to sniff the air and myself cautiously. Although its countenance resembled that of a bearded man, its senses were those of an animal.[2] The manticore's head appeared enormous, a fact that I first put off as an effect of my terror, but which I eventually discovered to be true; its head was nearly twice the size of the largest man's. Its eyes were like a hawks: very dark and slightly bulged, allowing it to see the movements of a single man from the loftiest heights it could attain. Its hair and beard were dark and matted with blood. Its facial skin was that of a healthy man of middle years, and its nose was wide and flaring as it sniffed about me from head to heel.

"Still, the most impressive feature was its mouth, for only this did not belong on a human face. Its lips were drawn back tightly against its jaw, exposing gums as black as a dog's. But even more amazing were its teeth. They were neither white as

yours, dear Grainne, nor yellow like your father's, nor even missing like yours, dearest Fiona." Fiona smiled, revealing the gap where her two front teeth had fallen out. "Instead, the manticore's teeth gleamed darkly in their sockets, for they looked all the world like tiny dagger blades forged of darkest iron.

"Finally, after spending only as much time inspecting me as I have spent describing its face, the monster appeared to have made up its mind about me. Having assured itself that I was no threat, it leapt forward and struck the air with its powerful wings, gaining altitude in a surprisingly short time."

"But Mr. Farwanderer, you couldn't have scared it away, even with one hand free! You were still tied down, you had no armor, no sword or spear. You were free to be killed!"

"Exactly, Grainne. The manticore struck off into the air as soon as it discovered that I was shieldless, swordless, and armorless. Hengist and his men rushed to follow the exiting beast, hoping to find its lair. Unluckily for me, one of his band thought to take me along in hopes that I could be used as manticore-fodder at the next opportunity. None of us had any idea at the time why the creature acted this way, least of all myself. Of all of us, I was the only one who had no desire to discover why, but I would be the only one to find out.

"It was not at all difficult to follow the beast, for it glided slowly through the air, always tending toward a certain nearby cliff. We arrived too late to see where it had disappeared, but a pile of scarred bones and other refuse at the foot of the cliff showed Hengist the general area in which to search the cave-pocked cliff.

"A short time after the party had spread out to look for other clues along the base of the cliff, one of the hunters cried out in alarm. We turned to see a smaller-size manticore leaping from one of the highest holes and gliding inexpertly to the forest floor. Hengist quickly decided to ignore this younger specimen and concentrate on the adult we'd followed.

"Now that he knew which cave was our target, Hengist managed to discern a rough pathway leading up the rocky face. It was steep and difficult to climb, but it was evidently sufficient for a manticore with good strong claws but with wings not yet strong enough to allow him to fly back to his roost.

"I was released from my bonds temporarily to ascend the cliff at sword point, for the path was too ill defined for a man to climb with his arms tied behind his back. As I rose, I noted the depth of the claw marks gouged into the stone, and a shiver ran through me. I was still expected to serve as a distraction for the manticore within. As I had been turned down once before by the beast, I feared more the swords at my back, but I was none too comfortable-with the thought of claws that could easily tear a man in two—especially when I was to be that man.

"Without incident, we reached the cave mouth and proceeded into a long corridor. When we rounded the final corner in the winding cavern, we saw by our lanterns' light a large chamber, littered with human remains, bits of armor, torn clothing, heaps of coins in rotting sacks, and, in the middle of it all, *the monster.*" The bard looked deeply into the wide eyes of the children. "The manticore looked even larger in the tight confines of the cave, and its ferocity was obviously increased by our intrusion.

"Faced with certain death both ahead and behind, I was too frightened to do anything but remain rooted to the spot, even as the manticore loosed a volley of iron darts from its tail.[3] The spikes flew past me—and struck Hengist, in the lead of his men, an action the monster quickly followed by leaping on Hengist with claws out and teeth bared.[4]

"Knocking me aside as it flew at Hengist, the manticore gave a strange, high-pitched roar completely unlike that of the lion, of which the manticore is a part.[5] It proceeded to tear at Hengist's armored throat and face. Although there were other members of his party standing about and raining blows on the beast, the monster concentrated all of its attacks on the one

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man most able to avoid them, for Hengist was the only one of the band equipped with armor adequate to blunt its attacks.[6] The beast's single-mindedness blinded it to my own movements away from the melee, and I crawled and scrambled for the only corner of the room not threatened by claw or sword.

"When I reached the far wall of the chamber, I became immediately aware of the reason for the monster's anger. Two cubs were hiding there, and they made movements toward me that mimicked their mother's attacks.[7] In my weak, confused, and defenseless condition, I could have easily been killed by these two if it weren't for a strange thing. While they swung their paws at me, flapped their tiny wings, waved their tails, and hissed through wide-open mouths, I noticed that they had no more than the stubs of claws and tail spikes, and dark, shiny ridges of strange material where teeth should be.[8]

"While I crouched, dividing my attention between the carnage I was escaping and the cubs before me, the mother manticore succeeded in slaying Hengist, but not without suffering a number of wounds of its own. Having finished off its immediate prey, it finally seemed to notice Hengist's retainers, and it turned on them and advanced, looking even more terrifying covered with gore than it had but minutes before. Guessing that the wounded manticore would eventually be brought down by the rest of the Hunter's band, I had to quickly come up with a plan of escape."

"So you snuck out just when they struck the killing blow to the manticore," suggested Aidan.

"No, silly. They blocked the entrance, so he took one of the baby manticores and used it as a hostage and kept it between him and the other guys," corrected Grainne, beaming at her superior grasp of the situation.

"Well, actually, neither of those solutions was at all feasible at the time. The egress was indeed blocked, and I'm not sure that the mother manticore would have understood the bargain implicit in a hostage-taking. Instead, I merely made for myself a disguise that all of the men were willing to believe. I smeared some of the blood and dirt from the floor of the cave over the scratches from the rough treatment at the hands of my captors and the paws of the cubs, then merely 'played dead.'

"The hunters eventually dispatched their prey but were too badly wounded to make a thorough search of the chamber. They merely took all of the valuables from the room,[9] their leader's body, the two cubs—which they hoped to sell—and a number of samples and organs from the adult manticore's body to be sold to alchemists and mages, leaving behind my own, supposedly dead, body.[10] Once they were well gone, I got up and made my way out of the cavern and off across the countryside to greener pastures. Now, off to bed with the three of you. Fiona is almost asleep now, and you should follow her example."

"But that's not a good ending! They got all the money and they killed the manticore and took the kittens and you didn't get anything."

"And I lost all of my belongings that had been confiscated in Bitu, forcing me to start over again with nothing. Yes, Fiona, that's how it ended."

"But the bad guys shouldn't get away with everything. That's not right!"

"Well, in actual fact, they got away with very little. The vast majority of their profits went toward the purchase of revivifying prayers for their leader, from a priest of Anu in Mardukan. And as for the cubs, when they'd brought Hengist back from the Isles Beyond, he had sell one cub to a wealthy baronet with the assurance that it could be raised as a flying mount in but a few years. The other cub was kept by Hengist for the same purpose.

"In less than three years, the two cubs had grown to their full size. Unfortunately for Hengist, they hadn't taken readily to the training of their owners. The baron's manticore (for the baronet had risen to become the thane of Kasayle in the intervening time) had proven so unbreakable that even the expert on manticores that he'd hired could do nothing with it. So, he sought out Hengist and demanded his original investment back, with the addition of all the money spent on raising the beast over the years, and with an additional fee levied merely for spite.

"Hengist had had more success than the baron because he was wary enough to have *charm monster* spells cast repeatedly on his own manticore. He offered to demonstrate that it was merely the other man's incompetence that had led to his failure. After having a number of his retainers lead the manticore out of its stable, Hengist prepared the saddle he'd had made, mounted the beast and strapped himself in, and rose into the air to the cheers of of the small crowd attending the event. No cheers, however, came from the baron and his manticore tamer.

"The monster was somewhat startled by all of the commotion, as Hengist had previously flown it only in isolation for fear of public outcry or an unfortunate accident. As Hengist flew it in sweeping circles and in dives toward the crowd, screams of excitement went up into the air, as well as hats thrown in salute.

"Unfortunately, the manticore's reflexes and instincts took precedence over its training, and the manticore neglected the presence of Hengist riding astride it. It reacted to all of the clamor as if it were being attacked, by arching its tail over its back to send a volley of darts toward the source of the distractions. Three of those iron darts plunged into Hengist's spine, killing him instantly and breaking his bonds to the saddle. The manticore, freed from the commands of its now missing master, turned about and sailed away to the nearby mountains before anyone could string a bow."

"Only seconds after Hengist's body hit the ground, the baron stated to the crowd that this was proof of the legitimacy of his claim against Hengist. Within a few short weeks, he was awarded the greater part of Hengist's estate in compensation from the courts. Not enough money was left to have Hengist raised to life again, so he was buried and so remains today.

"And, of course, the manticore trainer, who had watched the baron's cub grow from a mewling cub to a mighty beast of prey, collected his own compensation from the baron, then moved on to find another job. Positions 'in manticore taming would be almost nonexistent once this incident became public knowledge."

"But what were you doing then?"

"Why, Grainne, I said that I was trying to find a new job, for one can only make so much profit from three years with any type of monster, even one as magnificent as a manticore."

Footnotes

1. The *Monstrous Compendium* states that manticores prefer dismal lairs but that they are usually encountered outside of their caves 'while hunting for humans. The AD&D 2nd Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* shows that manticores are never

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Manticore

Continued from page 59

found in uninhabited areas but that they are most frequently seen over the forests and hills of sylvan settings. To ensure themselves a ready food-supply, manticores will rarely lair more than 20 miles (three hours leisurely flight time) from a human settlement or trade route.

2. The manticore's sensory organs are more efficient to some degree than the human organs that they resemble. Manticores possess eyesight like that of birds of prey, which they use to spot distant movements that could signify human activity. At closer ranges, they use their sense of smell to find metal that they may not be able to see because of poor lighting, clothing, or layers of decorative paint.

3. A healthy adult manticore has a complement of 12 iron darts in its tail that can be flung at prey in four volleys of three darts each. As the darts take about 24 hours per volley to grow back, emerging like shark teeth from a supply within the end of its tail, a manticore will not choose to fire all four sets of darts at any one opponent or group of opponents, preferring to soften up foes with one to two volleys before closing with its claws or teeth. Only in dire emergencies will all 12 darts be used, for it would take four days for the manticore to be fully armed again.

When an adult manticore is encountered, it will not necessarily have a full set of spikes readied. Roll 1d6. On a roll of 1, the manticore has only one volley of darts at the moment. A roll of 2 means two volleys are ready, and 3 means three volleys. Rolls of 4 and 5 both signify four volleys, and only a 6 means the manticore has no darts ready for use. A manticore is unlikely to attack when at its weakest.

4. Although manticores have teeth tough enough to pierce armor, and jaw and neck muscles strong enough to force these teeth through armor and tear it apart, they rarely use these fearsome weapons in combat because of the human configuration of their facial features, requiring them to twist their heads at an uncomfortable angle to catch upright foes. In extremis, they can bite for 1-8 hp damage, but all attacks with claws or tail in that same round are made at -2 to hit. If the manticore is blinded and using its teeth in combat, it will use them at - 3 to hit and all other weapons will be at - 6 (which is why they are unlikely to use both teeth and claws when blinded).

5. The voice of the manticore, coming as it does from a strange combination of a man's and a lion's throat, is higher in pitch than either, sounding like a man's falsetto voice. This is compounded by the relatively inflexible lips and jaws of the manticore to greatly reduce the number of sounds it can produce. Therefore, its language is relatively simple but still difficult to imitate.

6. Iron and steel form an important part of the manticore's diet as their claws, teeth, and tail darts are formed of them. If given a choice between an armored or a bare victim, the armored one will be attacked to provide the beast with both meat and metal, while the other is fairly ignored as it does not satisfy all of the manticore's dietary needs. Although the *Monstrous Compendium* states that they prefer human victims, manticores do so not because of the taste but rather because humans often carry more metal on them than any other creatures.

7. Manticores appear in groups of one to four. If a single manticore is encountered, it is most likely a rogue male or a female searching for food for her young. If two appear, they are probably a mated pair, while larger groups are usually simply mothers with their young (the males leave their females soon after the mating season ends). The female manticore normally fights with the same strength as the male, but if she is protecting her young she will have a bonus of + 1 to hit and damage on all attacks, including those from each individual tail spike.

8. Manticore cubs are born in litters of one to three, almost five months after the end of the autumn mating season. At birth, they are almost helpless and must depend on their mother for pieces of meat and ferrous metals that have been torn into manageable sizes for them.

Even with a regular and balanced diet, young manticores do not develop a full set of teeth, claws, and spikes until they are at least a year old. It takes at least another year before their wings are strong enough to carry them. During this year, they are able to glide unsteadily, but no powered flight is possible; their muscles are capable only of holding the wings rigidly open.

Although they are physically able to hunt and survive on their own two years after birth, manticores do not reach their full size until their third year, and they are not sexually mature until their fourth. Once a cub has reached the age of three, it behaves in all ways as a mature specimen described in *the Monstrous Compendium.*

Between the time a cub has claws and spikes and the time its wings grow fully, it can fight as a medium-size, 2 + 1 HD creature doing 1-2 hp damage with each paw, 1-4 hp damage with its teeth, and 1-3 hp damage with each tail spike. Under certain circumstances, it can use its rear claws for 1-2 hp damage at -4 to hit. The cub moves at a ground rate of 6 or at a gliding rate of 12.

At the age of two years, until it, attains its full growth and fighting capabilities at three years of age, the cub is man-size, has 4 +2 HD, and does 1-3 hp damage with its front and rear claws (with the rear claws used at -3 to hit), 1-6 hp damage with its teeth, and 1-4 hp damage with its tail darts. It can move at 9 on the ground or 15 in controlled flight.

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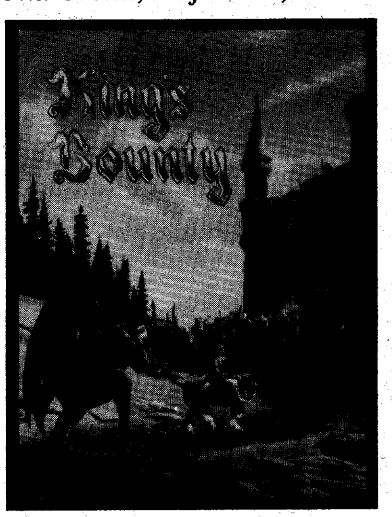

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9. Conspicuously lacking in the treasure troves of manticores are any items made of iron and steel, these being used for food. Any items found in their lairs that are made of these materials will be incomplete (e.g., a suit of chain mail with one of the arms chewed off) or mangled so that it is unusable. Enchanted items made of ferrous metal are also eaten. Even if a manticore has a steady diet of magical metals, its spikes and claws do not partake of the magicks, as those special properties are generally destroyed when the articles are chewed and digested.

10. The treasure strewn about a manticore's lair is the primary income to be derived from manticore hunting, but there are many other ways to eek a profit from it. The first of these is by capturing manticores alive and selling them to holders of menageries or the like, where they can attain prices up to 1,000 gp. Less mundane uses of manticores come from the sale of various parts of their freshly slain bodies. Their eyes can be used as ingredients in potions of *clairvoyance*, their blood in the ink of *protection from missiles* scrolls, and the hearts of female manticores can substitute for lion hearts in potions of *heroism*. In addition, the tail spikes can be used by mages to make many forms of magical darts and arrowheads. Finally, all of the metal in the beast's claws, teeth, and tail can be melted together and forged into the finest of steels, good enough to be utilized in magical weapon creation, as all impurities in the original ores are removed by the manticore's digestive system. The value of all of these body parts is usually one-tenth of the value of the product that can be constructed from them.

11. Unlike many other monsters that can be broken and trained to become flying mounts, without the liberal use of *charm* spells, manticores are absolutely untamable. Even with the use of *charm* spells, they are unlikely to remain tamed. If a *charmed* manticore is brought into combat, the strength of its instincts are likely to override the power of the spells so that it may make a saving throw versus spells every round it is in combat, with a successful saving throw breaking the effects of the *charm*. Ω

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The ecology of the mimic

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Journals* of Maerlun the Scholar:

The mimic is a curious (and dangerous) creature to most minds — but few know, or care to know, that there are actually several related species of mimic, divided into two groups: a larger, "killer" variety that is of lesser intelligence, attacking all nearby prey, and does not speak; and the more intelligent, eloquent species which will often bargain for food, has a curious (as yet unfathomed by me) language of its own, and often speaks orcish, the common tongue, dwarvish, or other tongues used in the vicinity of the individual creature's hunting ground.

The mimic gains its name from its ability to alter not only its body shape but the color and texture of the outer surface as well. The color and texture changes are accomplished by the shifting of pigmented liquid between interior and exterior body cells, so that the creature resembles wood or stone in color and texture depending on whether this pigmented liquid is brought to the outer surface of the creature's body or stored internally.

A mimic is naturally gray in hue, with a smooth, very hard outer skin that gives it the stone-like appearance. The pigmented liquid, brownish in color (often revealed to adventurers when a mimic is wounded in battle), is held within the body in large, muscular organs that serve as both bags and pumps. When these organs are squeezed by the contraction of the cavity wall muscles, they squirt their contents rapidly (within 1 round) into the outer skin layer, filling many capillaries that lie just beneath the skin surface. These capillaries then stand out, brownish and wrinkled, in a pattern resembling wood grain.

Reversing the process, from the woodgrain appearance to the natural state, requires a sort of external contortion; a mimic appears to wriggle and twist all over as it empties its capillaries of the liquid. (The creature can, as we all know, alter the external configuration of its form at will, within the limits imposed by the actual volume of its form.) The mimic grows replacement layers of skin beneath the outer one, which is constantly being worn away by the ravages of movement, battle, and feeding.

The mimic is amorphous, and moves in the same way it attacks: by extending strong pseudopods, which exude a sticky "glue," and pulling themselves along. A mimic can "unstick" its own glue at any time, and it never sticks to itself.

Reputedly, this glue is sticky enough that only the strongest of adventurers has a good chance of breaking the mimic's hold without killing the creature first. Some adventurers claim to have pulled themselves free from a mimic's glue, but such tales are rare and often their veracity is doubtful: (To simulate the possibility of breaking free in game terms, held characters may be allowed to attempt an "open doors" roll based on their strength. Repeated attempts to break free may be made, but no other action — attack or defense — is possible by the victim during the round of attempted escape.)

Mimics are interested only in personal safety and an endless quest for food. "Killer" mimics will attack any living creature, regardless of the number of adversaries or their powers. The more intelligent variety often prefers to bargain with an enemy initially — but the creatures have no moral standards as we know them: If an enemy is sufficiently weakened after a bargain has been struck, a mimic will "change its mind," always seeking a meal first and foremost.

Mimics have very sensitive "eyespots" (patches of pigment that are sensitive to heat; light, and vibration) all over their skin. Bright sunlight overwhelms these sensory spots, effectively blinding the mimic; thus, the creatures are almost always found below ground or in other areas where the sun never reaches. Mimics of all sorts are immune to the deleterious effects of alcohol (but will absorb it if offered, to make use of the inherent nutrients and sugar), and are also unaffected by slime (including green slime), molds (including the brown and yellow varieties), and the corrosive secretions of creatures such as the black pudding, gray ooze, ochre jelly, stunjelly, and gelatinous cube.

It should be remembered that mimics can travel on walls and ceilings as easily as they can on floors. Those of the more intelligent sort are most adept at "hiding" by assuming the shape of a partition wall, overhanging arch, or rough rock wall if they feel threatened. One famous, if somewhat extreme, example: A mimic somehow came into one of the busiest market squares of Waterdeep and assumed the shape of a statue. It remained undetected for two winters, until the chronic disappearance of street derelicts in the square on every dark night prompted an investigation. A sewer beside this strangely unfamiliar (to the sculptor who had "done" the square) statue was discovered to be filled to a depth of more than 60 feet with human and animal bones. (Even after this fact was discovered, the "statue" ate two members of the City Watch who prodded it carelessly with their spears, not expecting to find anything.)

Although the details of the concoction are not known by this scribe, it is generally said that the skin of the mimic is useful in the making of a *polymorph (self)* potion. Also, further investigation is needed to determine the range of travel of an individual mimic over a lifetime, and the precise efficacy of the creature's detection organs, which, based on casual observation, appear to "see" up to 90 feet in subterranean (not total) darkness, and up to 30 feet in the gloom of night, or in darkened areas above ground.

Mimic

"The mimic-beast is certainly legendary for the subtlety of its camouflage, yet I find some discomfort at the realization that so little has been said of its internal life: What alien thoughts must occupy this hunter's lonely hours in the cold caverns below? What urge compels its shifting, and what genius regulates its rippling mutations? What, indeed, of its inexpert fawning over the smooth dimensions of men and elves, or of its hideous and unnatural aping of the civilized tongue so far down into the eternal black?"

—from the notes of Sage Genovi, 71st Dragon of the Empty-Heart

The mimic is a terrifying apex predator; few natural beasts can match the creature for sheer strength or killing power, and its extraordinary camouflage ability and native intelligence give it a lethal advantage over other Darklands inhabitants.

Overview

The physical mutability of the mimic is its best-known trait: a mimic's outward form can perfectly replicate the appearance of nearly any structure or object it has ever observed—shifting color, structure, and shape to exact specifications in an instant—and its vast creativity allows it to improvise new forms of infinite complexity and subtlety at will. Although the average mimic has a repertoire of a few dozen well-established disguises, the variations it can achieve are theoretically limitless.

In its natural form, the mimic combines the qualities of the anglerfish, the rock octopus, and the scorpion: translucent, chitinous plates shift freely around the hulking frame of a distended mass of pale tentacles and eyes, all supported by the strength of a clear, trunk-like pseudopod. Thick gelatin

holds the mass together, acting as blood, digestive system, and skin all at once. The mimic is slow to move over land, but its speed is deceptive—its shape-shifting is startlingly quick, and when hungry and engaged with prey, the slams of the mimic's mutable limbs come fast and deadly.

A mimic's seething hatred of its own kind and its rapacious hunger forces it into new hunting grounds with horrible regularity. The mimic has no understanding of community or companionship, and actively avoids contact with all other beings except within the predator-prey dynamic; even the most clever and manipulative lair-tyrant mimics cannot stand the presence of other beings for more than a few minutes at a time. They are puzzled by human expressions like "pet," "friend," or "love," and often misinterpret the words to mean "food."

Although mimics are not naturally evil, they are certainly alien and incomprehensible, with sudden shocking moments of casual cruelty interrupting otherwise polite conversation. The mimic's reputation for friendliness—or, at least, guarded neutrality—is born out of its intelligence, its desire for food, and a strange, quasi-sexual obsession that mimics have with humans: all mimics believe that they will someday become human, with a fervent certainty equal only to humanity's belief in the gods. Those few mimics who truly attempt to become human are shattered by the failure; transformed into mockeries of that which they find most beautiful, these failed-apotheosis mimics are the bane of all life.

Many Shapes

In theory, a Large mimic can replicate any solid, inorganic object or structure with the general dimensions of 150 cubic feet, while a Huge mimic can replicate an object or structure encompassing a full 1,200 cubic feet or more. Because they are living creatures with a functioning anatomy—albeit a highly mutable, alien, and incomprehensible one—mimics are subject to the normal squeezing rules. Mimics can squeeze through or into a space that is at least half as wide as their normal space; a Large mimic (which normally takes up four 5-foot squares) can squeeze into a space that is one square wide.

A disguised mimic may choose to occupy fewer than four squares, including occupying only one (by squeezing along two dimensions simultaneously), but mimics cannot make their central body mass thinner than 3 feet in any single dimension. Within these limitations, a mimic has many options: a squeezing mimic could take the shape of a 3-foot-square, 16-foot-tall pillar, for example, or a 7-foot-square platform 3 feet thick. In addition, a mimic can add limitless complex details, including limbs, sensory organs, or elements as fine as human hair.

A mimic might be found posing as a throne, a statue, a fountain, a massive crystal, a tree, a protruding stone doorway with iron-banded wooden doors, a large writing desk with alchemist's lab, a wall, a rocky outcropping, or even a bookshelf stocked with books. Although a mimic cannot divide into multiple pieces or actually become a complex mechanical object such as a wagon or functioning ballista, it can easily take the outer shape of such a thing.

Ecology

Sages posit that the first mimics were created by the ancient aboleths as spies or war-weapons, generated from roper organs mingled with the blood of doppelgangers or some other shape-changing beast. Indeed, the mimic seems from all study and appearance to be a created creature: its abilities, habits, and obsessions are simultaneously too esoteric and too perfectly crafted to have arisen naturally over the cycle of millennia. Regardless, the infinitely adaptive and efficient beings are found across the face of the world, and lair deep within the underground caves in places unknown to any civilized species. Mimics may pass through six distinct life-phases during their centuries of existence: spore, plasmoid, hunter, lair-tyrant, metamorphic scholar, and failed-apotheosis; not all mimics enter into any of the last three phases, and the majority of mimics remain as simple hunters for the duration of their lifespans, unconcerned with the passage of ages around them.

Mimics are asexual, and reproduce via spores. When a mimic controls enough food and territory, it undergoes an involuntary internal change called spatter-spawning, laying out a large, thick glue-carpet of spore-rich protoplasm 30 or more feet in diameter. Having marked the walls and floor of a particular cavern or ruin with this stinking graffiti, it departs, never to return. Immature mimics bud out of the whitish glue-carpet, forming multihued, chitin-plated plasmoids the size of housecats; immediately ambulatory and capable of camouflage, these miniature mimics feed upon the glue-carpet, each other, and those helpless scavengers attracted by the stench and subsequently trapped by the glue.

A dozen or so of these plasmoids eventually depart the spatter-spawn pit, but less than 10 percent undergo the metamorphosis into full hunter mimics—the rest are eaten by larger predators or starve to death as their metabolisms accelerate in anticipation of metamorphosis. Each growing plasmoid consumes more than 2 tons of food over the next several weeks. Plasmoids are prone to random mutation, and the results of these changes appear during this transition to the hunter stage, as does their ability to create their own adhesive. In the end, a hunter mimic grows from a small, creeping scavenger into a lurking, intelligent predator larger than a bear. Once it becomes a hunter adult, a mimic isolates itself from others of its kind.

A variety of hunter mimic strains have been identified. The majority of the species—80 percent—forever remain hunters, never encountering humans nor dreaming of becoming like them. With far slower metabolisms than

Plasmoids and Spawn Pits

Mimic plasmoids have exactly the same statistics as monitor lizards, except that they are aberrations with the shapechanger subtype rather than animals and have the mimic shape extraordinary ability of an adult mimic (limited to Medium size). Mimic plasmoids are immune to the adhesive qualities of the spatter-spawn pit in which they are born.

The glue-carpet of a spatter-spawn pit is incredibly sticky; the organic glue replenishes via some unknown means, slowly generating fresh adhesive material as silt and dust collect upon it. An area covered in spatter-spawn glue is treated as difficult terrain, and any creature that begins its turn in an area coated with the substance must make a DC 16 Reflex save or be held fast. A successful DC 16 Strength check can pry the creature loose. Strong alcohol can temporarily eliminate the adhesive of the glue-carpet, but an affected area becomes sticky again after 1 minute.

The glue-carpet exudes a powerful odor of rotting fish; scavengers are attracted to the smell and often become trapped. Creatures with the Scent special ability can detect a glue-carpet from up to a mile away.

Mimic Packs

In exceptionally rare instances, when several dozen tons of foodstuffs are readily available (often in the wake of a large-scale war in a Darklands city), multiple plasmoids from the same spatter-spawn pit survive the metamorphosis into hunters. As they have functionally identical memories, they identify themselves as pieces of the same organism, and quickly organize into an efficient predatory pack. Although their relationships to one another are exceptionally cold and militaristic by human standards, this is the closest a mimic ever comes to family or friends. Those members of the pack who develop unique characteristics or memories are driven from the group, which considers them a cancerous variation on its uniformity.

their youthful forms, hunter mimics patiently wait for days or even weeks for food to stumble past, resting in a kind of hibernation. Hunter mimics also travel extensively, and their mimicry allows them to travel safely almost anywhere. Intelligent creatures, mimics feed off of weaker beings and do not engage obviously superior foes.

Some mimics develop into lair-tyrants: creatures obsessed with the control and domination of a wide-ranging area of abandoned sewers, keeps, temples, and other places of human engineering or habitation. These mimics are fascinated with the detritus and artifacts of humans, and manipulate both the societies of simple humanoid species around them (often kobolds or goblins who worship them as gods) and raw materials, usually toward the creation of opulent and ever-expanding lairs. Lair-tyrants often build devious and terrible traps to protect their underground palaces. Although still solitary beings, a lair-tyrant often acts as the secret mastermind behind the sudden expansion of a humanoid tribe, directing them always toward the taking of ever further territory. These lair-tyrant mimics sometimes develop psionic abilities, and often grow to enormous size.

The second-to-last stage of mimic development, the metamorphic scholar, is the natural culmination of the strange, species-wide belief that mimics can someday become human, a racial imperative indelibly woven into the first glue-carpet memories they consume. Although all mimics believe that they will someday learn how to shape-change into men, metamorphic scholars engage in obsessive research on the topic: stealing human children to raise as their own, taking apart human bodies to better understand their construction, and consuming blood from a wide variety of humans so as to learn how to better replicate it.

Habitat & Society

The mimic's pseudo-alchemical glue is the key to understanding their odd society. Though clear, odorless, and tasteless to humanoids, to the mimics the slime is thick with information. After gaining the race-memories of their species with their metamorphosis into plasmoids, mimics obtain new instincts from perusing the liquid trails of other mimics and leave behind simple chemical memories in their own glue.

For the mimic, the glue of another of their kind is a repulsive thing, the human equivalent of another person's spit and sweat, and they meticulously avoid it once they decode its messages. By means of this potent slime, mimics mark territory against others while simultaneously relaying information; in the arid and weather-free Darklands, the trail of a foreign mimic's passage is obvious to another mimic even years later.

Mimics despise the company of others, no matter the species—the only exception stems from their obsession

with humans. Because of this instinctive interest, mimics may tolerate the presence of a solitary human for several minutes at a time, though they eventually attack or drive away their visitor. A mimic quickly grows agitated in the presence of multiple creatures, even humans.

The memories of the mimic are as mutable as their forms, and the famous patience of the mimic is due to this very ability: mimics can discard boring or unpleasant memories as easily as a human throws out moldy bread. Mimics casually edit their minds in this way constantly, and think nothing of removing several weeks' worth of "empty" time spent waiting for a meal to arrive. Consequently, they have a hard time judging things like how long ago an earthquake occurred or a certain creature passed by them.

Campaign Role

A mimic can serve as a lurking or alien presence within a dungeon or wilderness site, a sort of living poltergeist that seems to be simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. The mimic certainly delivers an interesting low-level ambush encounter, but as a long-lived, slow-moving and methodical occupant of the Darklands, a hunter mimic could also act as a long-term contact for the PCs, perhaps a neutral party between surface-dwelling humans and underground kobolds or orcs who share a ruin-based border.

As lair-tyrants and metamorphic scholars, the mimics begin to take more active roles in the game: for instance, a Huge mimic might be the godlike puppet-master of an expansive humanoid regime, with the PCs never realizing until it's too late that their enemy is not the hobgoblin warlord on the massive throne, but the throne itself. And once an elder mimic becomes invested in transforming itself into a human and starts abducting townsfolk to study them, PCs will never look at the "friendly" mimic the same way again.

Treasure

Mimics carry treasure within hollowed-out bubbles inside their bodies; these fleshy pockets serve to keep coins, jewelry, books, and other tantalizing trinkets safe from harm when not in use. Hunter mimics have little use for this treasure, but they well understand the utility of gold and magic as bait for prey. Lair-tyrants and metamorphic scholar mimics take great joy in the acquisition of human-made treasure, decorating their homes in grand style.

Variants

Of the vast multitude of mimic adaptations found throughout Golarion (see the Mimic Mutations sidebar), the failed-apotheosis mimic deserves special mention.

All mimics believe that they will someday transform into humans. Some elders obsess over this and go to great lengths to truly understand humanity before they set their

Mimic Mutations

As supremely adaptive creatures with truly aberrant physiologies, mimics sometimes develop new powers as they mature into adulthood. A mimic's spawn inherit its powers and may mutate further, resulting in mimics with multiple unrelated abilities (for example, the subterranean mimic has the bioluminescence, gillfoot, and hypersenses abilities). The following represent several options for creating unique and deadly camouflaged hunters of the deep, along with the recommended CR increase for each.

Aberrant Biology (Ex): The mimic ignores extra damage from critical hits and sneak attacks 50% of the time. (+1 CR)

Adaptive Resistance (Ex): The mimic has resistance 20 against any one of the following energy types at any one time: fire, cold, electricity, or sonic. As a move action, the mimic may change the energy type against which it is resistant. (+1 CR)

Bioluminescence (Ex): The mimic can choose to shed light from any part of its body, ranging in intensity from a soft glow like that of a candle (shadowy illumination in a 5-foot radius) to the full brightness of a torch (bright light in a 20-foot radius and shadowy illumination for an additional 20 feet). The mimic may duplicate any color of light it so desires, even creating multiple colors, and may cancel or resume use of this ability at will as a free action. (+0 CR)

Corrosive Glue (Ex): The mimic deals an extra 2d6 points of acid damage with every successful slam attack or grapple check. (+1 CR)

Gillfoot (Ex): The mimic has climb speed 5 and swim speed 5. The mimic may always take a 5-foot step in any combat round, even if difficult terrain or other factors reduce its speed. A mimic may take this 5-foot step whether it is on land, climbing, or swimming. It can breathe water as easily as air. (+0 CR)

Glide (Ex): The mimic can create wings and has a fly speed of 40 feet (clumsy maneuverability). (+0 CR)

Hardy Protoplasm (Ex): The mimic has fast healing 5. (+1 CR)

Hypersenses (Ex): The mimic's entire body is a primitive sensory organ. This gives it blindsense with a range of 30 feet, and it cannot be flanked. (+0 CR)

Mutable Strikes (Ex): The mimic's slam attack deals bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage. The damage for its slam attack improves by one die step. (+0 CR)

Otherworldly Resilience (Ex): The mimic gains DR 5/adamantine. (+1 CR)

Supple Shifter (Ex): The mimic can squeeze into a space as small as 1/4 its base size. Its reach increases by 5 feet and it gains Combat Reflexes as a bonus feat. (+1 CR)

Toxic (Ex): The mimic's flesh is poisonous (contact, Fortitude DC 10 + 1/2 mimic's HD + mimic's Con modifier, primary and secondary damage 1d4 Constitution). Creatures hit by the mimic's natural attacks or attacking it with unarmed strikes or natural weapons are subject to this poison. (+1 CR)

bodies into human shape. Mimics who attempt this final transformation instead realize only horror: they become awful parodies of life, composed of aborted human-like limbs and melting faces crashing one over another like an endless wave of corpses. Sages theorize that what the mimic understands in that moment of failure is its true, alien origin, as eternally divorced from humanity as any force or concept could be; this monstrous self-revelation is the only memory a mimic cannot wipe away, and madness consumes them utterly.

Not all failed-apotheosis mimics are former metamorphic scholars: some hunter mimics and lair-tyrants attempt the transformation, only to meet with the same fate.

Failed-Apotheosis Mimic **CR 9**

NE Huge aberration (shapechanger)

Init +1; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10

DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 9, flat-footed 21 (+13 natural, –2 size)

hp 126 (11d8+77)

Fort +10, **Ref** +3, **Will** +8

DR 5/—; **Immune** acid

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft., climb 10 ft.

Melee 2 slams +17/+17 (1d12+10)

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

Special Attacks adhesive, crush, horrific appearance

TACTICS

Before Combat Mimics disguise themselves and wait for the approach of their opponents while luring curious prey closer; they know they cannot chase down most creatures and do not move until their prey is well within reach.

During Combat The mimic uses its horrific appearance, then strikes out at opponents, grapples using its adhesive, and crushes the life from its foes while constantly shifting to better terrain with its indomitable movement.

Morale A failed-apotheosis mimic fights until slain.

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 10, **Con** 24, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +8; **Grp** +26

Feats Alertness, Power Attack, Improved Natural Attack (slam), Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Climb +26, Disguise +15, Listen +10, Spot +10. A mimic has a +8 racial bonus on Disguise checks, a +8 bonus on Climb checks, and a +2 alchemical bonus to Climb checks (due to its adhesive). It can always choose to take 10 on Climb checks, even if rushed or threatened.

Languages Common

SQ bioluminescence, gillfoot, hypersenses, mimic shape

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Bioluminescence (Ex) See page 25.

Crush (Ex) A failed-apotheosis mimic deals 1d12+10 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Gillfoot (Ex) See page 25.

Horrific Appearance (Su) A failed-apotheosis mimic's natural form is a shifting weave of spurting tendrils, melting human visages, and tortured organs trapped within a web of alien light and slashing bones. This ability functions as a gaze attack; the creature may activate or suppress the ability as a free action. Any creature within 30 feet must save (Fortitude DC 17) or take 1d4 points of Strength drain, 1d4 points of Dexterity drain, and 1d4 points of Constitution drain; a successful save means a creature cannot be affected by the same mimic's horrific appearance for 24 hours. The DC is Charisma-based. When using its horrific appearance, the mimic cannot use its mimic shape ability.

Hypersenses (Ex) See page 25.

Mimic Shape (Ex) As a Huge creature, this mimic can assume the general shape of any object that fills roughly 1,200 cubic feet (10 feet by 10 feet by 12 feet), such as a treasure hoard, a stout cottage, or a vast doorway. The minimum size of any single dimension of a Huge mimic is 6 feet.

Mimics on Golarion

Subtle, shifting hunters lurking beneath the surface of the world, mimics exist in every part of the Darklands, with those living in Orv tending to have the most mutations. Found in higher concentrations in the upper realms, where they prove the bane of svirfneblin, drow, and serpentfolk alike, the Sekamina mimics are masters of picking off lone travelers and escapees; they vanish from the sight of patrols and war parties, only rarely moving near cities to search after prey. Relatively few mimics are found on the surface, but vents from the populous hunting grounds of Nar-Voth have led more than a few of these creatures upward in search of prey less dangerous than duergar and more satisfying than troglodytes. Upon reaching the upper limits of the Darklands, most mimics instinctively keep to isolated areas and range out at night to feed, returning to their caves or ruins every few days. Hunters swiftly adapt into lair-tyrants from these excursions, occupying parts of Varisia, the Mwangi Expanse, the Sodden Lands, the Worldwound, and other wild or sparsely-populated areas.

While most mimics find it hard to overcome their initial desire to pounce, and may still devour humans who come too close, those mimics who encounter humans willing to talk—especially Azlanti-blooded humans—often become obsessed, their fascination marked by a streak of uncharacteristically gregarious behavior and awkward worship. Of course, this is followed swiftly by jealousy and possessiveness, and the end result is often the same for the unfortunate traveler, as the mimic would rather see its new friend destroyed than risk possibly losing it to another mimic.

Mimic

What appeared to be a simple treasure chest transforms into a freakish monster with ragged teeth, a lashing tongue, and a dozen tentacle-feet. Still looking vaguely like a wooden chest, the melting, amorphous thing makes a guttural roar and flails about with a pair of long, agile pseudopods.

Mimic **CR 4**

N Large aberration (shapechanger)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +8

Defense

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 14
(+1 Dex, +5 natural, –1 size)

hp 52 (7d8+21)

Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +6

Immune acid

Offense

Spd 10 ft.

Melee 2 slams +9 (1d8+4)

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

Special Attacks adhesive, crush

Tactics

Before Combat Mimics usually take the shape of chests, altars, pillars, or other innocuous dungeon features and wait until unsuspecting prey approaches. A wandering mimic with little time to prepare may take the shape of rubble or a stone archway surrounding a wooden door.

During Combat Once combat has begun, a mimic attempts to grapple using its adhesive and then crushes the life from opponents.

Morale A mimic knows that it cannot easily flee combat, and seeks to barter and parley if overmatched (reduced to 10 hit points or less by intelligent opponents). Against animals, vermin, or other unintelligent foes, it fights until dead if unable to escape.

Statistics

Str 19, **Dex** 12, **Con** 17, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +13 (see adhesive)

Feats Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Climb +9, Disguise +13, Listen +8, Spot +8. A mimic has a +8 racial bonus on Disguise checks.

Languages Common

SQ mimic shape

Special Abilities

Adhesive (Ex) A mimic exudes a thick slime that acts as a powerful adhesive, holding fast any creatures or items that touch it. An adhesive-covered mimic automatically grapples any creature it hits with its slam attack. Opponents so grappled cannot get free while the mimic is alive without removing the adhesive first. A weapon that strikes an adhesive-coated mimic is stuck fast unless the wielder succeeds on a DC 16 Reflex save. A successful DC 16 Strength check is needed to pry it off. Strong alcohol dissolves the adhesive, but the mimic can still grapple normally. A mimic can dissolve its adhesive at will, and the substance breaks down 5 rounds after the creature dies.

Crush (Ex) A mimic deals 1d8+4 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Mimic Shape (Ex) A mimic can assume the general shape of any object that fills roughly 150 cubic feet (5 feet by 5 feet by 6 feet). A mimic's body is hard and has a rough texture, no matter what appearance it might present. Anyone who examines the mimic can detect the ruse with a successful Spot check opposed by the mimic's Disguise check. The mimic may cancel or resume use of this ability as a free action, and may maintain this shape indefinitely, including while sleeping.

The ecology of the mind flayer

As told by someone who ought to know

by Roger Moore

It wasn't so much the way the visitor looked as the way he appeared — the assembled adventurers had expected him to enter through the doorway like everyone else. The visitor instead faded into being from the very air itself in the center of the room, as hardened warriors and cynical thieves stepped back from the apparition in fear.

It was Melakar the White-Bearded who first recovered his bearing. He cleared his throat and stepped toward the visitor.

"Greetings, and welcome," he began. "We sent messengers into the astral plane asking for those who would, for a price, tell us about the race known as mind flayers, to satisfy our own curios—"

The visitor hissed between thin lips, and the mage stopped and paled.

"Don't play with me," said the visitor. "You and your guests are planning to raid a mind flayer lair you've heard rumor of, and you are desperate to know more about the creature beforehand. Surely, old fool, you didn't think to hide that from a telepath, and especially from a githyanki knight." After a moment the visitor smiled wickedly, and his pointed teeth gleamed. "Ah, you did think you could hide it." The githyanki looked at the adventurers around him. "None of you can hide anything from me! Take your hands from your weapons! Should you do the least harm to me, the vengeance of the githyanki will destroy you all!"

Slowly the adventurers around the room forced themselves to relax. The githyanki warrior also assumed a calmer posture, and then turned back to the mage.

"Speak quickly. The gravity of your world tortures me, and even thoughts of your gold do not give me great comfort."

"Where do the illithids, whom men call the mind flayers, come from?" asked the mage in a trembling voice.

The githyanki's eyes narrowed. "Mind flayers are not of your world. They are not of any known world. They have been traveling the planes for so long, not even they know where they come from. From a secure base underground or from a darkened planet they send out projections of themselves to new prime material planes, scouting and searching for a new realm to conquer and enslave.

"Once a realm is discovered, it is doomed; the mind flayers have one of their number remain projected at the new plane while others use their psionic powers to enter the Silver Realm, that which you call the astral plane. These others then follow the scout's silver cord to the entry point to the new plane, use psionic science to enter that plane, and begin bringing about its downfall. Our mages believe their lost home plane was anti-magical, and that they possess the same nature, for they resist magical influences so strongly that even the most accomplished wizards are taxed to slay them."

"Why do they live only in darkness?" asked an elf. "I've heard they can walk about in the sun like any other monster."

"Wrong. The illithids cannot tolerate light except in faint intensities. Their eyes are not like those of humans or elves;

they have solid white abominations in place of eyes, with no pupils visible. Our scholars have tested and dissected these eyes, and we find that they focus light in a strange manner, so that a sudden bright light will overwhelm the visual nerves and leave the creature in agony. We have found that a magical light spell cast successfully upon an illithid's eyes will send it into spasms. When blinded like this, it is in too much pain to use its psionic powers, and is helpless and easily slain."

The githyanki suddenly turned to his left. "You are correct," he said to a silent dwarven warrior, who gasped and stuttered.

The githyanki continued, cutting off the dwarf's response. "You were assuming that the mind flayers can see into the minds of others as I can, and you are right. For me, the power came as a gift of fate; for them, it is natural to all. However, they cannot understand the thoughts they receive, and furthermore do not care to understand them. They know only their own secret tongue and the languages of their allies under the earth.

"The power they have to read minds is used only to communicate among themselves, each illithid reading the passing thoughts of the other and thinking its own thoughts to be read in turn, and so forth. They are also known to use this talent to detect the presence of other beings, usually intruders in their cities and lairs. True speech they save for their rare communications with non-illithids. They may also cry out from the pain of a light in their eyes, or when cerebral parasites drain their psionic powers."

The dwarf's face tightened and looked more grim than usual. "You would do well to confine your prying to others," he growled. "What I think is none of your business."

The githyanki leaned back and shrieked, in what seemed like a laugh. "None of my business? Fools! Everything here is my business — I wouldn't have come if it were not! You sought a being who knew all the strengths and weaknesses of the mind flayers, and you got me. Who better to ask, you thought, than the greatest enemies of the brain-eaters? The githyanki — the people of Gith, who led us out of slavery and into the Silver Realm, out of the claws and tentacles of the mind flayers! We know more of mind flayers than you would learn yourselves in a lifetime."

A skeletal finger stabbed out at the audience; jeweled armbands jingled and loose brown wrappings swayed from his arms. "I read blind stupidity in all of you. Half of you believe that you need only rush up and hack at them with your pitiful swords, and the rest of you think that your magic will turn the trick."

The githyanki glanced toward the ceiling, then leveled his head again. "I'll tell you what I saw. I saw a mind flayer hit directly with a wizard's fireball spell, and the spell died out! Lightning and cold are almost always wasted on them, as though the attack was never made. They shrug off magic as one of you would brush away a bothersome insect. I saw a githyanki warrior older than any of you here, even you elves, charge a mind flayer — and in seconds it ruined his brain with blasts of mental energy. Three times it hit him — three times! The warrior was dead before he took ten more steps. It took five warriors more to bring the brain-eater down, and I was the only one of the five to come away with my brain and mind still intact."

The room was silent, and the githyanki continued. "Yes, ***brain-eater.*** That's what I said. Illithids relish the brains of humans and similar beings the way you eat the meat of cattle and fowl. To them, eating brains is a symbolic gesture. All illithids believe that they are the master race, the true and rightful rulers of all sentient creatures. They have no kinship to humanity or any other known race. They worship no gods, because they deem themselves the ones who should be worshipped.

"Being as intelligent as they are, endowed with psionic powers, and as physically weak as they are, the illithids believe that the mind is everything and all-important." The githyanki tapped the

yellowed skin of his temple with a bony finger. "To eat the brain of another race is the ultimate symbol of dominion over that race. They consume that which is important to them. Their tentacles have bony ridges that cut flesh and bone with ease, exposing the inside of the skull. Many collect the skulls of their victims and adorn their bodies with the trophies.

"They have a psionic power that especially helps them achieve their evil ends – a power of domination that they use with pleasure on their victims and those who would attack them. This domination power allows the mind flayer to control every movement of a single victim, to an unlimited extreme. Once, on a raid to an illithid lair, I saw a githyanki captain run himself through with his own sword while under the control of one of them. They would have a far easier time doing the same thing to one of you." The githyanki stopped and scanned the room with an expressionless gaze.

No one spoke when the warrior paused. His golden armor glinted in the torchlight, and dazzling gems of a dozen pure colors flashed from his rings, bracelets, and armor as he stood waiting.

"Come, come," the knight prodded. "I can read a hundred questions in your minds. Ask them out, so I may be paid."

A halfling shifted in his chair. "You said that the . . . illithids . . . live in cities?" he whispered.

The githyanki nodded. "Cities buried deep under the earth, in caverns wider than you would imagine. Each world has only one major illithid city, but many smaller outposts are set up elsewhere in the underlands. The mind flayer lair you intend to assault is but one of many this world supports, and you are nowhere near the major city."

"Where *is* their major city in this world?" called a priest, taking a step toward the githyanki.

The warrior shifted slightly, perhaps a shrug. "Later. Ask again when you have more gold."

"Please, at least tell us more about their cities," beseeched Melakar.

"I can tell you what I have seen. The great cities of the mind flayers are nothing like those you inhabit. They force slaves to carve the structures out of living rock, and then slay all the workers afterward. They use few stairways or ramps because each one can float its body by psionic means and use another psionic power to slow its fall. With these powers they can raise themselves up to escape enemies, and cross underground rifts and rivers without slowing.

"An illithid city is a sight no one forgets. Out of the darkness of a great chamber rise their stone towers, outlined by patches of softly glowing spores that have attached themselves here and there. No sound can be heard from within, except the chittering of their wererat friends and the deep, echoing growls of other creatures who roam their streets.

"They keep terrible guardians. Wererats, beholders, and grimlocks work with them – the beholders on somewhat of a more even basis than the other two races, which are used as fighters in the illithids' wars. Their cities are open to some devils and the rakshasas, but these are rarely seen. Hellcats will serve them, mites will inhabit the ruins around them, and they are known to sometimes employ ogre magi.

"All of these horrible allies have one thing in common – they are not creatures an illithid would eat. Beholders are protected by their armor. Ogre magi can heal their own wounds, wererats are poisoned with the disease of lycanthropy, grimlocks are scaled and foul to the taste, mites are all but brainless, and the rest of their cohorts are all spirits from other planes.

"Why do they keep allies if they are so powerful? Because illithids prefer others to do their fighting and their physical labors, and wish to have a delaying force to hold off intruders while the cowards flee further into their city. A mind flayer city has many surprises, especially in the remote interior."

Melakar pulled at his beard and said in a conversational tone, "I've heard that githzerai also work–"

The githyanki screamed. Melakar shrank back, aghast.

"Githzerai! Mad, traitorous wretches! Rot their souls in eternal flame! They claim kinship with us, the true people of Gith, yet they betray us all by allying themselves with the slavers! Blind they are, and mad for thinking the illithids will not deceive them. If the illithids are good for one thing, let it be for eating the brains of the githzerai – and yours as well!"

Enraged, the githyanki unsheathed his sword faster than anyone could react. Melakar barely had time to jump back as the sword-point swished in an arc at the level of his neck. In the next instant, the warriors around the room drew their weapons and hefted them for a charge at the mad visitor . . .

. . . who was no longer there. Just as quickly as he arrived, the githyanki was gone, the sound of his battle-scream lingering briefly after his body disappeared.

"Has he gone for good?" the halfling said anxiously, looking around the room. "He didn't even get his gold."

Melakar sat down, trembling. The questioning had not gone at all the way he thought it would. No one else spoke, and he looked up at the halfling.

"I wish I knew, my friend. We may not sleep well for many nights to come." Or, thought Melakar, perhaps for many nights more than that. Time passes slowly in the astral plane, and githyanki memories are long. . . .

"If he's dead by noon

the money is yours," the hooded man growled across the filthy table at the Hanging Man Tavern. "None if he lives."

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The ecology of the Minotaur

by Anthony Gerard

It was on the fifth of Fishspawn, in the year 425 of the Dancing Unicorn, when my caravan was attacked and taken by a large band of orcs. Amongst this horde were several ogres and minotaurs serving as mercenaries in the pay of the orcish chieftain, Garkun Three-Fingers, who was slain in the following month in the elven lands. After the caravan's defeat, several other unfortunates and I were given over to a large bull minotaur as part of the plunder, and thus began my captivity among the horned ones.

As I, more than any other human I know, have spent more time in the presence of minotaurs, I have taken it upon myself to write this brief narrative of their lives and habits. During my captivity, I observed in detail the society (such as it is) of these bestial folk, and was able to prolong my life by using this information to its best advantage in dealing with my lord and his monstrous people.

Of their appearance

For the benefit of the masses, I shall here note the obvious. The minotaur is a large, bipedal creature; a manlike beast with a bull's head, hooved feet, human hands, and thick, wiry hair on the head, forearms, lower abdomen, chest, and lower legs. Bull minotaurs often attain nine feet in height; females are generally somewhat shorter, perhaps seven feet on the average, but of no less savage a temperament.

The lower body and torso are similar in general appearance and build to those of ogres, although hairier. Females have breasts and broad hips similar to those of most humanoid types. The minotaur's hands are massive and have thick yellow nails, which occasionally serve as claws, though they often break.

As is common knowledge, the head is bovine in appearance, but there are many differences to the careful observer. The snout is thicker and more drawn out than that of an actual ox. The teeth, particularly the canines, are large and pointed, for minotaurs are carnivores of the most fell sort and regularly bite at their enemies and prey. Occasionally, the canine teeth protrude even when the mouth is closed. The eyes are set more forward and closer together than those of actual cattle, granting minotaurs depth perception.

The head is heavily furred, with the hair color ranging from black to a light red-brown tone. Bodily hair is the same color as the head hair, although somewhat shorter and stiffer. The large, deep eyes are generally a dark brown. The horns of the minotaur are structurally similar to an ox, consisting of a horn sheath over a central bone core. Both sexes possess horns, although those of the male are larger and heavier. The horns normally curve slightly forward, although they may

be broken or bent at an odd angle from old injuries. I have heard that some minotaurs possess the tails of cattle, but those I knew had no tail at all.

The horns of a bull minotaur are his pride. Certain free moments of his leisure time are spent polishing their length with old furs or rags, or sharpening their tips with stones. The color of the horn varies with the color of the hair, although bi-color and tri-color horns are not uncommon. Dark-haired minotaurs generally have dark yellow or yellow-brown horns. The minotaurs I was among seemed to favor darker horns for cultural reasons — and to this end, they oiled and stained their horns to achieve a dark tone. The horns were often decorated in one manner or another, being often studded with decorative brass or silver tacks and spikes. I saw one minotaur whose left horn had apparently been severed by an axe blow; the horn had been rejoined and secured by an etched band of brass, through the artifices of a gray dwarf who served as the band's blacksmith.

Other than horn ornamentation, minotaurs wear little in the way of decorative jewelry. A few of my acquaintance wore studded gauntlets or waistbands, which obviously showed ogrish influence. Minotaurs are hardly above copying a style or mannerism used by other races, since they have so little to contribute on their own save their native barbarism. If a said decoration is seen to enhance one's fearsomeness, every minotaur who sees it will adopt it at the drop of a hoof.

Of their growth

Minotaurs breed and give birth throughout the year, and their society favors replenishment and increase of their numbers. A single minotaur is usually born to a cow; twins are rare and regarded as holy. By its second year, a young minotaur has fully developed horns and can fight an orc on equal footing. By its fifth year, a minotaur is larger than a man, and by its tenth year, it has attained adult size and mannerisms. Sexual maturity comes early, even by the third year in some, and breeding likewise begins quickly for them. To bear a warrior son is the highest act to which a cow may aspire; to father a great many warriors is merely another social ornament for the male.

Young bulls are tutored in the use of weaponry by their sires and other males. The youths spend much of their time wrestling and fighting among themselves, as rivalry between bulls is fostered virtually from birth. Few cruelties are spared in their battles, and the scars from horn and tooth of one's early battles with other minotaurs serve to strengthen the warlike charisma that the bulls prize so highly.

There is little maternal affection among minotaurs. A young bull shows respect to a female, even its mother, only as long as she is physically superior to him. The world of the minotaur is rooted in brutality and force of might, and females are barely more than slaves among them.

When he reaches maturity, a young bull may wander widely to avoid contact with older, stronger bulls. Solitary minotaur encounters are usually of this type. My master was fond of boasting about his exploits during this time of his life; he cared little for civilized marvels, being intent upon showing his mastery over the world at large through acts of wanton violence and destruction of the basest kind. No barbarian warlord has known the utterly bestial worship of a minotaur for that which we call wickedness.

The minotaur's lifespan may be as long as eighty years, but because of the violence inherent in their life-styles, few live to even a ghost of this age. My master was a veteran of perhaps thirty winters, past his prime but still one to be feared and reckoned with by anyone of reason.

Of their society

To speak of minotaur society is perhaps as senseless a remark as to speak of the art of the orcs, yet certain traits become obvious to anyone even crudely familiar with this species. Particular practices vary to extremes between tribes of minotaurs, being snatches of other cultures and beings, adopted by minotaurs for a short time — only to be discarded as soon as a new practice is seen. I witnessed the sudden appearance, spread, and disposal of a hundred practices during my captivity, borrowed from every source within imagination — even from mortal enemies.

Polygamy suits minotaur bulls well; a strong bull may maintain a harem of up to six or seven females. Infanticide is rarely practiced by minotaurs, save for deformed births, despite their desire for more bulls. I have mentioned their concern with constant breeding and increase of their numbers. Even the birth of twin cows (considered an evil portent by some tribes) is better than no births at all. A cow, at least, can take her frustrations out upon the slaves kept either in common or by a particular bull. I have been too well acquainted with this practice myself, though I found ways of avoiding such unwanted attentions from the harem kept by my own master. I dwell more upon the lot of slaves elsewhere.

Bull minotaurs engage each other in combat over plunder, females, positions of authority, and any other possible point of friction that may be imagined. The leader of a raiding party or the dominant bull in an area is always the largest and strongest, but not necessarily the most intelligent. In such combat, the antagonists grapple weaponless, seeking to kick, bite, or gore each other into submission or an early grave. One or both of the opponents in such a duel may end up fatally wounded —which is often what was intended by the victor. A minotaur killing another in combat typically takes the left horn of his victim as a trophy. The tip of the horn is then removed so that it can be winded in battle or celebration. Such horns are highly prized; my captor owned four.

Slaves are usually supervised by females or young bulls and are employed in enlarging and adding to the labyrinthine minotaur lair. Minotaurs are not especially vigilant in overseeing their slaves. Escapes, at least temporary ones, are commonplace. The chief recreation of bull minotaurs (when not out raiding or drinking) is tracking escapees through the lair or overland. Perhaps one slave in two makes the escape a permanent one; of the one who fails, little can be said, save that perhaps it is better that minotaurs do not share the love of torture that other monstrosities (human and otherwise) relish. I digress, but here I shall note that a minotaur regards death as a holy thing that should come quickly, cleanly, and in combat. If the opponent has no weapons, at least the fight is ended much the sooner, and the victor can enjoy the status of another kill (though it will be of little worth, as they give more honor to kills against powerful and dangerous foes). A minotaur who has slain thirty men or orcs in a battle would not be held in half the respect accorded one who killed an ogre or another minotaur fighting for the opposition.

Minotaur favor twisted mazes in places underground or in dense forests for their lairs. My captor was lord of an area commonly referred to as the "Forest of Thorns," which was reputedly once an elven woodland burned by orcs. In this place, great thorn trees, thick as a man's thigh, grow and intertwine to the the point that they block the very sun. Through this dismal wood, the minotaurs had chopped a great maze of tunnels and chambers, forming a nightmarish dwelling that seemed to have no end.

Yet, this series of passages, hopelessly confusing to a civilized mind, is navigated by the minotaur with surreal ease. I believe this ability is due largely to the minotaur's acute senses (especially the olfactory one), though perhaps an inborn trait is present which allows the minotaur to puzzle out geometry with the skill of the eldest mathematical savant of any university. A minotaur can retrace its own trail through an unknown area with uncanny accuracy, its nostrils flared and snorting at the scent that it leaves — yet I heard of a minotaur called Faceless, which had suffered a severe facial wound that destroyed any sense of smell which it must have had, but was capable of the same feat.

In armed combat, minotaurs favor weapons that kill by concussion — a crude strategy, but one appropriate to their nature. Their favored weapon of choice is by far the two-handed poleaxe. Stoutly functional, these axes are rather crudely made. During my captivity, I never saw any means by which the minotaurs might have produced these themselves; I believe they obtained their weapons in trade from orcs or hobgoblins. Minotaurs also employ

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massive two-handed hammers, clubs, or flails. Occasionally, they use stout, thick spears, although only as thrusting weapons; I have never seen a minotaur throw a spear or other weapon, save in frustration.

Minotaurs prefer the company of ogres or other minotaurs. They have a grudging respect for trolls and, one would assume, also for giants. They look down on the human, humanoid, and demi-human races, making little distinction between them, save as individual combatants whom the minotaurs must fight and conquer. True monsters, like dragons, are merely opponents.

Minotaurs are exceptionally fond of alcoholic drink, especially strong "hard" liquors and wines. Three times in the company of visiting ogres, I observed my captor drink himself into a stupor that lasted for several days (as, indeed, his brutish guests did as well).

The language of the minotaur is very similar to that of the ogre. As I was somewhat familiar with ogrish, I was soon able to overcome the differences between the two tongues. Aside from their actual spoken language, there are a few vocalizations common to minotaurs alone. When enraged or excited, a minotaur bellows in a manner reminiscent of an actual bull. When pursuing prey or searching for a hidden enemy, a minotaur gives out a snort every few seconds, in an attempt to acquire possible scents.

The majority of minotaurs worship the demon lord of their kind, Baphomet, to a greater or lesser degree. A Jovite high priest has since told me that he believed them to be a special creation of Geryon from original ogrish stock, but I harbor my doubts. Other creatures mix the natures of two or more basic beasts, such as the centaur and the pegasus, yet we have no sure knowledge of how they came to be so, either. The gods will have their way. I never heard the name Geryon mentioned by any minotaur, though they freely called out the name of their own lord in curses, oaths, and taunts.

Minotaur bull-priests are easily recognized from other minotaurs. Their horns have series of crude pictograms carved into them; these "runes" are then darkened with blood, and the horn is coated with a dull yellow stain so that the carvings stand out in vivid contrast. In addition, the bull-priests have themselves painted with natural stains from earth and plant matter, and splash the blood of slain enemies upon themselves after battle. Gnoll blood is favored for some reason that I cannot explain, though some sage who has other knowledge of these beings may know the answer. Sacrifices are generally conducted in a central chamber of a bull-priest's labyrinth, usually before battle. Humans are the most common sacrifice, as they are the most easily available. It is reputed that if such a sacrifice is especially pleasing to the lord of mino-

taurs, it is consumed by a "cold flame." The passageways leading to such sacrificial chambers are decorated with the bones of previous victims in curious, intricate patterns.

Minotaur bull-priests are given some measure of grudging respect by other minotaurs, but this is always dependent on the physical strength of the priest himself. A battle horn made from a carved bull-priest's horn is highly regarded by minotaurs, so I assume the bull-priests may be slain by their fellows with the same facility as any other minotaur.

Overall, minotaurs are ignorant in the ways of magic. They are not curious, awed, or even amused by the ways of spell casters; magic is either a threat or arrogantly ignored. For this reason, minotaurs may be easily duped by even the simplest of magic, although illusions must be of the most superior sort to trick the minotaurs' keen senses. Minotaurs place no special value on magical items in a treasure hoard, although they may be aware of the items' value to other creatures. Magical items are soon traded for liquor or other prizes (unless the item is a weapon), so a minotaur's hoard rarely contains many such dweomered things.

Of my escape

For two years and two-hundred seventy-one days, I dwelt amongst these bestial creatures, and I came to know them as well as perhaps any could. I knew their smell, their curses, their triumphs, and their rage. I can close my eyes now and see my old master, doubtless now a mere skeleton on a forgotten battlefield, his offspring raiding and looting with their own savage tribes.

Many slaves were taken by my master's folk, but only I was favored enough to be kept alive, even when food was in short supply and my master's massive frame shrank from starvation. I could not have run from him, having a disabled knee from the day of my capture, and I had no muscles with which to fight him directly — but I was a student of spatial geometry before I took up my father's business and became a merchantman, and my teachers said that my ability at drafting was uncommonly sharp.

Thus, I survived by teaching my master puzzles. From the first, trembling moment when I handed that evil beast-lord a scrap of parchment with a maze drawn thereon, to the next thousand nights that followed, my life was wholly dependent upon my ability to create a fresh, new maze for my master to solve. He could not use his nose to solve it, you see, so only his eyes and brain were of use — truly a challenge for any of his kind. No man can imagine how slender a thread held me from destruction, save for my own terrorized ingenuity at creating brain-teasers, one per night, to keep that bull amused. Though he told me that he would slay me outright if any of my designs failed to challenge him, I believe that toward the end he came to be rather fond of me, and even kept other minotaurs who would have slain me for my poor meat away from my person at risk of his own life.

Such are the ways of the gods. When the scout force for Lord Darduin's dwarven legions rescued me in the heat of a pitched engagement, I had bettered my own understanding of mathematics to the highest degree, and now spend my days at this university, a teacher and scholar — and a free man.

Perhaps I should be grateful, but surely you understand if I wish it had been otherwise. When the weather changes and my knee aches, I sit and remember those days at my master's hooved feet, and wish I could forget.

Additional notes

1. Minotaurs are very adept at tracking and trailing. They have a base 50% chance to trail a man-sized creature. This base is modified upward 5% for each additional man-sized creature in a tracked group. The base is modified downward for environmental and terrain factors, or a pursued party's effort to conceal its scent trail (see *Unearthed Arcana,* page 21-22, for possible additional factors). A minotaur has a 20% chance to trail prey without the use of smell, using its other senses alone — especially its 90′ infravision. This base chance is decreased 2% for each melee round elapsed since the creature passed. The base is also modified (at the DM's option) for environmental and terrain factors.

2. Due to its keen senses of smell and hearing, a minotaur has a 20% chance to detect invisible creatures. The base chance is increased upward by 3% for each additional man-sized creature present.

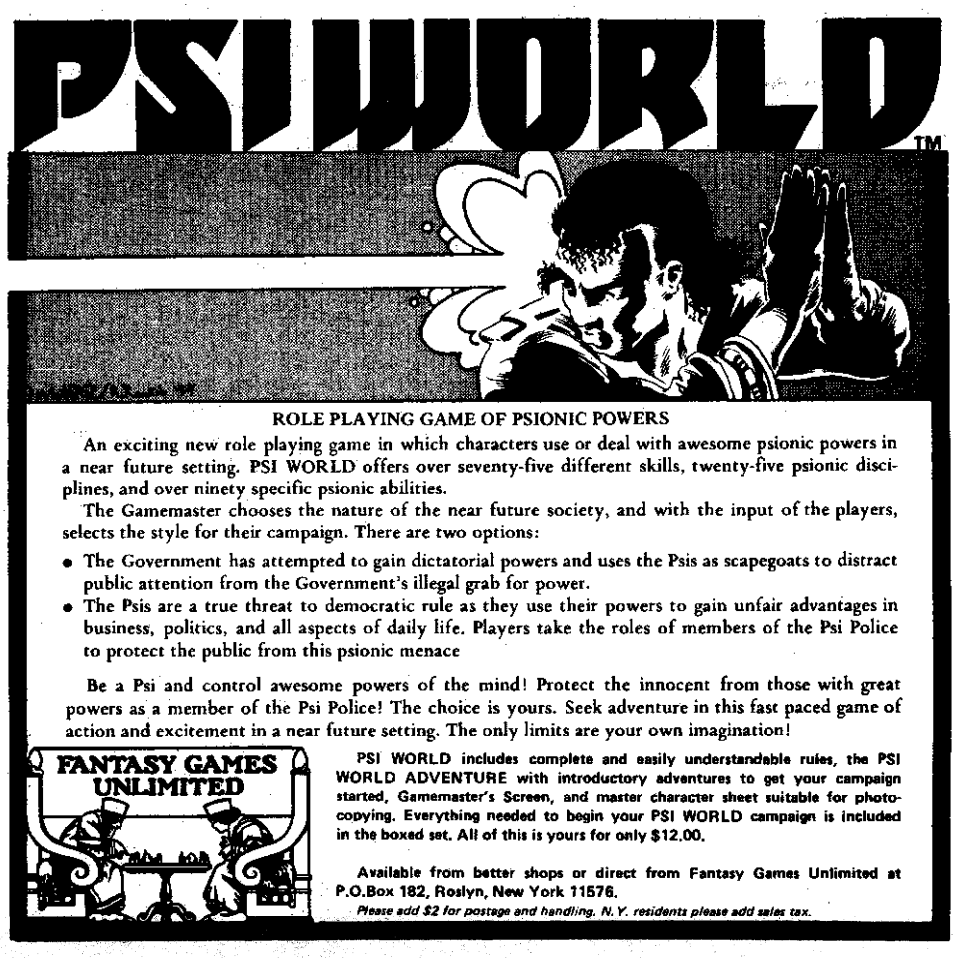
3. A base 75% chance is given for a minotaur to retrace his trail through an unfamiliar area using all senses; without the use of smell, the base drops to 45%.

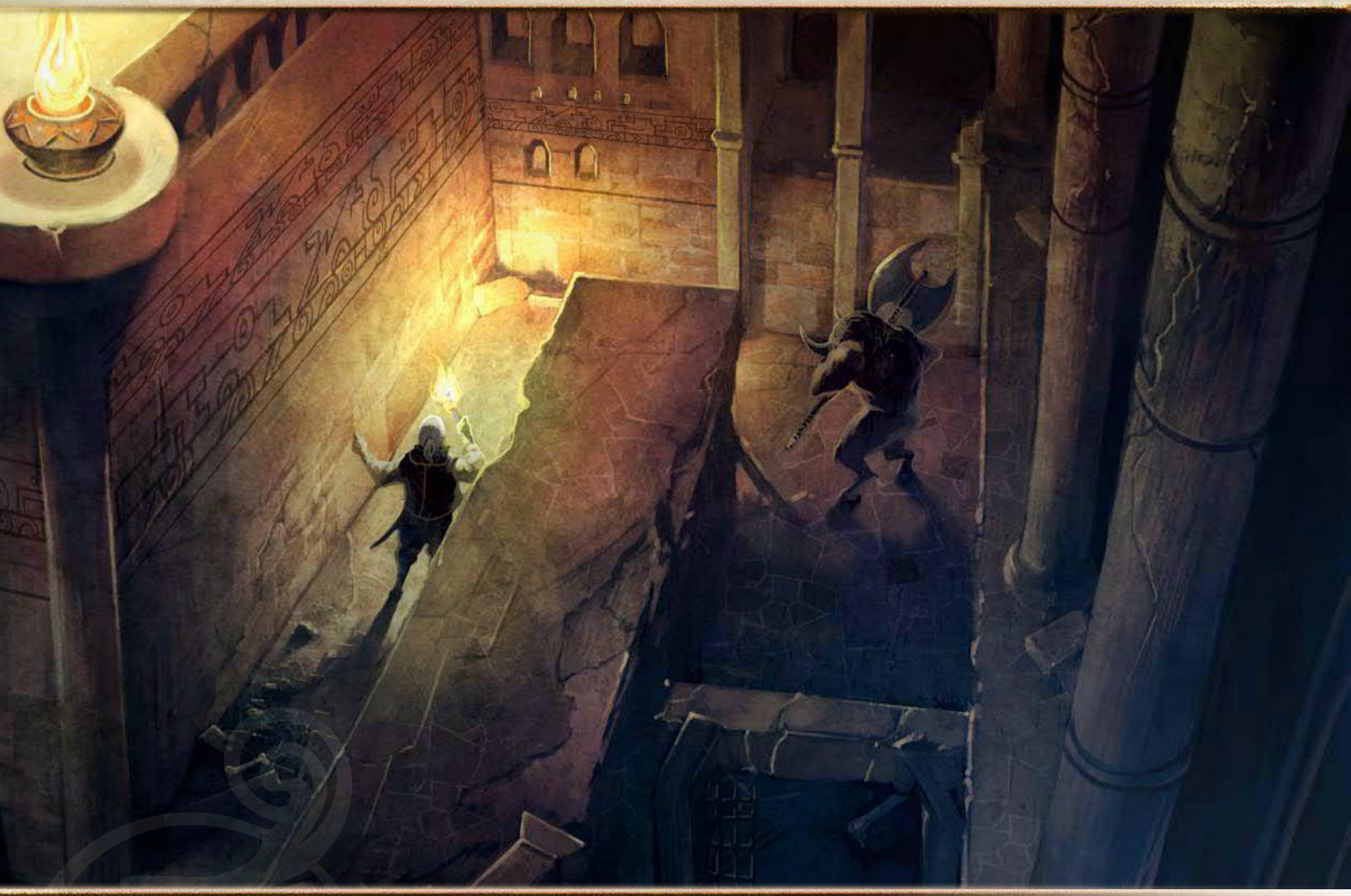
4. A base 25% chance is given for an individual fluent in ogrish to correctly interpret anything said by a minotaur.

5. Minotaur clerics reach a maximum of 3rd-level clerical ability. Such clerics cannot cast healing spells. At 3rd level, they gain a spell identical to the second-level magic-user spell *strength.*

6. A minotaur's contempt of magic can work to its disadvantage. For example, a minotaur would be loath to retreat from a magic-user — even in the face of major offensive spells such as *fireball.* Its conceit for its ability would force it to withstand the blast.

7. A minotaur, in addition to biting and goring, may kick with one hoof for 2-7 hp damage or may strike out with one nailed fist for 2-5 hp damage per round.





Minotaur

"It is said that the endless maze has but one exit. Those who become lost in its twisting corridors face far worse than starvation. A hunter stalks the maze—a hunter born of fury, with a hunger for the flesh of those who would scorn him.

"The beast is in the hunter's blood, and no man can match his ferocity. Rage girds the hunter's limbs, and no warrior can match his strength. Two horns does the hunter carry, but not to call for aid. His horns are used to rip and tear, to crush and kill. He is the minotaur, and the maze is his domain."

—Etched upon the gate of Charizduin, the Forbidden Labyrinth

Few monsters are so strongly rooted in mythology as the minotaur. Part man and part beast, the minotaur serves as both the cunning hunter and the feral monster, lurking at the fringes of society, preying on those whom it once hoped to join.

Overview

It is said that no one holds a grudge longer than a minotaur. Scorned by the civilized races in ancient times, minotaurs have been taking their vengeance for untold centuries. For those who run afoul of a minotaur, the fear of death comes second only to the fear of becoming the beast's next meal. For the minotaur, there is no greater meal than the flesh of its still-living foes.

Although traditionally said to dwell in mazes, these bull-headed humanoids are just as comfortable dwelling in any complex subterranean system of tunnels and chambers, be it a sewer or cave system. It is the complexity they desire—one that they can easily navigate, but that their prey cannot. They delight in stalking the hapless foes who wander into their domain, taking perverse pleasure

in charting their quarry's failed attempts at escape. Only when despair has finally set in does the hunt truly begin. Picking off lost victims one by one is their preferred means, with each victim more succulent than the last. Only when the minotaur has slain all but the last man does it relent, allowing the prey to escape so that his wide-eyed tales might lure another meal to the maze.

In battle, few can match the ferocity of a minotaur when its ire has been stirred. Prone to intense bouts of rage, minotaurs have been known to tear their foes apart and destroy much of the surrounding area before finally calming. When peaceful, however, some minotaurs might treat with those who approach them with the proper respect. Rumors hold that some have even given aid or advice. The reality of the matter is that the minotaur is both a civilized man and a feral beast, blended together and in constant conflict. While the beast is almost always in control, the man sometimes gains the upper hand, if only for a brief period of time. Those who receive advice from a minotaur should beware, for they might learn that the price for a minotaur's aid must be paid in flesh.

Ecology

Minotaurs are typically born to a pair of minotaur parents, although, rarely, minotaurs are sometimes born to human parents as the result of a powerful curse. When it comes to mating, minotaurs engage in a complex courting ritual. This courting involves an interested male challenging any other males to competitions in a maze, ranging from a race to claim a lone victim to outright combat. Gifts are also lavished upon the female, including battle trophies and beautiful weapons. After a period of 1 or 2 months, the female chooses a suitor, while the others move on to other prospects. The couple remains together until a child is born and weaned, at which time the parent of the same gender as the offspring takes to rearing it until adolescence. Upon reaching adolescence, these growing beasts forge out on their own, looking for a new place to inhabit where their hungry urges can be sated. This typically causes them to take up homes near human settlements—preferably close to mountainous terrain, where cave systems are common. Starting out cautiously, young minotaurs immediately go to work preying on nearby communities, slaughtering lone travelers, farmers, and trappers before moving on to larger groups. When found together in a small community, there are few targets a clan of minotaurs avoids. As minotaurs age, they are often slain in battle, due to diminished prowess. Rarely, a minotaur might become an elder, its fur turning almost entirely gray. Such minotaur elders lose some of their ferocity but gain a great deal in wisdom and cunning.

Minotaurs typically stand about 8 feet tall and weigh around 600 pounds. Although their torsos and arms are those of powerfully built humans, a thick shaggy brown fur covers their waist, legs, and neck. Their head is that of a snarling bull, with a pair of forward-thrusting horns flanking their brows. With the lips and tongue of a cow, their speech tends to include a great many snorts, rumbles, and snarls. Minotaurs possess roughly 2-foot-long tails covered in brown fur that end in shocks of coarse black hair. Their legs are covered in a longer fur and end in great cloven hooves. The sound of hooves and the occasional snort might be warning that a minotaur is nearby, although the unwary often mistake them for horses or other beasts of burden.

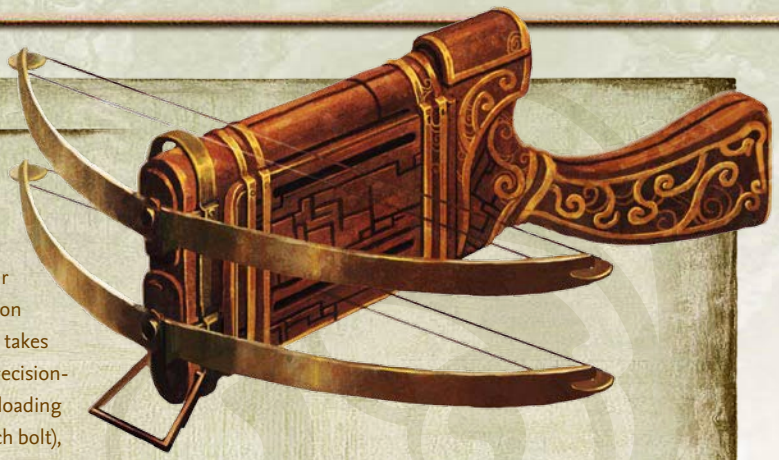
The effects of a minotaur on its surroundings are quite noticeable to those who know the signs. Aside from missing travelers and explorers, many of a town's cattle and beasts of burden might go missing or turn up slain. Minotaurs have great pity for cows, horses, and other livestock used for manual labor. As such, they typically free such beasts, or slay them when no other option presents itself. Close to their lairs, minotaurs tirelessly work to shape the environment to one more suitable to their unique talents. They drop trees to create natural mazes through the woods, cause cave-ins to complicate their cavernous homes, or even go so far as to build walls to create artificial mazes. This last task is usually undertaken by a clan of minotaurs when they find a suitable home with plenty of prey nearby. Not surprisingly, minotaurs who stumble upon an existing maze go to no end to gain control of it, hoping to use it as a lair or trap.

Using Mazes

Mazes are notoriously difficult to adjudicate as part of a game. Describing them is difficult and mapping them often ruins the point, or even worse, turns them into a tedious time-waster. Unfortunately, to fully utilize the minotaur, a labyrinth needs to be part of the encounter.

When incorporating a maze into your game, there are a couple of steps you can take to make them a more vibrant and puzzling component. First, make sure to set all of the encounters in a chamber contained within the maze. Fights in the corridors require you to draw complicated layouts and make for poor tactical situations (especially for the minotaur). Second, try to include plenty of interesting elements and landmarks in the maze, from old bones to crumbling fountains. Feel free to duplicate one or two of them to confuse the characters unless they can make the correct checks to realize the trick. Finally, only describe the turns and intersections. While players can use this information to sketch out a rough map, without the actual dimensions, they are bound to make mistakes and false assumptions, mimicking a real labyrinth experience. Finally, when the players have had enough, make sure they find their way out. Mazes can be very frustrating. Don't let that bleed into your game.

Minotaur Double Crossbow



Minotaurs have a love of complicated things, and the double crossbow is one of their favorites. This heavy weapon fires a pair of iron-tipped bolts with deadly accuracy. Due to its size and weight, however, non-proficient wielders suffer a –8 penalty on their attack rolls. Even proficient wielders take a –2 penalty on their attack rolls. If the attack is successful, the target takes the listed damage twice, although critical hits and precision-based damage are only applied to one of the bolts. Reloading a double crossbow takes 2 standard actions (one for each bolt), although the Rapid Reload feat reduces this to 2 move actions (meaning that it can be accomplished in 1 round).

Exotic Weapon	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Dmg (L)	Critical	Range	Weight	Type
Ranged Weapon								
Double Crossbow	300 gp	1d6	1d8	2d6	19–20/×2	100 ft.	18 lb.	Piercing

Habitat & Society

Perhaps no other creature has a greater affinity for its home than a minotaur. When not actively hunting or baiting prey, they spend a great deal of time maintaining and adding to their mazes. Since prey tends to get frustrated in the twisting corridors and dead-end chambers, many try to break through walls or otherwise mar the surfaces. After dealing with these intruders, the minotaur must spend days and weeks repairing the damage and laying false trails so the next victim is just as befuddled as the last. While most prefer to live in stone environments, some turn to metal and plants to build their labyrinths, such as giant fungus mazes and complex three-dimensional iron cubes.

While many minotaurs prefer to live alone, those that don't instead organize themselves into small tribes, often made up of unrelated individuals. A minotaur who wishes to join must bring an improvement or innovation to the maze as a gift. If the existing clan members deem the gift worthy, the minotaur is made a part of the tribe through a communal hunt. Those deemed unworthy are driven off immediately.

Minotaur society is far from rigid, and status is derived by prestige and battle-prowess. Members of a minotaur tribe are very competitive with one another, with contests being held frequently to determine rank. Such challenges include races through the maze and competitions to see who can claim the most victims in a limited period of time, from a single hour to an entire week. These competitions often turn to bloodshed between the minotaurs, but are rarely fatal. Those who are shamed, either through a failed hunt or by showing compassion to prey, are sharply chastised and forced to wear a harness and perform the duties of a pack animal for a length of time. Some are even made to go about on all fours, pulling stones from one place to another—one of the greatest degradations a minotaur can suffer.

The elderly are respected in minotaur society, so long as they can still hunt and aid the community. Those who can are used to plan raids and organize the defenses of the maze. Those who cannot are given the title of Builder and are in charge of designing the expansion of the maze and the placement of its many traps. No tribe allows more than one Builder. When another elder desires the position, the two must fight, with the loser being slain or exiled.

Minotaur tribes do not usually work together, instead competing with one another for choice hunting grounds and mazes. Displaced tribes sometimes attempt to eliminate rival groups to take over their lairs, so long as they feel confident of victory. Conflicts between tribes quickly turn bloody and continue until it becomes obvious that one side has the upper hand. The loser in such a situation either quickly flees the area or is absorbed into the victorious tribe. Such transplants are common and sometimes occur in the middle of a fight, with individuals shifting alliances quickly when the tide of battle turns.

Minotaurs maintain no relations with any of the civilized races. To them, humans, elves, and dwarves are cruel slavers fit for little more than the dinner plate. In return, such races view minotaurs as horrid monsters, devouring the flesh of friends and kin with reckless abandon. Sometimes, a minotaur might free a captive in exchange for services (usually of a grim variety). While this relationship could be viewed as an alliance, it is one coerced through fear and threats. Those seeking revenge or cultists who venerate beasts sometimes contact minotaurs or even entire tribes in the vain hope of bartering for their aid. While most beseechers end up paying with their lives, minotaurs have been known to enter such arrangements for as long as they

remain beneficial to the minotaurs. Agreements usually involve the tribe eliminating an individual or small group in exchange for treasure or a living sacrifice.

Minotaurs are sometimes found in league with other powerful evil creatures, such as medusas, rakshasas, or giants. Such alliances are held together through the power of the partner, with the minotaurs gladly joining in on evil schemes as long as they are allowed their independence in choosing their roles in the plots. Minotaurs dislike following the orders of others and have been known to attack their unwary allies over such slights.

Campaign Role

Minotaurs work best when used as primary antagonists. While they can certainly serve as minions to greater powers at higher levels, their penchant for mazes and preferred diet make them into great focal points for adventure. They are the monsters that lurk in dark places, who abduct the villagers only to serve them up in a grim banquet. The minotaur's desire to cause fear in the hearts of its prey only adds to the story. Perhaps townsfolk disappear, only to have their bones returned the following night, with a trail that leads back to the minotaur's lair. Remember that minotaurs prefer to fight and do not avoid confrontation—they just like to face their foes on favorable terms. They are brutes, but they have the cunning of hunters. These same principles can be applied to a group of minotaurs, making for a challenging encounter against higher-level characters.

Treasure

Minotaurs value treasure that is both decorative and functional. So while they might trample and ruin a fine tapestry or discard a dented magical shield, a gem-studded battleaxe is a prized possession. Despite this, minotaurs stockpile other valuables in their lairs in the hope that the treasure might lure the unwary into their mazes.

A typical encounter with a lone minotaur might net a masterwork battleaxe, a pair of golden bracers worth 200 gp, a diamond-studded nose ring worth 300 gp, a *potion of cure moderate wounds*, and a handful of coins.

When dealing with a group of minotaurs, each might only carry half the normal amount of treasure, while the rest is stockpiled at the heart of their maze. To ensure further victims come calling, such a tribe allows a single victim to glimpse the hoard before setting him free to spread rumors and legend. For example, a group of six minotaurs has set up a cunning maze in the Menador Mountains. While each individual minotaur carries assorted treasure worth about 200 gp, the center of their lair holds much more: a *+1 light steel shield*, a *scroll of fireball*, a *hand of the mage*, a crystal goblet worth 100 gp, a battered golden helm worth 150 gp, a jade statue of a gorgon worth 125 gp, and a mound of coins worth 500 gp.

New Feats

Minotaur's Charge

Your charge sends foes reeling away, knocking them to the ground.

Prerequisites: Str 13, Improved Bull Rush, powerful charge.

Benefit: When you hit an opponent with a charge attack, you might also initiate a bull rush as a free action. This does not require you to move into your opponent's square and does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If you successfully push your opponent 15 feet or more, he is also knocked prone.

Impaling Charge

Your charge impales opponents on your deadly horns.

Prerequisites: Gore attack, powerful charge.

Benefit: When you hit an opponent with a gore attack as part of a charge, you might also start a grapple as a free action. You do not need to make an additional touch attack to start this grapple and you do not provoke an attack of opportunity. Do not add your size modifier (if positive) to the initial grapple check made to start the grapple. Your size modifier applies as normal on all subsequent checks.

Variants

Minotaurs tend to distinguish themselves through the classes they take, with most favoring barbarian. Some minotaurs take the ranger class to enhance their hunting skills and gain bonuses against their favored prey. Minotaurs who take the cleric class almost exclusively choose Lamashtu as their patron, although minotaur clerics who serve Rovagug are not unheard of.

Still, physical differences do manifest themselves. Rarest of all are albino minotaurs, referred to as Ghost Bulls, who are greatly feared by their kin. These stark-white beasts are all male and possess Charisma scores of at least 18. They favor the sorcerer class instead of barbarian and possess certain divination spell-like abilities as well (3/day—*augury*, 1/week—*divination*).

Minotaurs also vary in their choice of equipment. Many favor using the double crossbow (+3 ranged attack, replace Great Fortitude with Exotic Weapon Proficiency) to deal with foes at range before charging in with their horns. Others wear armor (especially breastplates) when it can be made to fit them.

Minotaurs who grow very old find that their fur begins to gray and their furies begin to wane. These minotaur elders learned a great deal over the years and, through their devotion to Lamashtu, gained a number of powerful abilities. Minotaur elders frequently draw a number of their younger brethren to their call, organizing devastating raids and luring powerful adventurers into their incredibly cunning mazes.

MINOTAUR ELDER **CR 9**

CE Large monstrous humanoid

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +7, Spot +7

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 9, flat-footed —
(+5 armor, +8 natural, –1 size)

hp 119 (14d8+56)

Fort +10, **Ref** +9, **Will** +12

Defensive Abilities natural cunning

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft. in breastplate, 30 ft. base speed

Melee +1 *greataxe* +21/+16/+11 (3d6+11/x3) and gore +15 (1d8+3)

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

Special Attacks powerful charge

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th):
3/day—*fog cloud, glyph of warding* (DC 16), *stone shape*
1/day—*maze, wall of stone*

TACTICS

Before Combat Minotaur elders use their spell-like abilities extensively before combat to prepare the area for the coming battle, littering the surrounding area with *glyphs of warding* and using *stone shape* to create pits and traps.

During Combat Like ordinary minotaurs, minotaur elders begin combat with their terrifying charge attacks, using Power Attack and Impaling Charge to cripple one target. Once combat is truly joined, the elder uses *wall of stone* to divide his foes and Cleave to cut them down as quickly as possible. *Maze* is reserved for the most deadly opponent or the last foe, so the elder might toy with the trapped foe.

Morale Minotaur elders flee when reduced to 5 hp.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 10, **Con** 19, **Int** 9, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +14; **Grp** +25

Feats Cleave, Great Fortitude, Impaling Charge, Power Attack, Track

Skills Intimidate +5, Listen +10, Move Silently +4, Search +5, Spot +10

Languages giant

SQ maze mastery, natural cunning

Gear greataxe

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Maze Mastery (Su) Minotaur elders possess a supernatural cunning when in the confines of a maze or labyrinth. In such areas they receive a +4 bonus on initiative checks and a +8 racial bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks. In addition, a minotaur elder might enter a *maze* spell as it is being cast along with the intended target so long as the target is within 30 feet. This includes *maze* spells cast by the minotaur elder. Once inside, the minotaur elder can leave the *maze* as a move action. The minotaur elder and the target appear at opposite ends of a 30-foot-square chamber where all exits lead to the maze itself (and the only way out for the target).

Natural Cunning (Ex) This ability is identical to the minotaur ability.

Powerful Charge (Ex) When a minotaur elder charges, it can make a single gore attack with a +21 attack bonus that deals 4d6+10 points of damage.

Minotaurs in Golarion

In the ancient days, before the Earthfall that shattered the continents and brought about the Age of Darkness, the first of the humans, the Azlant, brought the curse of the minotaur down upon themselves.

Minotaurs hold that these first humans were a cruel and arrogant lot, believing themselves more important than the gods. Lamashtu, the goddess of monsters, tried to impress people of Tulo, and gifted them with a sacred birth—a great two-headed cow. In their horror, the people the of Tulo did not see the gift for what it was and put the sacred animal to the sword. Within a month, all the women of Tulo came to realize that they were pregnant. Taking this as a sign of favor, excitement grew as the time of their birthing drew near. The cries of joy quickly turned to terror as the first minotaurs were born. Afraid to anger the gods further, the people raised the minotaurs—at first. As other children were born, the people once again scorned Lamashtu, favoring their "normal" children and shunning the young minotaurs. Over time, the town elders decided to be rid of the minotaurs once and for all, imprisoning them in a gigantic maze.

As the years passed, the people of Tulo hid the truth about their terrible offspring, striking all record of them. Only Lamashtu remembered her chosen, and as the minotaurs aged, they came to know the injustices done to them. On the eve of the tenth anniversary of their imprisonment, the minotaurs surged out of their maze, having long since mastered their prison. In one night of bloodshed, the entire town of Tulo was devoured. Its children had come home for dinner.

Today, minotaurs have spread far and wide across the surface of Golarion. They lurk in the shadows, preying upon the civilized races. While they are rarely encountered in groups aboveground, there are a few isolated minotaur tribes in the Five Kings and Menador Mountain ranges. While most are simple hunters, preying upon travelers and explorers, a rare few rent their services as mercenaries or scouts. Such contracts almost always include the right to eat the quarry.

Names

Minotaurs take the names of their elders, taking on the moniker of departed family members and ancient heroes.

Male: Adgar, Boldun, Dramen, Erros, Grund, Hadol, Kollam, Lorgem, Maddar, Ner, Reven, Tutton, Vrabo, Zoth

Female: Aelli, Bosa, Duria, Enyad, Gorrin, Hebe, Hilise, Ilnuf, Kosa, Miris, Neki, Oddu, Sinna, Thadisa, Urga

MINOTAUR

The glazed bovine eyes of this bull-headed humanoid betray a feral cunning. With the torso of a muscular human, this beast is covered with thick, shaggy fur from the waist down. Its gnarled and callused hands grip the haft of a massive axe, the edge stained from the blood of its previous victims. With a furious snort and a stamp of its hooves, it lowers its deadly horns.

MINOTAUR **CR 4**

CE Large monstrous humanoid

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +7, Spot +7

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 9, flat-footed —
(+5 natural, –1 size)

hp 39 (6d8+12)

Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities natural cunning

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee greataxe +9/+4 (3d6+6/×3) and gore +4 (1d8+2)

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

Special Attacks powerful charge

TACTICS

Before Combat Minotaurs prefer to lure their prey into confusing terrain, such as a maze, sewer, or tunnel system, before setting up an ambush. If possible, they stalk their prey for days before finally committing to battle.

During Combat Minotaurs typically begin combat by charging the most threatening opponent. They follow this up with devastating swings of their greataxes, using Power Attack if they are hitting easily.

Morale Out in the open, a minotaur attempts to flee from combat if reduced to 10 hp. If in a maze or other controlled territory, most minotaurs fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 10, **Con** 15, **Int** 7, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +14

Feats Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Track

Skills Intimidate +2, Listen +7, Search +2, Spot +7

Language Giant

SQ natural cunning

Gear greataxe

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Natural Cunning (Ex) Minotaurs possess innate cunning and logical ability. This gives them immunity to *maze* spells, prevents them from ever becoming lost, and enables them to track enemies. Further, they are never caught flat-footed.

Powerful Charge (Ex) When a minotaur charges it can make a single gore attack with a +9 attack bonus that deals 4d6+6 points of damage.

Impossible to reason with, impossible to escape.

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The Mongrelman

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Steve Bryant

Knuckledragger limped toward the forts gate, an empty wooden bucket in his left hand. He hurried to catch up to the small party gathering there, not wishing to be left behind. This was a momentous occasion for him: for the first time in his four years[1], he was to be allowed outside the four walls of the wooden structure that had been his whole universe. His father, Scale-face, had convinced the others that he was old enough to take part in the duties and responsibilities of an adult.

Karg, the scarred old orc that kept watch at the gate, motioned for the two other guards to open up. As they pulled open the heavy doors, Karg gave the mongrelmen their orders. "Be back in two hours. Don't be late. Remember your families." This last, Knuckledragger knew, was a thinly-veiled threat—any who took the opportunity to escape did so with the knowledge that their family members back at the fort would be put to death slowly. The orcs were not known for their mercy, and to date no mongrelman had ever failed to return from these excursions outside the fort.

Knuckledragger fell into line behind his father as the mongrelmen shuffled through the gate of the orc fort. Ahead lay the wide world. Who knew what wonders it held? Knuckledragger had heard the stories, of course, and could already reproduce the sounds of many forest creatures, animals he had never seen, but whose calls he had heard imitated by others.[2]

Once beyond sight of the fort, Knuckledragger sensed a change in the adults around him. They walked with a proud bearing not stooped and hunched as if they wished to shrink into as small and unnoticeable a ball as possible. Knuckledragger was well accustomed to the posture, having witnessed it day in and day out during his lifetime as a thrall among the orcs. It was always best to escape notice, especially when living with cruel masters. A slave unseen was a slave not being beaten or tormented.[3]

Ah, but now sweet freedom! Knuckledragger drank in a deep breath, tasting the exotic fragrances as they passed through his muzzle. A dozen different wildflowers tickled at his shiny black nose, vying for his attention. How different things smelled out here, when compared to the stenches inside the orc fortress!

Knuckledragger pricked up his ear—his left one, the one covered with a soft, downy fur—as he became aware of the sounds of the forest ahead of him. Birds chittered in the trees, insects droned, and somewhere, a woodpecker drilled a tree in search of dinner.

"What are you thinking, robin chirp?" asked Scale-face, looking down at his son and calling him by his true name.[4]

"This, its all so beautiful!" gasped Knuckledragger. "If only we could stay here forever!"

"If only," agreed Scale-face. "But you know that we cannot. The orcs are our masters; still, perhaps someday this will not be so."

The small band trudged into the forest. There were six of them in all: besides Knuckledragger and his father, there was Half-Human, so named because, by the whims of fate, he had been born with human or human-like features along the entire left side of his body; Crab Leg who also had a crabman's eyestalk growing out his face, and who could therefore look in two places at once; One-Horn, who always held his head sideways because of the weight of the minotaur horn growing from the right side of his head; and Little Shorty, whose predominantly ogrish facial features looked very out of place on a body supported by stubby little goblin legs.

Once several hundred feet into the shade of the forest, the band stopped.

1. Mongrelmen, like many other short-lived races, grow quickly. They reach adulthood around age four or five, and they live to a maximum age of 40. Of course, those held as slaves by other races rarely live that long, counting themselves lucky if they live to see 15 or 20 years.

2. Regardless of their facial appearance, mongrelmen enjoy a wide variety of vocal abilities and can precisely imitate just about any noise they hear. This includes noise heard secondhand, so once a single mongrelman hears a particular animal call, he can pass that call on to all other mongrelmen in his tribe. Animal calls make up a large part of mongrelman "music."

3. Mongrelmen prefer not to be seen. They are well aware that their appearance causes disgust and fear (and often ridicule). For this reason, mongrelmen are abnormally fascinated with the concept of invisibility, for it not only hides their twisted bodies from sight but also aids in their pickpocketing abilities. To many, becoming invisible is the ultimate goal, and the quest for a *ring of invisibility* has launched a few mongrelmen on the path of the adventurer.

4. All mongrelmen have two names: their 'true name" and their "slave name." Their true name is most often an animal noise. A mongrelman is given his true name at birth, and it this name by which other mongrelmen call him.

Other races, unable (or unwilling) to perfect the animal mimicry necessary to pronounce a mongrelman's true name, often come up with a name for the mongrelman that they can pronounce. Referred to by mongrelmen as their slave names, they are the names by which they are known by other races. Such names are usually derogatory but somewhat descriptive of the mongrelman's physical appearance. Mongrelmen do not give themselves slave names, but they often adopt the first slave name given to them by others, no matter how derogatory. After all, a mongrelman doesn't really care what other races call him—he knows his true name.

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"Give your bucket to wolverine growl," advised Scale-face. Puzzled, Knuckledragger looked at Crab Leg, who reached out expectantly. "But I thought I was going to pick berries with you!" he complained.

"Wolverine growl will pick your berries for you. You will come with owl hoot and me."

"Where are we going?"

"You will see when we get there. Now, give wolverine growl your bucket."

Reluctantly, Knuckledragger handed his bucket over to Crab Leg. What was going on? Knuckledragger had looked forward to the experience of picking berries with the adults, and was disappointed that this was not to be. Still, he was in a forest, experiencing all kinds of new sensations. He decided to look on the bright side and just be glad that the adults were allowing him to accompany them.

Crab Leg, One-Horn, and Little Shorty went off in various directions, gathering berries and other edibles in their buckets. The other three, however, went in a different direction altogether, heading deeper into the forest.

"There is much you need to know," said Scale-face as they walked. "Things that cannot be said in front of the orcs."

"What kind of things?" Knuckledragger wanted to know.

"The story of our heritage. The tale of our beginnings. The legend of our Hidden God."

Knuckledragger had not known that they had a god, hidden or otherwise. He well knew of Gruumsh, the one-eyed god of the orcs, as well as a few other, lesser gods his masters respected. But still—a god of the mongrelmen? Was such a thing possible?

"Long ago," Scale-face began, "our people were not as you see us now. They were smooth of skin and uniform in appearance, much as all orcs look like orcs, or all humans look like humans. We were created by the Hidden God in that form and had magical powers: we were able to take on the shapes of other races. If you wished it, you could look like an orc, or an ogre, or an elf, merely by wishing it.

"But our ancestors angered the Hidden God, and he cursed them. Their children were born looking not like them, but like us, with bits of this creature and bits of that. Furthermore, they could not change their shape as their parents could, so they were forced to stay in the misshapen forms in which they were born. So it is today."

"What did they do to anger the Hidden God?"

"That, no one knows. But there is hope. Perhaps one day, the Hidden God will revoke his curse, and your children, or perhaps your children's children, will regain the power that is their birthright. Ah, we are here."

Knuckledragger looked around but saw nothing unusual. They had been walking through the forest and were now in another part of it. What made this part of the forest so special?

Then he saw it, as if a veil had been lifted from his eyes. That clump of trees over there, with the fallen branch—it was actually a small dwelling! Knuckledragger had looked right at it for several seconds without realizing what it was.[5]

"What is it?" he asked his father, his voice dropping to a whisper.

"This," replied Scale-face, "is the temple of the Hidden God."

A flap opened in the side of the structure, and an ancient mongrelman appeared from inside the temple. "Greetings owl hoot, lizard hiss. Is this your son?"

"Yes. Robin chirp, this is cricket song, the Priest of the Hidden God."

"Pleased to meet you, cricket song,[6]" said Knuckledragger, noting that the priests right hand was covered in scales the same color as those on the left side of Scale-face's head. Perhaps it was because of this similarity between the elder priest and his father, but Knuckledragger took an instant liking to him.

"Come inside, robin chirp. We have much to discuss."

"Owl hoot and I will be back for you soon," said Scale-face, holding up his bucket and smiling. "We must fill these for the orcs, lest they grow suspicious." With that, he and Half-Human trudged away from the temple, leaving Knuckledragger and the priest by themselves.

Knuckledragger followed the priest through the camouflaged flap and inside the temple. It was dark and gloomy, but exciting to the young mongrelman, for it was a secret place of which his masters, the orcs, did not know.

"How long have you lived here?" Knuckledragger asked.

"Twelve years," replied the priest.

"Twelve years! How old are you?"

"Thirty-seven. There are a few good years left in me yet!" Knuckledragger's mouth dropped. He'd never heard of anyone living to be so old. Maybe the Hidden God gave his priests the gift of long life. Knuckledragger asked if this was so.

"No, no," chuckled the priest. "So far, the Hidden God has remained as hidden to me, his priest, as to anyone. He has given me no powers, granted me no visions, provided me with no spells. Given me absolutely no indication, in fact, that he's even there at all."[7]

"Is he?" asked Knuckledragger. "I mean, what if he's dead or something?"

"No, my son, gods cannot die. He is testing us, and we must be patient. He will present himself when he is ready, and not before."

"How long must we wait?"

"As long as it takes."

5. The mongrelman knack for camouflage is an instinctive one. Some sages speculate that it is a logical extension of their desire to hide away from others, a method by which the slow-moving mongrelmen can escape those who would do them harm. In any case, most mongrelmen are able to camouflage themselves in one turn with materials at hand—usually twigs, branches, leaves, dirt, and mud. The base chance of success for their camouflage is 80%, and this increases by 1% per additional turn devoted to the task (to an upper limit of 95%). Mongrelmen are not squeamish about disguising themselves, thinking nothing of rubbing mud all over their bodies if it helps.

In addition to themselves, mongrelmen can camouflage stationary items up to the size of small buildings, which are usually undetectable at ranges greater than 50'.

6. Perhaps because mongrelmen all tend to be on the lowest end of any social scale, they take pains not to have levels of status in their own society. All mongrelmen call each other by their true names, regardless of station. Priests, elders, and even the leaders of free mongrelmen do without fancy titles—no "sir," "madam," or "my lord" is ever spoken by one mongrelman to another. Indeed, mongrelmen see each other as true equals, as perhaps only the lowest of the low can truly see themselves.

7. The sad reason for this is that the Hidden God does not exist. Rather, the legend of the Hidden God is a corrupted version of the mongrelmen's history, after being passed down verbally from generation to generation.

The Hidden God was actually an ancient wizard (whose name, alas, is lost to the ages) who, desiring a doppleganger-like race able to adapt the forms of others, created beings he called "infiltrators." The infiltrators were thin, wiry beings with large black eyes, who could absorb the genetic properties of beings whose flesh they consumed. Undergoing a ritual known as "the Feast," they would eat humanoid flesh, digest it in specialized organs within their body, and thereafter be able to transform their bodies into copies of the humanoid forms on which they had feasted. Utilizing this ability, they were able to infiltrate many humanoid societies and serve as spies for the wizard.

However, the wizard unknowingly created the Infiltrators without the ability to breed true to their forms. The offspring of two infiltrators was always a misshapen humanoid form showing various, random features of the humanoid forms "feasted" upon by its parents. Thus was born the mongrelman race.

Alas, mongrelmen today still worship the Hidden God and pray for the day he will return them to their "days of glory." Each mongrelman society has a single Priest of the Hidden God (in slave societies, the priest is often as hidden as their god) whose duties are to pray for betterment of their lot in life. The Hidden God, of course, never answers these prayers, but the mongrelmen are a patient folk, and they are willing to wait.

Knuckledragger hid his disappointment. "So what do you do? As a priest, I mean."

"I pray, mostly. I pray for the Hidden God's forgiveness for whatever sins our forefathers committed. I pray for a return of the powers it is said our ancestors possessed. Mostly, I pray for the patience to continue on as I have for these thirty-seven long years."

"Why do you live out here, by yourself?"

The elder priest smiled down at Knuckledragger. "I could not live with you, among the orcs. The Priest of the Hidden God must devote his time to prayers and supplication, time I would not have as a slave. Here, I have all that I need: a small stream nearby for my water, forest plants in abundance for my food,[8] and plenty of solitude in which to pray for our people."

"Cricket song? Could I ask you to say a prayer for my mother?"

"Of course, my child. What is your concern?"

"She's going to have a baby soon. Could you ask the Hidden God to see that the baby survives?"[9]

A look of pain flickered across the old priest's face for a fleeting moment. Then, in a voice full of weariness and hope, he said, "We will pray together."

Fidgeting in a torn leather bag that had been tossed into a comer, the priest pulled out an old piece of flint and steel, and worked his mismatched hands at starting a spark. After a few moments, he managed to light a yellowing taper candle and pulled back the curtain from a small alcove cut into the wall. "Behold, the shrine of the Hidden God," he intoned.

The alcove, of course, was empty.

Nonetheless, he placed the candle in a notch before the alcove: Together, he and Knuckledragger prayed to their god for an intercession in the fate of Knuckledragger's unborn sibling. They were still kneeling in position before the empty altar when Scale-face and Half-Human returned.

"It's time to go, robin chirp" he said quietly.

Knuckledragger got up, thanked the priest, and walked back toward the forests edge in silence with his father and his friend.

"You are quiet, robin chirp," Scale-face observed.

"Yes, I've been thinking. If the Hidden God returns our powers, what form will you take?"

"I don't think it will happen like that, my son."

"You don't?"

"No. The Hidden God took away the power not from the generation that angered him, but from their children. I'm sure that when he sees fit to return our power, it will be the same way. One day, our children will be born as they once were, and the race will be as it once was." He looked down at his son. "So do not waste time hoping to change your body someday.[10] Accept it as the one you will have for the rest of your life, and move on to other things. Besides," he said, smiling "you're not particularly ugly."[11]

They walked along in silence for awhile longer, then Knuckledragger blurted out, "I think I would like to serve the Hidden God."

"You would? But, you're much too young to be a priest. Perhaps in fifteen or twenty years, when you're much older. Right now, you are a strong young man in the prime of your life. You are needed by the rest of the community.[12] Ah, here come the others."

Crab Leg, One-Horn, and Little Shorty came hobbling up from out of the forest. "Great news, lizard hiss! Frog croak found a dead body in the forest, of a species unknown to us! A small humanoid, with blue skin."

"How small?"

"Only about three feet, but we don't know if he was fully grown. We took his arm, just in case."

"Where is it?"

"Strapped to wolverine growl's leg." Crab Leg passed Knuckledragger's bucket back to him, now filled with hunks of mushrooms and tubers, and lifted up his rotting, filthy robe[13] to show a small blue arm strapped to his inner leg by strips of cloth. He smiled, showing reptilian teeth. "We'll Feast tonight."[14]

"Come," said Scale-face. "We must not be late." Together, the six shambled off toward the orc fortress.

"Humph!" snorted Karg at their arrival, sounding as always, a bit disappointed that there'd be no torturing the hostages in retaliation for an escape attempt. As the mongrelmen shuffled single file back into the fort, he grabbed Scale-face by the shoulder. "You! Scale-face! Your woman is giving birth. You may go to her."

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8. Mongrelmen are omnivorous. Free mongrelman grow fruits and vegetables and often supplement their diet with domestic game, partially because they tend to be below-average hunters. While many mongrelmen sport teeth designed for eating meat, they are perfectly happy living a vegetarian existence if necessary.

9. Another sad fact of mongrelman existence is their high infant mortality rate. Even in free mongrelmen societies, only about 50% of infants born live more than a week. In slave societies, where the mongrelmen live under much harsher conditions, the infant mortality rate can be as high as 80%. For this reason, a healthy baby mongrelman is a cause for great rejoicing. Mongrelmen have a stoic attitude toward those that don't survive; considering the lives they lead, they often consider them "the lucky ones."

10. Although appreciation of beauty is an important part of mongrelman society, and they have a fascination with polymorph magic, no mongrelman would willingly alter his appearance to hide his ugliness. Mongrelmen take their hideous appearance as a fact of life, something over which they have no control, and while their ugliness shames them and causes them to seek to hide from others, they nonetheless believe it is their duty as mongrelmen to remain in the forms in which they were born until the Hidden God deems otherwise. To take matters in their own hands, they fear, would anger their god and prevent him from returning their shapeshifting powers. No mongrelman would put the improvement of his own appearance ahead of the betterment of his entire race.

Incidentally, the mongrelman love of beauty is much deeper than that of most other races, perhaps because they themselves are so far removed from it. A mongrelman is just as able to find and appreciate beauty in the smooth, even features of a female goblin as in the most delicate elven princess

11. "You're not particularly ugly," is a high complement among mongrelmen. They are truthful enough not to insult each others' intelligence by calling one another "beautiful," and "not particularly ugly" is about as high as they can honestly go.

12. Call it fatalism, rationalization, or just simple realism, but mongrelmen, while insisting on having a priest (or priestess) of the Hidden God in every mongrelman community, tend to reserve the post for those elderly members of the community who are unable to work at jobs requiring heavy manual labor.

13. Mongrelmen tend to wear dirty, ragged clothing. Because of their oddly-shaped bodies they prefer their clothes to be loose, and robes (especially those with hoods that can conceal their faces) are popular among both sexes. Dirty clothes don't bother mongrelmen as they aid in their attempts at camouflage.

For similar reasons, mongrelmen have difficulty fitting into standard armor. Only rarely will a mongrelman be lucky enough to be able to fit into a set of armor; usually they must make do with bits and pieces of different types. Players with mongrelmen PCs who wish to wear armor should consult The *Complete Fighter's Handbook,* page 111, for rules on piecemeal armor.

14. Mongrelmen today retain the ability to "feast." However, all "feasting does is store the humanoids form in the mongrelman's genetic code and passes that form on to its offspring. Thus, a mongrelman with no ogrish features "feasts" upon a slain ogre's flesh. Later, when he mates, his children could end up with body parts resembling those of an ogre. Only humanoid forms from four to nine feet or so can be successfully "feasted" upon, so the mongrelman makeup will never include halflings or kobolds (too small) or giants (too big).

Mongrelmen continue to "feast" for many reasons. Some believe that the Hidden God requires it of mongrelmen so that when he restores their ability to shapechange, they will have that many more forms they can adopt. Others believe that only when a set number of humanoid forms have been "feasted" upon will the Hidden God restore their power. Some simply like the flavor of humanoid meat.

In any case, "feasting" is a private act that mongrelmen will not share with others not of their race. "Feasting is always done in private, and not everyone in the mongrelman community will partake. Usually, only those who do not sport features of the humanoid to be "feasted" upon will take part, so that the flesh can be used only by those able to benefit from it. Children are not allowed to "feast" until they have been initiated into adult society and have learned the secret history of the mongrelmen and their Hidden God.

Scale-face passed his bucket of berries to Crab Leg and bowed before the orc guard. "Master, I thank you for your kindness," he said, then scurried off in the direction of the slave huts.[15] Knuckledragger hid his concern and went with the others to prepare the food.

The next hour went by quickly, as Knuckledragger was caught up in the daily routine of his slavery. There was the food to prepare, the war-beasts to groom, the fires to be tended to, and the weapons to sharpen.[16] Knuckledragger went about his duties in a daze, worried about his family, and thinking about his prayer to the Hidden God. Perhaps this will be the time, he thought. Perhaps my little brother or sister will be the first of the new race and be born with skin all the same color and texture. He was shaken from his reverie by Not Half Bad, a female mongrelman who was fortunate enough to have predominantly orcish features on her face and most of one arm and leg. "Your mother and sister are fine, robin chirp. Perhaps you would like to see them."

Giving a silent prayer of thanks to the Hidden God, Knuckledragger hurried over to the ramshackle hut where his family lived. Entering the open doorway, he saw his mother, Frog Lips, lying back in exhaustion on the pile of damp straw that made up her bed. Scale-face was holding a small bundle in his arms, wrapped in the cleanest scraps of cloth to be found. Seeing his son, he smiled down at him. "You have a sister," he said softly, and lowered her so Knuckledragger could see. Silently pleading with the Hidden God, Knuckledragger looked at his new sister with a heart filled with hope.

She had green scales covering the top of her scalp and halfway down the right side of her head. The left half was a sickly yellow, with large tan warts. Ogre-sized lips on the left side merged into human-sized lips on the right, giving her an artificial sneer. From the dark hair covering the back of her hand, Knuckledragger sensed the same gnoll blood in her that was responsible for his own muzzle and left ear.

"What do you think?" asked Scale-face.

Knuckledragger looked up at his father, and smiled sadly. "She's not particularly ugly," he said, then turned to finish his chores.

Johnathan M. Richards says he's somewhat of a mongrel himself, being aware of English, German, Scottish, and American Indian (Potawatomi tribe) blood. So far, no shapeshifting abilities have manifested.

15. There is almost no end to the amount of abuse a mongrelman slave is willing to take. Among mongrelmen, mere survival is the greatest accomplishment one could hope for. They remain courteous and obedient to their masters no matter what the provocation, wishing only to avoid trouble. Sadly, this makes them excellent slave material, a fact not many humanoid tribes are liable to overlook.

16. Mongrelman passivity is so great that humanoid tribes need not fear allowing mongrelmen access to weapons. There is no chance that the mongrelmen will use the weapon to try to free themselves from slavery in a bloody revolt, as such a concept is foreign to them. Many humanoid tribes even go so far as giving their mongrelmen slaves piecemeal armor and weapons and training them for battle, using them as "cannon fodder."

Mongrelmen can be trained to use just about any weapon, but prefer simple ones such as swords and clubs. Free mongrelmen often use blowguns; besides being a simple weapon to make and use, it is silent and can be used by a camouflaged mongrelman without giving away his location. In addition, it is easier for a mongrelman to remain still and hidden and use a blowgun on prey that comes within range than to track and chase down prey, given the standard mongrelman's limping gait. The blowgun darts are usually coated in a mild poison that causes paralysis for 1d4 rounds unless a save vs. poison is made at +2.

Appendix: Designing a Mongrelman PC

With most PCs, the character's physical appearance is up to the player, who can decide such things as whether or not his PC is a blonde or a brunette and what color his eyes are. After all, such details don't usually make a difference in how the PC will be played, or alter any of his capabilities.

Unfortunately, the same does not hold true for the mongrelman PC, made available in *The Complete Book of Humanoids (see* pages 43-46). As its very name suggests, a mongrelman is made of differing body parts from a wide variety of creatures, and no two mongrelmen are apt to look anything like one another. The player wishing to run a mongrelman PC is going to have to know just what his character looks like before he can even decide on his character class. After all, some physical traits are going to hamper, if not preclude altogether, various career possibilities. A mongrelman with two crab claws in place of hands is not likely to have much of a future as a mage, if he can't even perform the simplest of somatic gestures. Similarly, pickpocketing isn't likely to be possible to such a mongrelman; he'll probably end up as a warrior, and a pitiable one at that, as he'll be unable to wield the coveted magical swords and similar enchanted weapons a party is sure to encounter eventually.

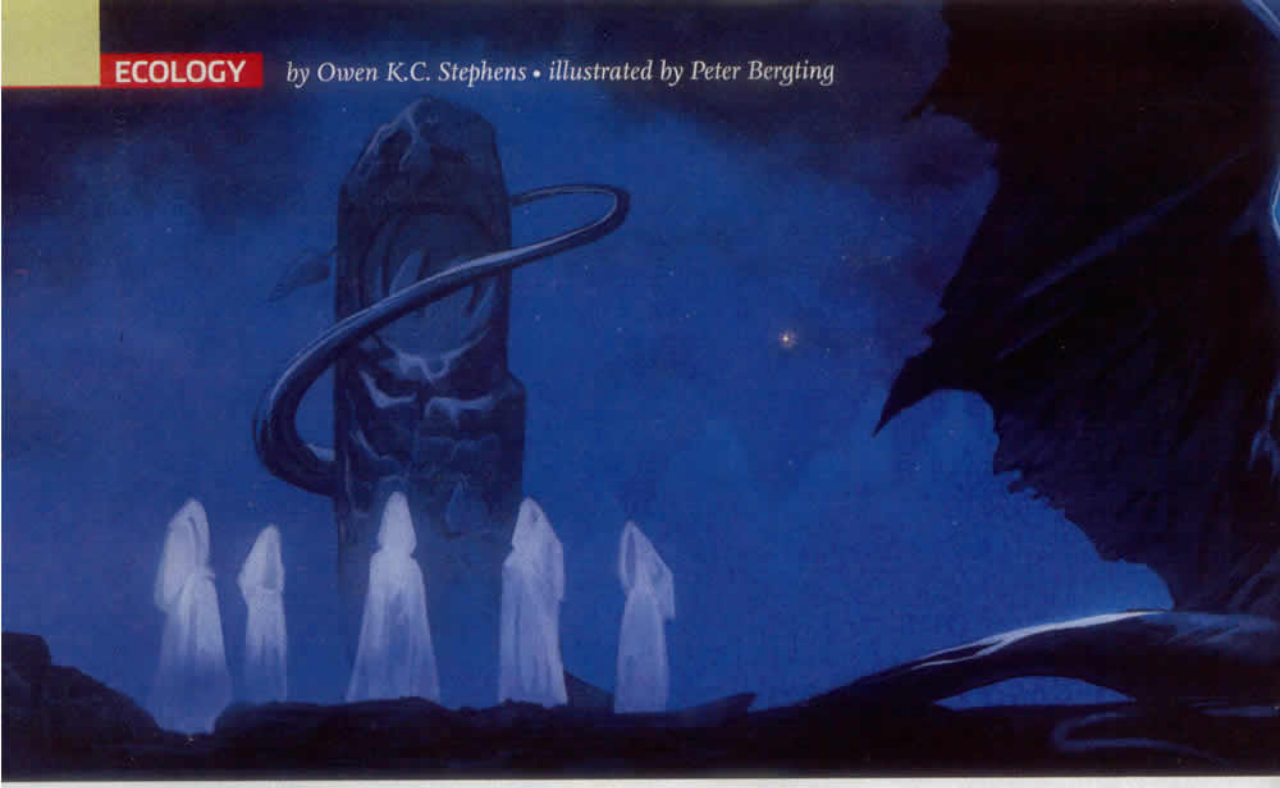
A system is needed to generate the physical appearance of a given mongrelman. This appendix provides one way to do so, by means of **Table 1: The Random Mongrelman Appearance Generator.** It also gives some notes on what additional capabilities and detrimental attributes accompany the mongrelman's specific physical makeup. These notes should be useful even to those who opt not to randomly roll their PCs' appearances, but prefer to design them piece by piece themselves.

The "Mongrelman" entry in the MONSTROUS MANUAL® rules states "mongrelmen are a mixture of the blood of many species: humans, orcs, gnolls, ogres, dwarves, hobgoblins, elves, bugbears, bullywugs, and many others." Since the creatures specified range in size from 4' to over 9' in height, only humanoid creatures within that size range were added to the table, specifically, the crabman, goblin, lizard man, minotaur, and satyr. If DMs wish to add other creatures to this list, it is easy enough to modify the table to suit their individual campaign worlds.

Randomly Determining Your Mongrelman's Appearance

A mongrelman's body makeup is generally split into nine different areas, each of which might be patterned after a different creature. Each of a mongrelman's arms and legs tend to be predominantly patterned after a single creature, while the head and torso are usually an amalgamation of several different creatures blending into each other. A diagram of these areas appears as **Illustration 1.** Mongrelman bodies are seldom symmetrically divided; often the torso body type might run partway

by Owen K.C. Stephens • illustrated by Peter Bergting



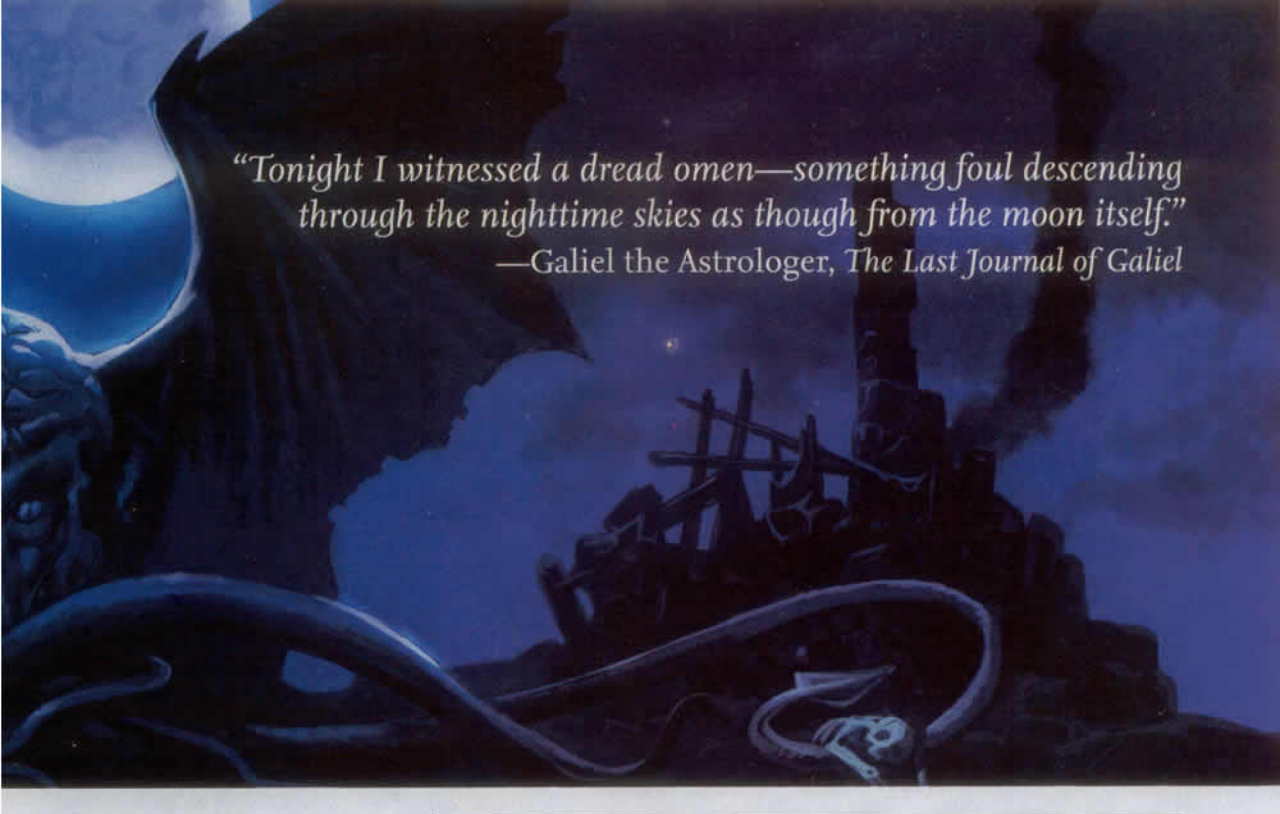
THE ECOLOGY OF THE MOONCALF

Massive and alien, rumored and feared, where the shadow of a mooncalf falls, tragedy follows. The living tools of beings distant and unfathomable, these flying terrors—masses of wings, tentacles, and sopping rubbery flesh—possess great intellect and even greater powers. Beholden of philosophies, goals, and motivations incomprehensible to any humanoid race, they cling to the highest reaches of the world, watching and waiting, malformed voyeurs and harbingers of doom.

HISTORY OF THE MOONCALF

It is no surprise that mooncalves seem otherworldly, for their racial origins trace back to beings beyond any world. From the airless voids between worlds, titanic things of immense power known only as "moongods" came into being. While other races first developed awareness on worlds nurtured by water, air, and earth, only endless expanses of cold and darkness nursed the moongods. Learning from the motion of the stars, their thoughts formed in ways utterly alien to any creature bound beneath a single sky, harmonizing them to the secrets of heavenly motions. Thus, the moongods developed astrology before any other art, holding the constellations themselves as deities of a kind.

Guided by their sacred stars, the moongods drifted through the void, eventually coming upon whole worlds of other beings. Fascinated by these blue-green orbs, the moongods sought to explore them but discovered they could not survive in the thick chemicals of air and water. Overly curious, though, many moongods peered too close, being drawn to their deaths like moths to a flame.



"Tonight I witnessed a dread omen—something foul descending through the nighttime skies as though from the moon itself."
—Galiel the Astrologer, *The Last Journal of Galiel*

Thus, the moongods created mooncalves—lesser aspects of themselves—better suited to explore these worlds. The mooncalves were given wings to fly through the thick resistance of air, as well as forms enabling them to survive and experience these new expanses of soft wetness. Birthed into the upper reaches of each world the moongods wished to explore, these creatures—half children, half living tools—were left to make whatever discoveries they could. As such, the first mooncalves came to ground, fully aware of their racial quest, the orphans of great powers that they only instinctually understand and can never reach.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOONCALF

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to mooncalves. Diviners, astologers, and others who study omens and the stars might possess this information.

Knowledge (arcana) DC	Result
15	A mooncalf is an intelligent, flying monstrosity that prefers high, solitary places and is often seen as an omen of ill fortune.
20	Mooncalves have keen senses and can see without the need for light. They hold control over storms and can command animals. Their strange flesh proves resistant to all but magical weapons.
25	Mooncalves are drawn to witness epic disasters. If they cannot find one occurring on their own, they are willing to manipulate events to create one. Thus, spotting one is not just an omen, but likely evidence that something cataclysmic might soon happen nearby.
30	Mooncalves believe themselves to be the tools of strange, otherworldly beings known as the moongods.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE MOONCALF

Winged, tentacled masses of muscle, cartilage, and mucus, mooncalves are horrors to behold. Bulbous and uneven, their bodies resemble large brains fixed with dead white eyes, two thick tentacles longer than their wingspan, and a protective cluster of numerous smaller tentacle arms. Nestled at the base of this mass of smaller tentacles is a razor-sharp beak similar to a squid's, within which coil a pair of long, whip-thin tongues.

The flesh of a mooncalf is much denser than most terrestrial creatures, making it strangely resistant to nonmagical attacks. Awkward flyers, mooncalves jerk about like bait dangling on an invisible lure, but their powerful wings allow them to move like this at great speeds. Ill adapted to ground movement, earthbound mooncalves seem vulnerable. In truth their long tentacles have more than enough strength to drag their bodies about in swift, yet ungainly twitches and wet flops. A typical mooncalf's core body measures 8 feet in diameter, with a total body weight of approximately 600 pounds.

Mooncalves don't have dietary needs like other creatures. Rather than requiring certain materials and minerals to survive, mooncalves flourish by consuming any substance—organic or inorganic. While they still starve if they don't consume

at least their body weight in materials every week, such a possibility seems unlikely. Mooncalves prefer a variety of food sources, and actively avoid eating the same material twice. Living organisms, however, seem to prove different enough that a mooncalf considers two different beings two different meals. Those few who have examined dead mooncalves have found that their bodies are essentially alchemical laboratories, capable of distilling and dissolving nearly any substance the creatures consume. In effect, they can digest nearly anything that they can eat. Thorough physical examination and observation of their eating habits, some scholars have proposed that mooncalves are capable of "memorizing" whatever they eat, becoming familiar with not just their meals' tastes and textures, but gaining intimate knowledge of every element and chemical that comprised the substance or being.

These powers of perception also reveal themselves in mooncalves' telepathy, allowing them to communicate with any being within 100 feet. Although they rarely converse with creatures they deem food or part of their experiments, more cunning mooncalves sometimes use this ability to manipulate lesser beings. Their strange minds also provide them with a variety of powerful abilities, allowing them to dominate the senses of weak-willed creatures and even alter their environments, either to better suit their needs or drive off threats.

Mooncalves do not sleep, although they have no immunity to magical sleep. Many mooncalves fly constantly, spending days or even weeks in the air. On worlds where low-hanging moons or floating chunks of land can be reached through flight, mooncalves prefer these as homes, but otherwise they find high mountains, hills, or ominous abandoned towers to serve as their lairs.

No young mooncalves have ever been sighted, leading to the belief that all mooncalves are the same age, spawned from the same single

THE MOONGODS

Demigods (Neutral Evil)

Although distant, uncaring deities, the moongods do attract a small number of humanoid worshipers. Mostly, these worshipers are those seeking power through knowledge—evil diviners and astrologers who form small cults, revering the secrets the moongods possess as much as the deities themselves. Occasionally, a mooncalf forms a cult to aid it in sowing dissent and disaster.

The moongods are symbolized by a moon shrouded by the shadows of tentacles. They have no true enemies, and no driving goals, making them unusually apathetic for deities.

Portfolio: Astrology, disasters, hidden knowledge, mooncalves.

Domains: Darkness*, Evil, Knowledge, Travel.

Favored Weapon: Tentacle (for creatures that possess them) or spiked chain.

Clerical Training: Worshipers must learn all the constellations, and witness at least one major disaster during the course of their training.

Quests: The moongods are uncaring and unhearing, so they do not give their followers specific quests.

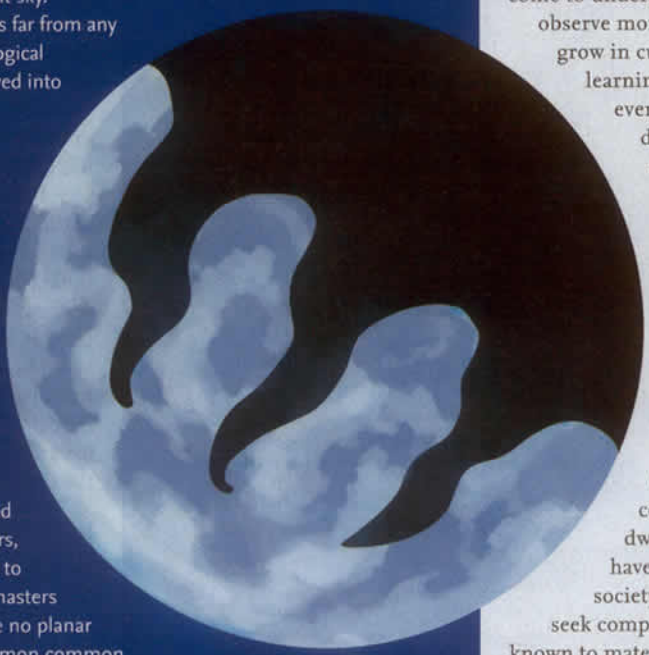
Prayers: Silent intonations of events the cleric has witnessed, which must be done while open to the night sky.

Temples: Windswept peaks far from any other habitation, with astrological signs and constellations carved into great circles of rock.

Rites: A major event, one that impacts no fewer than a thousand living, thinking creatures, must be witnessed at least once a decade. If such an event does not occur naturally, the cleric is required to arrange for one.

Herald and Allies: The moongods' herald is a massive 60 Hit Die moonlord known only as the Endless One. It has appeared over numerous epic disasters, many of which it is thought to have manipulated in their masters names. The moongods have no planar allies, and clerics often summon common fiends with *planar ally* spells.

*Detailed in the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).



mass birth. Only slight color variations, differing numbers of tentacles, and size distinguish between individuals. Size variation among mooncalves also proves strange, as it appears to relate to experience, events witnessed, and variety of creatures consumed. In short, every tidbit of information a mooncalf gathers seems to imperceptibly add to its bulk, eventually adding up, increasing its size as well as its already considerable powers as a moonlord.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE MOONCALF

Mooncalves were spawned fully knowledgeable and aware of their uncaring gods. Each inherited the drive to observe and the dispassionate superiority its parents hold over all other living creatures. As such, they often seek homes upon high mountains or spires—comforted by the nearness of the stars—close to areas densely populated with animals and sentient creatures, between which they make no distinction.

Thus, mooncalves spend their lives in research and observation, but they are rarely unobtrusive onlookers. Mooncalves seek to witness major events—particularly conflicts. While a small skirmish or minor fire might sate their curiosity for a few days, mooncalves seek truly epic battles, natural disasters, and upheavals of broad scope. As they come to understand the beings they observe more thoroughly, they grow in cunning and power, learning to engineer such events. Some even turn to divination magic and astrology to predict such catastrophes, ranging far to witness titanic calamities. Regardless of their methods, those who know of mooncalves know them as harbingers of dreadful events

With no need for tools, equipment, companionship or dwellings, mooncalves have no need to develop a society of their own, never seek companionship, and are not known to mate. Rarely, more experienced mooncalves build cults or networks of spies to help them find or create the disasters they seek. Besides such exceptions, however, the only company mooncalves long for is the return of the moongods and the cold embrace of the stars above.

MOONLORDS

Although all mooncalves begin life as Large creatures, as long as they continue witnessing and experiencing new events they never stop growing.

ADVANCED MOONCALF

Most commonly, mooncalves advance by Hit Dice, gaining power as they witness more and greater tragedies, becoming titanic moonlords. Sometimes, however, they take levels of cleric, worshiping the enigmatic moongods, or adopting the path of the diviner to magically learn of impending calamities.

MOONLORD **CR 16**

Advanced mooncalf
NE Gargantuan magical beast
Monster Manual II 150
Init +6; **Senses** blindsight 100 ft., darkvision 100 ft., keen senses, telepathy; Listen +15, Spot +19

AC 27, touch 8, flat-footed 25
hp 465 (28 HD); **DR** 10/magic
Fort +23, **Ref** +21, **Will** +16

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares); fly 150 ft. (poor)
Melee 2 tentacle rakes +27 melee (4d6+23/19–20) and 6 tentacle-arms +22 (2d6+16)*
Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft., 50 ft. with tentacle rake
Base Atk +28; **Grp** +53
Attack Options Cleave, Power Attack
Special Attack bite, improved grab
Spell-like Abilities (CL 9):
1/day—*call lightning* (DC 13), *control weather*, *control winds* (DC 15), *dominate animal* (DC 13), *greater magic fang*, *protection from elements*, *quench* (DC 13), *resist elements*

Abilities Str 36, Dex 14, Con 32, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 11
SQ Tentacles
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fighting, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Improved Critical (tentacle rake), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will[B], Lightning Reflexes[B], Omen of Crows, Omen of Storms, Power Attack, Toughness[B]
Skills Concentration +39 Hide +26, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (history) +36, Knowledge (local) +36, Listen +36, Spellcraft +36, Spot +36

Bite (Ex): With each successful grapple check a mooncalf automatically hits a grabbed opponent with its bite attack, dealing 4d8+6 points of slashing damage.
Improved Grab (Ex): If a mooncalf hits an opponent of Gargantuan size or smaller with a tentacle rake attack, it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold, it automatically hits with its bite attack in the same round. Thereafter, the mooncalf has the option to conduct the grapple normally, or simply use its tentacle to hold the opponent (–20 penalty on grapple check, but the mooncalf is not considered grappled). In either case, each successful grapple check it makes during successive rounds automatically deals tentacle rake and bite damage.
Tentacles: An opponent can attack either of a mooncalf's tentacles as if they were weapons (see Sunder on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*). Both of a mooncalf's tentacles have 20 hit points. If the mooncalf is currently grappling a target with a tentacle, it usually uses another limb to make its attack of opportunity against the sunder attack. Severing a mooncalf's tentacle deals damage to the creature equal to half the limb's hit points. A mooncalf regrows a severed limb in 1d10+10 days.
Keen Senses (Ex): A mooncalf sees four times as well as a human in low-light conditions and twice as well in normal light.
Spell-like Abilities: A mooncalf's spell-like abilities are Charisma based.
* Includes adjustment for 10-point Power Attack.

Some mooncalves have been documented as having grown to nearly 20 feet in diameter with tentacles more than 50 feet long. As the creature grows, it becomes more and more like the unknowable moongods that spawned it, gaining a touch of their otherworldly abilities. Many mooncalves turn to spellcasting at some point in their lives, channeling their innate power into magic. Those that don't, however, eventually become Gargantuan and are considered moonlords, creatures that challenge even evil dragons as threats to the world around them.

HARBINGER FEATS

Upon advancing to 28 Hit Dice, a mooncalf becomes a moonlord and gains the potential to actually bring about evil omens. These are acquired in the form of harbinger feats, motes of otherworldly power moonlords use to tap into their moongod heritage. All harbinger feats are supernatural abilities, and require an hour to use, creating an aura centered on the moonlord that lasts for 24 hours. A moonlord can only use one harbinger feat per week. Characters within an affected area may make a DC 25 Knowledge (arcana) check to realize the omens they are seeing point toward a single, magical source for the ill fortune befalling the area.

MIXED OMENS

Multiple bad signs appear throughout the land.

Prerequisite: Any three harbinger feats, mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Mixed Omens can use two different harbinger feats in one week. The feats may be used concurrently.

Normal: A mooncalf can only use one harbinger feat a week.

OMEN OF BONES

A faint breath of rot pervades the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with this feat taints the region in an aura of death. All undead within a 50-mile

radius gain turn resistance +2. This stacks with any turn resistance the creature might already possess.

Ghostly glimpses, distorted reflections, and eerie mirages haunt an area under an Omen of Bones.

OMEN OF CROWS

The land seems dark, as though it were but one vast graveyard.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Crows can create an aura that dampens healing magic. Within a 50-mile radius, all *cure* spells heal one less hit point of damage per casting.

An area under an Omen of Crows is often infested with crows or similar scavenging birds.

OMEN OF FLIES

Pestilence spreads through the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Flies can create an aura that strengthens diseases of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against disease take a –2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Flies is often infested with flies, maggots, and other insectile vermin.

OMEN OF LOSS

Memories become lost and history fades away.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Loss can create an aura of forgetfulness. All creatures within a 50-mile radius take a –2 penalty on all bardic knowledge rolls and Knowledge skill checks.

A thick mist and haunting lights settle over a land afflicted by an Omen of Loss.

OMEN OF SNAKES

Poison becomes more virulent.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Snakes can create an aura that strengthens poisons and venoms of all kinds. Within a 50-mile radius, all saving throws against poison take a –2 penalty.

An area under an Omen of Snakes is often infested with snakes.

OMEN OF STORMS

A feeling of dread settles over the land.

Prerequisite: Mooncalf, 28 HD.

Benefit: A mooncalf with Omen of Storms can create an aura that spreads fear and unease. Within a 50-mile radius all creatures with an Intelligence score of 3 or lower must make a DC 15 Will save or be shaken for the whole day.

An area under a Omen of Storms has cloudy, stormy weather.

ALTERNATIVE MOONCALF ORIGINS

The idea of mooncalves being spawned by a race of alien gods that exist in the void between worlds isn't appropriate for all cosmologies. Without changing their basic behavior, it's possible to use an alternative origin for mooncalves to bring them more in-line with any campaign world. A few examples are presented here:

Aberrant Creations: Although mooncalves believe themselves to be the spawn of otherworldly deities, they might in truth have been constructed as servants of illithids, grell, or any number of other aberrant creatures. Mooncalves might have escaped their original masters, or they might be unknowingly vulnerable to the magic or psionic powers their progenitors use to secretly control them.

Alternatively, within recent memory the illithid god Maanzecorian was destroyed. The moongods might embody the lingering fragments of that deity's sundered divinity, or be the remnants of Maanzecorian's orphaned herald.

Fiendish Origins: The moongods might actually be a single evil deity who uses mooncalves as its primary agents in the mortal realm. Alternatively, mooncalves might be a new breed of fiendish inhabitant belched from the pits of Carceri, Gehenna, or Hades.

Other Planes: The unknowable creatures that created the mooncalves might actually be natives of the Astral Plane. It's not the space between worlds they inhabit, but the space between realities. Mooncalves seek high places because the rarified air is more like astral space, which they have no innate way of returning to.

Alternatively, mooncalves are inscrutable, alien horrors, making them perfect vanguard agents of some intelligence from either the depths of the Ethereal Plane or the Far Realm (see DRAGON #330).

ORIGINS OF THE MOONCALF

The otherworldly mooncalf first appeared in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS in the opening scenes of the adventure *Heart of Nightfang Spire*. Alien and unknown, this monstrosity graced the module's cover with its pseudonatural presence.

Besides merely being a creation of D&D, however, the word "mooncalf" appears in many dictionaries, defined as a fool, a freak, or an deformed embryo, afflicted by the corruptive influence of the moon. The word also appears most notably in the works of Shakespeare as an insult leveled toward the character Caliban in Act III of *The Tempest*.

The mooncalf currently appears in the *Monster Manual II* and has statistics updated to D&D 3.5 available at **wizards.com/dnd/files/DnD35_update_booklet.zip**.

Shrouded in DEATH

The Ecology of the Mummy

by Terry Edwards · illustrated by Wayne Reynolds

They were the stuff of legend in lands half a world away. It was unheard of that a mummy should exist in the tropical southern continent, but there I was in the cavern tombs of the Mazteceta, frozen in fear as the undead monster pounded the life from my companions. At the time I didn't realize that the creature, with painted black skin stretched over clay molded in the shape of a man, was a mummy. When my wits were about me, I fled the cavern alongside the guide who had led our company to the tombs. He was injured, struck by the mummy, but nothing beyond my ability to heal, or so I thought. Within two days, the young man turned to dust before my eyes, cursed by the ancient guardian of an extinct civilization.

Years later I would return with the knowledge and power to master the monster. It now stands on display among my own creations and mummies collected from around the world.

–Uleram Zhehad, Author of *You Live Again, Forever*

Ecological Notes

Mummification is the state of a corpse in which bacteria and fungi are unable to grow and cause decay. This preserved state can occur naturally in the proper conditions or can be imposed upon a corpse artificially. Whether a mummy is created by natural or artificial means, there are only two ways to animate it into as undead: an act of the gods or a *create greater undead* spell.

Three natural settings consistently mummify a corpse given enough time. The hot climate and salty sand of the desert are ideal conditions to preserve a corpse. Buried in the sand, a corpse loses all moisture in a matter of weeks. Another ideal condition combines the freezing temperature and dry winds found in many glacial and mountain regions. The bitter cold prevents decay as the dry wind slowly dehydrates the corpse, leaving a "freeze-dried" mummy. A corpse can be frozen without being dehydrated, but a mummy created in such a fashion is subject to decay if temperatures rise above freezing. One last natural mummy type that bears mention is the bog mummy. Peat bogs, found in most temperate coastal regions, are ideal for mummy creation. Peat bogs are highly acidic beds of decaying moss. A corpse left in the cold, wet peat is preserved as its muscle dissolves and its skin cures to a leathery texture. Buried in the acidic peat, the bones of a corpse lose calcium, leaving them spongy; the result is often a deformed mummy.

Many methods have been established to preserve the dead. The best known of these comes from an ancient desert civilization. Following the guidelines perfected over millennia, the first step in creation is to wash the corpse in palm wine, although any disinfecting alcohol suffices. The brain and internal organs of the corpse are then removed, leaving only the heart, which is said to be a vital organ for rebirth of the body. Canopic jars are used to store the preserved organs, one jar each for liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines. It is believed that each jar represents a different god, and they are faced in one of the four cardinal directions. Some sages claim these jars store an animated mummy's life force much like a lich's phylactery. This is a misconception that has cost many a tomb robber his life.

After removing the organs, the skull is rinsed with palm wine and the abdominal cavity is stuffed with bags of incense and spices. Salt is then packed around the body to dehydrate the corpse (an average human corpse requires 400 pounds of salt to dehydrate). The corpse is left in a hot, dry room until mummified, a process that generally takes 35 days. According to the ancient method, the mummy is rubbed with frankincense and myrrh and wrapped with strips of linen held in place with a liquid resin. These linens are often inscribed with spells to protect the mummy in the afterlife. Gold caps on the fingers and toes are the finishing touches prior to the rituals and spells allowing the mummy to live again.

Clay mummies predate even the earliest wrapped mummies, and their creation process is very different. For this type of mummy, the skin is carefully removed from the mummy to be used later, and the internal tissues (fat, muscle, organs) are discarded. After being stripped of all flesh, the skeleton is meticulously cleaned and then reassembled with support sticks

THE SKULL: the brain is removed through the nasal passage and the skull rinsed with palm wine.

After dehydration of the body, the skin is rubbed with frankincense and myrhh. Spells (in the form of scrolls) are often inscribed on the mummy's wrappings.

ABDOMINAL CAVITY: All internal organs are removed except the heart. The chest and abdominal cavity are then stuffed with bags of herbs and incense.

ORGAN JARS: Canopic jars are used to store the preserved organs. Unlike a lich's phylactery, these jars give the posessor no ability to harm the mummy.

tied to the bones where needed. Reeds are stuffed into the skull, and clay is molded around the skeleton to replace lost tissues. Skin is then reapplied over the clay and painted black with a water-resistant pigment.

These are just two examples of preparing a corpse for animation as a mummy. As long as the basic elements of preservation are present, a mummy can be made. For instance, in a tropical climate, one could wrap special plants around the corpse to dehydrate and cure it. Smoking a corpse could be another way to preserve the dead for animation as a mummy. In a futuristic campaign, a corpse could be soaked in a formaldehyde-like concoction, preserving the corpse with a more life-like appearance.

Mummies are most often found in ancient ruins, the strongholds of powerful clerics, and areas conducive to natural mummification. When created, mummies serve primarily as guardians of tombs, temples, and other important religious sites. Natural mummies tend to wander aimlessly, destroying all life that crosses their path. Most mummies do not actively collect treasure, but their lairs might accumulate treasure left by slain intruders. Ancient cultures often entombed their dead with treasures collected throughout the deceased's life, believing that you could take your belongings with you into the afterlife. Depending on the wealth the mummy possessed in life, tomb robbing could be a very profitable endeavor.

Society Notes

Mummies usually have a close spiritual connection to the people who created them. Many cultures mummified their dead to protect the deceased's spirit in the afterlife. Others placed the mummies of family members in the home so that they could be together forever. In all cases, the mummy is a link between the living and the dead.

In cultures that mummify their dead, an animated mummy might be venerated as a living god. In this case, the mummy could be housed in a temple and placated with offerings and sacrifices. The mummy would likely be very important to its people, representing the vengeful wrath of the gods when worshipers were unable to please it or serving as a protector of the village in times of attack.

To appease the gods, some cultures resort to human sacrifice, either leaving the exposed corpse of the unfortunate victim on a frozen mountain peak or submerging it in a swamp. These sites become important religious locations, oracles where those in need can breech the veil between worlds and petition the dead. The dead are mummies animated by the god to whom they were sacrificed, serving the living as ancestral advisors or in other ways as the deity decrees.

A mummy's relationship with humanoids is dependent upon how the humanoids view death or the undead. Creatures without negative cultural views of the undead generally find the mummies beneficial to their existence.

Killer Creature Combos

Mummies are known to associate or share lairs with many different creatures, both living and nonliving.

Mummy and Will-O'-Wisp: Bog mummies are prized companions to the swamp-dwelling will-o'-wisp. When seen at a distance, this pair looks like a lantern-bearing traveler having difficulty navigating the swamp. The will-o'-wisp can even call out to potential victims to lure them closer. By the time their victims are near enough to discern their real appearance, the will-o'-wisp is feeding on the emotions of those who have succumbed to the mummy's despair ability. While the mummy engages combatants, the will-o'-wisp can appear where most needed to deliver its shock attack.

A single will-o'-wisp and one mummy is an EL 6 encounter.

Mummy and Mimic: Mummy tombs are often stuffed with treasures, offerings, statues, and sarcophagi. Mimics are sometimes sealed in tombs to protect the deceased's wealth from grave robbers. A mimic hidden among the tomb's contents is almost impossible to spot until it is too late. A foe paralyzed by the mummy's despair ability is easy prey for the mimic's grapple, and a grappled opponent is an easy target for the mummy's slam attack.

A single mummy and two mimics is an EL 8 encounter.

Mummy and Brown Mold: Brown mold is often found growing abundantly in a mummy's lair. A mummy is immune to the mold's cold subdual damage, and when PCs employ fire against the mummy, the mold doubles in size.

Two mummies and a patch of brown mold is an EL 6 encounter.

Mummy and Zombie: Other undead are immune to the mummy's despair ability, which is essential if one plans to share space with them. While the abilities of these monsters don't make for a fantastic combination, the strength of pairing these two undead lies in deception. With a little work prior to animating the zombies, their creator can disguise them as mummies. A zombie corpse can undergo the same mummification process as a true mummy and then simply be animated as a zombie instead of being the recipient of a *create greater undead* spell. With any luck, the deception will lure PCs into using unnecessary resources they would never waste on foes as weak as zombies.

A single mummy and two zombies is an EL 4 encounter.

Vs. PCs

The information below describes how best to use a mummy's abilities and is intended to help a DM run a mummy NPC. Players should skip this section and instead read the Vs. Mummies section later in this article for information on battling mummies.

Despair, Use It or Lose It: A mummy's despair ability can only affect a given creature once per day and only for 1d4 rounds. To put this ability to its best use, make sure the mummy is in melee with the PCs when they first see it. If any of the PCs are paralyzed with fear, the mummy should move in for a coup de grace, even if it must risk attacks from other foes to do so.

Trigger Your Traps: A crafty rogue can all too often find and disable the traps that litter a mummy's lair. The best way to prevent this is to have the mummy set off the traps. A mummy is completely unaffected by poison gas and takes little to no damage from most other traps after factoring in its resistance to blows and damage reduction.

No Holds Barred: If a particular PC is giving the mummy trouble, start a grapple. If successful, the mummy will still be able to deal damage with its slam attack, but the grappled PC will be forced to break the grapple or use a light weapon. Grappling also places severe restrictions on what spells a PC can cast and requires the caster to make a Concentration check. The loss of the mummy's Dexterity bonus to AC while

grappling is inconsequential since the mummy has no bonus.

A Helping (Magical) Hand: Generally used as guardians of tombs or treasures, a mummy's creator usually invests a little time crafting traps and casting spells to aid his undead sentinel. Magic traps such as *glyph of warding, greater glyph of warding,* and *symbol* are favorites of the evil clerics who animate mummies. Common choices for glyphs include *bane, circle of doom, desecrate,* and *doom.* For areas that are maintained, *unhallow* is a very effective spell, and if *protection from elements (fire)* is the spell effect tied to the site, the mummy's biggest weakness is practically eliminated.

Tactics: If possible, initiate combat when the mummy is in melee range of the PCs. The mummy's slow movement and lack of a ranged attack leave it vulnerable if spotted at a distance. Spellcasters are the biggest threat, so charge the cleric, sorcerer, or wizard, overrunning other PCs if necessary.

Vs. Mummies

If your party runs into a mummy, don't despair—there's plenty you can do to overcome a mummy's abilities.

Do Not Despair: If the party fails to overcome a mummy's despair ability, the resulting paralysis could give the mummy enough time to pound them into dust. A paladin's aura of courage is the best defense against despair. Paladins of at least 2nd level are immune to fear effects and grant all who remain within 10 feet of them a +4 morale bonus to their saving throws against fear effects. If you have no paladin in your group, you can still bolster Will saves with spells or bardic music. *Bless, protection from evil, remove fear,* and *aid* all improve saves against fear effects. If a party member has already succumbed to despair, the *remove fear* spell allows a new saving throw with a +4 morale bonus. *Remove paralysis* negates the effect for one person or allows a new save with a +4 resistance bonus for two people or +2 for three to four people.

This Guy's Tough: Mummies are resistant to blows, taking half damage from physical attacks. After damage is halved, the remaining damage must exceed the mummy's damage reduction to actually harm it. There is no way around the mummy's resistance to blows, but you can increase your damage to compensate. Weapons with high damage capability are an obvious choice. Using weapons two-handed allows you to add one-and-a-half times your Strength bonus to damage, making the most of each attack. Power Attack is also a good option; don't be afraid to use this feat to maximum effect since a hit that deals little damage won't harm the mummy anyway. To overcome the mummy's damage reduction, it is wise to have a weapon with at least a +1 enhancement. If you do not have a magic weapon, try the *magic weapon* or *shillelagh* spells.

Fire and Magic: Mummies are particularly vulnerable to magical and non-magical fire-based attacks. Although expensive at low levels, alchemist's fire is a great weapon against the dry husk of a mummy. Damage spells are good, but fire spells are better. The most effective low-level spells include *burning hands, flame blade, flaming sphere,* and *produce flame.* Keep in mind that cure spells damage undead, so feel free to dump useless spells for spontaneous cure spells. *Disrupt undead* can come in handy, dealing just enough damage to finish off a badly wounded mummy.

Rotten Mummy: Mummy rot is arguably the most devastating disease known. Successful saving throws do not allow a character to recover, and the DC of 20 makes preventing damage a hard task at best. A *remove disease* spell is the best cure for mummy rot, but at low levels you might be relying on the local temple for help. Remember that a Heal check can replace a saving throw to buy time until the disease is removed.

Tactics: When combating undead, a turning attempt should always be the first action. If the cleric is successful, the party should follow up with fire-based attacks to destroy the mummy.

A rogue is often most useful searching for and disabling traps that are all too often present in a mummy's lair. Bolster the Fortitude saves of melee combatants; the best defense against mummy rot is to not contract it. Mummies move slowly, so take advantage of their speed with hit-and-run tactics. If you expect to fight mummies, have the party druid rig a *fire trap* on a door through which you can lure the mummies.

NPC Mummies

The standard mummy as presented in the *Monster Manual* is great for challenging low-level PCs or as a random encounter in ancient ruins or isolated dungeons. However, when faced with PCs of higher level, the mummy needs a few more tricks to challenge the group. Advancement in Hit Dice is an option, but adding a character class increases the mummy's power and can provide a good story for an adventure. Below are some example adventure scenarios:

Sorcerer: A naturally mummified corpse animated by an evil god is a horrid villain. It's even more of a horrid villain when the mummy is granted the power of a sorcerer to help carry out whatever plans the animating god has.

Since mummies generally have high Charisma scores, they make good sorcerers. Mummy sorcerers animated by a deity, as in the above scenario, know the spells that will best aid the mummy in its particular mission. In general, mummy sorcerers prefer damage spells, especially from the Necromancy school, but they never use spells with the fire descriptor.

Blackguard: Great heroes and champions of war are highly revered by the people they fight for. Often immortalized through mummification upon their demise, the preserved icon serves as a symbol of hope to the living. Unfortunately, conflict on the Material Plane tends to have repercussions in other planes. A powerful outsider wronged by the deceased hero could take vengeance by animating the mummy of the hero.

Under the tutelage of an evil outsider, such a mummy can become a foul agent of evil, a blackguard. The blackguard's abilities are based on Wisdom and Charisma, both of which are typically high scores for mummies. A mummy blackguard's aura of despair combines well with its despair ability, paralyzing enemies for an advantage to its smite good and sneak attacks. Preferred mummy blackguard spells include inflict spells (to heal its wounds), *bull's strength,* (to boost its combat abilities), and *protection from elements* (to offset its fire vulnerability). A mummy blackguard who was a paladin in life might gain the fallen paladin blackguard abilities as though it retained its paladin levels.

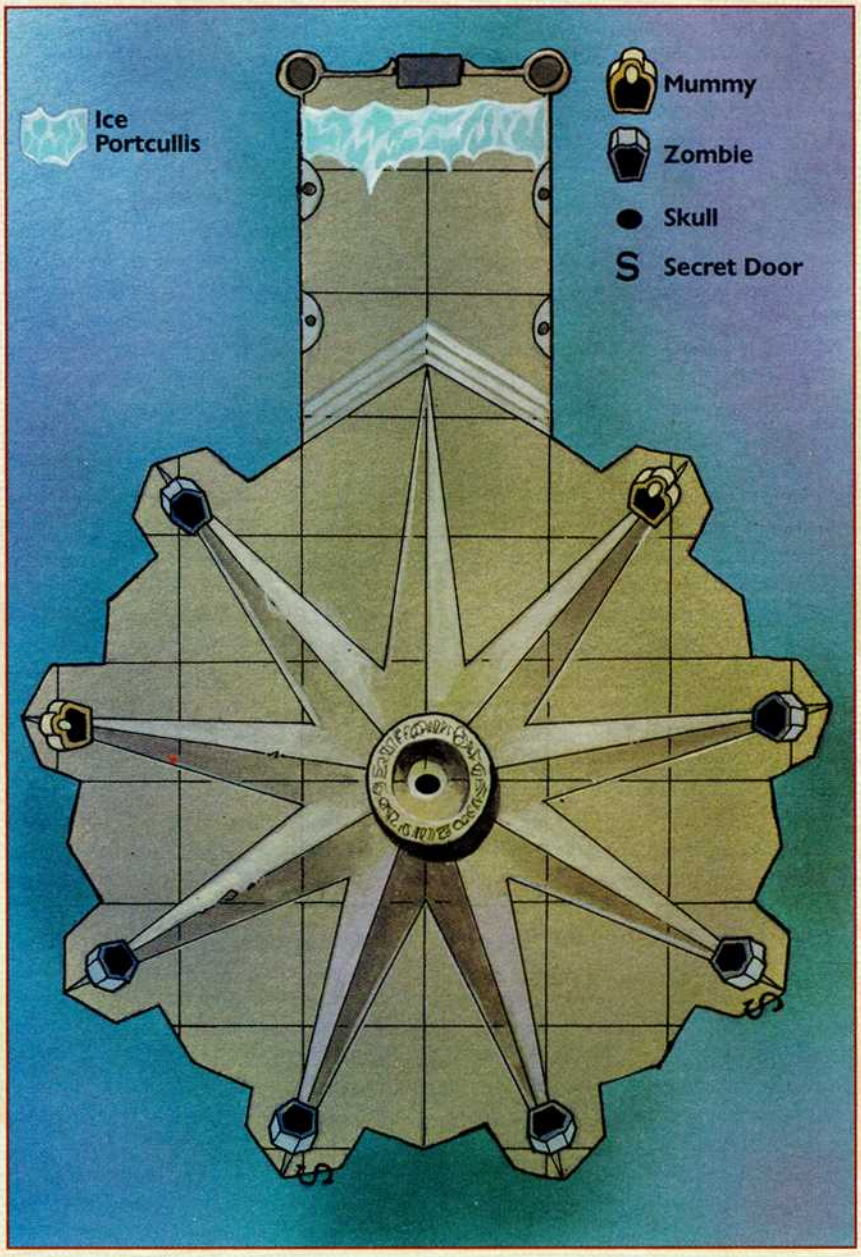
Cleric: The religious leaders of ancient civilizations were often perceived as the physical manifestation of the gods. These clerics were the bond between their people and the immortals they served,

so they were the representation of the gods if not the true manifestation. Some clerics wish to continue leading their people as a divine conduit even beyond death. These clerics ensure that after death, their flesh is preserved and their spirit "reawakened."

Mummy clerics are fearsome creatures, usually commanding a group of lesser undead and fanatic acolytes. Common domains of mummy clerics include Death, Destruction, Evil, Law, and Protection, but this is dependent on the deity worshiped. Mummy clerics prefer spells that weaken opponents (*bane, doom, bestow curse*), protect or strengthen their immortal bodies (*desecrate, resist elements, spell immunity*), or spells that cause suffering (*blindness/deafness, contagion, poison*).

Monk: Within secluded monasteries, monks strive for perfection of body, mind, and spirit. The road to perfection is a long one, requiring discipline and patience. Those seeking a shortcut can find it among some unscrupulous orders that use mummification to attain perfection of the body. Free from the demands of the flesh, the monk can focus exclusively on the balance of mind and spirit.

This might seem an odd class for undead creatures to take, but the mummy meets the alignment qualification, and the abilities of the monk compliment, or compensate for, the mummy's. Flurry of blows and the monks unarmed base attack bonus provide the mummy with potent pummeling power along with a stunning attack and more chances to spread disease. The monk's unarmored speed makes up for the mummy's poor mobility, and evasion provides protection from fire spells.



Magic Items

Many mummies are preserved with the belief that the deceased will require its body in the afterlife. To aid mummies in their journey to the next life, they are often entombed with items of protection. *Rings of protection* and *rings of elemental resistance* are common, as are *scarabs* and other magical jewelry. Scrolls offer protection to spellcasting mummies, and jewels in the form of *ioun stones* can be found in the tombs of wealthy individuals. Tombs are often filled with guardian statues, some of which can serve the mummy as *figurines of wondrous power*. Mummies highly prize any treasures they possessed in life and do not take lightly the theft of their belongings.

Mummy Variations

All mummy variations presented are identical to the mummy found on page 138 of the *Monster Manual* with the following exceptions:

Clay Mummy: Clay mummies do not have the fire vulnerability special quality. Instead, they have the bludgeoning vulnerability ability described below.

Bludgeoning Vulnerability (Ex): A clay mummy takes normal damage from bludgeoning weapons. The mummy's immunity to blows does not apply to bludgeoning weapons.

Ice Mummy: A creature that succumbs to an ice mummy's rot freezes and shatters, melting into nothing at the first thaw. Ice mummies have the cold subtype ability described below.

Cold Subtype (Ex): Cold immunity; double damage from fire except on a successful save.

Bog Mummy: A creature that succumbs to a bog mummy's rot breaks down into a moist, compost-like substance, washing away at the first rain.

Lair of the Ice Mummy

This lair is fairly typical of mummy tombs presenting common traps, enchantments, and monsters. In this case, the lair is the guard station to the

secret treasure rooms of Dem Hazed, glacial stronghold of the evil cleric Ameran of the North.

Frosty white mist hangs lazily in the chill air of the room, which is carved from solid ice. The floor is covered with a thin layer of sand, providing some traction on the slick surface of the ice. A dim light glows softly through the mist from the room; it emanates from an altar of dark ice in the center of the room, upon which sits a black skull.

The altar is carved from a block of frozen unholy water and glows due to a *continual flame* placed within it. The black skull atop the altar is enchanted with an *unhallow* spell and trapped with a *greater glyph of warding*. As per the *unhallow* spell's description, there is a spell effect tied to it. In this case, the site provides *protection from elements (fire)* to undead within the spell's radius. Destroying the skull has no effect on the *unhallow* spell but does trigger the glyph.

The temperature within the room hovers around 23 degrees Fahrenheit. While undead are immune to subdual damage caused by the cold temperature, unprotected PCs are subject to cold effects (see page 86 of the *DUNGEON MASTER'S Guide*) if they stay in the area too long.

Trap (EL 2): An ice portcullis is triggered when either of the mummies steps on a trigger stone directly in front of their alcoves. The portcullis is a 2-foot-thick wall of ice (72 hp/10 ft. square) that falls directly in front of the door.

Ice Portcullis Trap: CR 2; +10 melee (3d6/x2 crit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 20). Note: Damage applies only to those underneath the portcullis. The portcullis blocks the passageway.

Trap (EL 6): *Greater glyph of warding* has been cast on the black skull that rests upon the altar in the center of the room and is set off when touched or otherwise disturbed.

Greater Glyph of Warding: CR 6 spell, no reset, 20-ft-radius burst; *circle of doom* (1d8 + 15 points of damage, Fortitude save DC 17 halves); Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 30). Note: The negative energy released by *circle of doom* cures undead rather than harming them.

Creatures (EL 6): The undead guardians of Ameran maintain a ceaseless vigil over this area. They wait in their alcoves until they see or hear the PCs, at which point they attack. Two ice mummies are mixed in with a group of zombies. The zombies and mummies are indistinguishable from each other since the corpses were all mummified by freezing prior to animation.

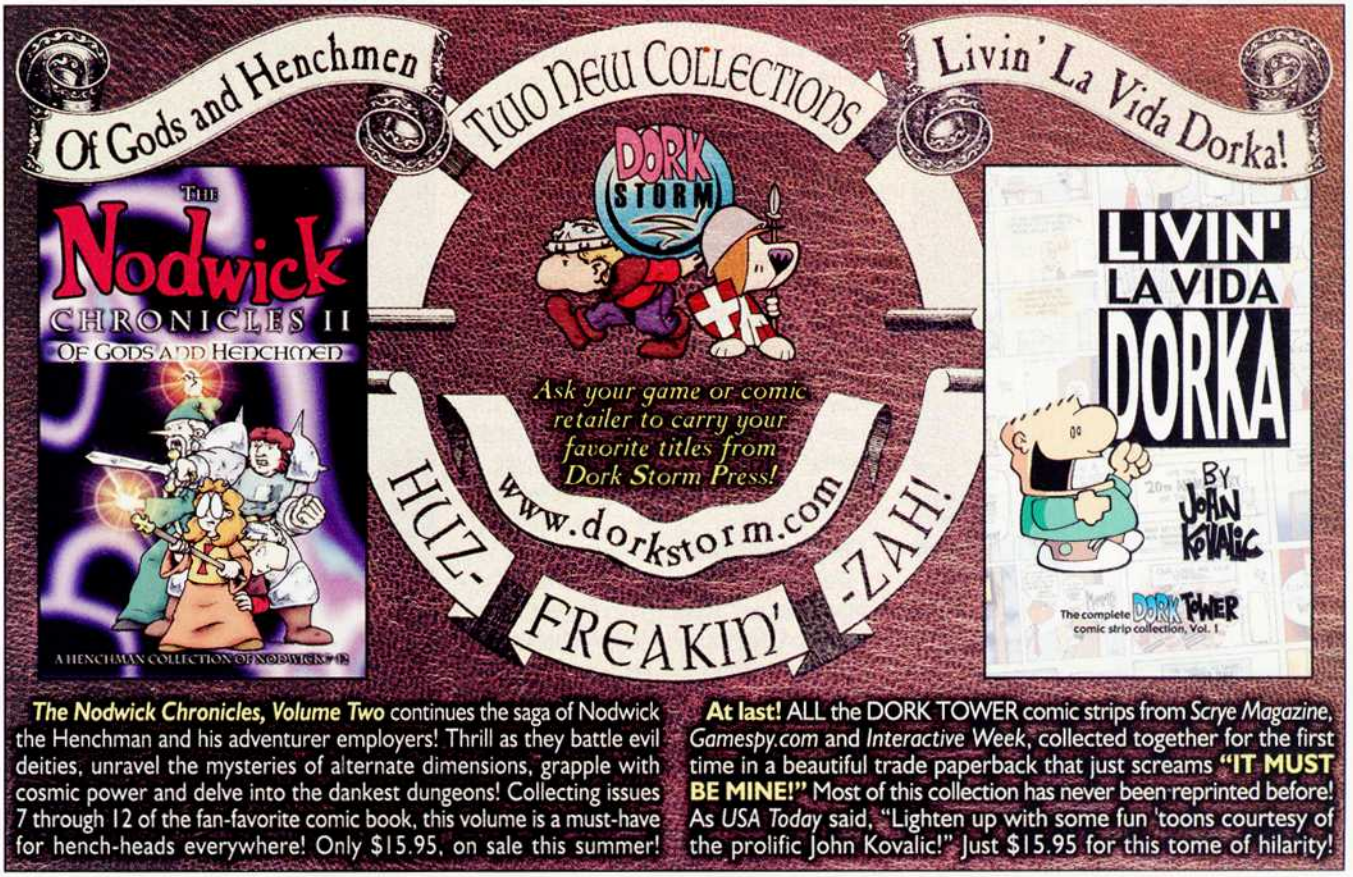
Ice Mummies (2): CR 3; Medium-size undead; HD 6d12+3; hp 42 each; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (-1 Dex, +8 natural), touch 9, flat-footed 17; Atk +6 melee (1d6+4, slam); SA despair, mummy rot; SQ undead, resistant to blows, damage reduction 5/+1, fire vulnerability, cold subtype; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 8, Con —, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills: Hide +8, Listen +9, Move Silently +8, Spot +9. *Feats:* Alertness, Toughness.

Zombies (6): CR 1/2; Medium-size undead; HD 2d12+3; hp 16 each; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (-1 Dex, +2 natural) touch 9, flat-footed 11; Atk +2 melee (1d6+1, slam); SQ undead, partial actions only; AL N; Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 8, Wis 10, Cha 1.

Feats: Toughness.

SQ—Partial Actions Only (Ex): Zombies have poor reflexes and can perform only partial actions. D



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Chapter Seven

Mummy

And so beauteous was my queen that I refuse to be without her. So beside me forever shall she lie, a sprig amid dust, a lotus among ashes. Though the skies break, and the oceans grow parched, and the moon falls as tears from the skies, forever in our paradise beyond the dawn's horizon shall we know bounty, and splendor, and serenity. And woe to those who, even in death, would tear us from our endless embrace, for our love will know no mortal distance and our wrath will not come gently. I have promised my queen eternity. And my queen is never denied.

—Translated from the empty sarcophagus of Shielseis III,
The Queen of Asps

In forgotten tombs and prisons of nature lie the preserved corpses of the ancient and honored dead. From such crypts spring the warnings of scholars and poets, cautionary tales of terrible curses and the vengeance of souls interrupted in their eternal rest. Much has been made of the depredations of the dead, the hunger of those that feast upon the quick and make prey of the living. Yet, in the case of the deathless princes misleadingly generalized as "mummies," their curses rarely come undeserved and their predations carry the justice of those who themselves have faced the ultimate judgment.

The very term "mummy" in reference to the vengeful dead is a gross misnomer. While cultures that practice mummification do often inadvertently aid in such beings' creation as a result of their preoccupation with the afterlife and the increased importance they place upon physical remains, the spontaneous reanimation of corpses might be witnessed among the ancient dead of numerous societies, including those with no complex burial rites. Unfortunately, terms like "vengeful souls," "ancient dead," or "terrestrially obsessed animates" prove misleading in their own rights and far less understood, so the inaccuracy regrettably stands.

To a large degree, the confusion regarding mummies relates to the popularization of a single description coupled with the scholarly difficulty in finding uniform physical characteristics between individuals. In other words, one cannot identify a mummy based on linen wrappings alone. Even an undead being that bears no resemblance to a stereotypical enshrouded cadaver might in fact possess the powers and prowess of a mummy. The vagary proves frustrating in research and potentially life-threatening in the field. As countless adventurers can doubtlessly attest, many mummies appear just as popular fiction and theater describe: dry, withered corpses bound in age-haunted wrappings and prayer strips bearing appeals to long-forgotten gods. But not all. Skeletons fleshed in mud and primeval ichor, frozen ancients more beast than man, and corpses buried in the furs of revered chiefs, the holy feathers of high priests, or the jade-inlaid armor of imperial lords—these, too, might all be mummies. Thus, a mere glance cannot be relied upon to identify these undead. Rather, it is by its curse and the vigor by which it wreaks its revenge that a mummy makes itself known.

Fortunately, even among the accursed dead, these horrors prove exceptionally rare, as the circumstances necessary for such beings' resurrection prove elaborate and, in many cases, quite expensive. Also, should one discover a mummy and find himself the target of its wrath, the creature's immortal ire likely comes deservedly—few such beings make the spiritual return to the mortal world lightly, typically only doing so in response to a trespass or desecration of the most fundamental and vulgar kind.

Genesis

Like all sentient undead, mummies possess a chthonic vice, one that proves so powerful that it might stretch beyond the veil of natural death. In this case: covetousness. This might seem like a strange distinction, for what undead creature is not possessed by powers or obsessions that act beyond death? Yet in numerous cases involving mummies, the uncovered corpses were not animate upon discovery. No mere trickery, in such situations not only were the remains not animate, but they were not undead before being disturbed. Although research into dark lore reveals that mummies might be created through necromantic magics, those that spontaneously manifest do so as a result of some outside influence—typically the desecration of a burial place, violation of physical remains, or conveyance of some terrible revelation. As such, the attachment between a departed soul and its immortally coveted remains, possessions, or—most intriguingly—philosophies proves so strong that the undermining of these fundaments draws the spirit back across the gulf of mortality to defend that from which its life and death took meaning.

What might provoke a mummy's resurrection varies widely, though cultural generalities exist. The most important requisite appears to be a lifelong preoccupation with death, typically held by an individual and compounded by his society. Populations who believe in the finality of death or the dissolution of the mortal spirit rarely produce mummies. Even believers in more traditional myths of the afterlife and the one-way progression of souls to a final reward or punishment infrequently breed such horrors. Those societies who tie their eternal rewards to the state of their physical remains or other monuments to their lives and believe that departed spirits might return to interact with the living unwittingly inflict a self-fulfilling curse upon themselves. Should one spend an entire life convinced that death does not sever his connection to the mortal realm, a belief compounded by his survivors who seek to elaborately placate his spirit, events that compromise the individual's interests in the living world make it possible for the soul to return to seek retribution. As such, the animating spirits of mummies retain a fixation on the world of the living, coveting aspects of their long-ended lives far past the point of reason—and prove all the more dangerous for this dementia. Fortunately, just as the resurrection of a mummy might prove swift, so too might its return to peace should the animate corpse or another party restore or correct whatever disturbance provoked the deathless zealots in the first place. Even mummies restored to peace still harbor potential for great danger, though, as once it's been provoked, time and greed rarely leave a corpse to rest peacefully forever.

Aside from mummies obsessed with their past lives, a second classification exists: the cursed. Not drawn back to the world by their own vices, these beings have their undead state forced upon them. In the most basic form, necromantic

magics empower a corpse with the traits of a mummy, granting such a creature the abilities of such ancient dead but without the fanaticism that make the most legendary examples so deadly. These creatures prove hate-filled but bestial, knowing only the will to destroy and the whims of their masters. Other cursed mummies typically spawn from excruciating deaths, curses of immortal suffering, and the wrath of ancient deities. On several occasions, such afflicted mummies have been unleashed from tombs meant to serve as eternal prisons, dusty vaults scored with damning confessions and vengeful prayers for eternal torment. These mummies lack the perverse protectiveness of their self-resurrecting cousins, replacing it instead with ancient plots, murderous obsessions, or ages-induced madness. The release of such vile beings, shunned even in the era of their creation, never proves kind to the modern age, time and insanity increasing the deadliness of these cursed dead countless times over.

Necrology

Regardless of the way in which these horrors come into being, all mummies share two common traits: the horror they inspire in the living and their terrifying disease.

Power over irrational fear is not unique to mummies, though it is a trait more typical of spectral undead. Although these corpses vary in appearances—as do most bodied undead—the sight of a mummy provokes an overwhelming sense of dread and despair. While encountering the walking dead might reasonably shock anyone, the horror provoked by these wandering cadavers typically proves disproportionate to their appearance, especially when compared to similar and arguably more unnerving creatures. Such is this unnatural, unreasonable fear that only the most iron-shod souls might tamp down their horror and face a mummy with control of their faculties. In most cases, though, witnesses freeze with terror, becoming prisoners of fright and ready victims for the undead's whims. Such paralyzing unease appears to have less to do with what a viewer sees and more with a pervasive aura of negative emotions or an instinctual perception of the being's foul intent. Perhaps this mortal fear stems from the creature's ability to force its dire will upon the living or the exploitation of some power gleaned in its soul's travels beyond mortality. Or perhaps this is not a power of the dead, but rather a weakness in the living. Maybe a viewer understands on some level that before him treads a being that has seen the other side of death, knows its secrets, and through force of will alone has managed to return—and so, like a child abandoned before a runaway carriage, the witness stands slack-jawed and uncomprehending, preparing for what must seem an inevitable end. In any case, even the most courageous cannot hope to rely upon their bravery in the face of such potent horrors, for mummies are masters of fear and foul truths mortal minds balk to comprehend.

A more understandable fear rises from the horrific, magical malady that mummies carry. Blurring the distinction between disease and curse, the legendary affliction known as mummy rot is aptly named, as victims face a swift, grotesque, and notoriously incurable wasting ailment. The specifics of the disease vary from mummy to mummy, seemingly based upon cultural lore retained from the creatures' lives. While many victims of mummy rot waste away as if beset by disfiguring dehydration and blistering sunburn, mummies from non-desert climes might afflict their victims with illnesses that gradually reduce flesh to ooze, cause chilling water to leak from the body, mimic the effects of rapid aging or rotting, or any of a myriad of other terrifying fates. In the end, however, most who suffer from this dreadful curse meet a grotesque end, being reduced to little more than ashes and muck, components too insignificant for any but the most accomplished clerics to restore.

Only the intervention of a deity or significant magics can save one afflicted with mummy rot, as victims are not simply infected by the disease, but rather cursed by it. Such misunderstanding of the ailment's origin has led dozens to waste away even under the ministrations of the most accomplished healers. Only by first removing the curse might one then treat the ailment, though even banishing the afflicting curse is no assurance that the disease might naturally release its host. Only the combination of potent abjurations and healing magics can assure recovery from a mummy's touch, though such treatments often prove too rare and expensive to be reliably obtained before the affliction finally metes out a mummy's dreadful justice.

Habitat & Society

While mummies notoriously haunt the hidden pyramids and buried necropolises of ancient cultures, such locations are not requisite to their resurrection. Most mummies created by powers other than foul magic possess connections to their resting places, perceiving such places as sanctuaries or prisons granted to them by their descendants. The form of such places means little; it is the spiritual connection and the importance the deceased places on such locations that hold significance. Thus, mummies are just as likely to rise from hidden barrow mounds, ancient catacombs, or acres of holy mud as from more majestic tombs. That being said, cultures that place such importance on the dead as to monumentalize the resting places of the deceased predispose themselves to the curse of mummies.

Upon reawakening, mummies typically retain a sense of the roles they occupied in life—such as fallen pharaohs, interred champions, or disgraced priests—and seek to carry out either their vengeances or their reawakened ambitions in fashions reminiscent of those from their past lives. Thus, a mummy's modus operandi proves more a product of its life than its undead form, its unpredictability adding to the difficulty in

both identifying and combating such a horror. For most such undead, no time seems to have passed since their deaths, and the secrets of their age remain fresh in their rotted minds. Thus, mummies often carry with them the knowledge, weapons, and magic of ages lost to history, yet even the most sage of these resurrected figures rarely shows any interest in passing along the lore of its era. Understanding what tools an ancient mummy has at its disposal may often be the key to defeating it.

Just as a mummy might utilize trappings of the past against which present-day cultures have little defense, they also possess the frustration of individuals out of time, of powerful figures made weak by the dissolution of all that once granted them esteem. Thus, many viciously seek a return to death, as they are god-kings of empires reduced to dust, high priests who have outlived their deities, or the great otherwise made weak by the irreconcilable passage of time. The most maniacal of the ancient dead might overcome their histories or seek to recreate them anew, establishing mockeries of eras past with themselves occupying their former positions of power. As mummies draw their power from their moot obsessions, none can merely accept the loss of what they once had, driven forward with all the vigor of deluded yet immortally powerful fanatics.

Campaign Role

History, not linen wrappings, separates mummies from more anonymous undead. While the most blasphemous necromancers might raise mummies from any corpse, those cursed to their fate by ancient punishments or who rise in response to modern violations bear with them not merely the powers of the ancient dead, but the full might of resentful traditions, gods, and determination.

The introduction of a mummy villain allows a GM to bring the world's history to deadly life. Garbed in the raiments of fallen societies, mummies are time travelers of a sort, carrying with them the trappings of their past lives—treasures, sorceries, and weapons forgotten or abandoned in modern day. The ancient dead also retain their memories, methods, and expectations, many conflicting violently with the truths of a world that has moved on. Their attempts to recreate the world they held power within might unleash all manner of forgotten dangers, from mythical summoned creatures to servants and beasts buried along with their masters. Such maniacal undead might even attempt to bring the past back to life in their new time, possibly through elaborate recreations, the resurrection of dead cults and power structures, or even magic gates to ages past. Such machinations resurrect the past more significantly than mere ruins and ancient treasures, allowing epics long forgotten to invade the present through the plots of their most notorious and fanatical villains and masterminds.

Aside from using mummies as a method to revive whole histories, they also give GMs the opportunity to throw PCs into the role of the invader. Most corpses with the potential to be mummies lie quietly until outside forces disturb them. Treasure hunters, tomb robbers, and explorers—all typical roles for adventurers—who steal from or otherwise upset ancient vaults run the risk of awakening and unleashing a mummy intent on restoring what has been spoiled and punishing interlopers. In such cases, the PCs are put in the role of offenders facing severe yet righteous wrath. Such might also lead to a party's choice of setting right its offenses—possibly meaning abandoning some fantastic treasure—or doing battle with a being seeking only what is its by right.

Known Mummies

Several mummies are known to walk the lands of Avistan and Garund, and from the deserts of mysterious Osirion to the frosty reaches of the Crown of the World, no land is safe from the avid desires of the ancient dead.

Alexayn the Miser: When Jhandorage Vaulnder Alexayn finally died, he did so a fantastically wealthy man. One of the founders of the now-notorious Aspis Consortium, Alexayn spent nearly half his considerable, unscrupulously gained fortune during his waning years, assuring his remembrance through construction and memorials across his home city of Ostenso. When the miser died, as per his wishes, he was interred in a towering mansion of a mausoleum along with his renowned collection of exotic objects d'art. Yet in the 108 years since his death, most of Alexayn's works have been overshadowed, and the business he founded has forgotten him. When an attempted grave robbing roused the mogul's corpse—covetous even in death—the discovery that his memory had already faded infuriated the newly risen mummy. Now, clad in the dated finery of a Chelish nobleman, the corpse Alexayn works to remind the world of his deeds, and assure that his name will linger for all time—in infamy if needs be.

The Harlot Queen: This creature is the only known mummy created from the mortal remains of a goddess. In life she was Arazni, warrior-herald of Aroden, who ascended when she passed the test of the *Starstone*. The Whispering

Facets of Fear

The horror of the mummy springs from more than merely its state as a walking corpse, its existence intrinsically tied to matters ancient and mysterious. Creatures born of faith in cultures, divinities, and traditions that, in many cases, undeath has cursed them to outlive, these ancient dead carry with them the secrets and powers of ages past, inscrutable plagues and righteous curses from which the living have little defense. Their terror is the fear of the dark and forgotten, of bitter cultures crumbled to dust, of vengeful deities and atrocious worship, and of a sacrosanct path to death upon which the living have no right to interfere. Grave robbers intruding upon the resting places of these ancient dead face not just the dangers and traps associated with forgotten crypts, but immersion in a realm of death intended to be sacred and inviolable—a home not just for a corpse, but for an immortal soul. Should such trespasses rouse the fury of the tomb's resident, in their final moments interlopers realize the blame for their own deaths falls not entirely on foul magics or the curse of unlife, but upon their own hubris for intruding upon the kingdom of the dead.

Tyrant killed her during the Shining Crusade, and though her allies the Knights of Ozem buried her with full honors, the necromancer-ghost Geb stole her remains and animated her as a mummy, believing her the only creature worthy to rule beside him. He rarely manifests in the world anymore, and she is little more than a figurehead. None can say how much she remembers of her former life.

Ossa Stormseer: At a young age, the raider princess Ossa nearly died from frostbite, losing six of her fingers and her right eye, which her chieftain father replaced with a brilliant blue iolite. This eye was said to grant her the power to see storms, and as she rose as a priestess among her people, she became known as a favorite of, even kin to, the spirits that stir the depths of the seas. After a long life devoted to her people's brutal gods of the oceans, Ossa fell in battle, her funeral barge sent to sail to the horizon to rejoin the revered denizens of the sea. But the fickle tides claimed the priestess's ship and swept it north, where it wrecked upon a glacier, never to sink into the depths. Her body frozen amid the rich offerings of her longship, Ossa's spirit returned, animating her corpse as a mummy. Having been trapped for centuries, the raider witch has gone mad with frustration, believing herself punished for some spiritual dishonor. She now lies imprisoned, seeking only to redeem herself in battle so she might be granted another, honorable burial at sea.

Walkena: In an odd reversal of Arazni's story, Walkena was a mortal boy prince of the original Mwangi society. Now the undead prince's followers worship him as a god, and the cruel boy-mummy is somehow able to grant spells like any deity.

Awakening the Dead

Not just any corpse can spontaneously manifest as a mummy. GMs interested in creating mummies resurrected "naturally" (rather than by spells like *create undead*) should consider the passion and force of will of the would-be mummy. By and large, a corpse should be of a creature with a Charisma of 15 or higher and possessing at least 8 Hit Dice. In addition, it should have a reason for caring about the eternal sanctity of its remains in excess of normal mortal concern. As such, priests of deities with the Death or Repose domains, heroes expecting a champion's burial, lords of cultures preoccupied with the afterlife, or individuals otherwise obsessed with death or their worldly possessions all make suitable candidates for resurrection as mummies—though countless other potential reasons for resurrection exist.

An Accursed Fate

Easily the most feared ability of mummies is their notorious curse: mummy rot. Both a disease and a curse, this affliction proves exceptionally difficult to cure, even for accomplished healers. Part of this blight's infamy comes from the specifics of its symptoms. While many mummies cause a curse that gradually withers away its victims till nothing but desert sand remains, the affliction itself proves highly variable and unique to many atypical individuals. In each case, the effects prove the same, but the symptoms can be wildly distinctive.

Corpse Chills: Those cursed with this form of mummy rot find themselves afflicted with an intense cold and a spreading frostbite that proves resistant to all nonmagical treatment. This curse usually originates from bodies mummified by extremely cold, dry conditions or buried in ice.

Grave Ichor: Someone cursed with this form of mummy rot finds his skin loosening and slipping as if over-soaked with water. Eventually, in its most fatal stages, the victim's flesh begins dripping from his body.

Phantom Infestation: The victim of this form of mummy rot bears the marks of one whose flesh is beset by worms or parasitic vermin. Though the skin breaks with scars, verminous trails, and minute bites, no infestation is ever witnessed, at least until the body bursts in an eruption of scarab beetles upon the victim's death.

Swamp Crumble: Typically transmitted only by mummies created by bog burial, victims of this affliction take 1d3 Dex, 1d3 Con, and 1d3 Cha instead of the normal effect of mummy rot. The disease causes the victim's bones to become brittle and dissolve; upon death, only the skin, internal organs, and other soft tissues remain. A side effect of swamp crumble is the victim's hair becomes tinged with red, with light-colored hair turning as red as fresh blood.

Sample Mummy

The tale of Pharaoh Sharsqa II and Shielseis, his dedicated concubine, is one of the greatest and darkest love stories of

ancient Osirion. Beautiful beyond words and vain beyond measure, Shielseis was accused of slowly poisoning her lord's first and second queens as well as his entire harem, leaving herself the sole recipient of his affections. When her murderousness was revealed by the pharaoh's chief advisor, the harem girl was condemned to death by a hundred snake bites. With her final words, she dramatically professed her love for the pharaoh before leaping into a pit of asps. Yet, despite her being waist deep in vipers, the asps refused to bite. Overwhelmed by the miracle and moved by her devotion, Sharsqa fell madly in love with the girl and lifted her from the pit, pronouncing her his new queen. When the pharaoh's advisor spoke out against Shielseis's low birth, a tiny asp slithered from her gown and struck the aged counselor, killing him instantly.

Eight years ago, grave robbers discovered the tomb of Sharsqa II and haphazardly plundered it, leaving behind the sarcophagus of Shielseis. Rising soon after as a elegant mummy clad in a beautiful ivory mask, the queen now seeks out both those who despoiled her beloved crypt and the unawakened mummy of Sharsqa II. Her search has led her across northern Garund, where she has fostered a network of agents and informants who know her only as the Queen of Asps.

SHIELSEIS, QUEEN OF ASPS CR 11

XP 12,800

LE female mummy cleric 9/aristocrat 2

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +16

Aura despair (30 ft., paralyzed for 1d4 rounds, Will DC 19 negates)

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 13, flat-footed 23; (+3 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +10 natural)

hp 199 (19 HD; 8d8+9d8+2d8+114)

Fort +13, **Ref** +7, **Will** +20

DR 5/—; **Immune** undead traits

Weaknesses vulnerable to fire

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.

Melee slam +21 (1d8+10 plus curse)

Special Attacks channel negative energy (5d6, DC 21, 8/day)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 9th)

5th—*flame strike*, *greater command*[D] (DC 20), *summon monster V*

4th—*air walk*, *discern lies*[D], *inflict critical wounds* (DC 19), *tongues*

3rd—*animate dead*, *bestow curse* (DC 18), *nondetection*[D], *speak with dead* (DC 18), *summon monster III*

2nd—*enthrall*[D] (DC 17), *inflict moderate wounds* (2, DC 17), *resist energy*, *spiritual weapon*, *undetectable alignment*

1st—*command* (DC 16), *comprehend languages*, *doom* (DC 16), *disguise self*[D], *divine favor*, *protection from good*, *shield of faith*

0—*bleed* (DC 15), *create water*, *detect magic*, *guidance*

D domain spell; **Domains** Nobility, Trickery

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** 10, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 21

Base Atk +13; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 33

Feats Alignment Channel, Command Undead, Deceitful, Dodge, Improved Channel, Improved Initiative, Leadership, Persuasive, Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +15, Heal +13, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (religion) +14, Perception +16, Sense Motive +13, Stealth +13

Languages Osiriani

Gear *bracers of armor +3*, *headband of alluring charisma +2*, *robe of blending*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Despair (Su) All creatures within a 30-foot radius that see Shielseis must make a DC 19 Will save or be paralyzed by fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by her despair ability for 24 hours. This is a paralysis and mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Curse (Su) *Mummy Rot*: slam—injury; *save* Fort DC 16; *onset* 1 minute; *frequency* 1 day; *effect* 1d6 Con and 1d6 Cha; *cure* —. Mummy rot is both a curse and a disease and can only be cured if the curse is first removed, at which point the disease can be magically removed. Even after the curse element of mummy rot is lifted, a creature suffering from the disease cannot recover naturally over time. Anyone casting a conjuration (healing) spell on the afflicted creature must succeed on a DC 20 caster level check, or the spell is wasted and the healing has no effect. Anyone who dies from mummy rot turns to dust and cannot be raised without a *resurrection* or greater magic. The save DC is Charisma-based.

The Ecology of

The Neogi

The demons of the Flow

by Jon Winter

Artwork by David 0. Miller

"Ship ahoy!" The sharp cry from the crow's nest launched the crew into a flurry of frenzied activity; loading ballistae, hoisting sails, grabbing hand weapons, and lashing barrels to the decks.

"Raise the cloaking helm!" Captain Orlando shouted down to the bridge. A shimmering, colorless wall of magical force materialized around the *Blue Jay*. To an onlooker, the shrikeship and her elven crew would have simply vanished, blending perfectly with the starry backcloth of space.

Red and wicked, a massive neogi deathspider cruised effortlessly toward the smaller ship. Web-like sails glistened between its huge grappling claws, scattering silver-orange light below. *Blood Glory* was the name daubed in black on the deathspider's hull.[1] Slowly, ominously, silently, the claws parted. The forward shell of the 'spider retracted, exposing the deck beneath. Even from this distance tiny figures could be seen, swarming about the weapons platform between the catapults, followed by lumbering, hulking monstrosities.

"They've spotted us!" At the shout from above, Orlando's heart sank. A catapult stone from the 'spider whisked past, dangerously close.

"Hard a-port!" The shrikeship suddenly rolled onto one side, throwing the gravity plane out of line for a brief instant. The deathspider spun, and the stars spiralled across the void. The Blue Jay lurched forward, doubling its speed as it passed the shell of the 'spider.

"Fire at the hulks!" Three ballista bolts shot whining from the shrikeship, then their scream was abruptly silenced by the void. A barrage of missile fire followed from the elves, their arrows streaking toward the larger ship. Cheers from the crew greeted the sight of two of the massive hulks falling from the 'spider, pierced with arrows and ballista bolts.

Slowly, almost ponderously, the deathspider turned on the shrikeship. With the attack the Blue Jay's cloak had fallen, and the neogi were upon them. . . .

Crunch! The whole ship shook violently under the impact of a huge catapult stone. As Alvirath watched the battle unfolding from her position at the helm, sharp flashes of white pain stabbed at her mind; jettison fire crashing onto the upper deck.

Wheeling around, the shrikeship dove beneath the *Blood Glory*, which hung motionless in the void, impossibly huge, defying gravity. Numerous ballistae fired their lethal bolts at the *Jay*. The small ship heaved as cracks appeared in the hull and one wing was torn away.

"Return fire!" Captain Orlando's voice rang out clear above the surviving crew's cries of alarm. Simultaneously the shrikeship's three ballistae fired. Three bolts sped toward the 'spider, crashing silently into her crystalline hull. The elves cheered raggedly, but their dwindling courage evaporated as the 'spider mercilessly bore down upon the crippled *Blue Jay* once again.

Bright signal lights flared from lamps at the bow of the shrikeship. Red, yellow, yellow; the code for parlay. Orlando crossed his elven fingers, praying the stories he had heard of the neogi were exaggerated.[2] He did not breathe until a returning flash came, seconds later. He mouthed the words silently as he translated them:

"Surrender or die."

Before Orlando even had time to order a retreat, the *Blood Glory* moved. Colossal grappling claws crashed onto the ***Jay's*** deck, ripping through the rails and crushing the hull. Already figures swarmed down the grappling legs; weak, pale human slaves shambling vaguely as if they were undead, and hulking blue-black creatures with swirling, mesmerizing eyes.[3]

The next few minutes were chaos. The ***Jay's*** crew hacked randomly at anything that moved, but the neogi's slaves quickly eliminated resistance. Four of the spider-like neogi scuttled down the legs of the deathspider and stood on the edge of the ***Jay's*** deck, dancing and chanting strange hissing words of arcane power in their foul language.[4]

Orlando shouted to his crew to attack the spell-casting neogi, but most were already bewitched by the hulks. They slashed at each other, the hulks, or anything else that was near. Feeling a stabbing pain in his lower leg, Orlando recoiled in horror as a neogi sank its fangs into his flesh. Lethargy coursed through his veins and, almost in slow motion, he stumbled backward. A sharp cuff over the head sent Orlando reeling toward the deck and into darkness.[5]

Within five minutes the ship was overrun; the hulks began stripping the shrikeship of anything even remotely valuable. The bodies and surviving crew of the Blue ***Jay*** were bound by the mindless zombie-slaves, and dragged back into the 'spider. Leaving the shrikeship a drifting wreck, the ***Blood*** Glory turned and left the gruesome scene, 'jamming off into the depths of the Stellar Main.[6]

In the distance, a dim star changed its course and began to follow. . . .

Allowing his sensitive elven eyes to adjust to the dim light, Orlando sat up slowly. His head was still throbbing from the blow he had received. As the room came into focus, he could see he was in a dark, dismal cell.[7] The stench of death was nauseating. Low, agonized groans of pain from nearby cells identified his surviving crew—they were not many. Orlando tried to stand, but his throbbing legs would not support him.

"Rest my son, you are still weak."

Orlando giddily turned to face the unseen speaker, fumbling for his sword-it was gone! An old man stood behind him, eyes as black as the void. Cocking his head slightly, the stranger smiled a little, as if amused. His voice was strange, almost lifeless.

"Do not worry, I mean no harm. I too am a prisoner here. Forgive me for startling you." The man placed a cool hand upon Orlando's forehead, muttering something under his breath. Warmth and vigor flowed through his hand into Orlando-he felt refreshed, healthy even.

"You are a priest?"

"Yes, my son. I am Feldar, of Ptah. Drink this. It will help." He held out a half-full waterskin. Orlando stood, took a swig, and spluttered as the powerful brandy burned inside him.

There was a pause before Orlando spoke again. "How long have you been here? What do they want with us?"

"I do not know, my son. These neogi are attacking all ships within range. I fear they wish to provoke the elves into another war. I suspect they will want to interrogate you."[8]

Orlando shuddered. He had heard many tales of those "questioned" by the neogi losing their limbs, eyes, nose, or ears to the vile creatures. His throat tightened as fear gripped him. Something approached the cell. Striding clumsily down the corridor was the dark form of an umber hulk, a neogi cradled in its arms. The pair stopped outside one of the cells opposite his own. The hulk bellowed a deep growl, and Orlando saw Alvirath—his wife—scrambling to her feet in the feeble light.

"Ga'kah'ki'zid am I," hissed the foul neogi. It paused, as if it expected the poor elf to be impressed. "Priest of Thrig'ki I am. Master hungers for meat. Meat with me will now come to Overmaster."[9]

There was a sharp creak as the hulk heaved open the massive cell door, and a cry of pain as the lumbering monstrosity grabbed Alvirath by her silver hair and pulled her from the cell. Protesting frantically, Alvirath was roughly shoved along the corridor. She beat her fists against the hulk's stony chest, but it ignored her angry blows.

Frustration and anger welled inside Orlando. "No!" he shouted, reaching through the bars in a vain attempt to save the elf, "You can't do that to her!"

Ponderously, the hulk turned about, clacking its huge jaws. From its cradle in its lord-servant's arms the neogi grinned a cruel, toothy smile. "Want you to come too?" it snickered gleefully. "Master-lord pleased to meet this Meat will be."

On command, the hulk lurched forward and unbolted Orlando's cell door. Rudely seizing Orlando by the neck, the huge hulk pushed the two prisoners in front of it. Feldar shook his head in despair as the cell door slammed, hoping Orlando's death would be a quick one.

Perched atop the hulk's massive head, the neogi flexed its legs eagerly, anticipating a great feast for its Overmaster. The loathsome creature's eyes glittered evilly in the dim light. Orlando struggled in vain to escape the iron grip of the hulk, but his neck was just squeezed more tightly. He reached across the hulk's broad chest, to touch Alvirath. Mute with fear, she could not speak, but her eyes said farewell.

The party left the cell block and stumbled along a narrow corridor deeper into the ship. The air became putrid and uncomfortably warm as the group emerged into a low-ceilinged hall. A set of double doors filled the south wall of the room. Orlando guessed from the two hulk guards on either side of the doors that whatever was inside was important.

Their neogi captor, from its vantage point on the hulk's head spoke again. "Now to meet Broodmaster we go." On a sharp command the hulks heaved open the huge doors. The fetid odor of stale air and

Neogi statistics modifiers

Statistic	Str	Dex	Con	Int	Wis	Cha
Modifier	-3	+1	0	+2	0	0(-15 to humanoids)

Neogi aging modifiers

Category	Mature	Old	Venerable
Age	2 months	15 years	30 years
Penalties	0	Str -1, Dex -1	Str -1, Dex-1, Con -1

Neogi level limits

Class	Mage	Specialist wizard	Priest
Level	12	12	12

death washed over Orlando. His stomach lurched.

Slowly and deliberately, their hulk captor dragged them forward, its colossal strength no match for two elves. The neogi on the hulk's head danced with a bloodthirsty furor, its sharp talons clattering on its lord-servant's iron-hard skin.

The stench worsened as they advanced into the huge room. Orlando could now see that the floor in the center had been cut away, revealing a gaping pit below into the cargo hold. His heart clenched in horror as he saw movement in the darkness below. Something huge twitched, glistening in the dim light with thick slime. A great watery eye appeared in the mountain of rotting flesh, its hideous gaze washing over the group. Another eye flicked open, and with a rumble, a cavernous mouth widened. Wickedly-sharp teeth gleamed as a deep bellow erupted from the monster.

There was movement across the room, and from the shadows scuttled more of the foul neogi. Hissing and spitting they advanced, circling the pit. The two captives stood inches from the edge of the chasm, still held firm by the hulk. From the pit the massive beast rose, squelching and growling hungrily. A humanoid creature across the pit caught Orlando's eye. His squinted to make out its form.

Greetings and ***farewell.*** The voice slithered through Orlando's mind as he strained to see. Sibilant and cool, it was quickly evaporated by the heat of Orlando's rage. An illithid! He had always suspected the slimy devils worked with the neogi, and here was proof.[10] Struggling with renewed vigor, he tried desperately to escape from the grasp of the hulk.

Escape is ***futile.*** Orlando felt his muscles suddenly seize up, and an agony of cramps shot through his body. He knew Alvirath felt the same pain. Mentally cursing all illithids, Orlando prayed to the elven gods to save him.

They cannot hear you out here. The illithid seemed amused by Orlando's futile efforts.

"The time of the broodmaster is nearing! Slake its thirst for meat we shall now! For the glory of Thrig'ki!" the small neogi screamed, spittle flying from the corners of its mouth. The hulk moved to throw Alvirath over the precipice.

"The glory of P'kk!" another of the small creatures shrieked. "The glory of T'zen'kil!"

"All the Holy Ones glory have!"

A sudden explosion rocked the ship, and searing flames erupted across the chamber. Terrified by the intense fire, the neogi scattered, screaming. The hulk holding Alvirath and Orlando reflexively shuffled backward, away from the pit, dragging its prisoners with it.

Orlando's fear and anger forced the illithid from his mind as he struggled against the iron grasp of the hulk. With grim satisfaction he noted the mind flayer's robe was burning, and he felt its shrill mental screeches of pain.

The far wall of the room suddenly collapsed, pierced by the barrel of a massive gun. The thunderous force of the ram threw Orlando and the hulks to the floor. Through the breach swarmed giff marines, brandishing cutlass, pistol, and all manner of outlandish weapons. The hulk holding the elves cropped his captives to enter the fray. Striking his head on the deck, Orlando once again fell into unconsciousness. Alvirath's tears splashed warm on his cheek as she kneeled next to him.

Below them the broodmaster was aflame, cracks opening in its warty sides. Young neogi erupted from its decaying flesh, spilling across the floorboards.[11]

Footnotes

Neogi look like a foul cross between a spider and a moray eel, and are about the size of a small dog. All neogi and their slaves are tattooed; the garish and intricate patterns announce name, age, number of slaves owned, and social status. Neogi are covered in coarse brown hair, which is frequently dyed bright colors as a status symbol. Their eight spidery legs are long and thin with sharp nails and flexible joints. Their heads are those of serpents or eels, with two forward-facing eyes and a mouth of sharp teeth for rending flesh. More information on neogi may be found in the ***Lorebook of the Void*** from the original SPELLJAMMER® campaign boxed set. They also appear in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ hardcover book.

1. The names of neogi ships show little imagination. Most involve the words "slave, "blood," "death," or "pain." Neogi ships tend to be painted red, black, orange, or purple with silver and gold highlights also being popular.

2. Neogi brutality is legendary, for they have no morals and less sympathy. Weak or injured neogi are killed and devoured. All slaves are eventually eaten, except the umber hulks that are too valuable. Any

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who surrender to the neogi are enslaved or placed in a lifejammer helm. Any slave refuses to or is incapable of working is eaten. Kender, halflings, and gnomes are not valued slaves because of their irritating habits; they are usually just tortured and eaten. Most other races are considered prime slave material, especially humans, elves and ogres.

3. Each mature neogi has an umber hulk slave, valued as its most treasured possession. Most neogi insist upon being carried everywhere by their hulks since they themselves can scuttle around only slowly. Powerful neogi own two or more hulks.

The neogi have an overdeveloped concept of ownership—everything is the property of a neogi. They consider themselves the supreme race in the universe and therefore own everything in it. This superiority complex leads to the strange titles they use: umber hulks are called "lord-servants," other neogi "kinsmen-slaves," the ship's master "captain-owner," and all others are "servant-slaves" or simply "meat."

4. Roughly one in 10 neogi has magical ability as a wizard of levels 1-8. Some neogi have aptitude enough to rise to 14th level, and rumors persist of magic-using neogi liches. Specialist neogi mages may choose between the schools of Necromancy, Conjuration/Summoning or Invocation/Evocation; other schools are unavailable or considered too weak to be of consequence. The foul creatures have developed many new spells of their own (see DRAGON® issue #184's article, "Magic with an Evil Bite" by Jason M. Walker for examples).

Neogi speaking human tongues overemphasize the letters s, z, and ***k,*** making their voice sound harsh and guttural. ***K'azz'jak'n,*** the neogi language, is reminiscent of snakes hissing and the whirring of thri-kreen. The structure and word order of the neogi tongue is very complex, but when speaking Common neogi do not bother with grammar.

5. Neogi possess a poisonous ***slowing*** bite that they use infrequently, because they must be close to their victim to administer the poison. The cowardly neogi are reluctant to place themselves in danger for the goods of others, preferring instead to send their slaves into combat.

This ***slowing*** poison also acts as a ***charm*** agent when administered over an extended period of time, helping to brainwash the slaves so they will not rebel. The effects are hard to reverse, requiring dispel ***magic*** and ***neutralize poison*** spells.

6. Umber hulks are trained to loot ships, and they enjoy this task immensely. They can recognize valuable metals, gemstones, and weapons, and usually can locate spelljamming helms. Food and drink often is devoured on the spot, as are any dead defenders.

When an enemy vessel has been stripped, neogi always leave the shell behind as a warning to other spacefarers—who can recognize the work of the neogi from its sheer brutality.

7. Neogi eyes are sensitive to light. Although bright light causes them no harm, neogi prefer to keep their ships in dismal darkness. They possess infravision to a 60' range. Neogi are not clean creatures, and the filth and smell of their quarters aboard their ships is quite nauseating. DMs should feel free to impose Constitution checks the first PCs encounter the stench.

8. Neogi torture methods are the stuff of fearsome tales. The pain that victims are forced to endure is hideous enough to make human torturers' stomachs turn. Neogi eat flesh, preferably alive and screaming, be it human, neogi, or illithid. Their normal diet is one pound of meat per day, although neogi may live without food for up to two weeks. Torture is their favorite method of "preparing" it.

9. One in 20 neogi has priestly abilities, and each spelljamming vessel is overseen by at least one priest. Priests are permitted to add the word ***ki'zid*** after their name, meaning "favored of deities." The Powers of the neogi are referred to as "deity" and not "god' or "goddess," as there is no distinction between male or female amongst the sexless neogi. Deities are viewed as servants by the insolent neogi, who continually demand favor and good fortune. Neogi never pray, and rarely offer sacrifice, since they see themselves as more important.

Pronouncing the name of a neogi deity incorrectly is an invitation to be killed slowly and painfully. Humans, who tend to find neogi pronunciation difficult, are advised not to attempt saying deities' names. There are five neogi deities:

Thrig'ki (lesser power), Align: NE, Plane: Karish (Abyss), Portfolio: "love" (envy/jealousy)

Although the deity of "love," ***Thrig*** is better translated as jealousy or hatred. To neogi, jealousy and love are the same. Thrig'ki appears as a neogi with writhing snakes for hair and twelve spidery legs.

P'kk (lesser power), Alignment: LE, Plane: Ki'pik (Baator), Portfolio: fear, tyranny.

P'kk is the favorite deity of captains and neogi in positions of power who enjoy bullying and manipulating their lessers. P'kk is seen as an umber hulk with the head of a neogi.

T'zen'kil (lesser power, Alignment: NE, Plane: Karish, Portfolio: torture, pain, suffering.

The name of T'zen'kil is invoked by neogi torturers and those in charge of the slave pens. Worshippers are tattooed with grotesque black symbols of pain. T'zen'kil looks like a black neogi with a whip for a tongue.

Kr'tx (lesser power), Alignment: CE, Plane: Jik'qu (Gray Waste), Portfolio: war, brutality, strength.

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Kr'tx is the neogi deity favored by umber hulk slaves, who delight in brutality and wanton destruction. The favor of Kr'tx is always demanded before a major battle. Kr'tx is seen as a red neogi with continually burning claws and hair.

Kil'lix (lesser power), Align: LE, Plane: Karish, Portfolio: death, murder, poison.

Kil'lix is the patron of murderers and assassins in the neogi world, and is seen as the darkest of shadows. Its horrid laugh is high-pitched and whining, yet also deep and booming, and is said to be heard by those who are about to die.

All neogi priests gain access to the same spheres of spells. ***Major access:*** All, Astral, Charm, Combat, Elemental, Healing (reversed only), Necromantic, War. ***Minor access:*** Protection, Summoning.

10. The neogi have no allies except for corrupt mind flayers, and this alliance is tenuous at best. Even the foul drow loathe the neogi, branding them blasphemers against their Spider-Queen Lolth. Illithids work for large profits as intermediaries between the neogi and the Arcane, who are unwilling to deal with the neogi directly.

11. Neogi reproduce asexually by poisoning old, frail captain-owners with a variety of toxic chemicals. The victims rapidly collapse into coma, and slowly expand into Great Old Masters" or "Broodmasters." These foul creatures grow fat on the flesh of slaves, all the while being eaten from the inside by developing young neogi. When broodmasters near the Time, their flesh begins to split. In a final ritual they burst, spilling out live young neogi. The young fight over the remains of the broodmaster until it has been devoured, then attack each other. From a litter of forty, only six or seven will survive, but these will be the toughest, most brutal neogi of the group. Natural selection therefore helps the race to remain powerful.

This violent reproductive process has a number of repercussions on the race. Neogi are sexless, and they cannot understand the concept of gender or love in other races. Many consider human women to be a different race from human men. The viciousness of their early lives leads their evil and hateful natures. Dominant neogi emotions are hatred, jealousy and fear, and it is these which keep lesser neogi in place under their masters.

Captain-owners become broodmasters when their underlings grow tired of senile rulership. If left to live their full lifespan, neogi die at about age 45, but most are assassinated before they reach 30.

The only neogi fable of interest to sages details the neogi creation myth. Their legends claim the universe was created by a Being named Ka'jik'zxi. This deity constructed the Planes, Spheres, Flow, and the planets. Finally it created five more deities, each like itself only weaker. The five, named Thrig'ki, P'kk, T'zen'kil, Kr'tx and Kil'lix, each represent one of the desirable aspects of the neogi race. These deities squabbled over their areas of control until Ka'jik'zxi grew tired of their bickering and punished them. Furious, the five hatched a plot to kill Ka'jik'zxi. Concocting a fatal brew with the "foulest ingredients" (including friendship, mercy, and compassion) they poisoned their Creator.

Ka'jik'zxi swelled up to a huge size, and the young deities hid, fearful of Ka'jik'zxi's wrath. Suddenly, Ka'jik'zxi burst, spilling its entrails across the spheres. Some landed in the Outer Planes—the parts containing mercy and compassion became the gods of good. Some of Ka'jik'zxi landed in the Lower Planes and became the evil gods. Ka'jik'zxi's brain landed in a forgotten Crystal Sphere.

After much searching, the neogi deities found the brain. There they were amazed to discover life—the first neogi had been "born." The deities taught the neogi of the multiverse and their destiny to conquer. The neogi built ships and left their homeworld—referred to in legends as Ka'jk'z. They have never returned, but the neogi know their mission: to conquer all the Spheres.

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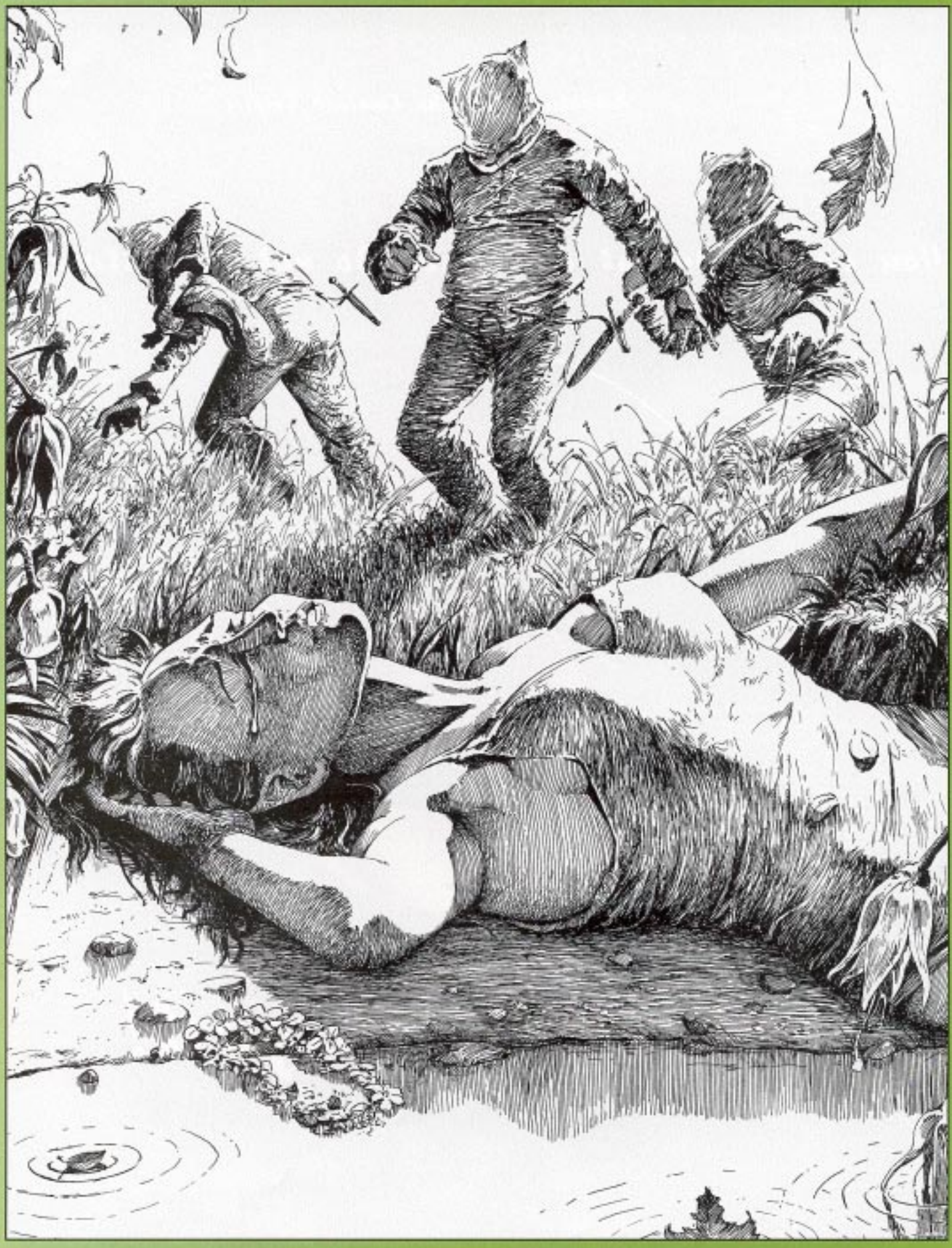

THE ECOLOGY OF The Nymph

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by David Kooharian

Dreelix pounded the gavel three times on the table and said those magical words of power, the words that silenced the conversations of those around him and brought all eyes facing his way. These were quite easily his ten favorite words in all the languages known to man:

"This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened."

Satisfied that his colleagues were giving him their undivided attention, Dreelix continued. "Tonight Zantoullios will debrief us on the results of our little forest expedition. Grindle will report the status of our current funds and will be collecting dues from those of you who failed to pay last month. Let me remind you all, here and now, about the ten-percent late fee! Finally, Willowquisp has come across a formula for a *potion of longevity;* he'll describe the necessary ingredients, and we'll start planning a Hunt accordingly."

Suddenly, the door to the meeting-hall swung open, and into the room stepped a beautiful young woman. "Mister President," she said in a husky voice, closing the door behind her, "I have a point of order: I seek admission into your illustrious organization."

Dreelix, irritated by the interruption of his meeting, was further annoyed to see that he was no longer the center of attention; all eyes were upon the young woman. Scowling, he opened his mouth to rebuke her, but then he got a good look at her himself.

By the gods, she was beautiful! Dreelix was never one to let his emotions run wild, but he felt his heart actually skip a beat as he looked upon her. Brown hair flowed-no, cascaded-over her shoulders, framing the most angelic face he'd ever seen. Large brown eyes, slightly almond-shaped and not a little mysterious, managed to project sensuality, aloofness, and mystique all at the same time. Her lips, her radiant skin, her sleek figure, her—were they? yes!—dimpled cheeks.... Dreelix's eyes didn't know where to focus as he tried to absorb the totality of this intense creature.

A small *hmmph!* caught Dreelix's attention, dragging him from his reverie. It was the Conjurer Ablasta, sitting at his right, who was frowning in jealousy at the young woman. Lady Ablasta enjoyed the position of being the only female member of the Monster Hunters Association, and she apparently didn't think much of sharing the role with a gorgeous young woman at least thirty years her junior. As she stared at the newcomer, she wore an expression of distaste usually mastered only by spinsterly head librarians when confronting a young patron with several overdue books.

Realizing his mouth was still hanging open, Dreelix snapped it shut and swallowed, his throat suddenly dry. He had lost control. How had this happened? Blast it all, he was in charge here!

"Look here, Miss . . . ?" he managed to blurt out, before realizing he didn't know her name.

"Azurielle," the young woman supplied.

"Azurielle, thank you. There is a certain protocol about these things. First of all, to gain admittance, you must be able to provide information on a specific creature that can be used in the fashioning of magical spells, items, and the like. There is the matter of the admittance fee, of course, and you must be sponsored by a current member. Until you can provide those ..."

"I believe I have the entrance fee right here," the young woman replied, reaching to untie a small sack from her belt. Dreelix couldn't help but notice how the simple movement accentuated the curves of her body, and he swallowed hard again. "As for a sponsor, perhaps one of you kind gentlemen ..."

She couldn't finish her sentence. Immediately, Grindle the Coin-Counter leapt to his feet, blurting out "I'll sponsor her!" He wasn't the only one to rise to the occasion. With a scraping of chairs, both Zantoullios and Buntleby jumped up as well, voicing their willingness to serve as sponsor, the former bumping his table as he did so, knocking over his drink.

"Well, it appears that we have no shortage of sponsors," admitted Dreelix. "But what about a monster? Do you have information on a specific monster useful to the Association?"

"I do indeed," replied Azurielle. "I have detailed information on the nymph."

Dreelix smiled. "You're a little late, I'm afraid. We only just last week returned from a successful nymph Hunt. In fact, Zantoullios was just about to brief us all on the results."

"Perhaps I might listen in, then?" asked Azurielle. "My knowledge is quite considerable; I might be able to add to your list of useful nymph by-products."

"By all means," replied Dreelix with a smile.

Looking upon Azurielle, Buntleby thought it seemed almost as if she was even more beautiful than when she first

entered the meeting hall. He was fortunate enough to have an empty chair next to him, and with a grand flourish and a beaming smile he ushered her into it. As she took a seat, he detected a scent like wild flowers about her.

"Now then, Zantoullios, if you're quite finished there ...?" Dreelix asked with a raised eyebrow.

Zantoullios had a sopping wet cloth napkin in his hand, with which he had been mopping up his spilled drink. "Certainly," he replied, dropping the napkin on the table and approaching the lectern on Dreelix's left.

Zantoullios cleared his throat, looked at Azurielle, smiled, and began his briefing. "Last week, after hearing of the presence of a nymph in the forest nearby, three of us went out in search of her. We had, of course, studied up a bit on the magical abilities of nymphs and pretty much knew what to expect."

"If I may ask, what magical abilities were you aware of, and how did you plan on counteracting them?" asked Azurielle.

"First of all, it is well known that even a glimpse of a nymph can cause blindness.[1] We countered that by wearing black gauze blindfolds. These allowed us to make out figures around us, but not in any detail. Thus, the nymph appeared as no more than a silhouette and could cause our vision no harm."

"Very clever," commented Azurielle.

"Next, we knew nymphs can cast the dimension door spell once per day.[2] Not wishing her to escape so easily, we assigned Grindle the task of keeping her in one place. As you can well see, Grindle easily weighs more than a *dimension door* spell can transport; once he got his arms around her, she was unable to teleport away."

Looking at Grindle, Azurielle could indeed see how the man's weight would prevent the use of the spell. Sensing her eyes upon him, Grindle beamed, flexed, and added "It's all muscle," a statement belied by the folds of flesh wobbling under his upper arm.

"But how did you approach her undetected?" asked Azurielle. "Surely the nymph would have seen you stumbling up to her, wearing gauze blindfolds and waving your arms about in the air?"

"Not so," replied Zantoullios. "It was only necessary for us to get Grindle within striking distance. While the rest of us stayed well out of sight, Grindle *polymorphed* himself into a mole. Thus, he was able to walk right up to her — nymphs often pet forest creatures that approach, and she certainly wasn't going to suspect a mole of being a man just because he kept his eyes closed.

"Once Grindle felt the nymph stroking his mole-pelt, it was simplicity itself to cancel the spell and overpower her. When Grindle called out that he had the nymph, the rest of us approached, and as he held her steady, it was easy enough for us to cut off a few locks of her hair-useful in the production of *sleeping potions*[3]*—and* coax a few tears out of her."

"Oh? And how did you manage that?" asked the young woman.

"It was simple, really, she was very obliging. In fact, she began leaking tears as we began cutting her hair—something about diminishing her beauty, I think. Dreelix kept the tears flowing by describing what would happen if she tried to escape—you know, burning down the forest, stomping on baby bunnies, that sort of thing. He's really very good at it, you know."

"I have always had the gift of eloquence," admitted Dreelix.

At his seat next to the beautiful newcomer, Buntleby frowned. A quick look at his friend Willowquisp the Zoophile, seated across the room from him, confirmed that neither man thought much of their leader's tactics. Apparently, neither did Azurielle, for Buntleby thought he could sense repressed anger building beneath the calm exterior of her lovely young face.

"How much did we acquire?" asked Old Gumphrey, the oldest of the Monster Hunters and a sage of well renown.

"I'd estimate enough hair for a good dozen or so *sleeping potions,* " replied Dreelix. "I haven't begun distilling the tears into *philters of love* yet, but I'd guess we should have enough for at least four, maybe five. I'll keep you posted."

"Well, Azurielle, as you can see, I'd say that we did our homework on the nymph. Thank you, Zantoullios, you may step down." Returning his gaze to the young woman seated by Buntleby, Dreelix asked, "Is there anything you'd care to add?

"There certainly is," replied Azurielle, standing up and approaching the lectern. All eyes were upon her as she walked, including those of Zantoullios, who nearly tripped over his chair as he attempted to take his seat.

"First of all, your study and research of the nymph seems a bit one-sided: it seems you bothered to study only how to capture and use a nymph to your own benefit. And, I must say, even that list is not all-inclusive. I know of at least one other use to which you can put those locks of nymph's hair."[4]

"By all means, let's hear more!" said Dreelix, always eager to learn of more ways to plunder magical creatures of their properties. He nodded to the Conjurer Ablasta, who began her spell of recording. Instantly, a feather quill poised itself over a book of blank pages, ready to copy down the words that would lead the Monster Hunters Association into new avenues of exploitation.

"Before I take up those matters, I would like to say a few words in general about the nymph," said Azurielle. Dreelix rather grumpily agreed; he was eager to get to the important facts, but found it hard to say "no" to such a beauty. Besides, he could always just daydream through the boring parts.

"Nymphs are not normal, flesh-and-blood creatures of the ordinary world. They are spirits of nature, the physical embodiments of loveliness. They appear as perfectly formed human or elven women; there are no male nymphs. Nor,

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1. Not only men but also women are susceptible to being blinded by looking at a nymph, as are demihumans of either sex. Furthermore, one need not look directly at a nymph in order to be blinded: viewing one through a scrying device like a *crystal ball* or *reflecting pool* has the same effect. The image of a nymph in a simple mirror can cause blindness; even seeing a nymph's reflection in a pool of water can do the job (although a saving throw at +4 is probably in order due the distortion caused by ripples on the water).

Perhaps because satyrs are thought to be linked to dryads (who in turn are nature spirits), they can gaze upon a nymph with no danger of losing their sight. In fact, chasing wood nymphs is one of a satyr's favorite pastimes. For their part, nymphs are fond of satyrs because of their musical ability — nymphs greatly enjoy music and dancing. It should be noted that nymphs are immune to the magical effects of a satyr's piping.

2. Although the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome indicates that nymphs can cast *dimension door* spells, it does not state at what level the spell is cast. Treat nymphs as 12th-level wizards when casting *dimension door;* this value gives them a spell range of 360 yards. This range is comparable to the distance dryads (who are able to use *dimension door* to teleport back to their trees, and to whom nymphs are closely related) will stray from their tree homes,

3. A *sleeping potion* made from—among other things—a lock of nymph's hair will cause imbibers to save vs. poison at-2 or fall into a deep sleep lasting 2d4 hours.

4. If the nymphs hair is enchanted, woven into a cloth and sewn into a garment, the wearer adds 1 to his or her Charisma. Creating such a garment requires the use of an *enchant an item* spell but no further spells—the Charisma boost is powered by the magic from the nymphs hair and works as long as the garment is worn. At least 20 strands of hair from a single nymph are required to create such a garment. The types of such magical vestments are many, but popular ones include robes, capes, and shirts or blouses.

I should say, need there be, for nymphs do not reproduce as you understand it. Wherever there is a place of exceptional natural beauty, there you will find a nymph. They are, I suppose you would say, 'spontaneously generated' by the beauty of the natural world. Similarly, when a place of great beauty is marred, when an ancient grove of trees is chopped down for firewood, or an ocean grotto is used as a dumping-ground for waste, then the nymph inhabiting that place fades away and dies.

"Nymphs, being nature spirits, need not eat, sleep, or even breathe.[5] They will not fight, seeking instead to flee from danger by using their *dimension* door ability and by use of druidical magic.[6]

"Since they are so closely tied to with the forces of nature, nymphs are not creatures to be trifled with. True, they disdain physical combat, but that does not make them powerless. Nature's way is not always the gale force of a hurricane; often it is the stealthy, patient encroachment of a tiny plant growing between the cracks of a rock."

Dreelix cleared his throat to interrupt with a question, but the young woman cut him off at once.

"In a minute," snapped Azurielle, which gave Dreelix pause: he was not used to being spoken to in that fashion. Before he could open his mouth to object, though, the young woman had continued.

"Nymphs despise evil and will often go to great lengths to defeat it. And I must say, Dreelix," and here she looked at the President of the Monster Hunters Association with a look of intense personal hatred, "I am not pleased with this Association of yours."

Buntleby saw in his mind what was about to happen next and tried to shout out a warning, but he was a fraction of a second too late. He got out the words "She's a—" before everything went crazy.

The young woman removed a ribbon from her hair, and immediately her features altered. Like a serpent sloughing off a skin to reveal its glistening new scales, Azurielle's human features were cast off and replaced with those of a nymph-as perfect a physical specimen as any assembled in the room had ever seen or could ever hope to see. The ribbon, now in the form of a hat, slipped from her fingers to the floor.

The results were instantaneous. Old Gumphrey the sage cried out in rapture,[7] his nearly-toothless mouth held drooping open as tears streamed down his face from eyes that saw no more. Lady Ablasta, jealous enough at Azurielle's human disguise, could not handle this next step up in beauty, and her vision shut itself down almost as a defense mechanism. *No one can be that beautiful!* she thought to herself as her world went black. Willowquisp, eyes bugging out from their sockets, fell over backward in his chair and sat staring sightlessly up at the ceiling.

"—nymph," ended Buntleby quietly, for it was too late, and the damage was done.

Looking around the room, Buntleby took a quick damage assessment. Over half of their ranks had gone blind, from the looks of it. Dreelix, remarkably, was unaffected—perhaps because he doesn't place as great a value on beauty as he does on personal power, thought Buntleby.

But Azurielle was not finished with the Association yet. While Buntleby was scanning the room to see who had survived the visual onslaught, the young nymph had been loosening her robes. As her single garment slid to the floor, Buntleby had a quick glimpse out of the corner of his eye, felt his heart explode in his chest, and fell over backward in shock.

He felt his head crash against the hardwood floor and thought to himself that this was a good thing. *I can't be dead if my head hurts,* he reasoned.

5. Indeed, nymphs are immune to the *sleep* spell and similar magic, as well as to spells altering the ability to breathe (such as *water breathing).* Nymphs are occasionally found underwater in places of exceptional beauty, and they are not discomfited by the lack of air or the pressure exerted by the waters of the deep.

6. The MONSTROUS MANUAL® tome (and both the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® and 1st-Edition *Monster Manual* book before it) states that nymphs "can employ druidical priest spells at 7th ability level," then errs on the number of spells available to nymphs. Like normal 7th-level druids, nymphs can cast three 1st, three 2nd, two 3rd, and one 4th level spell each day. Unlike human druids, however, they do not require material components for their spells, and their magical nature also gives them a 50% resistance to all magic.

7. Those blinded by a nymph are often caught up in a magical, rapturous condition in which the brain becomes overloaded by the beauty it has just beheld and is unable to process any other inputs. This state lasts anywhere from 2-20 minutes, during which time the victim is completely unaware of his surroundings. A successful saving throw vs. paralyzation indicates that the victim's mind is strong enough to avoid entering such a state.

"You care only for your own selfish desires," continued Azurielle. "It matters not who is hurt in the process, so long as you collect your precious magical items. You took your nymph's hair all right, Dreelix. I ask you, was it worth the price?"

Dreelix, however, didn't answer. He stood staring straight ahead, as in shock, and then slowly, slowly, started tipping over to his right, landing in a heap on the floor. His eyes remained wide open, but he saw nothing, for he was stone cold dead.

Cautiously, Buntleby rose to his feet. He dared a quick look around. Zantoullios lay slumped over at his table, his face in the wine-soaked napkin he had used to clean up his spill. Several others lay dead on the floor, including mighty Grindle. In the middle of the circle of tables stood Azurielle, wrapping her robe back around her and tying it in place. "It is done," was all she had to say.

"Indeed it is," remarked Buntleby. "But was it necessary?"

"Necessary?" shrieked the nymph, running her hand through her hair, exposing several different lengths, where it had been haphazardly hacked away. "They assaulted me! They threatened me! They cut my hair!"[8]

"And you are no less beautiful because of it. Azurielle, I agree with you, what they did was wrong and it shames me to be associated with their actions, but your vengeance was equally wrong. You killed the three that did you harm, but at the same time you killed several people who had nothing to do with it, as well as blinding quite a few innocent bystanders."

"Think nothing of it," piped up Willowquisp from his perch on his overturned chair on the floor. "It was well worth the blindness to see such beauty just once in my lifetime."

Azurielle stared at her surroundings as if seeing them for the first time. "Perhaps you are right," she admitted. "But nature can be very unforgiving at times. I was overcome by disgust for the greed inherent in your Association. The things Dreelix said to me, just to force my tears!"

"True, there are those who are in it just for the greed, and I'm sure Dreelix himself heads that list. But that's not true of all of us. Willowquisp and I enjoy learning about the creatures around us; my friend and mentor Spontayne shares our views. And, greed or no, this Association does have its uses: the red dragon armor worn by Sir Parnifax, Paladin of the Order of the Bleeding Rose, was fashioned from the hide of a wyrm we slew for its blood, and that armor has saved his life on many an occasion. Zantoullios, when he isn't blowing up his lab in untested experiments, does sometimes come up with something new; just last month, he increased the efficacy of a *potion of healing* by altering the amount of powdered troll's blood used, and his troglodyte bladder tests proved conclusively—"

"All right," conceded the nymph. "I see your point. I must admit, I acted impulsively. Perhaps I should go."

"Perhaps that would be for the best," agreed Buntleby quietly. "But before you do, I want to say that on behalf of the Monster Hunters Association, I'm sorry for what was done to you. I'm afraid that's the only apology you'll get; Dreelix won't likely have much to say on the subject."

Azurielle's eyes narrowed. "You'll have him returned from death?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I must. It's the right thing to do. Besides," Buntleby added with a chuckle, "the money will come out of the Association's coffers. After paying to have everyone here raised or their sight restored, we'll be close to broke. And that is a much better revenge on Dreelix than just killing him." He gave her a quick wink. "This will get him even madder."

Azurielle smiled a sweet smile. "You are a remarkable man," she noted. "I notice that you're the only one able to face me in my true form. Not many can do so. The human mind is such a frail thing; it cannot often stand up to absolutes. You should be proud."

"Alas, I must say that I wish it were not so. Seeing you will always be one of my most treasured memories; I just hope that your unearthly beauty hasn't spoiled the appeal of the women I shall encounter hereafter."

"Let us hope not," replied the nymph, picking up her hat from the floor and placing it on her head. Instantly, her features altered to those of the lovely young woman who had entered the meeting-hall and caused such a disturbance, such a short time ago. The hat resumed its previous form of a hair ribbon.

"A hat of disguise," remarked Buntleby with appreciation.

"Yes, a gift from an admirer."[9] Azurielle approached the Conjurer Ablasta, staring straight ahead at nothing. Grabbing the feather quill even now writing down every word spoken, the nymph broke it in half and tossed it to the floor. Then she approached Buntleby, and whispered in his ear.

"Off the record, I'd like you to do me a favor, if you would."

Buntleby beamed. "Certainly."

"See to it that your Association does not bother me again. It is for their own good; I have alerted Moonsilver of their deeds, and he will be keeping a watch out for them."

"Moonsilver?"

"The unicorn who guards that part of the forest."[10]

"Of course, Azurielle. But then, on second thought, I don't think I'd better mention Moonsilver specifically. You never know, Dreelix might want to try some experiments with a unicorn horn."

Azurielle nodded toward the broken quill on the floor. "I thought as much."

"Still, I'll make sure that they don't trouble you further."

"You're a dear." She blew him a kiss, said a single word in her own musical language, and disappeared.

Johnathan Richards has recently moved from California to Nebraska, where he and his sons, Stuart and Logan, have resumed their AD&D® game campaign.

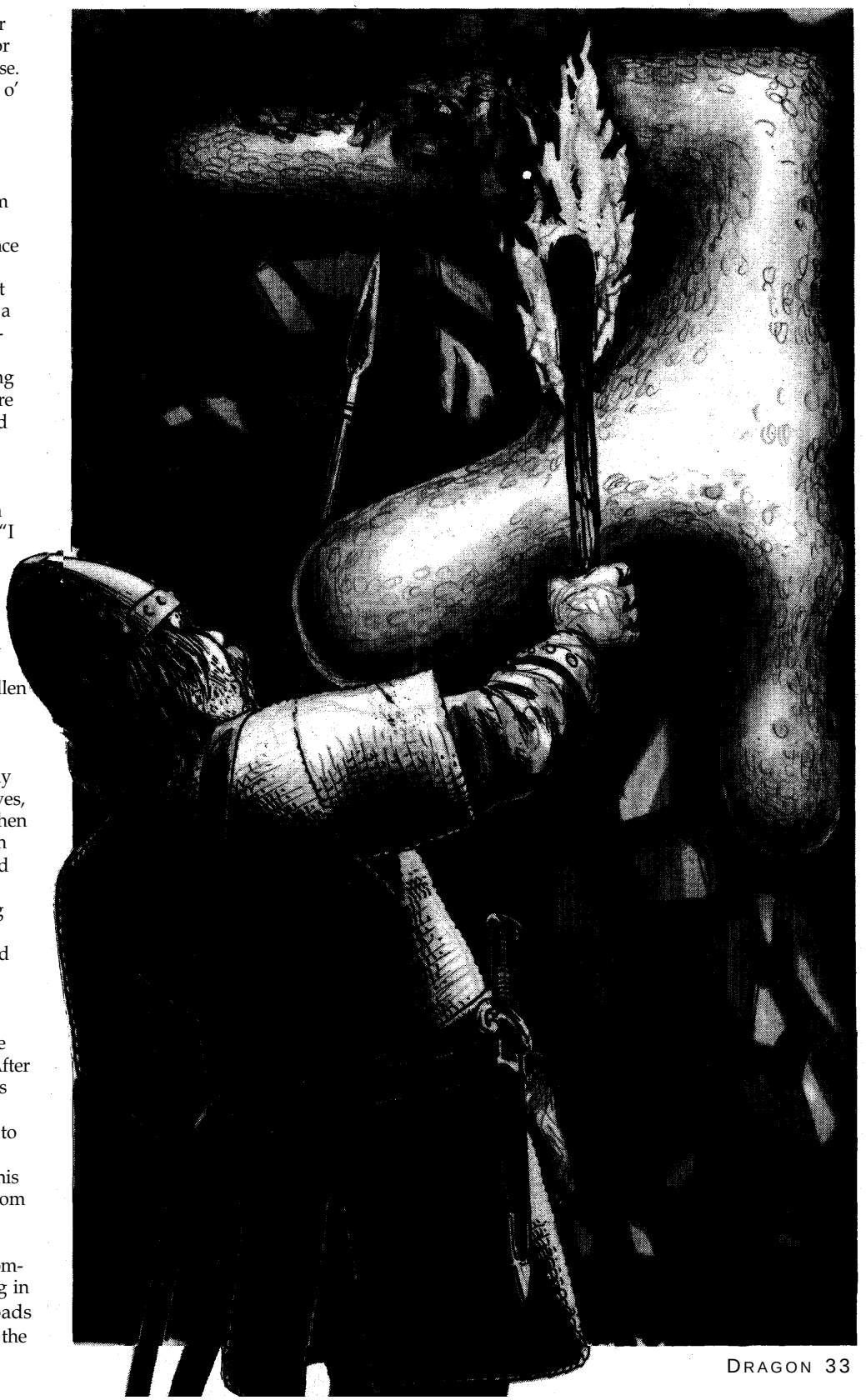
8. Nymphs, being physical manifestations of loveliness, care a great deal for their looks. They take special care to present themselves in the most appealing fashion, often weaving fragrant flowers into their hair. This is not all vanity and pride. however, as they are intimately entwined with the areas of natural beauty which gave them life. If a nymph is attacked and suffers damage, the area with which she is associated is likewise diminished in beauty. Killing a nymph is a sure way to cause her special area to become despoiled, and possibly even cursed. Specific curses are left to the DM, but those seeking inspiration should check out "Defiled and Cursed Groves" on pages 115-116 of *The Complete Druid'sHandbook.*

9. Most of a nymph's treasure consist of objects given to her by lovesick admirers. A great deal of these gifts are gemstones; a nymph will typically have 10-40 such gems stored in a safe place somewhere in her domain. Stored in the same location will usually be several potions, which the nymph makes herself using only natural ingredients from her domain. These potions are usually restorative in nature, such as potions of healing ,sweet water, and vitality, as well as antitoxins and *elixirs of health.* These potions are administered to those in need, most often the animals living in the immediate vicinity.

10. Those nymphs living in sylvan forests share a special relationship with unicorns. As the nymphs are nature spirits and do not normally fight. and unicorns are self-appointed guardians of their forests, unicorns go to great lengths to protect any nymphs inhabiting their woodlands, often fighting to the death. They are each able to speak the other's language.

The ecology of the ochre jelly

by Ed Greenwood



"Old favourites' time, is it?" Elminster asked, draining his cocoa and reaching for his pipe simultaneously with practiced ease. "I know that ye folks that play at the sort o' things that happen for *real* in the Realms are overly fond of pitting yer characters against witless giant amoebas! Just about their style, eh?"

I regarded him over the uplifted bottom of my mug. "Witless giant amoebas?" I asked, with the proper amount of deference in my tone.

"Ochre jellies, ye dolt!" Elminster shot back, expelling puffs of green smoke like a testy dragon. "Ye just asked about 'em — don't ye know anything to start with?"

"They're blobs, they ooze along looking for food — like adventurers — and they're always hungry," I offered. "I hoped you'd fill in the rest."

" 'Course ye did! 'Course ye did!" Elminster replied, drawing on his pipe. "And," he sighed (Ever see someone sigh while drawing on a pipe? Spectacular!), "I suppose — as usual — ye're right. Pay attention, then — and no questions, mind, till the tale's done."

I did as I was told, and Elminster related the tale of "How Grymmar Held the Pass":

"Now, in the days when the Sea of Fallen Stars was new to men, and the lands still wild and unsettled, bands of lawless men rose about scavenging and slaying and pillaging. Kings were hard put to it to pay and train fighting-men to guard themselves, to say nothing of their kingdoms. And when a king rode to war, it was likely to be with another king, over some insult or spurned daughter or an uncertain line on a map. Kings did not spend time or men chasing after a few brigands who would flee and leave traps behind, or set an ambush, and in the end melt away before searchers as though they had never been — until the searchers turned their backs, of course.

"The King of Cormyr was one of these monarchs, and a man with a problem. After spending a hot summer fighting all across his realm, from the Wyvernwater to Eveningstar, he had few men indeed left to call the Royal Host of Cormyr — some sixty-five stouthearts, to be exact. Then his weary ears heard news of an incursion from the east into Arabel, a merchant city too precious to give up without a fight.

"This was bad enough in itself, but compounding his plight were local cries rising in Eveningstar about bandits on the roads and a huge brigand army somewhere in the

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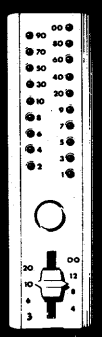

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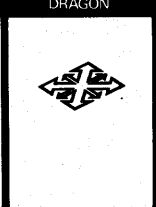
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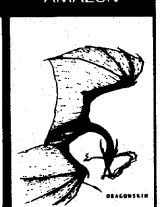
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mountains to the west. Nowadays, with the great fortress of High Horn looming over the west pass, such news would be of little concern. But in these early days of Cormyr's sovereignty, no such fortress existed to impede the progress of enemies from the west. Clearly, the king's men could not be in both places at once, and dividing the force could mean failure for both halves. But the king dared not disregard either threat. He called his men together to give them the facts of the matter and told them to be ready to travel the following day.

"Later that evening the king called for Grymmar, the oldest of his stalwarts, and asked for the grizzled lieutenant's counsel on how to divide soldiery and supplies so as to meet each threat. The king was surprised to hear that Grymmar had formulated a plan to deal with the brigands — a plan for which no soldiers would be needed, save Grymmar himself and a couple of strong men. The monarch gave his approval to the plan and his blessing to Grymmar, supplying him with documents that would enable him to acquire the goods and services he would need, and on the morrow the king led his army eastward.

"Grymmar spent part of this first day gathering supplies. With the king's authority to lend weight to his requests, he procured an unused stone coffin, placed within it three grunting and squealing pigs, and with the aid of his strong assistants loaded it into a cart along with a barrel of pitch and several torches. Then Grymmar and his curious entourage set out — not directly for the pass, but on a northerly route to a place not far from Eveningstar.

"Only days earlier, some of the king's men had cleaned out this place, an old dwarf-delve that had served as a hiding place for a group of bandits. A dozen ruffians there were in all, no trouble — but Grymmar and the others with him had all taken a fright when, as they leaned on their swords afterward in a deep and freshly bloodied chamber, something moving and shapeless and alive, ochre in color and horribly hungry in motion, had oozed in under the door.

" 'A flesh-eater! ' one of the warriors had warned, and they all had backed away hastily as the jellylike thing advanced. It flowed over stone and corpse alike, and left only bones and metal in its wake. The soldiers circled toward the exit, rushed through the doorway, slammed the portal, and sealed the space between door and floor with loose dirt.

"Now Grymmar made a return visit to the bandit hold, and with the help of his companions transported the contents of the cart down into the chamber where the flesh-eater was last seen. The coffin was set out, its lid awry, and the men sat nearby inside a circle of pitch they had smeared on the floor. Fairly soon the flesh-eater appeared, attracted by their presence, flowing eerily along a wall. Grymmar set the ring of pitch aflame, and the jelly shrank away from the men and went for the pigs in the coffin. When the thing was entirely inside the coffin, the men leapt forward, put the lid back in place, and sealed the container with more of the pitch. Then they carried the coffin back to the cart. Grymmar and one of his helpers headed directly for High Horn Pass, and the other man veered toward the druids' grove in the forest to the south and east of the pass.

"By the time Grymmar reached the pass at sunset of the following day, he could see the bandits in the distance, approaching from the other direction. He and his cohort unloaded the coffin, storing it under a ledge where it would not be detected in the darkness, and watched from an elevated hiding place as the brigands made camp in the pass itself — an expanse of land broad and flat enough to house all of their tents at once, although they had to keep rather close quarters.

"Then the druids arrived in the dark of night, responding to the summons of their king as conveyed by Grymmar's helper, and it was time to put the last stage of the plan into action. Grymmar crept back down to the coffin, scraped away the pitch, and loosened the lid. At the same time, the druids began their enchantments. Massive, threatening clouds formed in the sky above the pass, and before too long the air was rent with driving rain, booming thunder, and crackling bolts of lightning. The bandits were protected from the elements inside their tents, and they slept unafraid, but tent-cloth could not keep them safe from the real danger.

"To this day, some folk still tell of how the druids saved Eveningstar by bringing down the awesome storm that decimated the brigand army and forced the survivors to turn back. But others know better, for they have heard the real tale. The storm abated after a time, and at first light the next morning when Grymmar and the druids looked down upon the bandits' campsite, they saw scores of flesh-eaters — born of the lightning strikes — and dozens of corpses, many of them already nothing more than skeletons. The few bandits fortunate enough to escape death from the jellies now could see the carnage that had been wrought during the night, and they ran for their lives back the way they had come. . . .

". . . And that was how Grymmar held the pass."

At this point Elminster sat back and reignited his pipe, satisfied with the way he had told the story. I thanked him — and indeed it was a good tale — and then set about quizzing him as to the practical (to adventurers) details of the ochre jelly. Elminster related the following information, much of it drawn from the *Bestiary* of Hlammech the Naturalist:

An ochre jelly is amorphous in form, having an outer elastic "skin" or bag of tough, translucent cells, ochre in color. Inside the skin is a large mass of fluid — the main bulk of the creature. This fluid is thick, soupy stuff — stabbing an ochre jelly

won't cause the stuff to drain away quickly, like the way a wineskin loses its contents if punctured; fluid will ooze from the wound until excess skin cells (produced from the cellulose the creature devours, and carried around in little globules inside the fluid) arrive to "patch the leak." In this fashion, an ochre jelly can heal any wound it suffers from an edged weapon within 5-12 rounds (d8 + 4). A wound from a blunt weapon is more traumatic, rupturing a greater number of skin cells and taking 11-20 (d10 + 10) turns to close. In either case, the hit points lost when the wound was suffered are regained when it is healed.

Because of its construction, an ochre jelly can squeeze through any crack large enough to permit a thin "wafer" of skin cells (both sides) and internal fluids to pass — about an inch in width is required for an average-sized jelly. The creature's movement rate is only 1" when it compresses itself to travel through an opening smaller than the jelly's normal thickness. When at rest and under normal conditions, an average-sized ochre jelly is 3 to 6 inches thick and occupies a surface area equivalent to a 6' -diameter circle; however, the term "at rest" is theoretical in this case, because an ochre jelly never stops moving except to devour prey. When it moves, it does so by extending one or more pseudopods of skin and fluid, becoming elongated in the direction of movement, and setting up a rippling motion that enables it to "slosh" forward by means of inertia.

Ochre jellies can adhere readily to walls, ceilings, glass, and so forth — they do not seem affected by water, wine, oil, grease, and the like, and have never been observed to slip — but their grip on surfaces is not strong enough to enable them to pull open chests, armor, closed doors, etc., and they can be readily scraped or shoved off of a surface by a creature of at least average strength.

The creatures are non-intelligent and have no visual organs as we know them. They can detect heat, vibrations, and the scents of organic substances, and will move in the direction from where these stimuli come (in the order given; ochre jellies apparently "prefer" live humans or animals as prey, but can "smell" wood or plant growth, or corpses, if no live creatures are in the vicinity). They can sense the heat of a torch flame at a range of 500 feet, and the body heat of a living animal from 100 feet away; their sensitivity to vibrations (such as those caused by footsteps) or scents has a range of at least 500 feet, and often much farther depending on the severity of the vibration or the intensity of the odor; for instance, an ochre jelly can detect a troglodyte, by its scent, from several hundred yards away.

Ochre jellies will move mindlessly toward any stimulus, but will not voluntarily come into direct contact with any stimulus (such as a flame) that can damage them. In the absence of any detectable stimulus, an ochre jelly will continue to flow in the direction it is heading until forced to turn or double back on its path because of an obstacle; Grymmar and his companions were bound to eventually encounter the ochre jelly in the closed-off chamber, because the creature had nowhere else to go.

When an ochre jelly comes into contact with any consumable (i.e., living or once-living) substance, a number of one-way valves in the creature's skin surface will open, and globules of the corrosive digestive fluid inside will be expelled onto the prey. This fluid seems to be a sort of acid-based enzyme which first eats away and then breaks down (by chemical reaction) the flesh or cellulose. The ochre jelly then reabsorbs the digestive fluid at the same time that it ingests the nutrients, through a set of similar one-way valves that work in the opposite direction. These valves are very selective, only letting in the fluids that the ochre jelly "intends" to absorb; the creatures have been encountered in coastal salt waters, and in order to subsist in such an environment, they must be able to prevent the taking in the water with which they are surrounded.

As so often happens with the unique body fluids of certain mysterious creatures, the acid-enzyme secreted by an ochre jelly becomes inert if the creature is killed or the fluid is somehow prevented from being reabsorbed by the body. This neutralization of the fluid takes place immediately upon the death of an ochre jelly, or if the creature is forced to abandon partially consumed prey (which is why a victim's flesh does not continue to "dissolve" if the jelly is killed or pushed off). Similarly, the skin of an ochre jelly loses its distinctive properties after the creature is killed and cannot be salvaged for any useful purpose.

An ochre jelly can and will instinctively flow over or around its prey, enveloping it so as to retain contact if the target moves or struggles. If the creature is attached to a wall or a ceiling, it can send out pseudopods to contact something edible that is below or beside it. Once having made contact in this fashion, the jelly can detach itself from the wall or ceiling and flow onto the victim.

An ochre jelly can be damaged by cold- or fire-based attacks. Severe cold (freezing temperature or lower) of a lasting nature will further impair the creature, slowing its movement rate to 2" and adding 2-5 rounds to the time required for it to heal a wound, since its internal fluids cannot flow as freely to reach the affected area. (Note that a *cone of cold* spell, to name one example, is not cold "of a lasting nature," since the spell's duration is instantaneous.) Any single fire-based attack that does damage equal to at least one-quarter of the creature's maximum hit points will cause a wound that takes 16-25 (d10 + 15) rounds to heal, and for 4-7 rounds following the attack the ochre jelly will lose 3 hit points per round as fluid continues to leak from the wound. Fire damage of less severity will take 11-20 rounds to heal, the same as for a blow with a blunt weapon.

The sudden application of intense electrical energy (such as a lightning bolt or magical or natural origin) does not damage an ochre jelly; instead, this serves to increase the creature's metabolism and cause it to divide immediately (within the round following the electrical contact) into a number of smaller jellies, each identical to the original creature in all respects except for size and damage; they are capable of doing 2-6 (d4 + d2) points of damage per attack. The number of "offspring" created is usually (75%) 2-4, but occasionally as many as 5-8 are produced. These smaller jellies will grow into normal-sized creatures (doing the usual 3-12 points of damage) within 1-3 months after the split occurred.

In rare instances, an ochre jelly will split "voluntarily" into two equal-sized creatures (each doing normal damage), but only when the original creature is of huge size. Ochre jellies grow slightly every time they feed, but do not shrink when they go without food — and they can survive for several weeks on little or no nourishment. No example is known of an ochre jelly that died of "old age"; perhaps they do not age (as we understand the term), or perhaps they decompose quickly when they die in this manner, thus leaving no evidence of their passing.

An ochre jelly cannot be poisoned or intoxicated or otherwise adversely affected by attacks with *purely* fluids (including acid but not including flaming oil). It will absorb all such fluids, "walling" them into globules surrounded by excess skin cells, suspending them within its internal body fluid, and holding them harmlessly until it is not feeding on prey or involved in combat, whereupon it will expel them through the same openings that release its digestive fluid. A physical attack upon a jelly that ruptures a globule of this stored fluid may cause its contents to squirt out at the attacker.

Astute students of biology will note that ochre jellies are not precisely "amoebas" as we know them — but when I mentioned this to Elminster, he merely fixed me with a cold eye and grunted, "Hah! And what do your scientists in this world know of *anything?*" And that is all I learned from him about the ochre jelly.

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Ogre

"Hungry eyes peer down from craggy hills. They fix their feral gaze on twisting plumes of smoke rising from the homes of men. They wait for the dark. Brutish giants with obscene appetites for flesh and unnatural desires, ogres commit unspeakable acts on wind-blown peaks. They waylay travelers on whom they slake their fury and claim the skulls in remembrance of nights well spent. In the dark, they prowl the woods and dance their wild jigs on rocky mountainsides. The echo of the ogres' freakish cavorting shakes the shutters of far-off homesteads in the misty hours before the morn, reminding men to treasure every sunrise, for peril lurks close at hand when darkness falls again."

—Harlo Mardacci, **On Giants and Giantkin**

While orcs, hobgoblins, and bugbears are a threat to civilized man, they are predictable in their actions, and easily dealt with individually. The same is not true with ogres. These brooding menaces lurk on the fringes of society, striking out with terrific rage against those who can hardly hope to defend themselves. They are brutal children, prone to violence and completely lacking any sense of morality. For an ogre, cruelty is a sport and murder is a game.

Overview

Ogres are a sickness on the world. Horrific half-breeds of men and greater giants, these outcasts turned to unnatural ways and soon became twisted things. Malformed in body and psychotic in mind, ogres breed horror wherever they roam. They have plagued the realms of men since time immemorial, becoming legendary monstrosities whose ghastly reputation ensures even those who've never laid eyes on one fear them.

The savagery of ogres is especially terrifying, if for no other reason than they hold a distorted mirror up

to mankind. Many monsters tear men limb from limb and devour them, but few enjoy it as much ogres do, or play with their prey in the manner a morally deficient sociopath might. Heinous torture and slow, painful consumption await those who fall into ogres' clutches. Death comes slowly and only after a victim is broken in mind, body, and soul.

The most terrifying thing about ogrekind is their malignant sense of humor. What men call horror launches ogres into fits of oafish laughter. The look of anguish on a dwarf's face as his limbs are torn off, and the horrid sounds he makes, elicit wild guffaws from nearby ogres, and more than one no doubt mocks the poor victim, imitating his pained grunts with drooling glee. The sight of an elf with his back broken and his torso bent to force the back of his head to touch the small of his back is high comedy to an ogre.

In general, ogres possess no appreciation for anything beyond these evil torments, wild revels, lusty exertions, and the taste of savory, barbecued human meat. While some giants are known for cave paintings and other achievements in artistry, most ogres find such pursuits a contemptuous waste of time. They are not proficient at much beyond wholesale murder, although most tribes are industrious enough to forge basic tools and weapons, and many enjoy whittling wood pipes and fashioning crude twangy lutes and banjos to thumb around a blazing bonfire late into the night.

Ogres fear things larger than themselves, and they find it difficult to view smaller creatures as threats. They are gluttonous beasts prone to obesity and often eat themselves into a stupor when victims are plentiful. These lazy, cantankerous monsters make unsuitable minions for greater villains unless the masterminds can keep the ogres toiling with the constant threat of extreme physical violence. Still, when roused to anger or on the hunt, there are few sights more terrifying than a charging ogre.

Ecology

Ogres are giants. Even the smallest among their brood towers 2 feet over the tallest half-orc, and the biggest ogres top out at a terrifying 14 feet in height. On average, they weigh 800 pounds, but a well-fed ogre's mass can reach a staggering 2,000 pounds. An ogre can survive off any food, although it always prefers man flesh. Most ogres are woolly brutes, their chests like dark forests, and their arms matted with sweaty swaths of black or brown hair. Their heads are flat and most of their noses pug. Ogres' eyes tend to be too small for their bloated faces, hiding in the folds of their sloping fleshy brows. Their legs are stumpy and too short for their massive hulking frames, causing them to hobble about in a fashion that would be comical if not for the rusty gore-soaked hooks they wave about menacingly.

Mig-a-Mug-Tug

Ogres love a rousing bout of Mig-a-Mug-Tug. It's a simple pastime for their brutish minds: Two competitors grab each other by the ear, nose, or other sensitive spot and then squeeze and wrench them about as hard as they can. The first to collapse yowling in agony loses. Both competitors make Strength checks every round and then make Fortitude saves (the DC equals the opponent's check). A competitor who fails the save collapses, stunned for a round, and loses the contest. Ogres love other vicious games, too, like "Hatch-a-Catch" (in which they hurl rusty hatchets back and forth to each other, and the first to shed a finger or other bit loses), and "Man-Dueling." In the last, two ogres pick up living humanoids by the ankles and swing them at each other. When the "man-swords" are reduced to pulpy messes, the ogres discard them for fresh ones.

Ogres breed kin to kin and favor large families. Their bloodlines sullied by incest, these monstrosities are cursed by the gods with hideous deformities and madness beyond measure. Some ogre tribes eventually degenerate into drooling diseased progeny, barely capable of speech after 20 or so generations. These sick, blind abominations scorn the kiss of daylight, claw at the hills for worms, and feed on anything that crosses their paths. Most bloodlines prove resilient and retain a sinister cunning.

Female ogres are nearly always pregnant, although when they are not near the end of their terms, ogre women prove as fierce in battle as their male relatives. If male ogres are prone to obesity, females are even more so. Most ogresses outweigh males by a few hundred pounds. Some grow to mind-boggling girth, with their disgusting rolls of flesh hanging in gooey dollops on their arms, legs, torsos, and face. This excess of fat is extremely attractive to males of the tribe, who like their women big.

Freakishly hardy, ogres develop faster than most other creatures, topping out in height and girth at only 6 years of age. Females keep steady supplies of young coming to replace the ones murdered by their jealous siblings, beaten to death by their male kin, or slain by the arrows of humans and elves. Most ogres' lives are cut short by violence long before nature takes its course, and one who reaches 30 is considered a wizened elder.

Although they prefer to breed within their own family, ogres do occasionally force themselves onto other creatures. They revel in their basest desires, which sometimes leads them to assault those unfortunate enough to cross their paths. Few of their victims survive to bear the fruit of these exertions, but those half-breeds that live are occasionally kept by the ogres as children. These ogrekin are horribly malformed, their inbred genes mixing sourly with other stock and resulting in extreme aberrations. Ogre genes destroy a blood line. Ogrekin can mate with humans, but

Dancing Feet and Jabber Jaws

Ogres love a good hootenanny. They often build huge bonfires and madly cavort about the flames deep into the night. They particularly enjoy skull-jigs, adorning themselves with their favorite skulls, which clack and clatter away as the ogres jump and frolic obscenely. As a special treat, when captives are handy, the ogres hog-tie them and dance out their jigs atop the victims' bodies, pulping organs and crunching bones with each stomp.

Music might soothe the savage beast, but it makes the ogres wild. They love cacophonous sound, and often howl and hoot out "songs" they call Jabber-Jaw to accompany their jigs. They also love to coax grunting, yowling songs out of captives by brutal and often base means.

nothing in their family tree ever again resembles a natural human man or woman.

Ogre musk is vile and particularly pungent. A creature with the scent ability that has smelled it before can detect the reek of ogre at twice the normal range, and animals grow skittish when an ogre draws near. Ogres are fiercely territorial and use their spoor to mark their stomping ground. Piles of reeking waste are the first hints a party is entering ogre territory.

These contemptible creatures favor the night and lair in dark caves on lonely mountainsides. Although the sun does them no harm, ogres shun it when they can. Ogres flee a songbird's morning call and the cries of roosters as if they were cavalry trumpets, lurching back to their inky caves and waiting for the dark night before returning to their grim business. Some ogres go as far as to worship the night and howl mournfully at the moon. The sounds of their savage cries are so terrifying they silence wolves and coyotes. Moonless nights are for killing, and those are an ogre's favorite time to hunt. During the new moon in lands where ogres lair, even the bravest souls do not willingly walk the roads after sundown.

Habitat & Society

Ogres are fierce predators, laying waste to other species once they infest a territory. Their gluttony is only overshadowed by trolls, whom ogres envy and hate but fear too much to oppose. The only saving grace of ogrekind is their highly fractious nature. They murder each other as often as they do others, eating their own as readily as any other repast. Ogres never organize into groups larger than a few families loosely connected in a tribal fashion.

Tribes are highly patriarchal and are ruled by a Pappy, who earns this title by fathering as many brood as possible and keeps it by killing any contenders. Only virility and strength are respected among ogrekind. Wisdom, canny thought, and abilities such as craftsmanship are completely indeterminate in establishing an ogre's place in their society.

When male ogres reach puberty, they are sent on lone hunts for skulls. These hunts traditionally take place during full moons ("so's prey can see ya comin', got's to hunt good"), and the young ogres are sent down the mountain to menace the closest settlement. They know better than to return empty-handed, as the punishment for failing this rite of passage involves a number of torments culminating in terrible mutilation with rusty hooks. Even those who return with skeletal trophies in hand are not safe. Their skulls must satisfy the Pappy of the tribe, and if the elder ogre finds one lacking, the same grisly fate awaits the hopeful young giant who brought it. Oftentimes, an ogre's performance on its lone skull hunt goes a long way to determining its place in the tribe. Stories of Jaagrath Kreeg's lone hunt are proof of this—when the oversized ogre boy returned with 16 gore-slick skulls on a rope, including that of feared hunter Kalgoras and his four hardy sons, Kreeg's high rank in the clan was cemented immediately.

Ogres often raid in small groups or hunt small caravans of travelers, but on occasion, usually in the weeks of early spring, an entire tribe descends on a community to wreak utter havoc. Springtime anywhere near ogre territory is a time of great trepidation. Communities with nearby ogres hold none of the customary spring festivals common to most countryside villages, instead holding off on such revels until summer shows its bright sun and the ogres' wild season of mayhem abates. These springtime full-scale attacks are the stuff of pure nightmare. If help arrives too late, it finds only headless gore-spattered corpses spitted on rusty hooks and left hanging from trees to twist in the wind, with the choicest bits of flesh cleaved away.

After an evening of slaughter, ogres dance late into the night, the jawbones and bleached pates of their kills jangling obscenely. The echo of bones clattering can be heard up and down the mountain when ogres are at play. Ear-splitting howls of beastly fury echo through the hills, and the aroma of the cooked flesh rides the wind down the mountain.

Ogres are slothful by nature and more easily bored than most races. They can't pay attention to anything for very long unless it's squealing in pain or humiliation. They make poor sentries and even worse craftsmen. The only way a Pappy coaxes hard work out of these lazy brutes is to constantly threaten them with horrible pain and violence, and even this fails to motivate the slobbery giants to do more than pretend to work most of the time.

Ogres laugh at little things. They find creatures smaller than themselves hilarious. The sight of a human adventurer brandishing a sword sends most ogres into hysterical fits of grunting guffaws. They don't take humans, dwarves, elves, halfings, gnomes (especially gnomes), orcs, or goblinoids seriously at all, often laughing themselves to tears when such teensy foes challenge them. It's not until they are harmed by these miniature enemies that the ogres fly into sputtering rages and spit their foes on their rusty hooks. Ogres' underestimation of smaller enemies is often used to great advantage by wily adventurers.

Religion varies widely from tribe to tribe. Some have no interest in the divine, others are devoutly spiritual worshippers of Lamashtu, a few pay homage to idols of the wild, and many pray to various moon gods (real and invented). Most of their rituals involve bonfires (the only kind of light ogres seem to enjoy), drumming or other simple repetitive music to induce trancelike states, wild dancing, and "feeling the presence of the gods"—a savage gyration of the body, sometimes a dance, sometimes little more than a foaming seizure. Ogre tribes who bother to worship usually build shrines to whatever entity they revere, offering sacrifices of fresh kills to their chosen patron.

Campaign Role

Ogres are the savage heart of darkness. They are man turned monster by inbreeding, cannibalism, and offense to all things natural. Ogres allow a GM to show a party what depravities monsters can sink to for no other reason than amusement. Some villains commit horrors for the sake of sustenance (trolls, ghouls, vampires), or for the pursuit of knowledge or power (liches), but ogres do it out of a perverse sense of pleasure and because it makes them laugh. This folly is something all civilized races, at their darkest moments, are capable of.

An adventure against ogres is a trip into savagery in every sense. Ogres live in the wild untamed heights of unforgiving mountains. To battle ogres or avenge their malignant raids on communities, PCs leave the civilized world at their back and venture into places where brutality and animalistic fury are the only means of survival. Even the most principled heroes might surrender themselves to the wild and find dark places inside their souls they never wanted to know existed when they are faced with an enemy as savage as ogrekind.

Ogre Feats

Night Stalker

Ogres are big brutes, but some among them excel at hunting human prey in the dead of night and murdering them quietly.

Prerequisites: Stealthy, darkvision, Large or larger.

Benefit: While you are in areas of shadowy illumination or natural darkness, you ignore all size penalties to Hide checks and gain a +2 to Move Silently checks.

Quick At Hand

When enraged, ogres tend to grab the closest heavy objects and bring them to bear.

Prerequisite: Ogre.

Benefit: You may use any item as an improvised melee or ranged weapon without penalty.

Treasure

Ogres have little use for sparkly things. They hate the sun and all bright light. They hate the glitter of gold and blinding shimmer of diamonds. They use these trappings of civilization only when it suits their purpose—such as lures for man-traps, or to barter for slaves with species more powerful than themselves (otherwise they just take the slaves) to play with as they please. Ogres abhor money, viewing it as a weakness of tiny man-things, who count their coins when they should be lustily feeding and murdering their way through life. Such treasure found on their victims is usually discarded at the site of slaughter.

The only treasures ogres truly appreciate are good pelts. They love the smooth feeling of a fine speckled wolfskin cloak, or the velvety caress of a bear rug underfoot. In an ogre's lair, an adventurer likely finds exquisite pelts of all manner of creatures (including the leathery skin of humans and demihumans). Ogres also love vices: good pipe smoke, narcotics of any kind, and moonshine and other potent spirits are treasured by these monsters as well. Ogres sometimes raid communities known for their wineries or stills just to claim casks of inebriating man-drink. Some tribes ferment their own repugnant concoctions, but these can hardly be considered treasure.

Variants

Some ogres' inbreeding results in different appearances than the standard one described above. One tribe in particular, called the Thickuns, is recognized by its gigantically oversized heads and huge mouths that take up more than half their puffy faces (these ogres gain a secondary bite attack). The ogres of the Pickins tribe grow tall and lean like dead trees, and their fingers end in bony protrusions (they have natural claw attacks).

The Shaggras are a bizarre band of forest-dwelling ogres covered in dark fur that reeks of musk. Their fur has a freakish life of its own, undulating and even grabbing at enemies (these ogres have the improved grab special ability). The bushy thick fur also entangles weapons and cushions blows (the Shaggras have damage reduction 5/piercing).

Other tribes inbreed with such tenacity and enthusiasm that their already fragile gene pool buckles under the strain. Over time, these degenerate ogres turn feral, go blind, and develop grossly bulging limbs and chests. They rarely survive longer than a few more generations once their bloodline degenerates to this point, but these psychotic monstrosities always wreak plenty of terror on nearby populaces before they die out. Incapable of speech or even using simple weapons, degenerate ogres make up for these drawbacks with a bestial tenacity in combat. They rip, mash and pummel any prey they detect, often swinging smaller foes about by the ankles and dashing the unfortunate's brains against a tree trunk or boulder. Their deranged minds cannot grasp concepts like pain or fear and they fight well after most other creatures would have succumbed to their wounds.

DEGENERATE OGRE **CR 4**

CE Large giant

Init –1; **Senses** blindsight 30 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 8, flat-footed 16
(+3 armor, –1 Dex, +5 natural, –1 size)

hp 34 (4d8+16)

Fort +8, **Ref** +0, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft. in hide armor (40 ft. natural)

Melee slam +7 (1d6+8) and
bite +5 (1d6+4)

Ranged rock +1 (1d6+8)

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

Special Attacks Pummel

TACTICS

Before Combat Degenerates attack any creatures they detect without rhyme or reason, or anything remotely resembling a battle plan.

During Combat A degenerate is an unsubtle opponent, closing to melee range with the closest target and pummeling him to paste.

Morale Degenerates do not flee.

STATISTICS

Str 26, **Dex** 8, **Con** 18, **Int** 4, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 5

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +12

Feats Multiattack, Power Attack

Skills Climb +8, Listen +4

Languages —

SQ blindsight 30 ft., scent, utterly psychotic

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Pummel (Ex) If a degenerate ogre succeeds on both slam attacks against a single foe it may immediately pummel the target into oblivion, dashing him on the ground like a rag doll or savaging him with fists and a head butt. The victim takes an additional 2d6+8 damage and must immediately make a DC 20 Fortitude save or be dazed for 1 round.

Utterly Psychotic (Ex) A degenerate's inbreeding results in its mind abandoning any semblance of rational thought. They are immune to any mind-affecting effect and know no fear. Also, anyone attempting to commune with a degenerate's mind either though telepathic communication or similar magic immediately takes 1d6 points of Wisdom damage. Additionally, degenerates do not register pain and ignore any effect that stuns or dazes them. They also fight unhampered until reduced to –10 hp.

Ogres in Golarion

Ogre tribes infest many mountains throughout Golarion but are most populous in Varisia. Here they cavort and raid at their leisure, unopposed in most areas, except by particularly powerful orders of rangers such as the Black Arrows. The ogres scorn other giants, who tend to bully them into hard labor.

Hook Mountain holds claim to the most bloodthirsty ogres in Golarion. Many tribes infest the place, but the most noted of these are the terrifying Kreegs. The Kreeg ogres swear they are descended from the Mage Kings of the Wyvern Mountains, powerful ogre mages who claimed those forlorn peaks and ruled them for an age after the Runelords fell. They inhabited grim wonders of Thassilon, such as Skull's Crossing, but their obsessive inbreeding saw their decline into atrocity and self-destructive madness. Today's Kreegs aren't much better.

In the Mwangi Expanse resides a tribe of jet-black-skinned ogres, called the Mutangos, whose talent for stealthy murder is widely touted. The Mutangos are purportedly less savage than their northern kin, even offering their services as mercenaries on occasion, and sometimes lending their poisoned spears to other jungle peoples in efforts to push back expeditions by explorers and those seeking to gut the rain forest for resources.

Names

Ogres take characteristically simple names, either bestowed upon them by their unimaginative parents or fiercer monikers they give themselves.

Male: Biggun, Bogros, Chackajack, Chucky, Crunch-Bones, Fuddle, Groof, Gruggapug, Kimil, Kletus, Loppo, Ogsaw, Ripper, Saulmo, Yabbers

Female: Briarsnatch, Chips, Debb, Dorella, Ellargin, Heggra, Jully, Kandy, Karah, Leer, Matrag, Raea, Shinka, Snaggle, Ugg

Ogre

This creature's python-thick apish arms and stumpy legs conspire to drag its dirty knuckles through the wet grass and mud. The stooped giant blinks its dim eyes and an excess of soupy drool spills over its bulbous lips. Its misshapen features resemble a man's face rendered in watercolor, then distorted by a careless splash. It snarls as it charges, a sound the offspring of bear and man might make, showing flat black teeth well suited for grinding bones to paste.

OGRE **CR 3**

Large Giant

Init –1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 8, flat-footed 16 (+3 armor, –1 Dex, +5 natural, –1 size)

hp 29 (4d8+11)

Fort +6, **Ref** +0, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft. in hide armor (40 ft. natural)

Melee greatclub +8 (2d8+7) or

Melee ogrehook +8 (3d6+7)

Ranged javelin +1 (1d8+5) or

Ranged hatchet +1 (1d8+5)

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

TACTICS

Before Combat Ogres rarely lay ambushes, and when they do, it's not so much because they are crafty as because they are lazy. If they can kill a man with a well-thrown hatchet, they don't have to fight or chase him down.

During Combat Once battle is joined, ogres wade into the thick of melee, swinging their clubs and hooks at any target that presents itself.

Morale When their prey turns out to be more dangerous than they thought, the rare moment of good sense seizes ogres; they flee if reduced to less than 5 hp.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 8, **Con** 15, **Int** 6, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 7

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +12

Feats Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatclub)

Skills Climb +5, Listen +2, Spot +2.

Languages Giant

Gear bone javelins (5), greatclub, hatchets (2), hide armor, leather sack holding a collection of skulls and other bones, ogrehook, skinning knife

On the evening of our third day we came upon a caravan that had been ambushed by a band of ogres. They were doing terrible things. We managed to drive them off, but of the survivors... they would never be the same again.

by Tim Hitchcock • illustrated by Peter Bergting

the Ecology of the OGRE MAGE

Physically powerful, viciously cunning, and incredibly egotistical, ogre mages number among the most cruel and intimidating of the mortal races. Possessing an array of potent unnatural abilities, these lesser giants' terrible appearances and fearsome natures seem more akin to fiends than the crude ogres of the Material Plane. In truth, ogre mages hold connections to both their brutal namesakes and darker powers, rising from pits of savagery to forge barbarism and brutality into a weapon pointed at the heart of civilization.

HISTORY OF THE OGRE MAGE

While the libraries of sages and the lore of civilized peoples hold varied suppositions on the lineage of ogre mages, members of this cruel race refute all claims penned by humanoid hands—dismissing them as fearful lies and jealous insults. Through their varied bloodlines ogre mages carry their own tale, claiming it as the sole truth of their sorrowful history. Only one written copy of this tale is rumored to exist, tattooed upon the petrified skin of a gigantic primordial ancestor they call Muaj, the Last Immortal.

In those eldritch times, when man was closer to beast, many barbarous mortal tribes revered Vaprak the Destroyer above all other gods, as pain and violence served as the only absolute laws of existence. It was a time of ceaseless war, and Vaprak's followers called upon his favor with dark rituals and bloody sacrifices. In turn, the Destroyer rewarded his devotees with unholy blessings. His disciples birthed great warriors, hulking brutes twice the height of ordinary men with great claws and thick skin. For centuries, Vaprak's tribes remained locked in brutal and bloody conflict while deep in his Abyssal realm he greedily feasted upon the souls of the fallen.

Having endured ages of blood, many of the weaker tribes slowly turned from Vaprak and sought the salvation of more merciful deities. Over time, thousands abandoned the Destroyer, converting to benevolent faiths and—to Vaprak's disgust—they prospered.

Eventually, only those tribes descended from Vaprak's blessed warriors remained devoted to him, creatures the emerging civilized races reviled and called ogres and trolls—driving them to the harshest and most remote places of the world.

Still Vaprak refused to accept defeat. Deep in the Abyss, from the ranks of his demonic spawn, Vaprak summoned his three most powerful sons—Anori, Hakuni, and Muaj. He promised to make them feared and worshiped and raise them as gods in his own bloody pantheon if they'd perform a solitary task for him: be born as mortals for a single lifetime and lead his armies to victory over civilization. Greedy and destructive, the bloody-minded siblings bowed to their father's will.

Soon after, the shamans of Vaprak's three greatest remaining tribes received a vision. In it, each foresaw a champion born unto his tribe, a terrifying creature whose leadership would usher in a new age of conquest. The vision proclaimed that the three tribes were Vaprak's chosen ones, and under the tyranny of his own sons they would spill forth from the mountains and swamps to slaughter the weak and reclaim the world in the Destroyer's name.

Shortly thereafter, under the light of a full, blood-red moon, the sons of Vaprak were born to each tribe. Strange creatures of demonic appearance, they grew with unnatural quickness, supplanting the chieftains of each tribe within a month. Great armies of trolls and ogres formed around these fiendish warlords and, as the Destroyer

KNOWLEDGE OF THE OGRE MAGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check as it relates to ogre mages. Barbarian tribes, border guards, and other residents of savage frontiers are most likely to possess this information. The ogre mage appears on page 200 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (nature) DC	Result
18	More intelligent than normal ogres and with strangely colored skin, ogre mages possess great physical strength and a number of potent magical powers.
23	Ogre mages rely on a variety of spell-like abilities to charm and confuse their enemies. They are more lawfully minded than normal ogres.
28	Ogre mages possess the uncanny ability to fly, as well as the ability to take many forms. They generally live in cold mountainous regions alone or in small clans.
33	Ogre mages quickly regenerate lost limbs and other physical damage, although fire and acid affect them normally. They also often prove resistant to magical attacks. Ogre mages can typically speak Common and Giant.
38	At will, an ogre mage can unleash a blast of flensing ice. Many ogre mages worship the cruel god Vaprak the Destroyer, patron of ogres and trolls. This respect often comes grudgingly, however, as many ogre mages believe their god holds them in disfavor.

prophesied, hoards of savage giants raged forth from the broken places of the world.

Vaprak's war did not, however, proceed as the Destroyer has foreseen. Although the savage legions left countless dead and untold ruin in their wake, the devotion, invention, and magic of the rising civilized races ultimately drove back the beastlike hordes. Thus, even under the leadership of Vaprak's own once-immortal sons, the ogres and trolls were routed into the wilds where they have ever since remained, persecuted and hunted.

Witnessing this staggering defeat, Vaprak flew into an unending rage. In his fury, he blamed the hated civilized races for his defeat, but his damnation fell most directly upon Anori, Hakuni, and Muaj. Stripping them of their greatest powers and their immortality, he cursed his three failed sons and exiled them from the Abyss forever.

From these outcast, semi-divine lines the first ogre mages were spawned, belched up from the bowels of the planes, possessing the ambition of their godlike heritages yet eternally lacking the power and time to give their profane wills form.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE OGRE MAGE

Much speculation occurs over the fearsome and seemingly fiendish forms of ogre mages. As giants, they loom more than 10 feet tall and weigh upward of 700 pounds, their tremendous size only augmenting the terror of their grim forms and strange coloring. Hints of fiendish heritage seem evident in much of the race's gruesome physicality, such as their strong, curved horns, blackened teeth and nails, and stark white pupils. An unnaturally fast healing rate and metabolism provides these creatures with their regenerative properties as well as a notably high body temperature, offering a possible explanation for their preference for settling in colder climates. As trolls possess a similar physiology, some suspect that ogre mages might evidence some primal connection between both the ogre and troll races.

THE REAL HISTORY OF THE OGRE MAGE

While no tales exist about creatures specifically called ogre mages, stories about ogres are pervasive throughout Western folklore. Although the word "ogre" has French roots, the name is thought to be derived from the Latin name Orcus, the Roman god of the Underworld. The ogre mage, however, finds its origins more closely tied to the *oni* of Japanese folklore—spirits, some dangerous, some benevolent, with great strength, strangely colored skin, and sharp horns. Even today, during the Spring *Setsubun* festival, some people toss soybeans out their door, chanting *"Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi"* (*"Demons out! Luck in!"*)! In *Dungeons & Dragons*, the ogre mage originally appeared in the first edition *Monster Manual* (subtitled "Japanese ogre" therein), and recently appeared in the *D&D Miniatures: Angelfire* set.

Occasionally, mutations occur among ogre mage bloodlines, producing variants of different coloration and with subtly different powers. For the most part, though, consistent attributes indicate the stabilization of the race, and even a possible decline in their supernatural power. If ogre mages can in fact trace their lineage back to the Lower Planes, millennia of inbreeding and interbreeding with the native ogres of the Material Plane would likely be responsible for just such a gradual waning.

Ever seeking physical perfection and an edge over opponents, a striking number of ogre mages experiment with the manipulation of their regenerative properties, breaking or severing their limbs in personal displays of power and then reattaching in preferable ways, sometimes resulting in the growth of spiky protrusions of bone armor and weaponry. Regardless of such exploitation, ogre mages' regenerative abilities are not absolute, as fire and acid burn and scar them just as they do natural creatures.

The other abilities of ogre mages, such as their ability to fly without wings or produce a number of spell-like effects, have no evident relation to their physiology, marking some lingering supernatural or extraplanar connection.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE OGRE MAGE

Believing themselves forsaken by Vaprak, many ogre mages hold that their physical bodies are mere vessels for ancient, outcast souls. Upon death, one of these immortal souls passes from the ogre mage to its most powerful offspring. The soul thus remains trapped in a state of slow transcendence. With each new life it tries to attain a state closer to the foul divinity it lost—ever striving to appease a fickle, savage god. In this regard, the spirit or self proves of utmost importance, with many ogre mages worshiping themselves as divine vessels—in addition to the grudging respect they offer Vaprak. These beliefs fuel great acts of savagery and destructiveness as they seek to regain their fabled lost immortality.

Ogre mage culture is strictly patriarchal, with males seizing dominant roles over spouses and offspring. Within their small clans, adult males allot few rights

DESCENDANTS OF THE THREE

The ogre mages described in the *Monster Manual* represent the descendants of Muaj, the most commonly encountered scions of Vaprak's forsaken sons. Although less common, the lineages of Agmori and Hakuni are equally powerful, dangerous, and evil.

Cereborg

The fearsome descendants of Agmori live far to the north in castles carved from solid ice. Common folk refer to them as cereborgs for their renowned mastery of the psionic disciplines and identify them by their seemingly frostbitten blue skin. Cereborgs typically progress as psions, psychic warriors, or soulknives, some advancing into the psion uncarnate, thrallherd, and warmind prestige classes (*Expanded Psionics Handbook*).

Cereborge replace the spell-like abilities of normal ogre mages with the following psionic-like abilities (see *Expanded Psionics Handbook*):

Psionic-Like Abilities: At will—*cloud mind* (DC 15), *empathy* (DC 14); 1/day—*death urge* (DC 17), *dimension swap* (DC 15), *mental disruption* (DC 15), *psionic dimension door*. Manifester level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

Ogre Umbramage

The banished demigod Hakuni excelled in the ways of deception and assassination. Ogre mages tracing their lineage to him make unusual use of stealth and many dye their already darkly pigmented skins deep black. They often progress as rogues, ninjas (*Complete Adventurer*), and even shadowcasters (*Tome of Magic*), some advancing into the ghost-faced killer, master of shadow, or shadowblade prestige classes (*Complete Adventurer* and *Tome of Magic*).

Ogre umbermages replace the spell-like abilities of normal ogre mages with the following spell-like abilities:

Spell-Like Abilities: At will—*darkness*, *invisibility*; 1/day—*detect thoughts* (DC 15), *enervation* (DC 17), *scare* (DC 15), *shadow walk* (DC 19), *waves of fatigue* (DC 18). Caster level 9th. The save DCs are Charisma-based.

to weaker individuals and in many instances treat them little better than slaves. When an elder dies, he bequeaths his wealth and social position to the oldest son. Because males define themselves by social status, the eldest son changes often, and infanticide is both a culturally acceptable and expected method of ruling out potential threats. Still, strength is what is valued in the society, and many female ogre mages notoriously rise against their spouses, slay them, and assume their wealth and tribal position. Rather than ruling the clan, these matrons hold their position in escrow until such a time that a son reaches maturity and seizes it.

The responsibility of child-rearing falls upon the male clan leader's spouses or consorts. Male offspring are typically named after Vaprak's mythic sons, Anori, Hakuni, or Muaj—or variations thereof—while females garner demeaning titles, if any name at all. Mothers often raise their offspring in secret locations to prevent males from observing their children's growth. Typically, mothers lie about a male child's gender, raising him as a female to limit murderous culling. In this environment, females, consorts, and children form close alliances, with the relationship focusing on survival and defeating the father. The strongest bonds occur between the mother and the eldest son, or between male and female siblings. Young males become particularly devoted to whomever sheltered and provided for them in earlier years and many choose spouses incestuously. Regardless, once a male reaches maturity, he displays a violent eagerness to prove himself. Provided his father still lives, he seeks to hunt down and kill his elder in order to assume his position. Those with little hope of besting their fathers or elder siblings often flee their clans and seek power elsewhere—although many die trying to escape.

Outside of their clans—and regardless of their strong lawful tendencies—ogre mages rarely associate with others of their kind. They might briefly form alliances to fight common enemies, overthrow the threat of a more powerful ogre mage, or to barter for wealth and slaves, but such associations are rare and often end in betrayal.

Self-absorbed by their nature, ogre mages possess an unyielding sense of personal entitlement and rarely view other beings as anything more than commodities. They rapaciously take whatever they need, specifically preying on those weaker than themselves, whom they force into slavery or subjugate into worshipers—dual states with little real distinction. Ogre mages spend enormous effort cultivating groups of followers and slaves. Such minions are kept for both their menial uses and as a quantifiable way for their master to measure his power and influence.

ADVANCED OGRE MAGE

Ogre mages typically advance as sorcerers, their favored class. They prefer to rely on their inborn talent and only rarely pursue the more scholarly path of the wizard. Because of their natural regenerative powers, ogre mage

spellcasters focus on prestige classes that allow them to manipulate their bodies, such as the acolyte of the skin or blood magus (*Complete Arcane*). Those of a more martial disposition become fighters, monks, or samurai (*Complete Warrior*). Other classes hold little appeal to them. Given their history, clerics are exceptionally rare among ogre mages although some become ur priests (*Compete Divine*).

Although rare, fiendish and half-fiend ogre mages exist. Revered by others of their kind, they often become great leaders or warriors. Ogre mages view such individuals as proof of their immortal ancestry and females sometimes secretly breed with fiends in order to give their offspring a higher status.

SAMPLE ADVANCED OGRE MAGE

A sadistic mercenary, Muaj-Ruhlor lives only to watch lesser beings die. He seeks out wars and conflicts, indiscriminately hiring himself to either rival. He arrogantly takes pleasure in battlefield dramatics, cutting down both allies and enemies to sate his bloodlust.

MUAJ-RUHLOR **CR 17**

Male ogre mage fighter 5, kensai 3
LE Large giant
Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision; Listen +7, Spot +7
Languages Common, Giant, Infernal, Orc

AC 25, touch 10, flat-footed 24
hp 131 hp (13 HD); regeneration 5
SR 19
Fort +16 **Ref** +6, **Will** +8

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); fly 40 ft. (good)
Melee *+3 Large human bane, thundering greatsword* +21/+16 (4d8+10/17–20)
Space 10 ft; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +10; Grp +14
Atk Options Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Power Attack
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds, potion of haste, potion of resist energy (fire)* 20
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 9th)
At will—*darkness, invisibility*
1/day—*charm person* (DC 16), *cone of cold* (DC 19), *gaseous form, polymorph, sleep* (DC 16)

Abilities Str 26, Dex 12, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 20
Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (greatsword)
Skills Concentration +15, Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +14, Listen +7, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +8, Spot +7, Ride +6
Possessions combat gear plus *+3 great armor, +3 Large human bane thundering greatsword, cloak of resistance +2*

Flight (Su) Muaj-Ruhlor can cease or resume flight as a free action. While using gaseous form, he can fly at his normal speed and has perfect maneuverability.
Regeneration (Ex) Fire and acid deal normal damage to Muaj-Ruhlor.
Signature Weapon (Su) Muaj-Ruhlor's greatsword is his signature weapon. This ability grants his *+1 Large human bane thundering greatsword* a +3 enhancement bonus.
Power Surge (Ex) As a move action, Muaj-Ruhlor can make a DC 15 Concentration check. If he succeeds, he gains a +8 bonus to his strength for 1 round. Each time after the first that he successfully uses this ability in a 24-hour period, the check DC increases by 5.

Orc

"The first sign we had was the blast of a war horn, blown from the hills not one mile outside town. By the time the militia was forming up in the center of town, the horde was already at our wall, bashing down the gate with a crude wooden ram, its head shaped like a snarling wolf. The battle raged for hours, but the horde could not be stopped. By dusk, the orcs had overrun our defenses, killing nearly all the guards and many of the townsfolk besides, including my wife and both my sons. I swore I would pay them back for what they did, but how do you take vengeance against a formless rage?"

—Final report from Rett Thalmis, Trunau Watch Captain

Mad marauders in the dark of night, these terrors descend on the unsuspecting and leave naught but slaughter and burning ruins in their wake. Although beaten back in epic wars again and again, these raiders always seem to return to visit their wrath upon the weak and helpless. No frontier settlement or traveling merchant is ever completely safe from the depredations of the orcs.

Overview

Orcs are aggressive, brutish humanoids that exist by the strength of their arms and sinews. They are the cockroaches of the humanoid races, proven to survive and even thrive in conditions where others would fail. They were at their height in the dismal days in the darkness of prehistory, as all other humanoid races quailed in the cold darkness. As a natural outgrowth of this, they are extremely warlike, seeing the acquisition of new territory as their only path to survival. They are a race that has passed its primacy but refuses to give in to the judgment of fate and simply disappear—not, at least, without taking as many of their rivals with them as possible.

Orcs live in a patriarchal society that sees little value in their females other than to produce and raise broods of their brats. Mortality is high, and male children are of small importance until they have survived long enough to begin their training in arms. Female children that do not survive are not mourned at all.

Bestial and brutal, orcs vent their rage and prove their strength against any who fall within their reach. They are wanton in their violence and often turn to cannibalism and eat other intelligent races even when resources are otherwise sufficient, just to indulge in their thirst for violence and degradation. A prisoner who survives being captured by orcs is seldom ever the same again.

Orcs are fond of collecting trophies from those they kill and take a victim's severed head whenever possible. These they use to decorate their lairs, mounting them in crude attempts at taxidermy to savor the victory, or impaling them upon pikes outside their lairs to warn away intruders. These grisly trophies are often used as traps as well. Tribal shamans sometimes animate them to serve as alarms or even to attack. The nerves of even the most resolute invader might become shaken when some third cousin or old friend is recognizable as a gibbering undead thing.

As a race whose existence is based entirely on the bullying and intimidation of others, orcs take great delight in showing their personal strength and bravery through the extensive use of ritual scarring. This scarring is not done just for decorative purposes, but as rewards for feats accomplished and victories won. A grizzled orc veteran's face might be little more than a lump of scar tissue with both ears lopped off and one eye put out, all self-inflicted as a visible history of his deeds, allowing him to bask in the awe and admiration of his fellows. The scarring of a witch doctor is legendary among orcs and enough to make even their cast-iron guts a bit queasy. The ritual scarring for witch doctors is not limited to just the face, with different kinds of scarring patterns used on their arms, chest, and back, but facial scarring is certainly the most prestigious.

In battle, orcs sometimes wear hoods and masks. This is partly because a foe is not worthy to look upon their scarred badges of honor, but also because orcs find that masked attackers are more terrifying than even disfigured ones—the victim's mind is allowed to fill in the blanks with something even more horrible than the reality of the orc's features. Orcs prefer masks and half-masks of hideous, bestial design and are especially partial to executioner-style hoods, some leaving the lower half of the face and snarling maw exposed. When such resources are unavailable, however, a simple burlap sack with eyeholes cut in it seems to produce the desired effect. A particularly well-outfitted orc champion might wear a great helm that covers his entire face save for a narrow eye slit, and that is set with all manner of wicked hooks and barbs.

Orcs wear cured hides, furs, and whatever ragged clothing and armor they can lay their hands on. They are rarely uniform in attire beyond their tribal colors, which are emblazoned on standards, crudely painted on shields, and worked into their clothing and armor whenever possible. The colors they choose are always garish and unpleasant, sickening combinations of blood red, rust red, mustard yellow, putrescent yellow-green, vivid purples, and, of course, black.

Orc Grafitti

Orcs are almost compulsive vandals. This is exhibited not only in the wanton destruction they spread upon their enemies but also in the near ubiquitous grafitti that decorates the walls of their lairs. This grafitti exists not just as crude symbols, pictograms, and images of their tribal totems etched—sometimes quite brilliantly—in charcoal, soot, or colored clays, but for the literate among them manifests in grafitti slogans in the form of insults and boastings of virility or strength. Some samplings seen in various orc lairs include phrases such as, "Grod take bath," "Vog is goblin," "Dwarves wear dresses," and "Krunk's mate smell like old cheese… Krunk lucky."

Orcs enjoy producing their creative writing in Common when they are able to ensure the maximum appreciation of it, so alert adventurers happening upon such slanderous scribblings on the wall of a dungeon are forewarned that an orc lair is nearby even before the howling fiends ambush them from the darkness.

Ecology

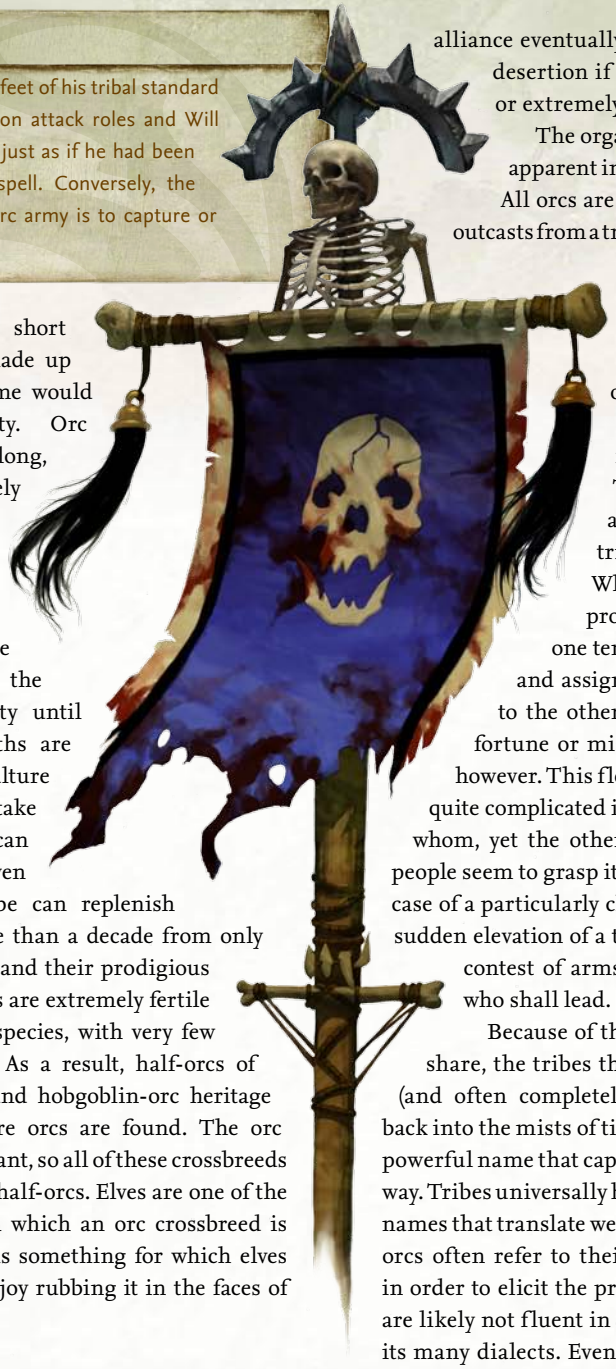
Orcs are heavily muscled humanoids who stand roughly 6 feet tall and who have particularly bestial faces. Skin tones range from sallow pink to grayish to dark green. They have vaguely porcine features with flat noses and teeth that resemble the tusks of a boar. Their hair is likewise wiry and coarse, like a boar's bristles, and they have red, bloodshot eyes and large, lupine ears.

Orcs possess small beady eyes so sensitive to bright light that they experience great difficulty in full daylight. Their eyes do, however, provide them darkvision out to a distance of 60 feet. As a result, orcs favor dark places and cling to the shadows above ground whenever possible. In their lairs, when they must have light (such as from heat sources) orcs prefer the dim red glow of hot coals in a hearth or brazier to the crackling brightness of an open flame. The fact that coals have excellent secondary uses for heating branding irons and other implements of torture serves as a bonus of sorts in their eyes.

Orcs are not long-lived, reaching maturity by the age of 12 and rarely living past 40 if they don't meet violent

Tribal Standards

Any orc fighting within 60 feet of his tribal standard gains a +1 morale bonus on attack roles and Will saves against fear effects, just as if he had been the recipient of a *bless* spell. Conversely, the quickest way to rout an orc army is to capture or destroy its standard.



deaths sooner. This short lifespan is more than made up for by their natural—some would say legendary—fecundity. Orc males often don't last long, but orc females rarely join in battle and thus enjoy a much higher survival rate through adulthood. In addition, orc females remain capable of reproduction from the time they reach maturity until death, and multiple births are not uncommon. Orcish culture allows a male orc to take as many mates as he can dominate and feed, so even a relatively depleted tribe can replenish its warriors in little more than a decade from only a handful of orc families and their prodigious broods. Furthermore, orcs are extremely fertile among other humanoid species, with very few unable to cross-fertilize. As a result, half-orcs of human-orc, goblin-orc, and hobgoblin-orc heritage are not uncommon where orcs are found. The orc strain is invariably dominant, so all of these crossbreeds share the traits of typical half-orcs. Elves are one of the few humanoid races with which an orc crossbreed is simply impossible. This is something for which elves are thankful, and they enjoy rubbing it in the faces of other humanoids.

Habitat & Society

Despite their inherently chaotic natures, orcs adhere to a hierarchy of sorts: the strong rule the weak. The weak begrudgingly serve the strong until they can find an avenue of escape or the means of overcoming their overlords. Orcs are true bullies, lording over anyone they can until met by sufficient resistance to cause them to seek dominance elsewhere. This extends not only to their own kind, but to other races as well. Any nearby goblins are likely to serve as battle fodder and menial labor to an orc tribe, while giants in an area naturally dominate the orcs. Any such alliance eventually falls apart thanks to treachery or desertion if someone other than a charismatic or extremely powerful orc is in charge.

The organization of the orcs is most readily apparent in their hierarchical system of tribes. All orcs are either affiliated with a tribe or are outcasts from a tribe. Outcasts have little effect on the social order and exist as brigands at the periphery of their culture. The tribes themselves, however, exist in an ever-changing ranking of dominance and subservience. Strong tribes rule the weak and owe fealty to still more powerful tribes. The subordination is not as direct as in a feudal society, where the tribes of serfs labor for their masters. Where tribes are forced to live in close proximity due to limited resources, one tends to take on the superior position and assign all the menial or distasteful jobs to the other. This status can change with the fortune or misfortune of one tribe or the other, however. This flexible system of ordering is actually quite complicated in its ramifications of who defers to whom, yet the otherwise intellectually limited orcish people seem to grasp it with a natural aplomb. Only in the case of a particularly charismatic or vicious leader, or the sudden elevation of a tribe's status, does it ever come to a contest of arms between two tribes to determine who shall lead.

Because of this strong tribal affiliation all orcs share, the tribes themselves are ancient, with storied (and often completely fabricated) histories that reach back into the mists of time. As such, each tribe must have a powerful name that captures the proper spirit of the orcish way. Tribes universally have violent and visually descriptive names that translate well into the Common tongue. In fact, orcs often refer to their tribes by their Common names in order to elicit the proper response from observers who are likely not fluent in the vagaries of the Orc tongue and its many dialects. Even if a tribe is utterly destroyed, it is inevitable that its name arises again among a group of orcs who claim to be truly descended from the line of its heroes and great chiefs. Some of the more infamous tribes that have plagued the other races of Golarion for centuries are the Broken Spine, Cleft Head, Dead Eye, Death's Head, Defiled Corpse, Gnarled Fist, Gouged Eye, Rotten Tongue, Severed Hand, Shattered Skull, and Vile Blade. Along with each tribe goes its tribal standard, bearing the vivid image of the tribe's totem in full gory and disturbing colors.

The importance of these tribal standards is not to be underestimated. The orcish sense of self is so strongly

tied to its tribe and tribal symbol that they take on almost mythical qualities to the orc. The standard is always kept either in the presence of the chief (while in his lair) or in the most-heavily defended portion of the army (when out on campaign—which is also usually in the presence of the chief, unless he is powerful enough to have a warlord to lead his tribe into battle for him). A tribe might have many lesser imitative standards and images of its standard, but the standard itself is a thing of sacred power.

Orcs hate the light, not only due to their light sensitivity but also because they partially blame it for the loss of their ancient empire. The sun is anathema to them. As a result, orcs typically dwell in caves or tunnels they have excavated themselves. About a quarter of orcs, however, live above ground. These habitations can be anything from a small crude settlement consisting of a few ramshackle huts to a large city of iron and stone extending both above and below ground. Even in these aboveground settlements they stay out of the light as much as possible—daytime guard duty usually falls to the orcs of the lowest rank or who have fallen out of favor. Such communities are often built in the shadows of a nearby cliff, in the depths of a canyon, beneath the eaves of a dense forest, or even on the lee side of an active volcano, where the rising smoke and fumes can provide them with nearly perpetual shade from the sun's glare.

Orcs have a strong sense of identity as the rightful rulers of the world and all of its peoples, largely because at one time that was very nearly the case, at least from their point of view. They believe they were unfairly displaced and cheated out of their racial heritage. Because of this, they are always on a war footing toward those who dwell around them, ever seeking to shift the balance of power in their favor. Even when sorely outmatched by their neighbors, orcs continue to plan for and dream of a time when they can turn the tables and resume their rightful station. In their minds, they are the only "True People," and all other humanoids are merely lesser beings, grasping and pawing for a share of the orc legacy. All of this makes them uncomfortable neighbors, at best, and often leads to their settlements being wiped out or driven away by those who know that a weak orc tribe today might be the rallying point for an orc horde tomorrow.

As a result of the orcs' inherent sense of superiority over all other beings, they make natural slavers, having no qualms about their cruel and abusive treatment toward other races. As bullies, they believe they need not do the work if they can make somebody else do it for them. Almost any race can be found among the slave pits of orc tribes. If the orcs can capture it, they'll enslave it, with a notable exception of the hated elves. If an elf is captured, it is always tortured and executed, and is often eaten in a communal banquet. The orcs see elves as little better than skulking assassins, flitting unseen through the forests and attacking from hiding with their slaying arrows. Even a captured elf is a danger, so orcs do not suffer them to live long enough to become troublesome.

Orc Numbering

Known to few is the orc system of numbering. Orcs count by groupings of twenty rather than the more common tens employed by other races. Called a vigesimal system, its use by orcs clearly stems from the use of fingers and toes by the often unshod orcs in their figuring and calculations. A group of five is known as a "limb," based on the number of digits on one limb, and a group of twenty is referred to as a "pot," signifying all four limbs that are placed in an orcish cook pot along with the rest of the victim. Unfortunately, as a byproduct of both the orcs' subnormal intelligence and propensity to be missing a digit or two due to mishap, most orcs don't a have a true idea of what a group of 20 actually looks like and regularly refer to groups of 19 or even 18 as a full "pot" as well.

Also of note is the strong tradition of witch doctors among orcs. These practitioners of both arcane and divine magic might or might not follow the orcs' primary deity, Rovagug, but they command the respect and even awe of their fellow orcs for their strange powers and stranger ways. Witch doctors always live at the outskirts of the tribal area, with some boundary between them to designate the differences between them and their kin—sometimes in a side cave, atop a hill, or just across a small stream. They are usually served by a handful of orcs—either willing apprentices or reticent servants assigned to the position by the tribal chief in order to appease the witch doctor's wrath. Witch doctors always don exotic fetish masks when among the rest of the tribe and, when occasionally glimpsed without these adornments, have ritual scarring on their faces to such an extent as to make them nearly unrecognizable even as orcs. These magical practitioners cast spells, read omens, and experience frenzied outbursts and visions that help them guide and warn the tribe. Even the most powerful chiefs fear and dread the words of witch doctors. Orcish shamans who follow Rovagug despise witch doctors for the power they wield over the tribe, but the shamans are powerless to act against them, bound as they are by millennia of tradition and taboos.

Campaign Role

Although of obvious use as battle fodder, the role of orcs transcends this stereotype. Orcs are the masked bandits on the outskirts of town who waylay the lone traveler. They are the thugs of the wilderness who make people long for the mean streets of the most crime-ridden cities. Orcs form the wrathful horde that levels villages and instigates entire campaigns to undo the deeds they have wrought. They are the bogeymen that mothers of misbehaving children warn

will come and take them for the cook pots if they don't straighten up—and all too often the mothers are right.

In a low-level campaign, the orc is the adversary—a worthy foe equal to the PCs and a dark reflection that must be faced and overcome. At higher levels, they are the foot soldiers who waylay travelers on the highways and the band of mercenaries tasked with hunting down the PCs. At the highest levels of play, orcs form the hordes that descend from the mountains and threaten the very kingdoms of humans, dwarves, and elves. They are not only the flood of destruction striking the defenses of the civilized nations in endless waves, but also the assassins, brutes, and warleaders of hordes. At their most formidable, orcs have character levels equal to those of the PCs, and are the ultimate foils of player characters.

Treasure

The treasures of the orcs are portable and can easily be captured, carried, or traded for valuable tools. Orcs never mint their own coinage but readily take whatever currency their victims might possess and use it in a combination of commerce and barter within their own tribes. Treasure caches usually consist of chests of coin and crates of trade bars in precious metals the orcs took from caravans they sacked. In addition, they might have notes of credit issued by banks and guilds. Such blood-stained monetary vehicles are of no further use to their former owners, and even although the orcs themselves gain no value from them, they know that they were prized by those they killed.

Variants

Other than advancement through character levels, orcs are physiologically fairly homogenous although they have great variations in their appearance, ranging from skin tone to facial features. It is in their facial features that they exhibit the greatest differences. They always appear bestial, and their faces can look like slightly barbaric or primitive-looking humans (for those who have some human blood in their line) or have flattened noses with prominent lower teeth, or even possess piglike snouts with true tusks.

It is believed among orckind that the more porcine the features, the closer to the original orc bloodlines. Particularly isolated tribes with little to no interbreeding with lesser races have largely piglike appearances and are afforded great respect among their peers. In fact, other than martial strength and amassed wealth, the quantum of this ancient orc blood as it manifests in an orc's appearance is really the only thing that can add to his status. The flatter an orc's nose and more prominent its lower canine teeth, the higher esteem in which it is held. The other humanoid races find this appearance and notion of status ridiculous, but the orcs don't much care and are likely to kill and eat anyone who says so—so most observers just keep it to themselves.

Orcs in Golarion

The orcs of Golarion were originally a strictly subterranean race involved in an age-old war with the dwarves. In the course of the war, as the dwarves themselves drew ever closer to their destiny on the world's surface, they drove the orcs before them, until finally these feral humanoids broke forth into the open air for the first time. What the orcs found was a cold land of darkening skies and scudding layers of dust clouds all but choking out the feeble glimmer of the sun, for this was the time after the fall of the *Starstone*. Finally free from the relentless pressure of the dwarves from below, they scattered in a free-for-all of bloody destruction and claimed the dismal new lands from the wretched inhabitants they found in crude shelters and small settlements.

The brute force of the rising orcs cut a swath of conquest across the face of Golarion. Over time, the winds died down and the dust settled, and the cursed light of the sun showed through in strength again. The sun forced the orcs into the shadows to hide from its unaccustomed brightness. When they recovered from their initial shock, they realized their empire had spread much further than they had known and they had lost contact with its scattered parts. They also discovered that the hated dwarves had followed them from the lightless depths to the surface, renewing the war with the isolated orc-holds. A new enemy, humans, inhabited the surface and fought with a tenacity that nearly equaled their own. By the time they had sufficiently gained their bearings, it was already too late: the overextended orc empire collapsed into separated tribes. What they had conquered with steel in the dark, they lost with blood in the light.

The time of orcs is long past on Golarion, and they now exist as little more than marauding bands on the outskirts of civilization. Still a danger to travelers and small settlements in the wilds, they rarely pose a threat to larger populaces except during the raising of orc hordes every generation or two that inevitably make some small gains before smashing themselves apart against organized, well-entrenched foes. In all of Avistan, only in the wildlands of the Hold of Belkzen do the orcs exist in any real concentration or semblance of their former glory.

Names

Orcs take fearsome names drawn from the sharp, strong words of their guttural tongue or derived from the names of past warlords.

Male Names: Bruk, Drith, Elvar, Grom, Ilkusk, Javad, Krug, Krunk, Reltag, Skald, Targ, Ukwar, Vog, Zerab

Female Names: Belzin, Dryath, Elkama, Gumar, Jasik, Kalkas, Lethra, Lukash, Ninkeen, Polta, Saba-Thu, Sakab, Urkla, Vlib, Wanta

Orc

This barbaric humanoid bears ragged equipment and armor in sullen colors. It has coarse body hair and a stooped posture like some primitive man but with a grayish-green skin tone and bestial facial features beneath a black hood. Burning red eyes peer below a low, sloping brow, just above a flattened nose, and prominent tusk-like teeth.

ORC **CR 1/2**

Male orc warrior 1

CE Medium humanoid (orc)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +1, Spot +1

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor)

hp 5 (1d8+1)

Fort +3, **Ref** +0, **Will** –2

Weakness light sensitivity

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee falchion +4 (2d4+4/18–20)

Ranged javelin +1 (1d6+3)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

TACTICS

Before Combat Orcs make few preparations before combat, preferring to charge headlong at any foe that presents itself.

During Combat Orcs prefer to use two-handed weapons to maximize the effectiveness of their great strength. They attack in ambushes from concealment to take an enemy off-guard and cause as much fear and confusion as possible.

Morale Orcs are bullies and cowards. They flee when the odds have turned against them and any nearby leaders are dead—or have already fled. They are prone to surrender and truces if such actions save their skins, although they honor such terms only as long as it is to their benefit to do so. Exceptions to this are dwarves and elves, from whom they neither ask nor give quarter.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 11, **Con** 12, **Int** 8, **Wis** 7, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +1; **Grp** +4

Feats Alertness

Skills Listen +1, Spot +1

Languages Orc

SQ light sensitivity

Gear falchion, hooded mask, 2 javelins, studded leather armor

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Light Sensitivity (Ex) Orcs are dazzled in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

The orc is the antithesis of civilized man. They think nothing of tomorrow, knowing only whatever warlike passion possesses them at the moment, taking what they want and despoiling what they don't. Never be mistaken: they're not men, they're monsters.

101 Dirty Orc Tricks

Traps and tactics for your favorite humanoids

by John Baichtal

illustrated by David Sutherland

There was a time when an orc was a deadly foe for a PC- even an experienced adventurer. Now, with specialization, style specialization, maximum hit points at 1st level (a norm in many campaigns), and other perks for PCs, orcs are little more than a nuisance. Part of the problem is that the average humanoid's repertoire of tactics can be summed up in three words: scream and charge. This old cliche is silly, because most humanoids have an Intelligence rating of at least Average, and some (kobolds in particular) are considered extremely cunning tacticians.

To solve this problem, here are 101 ploys and stratagems for supposedly stupid orcs, goblins, and other humanoids. Facing them, perhaps even high-level PCs will come to sweat at the sound of goblin drums. Though only orcs are mentioned, these tactics work admirably for virtually any humanoid foe.

1. The orcs are mounted. Worgs are good choices as are horses. The orcs use lances if they are available.

2.The orcs, hidden in the bushes, throw a skunk into the PCs' midst. Depending on the party's behavior, the skunk could simply run off or spray them, with results described on page 242 of the *MONSTROUS MANUALS™tome.* If there is a druid or ranger in the party, this ploy could be spectacularly unsuccessful.

3. The orcs roll boulders down hills at the PCs. Normal attacks rolls do not apply; each PC must make a successful Dexterity check to avoid the rocks. If a check fails, the PC suffers 4d6 hp damage, save vs. paralyzation for half damage.

4. A human-appearing half-orc is hired as a guide and leads the PCs in to an ambush.

5. The orc chieftain wears a *medallion of ESP* and thus knows the PCs' every move. The DM can roleplay this situation by having the orcs see through all of the PCs' tricks and taking advantage of their weaknesses.

6. An orcish shaman casts *animate dead* on orcs previously killed by the party.

7. The orcs wave torches at the PCs' mounts to spook them. This tactic forces a Morale check for the horses, but war horses are immune, thanks to their training. If a PC's horse is spooked, he must make a riding proficiency check or be thrown, suffering 1d6 hp damage. To regain control of the mount, the PC must make a second check. In the meantime, all of his actions are at -4 due to the horse's bucking.

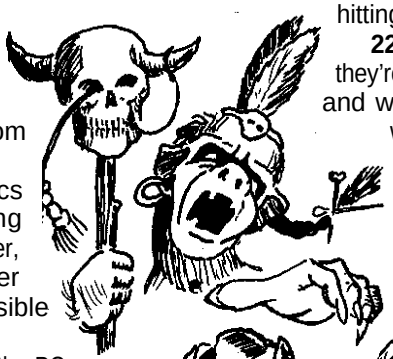
8. The orcs have dug spiked pits in the vicinity of the fight. These are about 10' deep, and a failed save vs. death magic means a PC falls in during melee. Each victim suffers 1d4 hits, and each hit

inflicts 1d6 hp damage. The DM should reduce this damage for low-level PCs.

9. The orcs have nets that they sling in the trees, ready to drop them on the party. Alternatively, they carry the nets to throw at individual PCs.

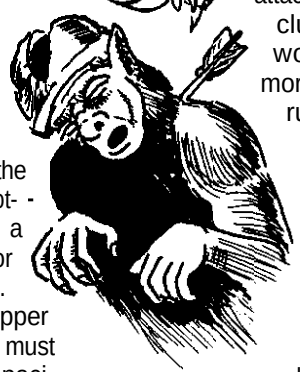
10. Orc footbowmen fire at the PCs from long range—200 yards or so—to soften up the PCs before melee begins. Footbows are huge bows bent by the strength of the legs. Thanks to the long range, accuracy is poor, but only PCs with similarly long-ranging weapons can retaliate.

11. The PCs' trail passes through a narrow ravine, and the orcs attack from above—the ambush. The orcs gain the following bonuses: 75% cover, +1 to hit for higher ground, and possible surprise.



12. The orcs lure the PCs into a charge, then greet them with set spears, which inflict double damage.

13. Grease has been spread on the floor (if indoors) to make the PCs' footing extremely slippery. Each round, a PC must make a Dexterity check or fall, negating all actions that round.



14. The orcs throw sacks of pepper throw into the PCs' faces. Each PC must make a save vs. poison or be incapacitated for 1d2 rounds, sneezing.

15. Concealed in the grass by the road are pits with orcs inside; the hiding orcs jump out to surprise the party. The PCs suffer a -2 penalty to their surprise rolls.

16. The orcs have poisoned weapons. Of course, the DM should make the poison's strength commensurate to the PCs' level. It might be interesting to run a high-level campaign with orcs as foes, armed with weapons envenomed with giant scorpion poison.

17. The orcs are armed with mancatchers. See the *Player's Handbook* for more information on these weapons.

18. Orcs sneak into camp while the PCs are asleep. This may seem like a simplistic ploy, but it has the potential to be quite effective. The orcs doff all metal armor and cover themselves with black mud to blend into the night and foil infravision. While these commando orcs attack, the regulars charge in to support.

19. The orcish shaman has a *sleep* spell memorized, making him a substantial threat to PCs of 4th level and under.

20. The orcs harry the party for many days, perhaps weeks, occasionally shooting an arrow at them or feigning a charge. If the orcs are not dissuaded, the party becomes worn out for lack of sleep. For everyday without proper rest, all of the PCs' d20 rolls suffer a -2 penalty. Eventually the PCs may collapse from sheer exhaustion.

21. The orcs have hostages whom they use as (demi-)human shields. Any PC using a missile weapon against orcs so protected has a 75% chance of hitting the hostage instead.

22. A number of orcs pretend they're shamans, dressed in robes and waving their arms as if they were spellcasters. The effectiveness of this depends on the PCs, but Intelligence checks might be in order.

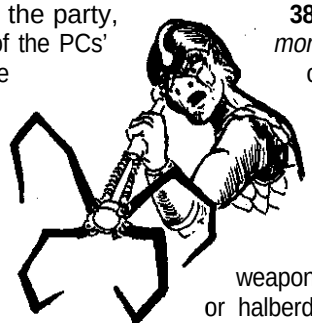
23. The orcs have a pet rust monster, and they attack the PCs armed with clubs, hide armor and wooden shields. For more information on the rust monster, see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 305.

24. The orcs have human allies and pretend to fight them; when the PCs charge to the rescue, they are attacked by both groups. Treat the allies as 1st-level fighters with 5 hp each.

25. An orc has a *potion of giant strength* and hurls rocks from far away. This scenario is a good challenge for mid-level PCs.

26. There are tripwires in the underbrush all around the party, so if the party charges or flees, their movement is hampered. Each PC who becomes tangled in a tripwire must make a successful Dexterity check or fall down, losing all actions for 1d2 rounds.

27. A squad of orcs consisting of light horsemen with bows attacks the PCs. Their plan is to shoot at the party, retreat beyond the range of the PCs' missiles, then return to fire again. They continue this tactic as long as they can.



28. The orcs have acquired some smoke powder, which they use to make crude bombs. Information on smoke powder appears in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide.*

29. The ground seems muddy, but it is actually soaked with oil, which the orcs set alight. Flaming mud causes 2d6 hp damage the first round, then 1d4 the next two rounds before burning out.

30. One of the orcs is a champion, possessing higher-than-normal fighting skills and hit points. Orcish champions are described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 282.

31. Casks of drugged wine are left for the PCs to find. If they drink the wine, they must make a save vs. poison or fall asleep.

32. Green leaves are thrown onto a fire upwind of the party, with the hope that the dense smoke blinds the PCs. Each affected PC must make a save vs. paralyzation each round or be incapacitated by the choking blinding fumes. This effect lasts until the PC leaves the smoky area.

33. The orcs have hired mercenaries, human or some other race. These individuals should be about as tough as a PC—so a 10th-level party might fight mercenary giants.

34. The orcs are concealed in low water, breathing through reeds. When the PCs pass by, the orcs leap out of the water. Surprise checks are rolled at a penalty of -3.

35. The orcs are mounted on trained war horses, which are not afraid of fire or startled by combat, and which often attack opponents on their own. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, pages 194 and 195, for more information on war horses.

36. One of the orcs is actually a shaman, a wizard/priest of level 1d4+1 in each class.

37. The orcs are unusually proficient with a particular weapon; this skill is equal to specialization.

38. An orc uses a *potion of polymorph self* to assume the form of a cute puppy. Then he wanders into the PCs' camp one night. After the PCs have fallen asleep, the puppy reverts to orc form and distracts the PCs while his fellows attack.

39. The orcs have heavy weapons, such as two-handed swords or halberds, which cause more damage than the usual orcish armament.

40. The orcs are armed with several crossbows each, allowing them to keep up a steady rate of fire from a distance.

41. The orcs hide behind wails or mantlets, shooting their bows through arrow slits. This protection is equal to 90% cover to missile fire.

42. The orcs have an ogre with them for "heavy artillery."

43. The orcs, who understand the common tongue, attack at night. If the PCs try to coordinate their actions verbally, the orcs hear and compensate. If the PCs fight silently, the players must write their PCs' actions instead of announcing them aloud. This technique should hinder cooperative tactics.

44. The orcs have prepared an avalanche over a mountain trail. PCs may make save vs. poison to avoid being covered in snow; those who fail must be rescued within one minute per Constitution point or smother to death.

45. The orcs hide near a spring, which has been doctored with a tasteless drug that makes the drinker sick. PCs failing a save vs. poison lose 6 points of Strength and 2d4 hit points. Meanwhile, the orcs attack.

46. The orcs found a couple of *potions of heroism* and use them when fighting the party. This simple trick is good for mid-level PCs.

47. The orcs have pet dogs that serve as guardians and trackers. Thieves trying to sneak around will be detected unless they are downwind of the dogs or have covered their scent somehow. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 57, for more information.

48. The orcs are mounted on flying animals (hippogriffs are good), or perhaps crude hang gliders.

49. Anticipating the PCs' invasion of their lair, half of the orcs hide in barrels, then jump out and attack from the rear. PCs suffer a -1 penalty to surprise rolls.

50. The orcs dress as human peasants in order to get close to the PCs. This works only if all the PCs fail their intelligence checks.

51. The orcs have some *potions of healing* and make use of them during the fight.

52. The orcs fire flaming arrows to start fires in the PCs' tents and other possessions, before they charge. This could be a particularly deadly tactic if the party has many flammable items (bolts of cloth, kegs of lamp oil) or if they are situated on a raft or boat.

53. The orcs form a shield wall. Archers fire from behind the wall. The wall offers the archers 90% cover and the shieldbearers 75% cover. The only down side is that they are vulnerable to melee attack . . . but see #8 above.

54. The orcs have erected a palisade the party must cross. The palisade grants the defenders at least 50% cover and is high enough that a PC needs a ladder to reach the top.

55. The orcs try to trick the party into wasting missiles by offering themselves as targets. Any arrows, bolts, etc., shot are broken or stolen. The orcs try this only if they are far enough away to avoid incoming missiles (by hiding behind trees, for instance), but they abandon this tactic immediately if the PCs' aim is true.

56. The orcs are archers firing from a boat in a nearby river or lake, preventing the party from charging them.

57. The orcs pretend to flee but scatter caltrops behind them. Caltrops cause 1d4 hp damage, and a PC dashing through must make a successful Dexterity check for every 10' of trapped ground or step on 1d4

58. Logs soaked with flaming tar are rolled-down hills at the PCs. A PC must either make a successful Dexterity check to jump over or else outrun a log, which attains a top speed of MV 15. A PC who is run over suffers 1d8 hp damage for the log and 1d6 for the fire. Ouch!

59. The orcs are berserkers, as described in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook.*

60. Sacks filled with angry rattlesnakes are tossed into the PCs' camp at night. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, pages 320 and 321, for more information on snakes.

61. The orcs have narrow (2-3' diameter) caves through which to retreat if they are charged. PCs crawling after them had better be good with daggers.

62. The orcs stretch a rope across the party's path to knock them off, their horses. This is especially fun if the party is chasing them. Each PC in the front of the group may make an Intelligence check to detect the ploy. Characters who don't see it coming must save vs. death or suffer 1d10 hp damage and be automatically unhorsed.

63. The orcs stake out a watering hole and attack while the party is bathing.

64. The orcs have spread bear traps throughout the underbrush. Snap! A bear trap inflicts 1d8 hp damage and requires a Strength of at least 15 to free the PC. An unaware PC must save vs. paralyzation to avoid stepping on one.

65. The orcs have dug an earthen cave underneath the trail, and they collapse it when the PCs cross over. The result of this trick is that the party tumbles into a 6' deep pit with loose earthen walls.

66. The orcs wield daggers in their left hands (perhaps badly) and use them to parry or strike. A kind DM can give the orcs the usual -2/-4 penalty; a ruthless DM can decide that the orcs have enough practice to eliminate some or all of these penalties.

67. The orcs are clad in rusty but functional plate mail, making them hard to hit for low-level PCs. This may seem like not much of a ploy, but when you consider that orcs normally have nothing better than ring mail . . .

68. There are orc longbowmen in a grove atop a nearby hill, and each archer has a stuffed dummy next to him to make the troop look twice as large. A PC unaware of the ploy has a 50% chance of targeting a dummy.

69. The orcs have a pet or mascot, such as a bear. Take a look through the ***MONSTROUS MANUAL*** tome and be creative.

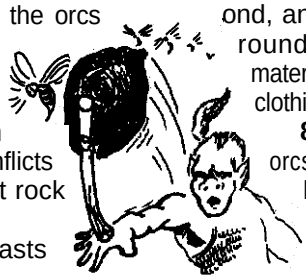
70. The orcs whirl bullroarers as they approach; these noisemakers make horses nervous (non-war mounts must make a Morale check), and PCs must make a riding proficiency check or the animals bolt away. Stupid and/or low-level NPCs must make a Morale check or flee, unless a strong PC leader orders them to stay put.

71. The orcs have the advantage of numbers and try to tackle and overbear the PCs rather than fence with them. This simple "trick" is a huge advantage that humanoids usually enjoy, but one that is almost never utilized by DMs.

72. The orcs form a spear hedge to keep the PCs at bay. A PC must endure at least two attacks to come within

sword range, and if either attack hits, the PC is forced back and must try again next round.

73. The orcs paint themselves black and slip through the underbrush with knives, rather than fight toe to toe. The DM may give the orcs a Hide in Shadows and Move Silently score or simply decide when and where the orcs are detected.



74. The orcs have a ballista or catapult that they use to attack the party from a distance. A ballista bolt inflicts 4d4 hp damage, a catapult rock 4d6 hp damage.

75. The orcs' shaman casts invisibility on their champion.

76. A nearby ditch has been filled with tar, then set on fire to form a barrier or divide the party. Any PC entering the ditch suffers 2d8 hp damage.

77. An orc with pig blood all over his face and dressed in a merchants clothes lies by the roadside begging for help. If a PC leans over to help him up, the orc lashes out with a concealed, poisoned dagger. The PCs surprise roll is at -3, and the poison is Type O (paralytic) venom. Other orcs are in hiding nearby.

78. The orcs pick a dark, rainy night to attack when humans cannot see and torches are doused by the torrent. Also, all missile fire suffers a -4 attack penalty, and bows and arrows may be ruined by the damp, at the DM's option.

79. The champion has had a *stoneskin* spell cast on him.

80. One of the orcs is a lycanthrope. This is a mean trick for low-level PCs, who most likely will not have any silver or magical weapons. Wereboars, werewolves, and wererats are the most appropriate types of lycanthrope.

81. The orcs are disguised as ghouls or other undead. PCs' failing their intelligence check believe them to be the genuine item.

82. One of the orcs has thieflike abilities-moving silently, backstabbing, opening locks. Consider the orc to be 5th level.

83. The orcs pretend to be drunk. When the party approaches, the orcs invite them over for a pint, acting as friendly as can be.

84. The orcs have pilums (light spears) that they stab into the PCs' shields and armor to slow them down. The recipient of this attack must stop and remove the spears (taking a whole round) or suffer a penalty to movement and AC equal to 1 for every spear so imbedded. Another advantage to pilums is that the shafts bend when they hit, so they cannot be thrown back at the orc.

85. The orcs have a huge keg of Greek fire that they roll into the party's midst and detonate. Anyone within 20' of the keg when it goes off suffers 3d6 hp damage the first round, 1d8 the second, and 1d4 the third and fourth rounds. Also, any flammable material in the vicinity (trees, hair, clothing) is likely to be set on fire.

86. Some of the attacking orcs climb nearby trees during he fight, firing missile weapons from the safety of a high branch.

87. In especially dry weather, the orcs set brush and forest ablaze. This one is a very orcish tactic.

88. The orcs are hiding in a wagon, which they move by pushing it from inside (there is no floor). There are arrow slits in the walls (providing 90% cover) and wet hides tacked outside to resist fire.

89. The orcs attack at night. The PC humans must use lights or fight at a disadvantage.

90. The orcs surround the PCs with a flaming barricade of brush and oil, then attack those trapped inside with missile weapons. Anyone trying to jump over the barricade must make both a Strength and a Dexterity check or be burned for 1d8 hp damage.

91. The orcs have a cage full of stirges and smear themselves with a stirge-repelling herb. Then they open the cage. Stirges are described fully in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 332. (See this issue's "Ecology of the Stirge" for variations of the monster.)

92. The orcs wear the armor (including full helmets) and emblems of a friendly group, In order to move close enough to attack.

93. The orcs keep a patch of quicksand between them and the party, then hurl insults and shoot arrows until the PCs charge. Any PC landing in quicksand must make three successful Dexterity checks, one per round, to escape. Every failed Dexterity check causes the PC to sink a little deeper; three failed checks and he is in over his head. Don't forget that the orcs are still there.

94. A number of orcs are actually ogrillons. See the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, page 275, for information on ogrillons.

95. A false treasure map lures victims into an ambush.

96. The orcs festoon themselves with leafy twigs and plant fronds as camouflage. This concealment gives the PCs a penalty of 1 on their surprise rolls and penalizes their missile fire by -1.

97. An orc throws a hornets nest into the PCs' midst. The hornets collectively inflict 1 hp damage per round to everyone in the swarm.

98. The orcs cause a herd of cows or other animals to stampede in the party's direction. The stampede lasts for 1d4+1 rounds. PCs caught in the stampede must make a successful Dexterity check every round to avoid being trampled. Any PC trampled suffers 2d4 hp damage and suffers a -4 penalty to his next round's Dexterity check.

99. A friendly wizard casts *massmorph* on a group of orcs to aid them in ambush. See the *PHB* for more information on this spell.

100. There are twice as many orcs as PCs, and the orcs fight in pairs, with one parrying, the other fighting. Whichever orc the PC attacks parries, and the other attacks. For best effect, use the parrying rules presented in the *Complete Fighter's Handbook.*

101. As the PCs are traveling down river in a boat or raft, orcish knifers attack from underwater and archers from the banks of the river.

John Baichtal is an aspiring freelance writer whose interests include beer, football, and spending way, way too much time in the role-playing game areas of America Online. He recently wrote his first short story, which his Mom said was "perfect," but which everyone else hated. What would we all do without Mom?

THE ECOLOGY OF The Osquip

Rats!

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by James Holloway

Dreelix pounded the gavel on the head table three times and liked what he heard This is the sound of power and authority, he thought.

All eyes turned his way, as wizards and sages ceased their muttered conversations and gave him their undivided attention. Dreelix cleared his throat and prepared his best speaking voice. "This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened," he intoned.

He shuffled a few papers in front of him as if consulting them, but in fact he knew exactly what he would say next. "Tonight we'll hear a status update on preparations for this spring's planned troll's-blood—gathering expedition, and Zantoullios will brief us on some fascinating new uses he's found for troglodyte bladders. But first, we have a new application for membership."

Excited whispers passed throughout the room, as the members looked around the tables to see if they could spot the new member.

"Buntleby, please approach the lectern."

A thin figure in gray robes stood up from his place at a table in the back, then walked up to the podium, at the right of the head table. He faced Dreelix, who was back to shuffling papers. The whisperers fell silent, eager to hear what followed.

"Buntleby of the Western Grove, you have applied for membership in the Monster Hunters Association."

"I have."

"Before allowing you entry into our illustrious organization, there are certain questions we must put to you. First of all, have you paid the entrance fee?"

"I have."

Dreelix looked over at Grindle the Coin-Counter, who gave a terse nod.

"And have you a sponsor?"

"Spontayne the Studious does me that honor."

Dreelix scanned the crowd of faces, and found Spontayne sitting in the back, his arms crossed in their usual position and his bearded face in its usual near-scowl. "Is this so?" asked Dreelix.

"It is," Spontayne replied.

"Very well then, Buntleby. Tell us, of what creature do you bring us knowledge? How might your inclusion into our hallowed ranks benefit the Association?"

"I bring you detailed information on the osquip, its habits, tactics, and usefulness—"

"Osquip?" interrupted Dreelix. "You mean that little rat with the extra legs?"

"The same."

"That's the 'monster' you've studied? A *rat?"*

"Not just a rat, no. The osquip is far more dangerous than any mere rat. And its potential for—"

"Still, its not much of a 'monster,' is it? Are you sure this is worth our time?"

"I believe it is. Perhaps you will hear me out and decide for yourselves."

"Let him speak," grumbled Spontayne from the back row.

"Very well. You may begin your presentation," said Dreelix, with a nod to the Conjurer Ablasta, who began her spell.

Immediately, a feather quill rose from the table and sat perched above an open book of blank pages at Dreelix's right, ready to record the new applicant's words.

Buntleby turned and addressed the audience. "The osquip, as I will show you, is much more than a rat with an extra set or two of legs. It is an enigma, a puzzle, but one that perhaps holds the key to a question that has plagued many a naturalist over the centuries."

At a table on the left, Willowquisp the Zoophile pricked up his ears, his curiosity obvious to anyone looking his way.

"To begin with, the osquip, while definitely belonging to the rodent family, is more closely related to the beaver than to the rat. This is most obvious in the size and structure of the front teeth, which project outward several inches from the jaw. However, while most rodents have four prominent incisors, two on top and two below, the osquip has twelve. This gives it a fearsome bite, enabling it to cut through solid rock and do terrible damage to its enemies.[1]

"Unlike the beaver, though, the osquip has no fur and lacks the beaver's flattened tail. The tail, when present[2], often closely resembles that of a rat, a fact that no doubt contributes to the commonly-held misconception that the osquip is some sort of mutant rat." With

1. As with most rodents, the osquip's teeth grow constantly and must be worn down through chewing. As the osquip's teeth are strong enough to chew through solid rock, nothing less than rock can wear them down. For this reason, osquips are almost always expanding their tunnel networks, not only to increase their living space (and hiding spots) but also to wear down their teeth.

Occasionally, an osquip's incisors will not be correctly aligned, and it will have either an overbite or an underbite. This occurrence, called malocclusion, prevents the teeth from being worn down properly, and eventually the teeth will grow to such a size that the creature cannot eat and will starve to death.

2. Osquip tails are almost as variable as the number of their limbs. Most are equipped with a rat-like tail a full 12 inches in length, but some (20% or so) have no tail, while others (5% at most) have a short, stumpy tail, rat-like in appearance but with a tail-to-body ratio similar to that of a bear.

this, Buntleby stole a quick look at Dreelix, but the leader was toying with his gavel and made no comment.

"Perhaps its most odd feature is the number of its limbs. All osquips have multiple pairs of legs, ranging from three to five, with three pairs being the most common. The number of limbs varies from individual to individual, and often baby osquips from the same litter will differ in the number of limbs they possess. I have been involved in raising osquips in captivity for close to eight months now, and I have often seen eight- or ten-legged osquips born of six-legged parents, so this doesn't seem to be an inherited trait.

"The osquip makes its home underground and will often be found in sprawling, complex labyrinthine tunnels of their own making. They live in a family-based pack structure, consisting of a mated pair and their various offspring. Osquips breed four or five times a year, producing litters of three to five whelps at a time. The young reach maturity in a matter of a few short months and are often breeding at about six months of age.[3] They live for about nine years.

"Osquips are strictly carnivorous, feeding mostly on other small mammals. There have been instances of cannibalism, but these acts are usually against enemy osquip packs; an osquip will never attack a member of its own pack, although they will eat their own dead if they happen upon the body." Buntleby noticed several members making faces of disgust, wrinkling their noses or putting their hands up over their mouths. *Odd reaction from a bunch of self-professed Monster Hunters,* he thought.

"While usually found alone, osquips occasionally make alliances with intelligence subterranean creatures, such as jermlaine. I myself have seen such an alliance in effect, during some field research involving frequent use of *invisibility* and *polymorph self* spells. Such alliances are often dangerous to the jermlaine, not to mention expensive, for the osquip must be heavily bribed with food and shiny objects, or it will turn on the jermlaine and devour it. However, to a jermlaine, the expense is worth it, for in exchange he receives a riding mount, beast of burden, and watchdog, all roiled into one."

Buntleby cleared his throat and looked around the room. "There is one additional benefit a jermlaine receives in a partnership with an osquip, but it is rather unusual. Nonetheless, it is true, and I report it to you now only in the interests of completeness.

"As I have said before, osquips can, and often do, chew through solid rock. However, their stomachs are not quite up to the level of ability as are their teeth, and the stone is only partially digested. In effect, what passes from an osquip's digestive system has a consistency similar to wet cement, and this substance is used by the jermiaine in a variety of interesting ways."[4]

Dreelix slapped his hand down on the table in front of him. "Buntleby!" he sputtered. "Do you really think we are in the least bit concerned about the alleged uses of... such a substance?" Dreelix was actually turning red in the face.

"I allege nothing; I merely report a fact. If you doubt me, I invite you to see for yourself." He motioned towards Spontayne, who reached beneath the table and brought out a cloth-covered cage. Placing it on the table in front of him and pulling off the cloth, he revealed a barred cage of shining metal. Inside was a hideous creature of pale yellow-gray, leathery skin.

Spontayne opened the door of the cage, and out skittered the osquip. It was of the "standard" variety; that is, it had the most common features of its kind — six legs and a long, rat-like tail. It sniffed the air curiously and squinted out at the surprised members of the Association.[5]

"Gentlemen — and Lady Ablasta — allow me to present Ozzie. Ozzie, be so good as to approach Dreelix at the head table, if you would. He doubts my claims; perhaps he requires a sample...?"

The creature scuttled across the table[6] and jumped nimbly to another, making his way toward the head table. As he passed, grown men, wizards and sages alike, backed up their chairs in order to let him by without having him brush against them. The sound of many voices filled the hall, as varied men of learning were simultaneously repulsed, fascinated, or amused by the spectacle.

"Look at that thing!"

"Ugly little sucker!"

"Fascinating! It obeys him!"

"Dreelix will have a fit."

"Most amusing!"

Dreelix pounded noisily with his gavel. "Order! We'll have order in here! Buntleby, call off your beast. I don't want it anywhere near me."

"As you wish. Come here, Ozzie. Good boy!" The creature jumped down from the table and crawled over to the gray-clad wizard, who stooped down and rubbed its leathery head. Ozzie, for his part, sighed contentedly and curled up at Buntleby's feet, rat-tail curled around his master's right ankle.

"Now then, if you're done with your little spectacle," Dreelix said with a grimace, "kindly get on with your briefing. And I would thank you to consider the dignity of those in whose company you find yourself. We are not concerned with tales of the properties of... well, dung."

"But of course, Dreelix. Forgive me, I forgot my surroundings. And let me say that I look forward with great anticipation to the discussion of troglodyte bladders later this evening." The young mage nodded in Dreelix's direction, and received only a scowl in return.

A voice was raised from the side of the room. "Excuse me, Dreelix? A suggestion, if I might, yes?" The speaker was Old Gumphrey, a sage of no small renown. "Perhaps we might dispense with the briefing format at this time and simply put questions to young Buntleby here. Yes?" He looked about the room at his compatriots. "Agreed?"

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3. Once at the age of sexual maturity, osquips tend to mate with the nearest available partner, regardless of relationship. Thus, parent and offspring often produce a new generation of offspring, some of whom might end up mating with the original parent. There is a good chance that the odd appearance of the osquip and the variety of tail size and limb quantity is a result of long-term chromosomal damage to the gene pool.

4. Osquip dung hardens after about an hour's exposure to air, at which time it maintains the hardness of stone. For this reason, jermlaine often use osquip dung as mortar to make stone walls, seal off tunnel entrances, and even to fashion sling stones and crude stone implements like axeheads. As for the osquips themselves, they apparently do not have either the intelligence or the inclination to come up with creative uses for their droppings.

5. Osquip vision is somewhat poor, and bright lights, while causing no harm (nor causing any combat penalties), do tend to make them somewhat nervous. They have an excellent sense of smell, somewhat akin to that of a dog, and relatively good hearing.

6. When walking, osquips move rather like insects. A six-legged osquip moves its front and rear legs on its right side and its middle leg on its left side forward at the same time, then follow with its front left, rear left, and middle right legs. Osquips with eight or ten legs walk similarly, moving alternate legs simultaneously so that half of their legs, however many that may be, are on the ground at the same time.

"Yes, an excellent suggestion," piped up Spontayne, looking squarely at Dreelix. "That way you may approach only those subjects you find of interest and avoid those you deem inappropriate."

"Very well," agreed Dreelix. "So be it. Buntleby, perhaps you haven't grasped this idea quite yet, but this association is founded solely for the purpose of obtaining rare and valuable body parts from strange and unusual creatures, useful in the production of magical spells, items, and the like. Look about you, what do you see? Wizards and sages, every one of us. We're not a bunch of mindless warriors, eager to pit our muscles and weapons against the newest monster to come along, just to say we did it. Neither are we cloistered scholars, seeking out knowledge for the sake of knowledge. So, Buntleby, I put it to you: What good is your information about osquips? How might we use the osquip to our advantage?"

"If you wish to limit yourselves in such a way, then so be it." Buntleby cleared his throat. "In a magical sense, the most useful part of an osquip is his teeth. Osquip incisors can be used as substitute material components for the *dig* spell, allowing it to be cast as normal, or it can be used to affect an amount of solid stone equal to half as much dirt normally affected. The teeth are, naturally, consumed in the course of the spell."

"How many teeth per spell use?"

"Two: one upper and one lower incisor from the same creature."

Dreelix rubbed his hands together, and glanced over at the feather-quill to be sure it was getting all of this down. It scribbled away, apparently catching up on what was said, then resumed its upright stance, waiting for further conversation to record. "Now we're getting somewhere. What else have you got?"

"I have found that osquip dung is a perfectly usable substitute for clay in the use of the *stone shape* spell."

"Again with the dung, eh? And are there any benefits to be gained by substituting the dung for the clay?"

"None whatsoever. The spell performs exactly the same way no matter which substance is used. I mention it only to point out there may be times when the spell is required and clay is not at hand."

"And osquip droppings are. And I suppose you suggest that we all start carrying droppings with us for such an emergency."

"Not at all. I merely thought to report a use for what to me, at least, is a common substance."

Dreelix snorted. "A common substance. Do you bring that beast with you everywhere you go?"

"I try not to let him stray too far."

A voice from the back piped up. "Must you bribe him, as would a jermlaine?"

"Were he just my pet, then yes," replied Buntleby. "However, Ozzie here is my familiar, and as such requires no constant bribes for his loyalty."[7]

That comment started up a whole new round of whisperings and mutterings around the room. Buntleby noticed that the feather-quill did not bother recording ail of the side-comments made by the gathered members, but rather it concerned itself solely on who "had the floor" at the time. Duly impressed, he made a mental note to himself to have a talk with the Conjurer Ablasta at a later time.

"Let's move on," suggested Dreelix. "Tell us about combat with the creatures. Is there anything we should know about fighting these things?"

"Only that they are very cunning and will attack any threat to their territory. As I have said, their tunnel networks are very elaborate; and, in a mine or dungeon corridor that contains an osquip nest, there are bound to be many secret tunnel entrances at the floor level from which the osquips can spring on intruders. In addition, most osquip networks contain at least one passage that slopes upward to a height of at least eight or nine feet and opens out onto the main cavern or mine shaft. The osquips use this as an ambush point, where they can leap down upon unsuspecting prey. Then, if the victim puts up a struggle, they scurry off into one of their holes for safety and attack with surprise from a different direction, out of a different hole.[8]

"So what is the best defense against the beasts in such a situation?" asked Dreelix.

"If at all possible, get to a position with your back against a wail, where the osquips must attack you from a facing direction. This is not as easy as it sounds, however, as you must ensure there are no ambush points above you, or hideyholes at your feet, and these are hard to spot in the midst of heated combat. Of course, the optimal place, in terms of defense, is in a pool of water."

"Why so?"

"Osquips are terrible swimmers. Partly this is due to their large number of legs, which tend to hinder smooth swimming strokes. I believe the biggest reason, though, is their diet: with bellies full of partially-digested stone, most osquips tend to sink straight to the bottom."

"Very well then, Buntleby, I believe I've heard enough. You've picked an odd 'monster' for study, but it seems you've researched it well enough." He turned his attention to the members, and formally intoned, "I call now for a show of hands: who supports the nomination of Buntleby of the Western Grove into our esteemed ranks?" After a quick scan across the hall, he said, "Very well, let it be noted that a full majority of members voted in Buntleby on this day. Buntleby, I hereby welcome you into the Monster Hunters Association. Please take your seat, and put your... familiar back in its cage."

Buntleby gathered up Ozzie, snoring gently at his feet, and took his seat next to Spontayne. "Nicely done," said the bearded man to his younger colleague.

"And now, on to the next order of business," intoned Dreelix, in what he considered his most effective and business-like voice. Zantoullios, do you have those bladders ready?"

As they filtered out of the meeting hall, Buntleby felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned, and saw Willowquisp the Zoophile. "A word, if I might, Buntleby."

"Yes, of course," replied the young mage, shifting his position in order to

7. Osquip familiars tend to be a rather rare occurrence. They almost never respond to a *find familiar* spell unless the wizard is specifically attempting to establish a link with an osquip (as was the case with Buntleby). In order to do so, the wizard must include at least 5,000 gp worth of shiny objects — usually coins and gems, and the more highly-polished the better — as material components for the spell. These components are not consumed as part of the spell, but must be turned over to the osquip if it answers the summons. As "bribes" go, this is the only one required to maintain loyalty, for once the osquip accepts the role as the wizard's familiar, loyalty from then on is assured.

It should be pointed out that the above addition to the *find familiar* spell in no way guarantees that an osquip will answer the summons. It is possible that a different creature will arrive to serve the wizard as a familiar, or that nothing at all will appear. DMs, of course, have the final say, but it is worth mentioning that an osquip is more powerful than the average familiar (3+1 HD, with a 2-12 hp damage attack), and might be more appropriate for a higher-level wizard.

8. Osquips impose a -5 penalty to their opponents' surprise rolls when they attack in this fashion.

better balance the weight of Ozzie's cage, inside which the osquip was snoring contentedly.

"Earlier, in your briefing, you said something about the osquip holding the key to a puzzle that has intrigued naturalists over the years. Being a naturalist, I find myself eager to hear more."

"Certainly. It's the matter of the variable number of legs each osquip has. I'm not certain what factor decides how many legs an osquip will be born with, for it doesn't seem to be an inherited trait, but it seems to me that such a limb-variability might help explain a few things taken for granted in the natural world."

"Such as?"

"Take the dragon. It, like most lizards, has four legs, and yet it has wings as well. Anyone taking a close look at a dragon's wings will see that they are a specialized form of limb, much like a bat's. Notice that the bat managed to grow its wings by adapting its forelimbs to that function. But what about the dragon? For a dragon to grow wings, it seems reasonable to me that at one point in its lineage, there had to be a spare set of limbs available to evolve into wings.

"Another example: look at the kobold and the urd. Are you familiar with the urd?"

"Not at all."

"It's basically a winged kobold. Unlike the bat, however, an urd still has functional arms, and independent wings. Again, those wings had to come from somewhere. Or, take the displacer beast. There is no doubt that the displacer beast is a member of the cat family, is there?"

"None at all, to the best of my knowledge."

"And yet it has two extra sets of limbs: one extra set of legs, and a pair of tentacles. Somewhere down the line, it had a common ancestor with, say, the tiger. So where did it get its extra limbs?

"I believe the osquip holds the answer. I think that perhaps its unusual limb-number variability is something that has occurred before, in other species. I think that the cat family, at one point, had four, six, or eight limbs, and that eventually the species evolved into your normal four-legged varieties, as well as oddities such as the eight-limbed displacer beasts and the six-legged cantobele. Yet, none of these creatures today has limb-number variability."

"So you think, over time, this variability stabilizes?"

"It must. I would venture to guess that, many years from now, the osquip as we know it today will be no more, that it will have produced new breeds of creatures, some with six limbs, some with eight, and some with ten. Furthermore, I predict that these three strains of creatures will be separate life-forms of their own, in the same way that a displacer beast is distinct from a tiger."

"And what will the extra limbs become?"

"Who can say? Wings, perhaps, like the dragon? Tentacles? Something new altogether? Only time will tell."

"Time, indeed, will tell."

Johnathan M. Richards enjoys looking at the unusual aspects of AD&D® monsters. He lives on Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.

Otyugh

"Something lives down here beneath the streets, and it's a lot more dangerous than the rats and spiders. Some say it wanders the slimy sewer tunnels, feeding on whatever happens to fall into its clutches, be it filth or flesh. Our garbage is its sustenance, but that does not mean that it would turn down finer fare. You might make a tasty morsel for such a ravenous beast. Now why don't you come and join me in the dark... and never mind the stench."

—Mysterious voice calling out from a darkened sewer tunnel

Anyone who has ever ventured into the sewers of a great city knows to watch out for two common creatures: dire rats and otyughs, although with the latter it has not always been so. Today, these lumbering monsters root around in the refuse of civilization, perfectly happy to consume that which others throw away.

The average otyugh spends most of its day wandering around the sewers, looking for tasty garbage to hoard and devour. While not particularly territorial, rival otyughs sometimes fight over an especially tasty garbage pit or dumping ground. When at rest, an otyugh buries itself in trash and filth, leaving only one of its tentacles on the surface to keep an eye on its surroundings. As a creature that lives underground, otyughs are active whenever they are hungry, but those encountered on the surface (such as in a swamp) are usually nocturnal.

Those who meet an otyugh often do so while exploring a sewer or swamp. In such an instance, the otyugh usually attacks without bothering to communicate, being fearful of outsiders who likely view it as a monster. Those who regularly dwell in their native environment can often

strike up an uneasy truce with these lumbering garbage eaters, agreeing to leave their filth alone in exchange for safe passage. Some even make agreements to provide the otyughs with tasty garbage in exchange for their protection. Such individuals are usually hiding something of little interest to otyughs but that would be considered obscene or profane by surface folk, such as an infernal cyst or an evil artifact.

Otyughs can speak a broken mix of Common and Undercommon and have a generally foul disposition. They know that others see them as monsters, and do not really care so long as they are allowed to feed in peace. Otyughs communicate with one another through a series of tentacle gestures and the release of faint smells into the air. Because otyughs are most often encountered in a sewer, most creatures would never detect their olfactory communication, but to other otyughs, the scents are quite clear. Although less accurate than most languages, an otyugh can communicate basic messages and emotions via scent up to a mile (or more if the receiver is downwind), even through a twisting maze of passages.

Ecology

Despite their odd shape and disgusting diet, otyughs are a naturally occurring creature, not created by magical experimentation or deliberate crossbreeding. Ancient texts speak of large creatures wandering the swamps on three stumps, waving as many tentacles above a crocodile-like maw. Some even theorize that the otyugh is the primordial relative of the crocodile, due to their similar features and environments. Such swamp-dwelling otyughs feed off decaying plants and animals in the swamp. When the sewers of cities became prevalent, many saw these locations as a bountiful feast, owing primarily to the rich fare of the city's inhabitants. Since this migration, otyughs have thrived. There are few predators in a city's sewer greater than the otyugh, placing it at the top of this subterranean food chain. The otyughs are aware of this, and are more than willing to make bargains with their surface-dwelling neighbors if necessary to ensure this security.

Otyughs are born in the same environment that they live in, usually sewers or swamps. After mating, a female otyugh carries the growing young internally for approximately 30 days, at which point the barely mobile, leech-like young crawl into a pouch located on her back. There they live for 6 months, parasitically feasting on her blood, until she expels them from the pouch in a particularly messy process. The independent young are nursed on sewer water and food chewed by the parents until their own teeth emerge 1 month later. A young otyugh spends the first year of its life living with one of its parents (with parents taking turns rearing children), learning the relatively simple skills it needs to survive.

Roleplaying an Otyugh

Unlike most creatures that clearly look like monsters, an otyugh can speak. Although otyughs are not too smart, and are generally driven by hunger above all else, roleplaying an encounter with one of these lumbering beasts can make for an entertaining event. Here are a few simple tips to help you with an otyugh encounter.

Treat it like a monster first: When the PCs first encounter the otyugh, treat it like an ordinary monster encounter, emphasizing its inhuman nature, nasty tentacles, and gaping maw, dripping with saliva. Don't forget to mention the horrible stench that follows it like a cloud. If you treat it like a monster first, the characters will be twice as shocked when it actually speaks.

Once wounded, surrender: After the PCs have hit the otyugh a few times, have the otyugh surrender. Merciless characters might cut it down anyway, so be prepared for this possibility, but otherwise it throws its tentacles up in the air and shouts, "Me give up!"

Use broken language: Otyughs are not too bright, and their grasp of language is simple. Avoid large words and long sentences. Make sure to speak in a deep, grumbly voice.

Give it some human characteristics: Although monstrous, an otyugh still has some things in common with the characters. It might ask for a snack or complain about its children. Be careful not to take this too far. After all, a snack for an otyugh might be a rotting leg, and its children might try to eat careless adventurers.

It is also during this time that an otyugh first learns to speak. This event is important to otyughs and is celebrated annually with a feast of the most delectable morsels the otyughs can find. After 1 year, the young otyughs leave their parents' dens to find their own. These first dens are usually close to their parents' at first, but as their food intake grows, they move farther away to avoid competing for resources.

At 5 years of age, an otyugh is fully grown and begins to search for a mate by releasing a cloyingly sweet scent into the air. Courtship is a lengthy affair, with both otyughs offering progressively nicer gifts to the other (all of which are made up of garbage and refuse). After a month of courtship, if both partners are sufficiently impressed, they exchange half of their assembled trophies with each other to seal the bond. Most otyughs mate for life, but they maintain separate lairs, joining one another daily to hunt and spend time together. Most surface dwellers find this behavior truly odd in something so monstrous, but otyughs genuinely show affection for their mates and will take terrible revenge on those who harm their spouses.

Many cities consider otyughs to be a pest at worst, while some even value their presence in the sewers as a sort of

Otyugh Treasures

Otyughs place a great amount of value in objects that most other creatures would find worthless. When a group of adventurers explores an otyugh's lair, use the following chart to randomly determine a few objects that can be found on display.

d20	Object
1	Broken weapon
2	Bent shield
3	Rotting barrel
4	Basket full of fish heads
5	Sack of rotten apples
6	Half-used candle
7	Human skull
8	Severed arm/leg
9	Decaying corpse
10	Tarnished silver plate (5 gp)
11	Bent golden spoon (2 gp)
12	Half-empty wine bottle
13	Soiled tapestry
14	Rotting meat
15	Collection of broken glass shards
16	Cracked stone lid of a sarcophagus
17	Length of chain
18	Used torches
19	Rusted kettle with a hole in it
20	Soiled minor magic item

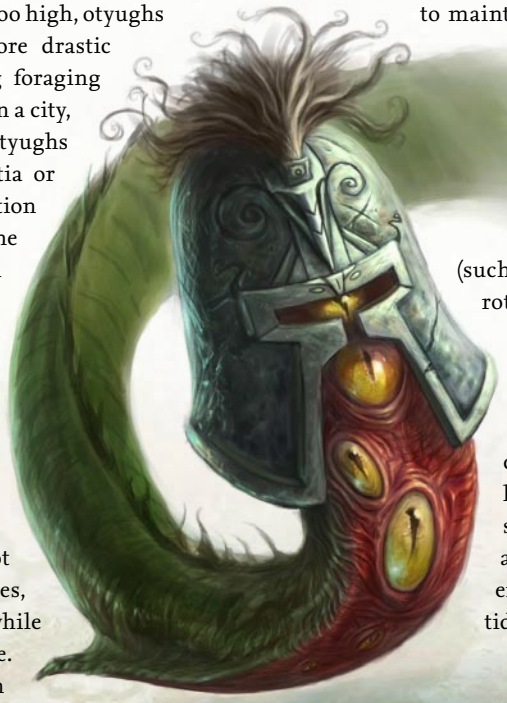
wandering clean-up crew. Otyugh population is controlled entirely by the food supply (or rather, garbage supply). When their population grows too high, otyughs begin to starve and take more drastic measures for food, including foraging outside their normal habitat. In a city, this usually means that the otyughs are hunted by the local militia or adventurers until the population is sufficiently trimmed. In the wild, this overpopulation often leads to groups splitting off to find new locations to feed.

Habitat & Society

Whether in a sewer or a swamp, otyughs tend to live a relatively solitary existence, meeting up with others of their kind infrequently. They do not even share a lair with their mates, instead preferring to meet while foraging for choice garbage. Such forays are usually done in silence, with the only communication occurring through scent. Although they live alone, otyughs do consider themselves part of a loose community of sewer dwellers (or swamp dwellers), which may include non-otyughs.

Whenever there is a threat to their habitat, the eldest otyugh in a community calls for a moot, or gathering. The moot is called by releasing a rather acrid scent, one that all otyughs recognize. Despite any differences or rivalries, all otyughs respond to this call and gather together to discuss the problem and come up with a solution. These moots are chaotic affairs, with each member shouting over the others, trying to get its ideas heard. While not particularly intelligent, otyughs are relatively crafty and can usually come up with a solution to most problems. Most moots are called to discuss a new, and possibly dangerous, inhabitant to the area or to determine what is to be done when the food supply dwindles. Occasionally moots are called to discuss an alliance with a local group or to resolve a territorial dispute before it gets too violent. Although it is a very rare practice, moots are sometimes convened to elect a leader in times of crisis or war. Such a leader is called a lord by the other otyughs and is usually obeyed by other members of the community until the crisis is over.

Otyughs frequently use such gatherings as a time to settle grudges and disputes over territory. Such matters are always decided through physical combat, with the opponents squaring off in a large, open space, while the rest of the community observes and shouts advice. During these bouts, each otyugh is given a single object by the community elder that the otyugh must hold onto throughout the fight. The victor is the last otyugh to maintain possession of his item. As a result, most disputes are solved in what looks like a wrestling match, with tentacles flailing and huge bodies slamming into one another. The objects used are usually identical, although they vary from match to match (such as a single flower, crumbling brick, or rotten apple).



An individual otyugh maintains a small lair somewhere near its feeding grounds. In a sewer environment, such lairs usually take the form of unused cisterns or basements. In a swamp, lairs are usually made in shallow bogs, surrounded by dense swamp reeds, allowing only one means of entry. In either case, otyugh lairs are by no means tidy. Garbage, refuse, and scraps of food litter the area, making the place smell as bad as it looks. As an otyugh wanders

the sewer, it often finds treasure that it brings back to its lair, piling it up in a place of honor. There are some who believe that anything of value that is thrown away eventually ends up in one of these hoards, but there is little truth to this legend. Otyughs value items differently than most other creatures, and the items they collect are rarely of any worth. This is not to say that an otyugh's treasure never contains anything of value, but those hoping to find riches must first sort through a mountain of trash. For those dealing with otyughs, it is unwise to insult their "treasures," and outright deadly to refuse a gift.

Campaign Role

Outside their obvious roles as a sewer and swamp monsters, otyughs make for fascinating roleplaying encounters. They are frequently aware of all the happenings in their environment and can make for interesting information-brokers. Convincing an otyugh to part with its knowledge is no simple task, as an otyugh does not value money, magic items, or other conventional treasure. Instead, those wishing to deal with an otyugh must often bring it a list of unusual items. While rarely expensive, gathering up a cart full of rotting pumpkins and hauling them into the sewer might lead to the local townsfolk asking some embarrassing questions.

In addition, otyughs collect strange and unusual items, meaning that if something gets thrown away, it might very well find itself in one of their treasure hoards. Locating and retrieving such an item should be difficult, especially if the local community of otyughs is large enough to pose a serious threat to would-be thieves. Characters might find themselves being forced to undertake unusual missions to garner their reward. Clearing up a clogged sewer drain or convincing a butcher shop to dump its leftovers into a particular trash heap might not seem like the work of an adventurer, but it does make for an interesting encounter or side quest.

Treasure

Otyughs collect items that last, as few things do in their damp environment; the bigger, the better. Metal and wooden objects are the favorites, regardless of their condition. An otyugh might pass up a small gold ring in favor of a metal shield with no straps, valuing such an item based on its size and overall condition, as opposed to its material. A clever adventurer might be able to trade an ordinary helm that is in good shape to an otyugh for a crushed golden crown.

Otyughs also value objects with strong odors, as these are things that stand out in their stinky environment. A basket of rotting fish is worth a lot to an otyugh, but they know that over time, such things lose their stench as they decompose, and value such items accordingly.

Scent Messages

Otyughs can communicate through scent, although the messages are very rudimentary. The following guide shows some common messages, and what they smell like.

Scent	Message
Rotting fish	Danger is near
Smoke	Come quickly
Flowers	Stay away
Sour apples	I am hungry, got food?
Rancid meat	No food here
Wet fungus	Delicious food here
Rotten potatoes	Bad food here
Ammonia	Time for a moot
Overripe fruit	Looking for a mate
Vinegar	Intruders
Onion	I am lost
Old wine	I am injured and need help

The true treasure of an otyugh's lair can be found on the bodies of their victims. An otyugh will often bring the bodies home to feed on them at their leisure, stripping off their gear and leaving it in a heap. Such items are rarely valuable to an otyugh and can usually be found tossed in a corner or trampled underfoot.

Variants

Otyughs sometimes dwell in environments with dangerous hazards and strange food sources. As a result, some exhibit odd mutations and other physical deformities.

Corpsefeaster: Some otyughs develop a particular taste for the flesh of dead creatures, preferring it above all other sources of food. Corpsefeaster otyughs possess a particularly heinous ability that allows them to vomit forth a shower of rotting meat and bones in a 20-foot cone. Anyone caught in this cone must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds. Creatures caught in this cone must also make a save against the corpsefeaster's disease, as if it had bitten them. Corpsefeaster otyughs lose the constrict ability.

Mutant: An otyugh might be born with an extra tentacle (adding one tentacle attack), another leg (increasing speed by 10 feet), or webbed feet and gills (granting a swim speed of 30 and the amphibious subtype).

Oozing: Otyughs that dwell in caustic environments, or those that dine on alchemical refuse, may develop the ability to secrete an acidic toxin through their hide. Any creature that is struck by an oozing otyugh's tentacle or bite takes an additional 1d6 points of acid damage. This additional damage is also dealt on a successful grapple check. Oozing otyughs do not transmit disease through their bite.

Plaguebearer: Considering where they live, otyughs make for natural disease carriers. Otyughs are immune to filth fever, the most common ailment for those visiting the sewers or swamps, and every otyugh is a carrier of the disease. Sometimes, however, an otyugh can become infected with so many ailments that it becomes a plaguebearer otyugh. These disgusting creatures are covered in lesions, boils, and rashes, and anyone in combat with them risks contracting a truly terrible sickness. Among their own kind, plaguebearers are regarded as prophets, and make proclamations (of dubious wisdom or veracity) to others of their kind, who accept these statements as truth. While other otyughs are smart enough to keep their distance, they often help to feed their stricken cousins and use them to punish those who intrude upon their domain.

Plaguebearer otyughs are in constant pain, leading many to believe they are in a sort of rage. Because they lack the proper appendages to sooth their wounds, these wretched creatures spend most of their time mindlessly bashing at anything that moves, desperate to distract themselves from the pain.

Plaguebearer Otyugh **CR 7**

N Large aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +5, Spot +6

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 9, flat-footed 19
(+10 natural, –1 size)

hp 90 (12d8+36)

DR 5/slashing or piercing; **Immune** disease

Fort +7, **Ref** +4, **Will** +7

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft.

Melee 2 tentacles +11 (1d8+2) and
bite +8 (1d6+1 plus disease)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with tentacle)

Special Attacks constrict (1d8+2 plus disease), disease, improved grab

TACTICS

Before Combat A plaguebearer otyugh rarely hides itself, instead preferring to charge at any creature it perceives as a threat.

During Combat Plaguebearer otyughs attack as many different enemies as possible, hoping to spread their diseases.

Morale A plaguebearer otyugh is in far too much pain to recognize danger to its life and fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 10, **Con** 17, **Int** 5, **Wis** 6, **Cha** 4

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +15

Feats Ability Focus (disease), Alertness, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (tentacle)

Skills Hide +1, Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Common

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constrict (Ex) A plaguebearer otyugh deals automatic tentacle damage with a successful grapple check. Creatures that take constrict damage are also subject to the plaguebearer otyugh's disease ability.

Disease (Ex) Sewer Madness—bite or constrict, Fortitude DC 21, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d4 Dex, 1d4 Con, and 1d4 Wis. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a plaguebearer otyugh must hit with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Skills A plaguebearer otyugh has a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when in its lair, due to its coloration.

Otyughs on Golarion

Otyughs are present in many of the sewer systems throughout Avistan and northern Garund. They are most prevalent in the sewers of Korvosa, where they are used as sewer cleaners in some city quarters. This is due to a lack of proper drainage, forcing the city's leaders to turn to an alternative means of waste disposal. Although efficient, the number of otyughs in the city is growing quite rapidly, leading to a number of breakouts, with hungry otyughs turning to the streets above for sustenance. It is only a matter of time before this situation becomes dire. For more information, see *Pathfinder Chronicles: Guide to Korvosa*.

In the ancient Taldan city of Zimar lives a self-proclaimed otyugh king, lording over the entire undercity. Known as Gulreesh, Lord of Filth, this massive otyugh holds court in a gigantic cistern, and those wishing to enter his domain had best treat him with respect, for it is rumored he devours those who offend him. It is unclear what connection Gulreesh has with the actual rulers of Zimar, but one thing is certain: the rulers aboveground take no actions against Gulreesh or his otyugh servants, leading some to believe that he is hiding some terrible secret about the rulers of the city, and they fear moving against him because of it.

The swamps and crumbling ruins of the Sodden Lands have become a breeding ground for otyughs. All of the rotting plants and bloated corpses of these ruined kingdoms make for a bountiful food supply. In addition, there is something about the area that causes aberrations (such as otyughs) to migrate there. Those otyughs that are born there are more feral than their kin, and many do not have the ability to speak. Not surprisingly, plaguebearer otyughs are relatively common in this rotting wasteland. The hurricane and constant rainfall does not seem to bother the otyughs, some of which may be found upon occasion standing at the shore watching the storm rage. If the otyughs know why this area is so fascinating to them, they are not telling.

Otyugh

The strong scent of rotting garbage precedes this walking horror. It stumbles on three massive legs that end in flat stumps with broad toes. Atop these is a gigantic mouth full of crumbling teeth that seems to stretch from one side of its broad body to the other. Extending from its trunk is a trio of muscular tentacles that wave menacingly, each one ending in a hooked pad.

Otyugh **CR 4**

N Large aberration

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +6, Spot +6

Defense

AC 17, touch 9, flat-footed 17
(+8 natural, –1 size)

hp 36 (6d8+9)

Fort +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +6

Offense

Spd 20 ft.

Melee 2 tentacles +4 (1d6) and
bite –2 (1d4 plus disease)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. w/ tentacle)

Special Attacks constrict (1d6), disease, improved grab

Tactics

Before Combat If an otyugh is aware of intruders, it submerges itself in a mound of garbage or underneath water, leaving only its eye-tentacle at the surface so that it can see. Once hidden, it waits for its prey to draw near before rushing out to attack.

During Combat An otyugh attacks the nearest creature, using its tentacles to grab and constrict opponents. If another creature is hurting it, an otyugh quickly shifts its attacks to the more dangerous target.

Morale An otyugh flees if it is reduced to 5 hit points or less unless it is in its lair, in which case it fights to the death.

Statistics

Str 11, **Dex** 10, **Con** 13, **Int** 5, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +8

Feats Alertness, Toughness, Weapon Focus (tentacle)

Skills Hide –1, Listen +6, Spot +6

Languages Common

Special Abilities

Constrict (Ex) An otyugh deals automatic tentacle damage with a successful grapple check.

Disease (Ex) Filth fever—bite, Fortitude DC 14, incubation period 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, an otyugh must hit with a tentacle attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

Skills An otyugh has a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks when in its lair, due to its coloration.

THE ECOLOGY OF THE OWLBEAR

Part bird, part bear, altogether deadly

by Johnathan M. Richards

Artwork by Scott Rosema

The two men traipsed through the forest, a study in contrasts. The older man, Griff, had the weather-worn skin of a man who had spent his life exposed to the elements. Gray was starting to show at his temples, yet he strode forward with a confident air, barely feeling the weight of the heavy crossbow he carried over his shoulder or the sword belted at his hip. Colin, on the other hand, was a young lad, cursed with a baby face and insatiable curiosity. He struggled to keep up the pace set by Griff, weighted down by the large pack on his back, nearly tripping over the walking stick he carried with every step.

They were nearing their prey, an owlbear that had taken up residence in the Spinewood Forest and had taken to attacking travelers on the King's Road.

"We're getting near," Griff said. "Take a look at that."

Colin looked at what the older man was indicating, a tree whose bark had literally been shredded in parallel grooves, vertically.[1] He stood staring at it for a while, marveling at the strength of a creature able to dig an inch into a tree with one swipe of its paw, then hurried to catch up to Griff, who had started off again.

After a few minutes' travel, Griff stopped, pointing ahead. "There," he said in a whisper. A cave was visible in the clearing ahead,, its dark interior cloaked in shadows and mystery. "Quietly now, unpack the gear."

Colin set down his walking stick, lowering his pack to the ground. Opening it, he pulled out a large earthenware jar of honey. Prying off the sealed lid with his knife, he left it in the middle of the clearing, not 20' from the mouth of the cave. Then he backed his way to where Griff stood, at the base of a huge oak, his eyes never leaving the cave for fear that if he did, he would be taken unawares by the beast that dwelled inside.

"Hold this," commanded Griff, passing Colin his crossbow. Dutifully, Colin held the weapon, impressed by its weight. Someday, he thought, I'll wield a weapon like this, and be a fighter like Griff. He often entertained such thoughts, but deep down, doubted that they would ever be more than dreams. His gawky, spindly frame seemed more suited to the life of a sage or wizard, and his insatiable hunger for reading had given him the nickname "Bookhead."

Suddenly realizing he had been daydreaming again, Colin snapped out of it to see Griff on a branch above him, reaching down for his weapon. Colin passed it up. "Leave the stick, and climb on up here," the older man whispered. Colin leaned his walking stick on the far side of the oak, and clambered up next to his mentor.

"How much time do we have?"

"Better part of an hour, I'd say. Owlbears like to sleep 'til noon or thereabouts. Part of their mixed-up heritage."

"Why don't we just go in there, then? Kill it while it sleeps?"

Griff just chuckled. "Kid, you want to live as long as me, you gotta learn not to take chances. Up here, we're safe. Owlbear can't reach us, but this," hefting the crossbow, "this lets us reach him."[2]

"And we're using honey as bait? I thought owlbears were strictly carnivorous. Their heads are all owl, according to the illustrations I've seen."

"Yeah, and their bottoms are all bear, but they still lay eggs. Just trust me on this, there's enough bear in an owlbear that it can't pass up honey."[3]

The two were silent for a while, as Griff readied his crossbow for firing. He had a perfect vantage of the honey jar from his perch in the oak, and yet was reasonably sure that he wouldn't be noticed by the owlbear, even taking its superior senses into account.[4]

The minutes passed, and neither resumed their whispered conversation, not wanting to take the chance of being overheard by a creature that could hear a mouse rustle in the grass across a field.

And finally, their patience was rewarded. The creature shuffled out of the cave,

reared up on its hind legs, and stretched. Colin was overcome with awe at the massive beast. Seeing it in person was so much greater than studying the inked sketches that were available in the Scribe's Library. The creature stood a full 8' tall, the brown feathers of its owlish head merging seamlessly into the fur of its body, somewhere past its shoulders and back. The owlbear looked around, and Colin noticed that it did so by turning its head instead of moving its eyes.[5]

Colin held his breath, afraid of being heard up in the tree, but he apparently avoided the owlbear's notice, for it dropped back down on all fours and approached the honey. Soon, it was lapping intently at the jar, seemingly oblivious to all else. Griff took aim, drew a short breath, and let out with a quiet "hoot." Immediately, the owlbear reared up, and Griff tightened his finger on the trigger. There was the quick twang of the crossbow, and the bolt went lightning-quick into the owlbear's right eye.

The screech was incredible. Colin covered his ears with both hands, amazed at the sheer intensity of the creature's deathroes. After what seemed an eternity, but was probably closer to a few scarce minutes, the owlbear dropped to its side, dead.

Griff jumped down out of the tree, landing like a cat. Colin, less sure of himself, climbed down. "And that's that," said the grizzled veteran.

"How'd you know one shot would kill him?" asked Colin. I would have expected it to have taken more to bring down something that big."

"And it would have, too, if I hadn't coated the bolt in poison," replied Griff. "As it was, did you see how long it took to die? He was dead as soon as the bolt hit, it just took him a while to realize it."[6]

Colin was shocked. He had always dreamed of being a hero, and idolized Griff as the epitome of everything he hoped to be himself, someday. But somehow, shooting at a creature with a poisoned crossbow bolt just didn't seem, well, heroic. Sadly, he realized his respect for his mentor had just dropped several notches.

While Colin was overcoming his shock, Griff had pulled out his long knife, and was beginning to skin the carcass. "Meat's not worth much, not the best eating, **but** a bearskin's a bearskin, even if there's only half a bear,"

"What's this?" asked Colin, picking up a tight oval bundle the size of his fist. It seemed organic, and had little bits of bone sticking out.

Griff glanced up from his skinning. "Owlbear pellet. The beasts spit them up like a cat with furballs." Colin dropped the pellet and wiped his hands on his pants.[7]

The enraged screech of an owlbear split the air. Colin jumped and turned to Griff, half expecting to see the beast he was skinning sit up and continue its attack. But no, the beast was dead, no doubt about it. The ear-splitting call was coming from behind them, from the cave mouth. As the two looked on with growing horror, another owlbear shambled forth on its hind legs, then dropped on all fours and charged.

"Run!" cried Griff, as he grabbed up his crossbow and hurried to load it. Colin was back at the oak and about to scurry up it into safety, when concern for his mentor made him look back. There was a twang from the weapon, and Colin grimaced when he saw the bolt fly past the head of the enraged beast. Then the owlbear was upon Griff, sending the man and the crossbow flying off in different directions with one swipe of its paw.[8]

Colin stood transfixed by the scene before him. Griff lay on the ground, obviously stunned, and the owlbear loomed above him, rearing up, blood dripping from one set of claws. Colin could run, either to the safety of the tree or back the way he came, but either way, his mentor and personal hero was dead.

Or, he could face the owlbear himself and buy Griff some time.

Grabbing up his walking stick, Colin yelled at the great beast, catching its attention. The giant head snapped in his direction, and it came toward the new threat.

Gotta even the odds, Colin thought. If I can blind him . . .

The boy dropped to one knee and scooped up a handful of loose dirt. He flung it straight into the creature's face, and leapt to the side. To his surprise, the owlbear matched his move, not bothered in the least by the cloud of grit and sand.[9]

"Griff!" Colin shouted, as he narrowly dodged a swipe of wicked claws. Sparing a quick glance in his mentor's direction, he saw that Griff was starting to come around. He also saw the crossbow lying in the dirt, its string severed by the owlbear's attack. Swinging his walking stick like a staff, Colin managed to land a blow to the side of the owlbear's head, but the attack didn't seem to bother it in the least. Colin did his best to keep out of the creature's reach, backing up in a circle.

"Griff! You okay?" Sweat was starting to pour into Colin's eyes, but he didn't have the time to wipe it away. Keeping the owlbear at bay was taking every ounce of his concentration.

"Fine," Griff replied, as he staggered to his feet. Out of the corner of his eye, Colin got a look at his mentor. Three long gashes scarred the side of his face, and one eye was covered in blood. Whether the eye itself was damaged or not, Colin couldn't tell, but he couldn't possibly see out of it in his present state. "Keep him busy," he said, pulling out his sword.

Colin tried, but as Griff approached from the side, the owlbear suddenly spun and attacked. Griff did some furious backpedalling to avoid its grasp, and tripped over the carcass of the first beast.[10] Colin jabbed his stick against the creature's head like a spear, managing to do little damage, but at least drawing the beast's attention away from Griff as he scrambled back up to his feet.

Colin was tiring rapidly. He sensed there was little hope that the two of them could overcome the owlbear; it seemed to sense their every move, and knew that the greatest weapon it faced was the sword, for it turned its attention to Griff every time he approached. The older fighter was weary as well, and it was only a matter of time before one or both of them went down. If I could only keep its attention, Colin thought.

And then an idea sprang to his head. Before he had time to think too much about it, he held his walking stick horizontally out in front of him, and charged the owlbear.

The beast reared up, but Colin dodged between the raised forelimbs and pressed himself against the owlbear's chest, forcing his stick into its open beak. Immediately, he felt himself in the crushing grip of the owlbear's hug, and even though he started to see blackness in the periphery of his vision, he held onto the stick, keeping the monster's beak from snapping at him.[11]

Colin could feel his ribs starting to crack. "Hurry," he tried to say, but couldn't get the word out for lack of breath. Fortunately, the advice was unnecessary, for Griff had leapt onto the owlbear's back and stabbed down with his sword at the base of the creature's neck. The sword went in deep, and Colin felt the monster's grip slacken a little, even as he felt consciousness slipping away from him. The owlbear bit down in pain, finally snapping Colin's stick in half, and it spun its head around, almost 180 degrees, until it was staring at Griff with its huge, yellow eyes. Griff snarled back at it, and sawed with his sword at the creature's wound. The owlbear dropped Colin's limp form and spun in circles, trying to reach the man on its back, but finally, the beast fell to the ground itself, done in by loss of blood from its neck wound. Griff collapsed next to the dead beast.

Sometime later, Griff managed to crawl back to his feet, and stumble to the backpack. There, he unwrapped the single ***potion of healing*** he always carried. Staggering back to the boy, he poured it down Colin's throat, and he awoke, choking and sputtering.

"You okay, kid?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. How about you? Your eye!"

"I'll be fine."

"But the potion! You should have—"

"Forget it, kid. You deserved it. That was just about the bravest thing I've ever seen. Bravest, or stupidest, I'm not quite sure just yet. But I'll be okay once we get back to town, and to a healer."

"Should we go, then?"

"Yeah, we should. But first we'd better check out the cave. Just to make sure."

"But if there's another one, we're in no shape . . ." Colin protested.

"No argument there, kid, but it should be okay. Owlbears might settle down with a mate, but you'll never find more than one mated pair in the same den. Now, cubs, that's another matter, and we'd best have a look to be sure, but owlbear cubs are a curious bunch, and I'm sure they'd have come out to see what all the noise was about."

Cautiously, the two entered the cave. Colin stopped to light a torch from the pack, and by the light it provided, they could see the cave interior was for the most part empty. Over in one corner, though, was a small pile of twigs and leaves, and mixed in with the pile were several white spherical objects two feet in diameter. "Bingo," said Griff. "Eggs. We're in luck, kid. These things go for 2,000 pieces of silver each."[12]

"We'll never carry them all off in our condition."

"Yeah, true, but do you think you could manage one? We can always come back for the others."

"Okay."

On the long way home, Colin hefting the owlbear egg, and Griff shouldering the broken crossbow and backpack, Colin asked his mentor a question that had been puzzling him.

"You know, I read that the owlbear was created by a wizard, a long time ago, as a guardian. And that he combined the strengths of both owls and bears to make his creation as formidable as possible!"

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, I've always wondered about that. You'd think that he'd have created the owlbear with wings. I mean, owls are practically silent when they fly. It just seems odd that he'd have missed so obvious an advantage."

"Let's just be glad he did, kid. Can you imagine if we had flying owlbears around here? I don't even want to think about it."

"I guess you're right."[13]

Notes

1. This is a common sight in owlbear-infested areas. The creatures claw at selected trees with their front paws. This not only keeps their claws sharp, but marks off an owlbear's territory.

2. Because of their great size and weight, owlbears are not good tree climbers. Anyone treed by an owlbear is not completely safe, though, because the beasts are just nasty enough to wait it out, and are often strong enough to knock over the tree, depending on the size of both the owlbear and the tree.

3. This appears to be the only exception to the owlbear's otherwise carnivorous diet. It remains well-adapted to honey-gathering, as its thick coat of fur and feathers protects it from bee stings, and it retains the long tongue of a bear, perfect for lapping up the sticky substance.

4. Like the owl, an owlbear has double normal infravision, and quadruple normal hearing. In fact, the owlbear's hearing is so finely developed that it can attack normally in total darkness, and similarly can attack ***invisible*** creatures without penalty. Of course, this can be nullified with a ***silence*** spell.

5. Indeed, the owlbear's eyes are fixed in its head, looking straight ahead. It compensates for this by being able to turn its head a full 270 degrees, as compared to a human's 180. The owlbear has twice as many neck bones as does a human (fourteen to our seven) which allows for this flexibility. In addition, an owlbear can snap its neck from one position to another almost instantaneously.

6. The rugged constitution of an owlbear allows it to fight on for 1-4 rounds after it reaches 0 to -8 hit points. Once brought to -9 or fewer hit points, however, it is immediately slain.

7. Like owls, owlbears tear their food into chunks and swallow the chunks whole. Inside the stomach, much of the prey is digested, but bones, fur, feathers, and insect shells are churned into pellets, and regurgitated by the beast. These pellets are usually found near an owlbear's lair, and are thus a good indicator of an owlbear's presence nearby.

8. Owlbears, like humans, can rotate their forearms, and this gives them great strength and agility in seizing their prey. It is perhaps this feature alone which gives the owlbear its deadly ability to "hug" its opponents—and, as Griff just found out, allows them to make powerful side-swipes with their wicked claws.

9. Owlbears have a transparent third eyelid (also called a nictitating membrane) that they can flip across their eyes at will. This protects their sensitive eyes from dust, grit, and the like, but it also can protect them from strong light. Light spells are therefore ineffectual as blinding attacks against an owlbear.

10. So acute is the owlbear's sense of hearing that even in melee, it's almost impossible to sneak up on one. Owlbear ears are somewhat unique in that they are asymmetrical; one ear is higher than the other, and this makes it extremely efficient in pinpointing exactly where a particular sound is coming from. This fact has no doubt proven to be very unnerving to many a thief who tried using his ability to move silently to move past an owlbear.

11. Fortunately for Colin, once an owlbear gets a victim into a hug, it cannot use its claws to attack, relying on its crushing strength and sharp beak to kill its prey. Colin's surprise attack managed to neutralize the owlbear's claw and beak attacks, at the cost of automatic hugging damage each round.

12. Owlbear eggs are nearly perfect spheres. There will be from one to six eggs in an clutch; the eggs are laid several days apart. Once the young start to hatch, the parents provide them with freshly-killed meat. Owlbear "cubs" are carnivores from the start, and even though the mother owlbear is half bear, she does not produce milk for her young. The young will be raised by the mother for the first two years, during which time she will teach the cubs how to hunt for themselves. After the end of the second year, the cubs will go off on their own and stake out their own territory.

13. The suggested revised experience-point value for owlbears with the extra abilities listed in this article is 650 XP.

In addition to the normal owlbear, there is also the arctic variety (hinted at in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ book), and, if your campaign world permits it, the winged variety.

Arctic owlbear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any arctic
FREQUENCY Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Pack
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Day
DIET Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)
TREASURE: Incidental
ALIGNMENT Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-8)
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVEMENT! 12, Sw 9
HIT DICE: 8 +2
THAC0: 13
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE/ATTACK: **l-10/1-10/2-12**
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to cold-based attacks
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: L (12' tall)
MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special
XP VALUE: 2,000

Arctic owlbears are the polar cousins of the normal owlbear; they resemble a cross between a snowy owl and a polar bear. Both fur and feathers are a snowy white, while the claws and beak are both black. Yellow, glowing eyes look forward from a rounded head. Arctic owlbears speak the owlbear language, made up of loud screeches.

Combat: Arctic owlbears are as foul-tempered as their forest-dwelling cousins, immediately attacking prey with their front claws and wicked beak. They hug for 2-16 points of damage per round after scoring a claw hit with a roll of 18 or better. Once engaged in a hugging attack, the arctic owlbear cannot use its claws, but uses its beak to full advantage. A single attempt to break free from a hug is allowed; use the chance to bend bars/lift gates to determine success.

The arctic owlbear's fur and feathers are all multi-layered, protecting it from the coldest temperatures, even when wet. For this reason, the beasts are immune to all cold-based attacks. Additionally, due to their ability to blend into the arctic environment, they are 75% likely to surprise their prey.

Habitat/Society: Arctic owlbears live in the coldest areas of the arctic, often making their lairs in pre-existing caves or carving their own dens in banks of snow. However, they tend to be wanderers, constantly on the move in search of prey, and so do not settle in one place for very long. If encountered in their lair, a mated pair of arctic owlbears may have 1-6 eggs (20%) or young (80%) with them; there is only a 25% chance of one or the other. The young will be from 40% to 70% grown, fighting as creatures with 5 or 6 Hit Dice. Damage from an immature arctic owlbear is l-6/1-6/2-8, and characters get a bonus of +20% to their bend bars/lift gates roll when trying to escape from a hug.

Ecology: Arctic owlbears live for about 20 years. They will prey on anything, but prefer seal meat above all else. Unlike normal owlbears, the arctic variety hunt primarily in the day, and, being good swimmers, will pursue their prey into the frigid waters without hesitation. They are well-equipped for their environment—rough, leathery pads on the bottom of their paws help them maintain stability over icy surfaces. The local inhabitants of arctic regions say that there's nothing worse than having an arctic owlbear on your trail, because of their stubborn determination, nasty disposition, and constant hunger.

Winged owlbear

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any nonarctic
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Family
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Late afternoon/early evening
DIET. Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE: Low (5-7)
TREASURE: Incidental
ALIGNMENT! Neutral
NO. APPEARING: 1 (2-5)
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVEMENT! 12, Fl 18 (E)
HIT DICE: 5 + 2
THAC0: 15
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6/1-6/2-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Hug, surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: L (8' tall, 20' wingspan)
MORALE: Steady (11-12) + Special
XP VALUE: 975

The winged owlbear is the ultimate synthesis of owl and bear. It looks like a standard owlbear, but in addition it has a pair of large wings growing from its shoulders. They are just as nasty-tempered as their ground-dwelling cousins, and speak the same language of screeches.

Combat: Winged owlbears fight as the wingless variety, utilizing their front claws, sharp beaks, and mighty hug. In addition, they are almost totally silent in flight due to the construction of their wing feathers, and this imposes a -6 penalty on opponents' surprise rolls.

Habitat/Society: Winged owlbears can be found in almost any nonarctic environment (when they can be found at all—they are very scarce), but seem to prefer wooded forests and mountainous terrains. Due to their flight capabilities, winged owlbears tend to claim larger territories as "theirs"—usually ten to twenty square miles.

Winged owlbears live in mated pairs. If encountered in their lairs, there is a 25% chance there will be 1-3 eggs (20%) or young (80%) in addition to the adults. The young are identical to normal owlbear young, as their wings will not support them in flight until they are at full size.

Ecology: Winged owlbears tend to live slightly longer than the normal variety, often reaching 25 years or so. They are sought after by wizards, even though to date no one has managed to domesticate one; nonetheless, eggs can go as high as 4,000 silver pieces, while the price for live young can reach 10,000 silver pieces.

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Owlbear

"Nothing is as angry as an owlbear. Everything is its enemy and its food—from the mouse to the dragon. Nothing scares it, nothing calms it, nothing stops it. To an owlbear, every fight is its last, and it acts as if everything it meets will kill and eat it unless it kills and eats those it encounters first. The owlbear consumes everything it can fit in its mouth and breaks everything it can't.

"Owlbears can be broken, it's true, and trained in a fashion as guards. But how secure would you feel, knowing your safety relied upon the mind behind those angry, red-rimmed eyes?"

—from the Pathfinder Society primer on monsters

Half predatory bird, half angry grizzly, owlbears combine two dangerous creatures in a hybrid form that is brutally efficient at killing. Half-mad from the moment they hatch, owlbears are terrors to anything unlucky enough to cross their paths. They respect only strength, whether that of another healthy male or a savage orc willing to lose eyes, fingers, and blood while trying to tame them. Born of magical experimentation, owlbears are loathed as unnatural and destructive, even by most druids.

Overview

Male owlbears grow to a bipedal height of 8 feet, and weigh up to 1,500 pounds, although larger specimens are frequently reported. The female is only slightly smaller. Some owlbears are furrier than others, but the majority of them are covered in coarse feathers (over an undercoat of short, thick hairs) which are much prized by scribes to make hardy quills. In all cases the creature has a truly horrid disposition and attacks anything larger than a mouse with which it comes into contact. An owlbear's attack is a combination of non-retractable claws (which

are at least 2 inches long) and bites with its beak. Though it travels like a quadruped, in combat the owlbear usually rears up on its hind legs, and can even deliver a vicious hug attack. It has the ability to turn its head 270 degrees, which combined with its excellent hearing makes the creature difficult to sneak up on. An owlbear makes an unsettling cry as it attacks—a guttural roar rising to an ear-piercing scream—and communicates its territory to others by a low, growling hoot.

Owlbears tend to lair in nests—huge masses of bones and flotsam that can cover many square yards or encompass large areas of caves or dungeons, which is where they are most frequently found. Owlbears eat practically anything and, like their avian cousins, regurgitate anything inedible in the form of pellets—foul hairy clusters of bone and waste, which may contain treasure. The owlbear is not acquisitive, and any valuables in its lair are incidental to its feeding habits.

Most owlbears prefer to live in cave or dungeon settings—narrow spaces, tight corners, and the dark suit their combat techniques. They are also encountered in forests; these owlbears build huge nests in great trees and mark their territory by raking the huge trunks, often killing the tree and making the lair easy to spot. Such nests are unfortunately a beacon for any owlbear hunter or greedy (and foolhardy) individual. Forest owlbears have occasionally been seen gathering honey from beehives, but apart from their grizzly-like viciousness, this seems to be the only significant bear habit retained by the creatures—they otherwise live on meat. Owlbears hunt by day or night, depending upon the habits of their preferred prey in the region. They usually do not hibernate, but can do so in winter months when food is scarce.

Ecology

Many fairy stories and folk tales, particularly "The Wicked Princess and the Wise Owl," "Fetcher's Second Fowl," and "The Owl Bride and the Bear Groom," offer plausible explanations for how the creature came into being. Some claim owlbears were created in the dungeons of Hell as nightmares for children, but the most commonly held theory is that they resulted from the dabbling of an insane wizard delving into the very weft of life. Frequent *legend lore* spells have enabled the wise to shed some light upon their origins, the most respected coming from *On the Origin of Monsters* by Erasmos Wedgwood:

"The Spurned One is credited by the wise with creating the first of the owlbears—forming them in his unholy crucible of life where the forms of many creatures were woven. Many fallen creatures created in the crucible were spared the foul hybrid life the Spurned One tried to give them, crawling away to die unseen in the dark dungeons of his lair. Here, however, he wove life between a great cave bear and a giant owl and gave rise to the first owlbear, a creature which survived from this early corruption and consequently thrived. Some surmise that the Spurned One learnt his dark secrets from the twisted fey and that his dabblings represent the only time a human has mastered the dark fey's perverting magic school and used a terrible spell of corrupt remaking.

"For a time, these early owlbears served as useful guards for the Spurned One. However, despite brutal training, these first eventually broke their chains and slew all other guardians between them and the safety of the forests and dungeons that surrounded the Spurned One's lair, and became the ancestors of the owlbear race."

An alternative genesis, suggested by the conjurer Quarus Mobe, states that the owlbear is the result of a magical accident caused when a wizard with an owl familiar summoned a bear in an area of high latent transmutation magic, resulting in an arcane dislocation that created an owlbear from the two. Mobe goes on to say that, in fact, such accidents are common, but that wizards rarely live to tell the tale. He also philosophized about where the remaining flesh (which he calls "the bear-owl portion") goes and why no one has ever seen one. This theory has been discredited by the wise, but persists in adventurer gossip and rumors passed by ignorant townsfolk.

Unlike their bear kin, adult owlbears mate for life—the process of finding a suitable mate kills so many that once they find one, another mate is never tolerated or sought. Such is an owlbear's attachment to its mate that if the mate is slain, the surviving owlbear may drag around the corpse for several days or weeks. It is not unusual to find an older lone owlbear that cherishes (in its kind's own way) the skull and rotting body parts of a deceased mate.

A mated female lays a clutch of 1–12 perfectly spherical eggs once per year, which incubate for 35–45 days before hatching. Rather than sitting on the eggs (which would crush them), owlbears rest near their eggs and warm them with body heat or exhaled breath, though sometimes a compost-like pile of leftover meat and regurgitated pellets in the lair provides a slow heat source. Eggs fetch

Corrupt Remaking

Although little is known about the *corrupt remaking* spell, it is rumored to be a twisted version of *baleful polymorph*, which allows the caster to fuse several creatures into a single living thing. Fragmentary notes on the spell mention a *crucible of remaking*, a minor artifact reputed to enhance shapechanging and necromantic magic. Presumably the spell requires holding all affected creatures or creature-parts in the crucible, perhaps with alchemical reagents to encourage certain traits in the hybrid creature, with the overall shape and design chosen by the creator at the time of casting.

A Friendship Made in Hell

Orcs have a special affinity for owlbears, admiring their savagery, tempers, and even their red-rimmed eyes. Some orc trainers have established a kind of affection for owlbears in their charge, and it is common knowledge that orcs make the best owlbear trainers. Orcs bearing owlbear-inflicted scars are greatly respected by their own kind, evidence that they have the strength to withstand the mighty owlbear.

It is considered a mark of great status for an orc to have an owlbear pet or mount, and those with more than one are afforded the greatest respect. Some orc tribes keep an owlbear as a mascot, and chiefs have been known to give owlbears names that otherwise might be given to strong orc sons. In some lands, this has developed into a boastful game of who has the biggest, fastest, greediest, or angriest owlbear, and travelers have reported seeing orcs riding garishly adorned, painted, or even plucked and tattooed owlbears.

Renowned orc chieftain **Bakarl Hosk** (CE male orc ranger 13) is a hulking brute with scar tissue covering one side of his face. He gladly tells the tale of how he came to have the injury—finding himself unarmed and facing the owlbear that is now his slave. The owlbear, Kharsk Fugg, is an iron-clad horror (banded mail barding, AC 21, speed 20 ft.) that acts as his battle mount.

Owlbear Equipment

Those able to train owlbears sometimes give them armor or other gear appropriate for their trained tasks. Usually these additions are designed to be very easy to attach or remove, as owlbears rarely tolerate anyone (even their handlers) reaching around and under them to tighten or loosen straps. Some "wild" owlbears still wear leather straps from these devices, showing they actually were once tamed and have since gone feral.

Owlbear Blinders: Used in siege warfare, these blinders restrict the owlbear's vision to directly where its head is pointing, helping to stop the owlbear from getting distracted and allowing the rider to focus its attention. This gives the rider a +2 equipment bonus to Ride checks made to control the owlbear, but gives the owlbear a –2 penalty to Spot checks. **Cost**: 10 gp.

Thorny Breastplate: This barding is covered in thick metal spikes and is designed to protect the owlbear's chest, shoulders, and neck, while leaving the limbs mostly free for moving and attacking. It provides a +5 bonus to AC, reduces the owlbear's speed to 20 feet, and adds +1d8 piercing damage to its grapple attacks. **Cost**: 600 gp. **Weight**: 80 lbs.

around 2,000 gp on the open market. Parents are even more ferocious when defending their eggs; even male owlbears, who drag kills back to their nesting mates, are more belligerent and sensitive to the presence of intruders. Owlbear hatchlings reach maturity after about 2 years. The young are particularly vulnerable to hunters at this early stage—immature owlbears are the easiest to train, and a young owlbear can sell for up to 5,000 gp. This lucrative trade has led to the founding of several companies specializing in professional owlbear hunting—fearless souls expert in the insane behavior of their prey.

Habitat & Society

Very occasionally a group of owlbears joins a particularly huge or fearsome male to form a pack. These packs tend to be short-lived, and as soon as the supply of food in the area dwindles, the owlbears turn on each other for sustenance. Owlbear hunters also note that owlbears come together in such packs when they are being hunted. Other than this, or when trained owlbears are kept together, they tend to be solitary or hunt in mated pairs.

An owlbear's lair is usually a nest of great size, which is crammed with discarded items from its kills. Individual lairs vary greatly depending on available prey and the success of an owlbear's hunting. One lair could be a vast heap of objects between trees containing wagon wheels from destroyed caravans, tree branches, and bones jutting up out of the main mass. Another could be a huge pit of filth, alive with lice and rot, barely covering a series of small caves filled with eggs. A different beast may lair in a huge cavern filled with a suffocating stench, its nest a chaos of haphazard construction near a churning pool formed by a subterranean river. In general, an owlbear lair has a 25% chance of having 1d6 eggs or young.

Campaign Role

Owlbears tend to be used as chance encounters or as guardians for lairs, but can also make for great infestation monsters, driven out of the wilds by necessity and humanoid encroachment into their habitats.

As noted earlier, owlbears react to being hunted by forming a pack, usually led by a particularly fearsome male. An adventure could take place during a harsh winter with the PCs holed up in a small village that is suddenly plagued by

owlbear attacks. These nocturnal ambushes provide a good hunter-and-hunted type of adventure, with the PCs asked to defend the village. This could then be extended by the sudden realization that the attacks are intelligent, and led by a druid or wizard who wants the locals distracted so he can rebuild a nearby stone circle that lies hidden beneath the winter snow. Conversely, the PCs might be contacted by a distraught naturalist seeking to save the "noble beasts" from bands of greedy hunters bent on harvesting their eggs, forcing the PCs to risk their necks for beasts that are more likely to attack them than appreciate their assistance.

Owlbears make great wild mounts and siege beasts (particularly in the company of orcs) or can be deadly companions of other humanoid creatures. Quests involving hunting, capturing, and even training owlbears may be interesting side treks to a main adventure plot.

Treasure

If it is edible, an owlbear consumes it. If it can be broken, it is smashed. If it cannot be broken, it is attacked. Treasure tends to be on the paltry side in owlbear lairs. However, so ravenous is the owlbear that its stomach and pellets often contain the majority of its treasure. What is left in its lair tends to be badly damaged (an owlbear gets angry at things in its way), and therefore only those objects too large to be eaten or too sturdy to be destroyed tend to remain.

Variants

Further magical experimentation and a few accidental mutations have resulted in several new types of owlbear.

Arctic Owlbear: These creatures have white fur and feathers (+12 racial bonus on Hide checks in snowy areas), and are at home on ice, snow, and even near-freezing water (swim 30 feet).

Darklands Owlbear: The Darklands are teeming with owlbears. While most of them look like those on the surface, nearly a third have blue or pink eyes and white or pale yellow fur and feathers, much like other darkness-adapted creatures that lose their coloration. Some of these pale ones have darkvision to a range of 120 feet, while others are eyeless and navigate with scent and tremorsense. Whether normal or albino, Darklands owlbears are commonly encountered in Nar-Voth and often seen in Sekamina, where the drow use them as guards or beasts of burden (pacified by charm magic).

Fruss Owlbear: These hollow-boned, magically bred owlbears can fly, though it is difficult and inefficient for them. Easily distinguished from common owlbears by their thicker shoulder muscles and longer forelimb feathers, fruss can fly at a speed of 30 feet (poor). Flying or gliding for a minute or more causes the owlbear to become fatigued. Though strong overall, the owlbears' flying muscles are weak, and they cannot carry more than 50 pounds when flying. A fruss can use improved grab while flying, but must immediately land if its opponent weighs more than 50 pounds.

Great Hook-Clawed Owlbear: Living in the Shafts of Lebb, these owlbears have developed huge claws to enable them to climb the endlessly deep dungeon shafts of that accursed place (climb speed 20 feet, base claw damage 1d8).

Screaming Owlbear: Native to the Maelstrom, these creatures are warped by exposure to chaos energy.

Owlbear Training Gear

Trainers use specialized items in their work.

Enraging Whip: This whip has small caltrops or metal barbs woven into its length and a quartet of metal whistles attached to the fall; when snapped, the whistle sounds like screaming owlbear young. An owlbear's rider uses this noise to enrage the monster, prodding it to attack the nearest creature. Anyone who attacks an owlbear with such a whip draws its attack in preference to all other targets. **Cost**: 10 gp.

Incubation Stove: Designed by dwarves, this iron pot-bellied stove is about the size of a halfling. It burns wood, coal, dung, or fungus stalks, and has a large moveable compartment on the outside to hold maturing owlbear eggs. The stoves need constant attention to maintain the right temperature, else the eggs get cooked rather than incubated. Some variations have a spring- or crank-turned device that turns the eggs. **Cost**: 750 gp. **Weight**: 250 lbs.

Target Dummy: Dummies come in various shapes and sizes depending on what creature or race the prospective owner of the owlbear wants them to hate most. **Cost**: 2–20 gp, depending on how durable and realistic the buyer wants them to be.

Training an Owlbear

Owlbear training is, of course, incredibly risky. Trainers use the Handle Animal skill, but the DC for all training checks on young owlbears increases by 5, and by 10 for adults. Training uses the same techniques as those for training an animal. An owlbear can be trained for one purpose just like an animal (typically combat riding, fighting, or guarding), and cannot generally be trained for heavy labor or performance. Training takes twice as long as usual, and a failed check means the owlbear attacks its would-be handler at some point during the training. Even if trained for riding or combat riding, a failed Ride check means the unruly owlbear follows its instincts, usually attacking a nearby creature or even attempting to harm its rider. Likewise, a failed Handle Animal check to get an owlbear to perform a known trick means the owlbear is likely to become dangerous to everyone around it. These habits mean that most creatures allied with an owlbear-tamer give him and his pet a wide berth.

Stripped of their base natures as animal-like predators, they are now more like chaos beasts—horrors whose forms are governed by their anger. Screaming owlbears are immune to critical hits and transformation magic.

Siege Owlbear: Bred primarily by orcs from the heftiest owlbear stock, siege owlbears represent the largest and most brutal of their kin. Such grotesque beasts tend to be used as stud creatures by orcs and are much prized by chieftains. The siege owlbear is bred for battle, fed a special diet of magically and alchemically augmented meats from a very young age, and trained to tolerate riders or gear such as small ballistas or catapults. Such owlbears have to be controlled by a rider and tend to be unpredictable—often setting off in a direction that suits the mount more than the handler. Even when dealing with the best-trained siege owlbear, a Ride check (DC 20) is required for every new instruction the rider wishes his mount to carry out, failure resulting in the owlbear doing what it wants (which may include rolling onto its back to dislodge the rider so the beast can attack him); once the owlbear is out of control this way, it takes a DC 30 Ride check to get it to obey again.

Siege Owlbear **CR 7**

N Huge magical beast

Init +0; **Senses** Listen +13, Spot +13

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 8, flat-footed 16
(+0 Dex, +8 natural, –2 size)

hp 187 (15d10+105)

Fort +16, **Ref** +9, **Will** +8

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +23 melee (1d8+10) and bite +18 melee (2d6+5)

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

Special Attacks improved grab, rend

TACTICS

Before Combat Like standard owlbears, siege owlbear are fierce and territorial. However, they are generally controlled by handlers and in such situations may be led into combat purposefully by their riders. If no rider is present, the siege owlbear reverts to its natural, untrained behavior.

During Combat The siege owlbear is, if anything, even more ferocious than its smaller standard cousin; it knows nothing of fear and attacks any enemy within reach.

Morale Siege owlbears that are ridden are generally kept under control and are subject to their riders' commands. In normal circumstances, however, the siege owlbear fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 31, **Dex** 10, **Con** 25, **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +31

Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Improved Bull Rush, Iron Will, Power Attack, Track

Skills Listen +13, Spot +13

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a siege owlbear must hit with a claw attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

Rend (Ex) A siege owlbear that hits with both claws latches onto its opponent's body and tears its flesh. This attack automatically deals an extra 2d8+10 points of damage.

Sleeyk Owlbear: Magically bred for speed and agility at the expense of strength, a sleeyk owlbear looks thinner and ganglier than a typical owlbear, though still muscular. A sleeyk has a speed of 40 feet, and Strength 19, Dexterity 18, Run as a bonus feat, and evasion.

Slime Owlbear: First reported by Pathfinder Herastus Quail in the Dungeons of the Mire Queen, this monster's feathers are coated with a green slime that didn't harm the creature.

Sloth Owlbear: Though these monsters don't grow quite as large as normal owlbears, they are still as ferocious as their land kin. Their claws are long and curved, allowing them to hang underneath strong branches and drop on prey. Sloth owlbears are slower than common ones (speed 20 feet) but are strong climbers (climb speed 10 feet).

Spectral Owlbear: A pack of ghostly owlbears called Herne's Vengeance occasionally rises from Estrovian Forest in Mendev on snowy nights. If slain, their bodies vanish at dawn, and locals believe these owlbears are actually undead, though they may be a magical variant with the power to enter the Ethereal Plane.

Owlbears on Golarion

There are many great forests in Golarion, and these are naturally infested with owlbears to varying degrees. Owlbears are common in parts of the Hold of Belkzen, where they are considered holy, and wander the lands unmolested save for self-defense or when captured by rival tribes not sharing in their worship. Huge owlbears guard the Brimstone Haruspex, and a statue of a two-headed owlbear stands in the Coins district of Absalom. The goblin tribe called the People of the Stirge have 190 songs describing the terror of owlbear attacks, and their tribe banners often depict a savage owlbear disemboweling a goblin.

Varisians praise a wild spirit called the Wise Beast, which resembles a ghostly owlbear. A famous fiddle piece called the "Wild Dance of the Wise Beast" is played on stormy nights around Varisian gypsy campfires, and Varisian birth tattoos occasionally depict the Wise Beast.

Owlbear

This creature's heavy bulk is covered in a mix of rough hair and large feathers. It is built like a bear, with long, sharp claws on each foot, but its head is that of a huge owl. The creature's beak is jagged and bloody, and its huge, staring eyes are rimmed with red, giving it a crazed appearance.

Owlbear **CR 4**

N Large magical beast

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +8

Defense

AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 14
(+1 Dex, +5 natural, –1 size)

hp 52 (5d10+25)

Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

Offense

Spd 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +9 melee (1d6+5) and bite +4 melee (1d8+2)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Special Attacks improved grab

Tactics

Before Combat Owlbears are fierce and territorial. They attack nearly anything that moves which is larger than a mouse, and tend to rush headlong into the fray at the earliest opportunity.

During Combat Owlbears have a well-earned reputation for ferocity and aggression that is almost unequaled, and their tactics tend to reflect this. Normally they choose one target and kill it before changing opponents, though they will switch to focus on opponents that have been injuring them greatly.

Morale An owlbear never flees its nest or young, and they fight to the death in almost every other instance as well.

Statistics

Str 21, **Dex** 12, **Con** 21, **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +13

Feats Alertness, Track

Skills Listen +8, Spot +8

Special Abilities

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, an owlbear must hit with a claw attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity.

The Mammoth Lords speak of Ur-Buvos, the dire owlbear. Taller than a mammoth, he is white in winter and brown in the summer, felling demon, giant, witch, or careless hunter with equal ease. He may be immortal, touched by the gods or the same sacred ancient magic that brings warmth from the ground, for elders nine generations back have told stories of his terrible hunger and deadly claws. Other stories say feasting on his warm heart makes a man immortal, and many are the brave would-be heroes who tried and failed to claim this prize.

by **Paul F. Culotta**

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

The Necrology of the Penanggalan

To Lord Briar of Thornwood, Grand Master of the Order of Storm.

Sire:

It is with the deepest sorrow and regret that I hereby resign from the Order of Storm.

True, the vows of paladinhood are supposed to be eternal and only can be taken away by our beloved Deity; yet in my instance, I know that this is simply a matter of time.

Let me assure you and my other brothers that this is not a matter of cowardice or failure to complete my first mission. You sent me to slay the beast of Boltang Swamp, and it is done. I did not hesitate to take this quest, nor did I falter when combat was joined. Strength flowed through my body in response to my prayers, and His aura shielded me from the worst of the beast's attacks. Although I was wounded, my sword found its way into the monster's heart, and now its head rests on a stake along the old swamp road.

Nor is my leaving the Order in any way related to what some of my brothers perceive as my "womanly weakness." I fully realize that you did not share this warped view, but there are several who sneered and whispered among themselves when I made my application. They cared little of my dying father's last wish that I become a paladin like him. Although he regretted not having any sons to follow his example, he did his best to mold me into a true holy knight. Well do I recall your decision to give me a chance, and I thank you for your faith in me, even though so many doubted.

Now my ambition to fulfill my father's wish, indeed my ambition to live, is gone, the spark extinguished; not from cowardice, not from female weakness, but from an all pervasive dooming evil that has consumed my body and soul beyond human aid or assistance. Having been thrown on to this evil path, I can do the only honorable thing, which is to resign, fast in the wilderness, and pray for divine relief from this curse.

It is my fervent hope that this letter reaches you so that others will learn of and avoid this threat's wicked grasp. The fellow I hired to deliver this letter was attracted by the fire at the Abbey, and he seems trustworthy enough. I can only hope that he finds the 20 pieces of gold I gave him enough incentive to make the long trek to Castle Midgard and put this in your hands.

How did this all begin? It started on the day that I slew the swamp beast. I wanted to press on and return swiftly, if for no other reason than to show my doubting brothers that a woman paladin indeed had a place in this world. But old Squint feared that I had been hurt too badly and insisted that we stop at the Abbey of St. Marlowe for the night. The beast had smashed my shield with his great spiked club and it had left my arm flaming with pain, so it took little persuasion to stop and ask for hospitality that night.

I should have known that something was amiss from the beginning. When I rang the bell at the gate, a young servant lady, about my age, came out bearing a torch. She introduced herself as Marla and advised us that we were welcome but all the friars were absent, having answered a call of distress from Thistledale. It seemed that plague had broken out there, and the Abbey had been left in Marla's sole care. I was quite amazed at her friendliness and lack of fear for one who was all alone.

Looking back on it, I should have seen that this tale was highly improbable, but the pain in my arm distracted me from clear thinking. Why would the friars of St. Marlowe, a celibate order, keep such an attractive servant lady in their midst? She was quite pretty with shining raven hair, blue eyes, and a figure that most women would envy. And why would they not send for the aid of our Order to stem this outbreak of disease? And was it not unlikely for them to leave their monastery in the hands of one servant in a countryside all too well known for its fierce monsters and ruthless outlaws? Oh, would that I had been more alert!

Marla noticed my damaged shield and how I favored my left arm as I dismounted and offered to fix me a hot bath after a good meal. I gratefully accepted, hoping that a good soak would help on the morrow's ride. She then showed Squint where to stable our mounts and directed me to one of the austere apartments that the friars kept for visitors. After lighting the single lamp, Marla bade me take off my armor while she prepared my meal and bath.

The small room was quite plain: a simple bed with woolen blankets and pillow, a wardrobe with two doors, a few pegs on the wall, a chamber pot, and a small table

and candle by the bed. On one wall was a small painting of St. Marlowe, and there was one small window next to the door.

My armor was difficult to get off — some of the snaps and clasps had been jammed by the blow of the beast's club and several of the bands were bent inwards-so I had to call for Squint, housed in the neighboring apartment, to assist me. He had no more success than I, and had to go to the stables where he found some tools. These worked well, but it was obvious that my wonderful blue banded armor was due for repairs at the armorer once we were to get back to Castle Midgard.

Equally obvious was the fact that the beast's club had hurt me far worse than I suspected. Squint was the first to notice it. Just above my wrist were the edges of a large purple bruise. Rolling up my sleeve revealed the worst: it radiated all the way up my left forearm and no doubt it would eventually turn an ugly yellow. I uttered a quick prayer and laid my hand upon the area and the bruise receded a little, and it seemed that it would be a few days before the forearm would be totally healed.

It was while I was contemplating the severity of the wound that Marla returned. As she opened the door, she saw me praying with my hand on my injured arm, and Squint of course was kneeling in prayer as well. I confess that I did not even hear her open the door (nor did Squint), and when she asked in an icy voice whether she wanted her to return later, both my squire and I jumped a little.

Looking at her, I was taken aback by her truly frightening look: her forehead was tightly creased and she positively glared at us. Her face was such a mask of fury that for some reason (instinct? training?) I clutched my holy medallion and attempted to detect for any evil.

Simply put, there was none,[1] which was hardly a surprise. (After all, how could a simple serving girl emanate powerful evil?) Still, her look was so intense that I had to say something, so I said, "Marla, is something wrong?"

"No, milady," she replied stiffly, "I see you want privacy so I shall leave."[2]

Suddenly I saw what she was thinking, and I laughed.

"No, Marla, it's all right. Squint and I were just uttering a prayer together. Squint is an old family retainer and my squire. He often prays with me when I am healing."

She looked confused for a moment, then asked, "Healing? Are you not a knight, milady?"

"Yes, Marla," I replied, "a knight I am, but did you not notice the emblem on my shield?"

She looked to the corner where my poor shield, though battered, still clearly showed the three yellow lightning bolts. She shook her head.

"Lady Rebecca, I know not these colors."

"Well," I explained patiently," this is a shield of the Order of Storm, a brotherhood of paladins, holy knights who heal the sick and protect the weak. Our keep is Castle Midgard, two days west of here. You have never heard of us?"

Marla parted her lips slightly and her eyes widened in curiosity and she said, "A paladin? But I only thought men...."

I interrupted: "Generally, yes; but the world is changing, girl. As far as I know, I am the only one in this land, but I doubt that I shall be the last."

At this, she smiled widely[3] and stated that she had brought us supper and that a warm bath awaited me when I was done. She then brought in a tray with a bowl of hot mushroom and lentil soup, a loaf of bread, and jug of herbal tea. The smell of something other than cold jerky and dark tack was wonderful and as I took my first sip of the soup, Marla told Squint that his food was waiting in his room.

After my meal, she took me to the monks' bath house where a large tub of steaming water was waiting. Marla insisted on personally attending to me as I was still hurt, and I did not complain. How wonderful the water felt, and how gentle this raven-haired servant was. Best of all, she washed my hair with a delightful soapy mixture that smelled like newly picked strawberries, and after it was dried, my hair, short as it was, looked positively lustrous.

After I returned to my room, Marla loaned me a comfortable, high-necked nightgown, bade me a good night's rest, and left. It did not take me long to drift off into a deep, peaceful slumber.

But, my lord, my sleep did not remain that way. Upon reflection of the last few days' events, the memory of my dream has returned. At first, it was a wonderful dream. There I was on the grassy banks of the River Excelsior. It was sunset and the breeze was cool but not overly so. As the sun reached the horizon, it turned the waters a lovely pink, and then orange, and then red. And then a deep red-like blood-and the hitherto clear waters became choppy while the wind transformed into a long, hot breeze. Then an endless line of heads, bobbing on stakes, came floating down the river. To my horror, I saw that they were all the heads of the beast of the Boltang Swamp. As each passed me by, it laughed and laughed and laughed."

At dawn I awoke feeling absolutely awful — my head was throbbing, my mouth was parched, and my body seemed sluggish. I drained the small water jug next to the bed as if I had not drunk in days, and then tried to get up. As I got to my feet, I nearly fainted, and I had to sit on the bed. What was wrong? A hot bath, good meal, and warm bed (even if the sleep hadn't been all that pleasant) should have rested me for today's trip, but I hardly felt refreshed!

As I pondered this, Marla came in with a breakfast of two eggs, thick sausage cakes, and more of the Abbey's bread. She looked very pleased and happy — her cheeks were all aglow, apparently from the morning chill,[5] and she had a wonderful sunny smile. As she set down the tray and poured me some tea, she remarked that Squint was already up and about saddling the horses, and that he would be in to pick up my armor to pack it up (since it could not be worn). She talked about some other small things as well, but I paid her no further mind; the warm breakfasty odor of the meal was too much and I ate like I had never eaten before, even the entire half loaf of bread.[6] When I had eaten all there was, I laid back down for just a few moments because I was still a bit tired, and I promptly fell back asleep.

Some time later, Squint was shaking my shoulder. My loyal squire gasped and asked what in the nine hells had happened. I told him nothing, just a bad dream, and then got out of bed to look for some riding clothes, and promptly fell down on the floor. Squint pulled me up gently, saying that I looked terrible, and that no, I was not all right, and that he was terribly worried. I repeated that I was fine, but then he held me up to the mirror, and sure enough, I was quite pale. Something was not right, and that moment was another opportunity to realize that there was an evil infecting the Abbey (and now me).

Instead, I became plagued with self-doubt and blame. Paladins, once ordained, were not supposed to get ill, yet here I was, quite weak and sick. Had I done something contrary to the Order? Was He punishing me? I had fought bravely and completed my mission, as well as offering prayers of thanks following my victory. Severing the head of the beast and putting it on display might have seemed barbaric, but you had expressly ordered me to leave a sign for any other denizens of the swamp to dissuade further raids. The display, I had reasoned, would also reassure the local inhabitants that law and order had prevailed. Surely this could not be the reason for the punishment?

Squint summed it up in his usual blunt manner: I needed another day of rest, no arguments, no discussion. Over his shoulder, Marla — who had observed all of this from the doorway-agreed. I got up to protest, but it was no good, I could not even stand up on my own accord.

I reluctantly went back to bed and Squint decided to take the day to sharpen our weapons and see what he could do with my armor. I tried reading from my book of prayers but I had trouble focusing, and instead just rested and enjoyed the sunshine and songs of the robins outside. Marla came back twice during the day, once to change the bed linens and empty the chamber pot, and another to bring another fine meal of roast beef and

lemonade. Yet another opportunity to unlock the mystery passed by for had I been able to pay attention I would have noticed that on both these occasions the robins stopped singing and would not return as long as Marla was around.[7]

That night, after another fine dinner and bath, I instructed Squint that no matter what, we had to get back to Castle Midgard. Although I felt only a little bit better, I was determined to return and report on my victory. Also I wanted desperately to speak with Father Matthias to see if there was something that I had done so wrong to deserve this illness and what I could do to atone for it. Prior to blowing out the candle, I uttered another prayer and laid hands upon my bruise and again it retracted, but the weakness and dizziness still persisted.[8]

That night my dreams again started wonderfully, with my charger and me relaxing on a hill and enjoying the colors and smells of fall leaves, but then the top of the hill collapsed inward and we fell for a long, long time. I hit the ground hard and found myself weak, broken, and helpless. Next to me was a blood-red iron coffin, barely illuminated by the light at the top of the hole. Then I saw the small brass label, and its writing was clear: "Here lies Lady Rebecca, the first and only woman Paladin of Storm." Then I heard laughing from above as the light went out, and looking up I saw two small red dots upon a black background. They slowly descended toward me, and as I lay helpless the laughter got louder and the dots became eyes that dripped salty blood all over me.[9]

The morning after went much like the previous day. I could not recall the dream, and I was even weaker. Squint disobeyed my previous day's orders and stated flatly that we were staying another day and that if I were not better by the next morning, he was going to ride to Castle Midgard for help. I was in no mood (or condition) to argue the point. The rosy-cheeked Marla readily agreed and reiterated that we were honored guests and could stay as long as we wanted. She also speculated that perhaps the brothers would return to the abbey that day or the next, and perhaps they could help. (Oh, Lord Thornwood, where were my brains? Why did I not question their absence at the outset?)

By now I was afraid to sleep: while I could not then recall the specifics of the dreams then, I knew they were bad. In desperation I prayed long and hard but got no insight at all. I even tried my power to cure disease on myself (I, who could not be diseased!), and not surprisingly, I felt no better. I did feel a little better that evening when I laid hands on my shoulder and the bruise completely healed and vanished. And of course Squint and I enjoyed Marla's good cooking.

Amazingly, on the third night I slept well. If I had a good dream or vision, I do not recall it now. Nor do I remember if it was bad, only that I slept deeply, the best night's rest since we had stopped.

And when I awoke, I actually felt a little better. Wobbly still to be sure, but my mind was not as muddled and my fear was gone. But all of this was dashed to pieces when a very concerned Marla came in with breakfast and announced that Squint had left. This made me sit straight up and ask (probably in a not too pleasant tone) what had happened. Marla sat at my bedside and looked me in the eyes (hers seemed so lifeless!) and told me that I had cried out so loudly in the night that Squint, sputtering a slew of Dalish curses, had saddled up, told her that he was riding to Castle Midgard for help, and that no matter what, she was to care for me until he returned.

Well, this was a mess. Here I was actually feeling a little better, and Squint had ridden off. Apparently the fever was beginning to break and it would only be maybe another day and I would be able to ride. Perhaps my application of curing disease had done something after all? In any case, I was frustrated and humiliated as I realized how ridiculous my first adventure would turn out. Instead of riding in to the castle in glory, a rescue party of healers would have to come and get me! No doubt they would insist on bearing me in on a litter. This was awful.

And what made it worse was that there was little I could do about it. Although my spirits were up, my body was still weak, even with my laying on of hands and Marla's cooking. I simply did not have the strength to ride yet. But I did persuade Marla to help me out to a chair in the courtyard where I could enjoy the sunshine. Of course she insisted that in return I had to allow her to prepare me a bath that evening, and of course I agreed readily.

This brings us, my Lord, to the final night, the time when I discovered the evil that was infecting my body and soul. And I am sorry to say that I missed the final clue that would have revealed the curse of this place. The clue was in the bath house itself and seemed insignificant. After I had taken off my nightgown, slipped into the warm, soapy water, and begun to wash, my hands ran across some small scabs at the base of my throat.[10] I asked Marla what she could make of these, and she said that apparently I had been bitten by mosquitoes at some point. She suggested that perhaps they had been the cause of my illness. At any rate, she said, they looked well healed. I though no more of it and enjoyed the rest of the bath.

The night's rest was short. It started with peaceful slumber, but soon reverted to an evil nightmare involving a flooded river of blood with me nailed to a circular wooden raft. As it spun in the wild current, I heard a roaring sound, that of a waterfall, and then I was falling down into a wide-opened mouth filled with incredibly sharp teeth. And as I fell to my doom, I prayed hard and saw that what surrounded the mouth was a face. It was a familiar one: that of Marla, the Abbey's serving girl and my good hostess these past days!

With a shriek I tore my hand free and slashed and cut. But no longer was I on the raft of doom. I was in my room and I was clutching the dagger I always kept under my saddlebag or pillow. My breath was ragged and I scanned the dark room but all I could see was a veil of black with two glowing red eyes. And my breath was not the only rasping sound in the room. Tentatively I reached out with my detection of evil and was repulsed by a sickening glow of pure, seething evil.[11]

With a hiss, the thing swooped at my throat, and I quickly kicked out of the covers. Simultaneously I grabbed my pillow with my free hand and held it out like a shield. Whatever it was hit it with a thump and a snarl. I rolled out of bed, releasing the pillow and leaving the monster choking on feathers. I fumbled with the door to the stand up closet, then got it opened, and reached for my sword, only to find it gone.

Something hit me in the back of my head and knocked me sprawling into the closet, and I nearly passed out. But I knew that to give up would mean death. Gasping, I got to my feet. The monster was just above the bed and it sounded like it was having quite a time with the pillow. When she got it out of her mouth, I knew she would try again. I saw the crimson eyes again, and they were staring at me malevolently. Slowly they weaved back and forth, and I rued the day that I had declined Sir Tristan's offer to teach me how to fight blindfolded. It would have made this a little easier, but at least the eyes (not to mention the amazingly strong glow of evil) helped me focus. In the darkness of my apartment, I could even see what appeared to be a black glow.

All I had was my dagger. No armor, no shield, no lance, no sword... just a dagger. And judging from the blow that nearly felled me, Marla had something else at her disposal. [12] What was I to do? Then it came back to me: your words at my ordination, that no matter how desperate the struggle, no matter how naked and afraid one might be, and despite a lack of strength or weapons, the paladin's greatest asset was his mind and his ability to think, reason, and-if necessary-outwit the forces of evil. So I thought, reasoned, and came up with a plan.

"Come, you twisted bit of nothingness and taste my blade!" I cried. Cackling horribly, the monster hissed and made right for my face. Just before it got there, I fell straight to the ground, and the back of the wardrobe resounded with a satisfying crack. I reached up quickly and slammed the closet door shut, and thrust my dagger between the two handles, effectively locking the creature in the wardrobe.

Oh, what a thumping and pounding she caused! I though that she would shake the wardrobe to pieces and for a moment I doubted that the dagger would hold, so I fled with the crashing on the thick oaken wardrobe walls ringing in my ears.

I found a lantern and looked for my missing equipment. It was in a barn stall along with Truscott, my noble steed, and Brandy, Squint's mare. Neither looked like they had suffered from whatever this evil creature was, but then I remembered: Squint had left, according to Marla, so what was Brandy doing here?

Taking the lantern, I went back to the small apartment where my squire had been housed and opened the door carefully. Squint was still there all right, sprawled in his bed, dead white, with two puncture wounds in his neck, right where the "mosquito bites" were on mine.[13] I had seen death before, but never had one so close been lost to such a foul monster, and I burst out in wracking, heaving sobs. Why had I not seen through this foul thing's guise?

It took me at least an hour to gather myself, and by then the dim glow of dawn was lighting the horizon. I felt exhausted, but I knew that I had to drive myself to see what other horrors were lurking in the abbey. All of the brothers' cells were empty, and the chapel was in reasonably good order, although it had not been cleaned in some days. But in the basement I found them. Each and every one of the peaceable brothers of St. Marlowe were dead, killed in the same way as Squint, and they had been stacked in the wine cellar like so much cordwood.[14]

By now, I had precious little energy left and it was good to find the Abbey's healing room. I took two of the brothers' potions and immediately felt the pain recede from the back of my head, where the monster's tail or whatever it was had struck me. But I still felt far weaker than I should have, and a third potion did not help at all.

Weak or not, I still had to confront the monster and put this matter to rest. So I took my sword and went back to my room. At first, I was shocked when I saw the wardrobe laying on its side, but then saw that the dagger holding it in place was still in place. I thumped it on the side and immediately it began to bump and shake again. For a moment I considered leaving the creature there and riding for the Castle to get your aid, but then I had visions of Squint riding by my side and telling me stories (for the 37th time) of my father's glorious quests before he had gotten married and had a daughter. My eyes misted over, knowing that I would never see Squint again, and that decided it for me. I did what my father would have done.

"Be still, evil one, I will let you free," I said, "and know you that it will be a short freedom, for today I shall destroy you."

With that, I reached down, removed the dagger, and jumped back, sword in one hand, dagger in the other. The doors immediately banged open and out she came.

Never, my Lord, have I seen a more despicable, unholy sight. It was indeed Marla, but only her head attached to a slimy, tapered, black appendage that was a little longer than my sword. Two of Marla's front teeth were incredibly long, much like the fangs of a snake, and she hissed and gurgled as she flew about. I swung at her, and the creature easily and quickly backed away, chuckling wetly.

But its laughter was short-lived because as soon as she retreated, she flew right into the sun's early morning rays coming in the apartment's window. And as soon as that happened, Marla gave a sharp gasp and the entire fell creature, head, tail, and all, fell to the ground with a thump and did not move.[14]

This was truly amazing, and I was immediately suspicious and thus approached cautiously. This was too easy, yet it just lay there quite still, although still making damp gurgling sounds. Even when I pricked the thing's black tail with my sword, it did nothing. So, I thought, you don't like light, do you? Well, let's get you nice and warm. And so I sunk my sword into the black tail, picked it up, and took it outside in the yard, leaving a blood trail all the way out.

Now its muttered curses grew louder, and if it could have squirmed away, I'm sure it would have done so. But it just spluttered away with curses I supposed, for I could not understand any of its warbly speech.

But then, yes, I could make out that it seemed to be calling my name. So I pinned the black part to the ground, and knelt by Marla's face, dagger ready to thrust right into her eye if she made so much as one move. Incredibly, there was a fresh slash just above the left eye from my first dagger cut, but there was not even one drop of blood showing from this wound. Yet on the tail, there was still bright red blood flowing from where my sword had pierced it. This was truly a horribly mystifying monster.[15]

"Rebecca," it croaked, in such a horrible way that I barely understood the words, "come here, I would talk to you."[16]

"What is it, you fiend? A plea for mercy, perhaps? You will surely be disappointed," I replied, waving the dagger right in front of her eye.

Marla seemed to gulp and then smiled, "Ah, you don't understand, milady. Soon you will be with me in sisterhood., just like me. Nothing can stop it. I have tasted your blood, and it is just a matter of time. It is inevitable. You will drink blood just as I have, and you will enjoy the taste forever. Now, please, let me go back to my body."

"Rubbish!" I cried. "Never, do you hear? I am a knight, a paladin of the Order of Storm! Nothing could ever make me like you!" I gave the head a solid kick, but that did not silence her. She laughed a horrible, gurgling laugh.

"Little one. You don't know what you are saying. There are powers greater than you. Shout all you want, but it will happen. Feel your neck."

So I did, and in spite of all the curing, I could still feel the marks and I could sense within myself the brutal truth. I had been healing myself for days, and I had drunk enough potions to bring huge Sir Bertram back from the dead, but my strength and health had not returned. In fact, all had gotten steadily worse. There could be only one answer: I was infected with evil — paladinic powers notwithstanding-and now I was apparently doomed to the worst of fates: being like the drooling thing at my feet, an undead feasting on the helpless whom I was sworn to defend.

The rest of my tale, Lord Thornwood, is as brief as my remaining days among the living. I did a thorough search of the rest of the abbey grounds and in a shed of gardening tools I found Marla's headless body. I could even look down into the body cavity and seen that her organs were all dried and withered. And I took this body, that of Squint, and those of the priests and stacked them all atop Marla's head. I confess that it took most of my remaining energy to do this, and I had to rest for a good hour before I could muster a little strength to douse the pile with oil and set it ablaze. Marla shrieked and cried pitifully, but I cared not.

Although Truscott and Brandy did not look like they had been harmed by Marla, I did not want to take any chances if I were to become like her, and so I set them free. I then burned the rest of the abbey as well. No doubt it was somehow infected with the same evil as I was, and only the purifying cleanliness of fire could assure anyone that the grounds were free of Marla's curse.

As for myself, my Lord, I regret that I fell prey to such a horrible fate, but I cannot run the risk that I would return to become an avenging evil spirit among my brothers. I will therefore make my way as far from Castle Midgard as I can, but if any of the members of our Order should meet me, they should know, from the account of this letter, what I am and how to go about destroying me.

In the meantime, this peasant is waiting for me to finish this letter, and I must be off. Please have the chaplain pray for my soul, and if Marla's prophecy is true, seek me out soon before I unleash myself.

-Rebecca of Kryptgarden

* * *

Lord Thornwood sighed, then shook his head. "Sir Kaye!" he bellowed.

"Sire!" answered a hard-looking knight.

"Get you to the Beastmaster and tell him to ready our griffons with two days' rations!"

"All of them, my lord?"

"Yes. Now hurry!" Lord Thornwood replied tersely. As Sir Kaye trotted off, he called out again. "Sir Tersted!"

"Sire!" Another knight stepped from the shadows into the light of the Grand Master's dais.

"Go down to the chapel and disturb Father Belding's prayers. Give him my apologies, but then advise him that he is going to take a griffon ride with Sir Bertram, Malerius, and me, as soon as he can get ready... which means in 15 minutes, no complaints, no excuses!"

Sir Tersted nodded and headed quickly for another hallway.

"Sir Tersted, one more thing!" called Lord Thornwood.

"Milord?" The other knight stopped and turned around.

"Tell Father Belding that if he does not have a dispel evil spell quick at hand, he had better come up with it before we leave or he will have to take along one of his precious scrolls!"

"Aye, milord!" Sir Tersted returned to his errand, running off down the corridor.

"Sir Bertram!'

"Yes, Lord Thornwood?" replied a huge, bearded man with an unusually large battleaxe at his side.

"Old friend, go on up to Malerius' tower and tell, er ask, him to join us, and if he wouldn't mind, he needs to bring along that crystal ball of his if we have any chance of finding her."

"Finding her? Finding who, milord?"

"Bertram," Lord Thornwood whispered, "a fellow paladin, our only sister, is in trouble, and we are going to save her soul."

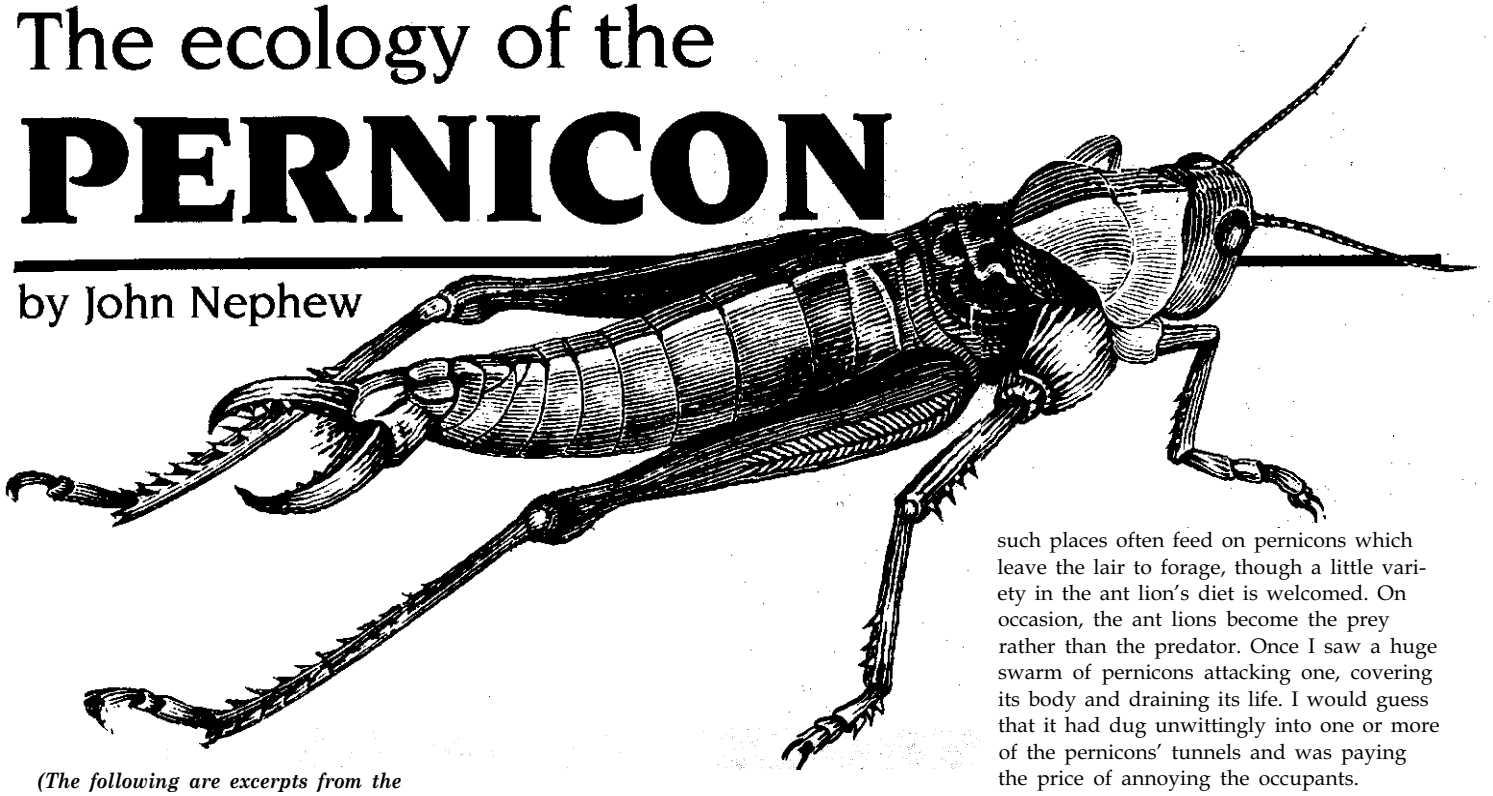
Sir Bertram nodded solemnly. As quickly as he could, he lumbered away to find the mage and his crystal ball. Ω

FOOTNOTES

1. While in human form, the penanggalan exudes the alignment it had in its previous life. Thus Lady Rebecca's detect *evil* ability did not work. Had Rebecca been a wizard or cleric casting a *know alignment* spell, she would have learned the alignment it had in its previous life, but that is all. The same applies for the clerical *true seeing* spell. Note that had Marla had an evil alignment in her pre-penanggalan days, Rebecca's ability might have worked if Marla had been strongly aligned and intent upon evil actions previously. About the only spell that works reliably with these creatures is the wizard spell, *detect undead.*
2. A creature of the Nine Hells, a penanggalan is incapable of showing feeling or articulating love in any form. Yet it is intelligent enough to realize that love is something that should be experienced and desired. Being incapable of love in any form, a penanggalan becomes furious if she witnesses any intimate act, however innocent, between a couple. From that moment on, the female of the couple will be singled out for the vampiress' attention, even ahead of a female of a higher charisma. The male will also be targeted for a later attack, and the monster will not rest until both have been death with.
3. The penanggalan will always prefer a female with high Charisma as its victim above all other females (except one who has shown affection to a man). Hence a female paladin is the victim of choice due to her high Charisma and her strong lawful good alignment. Although the paladin's protection from evil aura and +2 bonus to saves makes such a conquest risky, the penanggalan will go to great lengths to make her an undead sister.
4. Victims of a penanggalan are always attacked while asleep. If they fail their saving throw (with a -3 penalty), they are effectively hypnotized and acquiesce to the monster's draining attacks without awakening. Nothing is remembered from the experience, but victims often have horrible dreams of blood, corpses, and other ominous images.
5. Another subtle clue that one is dealing with a penanggalan is her complexion. Prior to feeding, it is rather pale. Up to ten hours after draining a victim, however, her complexion is rosy and flushed. This is even noticeable with penanggalans of all but the darkest skins.
6. Although weak and dizzy, a penanggalan's victim always awakens with a tremendous hunger and thirst. And although satisfying the body's appetites is an attempt to recover the lost hp, Strength, and Constitution, once the process starts, it is inevitable.
7. Animals are generally good at knowing when something is not right. They usually flee at the sight of undead, and although they won't do so when in the presence of a penanggalan in human form, they will slink or fly away just on their instinct that it is not a friendly person. No matter how hard a penanggalan tries, it cannot attract an animal to come to it.
8. Although lost hit points due to "non-penanggalan wounds" can be restored by magical curing spells, potions, and abilities, the hit points, Strength, and Constitution drained by this horrible vampiress can only be restored after a *dispel evil* spell has been cast upon the victim.
9. After the first attack, future attempts on a victim entitle her to another saving throw, but with an additional -2 penalty (hence the second night's attack is at -5, the third at -7, etc). Note that the paladin's +2 bonus on saving throws still applies against these penalties.
10. If a penanggalan leaves a victim alone one night, the cumulating -2 penalty from consecutive attacks no longer applies, and the victim's saving roll is subject only to the initial -3 penalty from a first night's attack.
11. When the head is detached from the body, the penanggalan's strong evil alignment is quickly revealed by any *detect evil* or *know alignment* spells. Note that a victim awakening from a penanggalan feeding is almost completely unheard of: only someone very strongly aligned with good has any chance of doing so.
12. The black "tail" of the penanggalan's head has a strength of 19 and is used as a whip to snag and choke victims, causing 1-4 hp damage (+7 for the 19 Strength) each round. In total darkness it glows with an eerie black luminescence.
13. While the penanggalan will slowly drain a female victim over a period of several evenings, she will kill a male victim outright in one night's feeding.
14. A penanggalan typically inhabits desolate, deserted places, such as abandoned buildings and graveyards. Yet if she can get away with it, she will take up residence in an inhabited area, such as a wayside inn or monastery, to wreak havoc-and feed for several nights running.
15. The greatest weakness of this undead monster is its absolute vulnerability to sunlight, for once that strikes the penanggalan while in "head" form, it falls to the ground paralyzed and helpless.
16. The tail of the penanggalan is a reservoir for blood that it has taken from its victims. It serves the same function as a camel's hump, although it can also serve as a whip-like club with a strength of 19. No other part of the penanggalan will ever bleed, even when in human form. This is another way to find out if one is dealing with one of these creatures, but such a method has obvious risks, particularly if the object of the experiment is *not* a penanggalan!
17. While in "head form," the penanggalan speaks in a gurgling manner that is barely recognizable as Common. A listener who makes an Intelligence check can understand the speech, but the monster's conversation is about impending doom of the listener or the joys of being undead.

The ecology of the PERNICON

by John Nephew



(The following are excerpts from the diaries of the Emir of Yandark, later High Sultan of Kiralsh, Jesouhd Ye'esif.)

During my recent visit to the eminent Colonel Endrivan of Olcoran, once an adventuring companion of mine and always a friend, he expressed some interest in a creature he had heard lived in the Iriahb Desert of my homeland. This creature, the insect known as the pernicon, captured his interest for the water-divining powers which have made it known. We discussed the topic for some time, since I have had some experience with the creature in my desert travels. It seems to me that little is commonly known about the pernicon, and many "facts" about it have been distorted. Since visiting with the colonel, I have taken some interest in the particulars of the creature and learned what new things I could of it. I record here that which I have learned, and hope the knowledge will be of use to the desert traveler and naturalist, and of interest to others.

The pernicon is in basic form similar to a locust, or grasshopper, of about two inches in length. There are several points that distinguish it from its smaller cousins. Coloration is vastly different, with red, yellow, ochre, and blue being common, as well as some rarer shades among those, such as orange-yellow or greenish-yellow. Another difference I have seen is that the pernicon lacks wings — it is a crawler and jumper.[1]

The pernicon lives in the outer reaches of deserts, probably so that it has a supply of vegetable matter available for consumption when there is a lack of animal life[2]; again, unlike the grasshoppers and locusts, it is truly an omnivore. The creature feeds on animals by jumping on them and clenching exposed flesh (or soft body parts, in the case of some creatures) with pincers at the rear of its abdomen. Through this, the insect drains the fluids of the victim — and often its life.[3]

The pincers continue to siphon out one's endurance even if the insect is slain, and removal of the pincers is a delicate and painful task. [4]

Though they are small and weak, the trouble in killing pernicons lies in ***hitting*** them, because of their size and swift hopping. Always beware those pincers; a pernicon dodging your blow may at the same time be launching its own attack. Of course, a pernicon that is attached to you makes a much easier target.[5]

One seeking these creatures should hope to find a small foraging group of pernicons, rather than the thousands that infest a lair. Though one or two cause little trouble to anyone with fighting experience, a large group poses a threat even to the most able of warriors.[6]

The lairs of the creature are found near the desert's edge[7], as mentioned before, near their plant and animal food supplies. A lair almost resembles a town, being made of many mounds resembling large anthills raised from the sand.

I caution the reader to remember that they are ***hills,*** with burrow entrances. Make sure that they are just that; near many pernicon "towns" are the pits of ant lions, which are giant insects of greater power and aggressiveness. Those ant lions living in such places often feed on pernicons which leave the lair to forage, though a little variety in the ant lion's diet is welcomed. On occasion, the ant lions become the prey rather than the predator. Once I saw a huge swarm of pernicons attacking one, covering its body and draining its life. I would guess that it had dug unwittingly into one or more of the pernicons' tunnels and was paying the price of annoying the occupants.

This brings me to the mention of their tunnels. The burrows from the mounds go down at least six feet, to where the ground is more firm. It is here that the pernicons rest, breed, and spend much of their time. They dig long tunnels, each usually no more than half an inch high — which is ample space for the insects. I have heard from some men and women of the desert that the pernicons, by their water-detecting powers, tend to dig down where there is a supply of ground water. I would suppose then that in some places there would be tunnels going down a hundred feet or more! The learned sage Elkir Hildar of Ye'nassa told me that they need these humid "wells" to lay their eggs in, lest the eggs shrivel up and the young die before birth.[8]

After the pernicons have eaten all the food near their "town," they move on to another location, abandoning their old lair to seek a new place with more food. The entire colony moves at once — a great multicolored blanket moving across the land: crawling, jumping, devouring everything in their path until they find a suitable site for a new tunnel complex.[9] Hundreds die on the journey, but hundreds more live. They are the hated enemies of farmers and those who live off the fertile land. As they eat plants around their new "town" in great quantities, they enlarge the desert.

But just as the farmers loathe them, the nomads and travelers of the desert treasure them almost beyond gold. The antennae of the creature have a curious water-detecting power. When within two score yards of great amounts of water[10], the antennae vibrate and hum.

The creature's water-divining power has

been cause for much speculation and theorizing among sages. It does not seem to be magical in a strict sense; many bards consider a sunset magical, and augurs see magic power in the flight of birds and the entrails of beasts. This is, however, no place to argue the difference between "magical" and "natural." No magical power is required in the preservation process. Through the length of the antenna from outer tip to anchor is a clear, oily liquid. In the presence of the elements of earth and air it remains still, but water causes the fluid to become agitated, vibrating the antenna. Close contact with fire renders the liquid a brittle solid, which has no divinatory powers. The sage Carthin of Ethrenor speaks of each element having its own radiation (similar to the energy of the Positive and Negative material planes), and suggests that the antenna's content is sensitive to the radiations of the water element.[11]

Among many nomadic tribes, the pernicon antenna is a sacred religious object offered by some shamans to their deities for water.[12] To some desert cultures, the insect itself is sacred and is the symbol of deities. The ancestors of one nomadic tribe I know of sacrificed criminals to the pernicon swarms. It is ironic that while some hold the pernicon sacred for religious reasons, among other groups (most notably the royalty and very wealthy classes of my land) the pernicon is sacred for culinary reasons. There are several ways to prepare the insect, though always the antennae and pincers are removed. In my favorite recipe, the pernicons are fried in olive oil and served with salt and camel butter. Cooked properly, they are light, crispy and delicious; furthermore, they are a status symbol indicating great wealth. Attempts have been made to domesticate the creatures, but none yet successfully.

Despite being a culinary delicacy, even more valued are the creatures' antennae, as mentioned before. It is not easy to find them on the market. Near the eastern edge of the Iriahb Desert, in the city of Grindar, they are sold for considerable sums of money, but they are often improperly preserved (disintegrating in the buyer's hands moments after being purchased) or were not correctly removed from the creature (and thus are completely useless). In all likelihood, you will have to find and preserve the antennae yourself to ensure their quality.

The first problem, once you have found and slain the pernicon, is the careful removal of the antenna. The antennae have a bulbous portion not far below the outside of the skull. This anchors the antenna, but still allows it movement. There are tiny muscles in the anchoring chamber. With them, the antennae may be moved together or in different ways. This is helpful in finding the direction of water. One antenna is aimed one direction, and the other the opposite. The creature can detect the most minute difference in the frequency of vibration, and the antenna vibrating faster is closer to the water. Humans using an antenna have to move around, with the antenna indicating the direction of the source.

Beneath the "anchors," the very bases of the antennae are short, thin projections with rounded tips. Each tip touches a sensitive, rubbery tissue atop the creature's brain. This tissue detects the vibrations of the antennae (if any) and the direction it is aimed, and sends them to the brain, which can interpret the signals.

To correctly remove the antenna, the skull must be pulled apart to either side of the anchor, and the antenna cut free from the muscle tissue and removed. Most professionals use a special tool, a spring-tweezers, to remove the antenna; if these are not available, the next best things are some of the more delicate instruments found in most sets of thieves' too1s.[13]

Though small and delicate, an antenna lasts quite a while if you care for it well. If allowed to become damp, it disintegrates. It is by nature dry, and immersion in water causes it to explode harmlessly.

An antenna is also brittle, and crumbles to dust unless handled with utmost care. It is good to have it stored carefully and used only when necessary. The Bilndiah nomads have a simple but effective means of storing their antennae, which I use myself and recommend to all travelers. They use a bone map case, in which is placed a roll of camel hide (with plenty of cushioning fur) around the antenna. It does an excellent job of protection, so that the antenna will usually remain intact even if dropped quite a distance;[14] it also keeps the antenna silent and still when not needed. If the case is watertight, it is even more useful. Some folk, such as some merchants I know, prefer metal or wooden cases, often inlaid and decorated with precious metals and stones.

A last word of advice must go to the traveler: The antenna can only detect water — if there is no water near, the antenna is of no more use than another grain of sand.

Notes

1 — The distance that a pernicon can jump varies greatly. This author suggests a base horizontal range of 10′ and a vertical range of 5′. These figures should be adjusted at the DM's discretion, in consideration of such factors as wind speed and direction, and temperature. Pernicons function more sluggishly in lower temperatures, but this is not generally a factor in their desert environment.

2 — Despite his travels and knowledge of the desert, the Emir has made a small mistake. The pernicon's diet does not consist mainly of other animals, as he appears to imply. They are primarily herbivores. Jesouhd Ye'esif is, though, accurate about the creatures' method of attacking. Creatures "eaten" aid the creature by providing much-needed liquids, and some nutrients, but pernicons cannot live on fluids alone.

3 — Note that the pernicon's attack form will not harm certain creatures greatly, if at all, at the DM's discretion. The "immune" group should include all undead, most elementals and para-elementals (including such creatures as the thoqqua, dune stalkers, grues, etc.), some outer-planar creatures, golems, and so on. The DM should remember how the pernicon harms — it sucks out body liquids. If a creature has no body fluids, it won't be harmed, except by the pincer being clamped on or pulled off.

4 — This author considers 1-4 hp damage for the removal of a pincer of ½ inch in length (at most) to be excessive, and recommends only 1 hp damage be taken instead.

5 — A pernicon attached to a victim has AC 10. Note that if an attack is made on such a pernicon and the attack misses, a "to hit" roll against the victim should be required 50% of the time, with no dexterity adjustments applicable. Even if the pernicon is killed, its pincers remain in the victim, as noted in the FIEND FOLIO® Tome, p. 72.

6 — For dealing with combat between pernicons and armored characters, refer to the accompanying article.

7 — An inhabited "town" of pernicons will rarely, if ever, be located more than a mile from the border of the desert.

8 — Female pernicons lay eggs twice a year. Special moisture-holding chambers are made by the pernicons, by gluing grains of sand together with sticky saliva (produced from fluids drained from victims), to hold the hundred or so eggs deposited by each female after mating. Because of the thin, membranous shells of the eggs, they have to be deposited on moist sand lest they shrivel up and die before hatching. This is the reason that the pernicons tunnel down to reach ground water or moisture (which is closer to the surface near the border of the desert), and the major reason that they possess water-detecting antennae. After sand on the chambers' floor is sufficiently dampened and the eggs deposited, the chamber is sealed by saliva-glued sand to contain the moisture. The young hatch within a week or so and eat their own shells (and sometimes their neighbors' shells, or even their neighbors). They then burrow out to join the colony. As the average, only 1-6 of a pernicon's hundred laid eggs will survive to maturity.

9 — There is a 1% chance that an encounter with wandering pernicons will be with a moving colony, in which case the number appearing will be the lair size rather than the normal "wandering" size *(i.e.,* 300-3000 rather than 4-40). Player characters meeting such a group are advised to get as far away as possible, as fast as possible. Pernicons en route to a new lair are particularly aggressive, since they will need animal fluids for the construction of the tunnels and egg chambers of the new lair (see note 6).

10 — The FIEND FOLIO Tome is vague as to what a "large quantity" of water is. This author recommends that any water body of 5,000 gallons or more should be easily detectable. Smaller amounts should be detectable at closer ranges.

11 — This could be compared to the

liquid-crystal display in digital watches. Electricity causes the liquid crystal molecules to align in such a way as to absorb light, becoming visible to the observer. The radiations of water cause the pernicon antenna's oily fluid to behave in the opposite manner — going from a neutral state to chaotic and agitated. Fire causes the reverse, the liquid going to a rigidly structured form. Submersion in water destroys the antenna; the oily substance disperses rapidly, bursting out of and shattering the antenna.

12 — If a pernicon antenna is used by a cleric or druid as an additional material component for a *create water* spell, the spell will produce 10%-60% more water than it would otherwise. As with other material components, the pernicon antenna will disappear after the spell is cast.

13 — Successful removal is not automatic. The base chance, rolled on a d20, is equal to the dexterity of the character (or the average of two characters) attempting the removal, modified as follows:

If the first time ever tried, -10 (then -9 on the second, -8 on the third, etc.);

If special tools are used, + 2;

If thieves' tools are used by two characters, no adjustment;

If thieves' tools are used by one character, -2; and,

If other tools are used, such as hairpins, -2 (two characters) or -4 (one character).

The task requires the total concentration of the individual(s) involved. If work is disturbed before finishing the removal, there is an 80% chance of the antenna being ruined.

14 — Pernicon antennae should have saving throws for resisting damage from falling. Normally 20 is the proper save, but in such a bone case, it should be 10, adjusted upward by 2 for every 10′ fallen. A metal case grants a base saving throw of 8.

The pernicon: a new version

by John Nephew

While the previous article may be applied to the official pernicon found in the FIEND FOLIO® Tome, hopefully making it easier to integrate into your campaign, several problems remain with the original monster. It is awkward for a DM to handle in combat, particularly if the monster appears in large numbers?; and its hit points, damage, and constitution drain are extremely great and powerful characteristics for a two-inch insect to have.

Herewith is presented the ***revised*** pernicon. Parts of the following description are taken directly from the FIEND FOLIO Tome (p. 72) and credit for these portions (and, of course, the original idea) goes to the original author of the pernicon, Mary Patterson.

PERNICON

FREQUENCY: ***Rare***
NO. APPEARING: ***4-40 (in lair or moving colony, 300-3000)***
ARMOR CLASS: 3
MOVE: ***12" (plus jumping)***
HIT DICE: ***1 hit point***
% IN LAIR: ***20% (1% chance of the encounter being with a moving colony)***
TREASURE TYPE: ***See below***
NO. OF ATTACKS: ***1***
DAMAGE/ATTACK: ***1 hit point***
SPECIAL ATTACKS: ***Continuous damage***
SPECIAL DEFENSES: ***Nil***
MAGIC RESISTANCE: ***Standard***
INTELLIGENCE: ***Semi-***
ALIGNMENT: ***Neutral***
SIZE: ***S (2 inches long)***
PSIONIC ABILITY: ***Nil***
Attack/defense modes: ***Nil/nil***
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: ***I/7 + 1/hp***

A brightly colored insect rather like a grasshopper about 2 inches long — red, yellow, ochire, and light blue — the pernicon inhabits the outer regions of deserts. It is much prized by the nomads of these regions, because the antennae on its head are water-diviners, vibrating and giving off a low hum when within 120′ of a large quantity of water.

The pernicon is usually inoffensive, but it attacks in large numbers if disturbed, accidentally or otherwise. It leaps on its victims and grips exposed flesh with the set of pincers at the rear of its abdomen. The pincers themselves do 1 hit point of damage and then begin draining the fluids of the victim at the rate of 1 hp per subsequent round, without requiring further "to hit" rolls. Normal pernicons are capable of draining 5 hp of fluids in that manner (thus being capable of doing 6 hp damage total), at which point they are quite bloated and will drop off the victim to crawl away.

A pernicon attached to a victim has an armor class of 10. However, on an attack against it that misses and is a roll of 4 or more under the number needed to hit it, the victim is hit and receives half-normal weapon damage (rounded down). If the insect is slain while attached, the pincers remain in the victim and continue to drain hit points (fluids) at the rate or 1 point per round. Removing the pincers, which can be done easily in 1 round by the victim or a companion, inflicts an additional 1 hp damage but stops the fluid loss.

Leader pernicons: In each colony of pernicons, there is one extraordinary leader pernicon, whose main functions are deciding when it's time to leave the lair, choosing where to establish a new lair, and breeding. Leader-type pernicons are different from normal sorts as follows: AC 2, 2 hp, 4" length, low intelligence, and the capability to drain up to 10 hp of fluids (at 1 hp/round). A leader-type pernicon invariably has its own chamber in the lair, and there is a 25% chance that the chamber's walls are of saliva-glued gold dust (value 2-12 gp if melted down). In mass combat (see below), the leader is treated as an individual monster, never as part of a swarm.

Combat: Since pernicons are small creatures that attack in large numbers, they are difficult to manage in a conventional combat manner. The following suggestions should help.

The main pernicon swarm always divides into small swarms of relatively equal size for each opponent. A swarm may then be in some ways treated as if it was a single creature (similar to the cifal; see the FIEND FOLIO Tome, page 19). Each pernicon has 1 hp, so the collective "creature" has as many hit points as there are pernicons within it. A victim is more likely to attack successfully against such a large number of insects, so the swarm's opponent receives +1 "to hit" for each ten pernicons alive and lighting him when the attack is made.

The number of pernicons that can actually attack depends on the clothing or armor of the opponent, as noted below.

Armor/clothing	Pernicons able to attack
Bare	200
Cloth	100
Leather	50
Studded leather	40
Ring mail	30
Scale mail	20
Chain mail	15
Splint mail	15
Banded mail	15
Elfin chain mail	12
Plate mail	10
Field plate	5
Full plate armor	3

Shields affect armor class (they can bat away insects), but not the number of creatures able to attack.

Combat is carried on in a fairly normal manner. When there are very large numbers of pernicons, it is recommended that the DM take a percentage (20 minus the number required to hit a pernicon, times

The ecology of the peryton

by Nigel Findley

"Hearts!" The younger mage brought his fist down on the table with enough force to make the tankards jump. "Explain that to me! Why hearts?"

I maintained my aloof manner. "Strange creatures have strange habits," I remarked casually. "And what could be more strange than a beast with the head and antlers of a deer and the body and wings of a vulture?"

The young wizard's elder companion sniffed. "An answer that is no answer. We came to speak to Nex — Nex the Collector, Nex of the Arrow — and find that the famous bounty hunter is no more than a child of twenty summers with a disrespectful tongue."

I narrowed my eyes and allowed a half-smile to creep onto my lips. "A *man* of only twenty summers I may be," I said quietly, flicking my glance between the two of them, "but in that time I have seen — and slain —more varieties of creature than you can name, even with all your wizards' learning.

"But," I continued less coldly, "this is beside the point. Perhaps all your questions will be answered by the carcass of a peryton, which I can and will deliver to you for . . ." I paused, making it seem as though I was just now deciding on a price, when actually I had made up my mind as soon as I saw the rich cloth of their robes and the lavish gold chains around their necks. " . . . ten thousand pieces of gold." I leaned back and awaited the storm of protest that was sure to follow.

And, as I had expected, the face of the younger wizard stiffened and became flushed. But, to my surprise, his elder companion only hesitated a moment, then nodded slowly. "The Wizards' Guild is prepared to meet your fee," he said. "Ten thousand gold nobles for a specimen of an adult peryton."

I tried, somewhat unsuccessfully, not to smirk. This kind of dickering I liked; that fee was two times my usual price. "The deal is struck," I said. "Now, of course, that does not include my expenses. . . ."

"You hunt the peryton?" I turned to find the source of the rough, low voice that came from behind me. The man who had spoken wore a deep purple tunic of fine workmanship. On a chain around his neck hung a silver token of a bird. Though almost three times my age, he was well-muscled and seemed to carry himself with confidence. I had brought my hand to my sword hilt as I turned, but let it drop again when I noticed that he was unarmed.

"Yes, good cleric," I said, "or so I intend. If such matters are your concern, join us. My name is—"

"Nex. I know. I am Amhotep." He pulled up a chair and seated himself at the table. "And what do you know about the peryton that you can think of hunting it without showing any doubt or concern?"

I shrugged. "I know that the beast dwells in mountainous regions, such as the peaks two days' ride north of here."

"That hardly seems sufficient ."

My voice hardened and I gestured toward my long bow, wrapped carefully in velvet and propped up in the nearby corner. "I also know that no creature lives. that I have seen over an arrow," I replied. "What more do I need to know?"

"Much more." The cleric's voice grew grim and cold. "Much. Knowledge is power, and ignorance can be death. Especially so if you intend to hunt the peryton with simple clothyard arrows. The arrows or any other weapons you may use — must be ensorcelled, and the magic must be strong, or they will simply glance off the creature's body."

I leaned forward and opened my mouth to comment, but he raised a hand to cut me off and kept talking. "Be still. There is yet more you should know. The peryton faces no such difficulty in slaying *its* foes. The creature's horns are hideously sharp and strong — some say they are magical, but I know better. They inflict terrible wounds, and the peryton wields them with skill worthy of a champion."

"You speak as someone intimately familiar with the beast," I put in.

If the cleric noticed the sarcasm contained in that remark, he gave no sign. "Familiarity comes through experience. When I was younger, I, too, hunted the peryton."

The two mages, who had been listening quietly to the cleric until this point, now turned to one another, exchanged glances, and murmured. I felt their attention being drawn away from me and toward the purple-clad cleric.

"Please continue," said the elder mage, and the cleric complied.

"My three brothers and I journeyed to those peaks you speak of," he said, turning slightly toward me with those words. "We also intended to return with a peryton as a trophy." He laughed mirthlessly. "My brothers — or, to be more exact, their bones —are still there, on those mountain slopes.

"For three days we searched diligently for signs of the creature, without success of any sort. But on the fourth day, the perytons — three of them — found us. We were traversing a treacherous rock face when their shadows passed over us, just as we heard the sound of their beating wings for the first time. Their shadows were as those of *men,* not beasts — a fact which we all observed, and which distracted us for a single fatal instant.

"By the time that instant had passed and we turned to fade them, the perytons were swooping down upon us from out of the sun." The cleric inhaled deeply, let the breath out slowly, and closed his eyes briefly as if in pain. "Two of my brothers died in that first pass, disemboweled by those flashing horns that ripped through leather as a sword through linen. By luck — or by the will of Thoth — my eldest brother and I evaded that first swooping attack. We began to descend the slope quickly, seeking cover, as the two beasts that killed them came out of the sky and landed near the bodies of our brothers.

"Though on the ground it may appear clumsy — almost comical — when airborne the peryton is a wonder to behold and a thing to fear. We were transfixed by horror at the sight of that third dark shape climbing, turning abruptly, making ready for another dive . . ." The cleric shuddered, and for a moment resumed the detached tone he had used earlier in his lecture.

"The creature maneuvers well; in a stretch of only about two hundred paces, it can turn a full ninety degrees while flying at full speed — and it can reach full speed in a mere minute after launching itself into the air. I have seen few creatures larger than a hawk that can equal it." During this interlude, the cleric's eyes were focused on me; now he turned his attention back to the two wizards and resumed the story.

"Running and scrambling, casting occasional glances backward and up at the sky, my brother and I were able to traverse less than one hundred yards down the slope before the third peryton went into another dive, with my brother as its target. And this time he was not so fortunate; though the slashing horns missed him, the peryton's body did not. The creature rammed into his upper body — whether by design or chance I could not tell. He was swept from the small plateau on which he had hoped to stand and fight, and he landed on a tiny ledge some thirty feet below.

"It would have been a blessing if the impact had killed him. As it was, my brother survived the fall, but both legs, and I believe his back, were broken. Unable to move or defend himself, he could still call to me for help that I was unable to give. And he could scream — oh, how he screamed — as the peryton settled on the ledge beside him.

"I escaped with my life, for the simple and dreadful reason that three perytons, and not four or more, swooped down on us that day. And of all the visions that haunt me of that terrible day, the worst was the sight of that vicious third beast tearing my brother's heart from his still-living body."

The cleric lowered his head, brought one hand up to touch the bird-token around his neck, and seemed to be mouthing a silent prayer. The rest of us were silent as well. As much as part of me wanted to do so, I could not bring myself to utter a sarcastic comment, to try to get the wizards again thinking about me and the reason we had come together at this table in the first place.

Then the cleric raised his head and gazed vacantly out at the mages seated across from him. The younger one shifted uneasily, then ventured to speak. "Perhaps, then, you can enlighten us where others cannot. Why do these creatures require the hearts of their victims?"

"The answer to your question is brief," the cleric said. "For reproduction — that much any sage can tell you. But to understand that answer, first you must know some things about the background of the peryton."

By this time I had regained my normal demeanor, looking and acting bored and, I hoped, convincing the others at the table that I actually felt that way. "Explain, then, if you must, and stop leading us along like this," I told the cleric.

He continued in a tone as if I had never spoken. "The origin of the peryton is lost in the backwaters of time," he said. "Many of the wise say that the creature is the result of magical experimentation — but that is not so, though I do not say that there is no magic in the peryton. Rather, the beast is more akin to beings like the githyanki and the mind flayer, in that none of them are native to this world or the plane it resides upon."

The younger mage raised his eyebrows and exhaled a short puff of disbelief, but the cleric was oblivious to this reaction. "The peryton was the dominant race on its home world," he continued. "Though they are all naturally independent and harshly competitive, at one point in their history the creatures banded together to subjugate — or destroy — all that dwelt around them. Such an alliance among chaotic creatures like these could hardly endure, but it did persist long enough to win a world and send advance invasion parties — at least two, probably many more — to establish their outposts . . . elsewhere.

"It is said in the councils of the wise that the first such outpost was established on a great island nation called Atlantis, in a world similar to this one. Exactly what became of that nation I do not know. Perhaps the resistance to the perytons' attempted conquest was too great, or perhaps the perytons overstepped themselves. Whatever the case, the entire island sank beneath the sea in a great upheaval. Though many others believe that this ended the threat of the perytons on that world, I have reason to doubt that stance. There still exists a prophecy that the perytons will bring about the eventual fall of one of that world's greatest cities, named Roma."

"Fascinating," interjected the elder wizard, but then his face took on a doubtful frown. "Yet, how could such a creature as the peryton travel the planes?"

"Through the powers of the mind," replied the cleric immediately. "By using the Talent, or what you might know as psionics. On their home plane, the perytons were possessed of the Talent, and it was through the Talent that the raiding parties intended to enslave this world and others."

"But —" The mage tried to break in, but Amhotep had anticipated his comment.

"Whether the perytons here lost their Talent gradually, over generations, or all at once, I know not, though I would suppose the latter to be true. This world is different from their own in so many ways. . . . The perytons that dwell in the mountain peaks of our world have lost their Talent, but they still possess their fierce, vicious nature and their scheming intelligence."

"What?" I blurted out, unable to control my surprise.

The cleric regarded me with a grim smile. "Oh, yes, my young hunter. They are as intelligent as most men, more so than many. They speak their own language, quite unlike that of any other creature. It is this intelligence, almost always unsuspected by those who would defeat them, that helps to make the peryton such a lethal adversary."

"All very interesting, good sir," said the elder mage, and he seemed to mean it. "But . . . the hearts?"

"That will soon become apparent," said the cleric, then resumed his narrative. "On its own world, the peryton eats nothing but the flesh of its prey. On this world — and, I suppose, others — the peryton is forced to broaden its diet to obtain the balance of elements its body needs. In addition to the flesh of creatures native to this world, it must eat plants and even some inanimate matter such as clay and soft ores.

"How these compounds are utilized by the peryton is, at the very least, interesting. In the same way that certain plants, on this plane and others, concentrate minerals from the soil in their stalks, the peryton assimilates iron and even heavier metals into its system, using these substances to strengthen and toughen its horns. The peryton's attack is not as deadly as it is merely because it is accurate, although the beast does indeed dive with terrible precision. The metals and minerals that the peryton consumes help to make its horns as hard as steel, able to take and hold a dagger-sharp point, unlike the antlers of normal creatures such as deer and elk, which are tapered but still rounded at the tips. A single slash, or a series of punctures, from those horns is enough to pene-

trate or push aside even metal armor, mortally wounding the flesh beneath it. It has been speculated that these metals also help to toughen the peryton's skin and feathers, which is why it cannot be wounded without enchanted weapons; however, I believe otherwise, since the peryton's coat of feathers is soft and downy to the touch. Quite possibly, its immunity to non-magical weapons comes simply from the fact that it is not a creature of this world."

Amhotep paused for two heartbeats, smiled, and nodded in the direction of the two mages. "And now to the hearts. The reason it craves hearts is, in essence, the same reason that it has such a varied diet: for mineral balance. The female peryton needs especially large amounts of the elements iron, potassium, sodium, and nitrogen to produce the metal-like shell of her eggs — if you find one, I dare you to break it open without the use of an acid, such as the one found in the albumen of the egg itself. As it so happens, the tissue of the human heart contains an abundance of these vital substances. Certainly there are other available sources, but none of the others so appropriately matches the peryton's ethos."

"Thank you for that, kind sir," said the elder mage. "We have been more than curious about that aspect of the beast, for reasons I daresay need not be explained to yourself. But a question remains, one you have raised yourself — the shadow."

The cleric smiled; it seemed to please him that the wizard had paid enough attention to remember that remark, and yet he began his response with a compliment that pleased the mage equally. "I would have been surprised had you not pursued that point. What I said, I meant quite literally: When the shadows of the perytons passed over me and my brothers, the shadows were those of *men*.

"When the sun strikes the body of a peryton, feet replace claws and arms appear instead of wings; the horns cannot be seen in the shadow, and the head rounds out to become that of a human — truly a sight that would be at least disconcerting, if it were not already so terrifying. And the shadow remains that way until the peryton has slain its chosen prey, whereupon the shadow it casts is that of its own body, and it then stays in that state until the creature has devoured and digested its prey.

"Whether this is some trick in the mind of the observer, or evidence of a higher power at work, I know not. Perhaps it is an unconscious remnant of their Talent, some power that projects through the creature's shadow the image of the prey it seeks the most — humans. Then, when the beast has killed a human, this instinctive need is fulfilled and, for a time, the peryton ceases to project the human shape. I cannot say which of these ideas is accurate; what I *do* know is that I myself have seen the change from man-shadow to beast-shadow, as it took place upon the vile creature that slew my last surviving brother."

"Truly fascinating," said the elder mage. "You have our sympathy," he added, gesturing toward his companion, "and our respect. But, as you must have already guessed, another question remains. Whence comes all of this detailed information that seems beyond the ken of even the most learned of sages?"

The cleric touched, then caressed, the silver bird pendant he wore. "I am honored by a source of knowledge that is denied, by its very nature, to most of the sages of this land."

The lecture and the questions now seemed to be at an end, and I had to admit to myself that I had been as engrossed as the wizards were in the cleric's story of him and his brothers, and the other things he had to say about the peryton. But, in saying all of it, he had clearly stolen all of their attention — and perhaps their gold as well — from me. I decided it was time to act decisively, and I did exactly that.

"Here," I proclaimed loudly, "is *another* source of knowledge denied to most sages." I reached beneath the table and grabbed my sack, talking while I extracted its contents. "You are the first to see one of my more recent trophies; in fact, I just finished preparing it earlier today. Notice the fine, membranous finish to the wings, and the lifelike position of the arms and hands. A good job, wouldn't you say?"

All three of them stared at the tiny stuffed body I had placed on the table. The cleric was the first to speak.

"A sprite?" he asked, quietly. "But why? These creatures are the most peaceable —"

"And beautiful," I cut in. "Notice the color of the clothing, and the way I preserved the texture of the pale skin."

The cleric slowly rose to a standing position; his face took on an expression I could not read. "Perhaps you *are* the one best suited to hunt the peryton," he said.

Then, suddenly, before I could react, he reached out and rapped me hard in the center of my chest with his forefinger. "You have nothing in here that the peryton could desire."

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Ecology of the Phantom Fungus

Terror from Beyond the Stars

By Scott Gable
Art by Michael Jaecks

"The rural tales are queer. They might be even queerer if city men and college chemists could be interested enough to analyze the water from that disused well, or the grey dust that no wind seems to disperse. Botanists, too, ought to study the stunted flora on the borders of that spot… People say the colour of the neighboring herbage is not quite right in the spring, and that wild things leave queer prints in the light winter snow."
— H.P. Lovecraft, The Colour Out of Space

From the field notes of Sir Randolph Corday, mycologist to the King (recovered from his staging camp in the lower Hazelwood):

Most adventurers know fungus only as the tiny toadstools that litter the forest floor. Sure, eating the wrong one could be disastrous, but otherwise, these strange growths pose no threat except to corpses—those that are prepared to return to the dirt. Mushrooms are harmless, right?

What if I were to tell you that many of those mushrooms you saw in the forest were actually the same creature? Or, that those mushrooms are really only the "flowers" of the creature and the rest of it lies hidden, just underground? Or, that this buried creature might span 3,000 acres with a total mass greater than any dragon? That, my friends, is exactly what a fungus is.

Fungus is primary composed of chitinous threads called hyphae that branch and crisscross in a vast network throughout the soil. These hyphae are ever growing and seeking new food sources, which are promptly broken down into the basest components and absorbed by the fungus. In this way, fungus decomposes organic matter and performs a vital cycling of matter. While fungus proves both strange and fascinating, and perhaps a touch humbling, it is not typically a threat to the living.

However, I have found incontrovertible proof of an even stranger fungus. This fungus exhibits the strangest of behaviors and physiology. It acts with deliberation and intent. I believe this fungus can only be from beyond the realms that we know.

Physiology of the Phantom Fungus

"...when he see all the trees a-bendin' at the maouth o' the glen… an' smelt the same awful smell… they was a swishin' lappin' saound, more nor what the bendin' trees an' bushes could make, an' all on a suddent the trees along the rud begun ter git pushed one side, an' they was a awful stompin' an' splashin' in the mud. But mind ye… he didn't see nothin' at all, only just the bendin' trees an' underbrush."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

My initial claims, at least, are clearly supported by various heroes' tales of confrontations with a "phantom fungus." Imagine, an invisible mushroom! It was this phantom fungus that I sought to study when I set out for the dark Crinderfeld domains.

The handful of stories that mention this strange creature are isolated to but a few regions. Seeking out the locals in the outer Crinderfeld Marches, I had hoped to discover clear evidence. Eventually, I found a few gnomes who had encountered and slain such a beast. They recounted the experience of being attacked by a foe they could not see, never knowing what was gnashing at their faces and defeating the beast only through luck.

The creature's dead body, they said, became visible a short time later. Unprompted, they described it as a giant, grotesque mushroom with a gnarled, ropey texture. The stalk, however, divided into four equivalent stumps that served as a means of locomotion. The top of the "mushroom cap" opened in a gaping maw of four-fold, radial symmetry lined with what appeared as chitinous teeth. Ropey knots, consistent with a rudimentary sensory organ, clustered around this mouth and around the rim of the cap. Unfortunately, the remains dissolved after several minutes and left nothing behind. Several other accounts indicate that this fungus may have several types.

The locals of these secluded areas have developed a "leave well-enough alone" attitude and avoid the phantom-filled forests. They have found that if they leave the creatures alone, the creatures typically leave them alone. However, according to local legends, much larger specimens have destroyed entire villages. Clearly, more investigation is needed.

The Phantom Fungus and the Fungal Collective

The phantom fungus is but a single stage in a strange and complex life cycle. Is it an individual creature or a part of a larger superorganism? Where does the individual begin?

The phantom fungus is a part of a communal organism more properly called a fungal collective.

Violet Fungus & Shrieker

As seen among mundane fungi, the mushroom found on the forest floor is merely the fruiting body of the fungus and is the result of the fungus's sexual reproduction; sexual reproduction in fungi does not require multiple individuals. This temporary "flower" creates and distributes the spores that perpetuate the species. Whether carried on the wind or on passing creatures, the violet fungus spores will develop into a new fungal node (see below) if they survive.

The violet fungus remains attached to the fungal collective by its hyphae. However, as a free action, the violet fungus can detach itself from the greater organism to move about on these durable appendages; as a move action, the violet fungus can reattach itself by burrowing its hyphae into the ground wherever the fungal collective is established. As long as it remains attached, the entire fungal collective senses what the violet fungus senses. The violet fungus blindly attacks anything that approaches it when disconnected, but while connected, it shares the intelligence of the fungal collective and may delay an attack out of guile.

The shrieker is a separate species of fungus that occasionally forms a symbiotic relationship with violet fungi and the associated fungal collective.

Phantom Fungus & Variants

"Whatever the horror was, it could scale a sheer stony cliff of almost complete verticality….

…It's invisible… It's a frightful thing to have alive, but it isn't as bad as what Wilbur would have let in if he'd lived longer. You'll never know what the world escaped. Now we've only this one thing to fight…"

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

The phantom fungus is a false fruiting body. Though it roughly resembles a mushroom and arises in a similar way, it does not bear spores and is the result of the fungal collective's asexual reproduction. These structures all begin the same, showing differentiation only at the end of their development; the entire growth cycle can take as little as 12 hours. The phantom fungus is a common result, but other variations are also possible. The phantom fungus serves as sentry and scout. Other variations have their own niches; all specialize in service to the fungal collective.

Though a phantom fungus and its variants typically detach themselves from the fungal collective as soon as they can, they can re-establish the connection as a move action by extending their hyphae into the ground wherever the fungal collective is established. They must remain stationary when connected to the fungal collective, but as a free action, they can disengage and move normally.

A phantom fungus and its variants cannot reproduce. They arise only through the fungal collective, established by a fungal node. Once active, the phantom fungus continues to grow. The common phantom fungus is but a first stage: a mature fungal horror is truly terrifying to behold.

The fungal collective dictates the behavior of all phantom fungi and variants. When detached from the fungal collective, they are treated as "knowing tricks or having a purpose" as detailed under the Handle Animal skill. Treat the fungal collective or fungal node as the trainer; given the intimate nature

of all communication within a fungal collective, Handle Animal checks are automatically successful.

Typically, a phantom fungus stands vigilant and unmoving as a sentry, using its natural invisibility to good effect. When trouble arises, it acts quickly to defend the fungal collective. While connected to the fungal collective, it can respond to a threat in another area. Once it detaches itself, it loses that awareness until it sees the threat directly or reattaches itself to the fungal collective.

Phantom fungi may serve as scouts, but due to their limited intelligence when disconnected from the fungal collective, they can offer only their direct sensory impressions back to the collective. They return to the fungal collective when a mission is completed.

One last role of phantom fungi is to collect organic matter. When times are lean or more resources are required, phantom fungi scour the land for any organic matter, either living or dead. They carry this back to the fungal collective in their gaping maws, to be slowly absorbed.

Fungal Node

"The colour… was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all.…

When they looked back toward the valley… the farm was shining with the hideous unknown blend of colour; trees, buildings, and even such grass and herbage as had not been wholly changed to lethal grey brittleness. The boughs were all straining skyward, tipped with tongues of foul flame… over all the rest reigned that riot of luminous amorphousness, that alien and undimensioned rainbow of cryptic poison… seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognizable chromaticism."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*

A fungal node holds a fungal collective together. In a sense, it is the "brains" of the operation, but the intelligence of the fungal collective really comes from the whole of each of its constituent parts. Clearly though, it is essential for managing and coordinating all activities performed by the fungal collective. Each fungal node differs slightly in personality and extends this personality into the collective intelligence. These give the collective a type of hivemind.

The fungal node itself simply appears as a giant truffle, and it lies fully underground—typically just a foot or two below the surface. Its hyphae extend from it underground in every direction, forming a sort of a massive chitinous web. These hyphae may stretch for miles and, together, they form the mycelium of the fungal node. This connects it to each and every constituent member of the fungal collective. The mycelium is so extensive that any member of the fungal collective can extend hyphae into the ground, while within the fungal collective's range, and establish a connection with the mycelium just below the surface of the ground.

The mycelium stretches in all directions to a range determined by the age of the fungal node and the availability of resources. The mycelium can extend through any organic matter; it cannot penetrate inorganic matter in the same way, but it can take advantage of minute cracks and, like tree roots, eventually break through most natural barriers. By secreting enzymes into the soil, the mycelium speeds up decomposition and absorbs the decomposed organic material as nutrients.

The mycelium extends throughout all available organic matter, including the local flora. This presents an opportunity to attack the affected plants, but the fungal collective instead uses it to exert control over the plants.

If the ranges of multiple fungal nodes overlap, they develop connections between their mycelia. The results are unpredictable. Often, the fungal collectives work collaboratively and toward the common interest. However, when there is a sizable difference in age among the fungal nodes, one fungal collective dominates and, ultimately, takes complete control. On rare occasions, open hostility erupts between two fungal collectives.

Occasionally, five or more fungal nodes—all a part of the same fungal collective—divert all energy to one of their number and evolve into a grand fungal node. This highly intelligent creature appears to be the apex of fungal evolution. It grows from the fungal node upward and breaks the surface of the soil as a giant mushroom, with a distinct personality. These grand fungal nodes show great variety in appearance from one to another, but each coruscates with strange, otherworldly colors. Telepathy allows for greater communication within and without the fungal collective, and they can shift their consciousness into an iridescent cloud of spores and move about. The increase of power with this new stage of life is dramatic, both in its potent abilities and the range of its control.

Occasionally, a grand fungal node must relocate. This is not a simple procedure and requires a tremendous amount of energy. For an entire year, the fungal node directs the fungal collective to focus on collecting organic matter: the fungal collective denudes their entire range of organic matter.

This is the grand sporulation and all plant and animal life—including humanoids—is at risk, as the grand fungal nodes considers all organic matter fuel for the process. With sufficient fuel, the grand fungal node, impervious within a capsule of strange organic material, launches into the sky in a supernatural display of pyrotechnics.

Within this capsule, it can relocate and start anew in any land far or near: some claim the capsules are even capable of interstellar and interplanar travel. The land left behind is drained of life and remains a barren wasteland of gray and brittle ash, devoid of all organic material. In every case, however, a single fungal node is left to attempt a fresh start.

Outer Ones (Mi-Go)

"They were pinkish things about five feet long; with crustaceous bodies bearing vast pairs of… membranous wings and sev-

eral sets of articulated limbs, and with a sort of convoluted ellipsoid, covered with multitudes of very short antennae, where a head would ordinarily be....

— H.P. Lovecraft, The Whisperer in Darkness

Within the larger and more advanced fungal collectives, special caretakers are often on hand. In a special process, the false fruiting body mentioned previously avoids differentiation into a phantom fungus or variation and begins incorporating both plant and animal characteristics. Requiring a full week of development, the result is a creature known simply as an outer one.

In addition to the grand fungal nodes, outer ones are among the only fungi of the fungal collective capable of communicating intelligently with the outside world using their limited telepathy and abhorrent buzzing approximation of speech. This makes them ideal for the role of ambassador to other sentient races. They are also the only ones (aside from the capsule of the grand fungal node) capable of surviving the void of interstellar travel, and they have been known to pass along the mind-shattering secrets of things beyond that they have collected to those deemed worthy.

Origins

"The main body of the beings inhabits strangely organized abysses wholly beyond the utmost reach of any human imagination. The space-time globule which we recognize as the totality of all cosmic entity is only an atom in the genuine infinity which is theirs."

— H.P. Lovecraft, The Whisperer in Darkness

Whoever reads this likely thinks me mad already, but I must go on. I have spoken to them; or rather, they have spoken to me. They are not creatures of the natural order that philosophers study. Yes, they have been here for eons and have integrated well with our natural world, but they originate from far away. Just by looking at some of them, you can tell they are not wholly within our world but rather they float between two worlds.

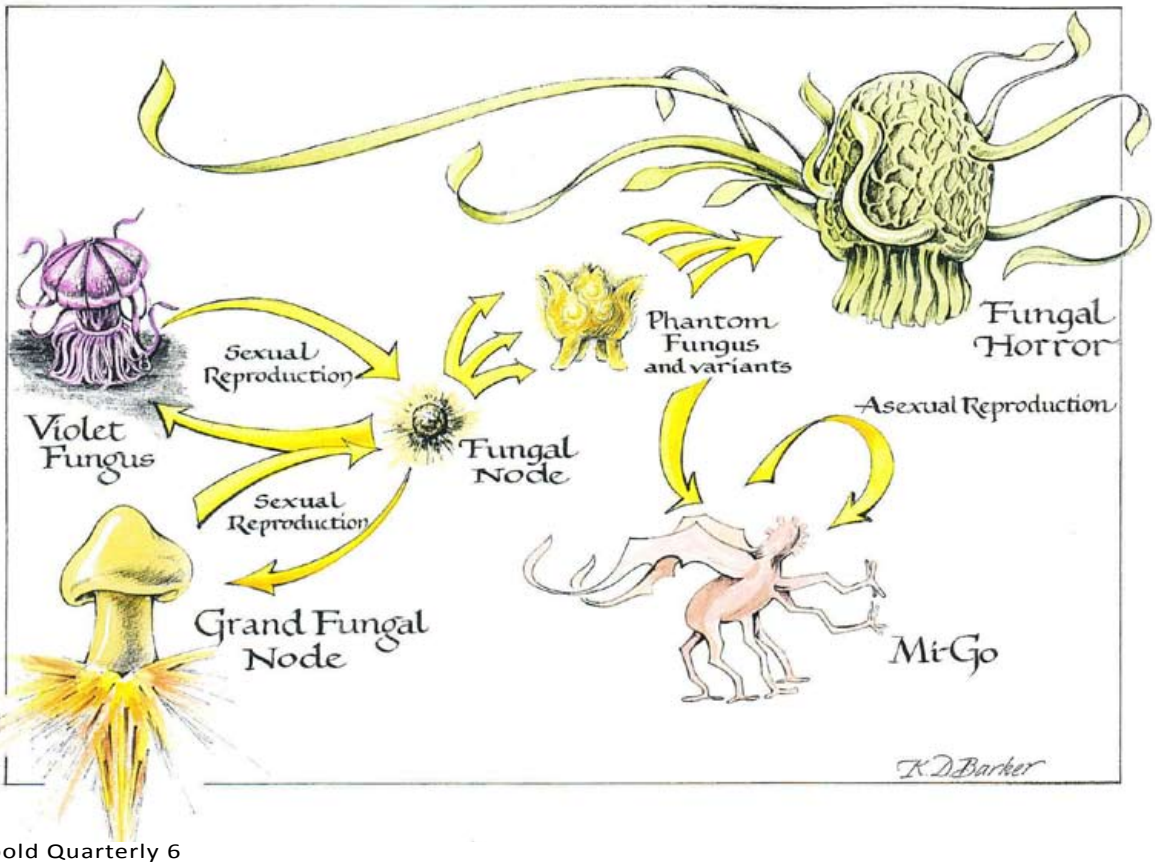
More than that, I believe they actually draw some sustenance from other planes. If my theories are correct, their hyphae are rooted not entirely within our reality but extend into the very fabric of the multiverse and draw energy from the planes. This might begin to explain their supernatural abilities and amazing diversity. What if all of the fungal collectives throughout the multiverse are connected? Perhaps there is really only *one* fungal collective—massive and spanning ever greater realms.

I must go. They promise to show me even more.

Differentiation

The fungal collective is a rich and complicated array of creatures. Some are detailed here, others are hinted at, and still others are left to be discovered. All its elements are able to join the fungal collective.

Variations (on the phantom fungus)
The phantom fungus is simply one of many variations of mobile fungus that arise from a fungal collective. The phantom fungus is reprinted here for reference. In each case, the variants are identical except for what appears under their individual entries; note that the invisibility power of the phantom fungus is not shared by the variants.



Phantom Fungus, CR3

Always N Medium plant
Init +0; Senses Low-light vision; Listen +4, Spot +4

Defense
AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 14
(+4 natural)
hp 15 (2d8+6)
Fort +6, **Ref** +0, **Will** +0
Defensive Abilities concealment; **Immune** criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

Offense
Spd 20 ft.
Melee bite +5 (1d6+3)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Special Attacks –

Tactics
Before Combat Phantom fungi make no preparations before combat. They may initiate combat at the first sight of intruders but may also simply hold ground. This is typically decided by the controlling fungal node—either directly if attached to the fungal collective or by standing orders if detached from the fungal collective.
During Combat Phantom fungi will typically wait motionless for the right moment to strike. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.
Morale Phantom fungi fight to the death unless ordered otherwise.

Statistics
Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 9
Base Atk +1; Grp +3
Feats Alertness
Skills Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4
Languages cannot speak
SQ greater invisibility

Special Abilities
Greater Invisibility (Su) A phantom fungus is constantly under the effect of *greater invisibility* (CL 12th). This effect is not susceptible to *invisibility purge* but is susceptible to *see invisible*. They become visible one minute after death. (Invisible creatures receive +2 bonus on attack rolls against sighted opponents, ignore Dexterity bonuses to AC, and gain concealment. The attack modifier above is already adjusted for this.)
Skills (Ex) A phantom fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

Ecology
Environment forest or underground
Organization solitary, rot (2-8), collective (9+)
Treasure none
Advancement 3-4 HD (Medium); 5-6 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment —

Engulfer Fungus, CR 3

Nothing but mouth, an engulfer fungus, also known as a trapdoor fungus, spends all of its life underground, lying in wait just below the surface. It tries to burrow underfoot and swallow its prey whole with its massive maw lined with thousands of sharp, chitinous teeth.

Always N Large plant
Init +0; **Senses** Low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

Defense
AC 13, touch 9, flat-footed 13 (+4 natural, -1 size)
Defensive Abilities — Immune criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

Offense
Spd burrow 20 ft.
Melee bite +6 (1d8+9)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Special Attacks improved grab, swallow

Tactics
During Combat Engulfer fungi will typically wait motionless, just at the surface of the ground, for the right moment to strike. Once an intruder is in range, they move to swallow it.

Statistics
Str 22
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +11
Feats Stealthy
Skills Hide +4, Listen +2, Move Silently +2, Spot +2

Special Abilities
Improved Grab (Ex) If an engulfer fungus hits a smaller creature, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. If successful, it can attempt to swallow on its next round.
Skills (Ex) An engulfer fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Hide checks.
Swallow (Ex) An engulfer fungus can swallow a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check. Once swallowed, an opponent automatically takes 1d8+9 bite damage per round. The opponent can climb out with a successful grapple check that leaves the opponent grappled in the creature's maw. As the creature is almost entirely underground, swallowed creatures are unable to cut their way out but can still damage the engulfer fungus from the inside.

Ecology
Advancement 3-4 HD (Large); 5-6 HD (Huge)

Faerie Fungus, CR 3

A thin sheet of iridescence fluttering on the wind that pops in and out of view, faerie fungi are constantly in flight. The presence of sentient, living creatures, however, always stirs their hunger.

Always N Tiny plant
Init +4; Senses Low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2

Defense
AC 18, touch 16, flat-footed 14
(+4 Dex, +2 natural, +2 size)
Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +0
Defensive Abilities blinking; **Immune** criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

Offense
Spd fly 20 ft.
Melee hyphae +7 (1d3-3 plus 1d2 Wis drain plus 1d2 Con drain)
Space 2 ½ ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.
Special Attacks consume

Tactics
During Combat Faerie fungi will typically flitter about randomly on the breeze until intruders are spotted. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.

Statistics
Str 4, **Dex** 18
Base Atk +1; Grp -10
Feats Weapon Finesse
Skills Hide +12, Listen +2, Move Silently +10, Spot +2

Special Abilities
Blinking (Su) Faerie fungi exist trapped between two worlds and are treated as if under the effects of a continuous *blink*.
Consume (Ex) If a faerie fungus hits with its hyphae attack, it drains 1d2 points of Wisdom and 1d2 points of Constitution. The Wisdom drain requires only a touch attack.
Skills (Ex) A faerie fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

Ecology
Advancement 3-4 HD (Tiny); 5-6 HD (Small)

Fisher Fungus, CR 3

Seemingly nothing but ropes and knots of long, chitinous vines, a fisher fungus—or snare fungus—lies on low branches or in the crotches of trees with its tentacles dangling in silent wait of prey.

Defense
Immune criticals, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

Offense
Spd 5 ft.; climb 20 ft.
Melee 4 tentacles +3 (1d6+2)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks constrict, entangle, improved grab

Tactics
During Combat Fisher fungi typically lie motionless on an overlying branch with their vine-like tentacles dangling to the ground, waiting for the right moment to strike. Once engaged, they simply attack the nearest foe.

Statistics
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +7
SQ –

Special Abilities
Constrict (Ex) A fisher fungus deals automatic tentacle damage with a grapple check.
Entangle (Ex) Any creature moving through an area that the fisher fungus threatens is considered entangled.
Improved Grab (Ex) If a fisher fungus hits a Large or smaller creature, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity. Fisher fungi receive a +4 bonus to grapple checks.
Skills (Ex) A fisher fungus has a +5 racial bonus on Move Silently checks.

Fungal Horror CR 13

"Bigger'n a barn... all made o' squirmin' ropes... hull thing sort o' shaped like a hen's egg bigger'n anything with dozens o' legs like hogs-heads that haff shut up when they step... nothin' solid abaout it—all like jelly, an' made o' sep'rit wrigglin' ropes pushed clost together... great bulgin' eyes all over it... ten or twenty maouths or trunks a-stickin' aout all along the sides, big as stove-pipes an all a-tossin' an openin' an' shuttin'... all grey, with kinder blue or purple rings..."

— H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*

A fungal horror is a mature phantom fungus. Over time, any phantom fungus or a variant could naturally develop into a fungal horror. However, given one minute, 30 or more phantom fungi and variants can combine their masses into a temporary fungal horror.

Once a month, any phantom fungus or variant can combine with others in this fashion. Thirty individuals can hold the form for 10 rounds.

Always N Huge plant
Init +4; **Senses** all-around vision, low-light vision, see invisible; Listen +12, Spot +12

Defense
AC 25, touch 12, flat-footed 25
(+4 deflection, +13 natural, -2 size)

hp 189 (18d8+108)
Fort +17, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6
Defensive Abilities concealment; **Immune** criticals, flanking, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, sleep effects, stunning

Offense
Spd 30 ft., climb 30 ft.
Melee 4 tentacles +22 (1d12+9) and
hyphae +17 (1d8+4 plus 1d6 Wis drain and 1d6 Con drain)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (20 ft. with tentacles)
Special Attacks constrict, consume, improved grab, trample

Tactics
Before Combat A fungal horror makes no preparations before combat. They simply charge fearlessly into battle at the first sign of prey.
During Combat Fungal horrors trample as many foes as possible, then lash out with their four massive tentacles.
Morale Fungal horrors fight to the death unless they are in the middle of a mission.

Statistics
Str 29, Dex 10, Con 23, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 10
Base Atk +13; Grp +30
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tentacle), Power Attack, Run
Skills Climb +17, Listen +12, Move Silently +5, Spot +12
SQ frightful presence, greater invisibility, walk anywhere

Special Abilities
All-Around Vision (Ex) A fungal horror has eyes scattered all about its body, allowing it to see everywhere at once and giving it a +4 racial bonus on Spot and Search checks and immunity to being flanked.
Constrict (Ex) A fungal horror deals automatic tentacle damage with a grapple check.
Consume (Ex) A fungal horror can consume a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check. The fungal horror drags the grappled opponent within reach of its hyphae and begins to consume the opponent's essence, dealing automatic hyphae damage. In any round that a fungal horror succeeds with its consume ability, colorful wisps of the prey's essence flow through this creature's body and make it visible until the beginning of its next round.

Frightful Presence (Ex) The appearance of a fungal horror is greatly unsettling. Whenever a fungal horror becomes visible—such as by its use of the consume ability or with *see invisibility*—its presence takes a toll. Creatures within a 30-foot radius are affected if they have fewer HD than the fungal horror. A successful Will save (DC 19) negates the effect and grants immunity to this effect for 24 hours. A failed Will save results in the target being panicked for 4d6 rounds if it has 4HD or less and shaken for 4d6 rounds with 5 HD or more. This is a fear effect.

Greater Invisibility (Su) A fungal horror is constantly under the effect of *greater invisibility* (CL 20th). This effect is not susceptible to *invisibility purge* but is susceptible to *see invisible*. They become visible one minute after death. (Invisible creatures receive a +2 bonus on attacks against sighted opponents, ignore Dex bonuses to AC, and gain concealment. The attack modifier above already reflects this.)

Improved Grab (Ex) If a fungal horror hits a smaller creature with a tentacle, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.

See Invisible (Su) A fungal horror is treated as if always under the effects of *see invisibility*.

Skills (Ex) A fungal horror gains a +8 racial bonus Climb checks and can always take 10 on Climb checks.

Trample (Ex) As a full-round action, a fungal horror can trample smaller opponents (Reflex save for half; DC 28). A fungal horror engaged in a grapple can trample at half speed with a successful grapple check and may include the grappled foe as a trample target. Instead of slam damage, any creature trampled by a fungal horror takes automatic hyphae damage.

Walk Anywhere (Ex) A fungal horror never suffers penalties to movement while on a natural surface—including soil, wood, or stone. Rough terrain is disregarded. Walls and ceilings are no obstacle, and a fungal horror moves across them as if walking on the floor: speed is never reduced, climb checks are not necessary, and its tentacles are always free.

Ecology
Environment forest or underground
Organization solitary
Treasure none
Advancement 19-25 HD (Huge)
Level Adjustment —

Grand Fungal Node

"[T]he hideous thing shot vertically up toward the sky like a rocket or meteor, leaving behind no trail and disappearing through a round and curiously regular hole in the clouds before any man could gasp or cry out… in one feverish kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and substance; blurring the glance of the few who saw it.…

…returned the next morning to see the ruins by daylight, but there were not any real ruins. Only the bricks of the chimney, the stones of the cellar, some mineral and metallic litter here and there… everything that had ever been living had gone. Five eldritch acres of dusty grey desert remained, nor has anything ever grown there since."

— H.P. Lovecraft,
The Colour Out of Space

Grand Fungal Node CR 20

Always N Huge plant
Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 250 ft.; Listen +50, Spot +50

Defense
AC 34, touch 19, flat-footed 30
(+15 deflection, -4 Dex, +15 natural, -2 size)
hp 577 (35d8+420)
Fort +31, **Ref** +9, **Will** +23
Defensive Abilities otherworldly aspect; **DR** 15/cold iron; **Immune** criticals, flanking, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, polymorph, *sleep* effects, stunning; **SR** 28

Offense
Spd 0 ft.
Melee 4 tendrils +31 (2d6+7 plus hyphal array)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft. (250 ft. with hyphal array)
Special Attacks hyphal array, spore cloud

Tactics
Before Combat With a network of hyphae and scattered minions in almost constant telepathic contact, grand fungal nodes know what happens in their territories immediately. At the first sign of a threat, they send minions to investigate and direct a spore cloud in that direction. In times of plenty, they may negotiate with travelers.
During Combat A grand fungal node often strikes at the first sign of prey with tendrils, spore cloud, and minions. They are more tolerant if the intruders have not discovered its main body. Intruders that move toward the main body are met with everything the grand fungal node can unleash.
Morale Grand fungal nodes negotiate with other creatures if the main body is threatened by an overwhelming force. Otherwise, they fight to the death.

Statistics
Str 25, **Dex** 2, **Con** 35, **Int** 24, **Wis** 30, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +26; **Grp** +45
Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Bullrush, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (tendril), Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Leadership[B], Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack
Skills Bluff +42, Diplomacy +50, Intimidate +46, Knowledge (arcana) +45, Knowledge (nature) +45, Knowledge (the planes) +45, Listen +50, Sense Motive +48, Spot +50
Languages Common, Undercommon
SQ shifting consciousness, telepathy 500 ft., territory

Special Abilities
Blindsight (Ex) A grand fungal node can sense vibrations within its territory using its extensive array of hyphae.
Hyphal Array (Ex) A grand fungal node has an immense network of hyphae burrowing through all organic matter in its territory. Within 250 ft. of the main body, the grand fungal node can manipulate the trees, vines, and roots as tendrils to attack foes. It may attack a single target or multiple targets anywhere within its range. Making one attack is a standard action and all 4 is a full-round action. Attacks of opportunity within this range are triggered normally.

When a creature begins its turn grappled by one of the grand fungal node's tendrils, hyphae exert their influence to feed on or usurp the victim. Each round as a part of its grapple, by feeding on grappled prey, the grand fungal node deals 1 point of Con drain and heals 20 hp. Alternately, the grand fungal node may usurp its prey: the victim must make a Will save (DC 31) or be controlled as per *dominate monster*. This Supernatural ability is Charisma based. Creatures can regain control with a *remove curse* or gain a new saving throw with *remove disease* or similar magic.

Additionally, the grand fungal node may raise corpses as temporary zombies using the usurp ability. This functions as *animate dead* (20th CL).
Improved Grab (Ex) If a grand fungal node hits a smaller creature with a tendril, it can start a grapple as a free action without provoking attacks of opportunity.
Otherworldly Aspect (Ex) A grand fungal node has a pulsing, throbbing chitinous body with alternating whorls and pits and with coruscating patterns of color. This grants the grand fungal node the benefits of *displacement*.
Shifting Consciousness (Ex) Due to its enormous network of hyphae, a grand fungal node can shift its consciousness to other fungal nodes (free action) or to spore clouds (see below). As it shifts consciousness within its territory, its abilities transfer to each new center of consciousness. For instance, a grand fungal node normally has complete control over the organic matter within 250 ft. of the main body using its hyphal array ability; however, if it creates a spore cloud, the ability becomes centered on the spore cloud.
Spore Cloud (Ex) A grand fungal node's secondary form is spore cloud, a scintillating cloud ejected from the main body and containing thousands of miniscule spores. This distributes the grand fungal node's consciousness into the cloud; the main body retains just enough awareness that, if it is attacked, full consciousness is restored to the main body as an immediate action no matter where the spore cloud is located, dispersing the spore cloud. The spore cloud maintains telepathic contact with the hyphal array and the collective. The spore differences from the main body are:

Always N Fine plant (swarm)
Init +4

Defense
AC 33, touch 33, flat-footed 28
(+10 deflection, +5 Dex, +8 size)
hp 60

Offense
Spd fly 40 ft. (perfect)
Melee swarm (5d6 plus energy drain)
Space 10 ft.
Special Attacks distraction (Fort DC 29), energy drain, hyphal array

Statistics
Str 0, **Dex** 21, **Con** 15, **Int** 24, **Wis** 30, **Cha** 19
Grp –

Special Abilities
Energy Drain (Su) Living creatures damaged by a spore cloud gain 1 negative level. For each negative level received, the spore cloud gains 5 temporary hit points. After 24 hours, creatures with negative levels must make a Fort save (DC 31) for each negative level or permanently lose that level. This ability is Charisma based.

Damage inflicted on a spore cloud does not transfer to the main body. If a spore cloud is reduced to 0 hp, it disperses, and the grand fungal node's full consciousness immediately transfers back to the main body. Only one spore cloud can exist at a time. A new one can be created as a standard action.

Territory (Ex) Each grand fungal node controls a territory. This territory will consist of a minimum of 1,000 ft. of dense, lush vegetation. Beyond this central 1,000 ft., the territory is more sparsely populated (for example, thinning woods and grasslands) or the densely packed vegetation may continue. The grand fungal node maintains its network of hyphae throughout the entire territory (up to several miles in diameter). The territory represents the grand fungal node's realm of direct influence. Spore clouds must remain within the territory.

Ecology
Environment forest or underground
Organization solitary
Treasure double (only inorganic material)
Advancement 36+ HD (Gargantuan)
Level Adjustment —

Outer Ones (Mi-Go)

"They... traverse the heatless and airless interstellar void in full corporeal form, and some of its variants cannot do this without mechanical aid or curious surgical transpositions. Only a few species have the ether-resisting wings… Those inhabiting certain remote peaks in the Old World were brought in other ways. Their external resemblance to animal life, and to the sort of structure we understand as material, is a matter of parallel evolution rather than of close kinship. Their brain-capacity exceeds that of any other surviving life-form, although the winged types of our hill country are by no means the most highly developed. Telepathy is their usual means of discourse...."

— H.P. Lovecraft, The Whisperer in Darkness

These winged wonders have a soft, chitinous body with many legs. At the end of each leg is a pair of saw-toothed claws capable of the same fine manipulation that fingers allow. Where their heads would be one sees only stubby, wiggling antennae. Unlike most members of the fungal collective, outer ones are self-replicating. Like others, however, specimens dissolve several minutes after death.

In addition to their innate abilities, outer ones are adept at using tools. While they can use the tools and devices of other races, they are excellent crafters and develop much new technology on their own.

Adventure Hook: the North Fields of Chilton

Those that farm the north fields of Chilton have long been known for their flights of fancy and their moonshine. The recent mangling of a young farmer, however, has brought serious attention from local authorities. The tale is spreading of the boy's arm disappearing almost to the shoulder into the very air—a clear cut through bone, blood everywhere. The lad swears that the air itself attacked him and on multiple occasions tried to block his long, frantic passage back to the farmhouse.

Many farmsteads have already been abandoned in the past year due to the phantom-filled woods beyond. The nights are filled with strange lights and stranger chitterings. What was only yesterday dismissed as wild imagination is today considered with deadly seriousness.

The ecology of . . .

The PIERCER

by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards

Being the text of an address given to the Wizards Guild of Kabring by the Wizard Pyrex, shortly before his unfortunate demise. . . .

"Brothers and sisters in the arcane arts:

"There can be few here tonight who at some time in the course of an expedition underground have not had to leap out of the way of a piercer launching itself from its roost high in the shadows above. If the piercer misses, it is usually smeared across the cavern floor. If it hits, it often does so with deadly accuracy. Because of these aspects of its existence, few people have any real idea of the creature's true nature or life cycle. For instance, in the Bestiary of Xygag, the sage has this to say about the piercer:

> *" 'Ye Piercer doth look like unto a stalactyte, and hangeth from the roofs of caves and caverns. Unto the height of a man, and thicker than a man's thigh do they grow, and in groups do they hang. If a creature doth pass beneath them, they will by its heat and noise perceive it, and fall upon it to kill and devour it, though in any other way they move but exceeding slow.'*

"Hardly pushing back the frontiers of scholarly analysis, I think you would agree. Unanswered therein are such questions as: How does it move? How does it feed? How, if it attacks only by sensing noise and heat, can it be so deadly accurate? And how, once it has impaled its prey, does it regain its lofty perch?

"Well, we now have the answers. After much careful and often dangerous research and observation, I have established the life cycle of this remarkable animal, which I shall now relate while a number of my assistants illustrate with conjured images.

"The piercer is a mollusk, hatched from an egg the size of a hen's, laid in clutches of six or eight in crevices on cavern walls or floors.

"When first hatched, it resembles a slug with a rather more pointed tail than usual, but soon its abrasive tongue is scouring from the walls not only the fungi on which the young feed, but grit and sand. Gradually the grit and sand are secreted into a rocky shell around its body, growing from a thin, sturdy point to a cone as thick around as a man's thigh, as it grows. When the piercer is about a foot long, it develops the distinctive adult oculars or eye stalks, which can be extended from the shell to point back along it.

"After slowly making its way to the roof of a cave, the adult piercer hangs there by its sucker foot, oculars alertly canted, waiting for its prey. Great patience is required, but when a creature passes immediately underneath it, down it plummets with fearful accuracy. Normally, its rocky shell will penetrate most hides, and it makes a kill.

"What *then?* I hear you ask. How do it feed on its prey, and how does it surmount the more immediate problem being stuck bolt upright in a skewer orc? Fair questions, indeed.

"What in fact happens is that the piercer must briefly leave its protective covering, and eat its prey while clear the shell. Now is when it is at its most vulnerable — save for when it mates Whenever possible it prefers to partially extrude itself from its victim, overbalance, and then pull its shell clear. This done, it can feast at leisure on the corpse, before crawling back to the roof to begin again the long wait.

"From time to time, two piercers will make their way to the cavern floor, where they perform a slow and intricate courtship, tracing labyrinthine trails in the dust. At the end of this ritual, they emerge briefly from their shells to consummate their union, and then laboriously return to their rocky roosts. In due course another clutch of eggs is laid, and a other generation of these remarkable gastropods emerges to continue the cycle.

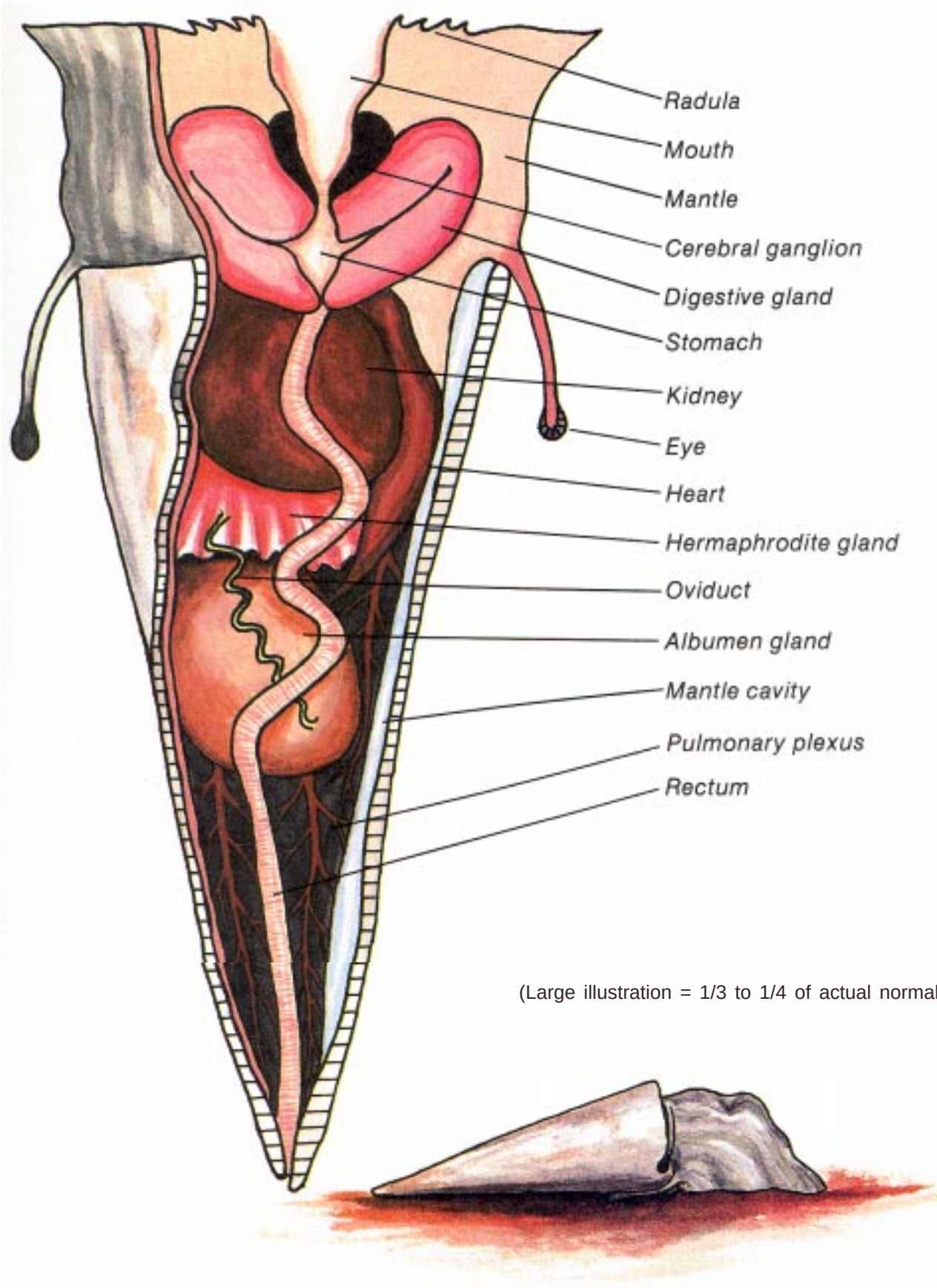
"Fellow thaumaturges, I give you *the piercer!"*

At this point a rabbit was released, and was prompt impaled by a small piercer previously unnoticed in the roof. Amid general uproar, the piercer was revealed to be an illusion, which was small consolation to the rabbit, but was generally agreed to be a stylish and highly professional finish to a fascinating address.

(This article previously appeared in Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.)

The piercer

(Mollusca
Megastromus pilum)



(Large illustration = 1/3 to 1/4 of actual normal size)

THE ECOLOGY OF THE PSEUDODRAGON

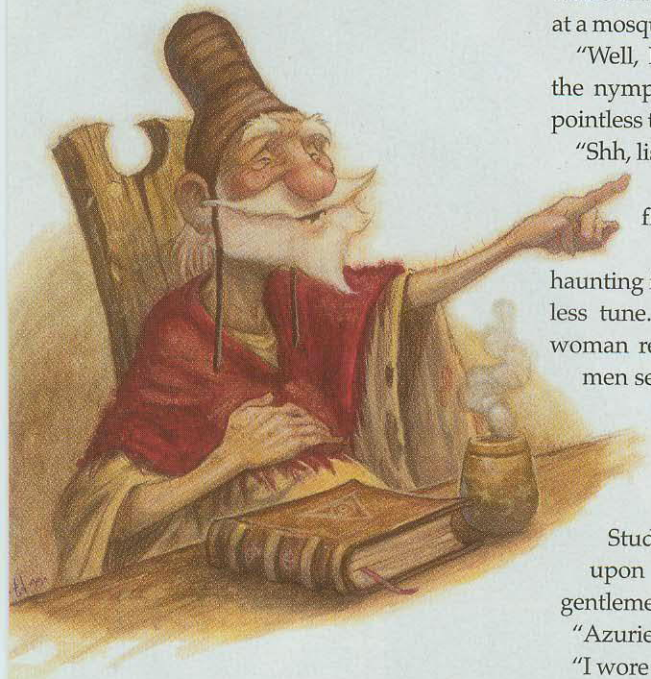
The Sting

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice . . . "

"Well," said Buntleby, "I guess this meeting of the, what?—Anti-Monster Hunters Association? Monster Savers Association? whatever—is hereby called to order. I wish I had thought to bring my gavel."

"You mean Dreelix's gavel," pointed out Spontayne.

"Yes, of course."



"We'll just have to try and do our best without it," said Willowquisp, slapping at a mosquito. "Shall we get on with it?"

"Well, I suppose we should wait for the nymph and her little pet.[1] Kind of pointless to start without them, isn't it?"

"Shh, listen—here she comes!"

The sudden scent of wildflowers blew by upon a spring breeze, accompanied by a haunting feminine voice singing a wordless tune. The singing stopped as the woman reached the backs of the three men seated together, side by side, on the forest floor. She placed a hand upon the shoulders of both Willowquisp the Zoophile and Spontayne the Studious, and planted a kiss firmly upon Buntleby's bald head. "Hello, gentlemen," she said in a silky voice.

"Azurielle," acknowledged Buntleby.

"I wore a hooded robe, so you needn't worry about looking at me," said Azurielle, pulling the hood up over her head to hide her unearthly beauty. "It's safe now; you can turn around."

Hesitantly, the three Monster Hunters turned to face her, snatching a quick peek and glancing away. When their vision wasn't obliterated by her supernatural beauty, they dared a longer look, and finally faced her fully. She sat with her legs bent at her side, her hooded robe obscuring her face but doing little to hide the delicate curves of her body.

"My, but you're a twitchy bunch today," she commented with a smile.

"Can you blame us?" griped Willowquisp. "The last time we got a look at your true features, we were all blinded or killed outright."[2]

"All water under the bridge," said Buntleby, waving a dismissive hand. "We are here now to bring you a warning: Some of our members plan mischief against one of your forest creatures."

While the Monster Hunters couldn't

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Tony DiTerlizzi

1. The term "pet" is misleading when used to describe the relationship between a pseudodragon and its companion, as any pseudodragon is quick to point out. There are two ways for a human to become the companion of one of these creatures: Either the human can summon the pseudodragon (via the wizard spell *find familiar*), or the pseudodragon can choose the human. A pseudodragon looking for a human companion uses its inherent telepathic powers to "eavesdrop" upon the minds of candidates. If it likes what it learns, it presents itself and makes its final decision based upon the human's reaction. (People who express overwhelming joy at the prospect are generally shoo-ins.)

Humans aren't the only race found as pseudodragon companions, although they are the most common. Demihumans (usually elves or halflings; less frequently, gnomes) are occasionally given the opportunity for such an honor, and the forest-dwelling pseudodragons are not against taking as companions members of such sylvan races as nymphs, dryads, or centaurs.

2. See "The Ecology of the Nymph" in *DRAGON Magazine* #240 for all of the sordid details.

see it under the hood of Azurielle's garment, her eyes narrowed to angry slits. "That greedy pig Dreelix, no doubt!" she spat.

Willowquisp's eyebrows shot up and he cast a quick glance in Buntleby's direction.

"Er, yes," admitted Buntleby.

"What's his twisted scheme this time? Chop a treant in half to see if there's anything magical about its sap? Pull the wings off of pixies and grind them into pixie dust? Slice off a unicorn's horn and use it for a magical backscratcher?"

"Nothing so devious," said Buntleby. "He merely wishes to capture a pseudodragon to milk it of its venom."[3]

"I believe there is also some plan afoot to use the magical properties of its scales in some color-changing magic," added Willowquisp.[4] "And I think the creature's blood has some magical uses as well."[5]

"Yes, thank you, Willowquisp," said Buntleby irritably. The elderly sage pursed his lips and shut up.

"And how does he intend to capture a pseudodragon?" asked the nymph.

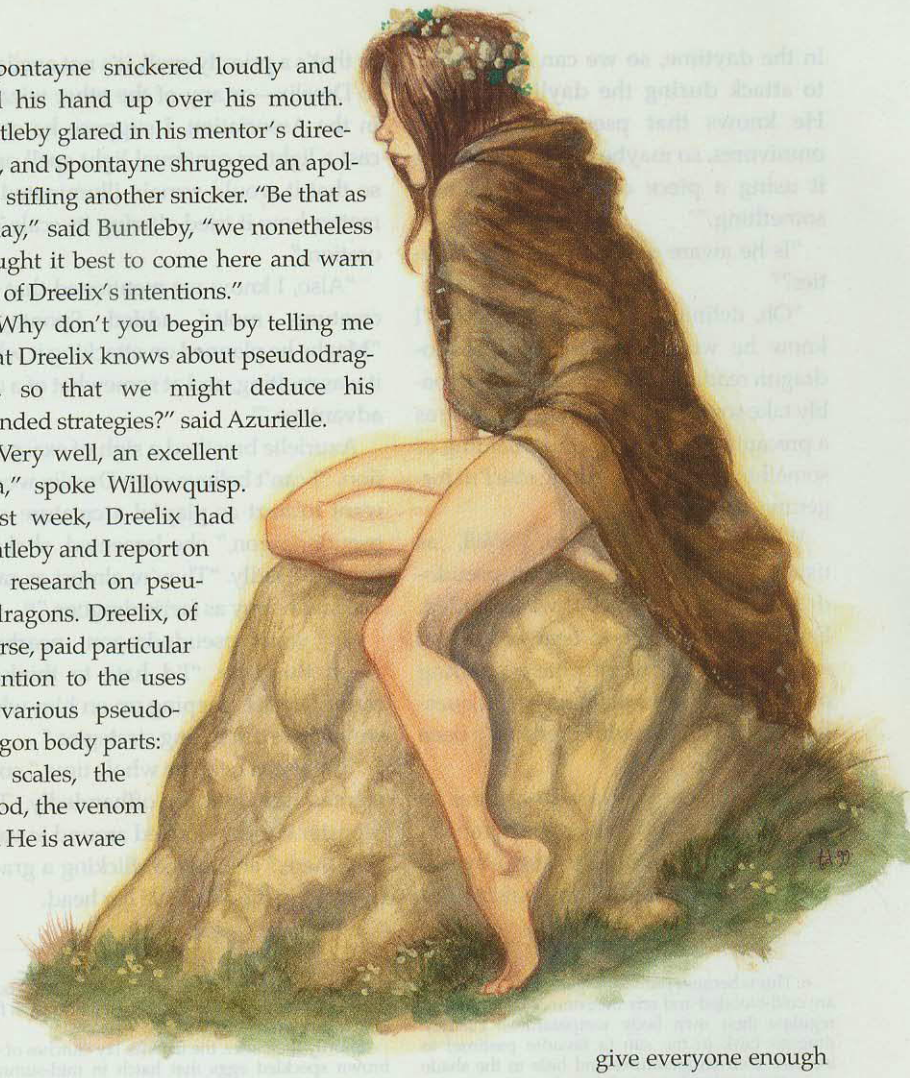
"As to that, I cannot say. I admit, he and I have had our little differences in the past, but I must give him credit for a brilliant mind; the man has a keen intellect and is a clever strategist. I fear my own humble mind might be useless in trying to outwit him."

"I'm surprised at your sudden change of opinion, Buntleby," said the nymph. "Didn't you tell me just last week that Dreelix was a 'bumbling incompetent,' a 'power-hungry blowhard,' and a 'self-aggrandizing buffoon?'"

Spontayne snickered loudly and held his hand up over his mouth. Buntleby glared in his mentor's direction, and Spontayne shrugged an apology, stifling another snicker. "Be that as it may," said Buntleby, "we nonetheless thought it best to come here and warn you of Dreelix's intentions."

"Why don't you begin by telling me what Dreelix knows about pseudodragons, so that we might deduce his intended strategies?" said Azurielle.

"Very well, an excellent idea," spoke Willowquisp. "Last week, Dreelix had Buntleby and I report on our research on pseudodragons. Dreelix, of course, paid particular attention to the uses of various pseudodragon body parts: the scales, the blood, the venom sac. He is aware of the quickness with which they can strike with their tail stingers, and he might perhaps have come up with some way to counter that attack."



"How?" asked the nymph.

"Perhaps a type of cork armor," suggested Buntleby. "The pseudodragon would slash out with its tail, get its stinger stuck in the cork, and that would give everyone enough time to jump it while it was stuck."

"An unlikely scheme," dismissed Azurielle.

"You never know with Dreelix," commented Willowquisp.

"So what else?" the nymph wanted to know.

"Well, let's see. I know we mentioned that pseudodragons are active primarily

3. A pseudodragon has a barbed stinger at the end of its highly flexible tail. The stinger is extremely sharp, like a hypodermic needle, and is attached to a venom sac in the bulbous end of the tail. Pseudodragons are adept at attacks with their stingers, striking at +4 to hit and inflicting no damage with their high-precision strikes. The tail is long enough to permit the creature to attack enemies directly ahead; the pseudodragon arches its tail over its body like a scorpion. Each stinger hit requires the victim to make a successful saving throw vs. poison or enter a state of catalepsy that lasts for 1–6 days. During this time, the victim appears to be quite dead, but there is a 75% chance that he or she wakes up unharmed after the catalepsy runs its course. (The other 25% of the time the victim dies.) The results of all stinger strikes are completely random—the pseudodragon cannot choose to use a lethal dose, and repeated doses of pseudodragon venom have no cumulative effect. As might be expected, pseudodragons are immune to the effects of their own venom.

Pseudodragon poison can be sold for about 100 gold pieces per ounce. A slain pseudodragon yields about 12 ounces from its venom sac; living pseudodragons can be "milked" (against their will; they see the process as extremely demeaning) for about 20 ounces a week.

4. Although their scale coloration is normally a reddish brown, pseudodragons have a chameleon-like ability to alter their colors to blend in with the local environment. This is done through specialized cells, called chromatophores, imbedded in the skin. The pseudodragon's outer skin consists of many tiny, translucent scales made of keratin (the same substance that composes human hair and nails). Layers of skin directly below the scales contain fixed blobs of reddish-brown color and free-floating blobs of a darker substance, melanin. The pseudodragon alters its coloration by means of nerve impulses directing the positioning of the melanin granules: By spreading throughout the cells, the darker melanin obscures the red pigmentation and causes a color change in the pseudodragon. There are several layers of skin, each with a different shade of melanin, allowing the pseudodragon to become green, brown, black, or shades between. A pseudodragon's skin need not be all the same color at once, either, for it can create camouflage patterns to aid it in blending into the forest environment. Because of these chameleon abilities, a pseudodragon has an 80% chance of remaining undetected in a forest environment by creatures unable to see invisible objects.

As a result of these abilities, pseudodragon skin can be used in the production of *rings of chameleon power, potions of rainbow hues,* and *cloaks of elvenkind.*

5. Pseudodragon blood is often used in the creation of *rings of spell resistance.* This is due to the highly magical nature of the pseudodragon: It not only has a 35% magic resistance but can also transmit this resistance to its companion through physical contact. Many pseudodragons enjoy perching on their companions' heads or shoulders; it gives the pseudodragon a good view, grants the companion the 35% magic resistance, and, by letting the companion do all the walking, subtly reminds the individual of his or her true place in the relationship.

in the daytime, so we can expect him to attack during the daylight hours.[6] He knows that pseudodragons are omnivores, so maybe he'll try trapping it using a piece of meat for bait or something."[7]

"Is he aware of their telepathic abilities?"

"Oh, definitely," replied Buntleby. "I know he wouldn't want the pseudodragon reading his mind, so he'll probably take some kind of countermeasure as a precaution: a ring of mind shielding or something similar. Anything else I'm forgetting?"

Willowquisp spoke up. "Well, as usual, I tried briefing him on pseudodragon mating habits but was rebuffed. Dreelix doesn't care to hear about that sort of thing, as it usually has no bearing on how to capture the monster in question or what to do with it once it's been slain."[8]

"Did he mention plans to counter its camouflage ability?" asked the nymph.

"Faerie fire would be the obvious choice," commented Willowquisp, "But as that's a priestly spell, it's not available to Dreelix—or any of the other wizards in the Association. I suppose he could cast a light or continual light spell on it, so that it would remain illuminated no matter how it tried altering its scale coloration."

"Also, I know we mentioned that the creatures molt," added Spontayne. "Maybe he planned on attacking it while it was molting, and at somewhat of a disadvantage."[9]

Azurielle breathed a sigh of exasperation. "I can't believe even Dreelix would want to hurt as playful a creature as a pseudodragon," she lamented, shaking her head sadly. "They're almost as carefree and happy as faerie dragons."[10]

"Is your pseudodragon nearby?" asked Buntleby. "I'd hate to think of crafty Dreelix creeping up on him while we sat here discussing strategies."

"He's been here the whole time," commented the nymph offhandedly. The Monster Hunters looked around in vain. "Up there," she added, flicking a graceful hand in the air above her head.

The Monster Hunters looked up and, after much searching, could gradually discern what appeared to be a green and black mottled face among the branches of the trees, its yellow, reptilian eyes staring down at them with feverish intensity.

The pseudodragon leapt down from its perch in the branch overhead, and leathery wings flapped it safely to the ground. It walked over to Azurielle and sat by her side, keeping a wary eye on the three Monster Hunters. "It's okay, Cuddles, they're friends," replied the nymph.[11]

Keeping its yellow eyes on the three strangers, the pseudodragon altered its coloration; the green and black mottling that hid it so well among the foliage of the trees became a reddish-brown. It twitched its tail back and forth, as if reminding everyone present to behave themselves, then yawned impressively, showing off its rows of razor-sharp teeth.[12]

"Amazing," remarked Spontayne. "A truly impressive creature."

"He's a cutey, all right," Azurielle

6. This is because pseudodragons, like all reptiles, are cold-blooded and rely on external conditions to regulate their own body temperatures. Pseudodragons bask in the sun (a favorite pastime) to increase their temperatures and hide in the shade when they get too hot. At night, when the temperature drops, the creatures become sluggish, striking at –2 to hit. They prefer spending the night in the safety of their lair: a hollow tree, cave, or even an underground burrow. (They'll lair in abandoned burrows, but do not dig burrows of their own.) Here they store their treasures (any bright, shiny thing they come across in their travel): bits of colored glass, polished pieces of metal (including coins), and especially gemstones of all sorts. (A typical pseudodragon lair contains ten times the normal amount of Treasure Type Q, plus frequently Treasure Types J, K, or M as well.) Pseudodragons value their treasures because of their attractiveness rather than for their inherent value; a highly polished copper piece is worth far more to a pseudodragon than a tarnished gold piece.

During winter, the pseudodragon hibernates in its lair, sleeping through the coldest season and awakening in the spring when it warms up.

Although the pseudodragon prefers daytime activity, it has excellent night vision. Pseudodragons possess infravision with a range of 60 feet and can see invisible objects (including other camouflaged pseudodragons).

7. While omnivorous, pseudodragons prefer meat above all else. Their diet consists primarily of rodents and small birds, and when those aren't available, leaves, fruits, and berries. Pseudodragons are somewhat finicky eaters and refuse to touch carrion.

8. Pseudodragons are solitary creatures, coming together only in the springtime to mate. During mating season, it isn't unusual to find gatherings of dozens of pseudodragons together. For 3 days, the small pseudodragon horde does little else, changing partners frequently and stopping only long enough to grab a quick bite to eat. They are extremely irritable toward trespassers during this time (especially the males) and immediately attack any intruders. At the end of the 3-day ritual, each pseudodragon flies off to its own territory.

Shortly thereafter, the females lay clutches of 4–6 brown speckled eggs that hatch in mid-summer. Because of the pseudodragon mating ritual, it is possible for each of the eggs to have been fertilized by a different male. Once the eggs hatch, the female pseudodragon cares for her young all that summer and autumn, teaching them to hunt and fly and sharing her lair with them. They hibernate together all winter; in the spring the young fly off to establish their own territories and start their own adult lives. Pseudodragons live for 10–15 years.

Pseudodragon eggs can be sold for as much as 10,000 gold pieces on the open market. Hatchlings can fetch up to 20,000 gold pieces to the right buyer. (Wizards, especially those without access to the *find familiar* spell, are the primary target audience.)

9. Like most reptiles, pseudodragons continue to grow throughout their lives. While their first year's growth spurt is fairly rapid, the growth cycle slows down after that and the creature's size increases at a much slower rate for the rest of its life.

As the pseudodragon's body grows, it gets too big for its skin and it sheds the outer layer. Unlike a snake, however, which usually crawls out of its old skin all at once and leaves it fairly intact (although inside out), a pseudodragon's old skin flakes off in bits and pieces. Anyone hoping to stumble across a pseudodragon floundering about as it struggles out of its old skin is in for a disappointment; since the skin flakes off in pieces, the pseudodragon is in no way hampered by the process. The creature aids the process by rubbing up against rocks, the hardened bark of ancient trees, and so forth.

A newly hatched pseudodragon sheds its skin monthly for the first year or so, then about twice a year thereafter. Males tend to grow somewhat larger and faster than females, but not noticeably so.

10. The faerie dragon is a chaotic offshoot of the pseudodragon race. While roughly the same size, the faerie dragon's wings are those of a butterfly instead of those of a dragon, and it lacks the pseudodragon's poisonous tail stinger. Their scales change color throughout their lives as they age; instead of the pseudodragon's chameleon abilities, the faerie dragon goes one step further with full invisibility. They share the same love for practical jokes, although with a faerie dragon's genius-level intelligence and spell use, their pranks tend to be even more elaborate than those of pseudodragons.

On the other hand, the faerie dragon is a strict herbivore, subsisting solely on fruits, nuts, berries, honey, and grains. Unlike pseudodragons, a faerie dragon's innate magic resistance increases as it ages. Finally, it has developed a gaseous breath weapon and prefers the company of sprites and pixies over human or demihuman companions. Despite their differences, though, pseudodragons and faerie dragons enjoy each others' company.

11. Pseudodragons have no spoken language, communicating among themselves via telepathy. While they have individual "names" that they use among themselves, these names are complicated to translate into a spoken tongue. As an example, a pseudodragon's "thought-name" might be "Playful Investigator-Who-Once-Got-His-Nose-Stuck-in-a-Beehive-and-Tried-Cornering-a-Skunk-in-a-Cave-That-One-Time." The "thought-name" is expressed instantly telepathically but is cumbersome when spoken aloud. Therefore, pseudodragons with human companions frequently allow themselves to be given a human "pet" name, often a childishly silly one—"Snooky," "Pookums," or "Boo-Boo," for instance. Pseudodragons revel in the "cuteness" of their pet names and often brag among themselves over who has the cutest name.

12. The teeth of a pseudodragon jut from the jaws, extending beyond the lips even when the creature's mouth is closed. The teeth are irregularly spaced, somewhat like a crocodile's, and inflict 1–3 points of damage upon those enemies bitten. Although pseudodragons have tiny claws, they are not used in combat. Rather, they help the creature keep its perch in tree branches and aid it in climbing.

agreed, bending over to scratch it behind its horns.[13] "Aren't you, my widdle cutesy-wootsie-wookums?" The pseudodragon purred in delight.[14]

"Do you think Dreelix will be after this particular one?" asked Spontayne.

"Probably," replied Buntleby. "It's the only one he knows of specifically. I'm sure he figures there are a bunch of them somewhere in the forest, but it's a big forest, and he knows where Azurielle likes to hang out. If he knows that she has a pet pseudodragon—"

The pseudodragon growled in anger at Buntleby.

"I mean, of course, if he knows that she's got a pseudodragon as a valued companion ..." Buntleby amended; the pseudodragon snorted his acceptance of this version of events. "... then it's only logical to assume that he'll try to capture, uh, Cuddles here," he finished.

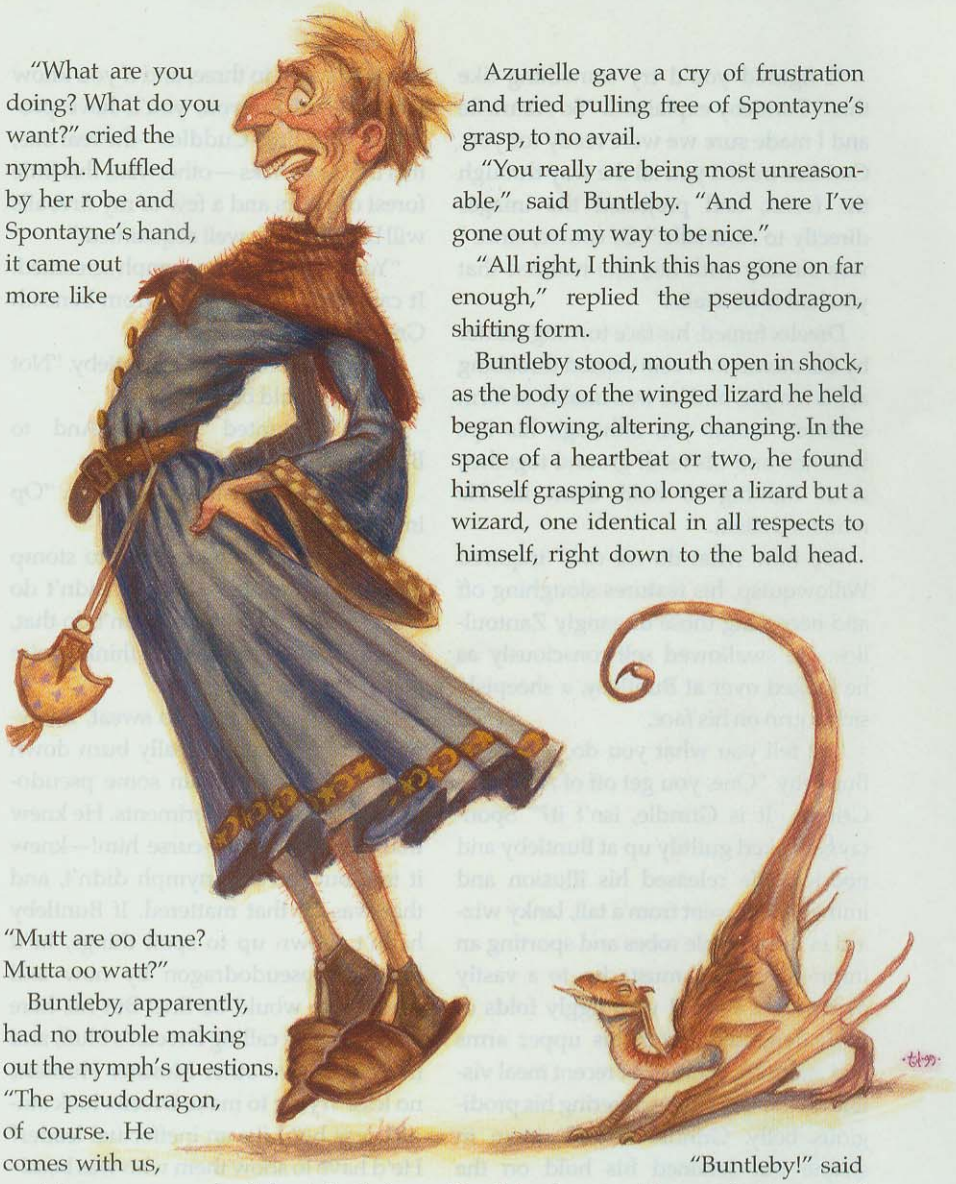
"I suppose that makes sense," sighed the nymph sadly, looking down at her scaly friend and rubbing him underneath his jaw. "When do you think he's likely to attack?"

The three Monster Hunters looked sidelong at each other; Spontayne gave Buntleby a nearly imperceptible nod.

"Well, knowing Dreelix," began Buntleby, "probably—*now*!"

The three Monster Hunters sprang as one onto the nymph and her reptilian companion. Buntleby snatched the pseudodragon's tail near the tip, just below the bulbous venom sac; Willowquisp grabbed at its neck, near the jawline, and clamped its mouth shut with one hand. Spontayne, meanwhile, leapt spread-eagled onto Azurielle, pinning her underneath his body. He grappled with the hood of her garment, holding it shut with one hand while he hugged her close to his body with the other arm, preventing her from fleeing or using her innate dimension door abilities to escape. "No blinding us this time!" he chortled to the nymph.

"What are you doing? What do you want?" cried the nymph. Muffled by her robe and Spontayne's hand, it came out more like "Mutt are oo dune? Mutta oo watt?"



Buntleby, apparently, had no trouble making out the nymph's questions. "The pseudodragon, of course. He comes with us, we let you go, you don't try interfering with us. As simple as that." He and Willowquisp held the prone pseudodragon at arm's length between them; Willowquisp gingerly transferred custody of the creature's head to Buntleby, and the wizard stood with one hand on the creature's tail and one hand around its neck. "Try anything, and your little pal here pays the price. All we want is a little venom, a little blood, and maybe a scale or two. We'll even give him back to you when we're done, pretty much none the worse for wear. How does that sound? Do we have a deal?"

Azurielle gave a cry of frustration and tried pulling free of Spontayne's grasp, to no avail.

"You really are being most unreasonable," said Buntleby. "And here I've gone out of my way to be nice."

"All right, I think this has gone on far enough," replied the pseudodragon, shifting form.

Buntleby stood, mouth open in shock, as the body of the winged lizard he held began flowing, altering, changing. In the space of a heartbeat or two, he found himself grasping no longer a lizard but a wizard, one identical in all respects to himself, right down to the bald head.

"Buntleby!" said Buntleby in astonishment, letting go of the newly formed wizard and taking an involuntary step backward.

"Hello, Dreelix," replied Buntleby—the real one. "I believe the jig is up, as they say."

Face red, the fake Buntleby's facial features changed, repositioning themselves into Dreelix's scowling countenance. His frame also dropped several inches in height, and he was forced to look up at the man he had just been caught impersonating.

"Why are—? When—? How did—?" he sputtered.

13. With the exception of the lengthy stinger-tipped tail, pseudodragons resemble tiny red dragons. Like red dragons, they have impressive horns jutting back from their heads, but these are not used in combat. They also have a frill of hardened skin on either side of their narrow faces; this frill joins with the two large horns at the top of the head and connects them to each other as well. The horns and frills are permanent fixtures to the pseudodragon's skull and are not shed when the creature molts.

14. While they have no spoken language, pseudodragons can make a wide variety of vocalizations to express their moods. Among their repertoire: a rasping purr, denoting pleasure; a sibilant hiss, like that of a snake, expressing unpleasant surprise; a bird-like chirp, denoting desire (pseudodragons often "chirp" at their companions when begging for food scraps); and a throaty growl when angry.

"I figured you'd try something like this," Buntleby explained. "So Azurielle and I made sure we were ready for you. Cuddles trailed you all the way through the forest, and projected the images directly to Azurielle.[15] Of course, since I was already with her, she realized that you had to be a fake."

Dreelix fumed, his face turning redder by the moment. A vein started throbbing at his temple, and he was unable to form coherent words yet, although his lips twitched and his teeth ground together, as if fighting to hold them in. He remained silent.

"So now what do we do?" inquired Willowquisp, his features sloughing off and becoming those of gangly Zantoullios. He swallowed self-consciously as he looked over at Buntleby, a sheepish, sickly grin on his face.

"I'll tell you what you do," snapped Buntleby. "One, you get off of Azurielle, Grindle. It is Grindle, isn't it?" Spontayne looked guiltily up at Buntleby and nodded. He released his illusion and immediately went from a tall, lanky wizard in fashionable robes and sporting an impressive black mustache, to a vastly overweight wizard with jiggly folds of flesh depending from his upper arms and stains from his most recent meal visible on the worn robe covering his prodigious belly. Grindle looked down in shame but retained his hold on the nymph as if frightened to let her go.

"Two," continued Buntleby, "The three of you apologize to Azurielle for your atrocious behavior, and beg for her forgiveness. Three, you hightail it out of the forest and never, ever set foot in Azurielle's grove again!"

"Forget it, Buntleby!" snapped Dreelix, finding his words at last. "I came here for a pseudodragon, and I'm not leaving here without one! Grindle! Hold her steady; don't let her escape. It's still three against one, Buntleby; like those odds? Now then, nymph, I'm going to count to three, and if you know what's good for you, you'll have produced your little Cuddles—the real one, this time, no tricks —otherwise, this little forest of yours and a few of my fireballs will become very well acquainted."

"You wouldn't!" the nymph screamed. It came out "Oo oodint!" from beneath Grindle's chubby hand.

"You're bluffing," said Buntleby. "Not even you would be that mean."

"One," counted Dreelix. And to Buntleby: "I never bluff."

"Stop him!" screamed Azurielle. "Op im!" is all that came out.

"Last time, you threatened to stomp on baby bunnies if Azurielle didn't do what you asked, but you didn't do that, either, Dreelix. Personally, I think you're just a big softy inside."

Dreelix was starting to sweat, knowing that he wouldn't really burn down the forest just to obtain some pseudodragon fluids for experiments. He knew that, and Buntleby—curse him!—knew it too, but the silly nymph didn't, and that was all that mattered. If Buntleby hadn't shown up to spoil things, he'd have his pseudodragon by now and everything would be fine! But no, here was Buntleby calling Dreelix's bluff, and in front of two other Monster Hunters, no less! Trying to make Dreelix look stupid, was he? Like an ineffectual leader? He'd have to show them who was boss!

"Two," he snarled.

"Well, you've made your choice," replied Buntleby, shaking his head sadly. "Get 'em, boys!"

Dreelix got as far as "Thr—" before the branches overhead exploded in a swarm of movement. At first it looked like the local flora was undergoing the rites of autumn all at once, dropping a season's worth of leaves in one fell swoop. Then the dropping shapes began changing color, from greens and browns and black to a familiar reddish-brown. No fewer than six angry pseudodragons swarmed all around the gathered party, stinger-tipped tails stabbing left and right at the three renegade Monster Hunters.[16]

Grindle took a hit in his rump and collapsed, landing on Azurielle and eliciting a whoof of expelled air from her. Zantoullios hid beneath wildly swaying hands, ducking from the enraged lizards and trying to fend them off. He, too, was ultimately unsuccessful and slumped over after taking a hit or two.

As might have been expected, Dreelix was the last to fall. One pseudodragon dived at him tail first, a malicious grin spread across its reptilian face. There was a solid *thunk* as the creature's stinger stabbed at the wizard's chest. Instead of falling over, however, the wizard just grinned back at the surprised beast. The creature's surprise intensified when it realized its tail was stuck fast, and it flapped its wings furiously trying to stay aloft. Dreelix slapped it mercilessly in the face.

Another pseudodragon hit Dreelix in the back, with similar results. It wasn't until a third creature managed to stab the wizard in the side of the neck that Dreelix fell over with a look of complete shock on his face, dragging the two struggling but stuck pseudodragons down with him.

Buntleby came quickly to their rescue, gently pulling their tails from the unconscious wizard's robes. "I'll be darned," he exclaimed, pulling open Dreelix's robes at the neck. He removed a dart board that the wizard had been wearing on a strap around his neck; there was another under his robes at his back. "Cork armor. Who'd have thought?"

Azurielle had finally managed to extricate herself from Grindle's unconscious form, and she walked over to Buntleby's side. "What are we going to do with them now?" she asked.

"You leave that to me," Buntleby replied.

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15. If a pseudodragon opts to take a human companion, it can transmit everything it hears and sees to its partner, so long as the two remain no more than 240 yards apart from each other. This allows the companion to use the pseudodragon as a spy, gaining the creature's infravision and invisibility-detection abilities while it is so linked. Once established, the audio-visual link can be broken by either of the two participants at any time, at will.

A pseudodragon can "link" with only one individual, its chosen companion; once the bond of companionship has been established, the pseudodragon is unable to "link" with anyone else, unless the companion is slain and the pseudodragon elects later to take on another. This makes choosing the right companion a very serious matter to the pseudodragon, as once a companion is chosen, the bond can be broken only through the death of one of the participants.

16. Although pseudodragons are normally reclusive creatures, they aren't against banding together in numbers when the need dictates. They are, after all, neutral good, with an intelligence equal to that of the average human. And if a forest nymph requests aid from a pseudodragon, even one to which she is not "bonded," it's a good bet that the pseudodragon will respond to the best of its abilities.

Buntleby, sitting at the head table of the meeting hall, tapped three times on the table with Dreelix's beloved gavel. "I hereby call this session of the Monster Hunters Association to order," he intoned in a close approximation of Dreelix's voice.

"What's going on? Where's Dreelix?" asked Lady Ablasta, a look of concern on her face. Lady Ablasta was set in her ways and didn't much like change, if she could help it. Clearly, the Association president's sudden replacement had thrown her for a loop.

"Oh, he's here," replied Buntleby. "But I'm afraid he won't be able to attend to his usual duties this week, so I'm graciously standing in for him. Willowquisp? Spontayne? Are you ready?"

"Ready," they replied in unison and approached a hastily hung curtain from behind the head table.

"My fellow Monster Hunters," began Buntleby, "if you'll recall, last week Dreelix asked Willowquisp and me to brief the Association on our findings after researching the pseudodragon. We were concerned about his ultimate plans, and he told us not to worry about them. Well, it seems our illustrious leader got a little ahead of himself, deciding to take matters into his own hands. This, alas, is the sad result."

With a flourish, Willowquisp and Spontayne pulled back the curtain. There was a unified gasp from the audience as the Monster Hunters got a good look at what was on exhibit there.

Dreelix, Grindle, and Zantoullios stood motionless, propped up against the wall and staring ahead at nothing. Dreelix was positioned with a finger up his nose, Zantoullios was sucking his thumb like a baby, and Grindle was apparently captured in mid-scratch, his right hand poised at his left armpit.[17] Each wore a torn and tattered robe filled

with the telltale holes of bite marks; scratches covered their bodies, and dried, reptilian dung was smeared on their faces. On a placard around each of their necks, printed in Buntleby's precise handwriting, read the inscription: *"We should have known better."*

Old Gumphrey, easily the oldest of the Monster Hunters, cackled aloud in glee at the sight. "Look at that!" he chortled.

"I believe we can now officially state for the record that the Monster Hunters will not be pursuing the pseudodragon line of research in the future," said Buntleby. "And perhaps at next week's meeting the trio standing before you will feel up to talking and can give you their side of the story. In the meantime, here's what I saw of the events ..."

There was absolute silence in the audience, as each of the assembled wizards and sages of the illustrious Monster Hunters Association strained to hear Buntleby's every word.

If Dreelix could hear Buntleby, he gave no indication of it.

Johnathan M. Richards was quite shocked to realize that this article marks the eighth appearance of the Monster Hunters Association. Fans of the series can find their previous entries in DRAGON® Magazine *issues #227 (osquip), #240 (nymph), Annual 2 (shambling mound), #246 (flumph), #258 (flail snail), #261 (dark naga), and #262 (jermlaine).*

17. Victims of pseudodragon venom enter a cataleptic state, known for a loss of voluntary control of the muscles and an overall muscular rigidity. While in this state, the victim's body can be moved into any position and the victim will remain like that until the catalepsy ends. Circulation, respiration, digestion, and similar organic functions continue during this time, but they are slowed down to such a rate that the victim might appear dead.

Pseudodragons, being pranksters, take full advantage of this quality of their venom to place their helpless victims into a variety of amusing positions. The victims usually fall over when stung, and since a pseudodragon lacks the strength to lift a human to his or her feet, the creature must make do with humorous prone positions. Favorites include the "I'm swimming on dry land" position, the "I'm trying, but I can't even do one push-up" position, and the perennial favorite, the "Dead bug" position (victim lying on his or her back with arms and legs sticking straight up).

Pseudodragons frequently make full use of multiple victims. A party of three cataleptics might be arranged in the "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" pattern; a party of four victims might be arranged in a square to give the appearance that each is sleeping soundly, using the belly of a friend as a pillow. With enough victims, a pseudodragon might even try spelling out short words.

Since pseudodragon-induced catalepsy can last up to 6 days, the victim might exit the state with exceptional hunger, thirst, and weakness, and might have bedsores if he or she was left in one position for too long.

THE ECOLOGY OF THE PURPLE WORM

BY JOHNATHAN M. RICHARDS · ILLUSTRATED BY DENNIS CRAMER

Dreelix tapped his trusty gavel three times upon a handy flat rock. "This field session of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby called to order," he intoned. Then, with a practiced flourish, he slid the gavel into a pocket of his robes with one hand while pulling his rolled-up carpet of flying from his back with the other. A quick flick of his wrists and the carpet unrolled flat on the ground between the feet of the Conjurer Ablasta, Grindle the Coin-Counter, Zantoullios, and himself.

"All aboard that's getting aboard," he said, stepping onto the carpet before even finishing the sentence. The other three stepped on as one, leaving Buntleby and Rhionda standing together out of immediate reach of the carpet. "Looks like you two get the cheap seats again," Dreelix snickered.

"What a surprise," grumbled Buntleby. "I hope you at least cleaned out the portable hole since we used it to carry hydra parts over to Old Gumphrey."

Grindle stopped short in sudden shock, midway in the action of unfolding his portable hole. "I . . . meant to get around to it," he said lamely, plopping the now-open hole down onto the dusty ground.

A HIDEOUS STENCH ROSE FROM THE CONFINES OF THE HOLE, A STINKING MIASMA OF ROTTING HYDRA FLESH.

Immediately, a hideous stench rose from the confines of the hole, a stinking miasma of rotting hydra flesh. All of the Monster Hunters (save Grindle) screwed their faces into expressions of disgust; Lady Ablasta yanked her perfumed handkerchief from a puffy sleeve and held it over her nose.

"There's no way I'm crawling into that disgusting thing!" said Buntleby into his palm, which was currently covering both nose and mouth.

"Me neither!" agreed Rhionda from a similar position.

"Ugh, fold that nasty thing back up, Grindle!" demanded Dreelix irritably. Turning to Buntleby and Rhionda, he added: "Suit yourselves, then. But my carpet only seats four, as you well know. If you wish to be left behind, that's your business, but the rest of us have a date in a purple worm's lair!"

"Hold on," said Rhionda, as Grindle folded up his hole and stashed it in a pocket of his robe. "Do you have one of your polymorph self spells ready, Bunt?"

"Yeah."

"Well, no problem, then. Turn into an eagle or something and follow along."

"And what about you?"

In response, Rhionda fished into her pack and produced a slim line of silken rope. Tying one end around her slender waist, she tossed the other end to Grindle, who now sat cross-legged on Dreelix's carpet with his prodigious belly resting on his massive thighs. "Here, hold this," she said. Grindle complied, and Rhionda rose a couple inches off the ground, courtesy of her boots of levitation. "All ready here," she said. "You coming, Bunt?"

Buntleby frowned in frustration and began the words to his spell. By the time his features had melted into those of a giant eagle, Dreelix had lifted his carpet from the ground and was speeding along toward the mountains north of the city, pulling Rhionda behind like some airborne water-skier. Buntleby shook his head in amazement, flapped his wings, and followed swiftly in pursuit.

The miles flew by quickly. In less time than would have been thought possible, Dreelix dropped his flying carpet toward a fissure in the side of a mountain. Zantoullios cast a quick light spell on the tip of his collapsible staff as they entered, and Buntleby, seeing what was coming, did a quick aerial polymorph from giant eagle to tiny bat. Then the Monster Hunters were whizzing through underground passages, with Lady Ablasta shrieking in fear as Dreelix cut a few corners close and Rhionda whooping in delight as she was pulled aloft. Bringing up the rear was Buntleby in bat form, little wings flapping rapidly in an effort to keep up.

Passing through various connected underground caverns, Buntleby found himself dodging and swerving around low-hanging stalactites. Then Dreelix's carpet took a quick dive to the right, into a narrow, circular tunnel with smooth sides.[2] This new tunnel twisted and turned, eventually spilling out into an enormous cavern.

This, apparently, was their destination, for Dreelix slowed down the magic carpet and let it glide to the floor. "At least his landings are getting better," gasped Lady Ablasta, her hand to her heart as if ensuring that it hadn't burst in fright during Dreelix's reckless underground piloting. She shakily got to her feet with help from Zantoullios, while Grindle passed the rope back to Rhionda. "That was great!" she exclaimed with enthusiasm, untying the rope from her waist. "We'll have to do that more often!"

Buntleby flapped to the floor and resumed his normal form. He bent over to catch his breath, leaning heavily on Grindle. "Easy . . . for you . . . to say," he gasped. "You didn't . . . have to fly over here . . . on your own power."

"So where exactly are we?" asked Zantoullios, extending his glowing staff in all directions. The cavern was much too large for any but the tiniest section at a time to be illuminated by the power of his spell. "And where's the worm?"

"He must be out hunting,"[3] said Dreelix matter-of-factly. "But don't worry, he'll be back—and when he shows, we'll be ready for him!"[4]

"Maybe we can loot his burrow in the meantime, then!" suggested Zantoullios. "Uh, do purple worms keep treasure?"

"Not that I'm . . . aware of," said Buntleby, still catching his breath. He cast a light spell on a small pebble and used it to take a quick look around a portion of the enormous cavern.[5] "But it wouldn't hurt to look, I guess. Hey, look at this!"

Dreelix ran quickly to Buntleby's side, eyes darting greedily about in search of whatever treasure Buntleby might have unearthed. "What? Where? What?" he said, head turning this way and that.

Buntleby held out his shining pebble. "Look! An underground pool of water. Neat, huh? I thought I heard water dripping. I wonder how far out it goes?" The water extended farther than the range of the wizard's light spell, but he got the sense that it went on for some distance.

"Pshaw!" scoffed Dreelix and turned away.

Buntleby called Grindle over by the water's edge. "Hole," he demanded, holding out his hand. Sheepishly, Grindle passed it over. "Anything in here you don't want getting wet?" asked Buntleby.

Grindle unfolded the portable hole, reached in with one hand, and brought out his lengthy spear. "Spear," he said, placing it on the stone floor of the cavern, then reached back inside the extradimensional opening. When he retracted his arm it was

GAME NOTES

1 A purple worm lairs in underground burrows. Given the worm's enormous size, these lairs are often gigantic. There is usually only one entrance to the lair, dug by the worm itself, but this often branches off in several directions some distance from the lair.

2 Purple worms tunnel through packed earth and solid stone, leaving behind passageways the width of their own bodies. Dirt and stone pass through the worm's simple digestive system and are ejected from the body after the worm has extracted any nutrients from the substances. The round tunnels left behind are common near purple worm lairs, often crisscrossing and penetrating into pre-existing caverns. Occasionally, a purple worm's tunnel breaches the surface world. This effect benefits those dwelling in the Underdark, creating new air shafts.

Such is the worm's efficiency at burrowing that its speed remains constant whether crawling upon a flat surface or digging its way through the earth.

3 Purple worms are opportunistic hunters, chasing down anything edible that crosses their path, but they do not go out of their way to find living food, for they extract sufficient nourishment from the dirt and stone of their underground environments.

4 Despite Dreelix's use of masculine pronouns, purple worms are hermaphroditic, each creature having both male and female sexual organs. The male organs are several segments in front of the female organs, toward the front of the worm's body. This arrangement allows any two purple worms to breed: They line up their bodies in opposite directions and fertilize each other's internal eggs.

During the mating process, the worms produce a great amount of the slimy mucus their bodies normally exude. This thick coating actually adheres the worms to each other while they mate; the entire process often takes several hours. Afterward, each crawls away to its own lair, where it secretes its eggs wrapped in a mucus cocoon.

Purple worms mate only once a year.

5 Purple worms have no concept of treasure. Nonetheless, their lairs often contain riches, if one knows where to look.

As purple worms burrow through the ground, they swallow vast amounts of dirt and stone. In mineral-rich areas, a purple worm might also be chewing its way through veins of copper, silver, gold, or other valuable ores. These ores are ejected, along with other detritus, in the worm's castings. Purple worm castings look like piles of wet dirt and are commonly found in the worm's lair.

There are more dignified methods of striking it rich than digging through purple worm dung, but the end results are often worth it. Occasionally, items from devoured adventurers make it through a purple worm's digestive tract relatively intact; these might include rings, metal armor and weapons, and the like, but nothing easily digestible like scrolls, leather or cloth goods, and so on.

Finally, a purple worm's gizzard often contains several gems or other acid-resistant valuables that are used to help the creature grind up its food. These items are usually embedded in the walls of the creature's gizzard, so retrieving them is only possible after the worm has been slain.

carrying a small cloth bag. "Snack," he identified, then passed the hole to Buntleby.

"Is that it?" asked Buntleby, holding his nose to keep out the rancid stench of overripe hydra. Grindle nodded his assent while reaching into his snack pouch and pulling out a sticky pastry. Buntleby shook his head, made a face of disgust, and pitched the portable hole into the water. Bubbles leapt to the surface as the extradimensional interior filled with water. Rolling up the sleeves of his blue robe, Buntleby carefully folded the hole back up underwater and returned it to Grindle, who was busy licking his fingers clean after his snack. "I'd let the thing soak," advised Buntleby, to which Grindle replied with a grunt and a nod. "We can pour it out later, and hopefully we'll have rinsed out the worst of the smell." Grindle dropped it back into his pocket and continued licking the frosting from his fingertips. He reached back into the bag, then thought better of it and stashed it into another pocket for later.

WATER STREAMED FROM THE MOTTLED SURFACE OF ITS GLISTENING, ARMOR-PLATED HIDE.

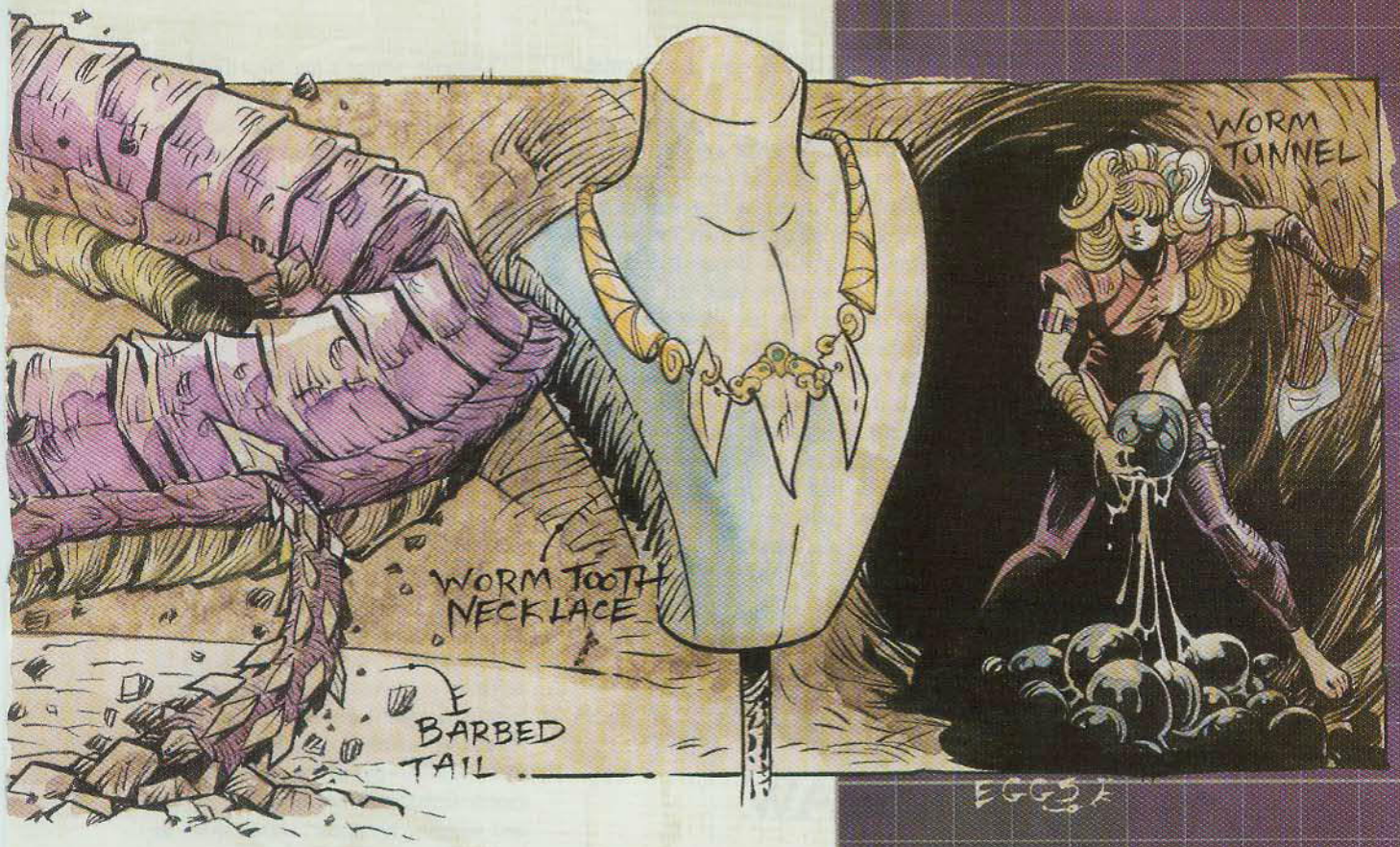
Surprisingly, the rest of the Monster Hunters had actually been busy during this time. Buntleby looked on in appreciation as Rhionda positioned the wizards to best effect: Zantoullios and Dreelix stood side by side facing the worm-dug entranceway, through which, presumably, the purple worm would re-enter its lair. Behind them sat the Conjurer Ablasta, preparing a arcane eye spell. Rhionda stood behind her, overlooking the trio, ready to flash the longsword strapped to her back into action should the need arise. She held Zantoullios' glowing staff so the gangly wizard's hands were free for spellcasting.

"There you are, Bunt," she said as the young wizard approached. "Why don't you take up position here by Zantoullios, and Grindle can stand over there by Dreelix. You guys got your combat spells all ready?"

"Sure. How long do you think we have to wait?"

"No telling. But we'll be ready for it. With Lady Ablasta's arcane eye spell, we'll have a few moments' notice, so we shouldn't need to waste time with any hold monster spells. We oughtta be able to blast the thing before it's all the way out of the tunnel. You ready with that arcane eye yet?"

"Yes," sniffed Lady Ablasta. "I'll send it off down the tunnel as far as I can, and let you know when I spot



anything." She closed her eyes in concentration, and her magic construct flew down the passageway.

"Now, when the thing shows up, you guys hit it with everything you've got," said Rhionda. "We definitely want to kill it before it crawls all the way in here, so we don't have to worry about its tail stinger."

"Is it . . . dangerous?" Zantoullios asked, Adam's-apple gulping its way down his scrawny neck.

"Yeah, kinda," replied Rhionda. "Not only is it wickedly sharp, but it's coated with poison.[6] Best if we don't have to deal with it."

"Well, I wish the stupid thing would hurry up and show itself," grumbled Dreelix. "I'm getting tired of waiting. See anything yet, Lady Ablasta?"

"Nothing," she replied curtly.

As if on cue, a great surge of water spilled from the underground pool behind the Monster Hunters. Startled, they spun around to see what all the commotion was about.

It was a worm—the largest any of the wizards had ever seen. Water streamed from the mottled surface[7] of its glistening, armor-plated hide as it wriggled onto the stone floor of the cavern. Then it surged forth like an avalanche, mouth open wide in anticipation of a quick meal of bite-sized morsels. And what a mouth it was! Jagged teeth grew out from the same armor plating that covered the beast's body, curving together into a complex arrangement that met at the front of the creature's face. Buried behind thick ridges were four primitive eyes, two to a side, that glinted in the magical light spilling from Zantoullios' staff and Buntleby's glowing pebble.[8] A long spike jutted from the worm's lower jaw, pointing at the assembled Monster Hunters as if choosing the beast's next meal.[9]

Several things happened all at once. Dreelix bleated in terror

6 A purple worm's tail stinger deals piercing damage and forces the victim to make a successful Fortitude save (DC 24) or take 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage. Regardless of the result of the first save, the victim must attempt a second Fortitude save 1 minute later or take an additional 2d6 points of temporary Strength damage.

A purple worm causes 2d6+6 points of damage with its tail stinger.

7 Purple worms "breathe" through the pores of their skin. (In fact, they can only continue to do so as long as their skin remains moist, which is one reason they're seldom seen on the surface: Too much sunlight dries up their mucus coating.) They extract oxygen equally well from both air and water and can be found in either environment. While underwater, their skin takes on a mottled look as the water washes some areas clear of their mucus coating. In fact, for years it was believed that the "mottled worm" was an aquatic variety of the purple worm. That this belief went unchallenged for so long is not surprising, as few individuals could get within observing range of a "mottled worm" without becoming the creature's next meal.

8 A purple worm's four eyes are situated equidistant around the circumference of its head, with each eye pointing forward. Thus, the creature can only see what is directly ahead of it. Thick, bony ridges protect the eyes from the worst of the dirt and stones they're liable to come into contact with in an underground environment. The eyes have no lids, remaining open at all times—even when the worm sleeps. However, since purple worms have poor vision and rely primarily upon their tremorsense, they seldom awaken as a result of visual stimulus.

9 The prominent jaw spike is a feature possessed by the worm even before hatching. The spike is initially used to assist the worm in escaping from its egg; later, the worm uses it to loosen up the rock and soil where it wishes to burrow. While iron-hard and as strong as the creature's powerful teeth, the jaw-spike is not used by the worm as a weapon, as it isn't particularly sharp.

and scrambled backward, arms flailing wildly. He bumped into Grindle just as the heavyset wizard spouted off the final words to a fireball spell. Grindle's fireball was inadvertently sent screaming straight up to explode along the cavern's high ceiling and sent a cascade of stalactites plummeting down upon the hapless Monster Hunters. Zantoullios, meanwhile, sent a barrage of magic missiles streaming at the purple worm, while Buntleby grabbed up the conjurer Ablasta, still sitting motionlessly amongst all of the commotion. Ablasta's eyes were closed as she strained her senses through her arcane eye at the far end of the entrance shaft, oblivious to the impending danger barreling her way.

Rhionda just shook her head sadly and calmly pulled the longsword from her back, letting Zantoullios' staff fall to the ground behind her. She faced the approaching worm, ignoring the bumbling wizards behind her and giving her full attention to the fast-crawling monstrosity[10] that even now bore down upon her.

So when the stalactite-chunk dislodged by Grindle's spell whacked her on the back of the head, she was unconscious before she knew what hit her. Rhionda's sword clattered to the stone floor; her own limp form followed immediately thereafter.

The wizards ducked and dodged the sudden rain of ceiling-stone, stumbling away in a desperate attempt to avoid both the falling stalactite pieces and the monster worm. By the time Buntleby had pulled Lady Ablasta to her feet and out of relative harm, he was aghast to see Rhionda's limp body being sucked into the purple worm's mouth like a strand of loose pasta.[11]

Without thinking, Buntleby raced toward the creature, screaming to attract its attention.[12] Dreelix, in the meantime, had readied a fireball spell of his own, but Grindle saw that Buntleby would be in the middle of the spell's effect and jostled Dreelix's arm just in time. Dreelix's fireball went screaming into the underground pool, raising an explosion of steam. A fine mist of hot water sprinkled down over the area.

Dreelix turned to berate Grindle for making him miss his shot, but the expression on the heavyset wizard's face made Dreelix turn to see what had caught his attention. Buntleby had reached the monster worm and without a moment's hesitation dived straight into its open maw. "What in the Nine Hells does that idiot think he's doing?" cried Dreelix in consternation. "I'm not paying to have him raised!"

WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION HE DIVED INTO ITS OPEN MAW.

"Well, he's out of the line of fire now," pointed out Zantoullios. "So let's *get it!*"

As one, the remaining Monster Hunter wizards spilled deadly spells from their fingertips. Wave after wave of magic missiles, fireballs, Melf's acid arrows, and the like pummeled the monster worm, whose hardened skin had attained its uniform purplish coloration now that it had dried out.

Inside the creature's maw, Buntleby was unaware of the magical barrage as he concentrated on crawling deeper into the beast's gullet.[13] He regretted having left his light-imbued pebble outside in the cavern, but trudged forward blindly on elbows and knees nonetheless. Waves of peristalsis kept crushing him between the walls of the worm's digestive tract. He did his best to ignore it and pressed on. Finally, he reached his goal: His hand brushed what could only be Rhionda's slick leather boot. Crawling his way up beside her, he heard her moan and start to come to.

"Crap! What happened? Where are we?" she asked.

"We're, uh, quite literally worm food," remarked Buntleby dryly.

"Dammit, where's my sword? Maybe we can cut our way out of here."[14]

"Got an even better idea," said Buntleby, as he wrapped one arm around her shoulder and began the words to a teleport spell.[15]

The two disappeared from the belly of the worm and reappeared instantaneously in the creature's lair, near the entrance tunnel. Buntleby leapt to his feet and helped Rhionda unsteadily to hers, still woozy from the blow to her head. From that vantage point, they could see that the other Monster Hunters weren't faring so well. The worm had survived the onslaught of offensive spells and seemed little the worse for wear. It had dragged its entire body out of the water and coiled up like a rattlesnake. Now it struck at the wizards with both its toothy maw and its stinger-tipped tail. As Buntleby watched in horror, Lady Ablasta just barely dodged the creature's snapping teeth and rapidly scrambled in an unladylike fashion out of the creature's reach. Grindle, all out of combat spells and wielding his spear, wasn't quite as lucky; the worm's glistening stinger stabbed him in a meaty thigh.

Grindle stared down at his leg in astonishment. A small bloodstain began spreading around the wound, staining the robe along the edges of the rip made by the sharp stinger. Grindle's lip quivered in restrained fury. Methodically checking each armpit just to be sure—yep, just as he thought, no sweat-stains: Blast it, this *was* his favorite robe! He dropped his spear to the ground and stomped straight for the purple worm's retreating tail.

The tail struck out again, in a beeline for Grindle's massive form.[16] In a move many would have thought impossible, the heavyset wizard not only dodged the attack but swung a leg up and over the tip of the tail as it struck. Pinning the end of the worm's tail between his thighs, Grindle hooked his legs together at the ankles and grabbed the beast's stinger in both hands.

Sweat beaded on Grindle's forehead as he struggled with the worm's stinger. The creature raised its tail for another strike, lifting the 300-pound wizard into the air as if he weighed nothing, but before it could strike again Grindle gave a roar of triumph and snapped the stinger off in both hands.[17] When the worm's tail struck the ground near

Dreelix's suddenly retreating form, Grindle lost his grip, rolled off, and bowled into the Monster Hunter's President. Dreelix was knocked to the ground and half buried under Grindle's massive form.

By this time, the worm had diverted its attention back to Lady Ablasta. Its mouth opened wide and the creature reared up, towering over the skinny woman. Lady Ablasta skittered backward, eyes glued to the gargantuan beast looming above her. Her dainty boot caught on a rock and she toppled onto her bottom. Before the worm could begin its descent, she hastily conjured up a web spell and flung it at the beast's head. Fortunately, it anchored itself between the cavern's ceiling and the top of the purple worm's head; the creature's head dangled in the air, suspended by numerous layers of thick, fibrous strands.

"Brilliant targeting," said Buntleby, as he and Rhionda rushed over to help the Conjurer Ablasta to her feet. "But it probably won't hold him for long."[18]

"Not really all that brilliant, I'm afraid," replied the elderly woman. "I was aiming for his mouth, hoping to gum up those teeth of his."

Zantoullios took advantage of the worm's temporary immobility to pop off the last of his magic missile spells. "That's it for me," he said, trotting over to the others. "Can't tell whether we're hurting him much, though." Then, characteristically, he slipped in a glob of worm-slime and bonked the back of his head on the stone ground. He bolted back up to a sitting position with a puzzled expression on his face, looked around with a blank stare, muttered incoherently, then passed out on his back, bonking his head a second time for good measure.

Grindle trundled up, carrying an unconscious Dreelix under one arm. "Hit his head when he fell," he explained. "And I think I kinda squooshed him."

"We're getting our butts kicked!" remarked Rhionda with a snarl. "Anybody got any more spells?"

"I do," offered Buntleby, sending off a series of magic missiles that slammed into the thrashing worm's side.

Lady Ablasta rolled up her sleeves, exposing a selection of thin wands. She might have used up her spell inventory, but she was far from helpless. She selected her wand of magic missiles, recalled that it had gotten almost totally drained during their recent battle with a pyrohydra, and returned it to its sheath. Hmmm, let's see, she thought. Fear? Not likely. Ah, how about a couple of lightning bolts? Let's see what that stupid worm thinks about a bolt or two up his britches!

It was a nice thought, but one too late in coming. By the time Lady Ablasta had made her decision and slid the wand of lightning bolt from its sheath, the purple worm had pulled itself free from the web spell. It thrashed its body around, swinging its tail wildly. The edge of it slammed into the elderly conjurer's body, sending her flying one way and her wand sailing the other. She lay unmoving in a heap on the ground.

"Cripes, three down," muttered Rhionda, pulling a dagger from her boot. She looked at it for a second, then turned her gaze back at the worm, which was getting its bearings. The beast's pointed chin-spike aimed her way, and the creature began undulating in her direction, its toothed maw opening wide in anticipation.

"See to Zantoullios!" yelled Buntleby to Grindle as he rushed over to aid the Conjurer Ablasta yet again. Grindle grabbed the gangly wizard by the back of the collar and dragged him away from the approaching worm, as Buntleby scooped up Ablasta and headed that way himself. Rhionda, meanwhile, went straight for

10 Purple worms crawl in an undulating manner by expanding and contracting the bands of muscle that run the entire length of their bodies. While they have no legs, their armored skin is covered with numerous hairlike bristles, called setae, that act to grip the surface and pull them along.

11 A purple worm's primary attack is with its bite, which deals 2d8+12 points of damage and allows it to initiate its improved grab. If the grapple attack is successful, the victim is pulled into the worm's mouth. At that point, bite damage is automatic until the victim escapes or is swallowed into the gizzard.

Swallowing a victim is accomplished by making a second successful grappling attack on any round following the initial successful grapple. If this second grapple attack is successful, the victim ends up in the worm's gizzard, where he or she takes 1d8 points of acid damage plus an additional 2d8+12 points of blunt damage each round. To climb out, the victim must make two successful grappling checks against the worm (one allows the victim to reach the maw, the second to exit the mouth). Unfortunately the purple worm has a +32 to grapple checks, dooming most attempts to escape in such a fashion.

12 Not that screaming at a purple worm does any good, as the creatures are stone deaf. They can detect vibrations, though, so the tromp of Buntleby's boots on the stone cavern floor can be "heard" by the worm much better than airborne sound waves.

Purple worms enjoy feasting upon shrieker fungus, but they are attracted by their scent, not the shrieks they make. Purple worms have a fairly good sense of smell; they often find their way back to their lairs by following the scent of their own mucus trails.

13 A cross-section of a purple worm shows five distinct layers. The outermost is the creature's mucus-coated skin, from which the beast's setae emerge. The next layer is a ring of muscle that circles each of the creature's numerous segments. The third layer is a series of long muscles running the length of the worm, connecting each ring-muscle in sequence. These long muscles allow the purple worm to crawl by expanding and contracting its body in sequence. The fourth layer is a hollow space called the coelom (pronounced SEE-lum, for those who care about such things), which is filled with fluid and acts as a buffer for the innermost layer, the digestive tract. The coelomic fluid allows the muscles of the digestive tract to keep about the business of pushing food along despite the movements of the rest of the body.

14 A victim inside a purple worm's gizzard can elect to carve its way out rather than climb back out through the mouth. This can only be accomplished with natural claws or a light piercing or slashing weapon. (This differs from the purple worm's description and is official errata. See this issue's "Sage Advice" for more details.) The gizzard of a purple worm is AC 20 and it takes 25 points of damage to carve a hole large enough to crawl out of. The hole is sealed up by muscular contraction shortly after being carved, so subsequent swallowed victims must cut their own exits.

15 Creatures swallowed by a purple worm are considered grappled and cannot cast spells with a somatic component, and any material components must already be in hand. Casting any spell requires a Concentration check (DC = 20 + spell level + damage dealt to the caster by the purple worm during the casting of the spell). *Teleport* has only a verbal component.

16 One of a purple worm's most useful senses is its tremorsense, which allows it to pinpoint the location of anything touching the ground within 60 feet of it. Of course, the best way to defeat a worm's tremorsense is to get off the ground, whether by flight magic, levitation, or something similar. If Willowquisp the Zoophile had been on hand for consultation, he'd probably have berated the Monster Hunters for not putting Dreelix's *carpet of flying* to its obvious use.

the advancing worm armed only with her dagger. The beast turned to face her. Seeing its response, Rhionda ran sideways, leading it further away from the others. She was confident that she could outdistance the worm for awhile, although she worried that she'd tire long before it would.

Buntleby dropped Lady Ablasta into Grindle's arms. "Here, look after them," he said, then turned to assist Rhionda against the worm. Grindle placed Lady Ablasta gently down upon the ground next to Dreelix and Zantoullios, all three out cold. He tried slapping Dreelix awake, to no avail. Then, with sudden inspiration, he removed the portable hole from his pocket and spread it out upon the ground next to the unconscious wizards. Cupping his hands in the water-filled hole, he dribbled some onto Dreelix's face.

That seemed to do the trick. "Pshyagh!" complained Dreelix. "That stuff stinks!"

Buntleby, meanwhile, was in pursuit of the worm; he snatched up Zantoullios' glowing staff in passing, but slid in a patch of worm-slime as he did so and fell to the ground, twisting his ankle in the process. Holding his sore ankle in one hand, he spouted off the words to his last magic missile spell, enjoying the sight of the streaking bursts of energy slamming into the worm's thick hide. That left him with a stinking cloud of questionable usefulness and two fireball spells that he didn't dare use until Rhionda was out of harm's way.

Rhionda splashed into the underground pool up to her ankles, then turned to face the worm. She feared that the creature would prove more maneuverable in the water than she was, and she didn't wish to find out for sure.[19] Instead, she applied one of her favorite maxims—when running out of options, go for the unpredictable—and charged the beast with her dagger.

Seeing this, Buntleby screamed in fright as he hobbled toward the beast on his one good foot. He cast his stinking cloud at the worm, hoping to at least distract it from Rhionda. But he needn't have worried; Rhionda, while often reckless, was no fool—as she came within touching distance of the worm, she bent her legs and jumped up for all she was worth.

With the aid of her boots of levitation, the jump took her straight up to the cavern ceiling. On the way up, she casually flicked her wrist and sent her dagger plunging deeply into one of the worm's beady black eyes.

SHE CASUALLY FLICKED HER WRIST AND SENT HER DAGGER PLUNGING DEEPLY INTO ONE OF THE WORM'S BEADY BLACK EYES.

"He's all yours, Bunt!" she cried from the safety of the ceiling, arms wrapped around a large stalactite for protection.

That was apparently true, for the purple worm, having lost track of its initial prey, turned to face Buntleby. The young wizard could see a stream of blood oozing its way down the creature's head from its wounded eye, but it didn't seem to faze the beast in the least.[20] As the worm snapped at him, Buntleby backed up, readying his first fireball spell but fearful of loosing it at this range. He hobbled back, the worm crawling after him. When he felt he was probably out of the range of effect, he cast the fireball, watching as it struck the creature in the head. "Got him!" Buntleby cried, excited at his success.

Then he noticed that the worm hadn't slowed its progress toward him, and he decided it was time to high-tail it again.

Grindle had succeeded at awakening the others with his "stinky water" trick when he saw Buntleby racing toward him with an awkward shamble-hop. "Get back!" Buntleby cried. "It's coming this way!" He peered over his shoulder and calculated the worm's distance: too close for his last fireball. Then he caught sight of the open portable hole, the water shimmering in the light of Zantoullios' staff.

"Into the water! Quick!" he yelled, turning to make a stand against the onrushing worm. "Quick!" he repeated, pushing Grindle into the water when he didn't move fast enough.

Dreelix and Zantoullios wasted no time diving into the hole; seeing Lady Ablasta hesitate at the indignity, Zantoullios grabbed her ankle with a bony hand and tugged her in as well. She sputtered and coughed when she surfaced, cursing Zantoullios in several languages none of the other Monster Hunters were aware she even knew.

By then, the worm was almost upon Buntleby, rearing up for a plunge-and-bite maneuver. The young wizard stood his ground, waiting until the last possible second before simultaneously falling backward into the "pool" and firing off the last of his fireballs. It went smack on target, past the rows of vicious teeth, down the creature's gullet, to strike somewhere inside the worm's digestive tract.

The explosion was incredible. Flames erupted throughout the worm's interior and shot out of its mouth like the dreaded breath of a red dragon. Buntleby missed the excitement, though, for while the flame shot over the Monster Hunters' heads he was spinning upside-down in the water-filled portable hole, doing his best not to get tangled up in the press of the other Monster Hunters' bodies. By the time he surfaced, the menace was over; the purple worm was dead.

"Hey, that was pretty impressive, Bunt!" said a familiar voice. Buntleby accepted Rhionda's proffered hand and pulled himself out of the water. Around him, the other Monster Hunters were doing likewise. Lady Ablasta, in sour humor, scowled at Zantoullios' offer of assistance and slapped his hand aside, crawling out of the portable hole on her own.

"What's that stink?" Rhionda asked suddenly.

"Us, no doubt," replied Buntleby. "We've been swimming in decaying-hydra washwater."

"No, it's not that. It's different," responded Rhionda.[21]

"It wasn't me," remarked Grindle,

looking over at Zantoullios. "I didn't do anything."

"Well, in any case, we got our worm!" enthused Dreelix, rubbing his hands together in glee. "It took some doing, but the Monster Hunters prevailed in the end!"

"And we were lucky at that," said Rhionda. "This was just a little one."[22]

"Regardless," replied Dreelix, looking in scorn at the simple-minded fighter he had been forced to allow into his prestigious organization. "The fact remains: Not even a purple worm can survive the magical onslaught of the Monster Hunters!"

"Well, I suppose we'd better start harvesting it," said Buntleby. "What do we want? Teeth? Blood? Digestive juices? Grindle, do you still have that stinger tip?"

"Uhhh . . . good question," replied Dreelix, scratching his head. "I suppose we should probably bring all that stuff over to Old Gumphrey, see if he can do anything with it. But all I'm really interested in is the thing's head. You, Rhionda, you're a fighter; go make yourself useful and cut that thing's head off with that sword of yours, there's a good girl."

"You want its whole head?" demanded Buntleby. "Whatever for?"

"You know that pompous windbag of a wizard, Quinquillian the Plane-Walker? He had the nerve to assert that the Monster Hunters wouldn't be able to handle a purple worm. Can you imagine? I told him that we certainly could too take down a purple worm, and he dared me to prove it. Dared! Me! I can't wait to see the look on his face when we show up and prove him wrong!"

"You mean—" began Buntleby.

"Tell me we didn't—" sputtered Zantoullios.

"I went through—" gasped the Conjurer Ablasta.

"Surely not even you—" started Rhionda.

Grindle, meanwhile, had pulled the small sack from his pocket and removed his soggy, frosting-covered pastry. He gave it a good squeeze to drain most of the water from it, then bit a good chunk of it off and chewed contentedly. "Huh?" he asked belatedly, mouth full, a puzzled expression on his face.

The other Monster Hunters ignored him and began arguing vehemently amongst themselves. Grindle shrugged his massive shoulders and returned his attention to the sticky pastry.

Finally Buntleby restored order. "All right, Dreelix, have it your way. Rhionda, go ahead and decapitate the worm if you can. Grindle, give her a hand, would you?" Grindle licked the last bit of frosting from his fingers and walked over to the dead worm.

"Oh, and Grindle?" asked Buntleby. "You still know the command words to Dreelix's carpet, don't you?" Grindle nodded, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Good," replied Buntleby. "You're piloting us home then. Rhionda, we'll let you ride on the tow line like you did on the way here."

"Great!" replied the young fighter, giving Buntleby a thumbs-up before slicing her sword deep into the worm's flesh.

"Wait a minute, what about me?" sputtered Dreelix.

"Oh, I haven't forgotten about you," replied Buntleby. "You'll get your worm's-head trophy all right, Dreelix—but you and it get the cheap seats on the way home!" D

17 Like the common earthworm, a purple worm enjoys a limited type of regenerative ability: It can regrow a severed head or tail (or just the tail spike) in about a week, provided that the cut occurs either in the first five body segments or the last twelve body segments.

A purple worm with one severed end still attacks with its remaining end: a tailless worm still bites; a headless worm still strikes with its tail spike. (Although a headless worm loses its vision, its tremorsense is based on organs spaced evenly throughout its skin, and the creature's brain consists of a long nerve that runs the length of its body.) Obviously, although a headless worm still has a digestive tract, it cannot "bite" or "swallow" prey, nor can it burrow new passageways through the dirt or stone. Generally, a purple worm in this condition curls into a ball and conserves its energy, awaiting full restoration after a week or so.

18 With a 35 Strength, purple worms enjoy a +12 modifier to Strength-related die rolls, so *web* spells are, at best, a temporary measure against them.

19 Even though purple worms can "swim," they habitually crawl along the bottom of the ocean (or lake, or underground pool) floor, searching for food. This is because their tremorsense allows them to detect creatures scuttling across the ocean floor, but they have a hard time fixing the locations of fish swimming through the water. Ocean-dwelling purple worms—mottled worms, if you prefer the term—can oftentimes be found far out to sea, exploring coral reefs and deep oceanic trenches alike.

20 Purple worm blood is reddish, with a faint trace of purple to it. It is often used in the magical inks used to inscribe the arcane versions of *bull's strength, endurance,* and *mass strength.* (The latter spell is found on page 85 of DRAGON #275.) Purple worm blood is also often used in the creation of *manuals of bodily health.*

21 When seriously injured, purple worms exude a chemical that warns others of their kind away from the area for weeks. Many Underdark civilizations, knowing of this "warning scent," harvest the appropriate glands from immature purple worms and douse it around the entranceways to their subterranean cities to keep purple worms at bay.

22 The standard purple worm is a Gargantuan beast, 5 feet in diameter and around 80 feet long, with a Hit Dice range of 16–32. While not as common, purple worms occasionally grow into the Colossal range, with 33–45 Hit Dice. These Colossal worms have up to a 10-foot diameter and can grow to be 150 feet long. A 40-HD Colossal purple worm bites for 4d6+16 points of damage, causes 2d8+8 points of damage with its tail spike, and the DC for its venom is 39 (10 + half the purple worm's Hit Dice + the purple worm's new Constitution modifier). A Colossal purple worm causes 4d6+16 points of crushing damage per round to creatures it has swallowed.

Purple Worm

"Day thirty of our expedition. We felt intermittent rumbling for several minutes, assumed it was an earthquake. Our duergar guides assured us the cavern was stable, and we pressed on. Then the ground burst open and the worm emerged, its teeth making a horrible grinding noise. Both of our pack lizards were in its direct path, and with two gulps they were gone. Then it ate one of our guides. The rest of us scattered, and I have become lost in a side passage..."

—the Journal of Eram Ia-Tep, found in a Darklands tunnel leading to Orv

Encased in segmented purple armor and with the ability to burrow through solid rock, a purple worm has few peers that can match it in sheer brute presence. Equipped with powerful jaws and a debilitating stinger, purple worms are well suited to battling many opponents at once, and use such opportunities to feed on as many foes as possible. Because it consumes vast quantities of rock as it burrows and processes the debris through its mighty gullet, a purple worm often leaves valuable treasures of unworked ores and gems in its wake—prizes for the taking by the careful scavenger.

Overview

Purple worms are truly masters of their territory, traveling through all three dimensions of their subterranean environment and its otherwise unyielding stone. With a full-grown specimen 80 feet in length, 5 feet in diameter, and weighing around 40,000 pounds, there are few opponents that can stand against one. Despite their great advantage in size and mobility, purple worms are driven by one overriding prerogative—feeding. That nature combined

with the purple worms' extremely low intelligence often allows the prepared individual who encounters one of the creatures to safely evade its predations as it pursues easier or more abundant prey.

Ecology

Many sages speculate that the world is like an apple with a rotten core, where horrific creatures burrow through the planet's flesh, creating tunnels and vaults of prodigious size, and from which deep-spawned horrors occasionally emerge. Of these unknowable abominations thought to inhabit the world's deeps, the purple worm is considered to be but one of its smallest, yet farthest-wandering monstrosities. While the learned scholars have guessed rightly on some particulars of the kind of organisms and ecosystems that occupy Golarion's depths, they are actually incorrect in their understanding of the origins of the purple worms, for the great beasts originate not from the dark depths within the world but rather from the blackness *above* the world.

The purple worms hail from the deeps of the Dark Tapestry beyond Golarion's skies. They were first introduced to the planet in its primeval days when meteoric bombardments were a more commonplace occurrence, long before the memory of the sentient races. It is possible that this cosmic hail that carried with it these interstellar vermin originated from the destruction of the planets that formed the asteroid field known as the Diaspora, though what part such creatures may have played in those planets' fate is unguessed. *The Annals of Eox* makes mention of "star-worms" but little context is given other than apocryphal warnings and dire portents.

Regardless, in days long past, when the world was young and its landscape still shaped by the craters from celestial impacts, some of these rocky missiles served as cradles of life for resilient organisms hibernating inside and surviving the rigors of extra-atmospheric travel within stony cocoons. Many of the creatures were vaporized upon impact, but others were buried deep within rubble-strewn craters, knocked out of dormancy and exposed to a world rich in life-giving elements which allowed them to grow large and thrive. From these beginnings, the worm-like creatures burrowed deep, seeking sanctuary and spreading out to explore this new palate of abundance they had stumbled upon.

Purple worms survive on just about any organic material they can find, but such fare is often scarce in the subterranean realms they inhabit. As a result, they are able to leach minerals out of the rock they process through their gullets as they burrow. These not only provide the elements necessary for them to naturally produce their armor and poisonous stings but drive the great metabolisms and allow them to survive on sparse provender. Though survive they do, a purple worm is never without the gnawing hunger of near starvation as it continues its eternal quest for sustenance. Due to this perpetual drive to hunt, purple worms seldom sleep, but when they do they typically enter hibernation, often for several years at a time.

Counting these periods of extended sleep, a purple worm can live for up to 800 years. They never stop growing, continually adding ring segments to their bodies. Undocumented older and larger specimens may also exist.

Purple worms are hermaphrodites and mate with other worms every decade or so, resulting in both individuals reproducing. Each worm lays a clutch of dozens of eggs within a mucus cocoon in a cavern and then collapses all entrances before abandoning it. Most of the eggs are destroyed through natural means or scavenging creatures, but 10 to 20 larval worms typically hatch. No more than a foot in diameter and 5 feet in length, these larvae turn on each other in a voracious feeding frenzy until only one or two are left; they then separate, as their ability to burrow through rock develops after about a week. During this time, the individual larval worms are relatively harmless to those who are prepared, but an entire swarm of them in feeding frenzy can prove to be a deadly encounter. Once the young develop the ability to burrow, they quickly begin to grow and reach maturity in only a handful of years.

Despite their penchant for burrowing, purple worms are also excellent swimmers, able to move swiftly through water and store air within their own coelum (the hollow cavity between their digestive tract and musculature), allowing them to modify their buoyancy and stay submerged for hours at a time.

Habitat & Society

As is to be expected, purple worms spend the majority of their existences underground, either in subterranean cysts or burrowing through the earth and stone. Though they have no known vulnerability to its rays, purple worms typically avoid the sun, emerging into the open air of the surface only occasionally and for short periods of time. Some speculate that their lack of sight and reliance upon tremorsense cause them to sense the surface world as a great unknowable void from which they instinctively recoil. As a result, though traveling aboveground is no proof against attacks from a shallowly burrowing purple worm, if such an attack occurs, clambering up a nearby tree or freestanding structure can often dissuade them from pursuing prey. Underground, this tactic is far less likely to succeed, as the worm can potentially attack from any direction as it burrows through the surrounding strata.

Campaign Role

Purple worms are best used sparingly in a game, as they represent a sort of apex predator that lurks beyond the confines of most creatures' experiences. They are the distant rumbling that causes a vibration through the ground before fading away, the strangely rounded tunnel leading deeper into the bowels of the earth where none existed a day before, the furrow of sand flying into the air under tree-like discharges of static electricity, the sudden collapse of a cave wall scattering both sides of an overwhelming battle. In this role, purple worms and their assorted kin can be used as plot devices, foreshadowing, and even a *deus ex machina* if necessary to spare the party from an untimely destruction. Only after a group of PCs has worked up to sufficient power should they actually face a purple worm in combat, and even then, they should be used only as a rare occurrence until such time as the adventure leads them to epic-level quests into worm spawning grounds, across worm-infested deserts, and even to claim the treasures of the fabled Star-Worm from beyond history.

Treasure

Purple worms do not collect treasure or intentionally hoard anything, but by their very natures they are frequently associated with valuable treasure finds. As a purple worm devours virtually any creature it meets, carried valuables that are able to survive the rigors of the beast's digestive tract are typically left behind—especially coins, weapons, or other durable metal goods. In addition, spelunkers often seek the former burrows of purple worms knowing that the casts they leave behind can contain rich deposits of unrefined ores that were isolated from the surrounding rock and deposited as leavings when a worm tunneled through. Finally, actually butchering the carcass of a deceased purple worm can yield finds of unfinished gemstones lodged in its digestive tract. Among these are occasionally found smooth, hand-sized ovoids ranging from pearly-gray to jet-black in color. Called worm pearls, these stones are natural formations that occur within one of the worm's kidney-like organs from concretions of certain minerals and calcium crystals. They are valued as precious stones in some cultures, and in such settlements, a fist-sized stone typically fetches as much as 10–100 gp on the open market, with the largest and shiniest worth up to 250 gp. A typical purple worm may have as many as 2–5 worm pearls.

Variants

The standard purple worm encountered by cave-delving adventurers is not the only such species in the larger family of gigantic burrowing worms.

Mottled Worm: Similar in many respects to the purple worm save for its brown and gray coloration, the mottled worm is an aquatic relative of the purple worm that dwells in salt or fresh water. Rather than conserve oxygen within their coelums as their violet cousins do, mottled worms are actually able to draw water into their coelums, where oxygen diffuses into their surrounding bloodstream via specialized gill-like organs. As a result, like fish, mottled worms can stay submerged indefinitely if the surrounding water is properly oxygenated. Since their coelums have enough stored fluid to allow their internal gills to function, mottled worms are also able to survive out of water for several hours, though the uncomfortable drying process makes them inclined to return to the water after about an hour on land.

Mottled worms cannot burrow through stone like their cousins, but are adept at moving through the muck and sand found on the seafloor and on tidal shelves (burrow speed 20 feet in mud, sand, or silt). Varieties exist that lurk both in shallow waters, preying on aquatic species, birds, and land animals, and in the deepest reaches of the sea where they build gigantic upright tubular formations created from their bodily waste. Such deep sea specimens are highly resistant to extremes in both temperature and pressure and, as a result, are often found near volcanic vents. Unlike purple worms, which are solitary, mottled worms of this deep-dwelling variety typically live in colonies of three to 12 individuals, and even the mighty krakens think twice before invading their hunting grounds.

Mottled worms have a poisonous bite rather than a poisonous sting.

Mottled Worm **CR 12**

N Gargantuan magical beast (aquatic)

Init –2; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +18, Spot –1

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 4, flat-footed 19
(–2 Dex, +15 natural, –4 size)

hp 200 (16d10+112)

Resist cold 10, fire 10; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

OFFENSE

Spd 10 ft., burrow 10 ft., swim 30 ft.

Melee bite +25 (2d8+12 plus poison) and tail slap +20 (2d8+18)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Special Attacks improved grab, poison, swallow whole

TACTICS

During Combat A mottled worm either lies in wait beneath a layer of muck before rising to attack with bite and tail slap or lurks within its tubular lair and springs forth with a readied action to bite and swallow anything that comes within reach.

Morale Like purple worms, mottled worms only retreat back into the muck or their stony lairs if reduced below 10 hit points.

STATISTICS

Str 35, **Dex** 6, **Con** 25, **Int** 1, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +16; **Grp** +40

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (tail slap)

Skills Listen +18, Swim +20

Great Worm: Less common than purple worms or even their mottled worm cousins, these are found only in the most desolate regions. Thought by many to be mere legend, the great worms have been exposed to great magic, such by slowly digesting artifacts embedded in their gullets, consuming the foci of ley lines, interacting with magical portals, swallowing mighty demons, and so on. The worms gain powers appropriate to this magic and sometimes grow to unusual sizes, or gain near-human intelligence or stranger abilities; most also have extended lifespans, with some speculated to be over 1,500 years old. Those that grow in size have even greater appetites than their fellows, and their territory quickly becomes depleted of resources, turning into a wasteland as the creatures spiral outward in search of more to consume. Others hibernate for long periods before rising, famished and hunting anything they can find. These long periods of inactivity—sometimes spanning decades at a time or longer—have contributed to the near-legendary status of these worms.

A great worm has one or more of the following abilities, usually related to the source of its mutation. For every three of these abilities it has, increase its CR by +1.

Secrets of Burrowing

Purple worms are capable of burrowing through solid rock through a combination of brute strength and the particular chemical composition of their digestive system. The sheer force of their heavily armored heads fractures rocks upon impact, which are then engulfed in their vast tooth-lined maws. Their individual teeth have the strength and rigidity of hardened steel and are able to break rock and grind it into smaller particles as it passes down the worm's gullet. There it passes through the worm's streamlined digestive tract and is exposed to its multiple stomachs' acid designed specifically for quickly breaking down stone and many raw ores. It is then ejected in a constant spray of rocky casts that are expelled into the tunnel behind the worm. These casts are similar in appearance and composition to ordinary rubble and can often completely fill a tunnel through which a purple worm has just burrowed. In areas where the mineral content of the rock provides more of the minerals useable by a purple worm as nutrients, the quantity of this waste-slag is much less, and these burrow-paths aren't filled in, creating rounded tunnels 5 or more feet in diameter that meander in great curves and spirals. Long after worm activity in an area has ceased, smaller creatures frequently use their former burrows as convenient passageways.

While burrowing, purple worms generate a great deal of internal heat as a result of both excessive friction and chemical reactions within their lower digestive tracts. Creatures that have been swallowed by a purple worm and managed to escape alive have reported that they were not carried far enough down the digestive tract to receive injury from this internal heat generation (though the grinding action of the crop and deluge of stomach acids was certainly damaging enough) but were able to feel it radiating from lower in the creature's gullet, and observers have even detected a dim red glow when the creatures move quickly through the earth. How this heat contributes to the breakdown of earth and materials in the casts left behind is not fully understood, but it is assumed that there is a reaction similar to a slag forge. Byproducts of this process are visible heat distortions rising into the air from a purple worm's maw or even from the ground or a subterranean surface after the creature has been burrowing for any extended period of time.

Energy Attack: A great worm naturally exudes energy (usually the same type as its immunity or resistance, if any). Every 1d4 rounds, this energy builds up enough to deal 4d6 hit points damage to the first creature it hits that round with one of its natural attacks. Creatures it swallows take 1d6 energy damage per round in addition to other damage from the gullet. If the great worm burrows, the walls of the burrow-tunnel are charged with this energy, dealing 1d6 hit points of damage per round of contact for

4 rounds after the great worm passes. Aternatively, instead of a touch attack, the great worm may gain a breath weapon useable every 1d4 rounds (30-ft. cone, 8d6 damage, Reflex half DC 25); the save DC is Constitution-based.

Energy Healing: A great worm heals when exposed to energy to which it has immunity. Any energy attack of this type used against the worm heals 1 point of damage for every 3 points of damage it would otherwise deal. It cannot heal above its normal hit points in this way. The worm gets no saving throw against magical attacks that deal this kind of damage.

Energy Resistance: A great worm has energy resistance 20 to two kinds of energy or immunity to one kind of energy. Sometimes it may gain a weakness appropriate to the source of its power or the opposite of its element; a cold-resistant great worm might become vulnerable to fire, a fire worm might take damage from cold or exposure to water, and so on.

Fast healing: A great worm has fast healing 10. This ability cannot repair acid or fire damage. If the great worm is immune to fire or acid, it cannot repair damage from an energy source to which it is not immune.

Improved Tremorsense: A great worm's tremorsense expands to 120 feet or even 360 feet.

Quasi-Arcane: A great worm gains a *lesser displacement* effect (20% concealment) and SR 23.

Quasi-Elemental or Quasi-Undead: Suffused with the power of an elemental plane, an undead force, or some connection to the Negative Energy Plane, a great worm has a 25% chance to ignore extra damage from a critical hit, sneak attack, poison, paralysis, or stunning.

Variant Attack: A great worm's bite attack might inject poison equivalent to that in its stinger, or inflict its targets with a disease (typically *mummy rot*).

Purple Worms on Golarion

Purple worms have inhabited Golarion since the earliest days of its prehistory when its surface was routinely bombarded by extraterrestrial debris. Carried among these falling stars were the first purple worms to reach the planet. Despite their long history on the world, their aversion to sunlight and lack of sufficient resources to sustain a large population keep incidences of their encounters with civilized races fairly rare. Without a doubt, purple worms are most frequently encountered in Golarion's Darklands, deep beneath the region's surface, and the races that dwell there are much more accustomed than uplanders to the ever-present danger that hungry purple worms represent.

Purple worms can be encountered virtually anywhere within the Darklands. They become more common the lower one descends, so much so that they are very rare in Nar-Voth yet hold the strange vault of the Black Desert as one of their great spawning grounds in Orv. Rumors even hold that some specimens as large as the great desert worms of Casmaron actually delve even deeper than Orv, enjoying a near-immunity to heat and electromagnetic energies as they burrow to the very center of the world, growing fat and fecund in riddled tunnels unguessed at in Golarion's unknown, rotten core.

The Darklands neothelids are gifted with superior intelligence and powerful mental abilities; they look upon purple worms as idiot cousins good only for labor and guard work. Using their powers, neothelids crush the will of any purple worms that enter their territory, pressing them into service as excavation workers, steeds, or bodyguards for themselves and their seugathi minions. Sages suspect that purple worms and neothelids may be related in some way (much as hyenas and gnolls are said to be distantly related).

Far more insidious are the intellect devourers, evil predators that merge with a victim's brain, animating the body like a puppet, even something the size of a purple worm. Whether they do this to easily travel long distances, infiltrate neothelid communities, or experience gluttony on a massive scale, these creatures may be responsible for some encounters with "intelligent purple worms." (For more information on intellect devourers, neothelids, and seugathi, see *Pathfinder Chronicles: Into the Darklands*.)

The seas and shallows of Golarion are likewise home to the worms' mottled cousins, though on the continental shelves they are fewer in number than even the purple worms of the Darklands. However, in the deep trenches of the world's oceans where strange, lightless vents in the ocean floor expel poisonous gases from untold nether regions, the true numbers of the great columnar tubes that sprout from rocky flumes are known only to the deepest-diving and most foolhardy of aquatic races. Few who have witnessed the stone forests of the trench floors have lived to tell of it.

In Casmaron's central desert, tribesmen still whisper of a great crater in the depths of the wastes where water is scarce and the ground too stony for even the great worms. In this miles-wide valley, originally formed by the impact of a meteorite long ago, is said to dwell the first of the purple worms to arrive on Golarion from the Dark Tapestry. Superstitious whispers around campfires in the darkness of the desert nights tell of the primordial Star-Worm that birthed the great worms of the deep desert and that will someday arise from its slumber and consume the world. Numerous folktales of Namzaruum the Sword and other heroes of ancient lore tell of encounters with this horrific monstrosity from beyond, though none speak of its destruction, and many tell of some great-but-unnamed treasure said to lie with the slumbering Star-Worm—a treasure perhaps capable of somehow staving off the dire future its awakening portends.

Purple Worm

A toothed maw the size of a pony bursts forth from the earth in a shower of stones and flying debris. A vast, sinuous body rises behind it, covered in segmented plates of chitinous armor a deep violet in color. The reeking stench of death and sulfurous fumes are almost overwhelming, as is the sheer volume of the inarticulate roar that echoes forth from the beast's cavernous gullet. A wicked stinger marks the terminus of its prodigious length.

Purple Worm **CR 12**

N Gargantuan magical beast

Init –2; **Senses** tremorsense 60 ft.; Listen +18, Spot –1

Defense

AC 19, touch 4, flat-footed 19
(–2 Dex, +15 natural, –4 size)

hp 200 (16d10+112)

Fort +17, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

Offense

Spd 20 ft., burrow 20 ft., swim 10 ft.

Melee bite +25 (2d8+12) and
sting +20 (2d6+6 plus poison)

Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Special Attacks improved grab, swallow whole, poison

Tactics

During Combat A purple worm stalks its prey, emerging from the ground beneath in a charge attempting to grab and swallow. If forced into melee in the open, the worm coils and attacks anyone in reach with its bite and sting.

Morale Purple worms have extremely low intelligence and rarely retreat from battle. If reduced to hit points, a purple worm attempts to escape by burrowing into the nearest solid surface.

Statistics

Str 35, **Dex** 6, **Con** 25, **Int** 1, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +16; **Grp** +40

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (sting)

Skills Listen +18, Swim +20

Special Abilities

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, a purple worm must hit with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can attempt to swallow the foe the following round.

Poison (Ex) Injury, Fortitude DC 25, initial damage 1d6 Str, secondary damage 2d6 Str. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Swallow Whole (Ex) A purple worm can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of a smaller size than itself by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d8+12 points of crushing damage plus 8 points of acid damage per round from the worm's gizzard. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using a light slashing or piercing weapon to deal 25 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 17). Once the creature exits, muscular action draws the armored segments of the worm together where chemical reactions with the creature's digestive enzymes cause them to fuse until natural healing occurs. Another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. A gargantuan worm's interior can hold 2 Large, 8 Medium, 32 Small, 128 Tiny, or 512 Diminutive or smaller opponents.

Skills A purple worm has a +8 racial bonus on any Swim check to perform some special action or avoid a hazard. It can always choose to take 10 on a Swim check, even if distracted or endangered. It can use the run action while swimming, provided it swims in a straight line.

by Eric Cagle
illustrated by Peter Bergting

THE ECOLOGY OF THE RAKSHASA

Considered by some the very embodiment of evil, rakshasas dominate all they encounter as masterful manipulators, powerful sorcerers, and terrible foes. Greedy, treacherous, immortal beings, rakshasas delight in plotting the downfall of others while raising their own status, making them consummate arch-villains in a sufficiently high-level campaign. In addition to their own abilities, rakshasas are charismatic individuals who draw large numbers of minions into their service, surrounding themselves with cadres of deadly and varied servitors. Clever and deceitful by nature, rakshasas are the bane of righteous creatures, as they prefer hiding in the shadows and using layers of lies, corruption, and double-crosses to keep themselves safe.

This article examines the rakshasas' history, physiology, and psychology, as well as ways in which player characters can combat such deadly adversaries.

History of the Rakshasa

A cloud of uncertainty conceals the rakshasas' origins. Numerous tales and legends say that they came from "a distant land," slowly corrupting the societies they encountered before moving on to richer grounds. Rakshasas possess all the earmarks of having the same lineage as devils, although they dwell primarily on the Material Plane. Even if they know their actual background, no rakshasa willingly parts with such information, and they often spin intricate webs of lies to further confuse the issue. The most popular theories include a race of fiendish animals somewhere in the rakshasas' distant past, intermingled with some unknown breed of devils. However, even this possibility seems unlikely considering rakshasas' uniquely insidious natures.

There exist countless documented cases of the rakshasas' sinister impact upon the world, even if some only suggest the fiends' claws manipulating major political players. Although vain and egotistical, rakshasas favor staying behind the scenes, pulling political strings with aplomb. They are linked to the toppling of untold organizations, merchant houses, churches, and even entire governments. Scholars who go through the effort of untangling the skeins of history discover rakshasas lurking behind some of the most deplorable crimes and tragedies imaginable. Those who delve too

deeply, however, risk drawing the attention of one or more rakshasas, who might briefly band together in order to quash an investigation before it uncovers too much.

Physiology of Rakshasas

A rakshasa possesses the same size and build as an average human, but with the head of some savage animal, most commonly that of a Bengal tiger, although those of carnivorous apes, mantises, and crocodiles are only slightly less common. Rakshasas' eyes vary vastly, from the gold and black slits of tigers to the multifaceted protruding orbs of insects, depending on the individual's specific animalistic visage. Regardless of their shape, rakshasas' eyes burn with a slight infernal light, filled with a deep cunning and intellect that most mortals find extremely disturbing.

A rakshasa's hands is easily its most unnerving feature. The joints on both hands are reversed, causing the creature to bend its fingers to grasp objects in the opposite direction to how most humanoid hands grasp. The rakshasa suffers no difficulty doing this and grips things in the same way as other humanoids, although it enjoys horrifying others with this unnatural feature.

VARIANT BREEDS

Originating in the legends and lore of India, rakshasas initially appeared in D&D among the creatures of the first edition *Monster Manual*. Several recent products present new variations on these popular villians, each with deadly new abilities and sinister motivations all their own.

Rakshasas in Eberron

The *Eberron Campaign Setting* unleashes a new rakshasa variant, known as the zakya. While still capable of casting spells, this breed of vicious fighters wades into hand-to-hand combat with relish. Zakyas once ruled the continents of Khorvaire and Sarolona, serving under powerful rajahs who commanded massive armies. Brought to heel by the combined might of the dragons of Argonneseen and the couatls of Xen'drik, the zakyas are a broken race, driven beneath the earth to plot and scheme. Their rulers, the Lords of Dust, fulfill many of the same roles as rakshasas in other settings—highly intelligent and vile schemers who use subterfuge, moral decay, and lies to further their plans. However, the zakyas are much more openly violent and bloodthirsty than their cousins and spoil for the chance to end lives on their blades and spears in combat.

Rakshasas in Monster Manual III

Monster Manual III introduces two new breeds of rakshasa, the ak'chazar and the naztharune. The ak'chazar seem most like the traditional rakshasa, deadly and manipulative schemers with powerful magical abilities and the heads of white tigers. Unlike their kin, however, ak'chazars hold dominion over the undead with a vast array of potent necromantic abilities and a cunning that even their fellow rakshasas begrudgingly respect. Besides these natural necromancers, *Monster Manual III* also presents the naztharune. These night-black rakshasas are master predators, applying their malicious racial ingenuity to the assassin's arts. With unnatural power over shadows, the naztharune strike from the darkness and vanish back into it without a trace. Along with their round-by-round tactics, *Monster Manual III* also provides suggestions for undead ak'chazar entourages, using naztharune as characters, and suggestions for both of these races' schemes in *Eberron* and the *Forgotten Realms*.

Rakshasas prefer their food in the form of raw meat, preferably while the animal still lives, and flavor such meals with rare spices, exotic side dishes, and other expensive delicacies disgusting to the eyes of mortals. Many of their movements and behaviors straddle the line between that of a human and a large feline, as they enjoy long rests and prowling about unseen like a cat but also savor the finer things in life, such as music, works of art, and literature. They relish fancy, expensive clothing, jewelry, and the finest weapons and armor. Similar to cats, rakshasas enjoy long naps and lazy moments surrounded by comfort and luxury.

Psychology and Society of Rakshasas

Greedier than most devils, rakshasas insatiably desire wealth and power. However, more than just taking what they can, rakshasas prefer stealing and looting from those who would suffer most from such actions—the destitute, the desperate, and those who rely on specific items. Rakshasas take great pride in ruining the lives of mortals, stealing everything from them, killing their families, and spreading horrible lies and rumors.

When a rakshasa first enters a territory, it does its best to maintain a low profile, seeking out weak-willed individuals that it uses as pawns and lackeys. It finds a base to host its insidious dealings, often fronted by an innocuous business or even a temple to some neutral deity. Over time, however, the rakshasa tightens the reins on both his victims and his lackeys, demanding larger and larger portions of their freedom, wealth, and power.

Rakshasa society could be described as a malevolent meritocracy, where only the fittest survive. Rakshasas constantly rank each other based on the power they accumulate, their cunning and subtlety, and their willingness to show a complete lack of morals. Female rakshasas raise their young alone, punctuating their children's lives with doting praise, constant tests, harsh discipline, and ruthless training. As a young rakshasa matures, it learns the meanings of both loss and power—that which is gained might easily be taken away, often by those who gave it in the first place.

Once a rakshasa reaches maturity, it's already well on its way to carving out an empire of crime and evil. Newly independent rakshasas commonly head out for unknown territories, far from its parents'—or any other rakshasa's—reach. Using a variety of disguises, the rakshasa spends years investigating a new area. A rakshasa instinctively seeks out a safe house from which to operate, decorating its interior in ostentatious displays of its wealth. It then begins creating a network of spies, informants, and easily bribed officials from which to establish its domain, as well as creating a small cadre of loyal, easily influenced lackeys. The rakshasa then creates or takes over local thieves guilds, mercenary units, and other undesirables, often doing so under one disguise or another. It rarely reveals its true nature to anyone but utterly dedicated lieutenants whose loyalty the rakshasa constantly monitors both via spies and its own ability to read thoughts.

Should a rakshasa encounter another of its kind, a shadowy war of intrigue and misinformation often begins. This battle of criminal politics culminates in one rakshasa dominating the other and subjugating its network or in the death of the weaker rival. As a rakshasa grows in power and dominates more and more of its kin, it takes on more and more prestigious titles, rising to ruhk, rajah, and all the way to maharajah after subjugating all other rakshasas in a region.

Notoriously cruel slavers, rakshasas collect slaves with the same relish they do exotic and rare art. A rakshasa surrounds itself with dozens of slaves who cater to its every whim. This serves to stroke the rakshasa's enormous ego as well as to show a level of status among others of its kind—the more slaves at its beck and call, the more powerful the rakshasa.

Using its detect thoughts ability, as well as information provided by spies and informants, a rakshasa searches out every weakness, sin, and secret about its enemies as possible. It then uses bribes and offers of power to attempt to bring its target into its web. If this fails, the rakshasa extorts, blackmails, or slanders its target to bring about his destruction. It loves nothing more than to see an otherwise good and upstanding citizen

RAVANNA

Lesser God (Lawful Evil)
Ravanna is the ten-headed lord of all rakshasas and embodies the ideals of that race. Decadent and egomaniacal, he possesses a cruel intellect, diabolical cunning, and patient subtleness that all of his minions aspire to.

Portfolio: Deception, intrigue, lies, rakshasas, tyranny
Domains: Destruction, Evil, Trickery
Favored Weapon: Javelin ("Yamafang")
Clerical Training: Few creatures willingly choose to serve Ravanna. Rather, the cunning god chooses his clerics based on their potential to serve him or advance his existing clergy's ambitions. Few who know of Ravanna refuse a summons into his service, as his fury is great and such commands commonly come from a group of powerful existing priests.
Quests: Ravanna demands that his servants constantly expand their power and influence while remaining unseen. This in effect makes his clergy more like a powerful and far-reaching criminal network than most priesthoods.
Prayers: Prayers to Ravanna are lengthy and self-depreciating affairs that extol his wonders while accentuating the unworthiness of his followers.
Temples: Ravanna demands few actual temples, but those that do exist tower as grand complexes made nearly entirely of precious materials and rife with terrible artistry. More common are the personal shrines Ravanna requires all his servants to maintain. These shrines are often ornate but portable affairs, both so his worshippers can conceal them at a moment's notice and transport them to their meal tables to commit his gory worship.
Rites: Ravanna demands daily sacrifices of both wealth and blood. Devotees of Ravanna make these sacrifices without any specific weapon or tool, but rather their own teeth and claws, regardless of race.
Herald and Allies: Ravanna's herald is a powerful rakshasa maharajah named Loliadac. With five heads—those of an ape, crocodile, mantis, tiger, and human—he commands an army of servants that travel Acheron, the Plane of Shadow, and the Material Plane at their god's command, acting as Ravanna's vengeful claw. Ravanna's allies and those he most commonly sends to fulfill *planar ally* spells are bone devils, hellcats, and of course rakshasas.

brought down by others of its kind due to some dark secret.

Rakshasas are natural spellcasters with a deep lust for the acquisition of arcane lore and magic items. They spend a great deal of time researching lost tomes and following up bits of rumors and legend to find powerful spells, especially those of an evil nature. Rakshasas sometimes sponsor adventuring groups to delve into forgotten tombs and forbidding lands in the quest for such items, often portraying themselves as kindly patrons of arcane organizations or ambitious merchants.

Versus the Rakshasa

Although they rarely engage in physical battle, rakshasas are powerful and deadly opponents. Once adventurers tear away the myriad veils of magic and lies a rakshasa hides behind, only preparation and skill will assure survival against one of these evil masterminds.

Beware of Deception: The most difficult part of fighting a rakshasa is realizing that you are opposing one in the first place. Rakshasas excel at deception, lies, and deceit. They use their change shape ability to keep opponents guessing, while also adopting a range of favorite particular disguises. Adventurers hoping to ferret out a shape-changing rakshasa should make frequent use of divination spells like *detect evil*, *detect thoughts*, and especially *true seeing*.

Turn Enemies into Allies: The hordes of lackeys and bodyguards rakshasas employ often present just as great a threat as rakshasas themselves. Because they can read the thought of others, rakshasas allow only the most loyal beings to get close to them. As such, characters attempting to shift the loyalty of a rakshasa's lieutenants through trickery or charm almost always fail. However, enchantment spells such as *charm monster*, *charm person*, and *geas/quest* prove far more successful. Magically turning a rakshasa's allies against it weakens its defenses while bolstering those of the characters.

RAKSHASA KNOWLEDGE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to the rakshasa. Those who hunt these beings or work under their control might possess this information.

Knowledge (The Planes) DC	Result
10	Rakshasas are hideously evil, animal-headed creatures whose malevolence is on par with most devils.
15	Rakshasas can take the form of almost any humanoid and use this ability to hide among unsuspecting groups in order to sow lies and corruption. They bully or bribe weak-willed individuals to do their bidding.
20	Rakshasas have the ability to read the thoughts of others, which allows them to discover a person's deepest fears and desires. They are resistant to most forms of attacks.
25	Rakshasas are extremely fractious beings that spend as much time fighting among themselves as they do plotting against other creatures.
30	Rakshasas are vulnerable to good-aligned piercing weapons, such as crossbow bolts benefiting from the spell *bless weapon*.

Guard Your Thoughts: A rakshasa's detect thoughts ability is often its most useful tool and weapon. Its constant awareness of the presence of thinking minds within the area forces its enemies to use spells such as *mind blank* (or, less powerfully, *nondetection*) and magic items such as *amulets of proof against detection and location*. As its detect thoughts ability requires at least three rounds of concentration for the rakshasa to read the surface thoughts of a creature, it does its best to stay within range for at least that long to reveal a person's intentions (but only if it is safe to do so). Those hunting rakshasas should remain mindful of the ability's 60-foot cone-shaped area. As a rakshasa must focus this ability in a specific area each round, a stealthy group of adventurers might keep their opponent's attention diverted long enough to get close enough to attack. As this ability also requires concentration to maintain, a rakshasa involved in combat often forgoes this ability in order to cast spells or attack. As fitting such an intelligent creature, a rakshasa often employs hit and run tactics, pulling back to someplace safe in order to read the thoughts of its enemies and change its tactics accordingly.

Destroy Magical Defenses: Rather cowardly by nature, rakshasas commonly cast spells that bolster themselves, such as *bear's endurance* and *haste*, or improves their defensive abilities, such as *mage armor*. Rakshasas also make judicious use of *charm person* or *suggestion* to change the attitude of anyone with ill intentions toward them. They reserve their offensive spells, such as *Melf's acid arrow*, as a last resort. Rakshasas that take character levels almost always take several levels in sorcerer. Spells like *dispel magic* are necessary to negate a rakshasa's defensive magic and perform counterspells, while several castings of *protection from evil* should defend an entire party against enchantment spells.

Beware of Resistances: Spellcasters should remember that rakshasas possess impressive spell resistance, which foils many magical attacks against them. Also, the rakshasa's damage reduction (15 good and piercing) seriously reduces any damage not dealt by a weapon that is both piercing and good aligned. A rakshasa uses these facts to its advantage, often attacking spellcasters first (who must overcome its spell resistance and are unlikely to deal physical damage that gets past the rakshasa's DR). Blessed bows and crossbows prove the most effective weapons when employed against rakshasas, allowing the attacker to fire from a safe distance while negating the rakshasa's formidable damage reduction. The spell *bless weapon* is also integral, as it gives any weapon the good quality, although it must be cast on a piercing weapon to totally overcome a rakshasa's damage reduction.

The ecology of the Remorhaz

by Kurt Martin and Ed Greenwood

An account from the lore-book entitled "Journeys and Trials of Rekansor; Explorer, Scout, and Leader of Men":

. . . Thus began the hardest segment of the journey back to our civilized lands in the east. Our clothing was barely adequate against the increasing chill, and we were reduced painfully in both numbers and supplies. Each day the true test of winter drew nearer, and even as we first began to struggle up the steep escarpments that announced the Krylen Peaks, the cold of their icy reaches stretched down to greet us with bitter blasts. The twelve of us yet remaining trudged on, weary to the soul of adventure, desiring only the end of the road and safety.

Arriving at the foot of Al-Kindor, the westernmost and mightiest of these mountains, I found a possible route for my group. Pressed by Time himself, we began to follow this sketchy path that picked its way through the fallen boulders at the mountain's base.

This way seemed to lead as we hoped: around the mountain on its southernmost side. With Al-Kindor at our backs, we could traverse the range at this narrow point in as little as two days. We pushed onward, climbing between the jumbled rocks in an endless, stumbling dance. Only the quick passing of this obstacle, this king of mountains, would put us within reach of the plains of home before all hope ended with the coming of winter. Each of us knew secretly that we would not survive even one true snowfall.

Curious as ever, I wondered at the improving sureness of the path as it wandered neatly among the rocks. With the first fluffy pockets of snow collecting under a new fall, the path remained solid and clear, yet no tracks were visible in the old snow to reveal the users of such a fine mountain course. The snow stiffened its assault, clutching at sword and arrow as well as hunched shoulders and hooded heads.

Above us loomed Al-Kindor, half shrouded in cloud. His jagged peaks tore at the clouds, ripping the snow from them. Already the upper reaches were turning distinctly white. The sky hung over us, a dismal grey, like the snow-dusted stone our boots scuffed over. For a moment, the sun poked a crimson ray out over the frozen tundra as it sank at our backs, setting the falling flakes on fire, turning white puffs into red drops of blood. I shivered at this grim omen.

We pushed on, intent on covering more ground before nightfall, hastily shuffling past a dark gap in the rocks — an aperture our inner selves warned us to avoid. Little did we know, it was a door where the remorhaz, the owner of the path, lay in terrible wait. Cunningly, the creature paused at our arrival, waiting for its body to warm from the stillness of its hunting vigil; waiting until all but the last of our party had struggled past before attacking with a birdlike shriek that chilled my blood more than the previous hours of frost had.

I turned to see a huge creature, looking much like a massive centipede, snapping at my men with enormous, fanged jaws. Its white, icy eyes glared down on us as the small, membranous wings on the sides of its head flapped to lift its jaws high for another strike. The remorhaz's thick neck arched, and the long, curving black horns on its head were silhouetted against the grim sky as it screamed another challenge. Now I saw clearly the folly of following such an easy path.

The beast's heavily scaled body was a man's height across and gleamed a cold blue, stretching away for several long strides before winding into the gap in the rocks. Along its back, a wide streak of bright red stood out, steaming from the creature's heat. Dozens of short, chitinous legs supported the low-slung bulk as it again snapped forward, its hard talons clattering on the stone.

Three of my party already lay silent in the gathering snow, torn by the beast's four horrible fangs. As my comrades threw back their hoods and heavy cloaks, snatching at weapons and shields, I quickly drew my bow and an arrow, and bounded to a rock at the path's edge. Pulling myself onto the frigid stone, I readied for a shot as Benol, my finest scout, dropped to the snow, her body hewn almost in two by a strike from the monster's jaws. Even as she fell, and my first arrow glanced harmlessly off the beast's armorlike skin, my group started forming a battle line, their weapons seeking the creature's weaker points.

Kelor thrust himself directly in front of the creature, his wide bastard sword glowing dully in the fading light. The remorhaz screeched as if in answer to his challenge and drew its head up to twice the height of a man. Kelor jumped forward, his sword swung back, ready for a massive blow. Then, despite the impact of two arrows, the beast shot forward blindingly fast, and Kelor disappeared into the snapping jaws. His sword, clattering noisily on the rocks, was the only evidence of where he had once stood.

We fought on instead of trying to flee; doubtless the creature could outrun us, tired as we were. Thoughts cluttered my mind as I searched desperately for a shard of hope. I could see Farvus, alone off to my left, hard at work with his spell magic. I whispered a silent prayer for his success as I returned to my bow-work; my red-feathered arrows were beginning to accumulate in the creature's soft underbelly. In spite of these wounds, and several rents from swords, the remorhaz seemed prepared to fight us to the last.

From amidst the rocks into which the long creature's body coiled, I saw the small, florentine form of Kartha emerge, his eyes intent on the monster's swinging head. I watched him, distracted from my attack, as he slunk alongside the kicking legs, staying clear of the red streak on the creature's back where the falling snow sizzled and steamed.

Kartha moved closer, perilously close to the thrusting, coiling neck, before pausing to stretch, raising his weapons high in the air. He plunged them into the steaming protrusions with an angry shout. The remorhaz heaved forward with a shriek of pain, throwing the overextended Kartha off balance. He glanced off the beast's back, let out a shrill scream, and fell limply to the snow. Curls of smoke rose from his still form. I paused in shock as the remorhaz snapped out again, oblivious to the knife and sword as they melted, then dripped into the snow.

Glancing frantically back to see what Farvus was doing, I was further shocked to see his obvious frustration. Already he had turned to shield and mace and was advancing toward the creature, which was now faced with only five standing opponents. I dropped from the rock and drew my sword to strike the remorhaz face to face. It was terrifying work. In a few short moments, my vision began to blur from the effort of slashing at the monster and desperately trying to avoid its fatal bite. I slipped and lunged in the damp snow, my tired legs heavy as logs. I managed to cut the thing twice, though my sword was heavy even in both hands. Its wings flapping, the beast snapped at me, its breath overpowering, its cries daunting.

Helt screamed as a fang tore into her. The remorhaz tossed her aside in a heap. But in the moment it took to do so, Farvus and I attacked with desperate strength, hitting the exposed neck, my sword biting deep into the softer underside of the monster's head.

Hacked and hewn, the snapping head finally dropped into the snow. Only three of us remained to see the creature's final moments — and we took no great pleasure in its demise. As we stood about the remorhaz for a long, silent minute, the cruel wind tore at our skin. Despair was in our hearts; the battle was won, but at too great a cost. Puffs of snow stood on the faces of our fallen friends. Distant were their homes and ours. Anguished, it struck me as likely that we would travel no great distance beyond that point — not with the bulk of the company silenced forever around us. Slowly we turned from the scene of battle, and looked again to the east. . . .

Notes

1. A remorhaz has a segmented body, like other worms, plus a winged neck and head. Each segment (a polar worm will have one such segment per hit die it possesses) consists of a central "core," or body cavity, where the digestive organs are located, surrounded by a network of terrifically strong muscles linked by corded nerves, and the whole sheathed by the worm's rock-hard external insulation and armor. Each segment is supported by a pair of flexible legs covered in similar segmented armor, each leg ending in a foot consisting of a large suction pad (devoid of nerves, so that a remorhaz cannot feel pain through its feet) and two iron-hard "toe-talons." These talons serve to propel the remorhaz across the most slippery ice — the "blue ice" at the heart of glaciers where the creatures prefer to lair. In conditions where a remorhaz's feet begin to slip, it will automatically drive its talons into the surface underfoot. It cannot penetrate hard rock, but can readily find and cling to fissures and cracks in rock, or penetrate softer rocks (such as sandstone), ice, frozen mud, and the like. Fallen prey and items so impaled by a talon will suffer damage as follows: Creatures suffer 4-9 (1d6 + 3) hit points of damage, and all items (such as armor) must save versus crushing blow or be damaged beyond usability. Magic items will of course gain bonuses to any such saving throws in accordance with their magical plusses; but note that all sorts of items may suffer penalties on saving throws due to the brittleness that extreme cold causes in many materials.

A remorhaz does not gain or lose heat through its feet or body armor unless the body armor has been broken (before an insulating scab of internal protective fluids forms), except through its back protrusions. Given steady food, a remorhaz will regenerate a completely lost pair of legs in twenty days or so; lesser damage could well be healed in half the time. A remorhaz can slither at half movement rate — but not climb bare ice walls — if all of its legs are gone; if more than half of its legs are gone, it will move at 9″ per round. Liquid mud or deep sand (which will not be encountered by a remorhaz in its normal habitat) will slow movement to 6″; unfrozen water is avoided by a remorhaz in the polar regions as it cools the worm's body with dangerous rapidity. A remorhaz can swim at the rate of 9″ per round.

2. The wings of a remorhaz aid in stability while rearing and lunging (and rarely, while slipping or falling), and in regulating body heat (see notes below), but cannot lift the entire body of the worm; a remorhaz cannot fly. The remorhaz can only raise its head and neck with the aid of these wings. The wings must beat continuously in order to do this and are highly susceptible to attack. The attacker must hit versus AC -2 to strike them, since they are small, fast-moving, and often out of reach. Area fire spells such as *fireball* will also affect the wings, with each wing taking as many points of damage as the creature has hit dice before becoming useless. The loss of one or both wings will cause the remorhaz to attack at - 3 to hit, since it will no longer be able to rear up and snap at its opponent. The remorhaz will, however, still be able to move and maneuver, and this state will inadvertently prevent attacks to its soft underside.

Damage done by the remorhaz's four fangs and sharp-edged jaws is determined by the size of the creature, with 13 and 14 HD specimens having the ability to swallow man-sized or smaller prey whole on a roll of 20. However, halflings and other small demi-humans, and creatures of similar size may be swallowed in this manner by a remorhaz as small as 11 HD; elves and small humans can likewise be swallowed whole by a 12 HD remorhaz. On any roil of 20, check the size of the

remorhaz to see if it is capable of swallowing the creature it has bitten. Even if the target is not swallowed, it takes full bite damage from that attack.

A remorhaz of 7 or 8 HD bites for 4-24 points of damage; 9 to 12 HD creatures do 5-30 points; and 13 to 14 HD creatures do 6-36 points. When raised up to strike, a remorhaz is 9 inches tall for every hit die it has. Thus, a 14 HD remorhaz would be 10 feet, 6 inches tall at the head and could attack a character standing on a second-story balcony. The remorhaz can strike out an equal distance horizontally.

3. The area of the remorhaz most vulnerable to physical attack is its eyes, which are actually two great, white, globular clusters of lenses, all working together, and all milky-white because they have natural filters to correct for snow glare. These natural filters allow the remorhaz to see reflections and movements with great clarity — and in gloom or at night with 9" ultravision (in full darkness, or when confused, a remorhaz uses the 7" infravision of its tiny eyes). Each compound eye has more than a thousand tiny eyes within it — thus, an attack to the eyes is not likely to blind a remorhaz; up to a dozen or more strikes on each eye would be necessary to accomplish that. A remorhaz regenerates its eyes only slowly (each tiny eye would take about 30 turns to heal, and only one at a time will be replaced by the worm's body).

Because of these insectlike eyes, remorhaz (the plural form is the same as the singular) have excellent peripheral vision. In combat, they are equally likely to strike at any creature in an arc of 180 degrees in front of them, with preference given to those striking the most recent, most damaging blows against it. The target of the remorhaz's attack will be at -2 to hit for the round after their attack, due to the overpowering stench of the creature's superheated breath (normal if they make their save vs. breath weapon). Remorhaz do not deliberately claw or trample prey, nor do they ever strike at them with their "tails" or nether body segments. In combat, they may "pin" opponents with their weight and bite at them, but prefer to rear up (aided by their wings) and lunge at all prey, biting with speed enough to knock down many aerial opponents, and with reach enough to strike from a rearing position at opponents up to half the remorhaz's own length away (on the ground or in the air).

The majority of the remorhaz's body is heavily insulated with armor that renders it proof against any harm from scraping against or over ice. The most flexible parts of the armor (and hence, the softest) are the underside regions of each segment, which must have softness and flexibility to aid traction over uneven ice — hence, the lower armor class. The intermediate armor class rating of a remorhaz reflects the relative vulnerability of its mouth and eyes, despite the mobility of the head as a target. Man-sized opponents of a remorhaz will find that while the creature's underside is softer than the rest of its body, only two attackers can strike at this area, with one standing on each side of the raised head. Other opponents standing directly in front of the remorhaz (two at most) can strike at the AC 2 head. All other attacks are versus AC 0.

4. Remorhaz have three life states: dormant, cold, and heated. Since remorhaz can "burn up" the energy provided by a large meal (such as two horses) in just a few hours of tunneling, moving, or fighting, they spend much of their time in either a dormant or cold state — dormant being a very sluggish, economical condition, and cold being active without heating the back protrusions. Remorhaz are always eager to eat, since they are active in proportion to how much they consume. Because of their metabolism, polar worms make ambush their primary hunting mode, and only occasionally travel in search of prey. A remorhaz will lay in wait along a well-travelled road in a "cold" state. When prey is sighted, the remorhaz heats its back protrusions, then attacks. Remorhaz lie dormant through periods when prey is scarce, spending at least one day in five dormant in any case. Dormant periods are always spent in the lair.

When excited (by easy prey when it is hungry) or angered by prey that eludes it, seems formidable, challenges it, or causes it pain, a remorhaz will cause its back protrusions — the blunt "horns" or projections, two of which rise at angles from the ridged top or back of each of its body segments and form two rows of craggy bumps — to become extremely hot, conducting the worm's internal digestive heat by means of internally produced and circulated fluids. This chemical, which is known as thrym, is released from its two stomachs, and pumped at great pressure into its insulated back horns. A remorhaz will then lunge at opponents and roll slightly to one side, seeking to crush or pin, and then burn with its horns. Contact with the cherry-red remorhaz horns does 10d10 points of damage to all creatures not impervious to (or protected against) heat damage; cooler, darker horns do only 5d10 points of damage. (A roll of 1-2 on 1d6 determines a hit with the darker, cooler horns.) Protection is provided by any item such as a *ring of fire resistance* — not just a normal item, such as armor or a pair of gloves, Damage to protected areas will still occur, though at a rate of 1/10 regular damage: 1d10 points for regular horns, 1d5 points for cooler horns. Non-magical metal weapons melt when touching cherry-red remorhaz horns; they gain a saving throw (vs. magical fire) against cooler horns. Magical metal weapons gain a saving throw vs. acid (with their magical bonuses, if any) against cherry-red remorhaz horns, and a saving throw vs. magical fire at + 5 (disregard magical bonuses) against the cooler horns; other magic items save vs. acid or magical fire - whichever is worse — against cherry-red remorhaz horns, and must make a saving throw of only half as much to escape damage from the cooler horns. Most creatures will feel the heat when they are within ten feet of the protrusions; these may also steam when wet. The remorhaz will usually heat its back to aid in tunneling through ice and snow, and will always do so in battle.

A remorhaz heats up its back in bursts of energy, for in doing so it is sacrificing its body heat to its chilly surroundings — and could freeze to death if it gives up too much heat. Normally, a remorhaz that decides to heat warms up for 2 rounds (during which time it has cooler horns, as above), fights for up to 6 additional rounds of cherry-red heat (less if it wins its fight, for it will shut down as soon as possible), and then follows with a further 2 rounds of cooling. A remorhaz of 10 HD or less can usually manage only one such burst every 36 hours (unless it can eat at will to provide more fuel; a nesting female remorhaz surrounded by already slain meals at hand is one example); a remorhaz of 11 to 14 HD can usually manage 10 rounds of full heat, typically in two bursts of 6 and 4 rounds each. If the air is damp, concealing plumes of fog will begin to form around the remorhaz as the cold air comes into contact with its back horns. The average remorhaz must take in one size M meal (of warm-blooded prey) every 36 hours to keep its heat at the required level, otherwise it risks the chance of freezing to death.

If a remorhaz gets too hot (usually only when removed from its normal environment), its surroundings reaching 60 degrees Fahrenheit or more, it will begin to fan itself with its wings, passing air over its back horns to carry the heat they radiate away. The remorhaz will grow sluggish (operating at half movement), but will not otherwise suffer harm from the excess heat. When it becomes cool again, the remorhaz will recover rapidly (in 1 or 2 rounds) to full movement and activity.

5. As a snakelike carnivore, the remorhaz requires special digestive processes to aid in breaking down the huge hunks of meat it swallows. Two tiny stomach glands produce and contain fluids that mix to make the liquid called thrym, which is then circulated through the creature's back protrusions and/or stomach. Digestion is achieved with both the heat and acidity of thrym. Since the liquid is extremely hot and caustic, there have been no known cases of even swallowed magical items surviving immersion in thrym, although it might be possible for artifacts and relics to do so. Molten metals and other indigestible materials are immediately excreted through a flap at the bottom of the beast's stomach. Wood and

leather are easily dissolved, if not useful to the remorhaz itself.

Obviously, anyone unfortunate enough to be swallowed by a remorhaz would be killed instantly by the tremendous -heat of the creature's body. Even major protection such as a *ring of fire resistance* would only allow a person to survive 1 or 2 rounds inside a remorhaz. DMs must be firm on this count, since killing the creature in the round after it swallows someone, then cutting the creature open to rescue the victim would still require that person to withstand at least 2 rounds of the phenomenal, acidic heat.

The remorhaz's thrym is the reason for its high magic resistance. This substance has a high anti-magic value, whether actually heating the creature or not; thus, the remorhaz's magic resistance remains the same regardless of the creature's state until it dies (see below). Note that all spells cast at a remorhaz must overcome this - 75% magic resistance, then the remorhaz's saving throws (if applicable); fire is saved against at +4, heat does no damage (being either absorbed to the benefit of the remorhaz, or lost), cold is saved against at - 3, and electrical-based attacks are saved against at par.

6. A polar worm's lair will usually consist of a number of large, smoothly rounded tunnels in ice and snow or rock, gradually descending to a bigger, central room. Tunnels in ice or snow will be very slippery, since the passing of the creature's hot back will repeatedly melt the snow, but leave it to quickly refreeze. With its numerous hard feet, the remorhaz moves at full speed on sheer ice (if it is a level surface) and has no problems in its own lair and tunnel complex. Remorhaz usually move with their heads down, their wings inactive, looking something like a walking snake. As a result of this position, remorhaz cannot snap out with their usual dexterity, and are thus somewhat vulnerable in small tunnels.

The central room of the remorhaz lair is generally about twice the width and length of the remorhaz that inhabits it, and has several entrances and exits. The nesting lair of a mated pair will be about double this size, and may have ice stalactites hanging from the ceiling as a result.

Remorhaz have no use for treasure as we know it; any treasure found will consist of belongings left behind by devoured prey — either scattered about the icy wastes or on the floor of the remorhaz's lair. Such treasure rarely consists of arms or armor, since these are usually destroyed or lost in combat, and will never be anything that cannot survive the extreme cold or inadvertent pummeling by the remorhaz. A remorhaz will take prey into its lair only when it is threatened by a storm or by other predators, if its meal is threatened by other, smaller predators too nimble or too numerous for the polar worm to slay, or if it is a male feeding a nesting female or a female hunting with its young.

7. Remorhaz mate only in glacial tunnels and icy caverns, although they range all over cold regions when hunting, often wandering far from their lairs; if they remained in a small area, food there would soon be exhausted. If food is scarce, remorhaz sometimes come down off the high glaciers into the tundra or even to the edge of muskeg regions to hunt. With the exception of mates, and mothers and their young, remorhaz hunt and lair alone; when food is plentiful, remorhaz of different sexes will instinctively wander out of their own normal ranges (each remorhaz has an informal, shifting circular territory of approximately 60 miles across) and seek one another out, establishing a nesting lair after they meet. They signal their presence at such rutting times by great, mournful roars, sounding at times like great wolves, and repeatedly rear up and flap their vestigial wings to attract notice. Remorhaz seldom fight among themselves over territory, mates, or prey.

Remorhaz females are generally larger than males (there are no 14 HD males), but they are otherwise identical in powers and appearance. A mated pair will stay together only until the eggs have hatched. During this time, the female will produce one or two grey-blue eggs 60 to 90 days after a nesting lair is created. Mating season for the remorhaz takes place in the fall of the coming year, with all pairs separating before that time. Any adult remorhaz has a 25% chance of having a mate during this season.

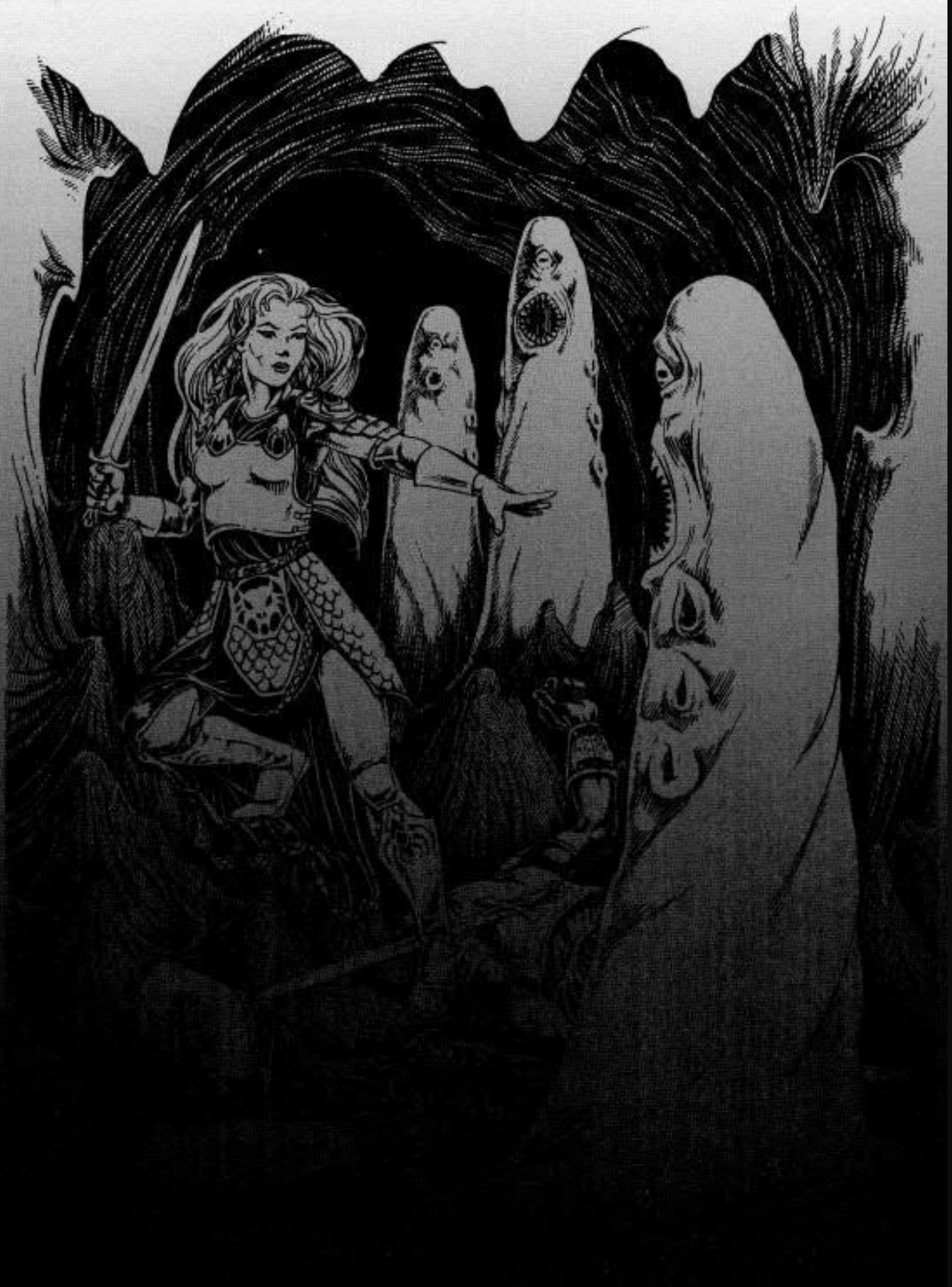
Remorhaz eggs must be kept warm (60 degrees Fahrenheit or more) or they will not hatch; any egg that is allowed to cool to the surrounding, freezing temperatures and remain that cold for more than a turn will never hatch a living young. For this reason, the female remorhaz coils about the eggs to keep them warm until they hatch (three or four months later). During this gestation period, the developing young change from helpless, soft worms to miniature remorhaz, and eat their way around the thick nutrient walls of their own eggs to freedom. The young stay in the nesting lair for approximately four months after hatching, growing in this time from 1 HD at birth to 7 HD at the end of that period. Immature remorhaz will only fight to defend themselves, biting for 2d6 points of damage, fighting as 2 HD less and attacking last in a round. The young seldom leave the lair, and will be size S at hatching, M at 2-3 HD, and L from 4 HD on. From birth, the newborn remorhaz has all the powers of the adult.

Shortly after their birth, young remorhaz are driven forth from the lair by the mother to fend for themselves, accompanying her for only a half-dozen or so daily hunts before being driven off. An adult male will leave his mate as soon as the young are born — but if the eggs fail to hatch (25% are infertile) or are damaged, destroyed, or go missing (due to predators, shifting glacial ice, and so on), he will remain patiently through one egg-laying after another until one or two live young are born. Polar worm eggs are valuable because the remorhaz make excellent guards. However, even those raised from the egg can never recognize more than one or two masters, and will attack anyone if they are hungry enough.

8. The fascinating body of the remorhaz will always reveal many useful items to the industrious. The largest specimens will yield two curving black horns the length of a man's body. These are easily hollowed out and have thus become scimitar scabbards and even unusual drinking mugs. The four sharp fangs make excellent daggers and knives, being almost a foot in length. The 28 legs are tubular in shape and very hard. They have been made into everything from canes and cups to blowguns, usually after they have been boiled to cook the succulent meat inside (a very rare delicacy indeed). The tough underskin of the beast makes excellent leather, while the scaly sections of the body make for good bucklers (they are not big enough for full-sized shields). The vestigial wings of the remorhaz are useful mostly for ornamentation, but become brittle and will eventually crumble if not immediately preserved.

In the largest remorhaz, the special stomach glands hold as much as a quart of the liquids that compose thrym. Unfortunately, few have succeeded in removing this substance from the creature without it losing its value. Though thrym requires the remorhaz's particular physiology to maintain its power, a mixture of the two chemicals after the creature's death will create a weak acidic reaction (as illustrated in the *DMG,* p. 64) — a potency that lasts for up to one day following the remorhaz's death. After this point, the individual liquids have a minor value to alchemists, who use the circulatory fluids as ingredients in the spell inks of all magics concerned with heat *(produce flame, heat metal, burning hands,* and so on), and in magics concerned with neutralizing poisons — for the fluids seem to confer upon the living remorhaz an immunity to poison. This fluid is also useful in the manufacture of potions, such as *potions of fire resistance,* and in the making of items such as *rings of fire* resistance and *rings of warmth.* Prices vary according to the scarcity of worms and differing strengths of the desires of alchemists, but are typical1y 5-10 gp per flask of each remorhaz fluid.

The cell retinae and internal fluid of the remorhaz's compound eyes are useful in the creation of *eyes of the eagle,* and in the making of special inks used to set down such spells as *infravision.* An intact remorhaz eye will bring *1-10* gp; fluid and remnants, up to 1 gp per flask.



Terror in the dark

THE ECOLOGY of the Roper

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Lorelle Ahlstrom

My name is Anna. I am alone in my bedroom, once again. I spend much of my time here, lying in bed, thinking, and wishing. I wish I could be up and about, like other children, but Father says I must stay in bed. My fever is high again. He worries so.

I wish I could go visiting again, but I'm not sure exactly how to go about it. It just happens. I can't really control how, or when, it happens, but I wish it would happen now. Sometimes it gets so lonely.

Father doesn't believe that I go visiting at all. Neither does the doctor who comes to see me. I heard them talking about it once, when they thought I was sleeping, and they said things like "fever dream" and "delirium." Besides, Father doesn't know it, but I visited him once, so I know what he really thinks.

He worries about me. An awful lot. He's afraid that I'll die, like Mama, and then he'll be all alone.

I feel sorry for Father. He spends so much of his time being very sad, and he puts so much effort into being brave in front of me. I wish I could tell him that I know exactly what he's feeling. I mean tell him and have him really believe me, because it's true. I *do* know, I've been right there in his head, and I know how terribly sad he feels. But he'd think I was only trying to comfort him, and he thinks that's his job, to comfort me. And I can't tell him about my visiting him, because he doesn't believe in that.

But it's true.

I've visited many different people. Some of them, like Mrs. Chandler in the village, I know. I visited her when she was helping a calf be born. Some of them are people I don't even know, like the time I visited a little boy who lived far away in the cold. He had a house that was made out of ice! And even though he was littler than me, his father had made him a spear of his very own, and he was learning how to hunt!

Once, I even visited a monster.

I still get goosebumps thinking about it, even though it was months ago. I've never visited it again since. But I think about it, and sometimes it gives me nightmares.

It started out the way it always does. I was in bed, with a fever, and I was kind of asleep and kind of not. It's sort of like having a dream but being awake at the same time and knowing that it *isn't* a dream. It's hard to explain. I was in bed, and I was floating in my room, looking down at my own body in the bed, and I knew I was going to go visiting.

I didn't know who I was going to visit, because I never do. I never know where I am going, either. Even when I'm done visiting, I never know exactly where it is I've just been. Like the little boy who lives in the cold place. I can still remember him and what it looks like where he lives, but I have no idea where that is, what direction, or anything. The same thing was true when I visited the monster. I don't know where I went to go visit him or how far away he was from me, because it's almost like it doesn't take any time at all to get to where I'm visiting. Just *whoosh* and I'm there.

Usually, when I get to where I'm visiting, I see right away out of the person's eyes and can "hear" what they're thinking. It wasn't that way when I visited the monster.

First of all, it was very confusing. It wasn't at all like visiting a person, or even anything *like* a person (I visited an elf once, and he was pretty much like a regular person). My body felt strange. I didn't have any arms or legs, just lots of little wiggly toes under my body.[1] My

1. Contrary to popular belief (and many an artist's depiction), the standard roper does not have tentacles waving around in all directions. Rather, it has a series of six sticky strands, three on each side, that it normally keeps within its body cavity. However, these strands can be extended at great speeds to capture prey. Once "fired," the strands cannot be manipulated by the roper, other than by being drawn back into the roper's body, dragging prey to the creature. On the other hand, the storoper, or "stone roper," does have 20'-long tentacles which it keeps extended from its body at all times, and this no doubt adds to the confusion.

Underneath the roper's body are its many cilia-like appendages. These provide the roper with its limited movement rate and are able to excrete the same sticky substance found on the ropers web-like strands. This anchors the roper when it drags large prey toward itself and also allows it to climb walls and hang from ceilings.

2. Ropers have a rough surface exterior, similar to rock in both appearance and texture. They are able to alter the color of their skin (which is normally a yellowish-tinted grey) in order to blend in with the rock surrounding them. Their tough outer skin not only gives ropers AC0, but it also prevents the roper's body heat from being detected by infravision. Furthermore, it is a good insulator, causing the roper to suffer only half-damage from cold-based attacks. On the other hand, ropers are unusually vulnerable to fire, saving at -4 against fire-based attacks.

To further their camouflage abilities, ropers are also extremely malleable beings, able to squeeze their bodies into a variety of shapes that help them to blend in with their environment. They can easily be mistaken for a stalagmite or a stalactite. By compressing its body down, a roper can assume a boulder-like

skin was hard on the outside, but kind of squishy on the inside, like it could be squashed into all kinds of different shapes, like clay.[2] And I had only one eye, in the middle of my forehead, but I didn't have a forehead. I didn't have a head, either. My "face" was at the top of my body, but all I had on it was one eye and a huge mouth with sharp teeth. There were ears, too, but they were tiny, and you probably wouldn't be able to see them.[3]

Once I had gotten settled into the monster's body, I started to take a look around and tried to figure out where I was. It was underground, that was for sure, because I was in this big cave, with all kinds of tunnels coming into it and going out of it. It was dark in the cave, I'm sure, because there weren't any lamps or fires or anything. That was the weird thing: I could see just fine, like it was only twilight.[4]

I think the monster was sleeping or something, because even though it had its eye open, it wasn't really paying attention to anything or thinking of anything. When I visit somebody, I always see what they see and hear what they hear, and I even know what they think. That's how I know how frightened Father is for me. But the monster was just sitting there.[5]

So far, I wasn't scared. The monster was weird to visit, but it hadn't done anything scary. In fact, it hadn't done much at all except just sit. I started to get bored, being in a sleeping monster. I started poking around in its head, looking at its memories.

The monster was really strange! When it was born, it looked just like a little rock. Well, not a really little one, but little compared to the full-grown monster. For the first six weeks of its life, all the monster did was sit there, absorbing some kind of energy from the ground below it.[6] It grew a little bit each day, but it never moved. Then, one day, it just kind of popped up, fully grown.

I was just starting to go through the monster's early memories and hadn't really found anything that exciting when the monster "woke up." It felt movement up ahead, and turned its body (I can't really say it turned its head, but it did kind of twist just the top part of its body) to concentrate on what was coming.

To my surprise, it was an elf! I'm not sure what an elf was doing down there in a monster cave, but it was a strange elf anyway. His skin was black, like no elf I've ever seen. He ran like something was chasing him, because he kept looking back over his shoulder. He wasn't paying attention to where he was going. Which was too bad, because the monster got him.

That was the beginning of the scary part. The monster let out a really loud scream, which I could hear just fine, but the elf didn't even seem to notice it. Then, the monster shot a big gooey rope from its body at the elf, and it hit him right on his chest.[7]

That got the elf's attention, because almost as soon as the rope hit the elf, the monster started reeling him in like a fisherman reels in a fish. It was a weird sensation for me, because I could feel movement inside the monster's body

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shape or fully flatten itself out so that it looks like a mere lump on the cavern floor. Due to this camouflage ability, a roper encountered in an underground setting causes its opponents to have a penalty of -2 on their surprise rolls.

3. A roper has no sense of smell. A very limited sense of touch is confined mostly to its cilia, to aid it in moving around. The roper's thick skin does not permit much feeling to penetrate. In fact, it is theoretically possible to sneak up on a roper from behind and knock it lightly on the back of its "head" without the roper being aware of the transgression. To date, however, no one has been found willing to put this theory to the test.

4. The roper has infravision capabilities to a range of 60'.

5. Ropers don't so much sleep as go into a light trance. While in such a state, they are aware of their surroundings and can readily return to a fully-alert state if necessary (if potential prey or a threat to it approaches). The trance is a way of preserving energy, much like hibernation, although the trance seldom lasts longer than a day or two. Since the roper can see only what is directly in front of it during its trance, it usually positions itself in a corner or flattens itself on the wall or ceiling of a cavern, where it is less likely to be approached undetected.

6. Ropers reproduce asexually. A roper "seed" is dropped off from the parent's body, and this "seed" looks exactly like a large rock (probably for protection, since an immature roper has no means of attack, and its main source of sensory input, its single eye, is buried in the creature's interior, until it "hatches" as a fully-grown roper). Over the next 2d4 weeks (depending on the size of the "seed" and the depth of the Underdark), the immature roper absorbs the magical emanations of the Underdark, which allow it to grow and are also responsible for some of its magical abilities — primarily, its Strength-draining strands and its high (80%) magic resistance.

As the roper's magic resistance is derived from the energy it absorbs from the Underdark, DMs might wish to rule that roper seeds that develop close to the surface (where the magical emanations are weaker) end up with a lower magic resistance — anywhere from 10-60%. In any case, once a roper "hatches," its magic resistance is fixed and does not fluctuate if it moves deeper into the Underdark or closer to the surface world.

7. Like the bat, the roper uses echolocation to find its prey. Since the roper has only one eye, it has a lack of depth perception. This would ordinarily cause it to be a poor shot when trying to "rope" prey. However, by sending out an ultrasonic pulse and hearing the echo, it is able to sense its surroundings with great accuracy. In fact, a roper can use its echolocation ability to target prey even in conditions of absolute darkness. It can likewise sense invisible creatures without penalty; however, the roper uses its echolocation only when actively hunting prey. While it would still be able to "see" a wizard it was fighting after the wizard cast an *invisibility* spell on himself, it would not be able to detect an invisible character walking past it down a dungeon corridor unless it was actively hunting at the time. The range of a roper's echolocation is 60.

Since echolocation is a hearing-based sense, it can effectively be negated by the successful casting of a *silence 15' radius* spell. Note that with the roper's 80% magic resistance, the use of any spell on a roper is usually doomed to failure, but a *silence 15' radius* spell cast on a potential roper victim masks it from the roper's echolocation sense. In this case, the roper is aware of an area of silence, but since its ultrasonic screech cannot penetrate the radius of the spell, it must rely only on its monocular vision in order to target any creatures in the spell's area of effect. In this case, the roper is at -2 to hit due to its lack of depth perception. A *deafness* spell has the same effect, but this spell must be cast directly on the roper — and make it past the creature's magic resistance.

8. The roper can fire only one strand per round, at a range of 20'-50', but once it hits, the captured prey is drawn 10' closer to the roper each round thereafter, as the strand is pulled back into the roper's body cavity. The drawing in of prey is automatic; thus a roper need not concentrate on reeling in a strand, and is free to fire additional strands in subsequent rounds. Each strand can pull up to 750 lbs. and, due to the roper's magical nature, temporarily (for 2d4 turns) drains one-half of the victim's Strength unless a saving throw vs. poison is made. The Strength loss begins 1d3 rounds after the strand's adhesion to the victim. Multiple strand attacks are possible against a single victim, and in such cases the effects of the Strength drain are cumulative. For the purposes of roper attacks, treat warriors with exceptional Strength (18/01 to 18/00) as having a Strength of 18, and round all fractions down.

To escape a roper's strand, the victim must either make a successful Open Doors roll or cause at least 6 hp damage in a single stroke with an edged weapon. The strand is AC0, and damage to the strand causes no hit point loss to the roper. Severed strands grow back in the course of a week.

Ropers have been known to use their strands in an unusual fashion: by firing several

where the gooey rope came from, almost like a snake squirming around.[8]

The elf grabbed a knife from his belt, and started hacking at the rope, but he wasn't strong enough, because he was getting closer and closer, until he was close enough for the monster to open up really wide and bite the elf. It was horrible, because the monster's mouth was so big that he fit the elf's whole head, neck, and shoulders into it before he bit down. The elf wiggled a little bit, then was still. I knew he was dead.

I was very scared, and I wanted nothing more than to return to my own room, to my own body, but I couldn't. I was trapped in the monster's body, and I couldn't get out. I couldn't even close my eyes or look away. So I sat there and watched the elf get eaten, body, clothes, and all.[9]

Once the elf was in the monster's stomach, it went back to its nap, or whatever it was. It didn't get to stay that way very long, because there was more noise coming down from the passageway. It was three more elves, dressed the same as the first one, and with the same dark skin. Two of them had swords in their hands and funny little bows and arrows strapped to their arms. The other was a lady elf with long, white hair. They came running into the cavern, and it seemed like they were chasing the first elf. That made me feel a little better, because maybe the first elf was bad or something and these three were trying to put him in jail. Anyway, at the time, I hoped that was the case, because I felt so bad about the monster killing him.

The three new elves came along the same way, toward the monster, and I wished that I could call out a warning. Then I got a shock, because right as I was yelling in my head, the monster gave a loud shriek. I thought I might have made it make that noise, but then I remembered it had made the same noise right before it attacked the first elf.

Another sticky rope shot out from the monster, and hit one of the new elves in the arm. He dropped his sword when the monster tugged him closer, and the other one jumped forward to try to cut the rope. The lady elf backed up and started doing some magic, which I was glad to see, because maybe they could kill the monster. Then I got scared, because I didn't know what would happen to me if I was still visiting the monster when it died.

The monster only had one eye, and it was concentrating on the two elves, but out of the corner of its vision I could see the lady elf vanish from sight. I never had gotten to see anyone turn invisible before.

By the time I turned my attention back at what the monster was doing, it was too late for the elves. The first one had shot a little arrow at the monster, but it bounced right off of its skin without hurting it at all. The second elf, while trying to cut the rope from his friend, got tangled up in two ropes of his own and was dragged closer too. The first elf got close enough for the monster to bite him, and it did. It felt like the elf's whole head came off in the monster's mouth, but then he let go, and let the elf's body fall to the ground.[10] The second elf was screaming out as he struggled to free himself with his sword. I think he was probably calling for help from the lady elf, but I guess he didn't know she was invisible and maybe thought she had run away. In any case, it didn't do any good, because even though he finally cut one rope off of him, the other one dragged him in until he was close enough for the monster to bite him to death too.

Once both of the elves were dead, the monster sucked its sticky ropes back into its body and started making those

strands on the cavern ceiling overhead, then releasing the adhesive cilia keeping them in place and "reeling in" their strands, they can pull themselves up to the ceiling at a remarkable speed, much quicker than if they had walked up the surface of the cavern wall with their cilia. Such maneuvers are rare and are usually performed when speed is of the essence (such as to avoid a lava flow or a black pudding).

9. As a fully-grown roper can stand 9' tall, it can swallow creatures of up to medium size. Lacking hands or arms (the strands are good only at dragging objects closer, like a winch), the roper swallows creatures whole if possible. The process of swallowing any creature larger than size S, however, takes some manipulation on the roper's part; as a result, there is no chance of it swallowing creatures whole in combat. Instead, it uses its bite to kill the victim, and then goes through the process of getting the meal into its mouth. Some ropers have been known to clamp down on an opponent and then shake it back and forth while clenched it its jaws, causing an additional 5d4 hp damage each round until the victim is dead.

10. A roper can digest only one creature of size M at a time, but this won't stop it from attacking additional prey if opportunity presents itself. In such an instance, the roper attacks and kills its prey, then lets it sit in a heap while it digests its current meal. The digestion of a medium-sized creature can take up to a full day, after which time the roper swallows its next kill. A roper with a grisly

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high-pitched shrieks again. I'm sure the lady elf couldn't hear them, but I bet she was surprised when the monster turned its "head" to look straight at her. The monster kept shrieking, over and over, and then it started moving toward her on its little crawly-feet.

I couldn't see her, but I "knew" she was there. The monster knew where she was from the noises it made. I wish it was more like sight, though, because I would have liked to have seen her face when she saw the monster coming after her. She must have been scared to know it could kind of see her, even though she was invisible.

She was pretty smart, turning invisible and all, and I think she must have seen one of these kinds of monsters before, because she was careful to stay far enough away that the monster couldn't hit her with one of its sticky ropes. At the same time, chasing the elf lady didn't seem like such a smart idea to me. The monster moved much slower than she did, so there wasn't much of a chance to catch her. Why did it need to catch her when there were still two dead elves it left behind that it could eat? Then, when I started peeking into the monster's thoughts, I saw what it was up to.

I tried calling out a warning, but that was no good, since I was just visiting. The monster wasn't trying to eat her at all! But by chasing her, it was making her back up away from it, to stay out of range of its sticky ropes. Unfortunately for the elf, it was also making her back up into the range of another of the monsters, and she didn't realize it until a sticky rope hit her square in the back. She screamed and fell to the ground and kept on screaming.[11] The monster I was visiting turned away and moved back to where it was before, by the two dead elves, so I didn't have to see the elf lady get eaten. It didn't take very long before her screaming stopped.[12]

Once the monster got back into position, it went back into its trance, seemingly just happy to sit there. Every once in a while its stomach would make a funny noise, and there would be a bubbly sensation from deep within.[13] The monster stayed like that for the rest of my visit, which fortunately didn't last much longer. Then it was *whoosh,* and I was back in my own bedroom, in my own body, and I cried and cried because of what I had seen. Father came in to comfort me, telling me that it was just a bad dream, but I knew that it wasn't. He felt my head and said I was burning up, and he got me some more of my medicine. I tried to sleep afterward, but I was too frightened. I kept thinking of the monster and scared myself thinking about what it would be like if it came out of its cave and started eating people.[14]

That was the scariest visit I ever went on. I was afraid of visiting for a long time after that, afraid that I'd end up in another monster and see other people get killed. As usual I didn't have any choice in the matter. Two weeks after the monster visit, I ended up visiting an old lady who lived in a big castle, and she was nice. A few days after that I visited the boy who lives in the ice house again. I haven't visited any monsters since. Just that one.

For that matter, I haven't visited anyone for a long time now. My fever's higher than its been in a long time, and it seems even harder to sit up in bed and look out of my window. The medicine from the doctor doesn't seem to be helping. Father is very worried.

It's been so long, but I think, very soon, I'll be going on another visit. Only this time, I don't think I'll be coming back. Father will be sad, and I will miss him. But I think, before too long . . .

. . . I'll be going to visit Mama.

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"future meal" waiting at the base of its body is less likely to cause surprise to opponents; DMs might wish to limit the surprise penalty to -1, or do away with it altogether.

11. Drow elves have a healthy respect for the roper, recognizing it as a power to be feared in the Underdark. No doubt it is for this reason that the yochlol, or "handmaiden of Lolth," adopts a form similar to that of a roper when appearing before the drow on the Prime Material Plane.

12. As solitary creatures, ropers rarely cooperate with each other and are usually found together only in areas where the hunting is good, but their high intelligence and evil cunning can make them extremely dangerous adversaries when they work together.

13. The roper's digestive processes are nothing short of incredible. Its powerful stomach acids are able to digest almost anything, from the softest flesh to the hardest metal. Two notable exceptions to this are platinum and gemstones, which the roper is unable to digest. For this reason, these substances are often found undigested inside a roper's stomach (3d6 platinum pieces, and a 35% chance of holding 5d4 gems). However, they are put to good use, grinding up the roper's meal much like the stones swallowed by some birds for the same reason.

The stomach acid from a slain roper is worth about 4 gp per ounce to an alchemist. A full-grown roper can supply 80-120 ounces of the acid, but it must be carefully harvested and stored only in platinum vials. Other roper by-products include the glands that produce the sticky glue coating its cilia and strands (the glue itself sells for about 8 gp per ounce, or 25 gp per gland, of which the roper has a total of four) and the eye, which is considered a delicacy among certain humanoid races (prices vary). Roper glue is a valuable component used in the preparation of sovereign glue.

14. Fortunately for surface-dwelling people, ropers prefer an underground existence. They leave the Underdark for the surface world only if prey becomes too scarce, and then only at night, for they find bright light uncomfortable; however, lest any spellcasters get any smart ideas, a *continual light* spell cast on a roper's eye makes for a poor weapon, as the creature can rely on its echolocation to target prey without using sight at all.

Walls

Continued from page 27

anyone within 50' of where it finally strikes must make a saving throw vs. breath weapon or be deafened and stunned for 1-2 rounds.

Table 1 in this article is based on Table 52, Structural Saving Throws, found in the *DMG.* The structure must match the number below or better to remain undamaged by the battering ram. A failed saving throw indicates that a number of cubic feet of the material is broken apart/destroyed/breached equal to the amount the roll was missed by. For example, a mage uses a *thunderstrike rod* on an earthen embankment. The defenders make an abysmal saving throw roll of 2, and thus an amount of packed earth flies apart in all directions equal to (5 - 2 = 3) cubic feet.

Steve Berman spends most of the year in New Jersey waiting for the autumn season when he can attend the local Renaissance faires. He has yet to lay seige to any castles.

Roper

"Down here in the cold, the shadows moan and twist. I hear screams and whispers spoken in the hollowed dark. I search for truths too old for mankind—the ancient wisdom I seek is too sharp, too stark. I have heard the folk-rhymes of you surface folk, warning you away from crevice and cave; you should have heeded them. My touch has sapped away your strength and made you easy prey. Now I shall learn a great deal about the real you as I slowly eat your flesh. First, tell me of your childhood..."

—from a roper to its victim

The torchlight casts strange shadows among the rocks. Stalactites sway to the flicker of the fire, but suddenly one moves against the cast of the light. A jagged fissure opens noiselessly across its shale-like side. Rock moves like sinew, and strands of stone peel off and writhe like hungry serpents before lashing out across the cavern. Clutching and grasping, the stony tentacles reach out to drag the weak toward a waiting maw of bone-crushing teeth.

Overview

Ropers rule the darkest, most forlorn caves beneath the earth, feasting on the flesh of anyone foolish or ignorant enough to trespass. Roper territory riddles the crust of the world. These strange mazes, wrought either by the ropers themselves or by whatever greater power brought these abominations into being, are filled with stalactites like giants' teeth, and strange arrays of stone to boggle any architect's wildest fever-dreams. Here ropers creep through the bones of the earth and pry untold secrets from walls of stone. They hide among outcroppings of rock or skulk around stalactites, lashing out of the

darkness with wiry strands of powerful sinew, crushing the breath from men and dragging them like screaming babes into maws of grinding stony teeth. Their rocky hides crave the dark, and they blend into the palette of the surrounding environs—most victims don't even perceive the danger until their limbs are encircled by the ropers' strength-sapping strands. Stone and rock are their silent allies, hiding them from the prying eyes of trespassing explorers until it is too late. Treasure hunters who leave no stone unturned eventually fall prey to a roper's crushing embrace as a stalagmite reveals itself to be a monster.

This stealth is hardly necessary most of the time. A roper's hide is nigh-impenetrable, turning aside axe and blade like the most ancient, dwarven-wrought stone, and even potent arcane assaults simply slide from their shale-like forms. Their ability to coordinate six attacking strands at once allows these devastating monsters to easily neutralize an entire party of interlopers from a distance. Ropers are deadly adversaries in a stand-up fight, let alone when attacking with complete surprise.

Though these prodigious predators possess the strength to tear a man in quarters or bite him clean in half, few adventurers realize ropers also possess a canny intellect and a strange philosophy spurred by darkness and agony. These cryptic killers gather in deep caves far from the light of men, lean their rocky points together like monks at vespers, and share strange mutters in the dark. What fell musings these cabals of ropers share remain forever a mystery to surface dwellers, but the urgency that drives their meetings cannot bode well for mankind.

Ecology

Ropers resemble uncarved stone in every respect, and until their strands peel from their frames and maws crack open wide, they are almost impossible to discern among rocky environs. The average specimen weighs just over a ton, and towers 10 feet in height when standing erect. A roper can hunch its form to resemble a simple boulder or outcropping of stone, or when raised up can appear as a stalagmite or roughly hewn pillar. Some look like simple conical stalagmites, but others' shapes vary widely and even more are mutable, allowing them to appear as a bevy of rock formations to further confuse trespassers. Their hides are harder than most stone and half a foot thick.

Ropers are amazing creatures—their stone-like qualities don't stop at their exteriors. They have no blood, but instead strange contractions pump fine dust through rocky canals within the roper's innards. Their strands are filaments of grainy, stone-like sinew, at once as hard as marble yet as tensile as a worked-leather whip. The strands are capable of delicate movement, but strong enough to strangle an orc to death, and strange pores in the roper's strands drain away a man's strength. The filaments numb the victim's muscles by constricting pressure points throughout the body, eventually resulting in utter paralysis, leaving him completely helpless.

A roper senses prey by means of strange, tiny filaments studding its pointed crown. These filaments behave for the most part like any normal animal's eyes, save that a roper can perceive through all of them in conjunction. It's possible these integrated eye-stalks are what allows a roper to attack with all six strands in concert.

A roper's maw can seal almost completely shut, appearing as solid, unbroken stone. When opened, this cavernous orifice spreads 2 feet wide. The circular saw-like action of a roper's jaws can crush granite, and makes even shorter work of bone and gristle. Most organic matter is spewed back out eventually. Flesh and meat are indigestible to a roper, but bone nourishes these brutal creatures, ground to dust by the gnashing action of the roper's crushing insides.

The origin of this bizarre rocky creature is a mystery. The ropers' freakish obeisance to Rovagug inspires many scholars to posit the Rough Beast's hand in their creation, but others claim these strange monsters are the result of some mad wizard's meddling. An ancient tale speaks to a gout of Rovagug's blood spilt below the earth, tainting the insides of an ancient cavern, and it is said that from this sick, polluted crucible the first ropers were born.

Alternatively, more than a few sages have pointed to the similarities between ropers and mimics, claiming a common ancestry. One noted sage, the withered elf Jacorsis, published his theory putting forth both the mimic and roper as the products of experiments conducted by a nameless archmage from antiquity. Certainly similarities

Silent as Stone

You move over stone with such natural poise that you are nearly noiseless. You are skilled in taking down a single foe in a party in absolute silence.

Prerequisite: Roper, Stealthy.

Benefit: You gain a +4 bonus to all Move Silently checks in rocky environments and may use Move Silently at no penalty while climbing. If you attack with your strands in the surprise round, you may automatically choke the victim and cover his mouth with a strand to quell any sound. If you hit with a strand in the surprise round, on your next turn make a Move Silently check at –5 opposed by the Listen check of nearby creatures; if you succeed, you silently drag your opponent 10 feet toward you, and your target's allies are unaware your target is missing (barring precautions or activities that would make this obvious, such as being tied together, your target carrying the only light source, your target speaking before the attack, and so on).

in their rocky structures and their ability to camouflage their appearance substantiate his research. It is also not uncommon for cabals of ropers to enslave or cohabitate with mimics.

Whatever their origin, ropers now firmly guide their own destiny toward some cryptic goal.

Habitat & Society

Ropers prowl the deepest chasms of the world, scorning the sun and the civilized world of the surface dwellers. They are at home among rocks and crags only, and cannot abide other environs for long. The few captured and taken from the Darklands by particularly skilled darkhunters and adventurers soon wither and die unless returned to the lightless caverns of their birth—not out of any physical need, but rather a psychological malaise that makes them will themselves to death if they cannot escape to their preferred terrain. They favor caverns riddled with craggy ridges, sanity-crushing spirals of sweeping stone, basalt towers, jagged tooth-like stalactites, or other bizarre formations of rock. Most ropers are very particular about their lairs, choosing their caverns based on whatever strange tastes toward stone formations they harbor.

Crystal Sigil

Many ropers also enjoy icy climes, and entire cabals numbering in the hundreds gather beneath glacial sheets. There in ancient ice caves they ponder whatever fell philosophies spark their inscrutable intellects. Ropers delve into the deepest meanings of darkness, pain, and the eternal nature of stone. These cabals are little known, and most sages are completely unaware of the social aspect of these strange subterranean predators. Many adventurers dismiss ropers as simple skulking threats, but those few to encounter a cabal and become mired in its devious web know the true terror of roper society. Their pensive exploration of agony and terror is unlike any other race's. They are obsessed with tormenting intruders, not because they enjoy it, but because they believe the dread experiments they conduct lead them to some gross enlightenment. They have no morality or mercy to which to appeal.

Ropers favor the flesh of humans above all other prey, but taste has little to do with this preference. Ropers take perverse pleasure in eating intelligent food capable of holding a conversation. They thrive on the pain their food experiences, and the higher the intellect of the devoured, the more a roper savors their agony. The animal pain experienced by a lower creature is nothing compared to the dread realization and succulent anguish a sentient person undergoes as he, paralyzed with weakness, watches the roper slowly munch off his limbs.

While ropers attack from ambush, they do not always kill their prey immediately. Ropers are conversant creatures, finding the art of discourse to be one of life's most luxuriant pleasures. Once a victim is sapped of his strength and rendered harmless, a roper may endeavor to entreat with him before it grinds him to paste and gulps him down. It delights on each philosophical morsel offered by a guest, making the devouring of his flesh all the more savory when the conversation begins to wane. More than a few adventurers have delayed their demise long enough for help to arrive by keeping a roper's intellectual interest. After the limbs are deadened, a sharp tongue and quick wits are still potent weapons against death at a roper's maw. Anyone able to wax philosophical might stave off the inevitable for days, perhaps with one or more limbs gone, the wound bound with a roper strand as a tourniquet.

Ropers enjoy slowly eating a particularly interesting conversationalist, keeping him alive for as long as possible and observing changes to his reasoning as he is devoured over time. Ropers take special delight in the way pain warps a fascinating mind, and the realization that one is slowly being chewed to paste provokes startlingly enlightened musings. Ropers have a saying, impossible to translate completely, that means roughly, "You cannot truly know another until you have eaten him—slowly." Ropers claim they know a living meal better than his dearest friends, lovers, or family. As the victim confronts his horrid death, he often opens his heart wide to the strange thing eating him, and the epiphanies he reaches in the throes of death are often illuminating in the extreme.

These epiphanies, especially those capable of shaking up their twisted psyches, are the only truly valuable experiences to ropers. They desire a meal that can awaken them to new and strange passageways in the mazes of their murky minds; some will even pay a high price to those who can bring particularly demented sages or warped wizards to their waiting maws.

Campaign Role

Ropers are wonderful stealth killers, and as masters of ambush they add an exciting and unexpected encounter to any subterranean jaunt through the Darklands, or even near-surface caves. However, a roper also makes for a wonderful mystery, such as an unusual cavern where any who enter never return, a rash of strange disappearances near a deep chasm, or a rickety bridge spanning a crevice where lone travelers don't make it across. Perhaps the first time the PCs explore this traveler-swallowing place, they are able to pass unmolested (the roper may be out of its lair, or perhaps lost in thought, or waiting for a solitary creature to pass by). The PCs might then have to make a difficult Spot check on their second pass through the roper's domain to discover a certain rock formation has moved, maybe giving them a few precious moments before the beast springs a deadly ambush.

Beyond simple monsters, ropers possess a considerable intellect and a deep, timeless wisdom. The strange cabals they gather could pursue any bizarre agenda toward which their twisted philosophies push them. Roper conspiracies could have far ranging consequences, resulting in the slaying of entire populations of surface dwellers. There are rumors of entire villages plunging into mile-wide sinkholes, their people swallowed up by inky darkness, their terror-filled cries echoing up from below for long days of horrific torment. This crude excavation is a simple plot compared to some of the ropers' more nebulous and convoluted schemes. Their twisted thoughts, too strange for a sane man to comprehend, lead to all manner of malfeasance. Unraveling their labyrinthine plans may prove an action-packed endeavor to any stalwart party of adventurers... as long as they remain unafraid of the dark.

Treasure

Ropers keep only what stimulates their dark thoughts: tomes of arcane lore, strange objects of power, historical oddities, and occasionally objects deemed of personal value to their favorite meals (the odd wedding ring or father's sword bequeathed to his son, etc.). If a roper finds a visitor particularly succulent, offering up delightful conversation before being ground to pulp in its maw, then the roper usually claims some trophy by which to remember this "old friend." Ropers also favor especially lustrous trinkets, anything they can gaze into for hours and lose themselves in thought. Especially shiny gold or flawless, smoky gemstones the size of a man's fist can entrance a roper for days.

Ropers are far more cunning than most give them credit for, and they always make use of any particularly powerful magic items found on their prey. Anything beyond their understanding to employ they bring to their cabal's next moot in hopes that another, wiser roper might teach them its power. Though they cannot use spell trigger or spell completion devices, and most humanoid gear won't fit them, they can use rings, necklaces, belts, cloaks, and hats, though wearing these things may make them stand out among a collection of stalagmites, and to offset this the roper often tries to look like a boulder or squat pillar upon which someone has left some treasure.

Stone Clinger

All ropers have a propensity for climbing, but some cling to rock like moss. You can even hang upside down from the ceiling of caverns or stone chambers appearing as stalactites. You can fall from a great height, piercing a victim below or crushing him flat.

Prerequisites: Roper.

Benefit: You gain a climb speed of 10 feet and all the benefits of having a climb speed (bonus to Climb checks, always able to take 10 on Climb checks, and so on). You may hang upside down indefinitely from the ceiling, and then fall on any creature passing below, dealing 2d6+6 crushing or piercing damage (your choice).

Bandying with Ropers

Many more pensive ropers hold off on devouring foes until they've tired of their conversation. They grapple foes with their strands and weaken them until their victims couldn't win a wrestling match with a puppy, then leisurely entreat with their meals-to-be, picking their brains for interesting thoughts or ideas before finishing them off. A particularly canny adventurer possessed of deep knowledge or enlightening wisdom might stave off death for hours, and even distract a roper long enough to regain some Strength and surprise the creature with a daring escape.

Every hour a roper entreats with a victim, the victim can attempt a Knowledge, bardic knowledge, or Wisdom check. The DC of the first check is 10, but every hour thereafter the successive checks increase by +2. If a victim makes a Bluff or Diplomacy check equal to the roper's DC, the monster is so engrossed in the discussion it doesn't bother to weaken the victim again.

At the GM's discretion, a PC who fails a check could try posing a riddle to the roper instead. Some ropers are suckers for a good riddle and enjoy a battle of wits using riddles as weapons. If the GM has a roper encounter planned, its worth prepping some riddles in ascending difficulty, and as long as a PC can keep answering them, he stays alive for another hour per riddle. If the player is having difficulty with a riddle, allow a DC 15 Wisdom check for a clue.

Variants

Common ropers are merely the most often encountered. Their race is bizarrely diverse, perhaps due to the mysterious link to mimics in their origin. Some ropers are far more mutable than their cousins. These ropers, sometimes called molting stranglers, shed their external rocky carapace every few months, sloughing it off like crusted dead skin. Each time their skin sheds, the ropers' form becomes less permanent and more changeable. They gain the ability to assume other forms, taking on diverse shapes, even mimicking the appearance of other creatures (in the same manner as a mimic). Additionally, their shed skin sometimes clings to a miserable semblance of life, acting as a simulacrum of the roper for a short time before dying horribly. The molting stranglers often use these pathetic shed skins to lure enemies into traps, hastening the end of their sick half-life.

Common ropers are composed of a rock-like substance similar to granite or marble, but some varieties are composed of different stone. One of the more dangerous mutations is made of a stone similar to basalt. These basalt ropers, also called vulkards, lack their cousins' vulnerability to fire, and instead are immune to it. Additionally, these ropers feed on fire, growing stronger and healthier when exposed to it; any attack against a vulkard that deals fire damage heals 1 point of damage for every 4 points of fire damage it would otherwise deal. A vulkard gets no saving throw against attacks that deal fire damage.

Far more insidious and dangerous breeds of ropers exist. Sigil crags, a strange and timeless race of ropers, manifest bizarre and powerful runes of crystal on their rocky exteriors. These sigils of power crystallize after a particularly interesting meal, which usually takes days instead of hours, and most often when the prey is a powerful spellcaster. Sigil crags often munch down the caster's hands first, leaving him incapable of casting spells with somatic components, and then explore his secrets during a lengthy feast. The secrets coughed up in the crushing embrace of a sigil crag as the hideous thing slowly masticates a caster's limbs are unthinkably powerful. Each sigil covering a sigil crag's hide allows it to cast a *symbol* spell of the GM's choosing once per day. Most sigil crags are only fortunate enough to enjoy a few sigil-worthy meals in the course of a lifetime, but particularly old and powerful ones are encrusted nearly completely in these dread runes. Sigil crags are CR 13.

A particularly gruesome breed of roper is the dreaded shardstriker. The strands of a shardstriker are jagged, stone-like threads which rend opponents to shreds even as they ensnare them. These brutish degenerates of the roper race are far less philosophical than the others, but they make up for this shortcoming with a healthy dose of sheer viciousness. These demented ropers slice victims to gory bits, often shredding them with all six of their strands. A strand attack by a shardstriker deals 1d8+4 slashing damage as well as dragging the foe. If a shardstriker hits a single foe with more than one strand, it also rends him for an additional 2d6+6 slashing damage. Shardstrikers are CR 13.

Ropers on Golarion

Ropers of Golarion worship Rovagug, whom they view as their creator. Their insidiousness knows no bounds, and their cabals explore darkness and torment for several reasons, but most pursue one goal alone—discovering the meaning of their existence. They philosophize over the mysterious, fell purpose for which Rovagug brought them into being, searching for an answer in the agony of captives and the twisted secrets of deep caverns scarring the face of the world. Some sages suggest they pursue a greater and more deadly purpose, with far-reaching ramifications that could leave entire civilizations in ruins.

Before the Age of Lost Omens, the elven geographer, explorer, and bard Talsindro Yarmaht endeavored to map the known territory of ropers. His efforts, spanning 5 centuries, nearly consumed him. Shortly before his disappearance, strange letters and crazed, spiral-patterned maps claiming some "calamitous discovery" related to his work reached his granddaughter and her human husband Drelzarg Ice-Eyes, a noted Pathfinder of his day. These letters and the accompanying maps supposedly showed a series of chasms infested with ropers in the shape of some strange and ancient glyph; they are still locked away in the Grand Lodge of Absalom, and anyone who gazes upon these maps bleeds from the eyes ever after. Whether there is any truth to this long-spun yarn or not, roper gathering places remain a point of deep interest among many subterranean explorers and sages.

Perhaps even more disturbing are rumors of strange groups of ropers inhabiting ice caves in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings. Supposedly they are responsible for disappearing children and young warriors, and are called the Takers in the Ice. Worse, sometimes these disappeared folk return years later, shriveled and tortured, gone mad from cold and years of the demented ministrations of the icy ropers. Some crawl back with only one remaining limb, the others ending in chewed stumps and scar tissue. Most cannot speak, but those who can form words usually just blather bizarre trivia until their voices crack, their eyes filled with fear. The ropers do not kidnap folk from Irrisen, perhaps due to a pact with the ice trolls, or perhaps out of fear of Baba Yaga and her daughters.

In the Darklands region of Nar-Voth, a great cave called the Endless Gulf is home to vast numbers of ropers and other creatures that cling to its walls. In Sekamina, ropers prey on travelers trying to reach the Dying Sea.

Roper

This large stalagmite suddenly twists to life, revealing a circular mouth full of jagged rocky teeth. Rope-like strands extend from its sides, lashing out at everything nearby.

Roper **CR 12**

CE Large magical beast

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +13, Spot +13

Defense

AC 24, touch 10, flat-footed 23 (+1 Dex, +14 natural, –1 size)

hp 85 (10d10 +30)

Fort +10, **Ref** +8, **Will** +8

Resist cold 10; **Immune** electricity; **SR** 30

Vulnerable fire

Offense

Spd 10 ft.

Melee bite +13 (2d6+6)

Ranged 6 strands +11 ranged touch (drag)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 50 ft.

Tactics

Before Combat Ropers conceal themselves among their rocky lairs and hold stock-still, waiting for interlopers to draw within range before springing their ambush.

During Combat Once as many targets as possible are in range, a roper lashes out with six strands and drags prey to its waiting maw, sapping its victims' strength as it does so.

Morale Ropers view humans as prey, and do not flee a fight with them any more than a man might run from a rat.

Statistics

Str 19, **Dex** 13, **Con** 17, **Int** 12, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +10; **Grp** +18

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (strand)

Skills Climb +12, Hide +10, Listen +13, Spot +13.

Languages Terran, Undercommon

Special Abilities

Drag (Ex) If a roper hits with a strand attack, the strand latches onto the opponent's body. This deals no damage but drags the stuck opponent 10 feet closer each subsequent round (provoking no attack of opportunity for this movement) unless that creature breaks free, which requires a DC 23 Escape Artist check or a DC 19 Strength check. The check DCs are Strength-based, and the Escape Artist DC includes a +4 racial bonus. A roper can draw a creature within 10 feet of itself and bite with a +4 attack bonus in the same round. A strand has 10 hit points and can be attacked by making a successful sunder attempt, but attacking a roper's strand does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If the strand is currently attached to a target, the roper takes a –4 penalty on its opposed attack roll to resist the sunder attempt. Severing a strand deals no damage to a roper.

Strands (Ex) Most encounters with a roper begin when it fires strong, sticky strands. The creature can have up to six strands at once, and it can strike up to 50 feet away (no range increment). If a strand is severed, the roper can extrude a new one on its next turn as a free action.

Weakness (Ex) A roper's strands can sap an opponent's strength. Anyone grabbed by a strand must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or take 2d8 points of Strength damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Skills Ropers have a +8 racial bonus to Hide checks in stony or icy areas.

The Ecology of the Rot Grub

A brief lecture not easily forgotten

by Ed Greenwood

The scholar Tantras held up a wriggling thing in a wooden clamp, taking care not to touch it with his hands. "Brethren of the Council, behold — a rot grub." His eyebrows raised at the ill-suppressed sputters of mirth audible in the meeting-chamber of the Council, but he did not look surprised at the reaction. He had counted on it.

"Not magnificent, I'll admit," the sage continued with a faint smile, calmly twirling the clamp. "Certainly not as impressive as, say, a dragon, but often—" he paused to look around the darkened lecture room at his invisible audience "—just as deadly, if not more so."

"Dispense with the cheap theatrics," came an authoritarian voice from the darkness in the back of the hall. "We are not impressed with your wit."

The clamp stopped twirling. A cold light entered Tantras's gaze as he looked toward the rear of the hall. "I see" he said easily, his smile twisting. "But such mighty mages as are assembled here may have reason to take an interest in the lowly rot grub. Those of you who are even now spending vast sums in order to learn the secret of achieving lichdom should think on the usefulness of a brainless, sightless body, tunneled into ruin by these creatures. Such a body might survive transformation — but then, it might not. And rot grubs will eat into carrion — yea, into anything organic their mouths can reach, including undead flesh as well as living."

The sudden stillness in the hall was unbroken for the space of a long minute. The writhing form in the grip of the clamp never ceased to move, straining to free itself. Tantras lowered his gaze to the mottled brown, tawny, and white grub.

"Well, say on, then," a nameless Council member grunted.

The clamp began again to rotate slowly in Tantras's hand. "My thanks, Brother," he said in an inflectionless tone, his smile deepening. "My part in the Converse tonight is admittedly not a matter of great import in the doings of states, nor yet a delicate point or discovery in dweomercraft ... but I believe many of us here would do well, every so often, to think on what is most basic in our existence. Aside from its value as an exercise in humility, such a practice yields practical information which may in time be of inestimable value. If Amurathor the Great had known what I am about to relate concerning the habits and nature of the rot grub, he might still be with us, and this Council a mere whimsy of outlawed, harried workers of magic. But he was ignorant, and he is gone, and we are neither.

"Harken, then: The rot grub, as you know, feeds on living flesh. With these—" he indicated with a wooden probe the successive rings of rasping, razor-sharp teeth at one end of his specimen "—they also burrow through offal, dung, dead flesh, and even such organic matter as loam or large plants. When burrowing, either for safety or to kill prey, a grub can cut away large gobbets of material and pass them rapidly, by muscular contortion, straight through its body, expelling them with some force." Tantras reached over and opened a metal box on the table beside him, revealing the topmost part of a large joint of mutton. He then held the clamp over the box and released the grub, ignoring the startled gasps from the front row of the audience. Twisting as it fell, the worm promptly vanished into the mutton, spraying tiny pieces of meat into the air from its burrowing hole. "As you see, it works with great speed, and it is this faculty that makes the rot grub so dangerous to man. All of you know that a rot grub will burrow to the heart of a man or any larger, living, and blooded creature in a very short time. Know now that rot grubs do this in order to breed.

"Rot grubs need flesh soaked in blood and rich in oxygen, such as that of the heart, in which to lay their eggs, for only in such an environment can the eggs be fertilized. They burrow there by instinct and lay a cluster of from six to a dozen eggs even if no other rot grub is present to fertilize the clutch. My experiments have shown that all grubs can lay eggs, and all can fertilize the eggs of others, although apparently not their own." Noting some stirring from the front rows, the sage lowered the wooden probe and gently poked at the mutton. "We are safe," he said, "so long as our friend is occupied."

The comment drew no laughter. The sage then reached into a pocket in his robes and brought out a slim, firmly-stoppered glass phial. "These are a bit small, but it is perilous to expose them to the air so near a live rot grub. In this phial are four rot grub eggs: small, green-white rubbery spheres a little less than the size of your smallest fingernail. As I've said, one rot grub lays a clutch of these, and if another rot grub comes into contact with the host creature, it will also burrow to the heart, locate the eggs by the scent and burrowing tube left by its predecessor, and exude a red, viscous fluid from its mouth as it rolls the eggs about and examines them. This fluid penetrates the

outer skin of the eggs. If the second rot grub arrives within twenty minutes of the laying of the eggs, successful fertilization occurs. Otherwise, the eggs die.

"Fertilized eggs and grubs can survive for long periods in carrion, even entombed corpses, or anywhere that affords protection from crushing, air, water, and extremes of temperature. They cease to move and function, and thus cease to require food, air, or like sustenance. The rot grub in this meat can wait here for a very long time for a live host — precisely how long, my knowledge at present does not answer, but at least two centuries, as the opening of the tomb of King Eurovan of the now-vanished realm of Nuvorene attests; a tomb-robber was slain by rot grubs then. In such a suspended state does the rot grub lie until vibration, the actual movement of their 'home' meat, or contact with warm, living flesh awakens it."

Tantras sighed and carefully closed the lid of the metal box with his probe. The automatic lock rattled and snapped shut. "And so it was with Amurathor, who like many of us believed that rot grubs shunned the taint of undead flesh. Yet it took but four of these little creatures to turn his enchanted and rotting body, reanimated by his sorcery into existence as a lich, into the skeleton which stands by the entryway to this hall — stripped of all matter but the very bone itself in a matter of an hour." He offered a side look to a particular spot in the back of the room. "Not bad work for cheap theatrics."

The sage dropped the wooden clamp onto the box lid and casually wiped his hands on his robes. "Behold, the rot grub. The most efficient of the natural scavengers, and the deadliest, for its size and repulsiveness lead all to underestimate it. Pray do not make this mistake yourselves. My last suggestion, my Brethren, is that you leave one of these—" he tapped the box with a finger "—with your most treasured magical devices and wealth in your vaults. A mundane defense, perhaps, but practical. No thief can resist opening a box. It has been a pleasure to speak with you. Good evening, and good fortune." Ω

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Ecology of the Rust Monster

by Shawn Merwin
illustrations by Adam Gillespie & Jason A. Engle
Cartography by Sean Macdonald

"Gather 'round, my children. You've asked for another tale, and another tale you shall have. You've heard me speak of the fiercest of the dragons that breathe fire and ice. I've told you about the deadliest of demons and the most nightmarish creatures from worlds beyond our own. I've heard tales of the bravest of warriors and most cunning of rogues, men and women brave enough to stand before villains so hideous that the very sight of them could kill a normal person. But listen closely, young ones, and I will tell you of a creature that even the boldest of heroes flees from!"

History

Sages the world over have many theories regarding the origins of the rust monster; however, none of them can say with any genuine certainty where the creatures came from or what the sources of their strange and destructive powers are. Doomsday cultists claim the creatures are harbingers of the end of civilization, while more exotic theories exist—such as the one stating the creatures were a mad wizard's invention to ward himself against the impending

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attack of the chain devils known as kyton. Each belief about the genesis of the rust monster is as wild and speculative as the next.

More reasonable experts on the matter—those who have had an opportunity to study the creatures—put forth a slightly duller but more plausible explanation: Rust monsters are creatures of the natural world whose habitats and proximity to metallic ore necessitated an evolutionary change. Scarcity of organic matter to act as food for the creatures forced a mutation that allowed them to gain sustenance through the intake of metallic material, or more precisely, *rusted* metallic material.

Much of the mystery (and the outlandish stories) behind the rust monster is a result of its habitat. The creatures, in their natural environment, tend to live deep beneath the surface, in proximity to the veins of the metallic ore that offer them sustenance. With a habitat so far removed from the population centers of most other creatures of the natural world, the rust monster is often associated with other creatures that lurk in the Underdark, particularly aberrations and other creatures from the Far Realm.

Early Encounters

As the surface-dwelling humanoids achieved advances in technology, particularly in the areas of mining and smelting, the likelihood of interaction with the rust monster increased dramatically. Unfortunately, the same technology that allowed surface dwellers to delve into the depths of the earth—iron picks, steel shovels, copper pipes—ensured that the rust monsters would be seen as little more than vile and destructive nuisances. (The Dwarven word for the creature, and its translation into other languages from the Dwarven, cannot be repeated in polite company.)

Ironically, the use of rails and ore carts brought more than a few rust monsters much closer to the surface. The rails on which the ore carts ran acted as a continuous feast for the creatures. The collection of large amounts of ore closer and closer to the surface drew the creatures ever upward, providing them with both the incentive to reach the surface and the means to survive and prosper once they got there.

Attempts at Domestication

After the existence of rust monsters was confirmed and people learned more about their strange powers, enterprising individuals saw the potential for the creatures to be used as tools and weapons.

The first documented use of the rust monster as tools of civilized forces were in battles between denizens of the underworld, particularly the drow and the duergar. Spies and agents of each group attempted to release the creatures in militarily strategic areas containing metal: armories and weapon depositories, warehouses containing metal, fortifications made of metals, and so on. One well-placed rust monster could wreak more devastation on an enemy's infrastructure and supplies than a large number of troops or a costly ritual. When more became known of the strange abilities of the rust monster, these tactics also spread to the surface world. Warring nations, looking for any advantage in their prolonged conflicts, unleashed semidomesticated rust monsters with the hopes the creatures would weaken the enemy's infrastructure.

After use of rust monsters in warfare became known, individuals with the resources to procure the creatures used them in smaller instances of sabotage. Rival businesses, mining companies, guilds, and even adventuring companies stooped to deploying rust monsters against their competitors. Often the collateral damage in these small conflicts spread far beyond the limits of the intended targets.

The uses of the rust monster in warfare and sabotage only added to their reputation as a nuisance and bringer of woe. More often than not, the creatures ended up doing more damage to their keepers than to the enemy. After a number of instances where rust monsters escaped from "farms" where domestication was attempted—resulting in the destruction of countless villages, towns, and cities—many civilized areas were forced to ban the import, domestication, and sale of the rust monster. In locations where the infrastructure makes use of metallic materials, the penalty for even possessing a rust monster can be as harsh as heavy fines, imprisonment, and even execution.

Recent Research

Interest in the rust monster as a scientific curiosity exploded when it was learned, only a few years ago, that the creature can store *residuum* in its body after eating dweomered metal. Most of the earliest encounters with rust monsters involved only nonmagic metals, so this *residuum*-storing capability of the creature was never known. Even when the creatures came into contact with the adventurers exploring deeper into the places where the rust monsters laired, very few adventurers whose magic gear was destroyed and eaten by the creatures remained in the area long enough to learn of this aspect, assuming they survived the encounters.

Individuals with more ambition than intellect or common sense, upon learning about the rust monster's ability to store *residuum* from consumed magic

metal, schemed for ways to take advantage of this ability. They reasoned that if unwanted magic items are sold for a fraction of what it cost to create them, and if the *residuum* recovered from the Disenchant Magic Item ritual is similarly just a fraction of the value of the item, then feeding unwanted or unusable magic items to rust monsters could be a lucrative business.

However, these schemers failed to realize several problems with such plans. Keeping rust monsters in captivity required a great deal of capital and attention—so many escaped captivity and did extensive damage that the cost greatly outweighed the potential gain. The sharp claws of the rust monster can dig through all but the hardest natural materials, and obviously any sort of metal restraints are useless in holding the creatures.

Rust monsters in captivity failed to breed and thrive as they do in their natural environs. To get the *residuum* from the creature, the rust monster must be cut open, thus killing the beast, and they turned out to be somehow resistant to efforts made to bring them back to life. Worst of all, the amount of time needed for the rust monster to digest the magic metal and leave the *residuum* varied. After a magic metal object is consumed, the creature must fully digest the rusted metal. Cutting open the creature too soon might reveal just useless, partially digested rusted metal. However, if the *residuum* was left inside the creature too long, it began to be absorbed by the creature—sometimes to the point that less *residuum* is present than would have been gained through a simple Disenchant Magic Item ritual.

How Much Is Enough?

DMs who want to integrate residuum found inside a rust monster into an encounter, adventure, or even campaign can use the information in the rust monster nightmare below to help figure out how much is enough. (See page 124 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for treasure guidelines, also.)

Physiology and Habitat

More frequent contact with the beast called the rust monster has moved what is known about the beast past the realm of myth into an area of scientific inquiry and study. This study has revealed much about the creature, although what has been learned has made the creature no less wondrous—and no less feared and hated for the destruction it can bring to civilization.

Natural Habitat and Social Structure

The most conducive habitat for the rust monster is a sheltered underground area rich in naturally occurring metallic ore. In such an environment, a colony of 12 to 40 rust monsters can survive for months, or even years, without the need to uproot themselves in search of additional sustenance. Such an area provides plenty of nourishment, while at the same time requiring the colony of rust monsters to work together to find and harvest their required food, protect themselves, raise their young, and survive.

In such an environment, generally three to five adult males work in cooperation with five to seven adult females in the creation of the colony. Each female, depending on the stability of the colony and the abundance of food, can rear from one to six offspring at a time. The males and nonpregnant adult females labor at digging through the stone to find the metallic ore needed to survive. Ore found is brought back to the colony and shared. The newborn rust monster lacks sufficient secretion from its rust sac to oxidize its own meals, so it relies on others to prepare its food for consumption.

Once the needs of the pregnant females and young in the colony are met, the adults consume the rest of the food. If there is not enough food to meet the nutritional needs of the adult population, the adults generally fight over the food. Generally these fights are not to the death, although in this way the weaker of the rust monsters are generally forced to leave the colony and find their own food sources elsewhere. However, the rust monster is by no means any more intelligent that any other beast. This social organization that serves a rust monster colony is instinctual rather than contractual.

Colonies are formed when one dominant male or female finds an abundance of ore and allows other rust monsters to join it in working the ore. In this way, the creatures are not unlike the dwarves that revile them so. In the absence of abundant ore, the rust monsters—whether male or female—tend to be solitary creatures searching for enough food to survive.

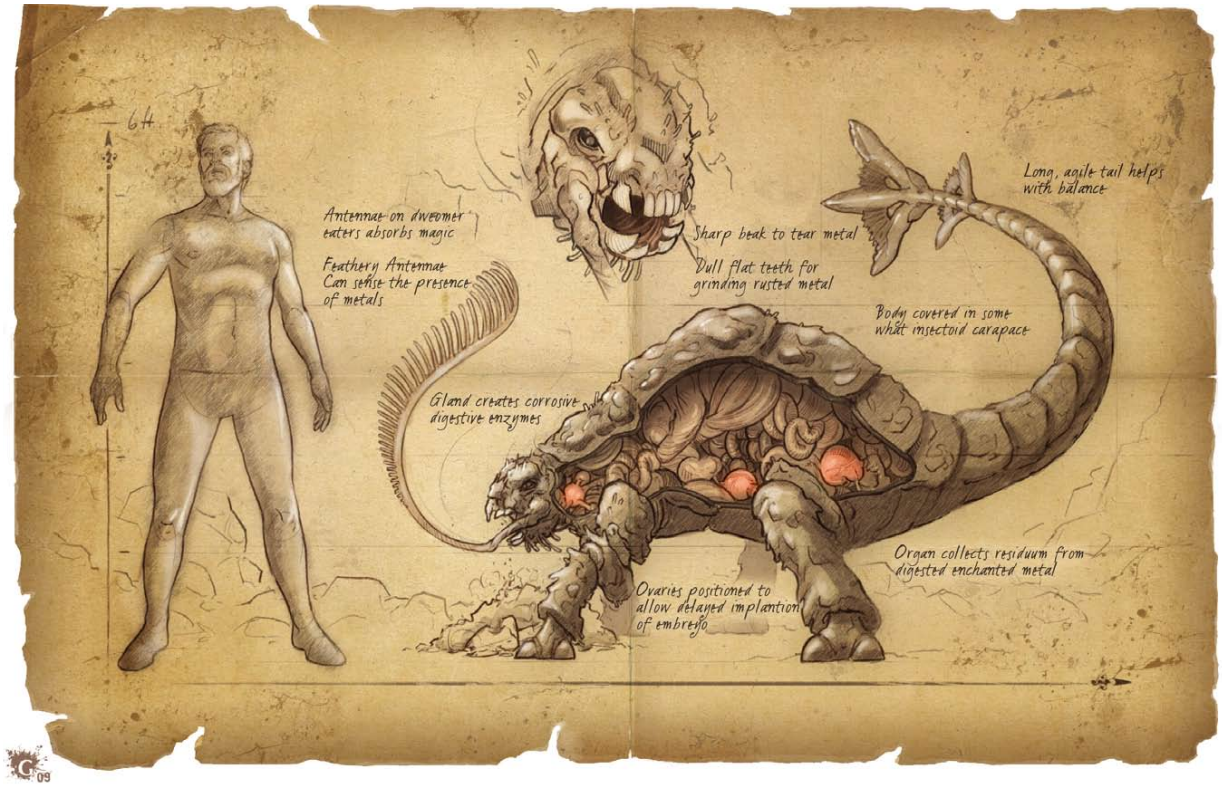
Oddly enough, experts on the rust monster believe that while other species thrive in an environment where food is overabundant, the rust monsters' social structure breaks down when in such conditions. Two primary reasons exist for this. First, when an overabundance of food is present, the rust monster tends

to reproduce too quickly and prolifically, and soon the colony breaks down with too many young.

The other reason has to do with the chemical reaction that takes place in a male rust monster when it digests too much metal, or metal that is too pure. A rust monster partaking of too much metal or too refined a metal has a reaction not unlike a humanoid addicted to drugs or alcohol. The creature craves more of the metal, becomes unwilling to share the metal with other rust monsters, and finally becomes violent if it cannot have as much metal as it needs. This veritable addiction can lead to a breakdown of the colony's delicately balanced social structure. Even something such as a typical party of adventurers, with all their worked metal gear, can disrupt a thriving colony. As soon as the males get a taste of the iron or steel weapons and armor, the gold or platinum coins, and the silver jewelry, the violent reaction is triggered and the colony falls apart from the inside.

Physiology and Diet

Whatever the origins of the rust monster, none can dispute that the creature's main source of nourishment is rusted metallic material. Experts on the creature differ on whether the process by which the rust monster survives is natural or magical, but none deny that it is fascinating.



The process begins in a gland located in the rust monster's throat called the rust sac. This gland produces an oxidizing substance that, when it comes into contact with metal, rusts it practically immediately. Ducts lead from the rust sac into the creature's mouth, which mean that the creature's entire mouth—including the teeth and tongue—are awash in this substance. As a result, a rust monster's bite, in addition to being very powerful, delivers enough of the oxidizing substance to be harmful to any metallic substances, including armor and weapons.

Ducts also lead from the rust sac into the blood of the creature. While the amount of the oxidizing substance in the blood is less than what is in the mouth, enough is present in the blood to pose a risk to weapons that draw blood when they strike the rust monster.

Interestingly, experiments have shown that in the absence of metallic substances, rust monsters seem partial to mammalian blood as a food source. Many experts believe that rust monsters are therefore naturally susceptible to a form of vampirism. More preposterous theories claim that mammalian blood contains metal! It is undisputable, however, that when no other natural form of metal is present, but an abundance of blood is nearby, the rust monster is drawn to the blood as if it was metallic.

The most basic staple of the rust monster's diet is unworked metallic ore. The rust monster can sense such ore if within several hundred feet of it, even through solid rock. Using its powerful claws for digging, the creature can slowly and methodically tunnel through solid rock until it reaches the ore. Its beaklike mouth can clear rock away from the metallic substance it is seeking. After using the oxidizing substance in its saliva to rust the ore, the creature's

large, flat, platelike teeth grind the rusted metal into digestible flakes.

The rust flakes travel down the throat and into the stomach, as with other mammalian creatures. In addition to other glands that supply the stomach with substances for digestion, another gland produces a substance with the sole purpose of turning the rusted material into nutrients that the rust monster's body can use.

In the course of a normal meal, the rust monster consumes a large amount of rock. This rocky material that is swallowed with the metal is held in the stomach for a short time, and it assists in the processing and digesting of the metal into the nutrients used by the body. Some also believe that small amounts of the rock are used in the creation of the bony plates that cover the rust monster's body. Undigested and unused rock material is eliminated from the body as normal waste.

As was mentioned previously, the rust monster's physiology is designed best for the consumption and processing of naturally occurring metallic ore. The baser metals, such as iron and copper, are sufficient for the survival and prosperity of the creature. More precious metals, particularly gold and platinum, can sustain a rust monster, although they are of less nutritional value: this is akin to a child preferring sweets even though onions and potatoes are better for their growth and development. However, the rust monster does not have a mother that can enforce the proper diet with a stern word or a hickory switch.

Where the rust monster is truly at risk, however, is in the consumption of metal that has been worked. The smelting process removes the impurities from the ore, making it highly concentrated. Whereas they normally consume ore mixed with dirt, rock, and other substances found in the earth, smelted metal is quite pure. Imagine if a man raised drinking watered-down grog or wine suddenly found the finest elven wine or the strongest dwarven ale at his table. The difference would be not only noticeable, but also quite deleterious indeed!

And so it is similar with the rust monster and worked metal. The unadulterated strength of the metal affects the rust monster's system and brings about changes in the creature. The powerful rush of nutrients into the rust monster's system overpowers the creature's social instincts. It craves the more concentrated metal to the point that it is willing to destroy its own kind to get it. While just one instance of exposure to worked metal can cause a creature's behavior to change slightly, it takes repeated and prolonged ingestion of such metal to cause the creature to truly lose its way. But as we will see, the imbibing of worked metal is not the only thing that can cause a rust monster to change in truly dramatic ways.

Instant Transformations

While the ability of the rust monster to instantly oxidize and consume metal is totally amazing by itself, what happens when it eats enchanted metal is nothing short of miraculous. As wizards and sages have known for years, *residuum* is an element left behind when a magic item is disenchanted. That *residuum* can thereafter be used to fuel a variety of rituals.

Through a purely coincidental encounter between a rust monster and an enraged barbarian who lost his magic executioner's axe to the beast, it was learned that the rust monster has a special organ dubbed the *residuum pouch*. This small sac is connected to the digestive track of the rust monster between the stomach and the intestines. After the magic metal is digested, the *residuum* is diverted from the intestines to the *residuum pouch*. Once there, the *residuum* sits for a period of time. During this time, which can be anywhere from a few minutes to several weeks, the *residuum* is absorbed into the rust monster's body through ducts from the *residuum pouch* back into the intestines.

The rust monster nightmare still needs to consume rusted metal to survive, but it can also gain sustenance from magic. For example, a wizard who uses a magic orb to attack the rust monster nightmare might find that the some of the orb's power is absorbed, causing the orb to decay, even though the orb never makes contact with the creature. An item might even be rendered useless if it decays enough. The rust monster nightmare can then consume the magic item, just as it could eat a rusted metal item.

The speed of the transformation between rust monster and rust monster nightmare is astounding. Some experts believe that the long antennae and pluming tail of the rust monster, which is sensitive to metal, are magic conduits that are altered by the existence of *residuum* in them. Hence, an almost ritual-like occurrence takes place in the antennae and tail when those appendages are infused with *residuum*, leading to inexplicable and devastating new powers, as well as a rapid increase in size and strength.

Some of the more imaginative thinkers on the subject of the rust monster theorize that if the magical properties of the antennae and tail can react in such a way when exposed to residuum, it is likely that similar transformations could take place when exposed to other forces, such as highly magnetized metal, to different chemical compounds, or even to strong emotions.

Insectoid or Mammalian?

Many early observers of the rust monster mistakenly assumed the creature was insectoid. This was certainly an understandable mistake. The creature's hard, seemingly chitinous covering, the jointed and armored legs, and the large feathery antennae all indicated a physiology that resembled a variety of insects. (One early description of the creature was "the metal mantis.")

Closer examination of the creature, in concert with the first true vivisections of the beast, revealed otherwise. The internal organs, including one heart, one stomach, one liver, two kidneys, and most of the other organs associated with mammals, were all present. However, what makes the creature the unique specimen that it is are the extra organs it possesses.

One intriguing way in which the creature resembles some mammals is a peculiar aspect of the female's reproductive system. When an embryo in a female rust monster in fertilized, the embryo doesn't immediately implant in the uterine wall. This phenomenon, known as embryonic diapause, is present in a few other species, particular those that need to go for long periods of time without the required nutrition.

Essentially, the female rust monster can carry between one and eight fertilized embryos without truly being pregnant. The females can stay in that condition for up to 2 years. When the female's body is in a state where it is healthy enough to support the young, then the embryos implant and begin to gestate. This mechanism that ensures the female is in a situation to support its young is another hurdle to rust monster domestication. The circumstances that are necessary to allow the embryos to implant are almost impossible to maintain in a nonnatural habitat. Female rust monsters in captivity very rarely give birth, as intrepid would-be rust monster breeders continue to learn at the cost of their fortunes.

Knowledge of Rust Monster

Arcana

DC 10: Rust monsters are creatures that have the ability to rust through metal objects and then eat them.

DC 15: A rust monster can rust metal with its bite. The blood of the creature also contains a rusting substance, so even damaging them with metal can leave metal weapons at risk.

DC 20: Rust monsters that eat magic metal can store ***residuum***, a substance used in magical rituals, in their bodies. This ***residuum*** can be harvested if the creature is killed when the metal has digested but before the ***residuum*** is absorbed.

Dungeoneering

DC 15: A rust monster lair is generally recognizable by thin, winding tunnels that follow precisely the course of the vein of metal through the ground.

DC 20: A lair of a rust monster colony can be a very dangerous place, because a swarm of young rust monsters could be encountered, and one altered rust monster might also be present, such as a rust monster lodestone.

History

DC 15: Unscrupulous leaders in wars both above and below the ground have used rust monsters as weapons. In many cases, the rust monsters did more damage to their keepers than to the enemy.

DC 20: Many nations and cities have obscure laws on the books making it illegal to purchase, sell, raise, or even possess a living rust monster.

Nature

DC 15: Rust monsters are normally found far below the earth, in places where there is an abundance of naturally occurring metallic ore.

DC 20: Rust monsters are very hard to domesticate, although they are sometimes used as guards by creatures who do not normally use a great deal of metal, such as fey or lizardfolk.

Alchemical Items and Potions

The strange physiology of the rust monster means that some of its body parts, including its tail, antennae, rust sac, and residuum pouch, can be used in the creation of alchemical items and magic items such as potions. Since the rust monster is such a rare specimen, these items of power are equally rare and difficult to make.

Rust Bomb

Level: 5
Category: Volatile
Time: 1 hour
Component Cost: See below.
Market Price: 200 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature (no check)
The liquid distilled from the rust monster's rust sac spreads from the shattered glass vial across the armor of a foe, leaving gaps in its defenses.

Rust Bomb **Level 5+**

On impact, this glass vial breaks, releasing a rusting agent that begins to deteriorate metal armor.

Lvl 5	50 gp	Lvl 20	5,000 gp
Lvl 10	200 gp	Lvl 25	25,000 gp
Lvl 15	1,000 gp	Lvl 30	125,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. Make an attack: Ranged 5/10; +8 vs. Reflex; on a hit, a target wearing metal armor or that has a metallic body takes a -1 penalty to AC until the end of the encounter.

Level 10: +13 vs. Reflex
Level 15: +18 vs. Reflex.
Level 20: +23 vs. Reflex.
Level 25: +28 vs. Reflex.
Level 30: +33 vs. Reflex.

Corrosive Oil

Level: 3
Category: Oil
Time: 15 minutes
Component Cost: See below.
Market Price: 400 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature (no check)
The oil made from the blood of a rust monster can coat any nonmetallic surface. Any metallic weapon that comes into contact with the coated surface begins to lose its effectiveness.

Corrosive Oil **Level 3+**

Nonmetallic armor coated with this oil has the ability to lessen the effectiveness of metallic weapons that strike it.

Lvl 3	30 gp	Lvl 18	3,400 gp
Lvl 8	125 gp	Lvl 23	17,000 gp
Lvl 13	650 gp	Lvl 28	85,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable): Standard Action. Apply corrosive oil to a set of nonmetallic armor that you wear. The next time a creature hits you with a metallic weapon, make the following attack: +6 vs. Reflex; on a hit, the attacker takes a -1 penalty to attack rolls with that weapon and a -2 penalty to damage rolls with that weapon (save ends both). *Aftereffect*: The attacker takes a -2 penalty to damage rolls made with that weapon (save ends).

Level 8: +11 vs. Reflex; -3 penalty to damage rolls.
Level 13: +16 vs. Reflex; -5 penalty to damage rolls.
Level 18: +21 vs. Reflex; -6 penalty to damage rolls.
Level 23: +26 vs. Reflex; -8 penalty to damage rolls.
Level 28: +31 vs. Reflex; -9 penalty to damage rolls.

Level: 3+
Category: Curative
Time: 15 minutes
Component Cost: See below
Market Price: 30 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature (no check)
When dried, powdered, and prepared appropriately, a rust monster's antennae can produce a deep red powder that enables a creature to resist the effects of fear.

Bravery Powder **Level 8+**

This powder, made from the antennae of a rust monster terror, helps fortify the spirit against fear effects.

Lvl 3	30 gp	Lvl 18	3,400 gp
Lvl 8	125 gp	Lvl 23	17,000 gp
Lvl 13	650 gp	Lvl 28	85,000 gp

Power (Consumable): Minor Action. You or an adjacent ally can make a saving throw against a fear effect. The source of the effect must be 6th level or lower.
Level 8: The source of the effect must be 11th level or lower.
Level 13: The source of the effect must be 16th level or lower.
Level 18: The source of the effect must be 21st level or lower.
Level 23: The source of the effect must be 26th level or lower.
Level 28: The source of the effect must be 31st level or lower.

New Rust Monsters

The normal form of the creature is the average rust monster, although the young can be dangerous when they attack in a swarm. The text below describes other types of rust monsters that are created when the normal beasts are exposed to large amounts of certain substances. These creatures generally look exactly like a normal rust monster, but the absorption of certain substances or even emotions alters the powers that the creature possesses.

Rust Monster Lodestone

The rust monster lodestone is created when a standard rust monster consumes an unusually large amount of magnetized metal. When this transformation takes place, the creature loses its ability to secrete the metal rusting enzymes from its rust sac. It therefore loses the ability to rust metal, although it can still consume it. However, its inherent magnetism allows it to manipulate magnetic waves, thus giving it the ability to move and damage creatures from a distance.

Rust Monster Lodestone **Level 8 Controller**
Medium natural beast XP 350
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
Repulsion aura 2; enemies treat all squares within the aura as difficult terrain.
HP 86; **Bloodied** 43
AC 22; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22
Speed 6
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+13 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and target slides 1 square, or 2 squares if the target is wearing heavy armor.
Dissolve Metal (standard; encounter) ✦ **Reliable**
Targets a creature wearing or wielding a rusting magic item of 10th level or lower or any nonmagic rusting item; +12 vs. Reflex; the rusting item is destroyed.
Repulsing Strike (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
+12 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 6 damage, and target slides 3 squares, or 6 squares if the target is wearing heavy armor.
Lodestone Assault (standard; recharge when first bloodied)
Ranged 5; the rust monster lodestone slides an ally up to 5 squares, then that ally makes a melee basic attack with a +2 power bonus to the attack roll.
Lodestone Pulse (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; +12 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the rust monster lodestone's next turn. *Aftereffect:* If the target is wearing heavy armor, it is slowed (save ends).
Magnetic Burst (standard; encounter)
Area burst 2 within 10; +12 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 damage, plus an additional 4 damage if the target is wearing heavy armor, and the target is knocked prone.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 8 (+3) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 18 (+8)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 12 (+5)

Rust Monster Lodestone Tactics

The rust monster lodestone is generally found as a dominant male in a large rust monster colony. Although the lodestone cannot actually cause a weapon to rust, it can consume an already rusted piece of metal. The lodestone uses its control over magnetic forces to manipulate living creatures, whether enemies or allied rust monsters.

Rust Monster Terror

The rust monster terror mutates from a normal rust monster because of exposure to intense fear and panic absorbed from humanoid creatures that encounter it. The psychic energy released by the terrified emotions is brought into the creature through

Rust Monster Terror **Level 9 Soldier**
Medium natural beast XP 400
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP 94; **Bloodied** 47
AC 25; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19
Speed 6
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the rust monster terror's next turn.
Dissolve Metal (standard; encounter) ✦ **Reliable**
Targets a creature wearing or wielding a rusting magic item of 10th level or lower or any nonmagic rusting item; +12 vs. Reflex; the rusting item is destroyed.
Terror Burst (minor; recharge ⚃) ✦ **Fear**
Burst 1; +12 vs. Will; targets hit by the attack take a -2 penalty to attack rolls and are immobilized (save ends).
Fear Reverberation
If targeted with a fear power, the attack automatically misses, and both the rust monster terror and the attacker take ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).
Residuum Recovery
A rust monster terror consumes any item it destroys. The *residuum* from any magic items the creature has destroyed can be retrieved from its stomach. The *residuum* is worth the market value of the item (not one-fifth the value).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+7) **Dex** 10 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 2 (+0) **Cha** 12 (+5)

their sensitive antennae. The energy can then be used by the rust monster terror to attack other creatures. This change in the creature renders the rust sac useless, but the creature can still consume and destroy equipment rusted by other rust monsters.

Rust Monster Terror Tactics

A rust monster terror acts as a guard of thriving rust monster colonies. While it cannot rust metal due to changes in their rust sac, it can consume rusted metal as easily as a normal rust monster. The terror uses *terror burst* when surrounded by strong foes. Assuming there is no nearby rusted metal to consume, a rust monster terror bites its enemies and attempts to keep them away from the females and the young.

Rust Monster Nightmare **Level 24 Solo Controller**
Huge natural beast XP 30,250

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +21; blindsight 20
Repulsion aura 4; enemies treat all squares within the aura as difficult terrain.
HP 888; **Bloodied** 444
AC 38; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 36
Resist psychic 30
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, teleport 6
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 3d8 + 6 damage, and if the target is wearing magic armor, the armor starts decaying; the wearer takes a -1 penalty to AC until the end of encounter. This penalty is cumulative, to a maximum -5.

Consumptive Focus (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; +27 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 6 psychic damage, and if the target is wearing magic armor, the armor starts decaying; the wearer takes a -1 penalty to AC until the end of encounter. This penalty is cumulative, to a maximum -5.

Dissolve Item (minor 1/turn; recharge ⚄ ⚅) F **Reliable**
Targets a creature wearing or wielding a decaying magic item of 30th level or lower; +28 vs. Reflex; the decaying magic item is destroyed.

Nightmare's Flurry (standard; at-will)
The rust monster nightmare shifts 4 squares by leaping and makes four melee or ranged basic attacks.

Dweomer Feedback (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Ranged 10; +26 vs. Fortitude; 3d12 + 6 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw*: The target is unconscious (save ends). The rust monster nightmare causes the magical possession of the target to exude painful vibrations.

Psychic Trap (standard; recharge when first bloodied)
Close blast 5; +26 vs. Will; 2d12 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the rust monster nightmare's next turn. *Miss*: Half damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the rust monster nightmare's next turn.

Extradimensional Lock (immediate interrupt, when an enemy teleports into or out of a square adjacent to the rust monster nightmare; at-will)
Targets the triggering creature; +27 vs. Will; the teleport fails and the rust monster gains 20 temporary hit points.

Magic Consumption (when the rust monster nightmare is hit by an attack that uses a magic implement or weapon; at-will)
The implement or weapon used in the triggering attack begins decaying; the wielder of the weapon takes a -1 penalty to damage rolls with that weapon until the end of the encounter. This penalty is cumulative, to a maximum of -5.

Residuum Recovery
A rust monster nightmare consumes any item it destroys. The *residuum* from any magic items the creature has destroyed can be retrieved from its stomach. The *residuum* is worth the market value of the item (not one-fifth the value).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** – (telepathy)
Str 25 (+19) **Dex** 17 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+16)
Con 22 (+18) **Int** 8 (+11) **Cha** 12 (+13)

Rust Monster Nightmare

Imagine if a normal rust monster found its way into the armory of a long-abandoned dwarven stronghold—one that held numerous and powerful magic weapons, armor, and shield, and possibly even an artifact! Through constant ingestion and absorption of the highly enchanted metals of such a place, it is theoretically possible for the creature to mutate into an epic-level threat.

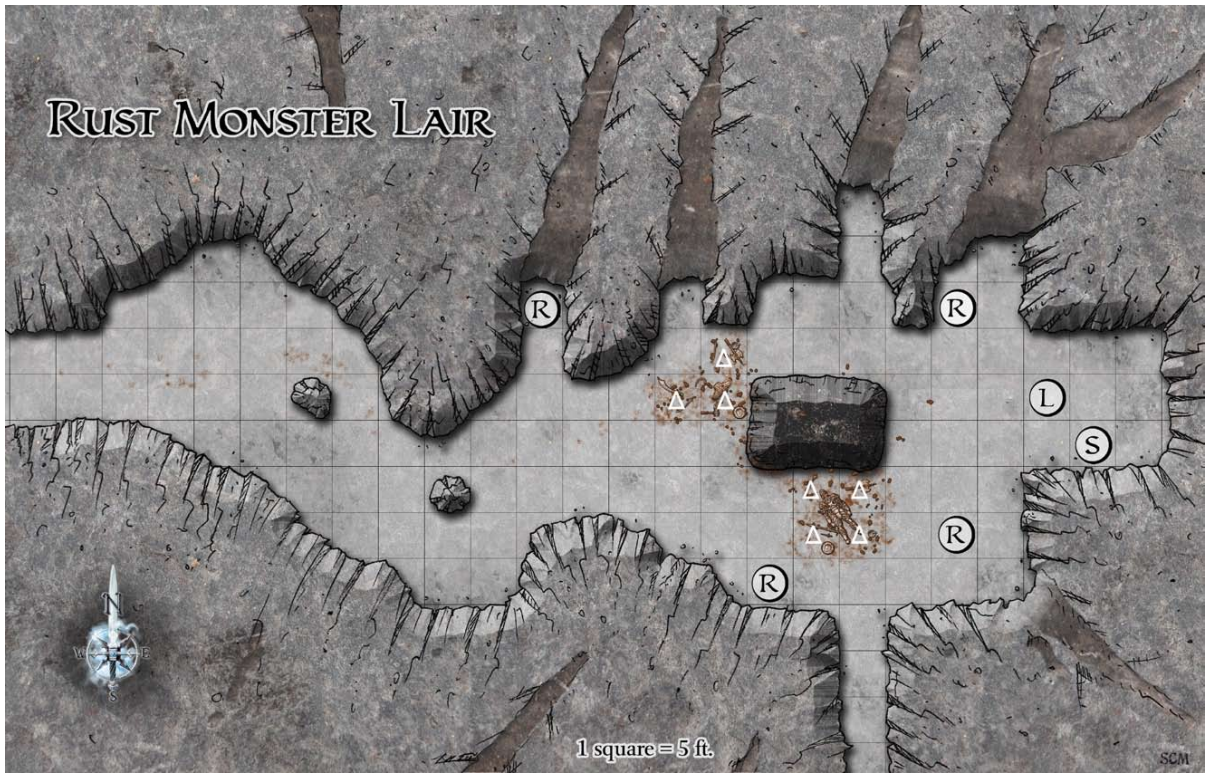
Such a creature could certainly gain a reputation as being a powerful force, to the point where legends might evolve, leading civilized folks to believe that a powerful dragon or demon was lairing there. The creature might even gain sentience, possibly collecting an army of followers and worshipers who revere the great beast for its power, size, and capabilities.

Rust Monster Nightmare Tactics

A rust monster nightmare targets creatures wearing large amounts of metal, as do most of the normal versions of the creature. It uses *dweomer feedback* as early in a battle as possible, then wades into melee range, hoping to maximize a *psychic trap*. It then uses *consumptive focus* against an armored target, or *bite* against a lightly armored enemy, and *dissolve item* if a creature already has a decaying item.

Sample Encounters

Neither the rust monsters nor their altered cousins are naturally violent or aggressive. However, their near-constant craving to consume metallic substances makes them seem like they are inherently violent when they are in the presence of metal. In their natural habitats, they are most often encoun-



tered when they are either searching for food or protecting their lairs. When they are encountered outside of their natural habitat, they are most often being used as guards or attack beasts.

Rust Monster Lair

Encounter Level 8 (1,750 XP)

The lair represented by the map shows what adventurers might find when they come upon a portion of a rust monster colony. In this particular lair, a female rust monster has recently given birth to a swarm of rust monster young. This portion of the colony is led by a rust monster lodestone. Four normal rust monsters are bringing pieces of rusted metallic ore to the swarm to give it nourishment.

Setup

Rust monster lodestone (L)
Young rust monster swarm (S)
4 rust monsters (R)

Lair Features

Colonies with pregnant females or abundant young often contain a large amount of rusted material. These piles of rusted metal could be designated as difficult terrain. To make the encounter more challenging, the DM might make the piles of rusted metal into hazardous terrain. In such a case, creatures other than the rust monsters entering the terrain might take an attack (+8 vs. Reflex; on a hit, the target takes 1d8 damage and ongoing 5 poison damage). Alternatively, PCs cut by the rusted metal could contract a disease.

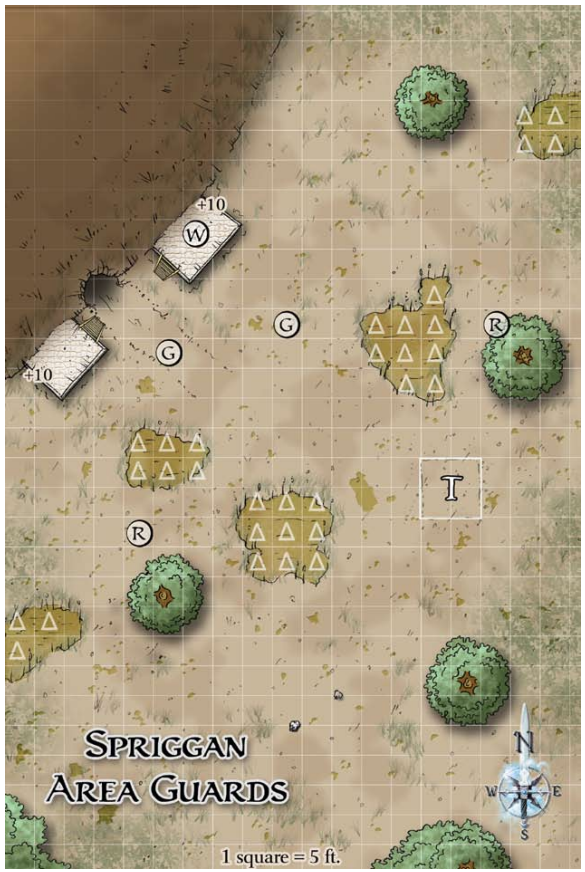
In addition, a lair containing these metallic piles and a rust monster lodestone could be spiced up by allowing the lodestone, as a minor action, to move one or more of the piles to new squares, forcing the PCs to deal with difficult terrain that can be manipulated by the enemy.

Rusty Paralysis Level 8 Disease

This disease affects those cut by rusty metal. The victim gets slowly weaker, and in the final stages the victim becomes paralyzed.

Attack: +11 vs. Fortitude
Endurance improve DC 19, maintain DC 14, worsen DC 13 or lower

The target is cured. ◀ **Initial Effect** The target loses one healing surge that it cannot regain until cured. ◀▶ The target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls. The target cannot spend healing surges.. ▶ **Final State** The target is restrained.



Rust Monster Guards (Spriggan Lair)

Encounter Level 7 (1,650 XP)

The area represented by the map shows how other creatures might use rust monsters as guards. In this case, a group of spriggans (*Monster Manual 2*, page 192) is using two rust monsters as the first line of defense for their underground lair.

Setup

Spriggan witherer (W)
2 spriggan giant souls (S)
2 rust monsters (R)
False floor pit (T)

Lair Features

A thin metal plate covering a pit might be made a threat if the rust monster was allowed to rust the plate without eating it, thus making it weak and susceptible to breaking when a certain threshold of weight was placed on it. Alternatively, the metal plate could be left whole, but the rust monsters are released when PCs step upon it. When the rust monsters rush forward to attack, they bite the metal plate instead of the PCs, thus triggering the trap while the PCs are in a precarious situation.

The most difficult problem faced by those using rust monsters as guards is keeping them in place, since they normally range far and wide until they come upon a source of metal. The spriggans have devised a method to keep the rust monsters in the area they are supposed to guard. The tricky fey creatures spread fine iron shavings in an area, such as in thick grass or buried under a thin layer of soil. The rust monsters can sense an abundance of metal in the area, but they can find only the tiniest pieces of metal through great effort. As long as no other source of metal is nearby, the rust monster might spend weeks of painstaking labor as they find, rust, and devour the shavings. The genius of this method is that it keeps the rust monsters occupied until a typical adventuring party approaches. The adventurers generally wear or carry so much metal that the rust monsters are immediately drawn to them and away from the metal shavings that held them in their guard areas.

About the Author

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by Nicholas Hudson and Nicolas Logue • illustrated by Peter Bergting • photography by Tony Moseley

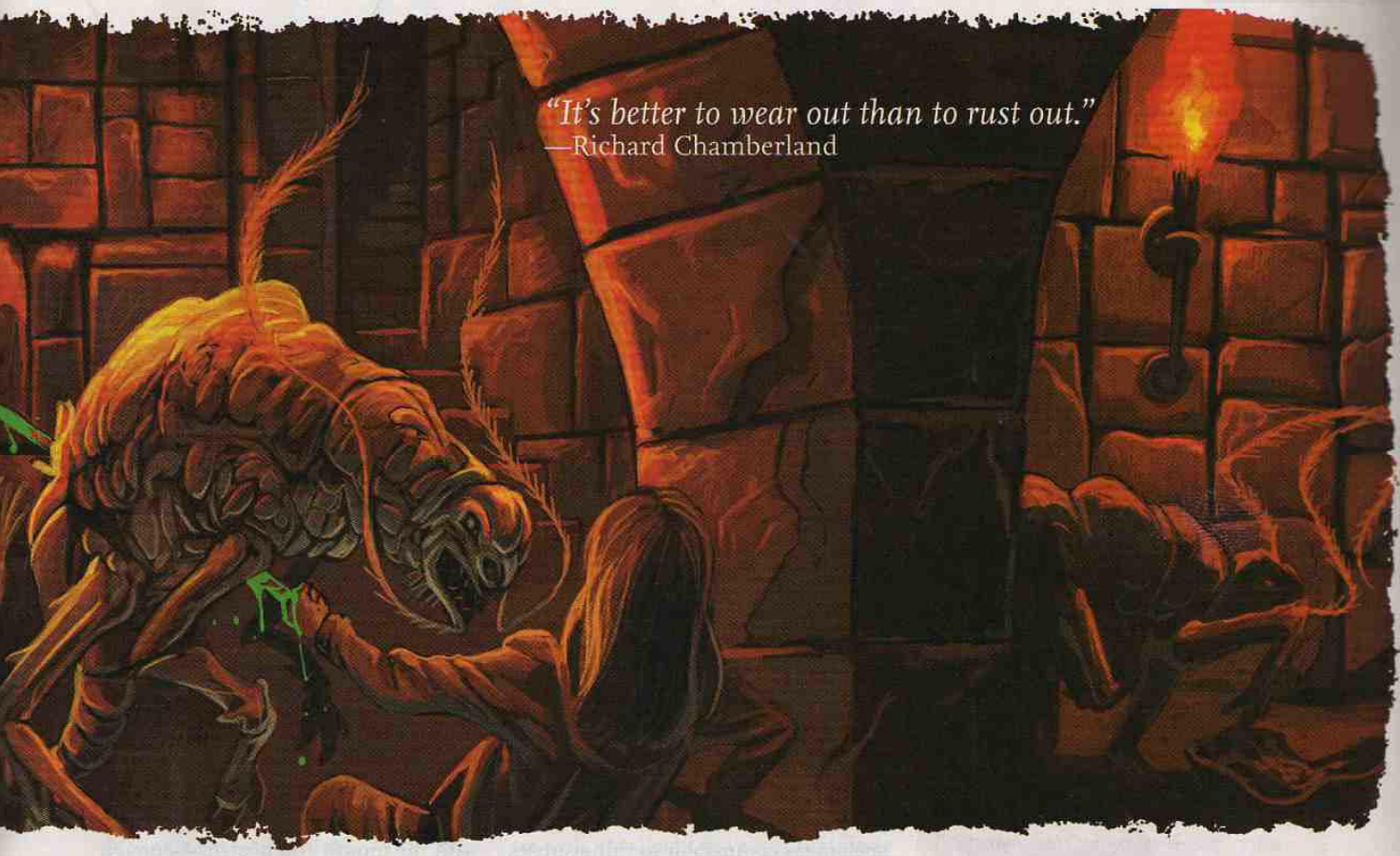
The Ecology of the RUST MONSTER

When magic and metal determine one's prowess, a beast capable of crumbling even artifacts with its merest touch holds the power to ruin armies and shatter kingdoms. Such is the might of the universally dreaded rust monster.

As the cost required to imbue even a simple weapon with magical power greatly outweighs that necessary to return life to the dead, many warriors consider tangling with rust monsters a fate worse than death. Ironically, rust monsters become more dangerous as adventurers become more powerful. As adventurers increase in wealth and experience they possess much more to lose—expensive weapons, magic armor, wonders of sorcerous might, and artifacts from the planes and beyond. While adventuring neophytes might see rust monsters as nothing more than nuisances, hardened veterans speak of these pervasive beasts with a specially held dread—for ruin might be a mere antenna swipe away.

HISTORY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters are woefully under-studied, as most adventurers would rather avoid the beasts than observe them. Even more frustrating, the creatures' peculiar physiology resists dissection by metal scalpels, and such dull-witted beasts have no records or stories of their own. Among the many fanciful theories proposed to explain the origin of rust monsters, scholars favor two.



"It's better to wear out than to rust out."
—Richard Chamberland

The majority view holds that rust monsters originated on the harsh plane of Acheron, having carved out a successful niche there. With an infinite number of metal cubes, rust monsters could feast freely on the essence of the plane itself. Some scholars believe that Acheron's crashing cubes were not always the rusted and pitted wrecks seen today, their pristine geometries eroded over the eons by rust monsters' insatiable hunger.

On Acheron, the native bladeling tribes treat rust monsters with respect and dread. The jagged pages of bladeling holy scriptures predict an apocalypse ensuing when these marauding aberrations bore a planar hole into Mechanus and rust away several key gears, bringing the multiverse to a grinding cataclysmic halt. Lending credence to this belief, some of the best-traveled planar explorers tell tales of planet-sized cubes on Acheron's farthest frontiers, skeletal hulks reduced to little more than rusted frames and home to populations of rust monsters that dwarf the number residing on all the Material Plane. Whether this doomsday paranoia is founded or not, rust monsters seem to have fared quite well on the Material Plane and now feast upon its metals as ravenously as on Acheron's.

A divergent view of the origin of rust monsters holds that they were specifically bred to prevent the rise of technology. Some scholars believe an unnamed entity who once ruled several demiplanes far from the Great Wheel pronounced technology and technological creatures to be inimical to magic and the existing planar order. This intelligence—allegedly an amalgam of sentient plant life—created rust monsters from tiny planar parasites in the hopes of eliminating the

KNOWLEDGE OF THE RUST MONSTER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check as it relates to rust monsters. Underdark explorers, those who study aberrations, and most veteran adventurers are likely to possess this information.

Knowledge (dungeoneering)

DC	Result
10	Rust monsters are dog-sized insectial creatures best known for their mothlike antennae, the touch of which corrodes metallic objects.
15	A rust monster's carapace destroys metal—even rare minerals like adamantine—just as its antennae do. Wood, stone, and nonmetalic substances are unaffected by these creatures' touch.
20	While dull-witted, rust monsters are tenacious. They can smell metal at great distances and relentlessly pursue their meals, favoring rare and valuable materials to crude metals.
25	Although they are more resistant than normal metal wares, magic weapons and armor are also vulnerable to a rust monster's corrosive powers.

TALES OF RUST AND DOOM

From humble beginnings, rust monsters have been plaguing D&D players (and pleasing DMs) for nearly three decades. Ed Greenwood even presented his take on the rust monster twenty-two years ago, in DRAGON #88, with the first "Ecology of the Rust Monster." Presented here are a few industry insiders' reminiscences regarding D&D's romance with rust.

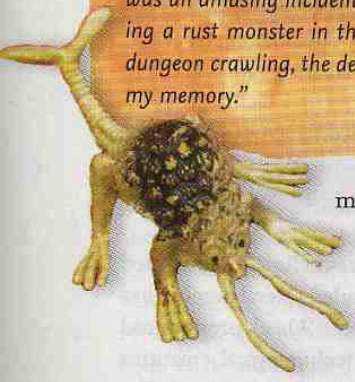
"There isn't much to relate regarding the rust monster, truth be told. When I picked up a bag of plastic monsters made in Hong Kong at the local dime store to add to the sand table array—we were playing Chainmail Fantasy Supplement *miniatures at a 1:1 scale, there was the figurine that looked rather like a lobster with a propeller on its tail.*

"As we assigned names and stats to these critters, bulette and owl bear for instance, nothing very fearsome came to mind regarding the one with the projecting feelers. Then inspiration struck me. It was a "rust monster," a thing whose touch turned ferrous metals to ferrous oxide, even magical steel armor or enchanted iron or steel weapons.

"The players soon learned to hit one with spells and arrows so as to slay it at a distance. When one appeared in the D&D game, usually in a dungeon setting, there was great haste to remove from its vicinity if there was no sure and quick means of destroying it at hand.

"Sadly, although I do recall that there was an amusing incident or two involving a rust monster in the early days of dungeon crawling, the details are lost to my memory."

—Gary Gygax



metal fundamental to many technologies. This rumor is supported in several ancient poetic sagas and songs, especially among nature-loving races and societies. Supposedly, a large concern of adventurers once sought to track down the entity responsible for the genesis of rust monsters. All they found, though, was a land reduced to a crumbled ruin—all vitality sapped from an entire realm collapsed in upon itself.

Despite their base intelligence and manner, rust monsters have come to be potent symbols. Nihilistic groups like the Doomguard favor these beasts as manifestations of the inherent weakness of all matter, while anarchists, freedom fighters, and slaves across the planes cherish the rust monster as a herald signaling the end of shackles and tyranny.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE RUST MONSTER

Aberrant creatures, rust monsters appear to be equal parts overgrown crustacean and impossibly large insect. While most grow to the size of powerful mastiffs or even small ponies, specimens comparable to rhinoceroses in size, weight, and armor thickness are sometimes found in metal-rich areas.

The most noteworthy part of a rust monster is its antennae. Covered with minuscule, stiff hairs, these antennae tie to a number of complex capillary tubes that stretch into the stomach. Rust monsters breathe in carbon dioxide and convert it into oxygen and other caustic gases. These gases are pumped into the small hairs where, upon contact with metal, the gases quickly initiate an oxidation reaction that corrodes the metal. The name "rust monster" is something of a misnomer, though, as they corrode any metal, not just iron; iron turns into rust, while other metals merely become coarse, worthless dust. A rust monster's carapace is covered in the same hairs as the antennae, corroding all metal coming into contact with its body. Only the boney flanges of a rust monster's tail are devoid of these hairs, a trait useful in the creatures' mating process.

Rust monsters are natural trackers, capable of seeking out an armored opponent as easily as a vein of valuable metal ore. When around bloodshed, the scent of iron in the blood drives hungry rust monsters into a frenzy, and starved specimens have been known to viciously attack wounded creatures.

A rust monster's tail is used for stability and breathing, with a gill-like structure that helps take in—along with the mouth and nostrils—enough carbon dioxide to produce the large supplies of oxygen they need to corrode metal. Males possess larger tails than females, which in addition to breathing they use to attract the attention of potential mates.

Rust monsters hatch from spherical, iron-colored eggs. After a brief pregnancy, a mother lays her clutch of eight to twelve sticky, melon-sized eggs into deposits of metal rich rock. Although the eggs require no special attention, both of the parents stay nearby to ward away any hunters (particularly umber hulks, which view all rust monsters—but particularly their young—as delicacies). After approximately a month the eggs hatch, each spilling out a tiny larval rust monster about the length of a man's forearm. These young have no appendages and look like nothing more than bloated, brownish maggots with moist antennae approximately a foot long. These antennae possess the same corrosive effects as an adult rust monster's, and over the next two years grow in size, along with legs, a bony tail, and a hardened carapace.

Some adventurers hunt juvenile rust monsters as they are more easily handled and turned to specific purposes than adults.

Being aberrations, mutation is natural to rust monsters, and several regional variants exist. Shaggy, blue-white frostfell rust monsters prowl some arctic regions, supplementing oxidation with extreme cold to shatter metals. Moss rust monsters dwell in damp rainforests and swamps, their infected hides riddled with dripping, mossy spores. Dun and khaki-hued waste rust monsters roam desert landscapes, reducing metal they encounter into sand instead of rust. Legends even say the al-Khalid desert was actually once the great sprawling city of a learned and terrible race that raised buildings made of steel, but a horde of rust monsters reduced it to sand in one fell night.

A few unconfirmed theories imply that rust monsters are the larval stage of some other creature. With little evidence, such theories propose obvious links between rust monsters and destructive rust dragons (see page 186 of the *Draconomicon*) or similarly formed annihilators (see page 79 of *Underdark*). Certainly many metals have magical properties, which in concert with aberrations' penchant for mutation could have caused strains of rust monsters to evolve into different creatures. Many sages believe a missing link in a rust dragon's origin might be explained by some connection—or processes—involving rust monsters and metallic dragons. Some studies claim that certain breeds of rust monsters seek out the eggs of metallic dragons and either taint the wyrmling within or transform themselves after feasting on the yolk.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF RUST MONSTERS

Rust monsters are solitary creatures. Males are uninterested in reproduction until they come into contact with a rare metal—often adamantine or mithral—that triggers psychological changes. The male harvests bits of the metal and scoops uncorroded chunks up with its tail and travels until it finds a female to present it to. Several males often compete to bring a female the largest amounts of the rarest metals, with but one earning her attention. After winning a mate, the male remains with the female until their eggs hatch, then departs. Adventurers with exotic metal items might find themselves harried by waves of hopeful male rust monsters seeking the rare metals they need to impress a female.

Like underground-dwelling locusts, rust monsters wander the depths searching for metal in any form. Upon finding a place with suitable

"The party was a typical [first edition] bunch... exploring a typical [first edition] hackfest of corridors and idols and rabid lizardmen, when they threatened to go off the map of what I had prepared earlier.

"I was being a cheesy bastard that day, so I said: 'There's a corridor there, but you see an iron golem standing in front of it.' You know, nothing challenges players like the sure-TPK encounter, so they were convinced that was the way to go. I tried, but I couldn't talk them out of it. 'There's supposed to be rich treasure in the temple section' got me nowhere. 'Your henchman are refusing to go fight that thing' didn't work either. They were determined.

"Then one of the players... remembered the rust monster they had avoided in a prior session. 'I bet we could capture that thing and kill the iron golem with it!' he says. [So] that's the way it worked out. Of course, the party demanded full experience for the kill. I refused, saying 'The rust monster killed it. It gets the XP.' Like I said, I was a cheesy bastard that day."

—Wolfgang Baur

"The rust monster... makes me recall my first experience with D&D. I don't even know what edition it was, but my best friend lent me the books, and one had a solo adventure in it. Each section had it's own portion of map drawn on graph paper that you could transfer to your own map. I don't recall much of the dungeon save for the map sections with a statue represented by a star and a rust monster. I fell in love with the concept of roleplaying (and with graph paper) that day. I must have run through the solo adventure about fifteen times in a row, each time faithfully redrawing the map... and pretending I didn't know what lay around the corner. To this day rust monsters give me a warm, fuzzy feeling (and stars make me nervous. Designers never mark a statue on a map unless it's trapped or a golem)."

—Amber E. Scott

metallic food sources, a rust monster seeks out a den, preferring cramped, defensible tunnel complexes with several exits useful for evading predators—particularly umber hulks. When injured by metal-using enemies, rust monsters hide in their tunnels, relying on the cramped space to force as much contact with their corrosive carapaces as possible.

Aside from their native Underdark, rust monsters might make their homes in a variety of other regions, eagerly relocating to any environment with an abundant metal food source. While mountains and ore-rich hills attract many of the creatures, the debris and metal-strewn sewers of most cities prove especially hospitable. Many civil officials dread rust monsters and the damage they can do on a community's substructure. Rumors of rust monsters infesting a city's depths often precede retellings of the tale of Haven City, a cliff-side port, half of which supposedly slid onto the sea when rust monsters devoured its underground supports.

Many societies with access to rust monsters seek to domesticate them, hoping to deny their enemies the advantage of metal weaponry (see page 86 of the *Arms and Equipment Guide*). In addition to war, rust monsters serve other uses. Many duergar train rust monsters to track veins of ore or employ the aberrations against enemy fortifications and spells like *wall of iron*. In some societies, enterprising surgeons use rust monster larva to dissolve and eliminate shrapnel, barbed arrowheads and other invasive metal weaponry. Rust monsters are also extremely useful for destroying cursed items, and many adventurers laden with malignant magic items seek them out. Creatures vulnerable to specific metals also often exploit the defensive potential of rust monsters. Noble fey houses and packs of lycanthropes sometimes train rust monsters as guardians, eager to destroy the substances that would do their masters harm.

ADVANCED RUST MONSTER

Rust monsters advance exclusively by Hit Dice, growing in size as they age. Such oversized specimens might be found wandering metal-rich regions or as domesticated war beasts.

Like a personification of the rage warriors feel toward rust monsters, o-Akasabi-*sama* is an ancient and cunning creature. Over the decades this monstrosity has destroyed the weapons and holy katanas of numerous master swordsmen, many of whom committed ritual suicide in disgrace. Now the ghosts of these dishonored warriors haunt the seemingly oblivious rust monster, bitterly goading others into o-Akasabi-*sama*'s corrosive reach.

O-AKASABI-SAMA **CR 8**

Advanced rust monster
N Large aberration
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Listen +10, Spot +10

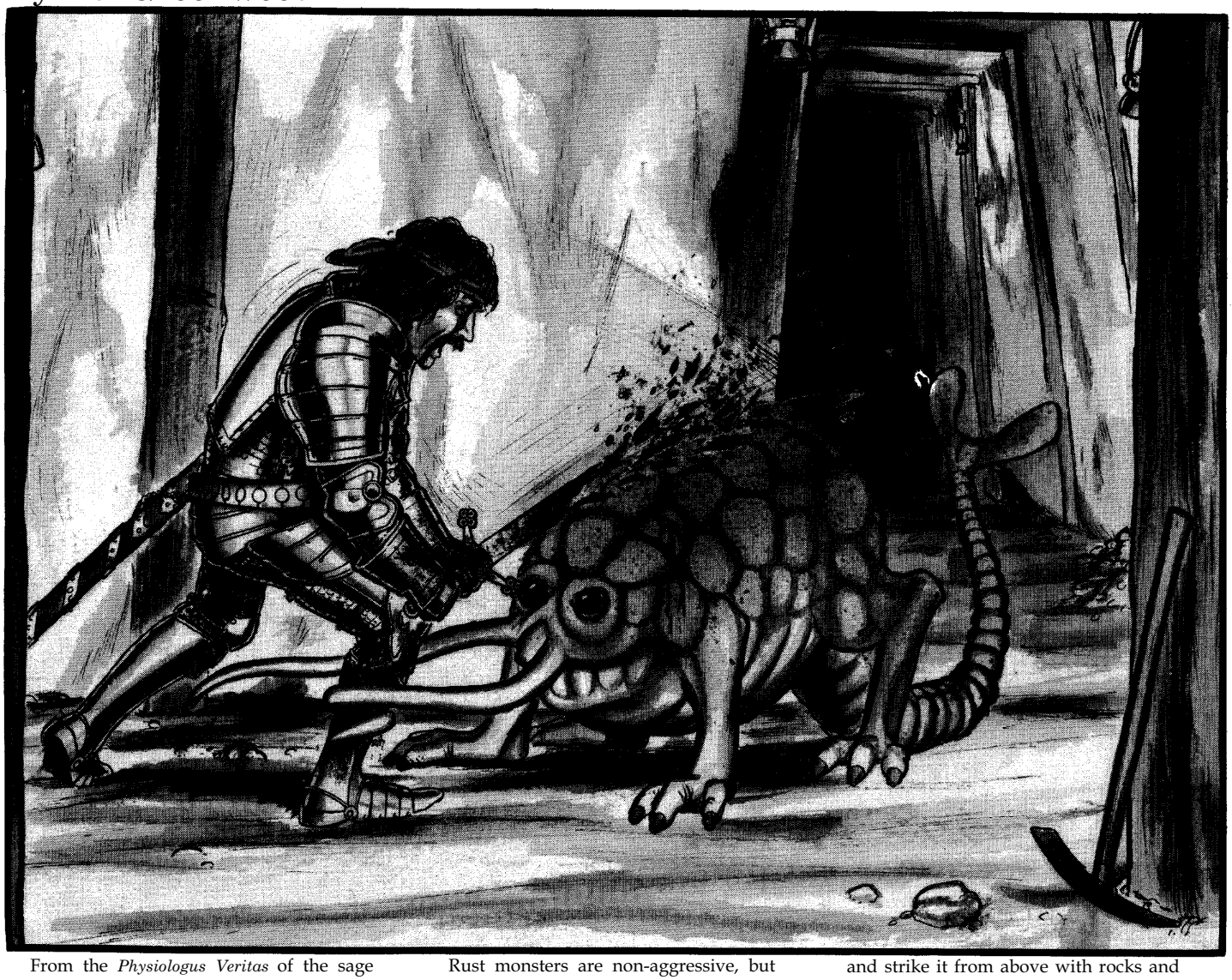
AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 17
hp 142 (15 HD)
Fort +10, **Ref** +8, **Will** +11

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee antennae touch +16 melee (rust) and bite +11 melee (1d6+3)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +10; **Grp** +20

Abilities Str 22, Dex 16, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 6
Feats Ability Focus (rust), Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Natural Armor, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Track
Skills Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +8
Rust (Ex) When o-Akasabi-*sama* makes a successful touch attack with its antennae, it causes the target metal to corrode, falling to pieces and becoming useless immediately. The touch can destroy up to a 10-foot cube of metal instantly. Magic armor and weapons, and other magic items made of metal, must succeed on a DC 28 Reflex save or be dissolved. A metal weapon that deals damage to a rust monster corrodes immediately. Wooden, stone, and other nonmetallic weapons are unaffected.
Spectral Entourage o-Akasabi-*sama* is attended at all times by at least three rust-colored wraiths that harry well-armed opponents and try to draw them into the rust monster's clutches. With his undead entourage, o-Akasabi-*sama* is EL 10.

The ecology of the rust monster

by Ed Greenwood



From the *Physiologus Veritas* of the sage Baerdalumi, with notes appended by the author:

The rust monster is a creature of curious, even comical appearance. It waddles with great speed in an ungainly, rocking motion like a raccoon cub, dubbed "gallumphing" by some long-ago observer, and chitters in the fashion of field mice. It is much respected by artisans and fighting-men, however, for its power to cause metal to rust or corrode away by its touch, which corroded metal it then devours and lives on. An example of this respect is the great mercenary general Gulgathas, who has issued standing orders that all smithies in his army's encampments are to be encircled with a bristling row of sloped, fire-hardened stakes, or propped spears, to discourage the attacks of such creatures.

Rust monsters are non-aggressive, but are both curious and utterly fearless — even, it is said, being immune to magical and psionic influence in their single-minded pursuit of metal.[1] They can smell metal from as far away as a man can make out the features of another man, and are known to prefer ferrous metals over non-ferrous sorts.[2] Metal clearly visible to the eyes but beyond smell range is apparently nonexistent to rust monsters, and they climb poorly, so the lofty upper reaches of any pole or tree that can withstand their gallumphing charges is a safe haven against the creatures. They have near-infinite patience and perseverance, however, and have been known to wait at the base of such a nearby trove for a month or more.[3]

Perhaps the best way of battling a rust monster is to crush it in a deadfall, with rolled boulders, or perhaps to trap it in a pit and strike it from above with rocks and clubs. If one must face it in open-field battle, it can often be successfully disabled by first striking at its antennae and then at its legs, possibly enabling one to escape with prized metal (magical weapon, coins, jewelry) intact. Beware its tail — an ankle-high, lashing sweep of this appendage has knocked many a warrior on his rump, and before he can rise the creature has spun about to beat upon his armor with its antennae, and greedily seek out buckles, weapons, flasks, coffers, and even mirrors buried deep in backpacks![4] It has a dexterous, sticky, six-inch-long tongue that it can extend from under its beak to catch up even the smallest flakes of metal or rust.

It is not known what rust monsters originally ate, or why they developed a bony "shell" of armor, an oddly shaped tail, or their strangely specialized antennae, but

since recorded history began these curious beasts have lived in symbiosis with a particular type of bacteria that can apparently coexist with no other species of creature.

These bacteria are found in a rust monster's antennae, stomach, and bloodstream, and have a particular need for metallic ores. They gain energy from the sun (the monster absorbs heat through its body armor and tail), and with this and ingested metallic oxides (more commonly called "rust"), they produce chemical energy (sugar) to power, repair, and nourish for growth both themselves (the bacteria cells) and their host, the rust monster.

The bacteria — a type not yet identified or reproduced by any alchemist — can upon contact with any metal (there are no known exceptions) oxidize the metal,[5] even if it is inside a rust monster. Thus, anything swallowed by a rust monster, touched by its antennae or tongue, or that draws blood from its innards will rust. A weapon that bounces harmlessly off a rust monster's tail, legs, or bony shell will be unaffected, but any metal weapon that pierces its bony shell and wounds the beast will immediately rust and become useless. Hand-held wooden piercing weapons do not have enough strength to penetrate the shell, and can only harm-its eyes and mouth. Wooden clubs are effective weapons against the beast, as are crossbow bolts and arrows.

Rust monsters cannot dig through rock, but can scratch away loose rubble and earth to uncover buried metal (in tombs or caches). They can glean sustenance from all ferrous metallic ores, and often follow the subterranean tunnels of umber hulks, purple worms, and the like, searching for exposed veins of ore in the tunnel walls, or metal treasure in the lairs of various underground creatures. Many an otyugh has dined on a rust monster that tried to root through it to get at treasure lying underneath.

The beasts will often be found exploring mines in search of tools and ironmongery. In one mine north of Mirabar, a standing guard of warriors with wooden weapons is employed to keep lurking rust monsters away from the exposed veins of ore, tools and hoists, and quarried ore. Magic-users are sometimes hired to rid a place of rust monsters by the use of "chain traps." Lengths of old, rusty chain are laid in a large circle in a strategically located cavern or other large area; at the center of the circle sits the magic-user and a few bodyguards with wooden staves. When a rust monster gallumphs up to feast, it ignores the men, the magic-user leisurely throws a fireball at the beast, and its body is rolled aside with the staves. If scavengers (such as hunting dogs or dungeon inhabitants) are not likely to dispose of the remains, the body is painted with a rune or message to warn away other adventurers. Rust monster antennae will continue to rust metal for some time after the creature's death.[6]

Rust monsters wander endlessly in search of food, their bony exterior armor protecting them from most predators. They do not pair for life or choose specific mates, but merely mate with another rust monster when circumstances allow. This prolificacy has kept the curiously unaggressive rust monster from dying out in the face of attacks from humans and natural predators.[7]

Notes

1. A rust monster has only *animal* intelligence, and although it will choose to avoid noise, light, and groups of other living creatures, these cautious habits are swept away when it smells a meal. It will pursue edible metal that it has detected regardless of attacks upon it, potential danger, or attempts to *charm, dominate,* or otherwise control its actions by magical or psionic means. (This includes a *repulsion* spell, but a *push* from a magic-user of sufficiently high level would work. A *gust of wind,* however, will not even slow a hungry, ground-hugging rust monster.) The beast's instinctive hunger for metal is too strong for the monster's dim intellect to even notice any other forces attempting to coerce it. In theory, *charm monster* could affect the beast — but only if it is not commanded to do anything that violates its basic nature. (In other words, any command it is given must directly involve getting something to eat, or the *charm* is liable to be broken.) Psionic *domination* of a rust monster is also possible, but it can be troublesome and expensive to maintain control of the monster while forcing it to act against its nature.

2. The sense of smell of a rust monster is apparently linked to magnetism; it increases in effectiveness as the amount and purity of the metal increases. Thus, traces of metal immersed or suspended in liquid, sand, or some forms of clay would escape the rust monster's attention; but rusty nails or tiny shards of metal from a notched or scratched weapon would not. The beast's acute (effective up to 9" distant) sense of smell is believed to be a result of a strain of bacteria unique to rust monsters, which also lends them their rusting ability. Rust monsters can also smell non-ferrous (non-magnetic) metal, but only at a distance of 2".

3. A rust monster can go for as long as two months between one full meal (a suit of plate mail, or equivalent weight in metal) and the next, if it does not expend much energy in the meantime. The monster will unthinkingly try to wait out a target perched in a tree, but won't wait so long that it starves to death. (The unfortunate figure in the tree will probably fall unconscious and drop out of the tree long before this anyway.)

4. If the die roll for the rust monster's chance to hit is one or two digits lower than the number needed for a successful strike with its antennae, there is a chance that it has knocked over an adversary with its tail. Any humanoid standing to the rear of the monster or on either side of it within 5 feet of its body must roll his dexterity or lower on d20 to avoid being knocked down by a sweep of the tail. The rust monster is +4 to hit in the following round against any single target that was knocked down; a miss indicates that the character managed to scramble to his feet and get out of reach of the antennae in time. No character who is knocked down can attack the rust monster in the following round.

Although [a rust monster] will choose to avoid noise, light, and groups of other living creatures, these cautious habits are swept away when it smells a meal.

5. The bacteria will spread rapidly across the entire surface of any metal object it comes into contact with. A dagger or sword blade or any other relatively small piece of metal will rust completely in 2 segments, and a full suit of plate mail will be corroded within 5 segments after contact. Metal weapons that pierce a rust monster's body will do normal damage on that strike, but will rust immediately afterward. If pulled back from the creature's body and wielded again, the weapon will crumble harmlessly into chunks of rusted metal. The rust monster takes significantly longer to consume the rust — typically 1 round for a buckle, handful of coins, or dagger blade; 2 rounds for a helm; 3 rounds for a shield; 5 rounds for a complete suit of mail; and 6 rounds or longer for horse barding or full coat-of-plate. A rust monster will not stop to eat when it is being attacked, but will begin gobbling its spoils as soon as it perceives that all attacks upon it have ceased.

The DM should judge the effects of a successful rust monster antenna-strike according to the circumstances. If only a certain part of a character's body or weapon is exposed through a doorway or hole, then only that part can be affected. However, the rust does spread across the extent of an entire area of metal; if a character clad in a ring mail jersey strikes at a rust monster through a small opening and his arm is hit by one of the antennae, the *rust* will travel along the jersey and the character will soon lose his shirt. The corrosive action does not "jump" across gaps between two objects or areas of metal. For instance, a character who wears metal leggings and a metal breastplate that aren't in contact with each other will not have all of his armor affected

When forced to fight on open ground, a rust monster will tend to strike at the nearest and largest concentration of ferrous metal.

by the same strike, in the same way that a suit of armor and a helm cannot be rusted at the same time — unless there is a metal-to-metal connection between the armor and the helm.

When forced to fight on open ground, a rust monster will tend to strike at the nearest and largest concentration of ferrous metal, but may not be right on target because of evasive action taken by the target. In such cases, the following table can be used to determine where a rust monster's antenna strike hits:

Dice roll	*Item struck*
01-36	Weapon
37-64	Shield
65-85	Armor
86-95	Helm
96-00	Minor but visible metal object (belt buckle, headband, gauntlet, etc.)

Obviously, the item struck will only be affected if it is being held, carried, or worn by the target, and only if the item is metal. Re-roll if an effect on an absent or non-metallic item is indicated, or simply assign a result if only one of the above items is applicable. The rust monster never fails to rust *something* on a successful hit, as long as the target is wearing or carrying anything metallic in plain view. If the target character or creature has no metal to be rusted, there can't be a successful hit in the first place. Even so, the rust monster will smell metal items in a backpack or belt pouch, and will relentlessly try to get at the metal it cannot see unless and until a better prospect comes along.

Metal gates, statues (even animated, magical ones such as iron golems) and the like can be affected by rust monster antennae strikes. Very large objects may take 1 or 2 rounds before rusting entirely and then collapsing. Magical objects with a "plus" get a straight saving throw, at 10% per "plus," to avoid being rusted, as per the Monster Manual. Large enchanted objects (such as an iron golem) get a saving throw vs. petrification at +1 to avoid the rusting effect. An iron golem striking a rust monster would do 4-40 points of damage, perhaps killing the creature — but if a golem carrying an edged weapon struck the antennae or the body of the rust monster with its blade and not with a crushing blow from its fist (the golem is unintelligent and does not choose its attack mode deliberately), the golem would begin to corrode immediately and would collapse into a mound of rust at the end of the following round. During this second round, it can move only 3" without toppling, and it will do only half damage on any attack.

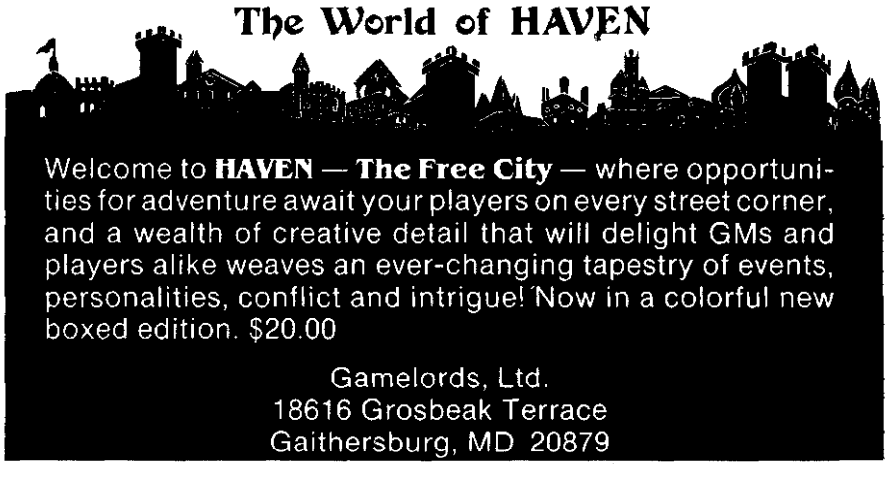
A rust monster antenna will take at least 5 hit points of damage before being severed. Rust monsters are apparently immune to all forms of poison, including the breath weapons of iron golems and those of brass, bronze, silver, green, and gold dragons (who must often fight rust monsters to defend their hoards), and liquid poisons produced by various creatures and by men (and smeared on weapons). Fire does normal damage to a rust monster, but acid rarely seems to have an effect (+3 on saving throw, half damage if save fails, no damage if save succeeds).

6. The bacteria can survive, and continue to act through the antennae, for 6-105 days after the death of the host rust monster, depending on the availability of food. The bacteria can thrive on previously devoured metallic oxides in the stomach and bloodstream of the monster, any metallic weapons left lodged in the monster's body, or newly introduced metal — but the bacteria will die when such supplies are exhausted. A rust monster antenna that was placed in a bowl of water with rust and a lot of metal could continue to thrive indefinitely, and perhaps could even be carried as a weapon for occasions of 5 days or less before the bacteria would need to have their food supply replenished.

A scavenger that devours a rust monster would have any previously devoured metallic treasure still in its body rusted and eaten by the bacteria, but the bacteria could *not* take over the creature so that its attacks would have the ability to rust. Only the creature known as the rust monster (sages have argued over a "proper" name for this beast for decades, but none has gained common acceptance, or seems likely to) can support the mysterious bacteria, and rust monsters do not eat each other. In the example of the scavenger mentioned above, the bacteria would die when its metallic food in the scavenger's stomach was used up, without harming the host, and would be excreted.

7. Rust monsters mate often, following a ritual in which each one of the pair makes agitated chittering noises for several minutes. If one of the adults is fertilized, a young rust monster will begin to form in the body of the parent. It will be born 4-7 months later, live, whole, and active, and will usually accompany its parent until it is full grown.

Newly born rust monsters have all the powers of an adult (there is a transferal of some of the bacteria from parent to child), but have only 1+4 HD and are size S, with a 5-foot-long tail and 3-foot-long antennae. Such a "rusty" will grow rapidly to a young, 3 HD, M-size form, with full adult-size tail (10′) and antennae (7′), usually within 8 months or so, but this growth is dependent on food supply. After a year of life a rust monster is a mature adult and can mate with others of its kind. Ω



Rust Monster

"The only warning we had was the vein in front of us melting away beneath our picks, and then they were upon us. They were hunched and armored, like cockroaches or lobsters, with scuttling legs and thrashing tails like bony fans. The noise of their chittering mandibles was bad enough, but the worst were those antennae. Soft and feathery, they caressed us all, and where they touched the metal rusted away to dust in seconds. Some of us ran, others lay still and let them take their fill. Garesk, though—he had three gold teeth.

"He was a good man. I'll give his family the news."

—Durg Stonehollow, dwarven mine captain

Adventurers of all races and creeds despise the rust monster—not because it's especially horrifying in appearance, nor because it's irredeemably evil, nor even because it's particularly dangerous. Rather, most adventurers' loathing for the strange creatures is strictly practical: by their very nature, rust monsters destroy treasure, and it's not unheard of for an armored fighter or paladin to frantically backpedal away from a hungry rust monster, leaving only the wizard and his trusty staff to dispatch the beast.

Overview

Since the dawn of humanoid civilization, man's strength has always been in his tools. Put a sword in his hand, a shield on his arm, and a helm on his head, and whole continents will fall before him, great cities rising and thriving in his wake. Yet the wise man knows he's never more than an ounce of sharpened steel away from the bottom of the food chain, with the beasts of the field ever waiting for his soft flesh to show itself. It's for this reason that man fears the rust monster.

Hunched and armor-plated, the average rust monster is roughly 5 feet long and 200 pounds, its orange or rust-red bulk supported by four clawed legs that skitter with surprising speed when it charges. While its appearance, with constantly moving fly-like mandibles and twitching propeller tail, would be alien and frightening on its own, most who delve into the mountain crevices and mineshafts where rust monsters are most commonly found quickly recognize the creatures for what they are: voracious consumers of anything metallic. Called "locusts of the Darklands" by some dwarves, rust monsters prefer iron, steel, and other ferrous alloys, but are capable of instantly oxidizing and devouring any metal objects merely by brushing them with their moth-like antennae. How exactly this process works is a mystery to scholars and magi alike, but not even arcane items or godly relics are capable of withstanding the alien creature's unique ability. Many are the heroes who, after seeing their holy or enchanted broadswords rust and disintegrate in their hands, would rather face a dragon's wrath than the blank-eyed rust monster's mindless hunger.

Ecology

Ancient beyond compare, the rust monster's origins are lost to the sands of prehistory. While most speculate that they somehow evolved from the giant isopods and crustaceans who roam the ocean floors near geothermal vents, others posit that they might have evolved on the Elemental Plane of Earth, their endless tunneling providing younger elemental races with space to live and grow. Still others suggest that, given its supremely alien nature, the rust monster might have been introduced to Golarion by visitors from another world—possibly as an act of aggression designed to slow the march of technology by limiting younger races' access to metals, or as living power generators for some unknown future project. Whatever the case, rust monsters stand alone in their family, bearing similarities to crustaceans, insects, and mammals, but kinship to none.

The ability from which the rust monster gains its name is one of the strangest in the animal kingdom, more unusual than even the medusa's stare or the mimic's shapeshifting. Like the purple worm or the xorn, rust monsters gain their nourishment from consuming minerals instead of organic matter, but the manner in which they accomplish this is completely unique.

Like the electric eel, the rust monster's body acts like a giant battery, capable of storing vast amounts of energy and manifesting it as a unique and powerful electromagnetic field. While this field passes through the flesh of most living creatures without notice, its effect on metals is profound. When metal is contacted by the rust monster's body—particularly its feathery antennae—a circuit is closed and vast amounts of electrical current pour through the object, this supernaturally augmented electrolysis exponentially accelerating the normal rate of oxidization. To the outside observer, the metal simply disintegrates into uselessness. Inside the rust monster, however, a different story plays out.

The process of oxidization—called rusting, in ferrous metal—releases vast amounts of energy in the form of heat. This energy, gathered by the charged fields focused on the rust monster's antennae, is the true source of the rust monster's life force. Unlike most creatures, the rust monster gains no sustenance from the digestion process, having evolved to absorb energy only in its purest form. While rust monsters are frequently observed gobbling up the rust left behind after a metallic item is destroyed, this consumption serves a different function, providing the animal with key minerals it needs to form its highly metallic bones and blood. Excess metals go to form the protective carapace on its back and tail—the plates armoring a rust monster's back are made up almost exclusively of processed iron, giving the beast its typical red-orange coloration.

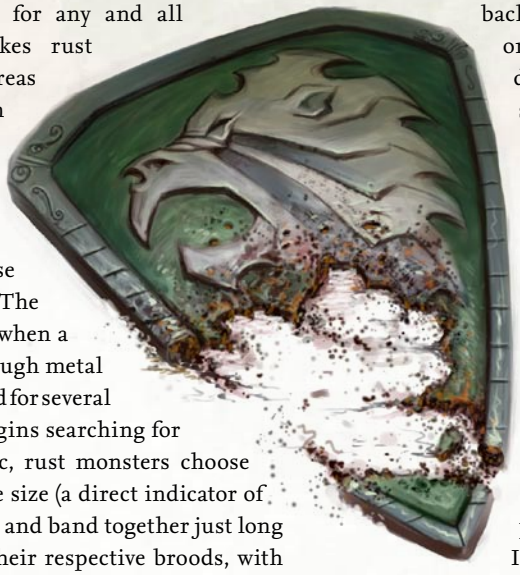
While the rust monster's feeding process is singularly elegant, it does not provide well for energy storage when compared to creatures who can transform excess food into fat stores. Instead, the rust monster is born with the instinctual knowledge that its biological clock is ticking—when its internal battery runs down, it dies. As a result, the rust monster exists in a state of constant and extreme hunger, going to any lengths to ensure that it consumes as much metal as possible. This can occasionally lead to the hungry beasts taking in more energy than they can actually accommodate, giving rise to another unique trait: the creature's strange propeller tail. After stymieing naturalists for hundreds of years, the fan-shaped appendage is now believed by researchers to be used to shed excess heat, much like a desert hare's long ears, its shape uniquely suited to dispersing excess energy in the form of radiated heat before the overzealous rust monster cooks itself.

This manipulation of electromagnetic fields is also responsible for the rust monster's ability to "smell" metal at a distance. In reality, this ability to locate even miniscule metal objects up to 90 feet away is part of a greater ability to see the complex twisting of Golarion's own magnetic fields. Around any metallic object, these natural fields distort, creating a beacon that shines bright through wood, stone, and flesh, showing the hungry monsters where to find their next meal. While their eyes are perfectly functional, able to see even in the total darkness of their subterranean homes, the weaving of the magnetic fields so overrides a rust monster's other senses that clever adventurers can frequently escape by

distracting them with large chunks of metal armor and fleeing the other way. In places where metal is scarce, however, some rust monsters have been known to hunt and kill unarmored creatures in order to harvest the iron from their blood.

Habitat & Society

Though heated competition for any and all available food sources makes rust monsters solitary by nature, areas rich enough with metal ore can sometimes attract swarms of them, the pugnacious beasts clashing violently whenever they come into conflict over a given delicacy but otherwise content to ignore each other. The exception to this is mating—when a rust monster comes upon enough metal that it feels consistently well fed for several weeks, it enters estrus and begins searching for a mate. Fully hermaphroditic, rust monsters choose their mates based on carapace size (a direct indicator of how well nourished a beast is) and band together just long enough to couple and raise their respective broods, with both parties carrying their young to term.



Unlike most insectoid creatures, rust monsters do not lay eggs; young are born live in litters of 10 to 12 juveniles, called "nymphs." At birth, rust monsters are soft and partially transparent, completely boneless but already possessing long prehensile antennae—this lack of bones helps the young pass through the parent's narrow and armored birth canal. Young are born already able to sense and consume metal, and by a year old most have already consumed enough ore to build themselves bones and carapace identical to an adult's. (Possessing the same powers but easier to manipulate than adults, rust monster nymphs can be extremely valuable in the right markets.)

Rust monsters live almost exclusively underground, and frequently inhabit iron-rich mountain regions, though they have been known to sometimes wander into populated areas and wreak havoc by consuming vast quantities of urban infrastructure. (A city with a rust monster loose in its sewer system does not quickly forget the ensuing unpleasantness.) Even in the wild, an infestation can be extremely destructive, as rust monsters burrowing through a region in search of metals can greatly increase erosion, with whole mountainsides collapsing and sloughing away as their metallic foundations are rotted out from within.

Due to their chosen environment, rust monsters are a notorious threat to dwarven societies, with the stout folk's famous forges an irresistible prize to the hungry beasts. While not an everyday occurrence, the problem of rust monster attacks is common enough that most dwarven communities of a given size keep a supply of stone weapons close at hand for just such an occasion. These hunts, when they happen, are impressive and highly ritualized affairs with a history dating back well before the dwarves emerged onto Golarion's surface. In them, young dwarven men prove their bravery by stripping naked, painting their bodies with fungus pigments, and stalking the insectoid creatures with stone spears and axes. Not all interactions between the two groups are violent, however—though rust monsters are nearly impossible to domesticate, many groups of dwarven miners use leashed specimens to lead them to the best ore deposits.

With their formidable dietary requirements, rust monsters tend to be transient, and rarely stay in one place long enough to make a proper lair. In those cases where a given rust monster finds a vein of ore rich enough to support it for a long time, the chambers it creates are jagged and random, pitted natural caverns connected by long, thin cracks and chasms where the beast has sucked a vein dry. These narrow passages, which can stretch for miles, also present convenient hiding places for rust monsters and their young in the face of outside threats.

It is unclear how long a rust monster's natural lifespan is, as most eventually die from starvation or violence, but accounts of famous rust monsters indicate that they can live for several centuries, if not longer.

Campaign Role

Rust monsters are one of the most feared opponents in the game's history, chiefly because they target the one resource which can't be easily restored by magic: a party's gear. As such, they make a great tool for putting fear into even the cockiest party, bringing terror far out of proportion to their challenge rating. Even aside from the threat they represent, rust monsters' unique abilities mix combat up by forcing the party members to modify their standard tactics and think in new ways. It should be noted, however, that rust monsters are best used sparingly and carefully, as it's easy for a player whose best weapon or quest object gets consumed by a wandering rust monster to feel "punished" by the GM.

Rust monsters don't have to be just random dungeon encounters, though. They're also perfect tools for PCs looking to destroy cursed magic items or even artifacts, and

druids face an interesting conflict in that the monsters, while aberrations and inherently an affront to nature, are also the natural enemies of corrupt modern society and technological advancement. The druid who manages to control a rust monster—perhaps even a whole pack—is capable of defending or retaking vast tracts of land from enemies who are likely to rely solely on metal weapons.

Treasure

Though rust monsters themselves have no appreciation for treasure or material wealth beyond those metallic objects which can be immediately consumed, their lairs are often strewn with valuable items cast aside by the beasts in their quest for food. Loose gems and precious stones are particularly common, as once the metal in a gem-encrusted sword or diadem is consumed, the stones that remain are ignored by the rust monster. In fact, those adventurers who succeed in cutting open a deceased rust monster often find small gems in its gizzard as well, accidentally ingested in the monster's race to devour their corroding metallic settings.

Due to their positions near or within natural metallic veins, gems are the only valuables a rust monster might come by naturally. After them, the most common items are those stripped from fleeing or deceased adventurers and other victims. Scrolls, books, and potions are all completely safe from rust monsters, as are bows, many staves and wands, magical clothing, and other such items. In areas where rust monsters regularly clash with civilized races, these items can sometimes be found trampled and gathering dust in forgotten corners, worthless to the rust monster and left wherever they have fallen.

Variants

Though most rust monsters are roughly identical save for size and the unique patterns of plates that armor their backs, several variants can be found throughout the distant corners of Golarion, some even more dangerous than the common variety. Deep below the sea, weaker cat-sized rust monsters prowl the ocean floor devouring shipwrecks, trash, and other detritus, posing a threat only to those salvage divers who seek to rob them of their valuable meals. In Sargava and lands farther south, many rust monsters have evolved an advanced way to disperse the excess energy generated by their feeding, discharging it onto opponents for 1d6 electricity damage each time they successfully consume an object carried by that character.

By far the most feared variant known, however, is the notorious beast called the rust lord, found primarily in areas where metal is scarce or has been depleted, such as the deserts of Osirion or the jungle caves of the Mwangi Expanse. These hulking monstrosities are so regularly starved for nutrients that they have evolved to prey specifically on other living creatures, consuming the iron in their blood and tracking them by the twisting wake of their magnetic fields.

They're Not All Bad...

Rust monsters may be terrifying to encounter in the wild, but when carefully tended and confined to wooden and stone enclosures, their unique abilities can make them extremely useful. In addition to druids and other environmental activists who might use them to disrupt the march of civilization, they can prove devastatingly effective juggernauts in warfare, especially if turned loose on fragile supply lines or used to instantly chew through portcullises and steel-bound gates to capture fortifications.

Rust monsters (or at least their antennae) can also be useful in numerous arcane practices, ranging from destroying cursed magic items to assisting in delicate healing procedures by dissolving shrapnel or steel arrowheads without exacerbating the wounds. In some extremely experimental cases, wizards and tinkerers specializing in transmutation have discovered ways to siphon away a portion of the massive amount of energy produced by a rust monster's feeding, leaving the unfortunate monster just enough to survive and using the rest of the energy to power massive constructs and magnificent magical rituals.

Rust Monster Antenna Whip

Aura moderate transmutation; **CL** 7th
Slot hand; **Price** 56,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

Crafted from a preserved rust monster antenna, this item works similarly to a *gauntlet of rust*, with the exceptions that you can make a *rusting grasp* touch attack with the whip at will, you can use it on all nonmagical metallic objects (not just ferrous ones), and it does not protect you from other rusting attacks. This item counts as a whip for the purposes of proficiency and weapon feats.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *rusting grasp*; Cost 28,000 gp (24,000 gp if deceased rust monster is provided), 2,240 XP

Rust Lord **CR 7**

N Large aberration

Init +3; **Senses** metalsense 100 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +7, Spot +7

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 12, flat-footed 19
(+3 Dex, +10 natural, –1 size)

hp 85 (10d8+40)
Fort +9, **Ref** +6, **Will** +6
Resist fire 10; **SR** 16

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 20 ft.
Melee 2 antennae +14 touch (rust or bloodrust) and bite +10 (1d8+8)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (15 ft. with antennae)
Special Attacks bloodrust, rust

TACTICS

During Combat Rust lords charge headlong into combat at the first hint of metal or other living beasts. Mad with hunger, they focus first on consuming any large metal objects with their rust ability before moving on to the comparatively small amounts of metal in their enemies' blood, but they aren't opposed to using their bite and bloodrust abilities to incapacitate foes who look like they're attempting to escape.
Morale A rust lord never surrenders, and fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 17, **Con** 19, **Int** 2, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 8
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +19
Feats Alertness, Great Fortitude, Multiattack, Track
Skills Listen +7, Move Silently +8, Spot +7
Languages none
SQ metalsense

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Rust (Ex) A rust lord that makes a successful touch attack with an antenna causes the target metal to corrode, falling to pieces and becoming useless immediately. The touch can destroy up to a 10-foot cube of metal instantly. Magic armor and weapons, and other magic items made of metal, must succeed on a DC 23 Reflex save or be dissolved. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +4 racial bonus. A metal weapon that deals damage to a rust lord corrodes immediately. Wooden, stone, and other nonmetallic weapons are unaffected.
Metalsense (Ex) A rust lord can sense the twisting magnetic fields around metal objects to such a fine degree that it can perfectly discern the location of any metal object or creature with metallic blood (such as most humanoids) as if it could see it clearly, out to a range of 100 feet. Stone, wood, invisibility, and magical barriers are incapable of blocking this sense, and only an object containing significantly more metal, placed between the rust lord and its target, provides concealment or total concealment for this sense. For example, a man hiding behind a suit of discarded full plate has concealment, and one hiding behind a *wall of iron* has total concealment, though the rust lord might still be able to see him with its darkvision.
Bloodrust (Ex) A brush from a rust lord's antennae against flesh or thin clothing instantly draws forth the iron and other metallic minerals inside a creature's blood, tearing through the skin in a fine mist and causing 1d4 points of Con damage.

Rust Monsters on Golarion

Rust monsters have existed on all of Golarion's continents throughout recorded history, though in ages past they were primarily a subterranean phenomenon. For countless generations before the Quest for Sky, they competed fiercely with the dwarves for metals, and some believe that the increase in surface encounters over the last several thousand years is the result of the hungry beasts following the dwarves up from their ancient hunting grounds. Others worry that this is a result of them depleting all the metals farther down, in which case Golarion's ability to support modern metal-based societies might be dangerously close to exhaustion. Certainly, the beasts seem especially common in areas where dwarves first emerged onto the surface, and are a constant problem for the remaining Sky Citadels. Urgir, the fallen citadel in the Hold of Belkzen, already suffers from regular earthquakes and collapses due to the orcs being unaware (or heedless) of the swarm of beasts gnawing away at the city's subterranean foundations.

In Avistan, rust monsters are primarily found in the major mountain chains such as the Five Kings, the Menadors, and of course Varisia's Iron Peaks, whose deep roots are metal-rich enough to keep the creatures from venturing into more populated regions. In Garund, the creatures are far less common, especially outside of the Shattered Range in the south. Beneath the planet's surface, however, rust monsters can be found at any given depth in the Darklands, burrowing freely without regard to what lies above them. Those explorers who have attempted to chart the sea bottoms have even reported finding smaller versions there around mineral-rich geothermal vents, which combined with their similarities to existing bottom-feeding sea creatures lends credence to the hypothesis that these may be ancestors of the terrestrial rust monster.

Despite their uses as mining aids or beasts of war, few of Golarion's civilized races are willing to tolerate the presence of a rust monster for long. For most, this is simply a reaction to the creature's crazed hunger and tendency to destroy material wealth, but for some it takes on religious overtones. A new theory, growing popular in areas where rust monsters are most common, holds that the beasts are actually part of an infernal plot to release Rovagug from his prison in the center of the earth, the hungry monsters sent down into the depths to eventually locate and devour the mad god's chains and bring about the end of the world. While this is currently still a fringe belief, the church of Sarenrae has been known to offer bounties for each rust monster head presented, and acolytes of Gorum, Torag, and even Droskar similarly see the creatures as abominations intent on undermining their power.

Rust Monster

This insectoid monster is the size of a small horse, with four claw-tipped legs and a squat, humped frame. Its back is protected by a thick carapace of overlapping rust-colored plates, and its armored tail ends in a strange protrusion of fanned bone and hide. Two small black eyes perch above twitching mandibles, and from beneath each eye protrudes a long, feathery antenna.

Rust Monster **CR 3**

N Medium aberration

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision, scent; Listen +7, Spot +7

Defense

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15
(+3 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 27 (5d8+5)

Fort +4, **Ref** +2, **Will** +5

Offense

Spd 40 ft.

Melee antennae touch +3 (rust) and bite –2 (1d3)

Special Attacks Rust

Tactics

Before Combat Rust monsters have little capacity for subtlety, and tend to charge straight into combat if they sense metal.

During Combat A hungry rust monster always targets the largest metal object available with its antennae, striking first at things like armor and shields before moving on to smaller items. While it employs its bite against any enemy actively damaging it or standing in its way, most rust monsters are concerned only with consuming as much metal as quickly as possible. As such, though rust monsters have frequently been known to pursue metal-bearing prey for long distances, they can often be distracted by large offerings of metallic items, giving characters a chance to escape.

Morale Rust monsters are notoriously single-minded, and will fight to the death as long as there's metal to be gained.

Statistics

Str 10, **Dex** 17, **Con** 13, **Int** 2, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 8

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3

Feats Alertness, Track

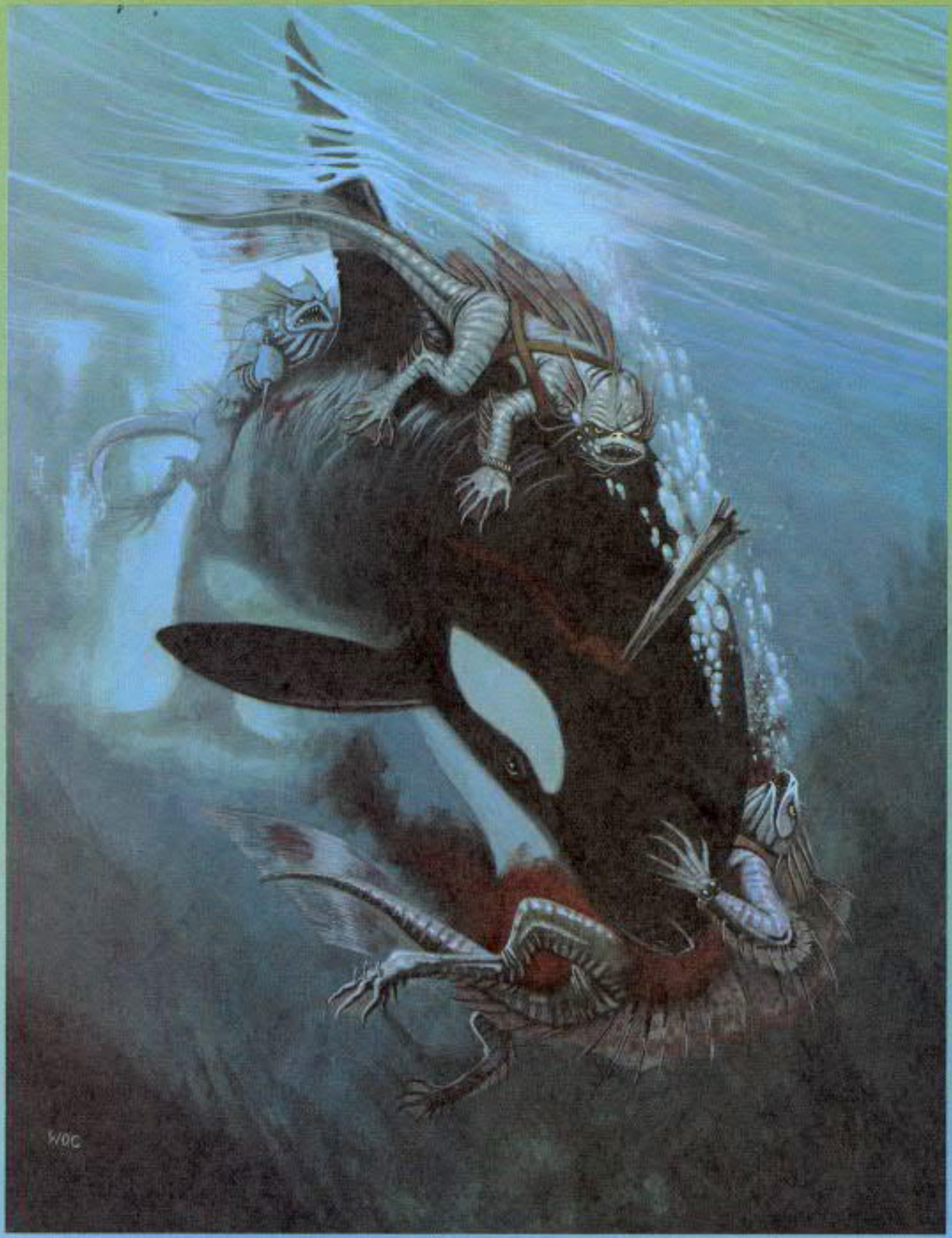
Skills Listen +7, Spot +7

Languages none

Special Abilities

Rust (Ex) A rust monster that makes a successful touch attack with its antennae causes the target metal to corrode, falling to pieces and becoming useless immediately. The touch can destroy up to a 10-foot cube of metal instantly. Magic armor and weapons, and other magic items made of metal, must succeed on a DC 17 Reflex save or be dissolved. The save DC is Constitution-based and includes a +4 racial bonus. A metal weapon that deals damage to a rust monster corrodes immediately. Wooden, stone, and other nonmetallic weapons are unaffected.

"Good gods, it's EATING the TREASURE!"
—typical adventurer reaction to a rust monster



More Sahuagin Secrets Revealed

by Skip Williams

color illustration by William O'Connor
black & white illustrations by Arnie Swekel

The Sea Devils, a 96-page book of lore and game information on the mysterious sahuagin, made its debut last month. Upon reading the manuscript, editor Keith Strohm exclaimed: "Boy, I sure wouldn't want to meet these guys."

In writing the book, I tried to make it a rigorous study of the sahuagin, exploring and developing all the powers attributed to the sea devils in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome. The book also includes a similar treatment of sahuagin culture. Inevitably, deadlines and page counts forced an end to the project, leaving several ideas undeveloped. These I present here. (Sorry, Keith).

Sahuagin Technology

The sea devils possess almost 20% more brain power than do humans, and they have discovered numerous ways to overcome the difficulties of life under the sea. The sahuagin make new discoveries all the time. The items described below have recently appeared in the sahuagin's arsenal, though they remain fairly rare.

Eye Protectors

To protect their eyes against the ravages of bright light, many sahuagin don masks fitted with lenses fashioned from transparent crystal and treated with a photosensitive gel. The sahuagin weave the masks from seaweed fibers and sinew (the same materials that comprise their nets). Each mask sports four cords trailing from its corners. A sahuagin donning a mask loops two of the cords over its anterior fins and ties the remaining pair under its chin.

When exposed to strong light, the gel on the lenses quickly darkens. Anyone fitted with a pair of these goggles gains a +4 saving throw bonus vs. light-based attacks. (Sahuagin normally suffer a -2 penalty vs. such attacks.) Further, sahuagin wearing these masks do not suffer temporary blindness when exposed to magical light and can function on the surface in full daylight without impediment.

One coating of the photosensitive gel lasts about two hours. Once the gel darkens, it stays that way. If necessary, a sahuagin can wipe off the darkened gel and apply a new coating. Sahuagin females make the gel from the bodies of octopi and other sea creatures that possess protective coloration. The gel-making process is fairly time consuming and difficult, and only sahuagin nobles and their subordinates enjoy its benefit. The gel usually comes packed in small shells that hold enough for four applications. The gel works equally well when applied to normal goggles or spectacles, though surface dwellers have a hard time focusing through it (the wearer sees as though walking through light rain or fog; see chapter 13 in the *Player's Handbook* for details.). A full shell would bring 200-600 gp if sold.

Sahuagin Armor

Though unarmored sahuagin enjoy a reasonable level of resistance to physical harm, the sea devils occasionally find some additional protection desirable. The basic form of sahuagin armor is a sharkskin suit that covers the sea devil's neck, torso, upper arms, and thighs. Slits in the suit allow the wearer's fins to protrude. Straps at the neck, waist and thighs hold the suit in place. The basic suit does not improve the sea devil's Armor Class, but the process used to cure the sharkskin makes the hide resistant to fire and fresh water. A sahuagin wearing the suit gains a +2 saving throw bonus vs. fire attacks (instead of the usual -2 penalty) and suffers no additional damage from magical fire (instead of the usual +1 point of damage per die). In addition, the sea devil can endure exposure to fresh water for up to an hour before it must make a saving throw to see if the irritation forces it to retreat (see *The Sea Devils,* page 37). Sudden exposure to fresh water still has the normal effects. Because of its resistance to liquids, the suit also grants a +2 saving throw bonus against acid attacks.

The sea devils also construct heavier suits of the same basic design, but reinforced with plates of coral and shell. Such suits have all the protective qualities noted above, and grant the sahuagin wearing it an Armor Class of 3. The suit's weight and bulk, however, slow the sea devil's movement rate by one third (to MV 8, Swim 16).

The ultimate form of sahuagin armor features a basic suit reinforced with several layers of hardened bronze plates and a sort of half helmet made from bronze or a large shell. This suit grants the sea devil wearing it an Armor Class of 0. The suit slows the sahuagin's movement rate by half (MV 6, Swim 12). However, the helmet is fitted with eye protection as noted above. The suit also grants the wearer complete immunity to fresh water. The suit contains a water-retaining layer that provides a +4 saving throw bonus against fire attacks and reduces damage from such attacks by half. A sahuagin wearing the suit can function on the surface for eight hours instead of the usual four.

Sahuagin armor will not fit any other creature. The heavier versions prove much too complicated to survive attempts at alteration. However, a leather worker could merge two basic suits into a garment that another

humanoid could wear. A character wearing such a suit gains a +2 saving throw bonus vs. fire or acid attacks. The suit is non-bulky and weighs about 8 lbs. Only characters normally allowed leather armor can wear them. Unlike other protective gear, the altered suit can be worn under other types of armor.

Sekolah's Fire

The sahuagin developed this unearthly substance for use against scrags (marine trolls). An oily jelly with a pungent, fishy odor, Sekolah's fire seems more like some unwholesome condiment that the deadly weapon it is. Upon contact with water (fresh or salt) the jelly ignites, burning with a ruddy glow. When completely immersed in water, the substance burns even more furiously, creating a seething mass of flame and steam that parboils anything in it. Worse, the flaming jelly tends to cling to any creature it contacts; opponents struck by Sekolah's fire cannot escape its flames even when they leave the affected area. By some trick of sahuagin ingenuity, Sekolah's fire sheds very little light, only about as much as a bed of glowing embers, and does not adversely affect the sahuagin's light-sensitive eyes.

Sahuagin usually carry Sekolah's fire in thin metal tubes fitted with bulbs or plungers. Each tube is about twice the size of a standard potion bottle and contains enough jelly for one use. Underwater, a tube creates an oblong cloud 30' long, 20' high, and 20' wide; the cloud extends away from the user, with one of its short (20') sides centered at the tube's mouth. The substance burns for five rounds, inflicting 3d10 hp damage each round. (Though nonmagical, the fire is treated as a magical fire attack when determining the effectiveness of magical protection such as a *ring of fire resistance).*

When used above water, a tube creates a jet of flame 15' long, 5' wide at the tube's mouth, and 10' wide at the jet's far end. The jelly burns for three rounds, inflicting 3d6 hp (nonmagical) fire damage each round.

In either case, victims are allowed saving throws vs. breath weapon; successful saving throws reduce all damage from any particular dose of Sekolah's fire by half. Submerged victims suffer a -2 saving throw penalty.

The sahuagin sometimes pack the jelly into flasks that function just like flasks of oil. Underwater, a flask creates a 20' globe of fire. Above water, a flask creates a 10' puddle of flame. Both cause damage as noted above.

Sekolah's fire produces its own oxygen and cannot be smothered or quenched by nonmagical means. A *quench fire* or *pyrotechnics* spell can put it out, though any unburned jelly in the area of affect or clinging to a creature can be set alight again (which happens instantly underwater).

Above water or below, Sekolah's fire consumes flammable items it touches and scorches everything else. Characters failing their saving throws against Sekolah's fire must attempt item saving throws for their equipment-vs. magical fire underwater and normal fire above water. Above water, Sekolah's fire sets alight any wooden structure it touches. Though the jelly always burns itself out, smothering the area with sand or other dry, nonflammable material keeps the fire from spreading.

Sahuagin priestesses concoct Sekolah's fire using blubber, fish oil, and numerous chemicals gathered from the sea. For obvious reasons, the sahuagin use air-filled spaces to mix the jelly and pack it into tubes. Usually, only the kingdom's royal high priestess and her assistants know the formula.

Sekolah's fire has been a tremendous success as a weapon against the scrags. The sahuagin also find it useful for setting ships alight and for breaking up massed groups of enemies. Sahuagin priestesses guard the secret of Sekolah's fire jealously. Generally, only forces directly under the command of a sahuagin king or prince are equipped with Sekolah's fire. Even then, only chieftains and their lieutenants carry the substance, usually one or two tubes each. Sahuagin armed with the Sekolah's fire usually employ it quickly so as to use it up before the enemy has any chance to capture a tube.

Tubes of Sekolah's fire can prove as dangerous to the sahuagin carrying them as to the enemy. If accidentally ruptured underwater, a tube explodes, filling a 15' sphere with fire as noted above. On the surface, jelly in a ruptured tube ignites if exposed to fire or dampness, filling a 5' sphere.

If sold on the open market a tube or flask of Sekolah's fire would bring 200-500 gold pieces.

Fighting Sahuagin

Sahuagin prefer to fight with their brains. Their tactics emphasize mobility, the concentration of force, and protection from enemy counterattacks. A basic sahuagin tactic is to make a first strike from beyond the enemy's visual range. Sahuagin see at least three times as far underwater as humans and demihumans do. On the surface at night, they see roughly twice as far; this can give them a decided edge in missile combat. Sahuagin are known for attacking on the surface during the dark of the moon. This is not because they fear light, but because the darkness conceals them.

Underwater Tactics

When sahuagin note an enemy, they usually split into three groups. One group shadows the foe, while the others surround the enemy—sea devils usually prefer to attack from above, below and behind, or from the left, right, and behind. At a prearranged signal, two of the groups launch missile attacks (and cast spells if the sahuagin party includes priestesses) while the remaining group observes the results. While the attackers reload their weapons, the other group notes the target's reaction and act appropriately. They generally launch missile attacks themselves—paying special attention to opposing spellcasters—or charge in for melee attacks. It is important to remember that sahuagin are blindingly fast (they swim at a rate of 24, which is as quick as a light horse on land). Note that sahuagin relentlessly attack any spellcasting opponents to kill these magical threats as early as possible. An underwater fight against sahuagin should play out like an old western movie in which hordes of whooping Indians pepper their foes with arrows—except that most of the time the sahuagin should be out of sight.

Because most player characters don't enjoy fast swimming rates, they should have great difficulty closing with the sahuagin and effectively counterattacking. A *protection from normal missiles* spell, however, renders sahuagin darts, javelins, and crossbows harmless (at least while the spell lasts). Magical barriers such as *wall of stone, wall of force* and *Otiluke's resilient sphere* can give PCs some cover, and a few quick *continual light* spells might reveal the sahuagin skulking in the submarine darkness (and blind them). Divination spells such as *wizard* eye also can help beleaguered PCs track sahuagin down.

If hard pressed, sahuagin won't hesitate to use their superior movement rates to vanish into the depths only to

regroup and return after an hour or so, when a party's protective spells have expired. The best way to deal with this tactic is to leave the area immediately.

In a pitched battle with sahuagin, anything that limits the sea devil's speed and maneuverability can be helpful. Even wrestling attacks can defeat the sea devils' hit-and-run tactics. Spells such as slow and *entangle* prove quite effective. Finally, all characters should stand ready to assist comrades who become trapped in sahuagin nets.

Surface Tactics

After an initial attack with spells and missiles, sea devils close in from at least two different directions. If the battlefield has some obvious place where enemy reinforcements can arrive—such as a fortress or a ship's hatch—the sea devils quickly move to cut it off. One of their favorite methods for doing so is spreading out nets to catch creatures emerging from an opening; many a sailor's life has ended when he blundered into a sahuagin net and found himself stabbed with a trident or dragged, still struggling, into the sea.

Defeating sahuagin on the surface often proves a matter of sheer power. *Light* and *continual light* spells are even more effective against sea devils in the open air. Fire-based spells, ineffective underwater, slay sea devils quite readily, though parties traveling aboard ships must be very careful with them.

Other Nasty Sahuagin Tricks

Sahuagin make full use of their superior memories to recall all the details of a battlefield and its surrounding area. They often use this knowledge to choose routes of retreat that pose real dangers to pursuers. When raiding coastal areas, for example, sahuagin might make a dash for a nearby sea cliff and dive cleanly into the water upon reaching its edge. Pursuers dogging the sea devils' heels might come upon the precipice unexpectedly and suffer nasty falls.

Sahuagin always make good use of reserves in any important battle. These troops lie in wait to ambush pursuers, and they always remain ready to take advantage of any tactical situation that might develop. For example, if a town garrison sallies forth to meet a wave of attacking sea devils, the sahuagin reserve will try to enter the settlement unseen. Likewise, adventurers who surge forward to beat off attacking sea devils may find themselves blindsided by the sahuagin reserve.

Because of their ability to sense living creatures underwater, sahuagin invariably arrange to render any area where they fight into a cloud of murk. Often they can accomplish this task without any special effort at all, as the violence of an underwater fight can stir up loose silt from the bottom and send all manner or other debris swirling through the water. The sea devils sow most underwater areas in sahuagin villages, towns, and buildings, with a fine layer of silt. If a battle erupts, the immediate vicinity (all areas within 20' of the fight) becomes murky after only 2-5 (1d4+1) rounds of combat and effectively opaque in twice that time (double the initial die roll). The sea devils use the concealment the murk provides to press the attack, to fall back to a more defensible position or to bring reinforcements to the battle secretly.

The Kalimox

The Kalimox (CALL-ee-moh) is a sahuagin memory game involving gestures and vocalizations (see the *Sea Devils,* page 54). The sea devils use it for both recreation and as a way to conduct nonlethal duels. It is possible that a character employing *polymorph* magic (or a similar magical disguise) to look like a sahuagin might find himself challenged to a kalimox. To conduct a kalimox, make three opposed Intelligence checks between the challenger and the challenged; the winner of each check is the one who succeeds his check by the larger margin. A typical sahuagin has an Intelligence score of 14 but receives a +5 bonus when performing a kalimox. Characters can add their reaction/attacking adjustments (from their Dexterity scores) to their Intelligence scores. The competitor who wins two out of the three opposed checks wins the challenge. In the event of a tie, the challenge continues, and the first competitor to lose an opposed check loses the challenge.

Skip Williams suggests that telemarketers make a good model for sahuagin because both tend to strike without warning, tirelessly attack again and again if they don't immediately succeed, and would gladly consume their own children.

SEARING FLAMES

THE ECOLOGY OF THE SALAMANDER

by Christopher Campbell · illustrated by Anne Stokes

Sinuous and sinister, wreathed in flames like the classic image of a soul burning in Hell, the salamander is truly the stuff of nightmares. Combining two common representations of evil—snakes and fire—salamanders do their best to live up to their opponents' preconceived notions. These cruel, rapacious predators destroy all they encounter, leaving nothing but devastation in their wake. Even when such destruction is not their goal, it is nevertheless inevitable, for little can withstand prolonged exposure to a salamander's consuming flames.

Native to a harsh environment where only the strong can survive, salamanders devote much of their time to games of warfare and social dominance. Largely because they themselves are prey for more powerful beings, such as the efreet, salamanders take great delight in venting their frustrations on weaker races.

PHYSIOLOGY

A salamander's form combines the well-muscled torso of a humanoid with the lower body of a constrictor snake. Individuals might range in length from a mere 4 feet (for a flamebrother) to a whopping 32 feet (for the oldest noble salamander). Although salamanders are asexual, their thin faces have a distinctly masculine appearance. A typical salamander's craggy features include a hooked nose and jutting chin.

A salamander's entire body is covered in thick scales of red and black that provide excellent protection from physical attacks. Spines of chitinous material poke out from between a salamander's scales. The oily liquid that oozes from the tips of these barbs is a natural waste product of the salamander's metabolism. When exposed to the intense heat generated by the creature's body, this substance bursts into flames, creating a fiery aura that radiates no more than 1 inch from the salamander. The temperature of this aura is so great that direct contact with it deals fire damage, boils away liquids, and incinerates paper.

Because of their similar appearances and close association, many believe that flamebrothers are juvenile salamanders, but in fact they are a separate species. Knowledgeable sages compare this relationship to that of goblins and hobgoblins. Although just as intelligent, flamebrothers tend to savagery and tribalism when left to their own devices. Salamanders act as a civilizing element to flamebrother society, and as with hobgoblin control of goblin tribes, salamander domination offers an often welcome stability.

LIFE CYCLE

A salamander reproduces asexually by budding, splitting off one larva every ten years. Budding is an automatic function over which the salamander has no control. The process takes 1 week, after which the salamander is particularly vulnerable to attack until its body has recovered.

The first sign of budding is a swelling at the tip of the salamander's tail. The lump grows and spreads upward through the tail, increasing in size each day. Salamanders are extremely irritable and more vicious than normal during this time. From the second to the fifth day, the lump slows the salamander's movement by one-half and prevents it from constricting. By the sixth day, the salamander's entire body is swollen, and the creature is practically immobile. It cannot attack, it loses its Dexterity bonus (if any) to AC, and its speed is reduced to 5 feet. On the seventh day, the salamander's skin splits open, releasing the original adult salamander (with a new skin) plus one larva.

For one week following budding, the parent salamander's natural AC bonus is reduced to +3 while its new scales harden. It generally tries to avoid making constriction attacks during this time, since sustained pressure is extremely painful on the newly formed skin. Once

its scales have reached their full hardness, the salamander is ready to resume its former activities.

A larva must incubate within a fire source for one full year to evolve into a mature salamander. Although dangerous in its own right, it cannot survive for long outside a fire. If prevented from returning to its nurturing flames for more than 1 minute, a larva cools rapidly and dies as its body hardens into a substance resembling charred wood. Because of this vulnerability, larvae incubation chambers (called blazes) are heavily guarded and defended unto death.

A SALAMANDER HAS NO DRIVE TO OBTAIN SUSTENANCE...

The maturation process works much the same as budding. At the end of its year in the flames, the larva swells, tripling in size over the course of one week. It loses its Dexterity bonus (if any) to AC during this time, and it can't move. At the end of the week, the larva's skin splits, releasing an adult salamander. Newly formed salamanders have the same vulnerabilities and restrictions as those that have just budded, and those limitations last for the same period of time.

Noble Salamanders

Noble salamanders do not reproduce. If an average salamander is lucky enough to survive for fifty years, it goes through yet another metamorphosis. Just like a maturing larva, it swells up, becoming completely immobile and helpless. At the end of one week, its skin splits, and a noble salamander emerges from the husk.

Not only is a noble salamander much larger than an average one, it also has a set of antlerlike projections on its forehead. These antlers are not for combat, as many sages believe. Rather, they somehow focus or channel the arcane energy that noble salamanders require for their spell-like abilities. Properly prepared, a noble salamander's antler can serve as the basis for a wand for any spell of the noble salamanders spell-like abilities, cutting the item's usual cost of materials by 25%. (See the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for complete details on magic item creation.)

Young Salamanders

Juvenile salamanders come in two forms—the flamebrother larva and the average salamander larva. Each kind of larva must spend one year in the flames to mature. At that point, it splits to release the corresponding adult salamander.

Flamebrother Larva

Tiny Outsider (Extraplanar, Fire)
Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 hp)
Initiative: +2
Speed: 10 ft.
AC: 17 (+2 size, +2 Dex, +3 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-8
Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d3-1 plus 1d3 fire)
Full Attack: Bite +2 melee (1d3-1 plus 1d3 fire)
Space/Reach: 2-1/2 ft./0 ft.
Special Attacks: Heat
Special Qualities: Camouflage, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, vulnerability to cold
Saves: Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +3
Abilities: Str 8, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 5, Wis 13, Cha 12
Skills: Craft (blacksmithing) +5*, Hide +14*, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Spot +7
Feats: Alertness
Climate/Terrain: Elemental Plane of Fire
Organization: Solitary, pair, or cluster (3-5)
Challenge Rating: 1/2
Treasure: None
Alignment: Usually evil (any)
Advancement: 2-3 HD (Tiny)

The creature resembles a fat snake or worm with a pink hide and a mouth filled with needle-like teeth.

A flamebrother larva measures about 1 foot long. Because they require a constant fire source to mature, these larvae are encountered only on their native plane or in areas of sustained high heat, such as volcanoes. The occasional sorcerer or wizard might keep one or two as pets in a carefully tended fireplace, but this practice is exceedingly rare.

If ever forcibly removed from its fire, a flamebrother larva immediately attempts to return to it. Fire deprivation for longer than 1 minute results in death as the flamebrother larva's body stiffens and hardens into a woodlike substance.

Flamebrother larvae understand Ignan, but they cannot speak.

Combat

Flamebrother larvae use their environment to their advantage, blending into the dancing flames and striking to catch opponents by surprise.

Heat (Ex): A flamebrother larva generates so much heat that its mere touch deals 1d3 points of additional fire damage.

Camouflage (Ex): The outline of a flamebrother larva in a fiery or extremely hot area (flames, lava, burning embers, or the like) appears to shift and waver. This distortion grants it concealment (20% miss chance).

***Skills:** A flamebrother larva receives a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks made within a fire source. Although incapable of using the skill, flamebrother larvae still possess the salamander's +4 racial bonus to Craft (blacksmithing).

Average Salamandar Larva

Small Outsider (Extraplanar, Fire)
Hit Dice: 3d8+3 (16 hp)
Initiative: +1
Speed: 10 ft.
AC: 17 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural), touch 12, flat-footed 16
Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+0
Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d4+1 plus 1d3 fire)
Full Attack: Bite +5 melee (1d4+1 plus 1d3 fire)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Heat
Special Qualities: Camouflage, darkvision 60 ft., immunity to fire, vulnerability to cold
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4
Abilities: Str 13, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 13, Cha 12

Skills: Bluff +7, Craft (blacksmithing) +2*, Hide +11*, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Search +4, Spot +9
Feats: Alertness, Power Attack
Climate/Terrain: Elemental Plane of Fire
Organization: Solitary, pair, or cluster (3-5)
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: None
Alignment: Usually evil (any)
Advancement: 4-8 HD (Small)

The creature resembles a fat maggot with a fang-filled maw.

An average salamander larva ranges from 2 to 3 feet long. Like the flamebrother larva, it requires a constant fire source to mature, so these creatures are encountered only on the Elemental Plane of Fire or in areas of sustained high heat, such as volcanoes.

If ever forcibly removed from its fire, an average salamander larva immediately attempts to return to it. Fire deprivation for longer than 1 minute results in death as the larva's body stiffens and hardens into a woodlike substance.

Average salamander larvae understand Ignan, but they cannot speak.

Combat

Like flamebrother larvae, average salamander larvae can blend into the dancing flames in which they live for defense.

Heat (Ex): A average salamander larva generates so much heat that its mere touch deals 1d3 points of additional fire damage.

Camouflage (Ex): The outline of a average salamander larva in a fiery or extremely hot area (flames, lava, burning embers, or the like) appears to shift and waver. This distortion grants it concealment (20% miss chance).

***Skills:** A average salamander larva receives a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks made within a fire source. Although incapable of using the skill, average salamander larvae still possess the salamander's +4 racial bonus to Craft (blacksmithing).

MINDSET

As a native of the Elemental Plane of Fire, a salamander does not think like a creature of the Material Plane. It has no drive to propagate because budding is an automatic process. It has no drive to obtain sustenance, since smoke and flames provide all the nutrients it requires. It has no need to secure shelter because its environment poses no danger to it. What then motivates a salamander? In a word: fire.

Born of fire, nurtured by it, and surrounded by it constantly, salamanders live by its rules and embrace its strengths. Fire burns. Fire consumes. Fire destroys. Fire represents the ultimate in strength and power, and salamanders judge all things by their interactions with it. Earth and stone smoke and crack beneath a salamander's fiery form but withstand destruction, and so they earn its respect. Metal bends to the will of fire but resists complete annihilation, and so the salamander employs it as a tool. Gems capture and reflect the light of fire, splitting it into a dazzling display of color and brilliance, and so the salamander prizes gems. All else is of little consequence. At the touch of fire, liquids boil away, paper turns to ash, and the creatures of the Material Plane cower. Thus, all of these earn only contempt from a salamander.

SOCIETY

Salamanders are most often encountered in clusters—small groups of three to five individuals, all of the same kind. On the Elemental Plane of Fire, clusters belong to a tribe, which in turn might owe allegiance to either a king or a council. Away from their home plane, salamander groupings rarely expand beyond the cluster, since the local environment usually cannot support a larger population.

A salamander tribe consists of six to eight clusters that share a communal larvae blaze and metalworking facility. A lone average salamander might take charge of a tribe of flamebrothers, but such tribes might also exist without leaders. Noble salamanders almost always rule over average salamander communities, either singly or as a group. Such oligarchies often owe allegiance to even more powerful creatures of fire, such as red dragons or efreet.

The worship of fire as both a creative and a destructive force is not a concept unique to salamanders, but as creatures born and refined to maturity in flames, they claim part of fire's divinity for themselves. As divine creatures in their own right, they feel it only natural that they have dominion over lesser beings. This attitude leads to the practice of slavery as a means of reinforcing the dominance of salamanders over inferior races.

LAIRS

The Elemental Plane of Fire is an endless expanse of flame. Huge sheets of black basalt float in oceans of magma, and all of it has been ablaze since the creation of the multiverse. This environment is the natural habitat of salamanders and the one with which they are most familiar.

The curse of being an outsider, however, is that lesser creatures from other planes can call on you to do their bidding, if even only for a short period of time. Summoning spells expose salamanders to a wide variety of terrains and settings, and they are capable of surviving in any kind of natural environment except underwater. Sometimes, however, the summoning magic goes awry, and a salamander is unable to return home. In such a case, the creature sets about making its surroundings feel more comfortable. Such adjustments are always made at the expense of the environment, but salamanders have no regard for anything that cannot withstand the ravages of fire.

...SINCE SMOKE AND FLAMES PROVIDE ALL THE NUTRIENTS IT REQUIRES.

Given a choice, salamanders gravitate toward the hottest, driest locales they can find to establish their bases of operation. A subterranean lair makes an ideal refuge, second only to an active

FAMILIARS FOR SALAMANDERS

As an optional rule, you can give the standard familiars in the *Player's Handbook* the fire subtype to make them viable as familiars for salamander sorcerers and wizards. The ability to have a familiar is an integral part of those classes, and it's unfair to restrict a salamander's choices to creatures that could not survive in its normal habitat. These fire-based familiars might also have cosmetic changes—such as orange and red coloring, an aura of flickering flames that causes no damage, or an altogether alien appearance—that differentiate them from their Material Plane counterparts.

volcano. The dryness of the desert appeals to salamanders, but the distinct lack of fuel in such a terrain poses a major drawback, since a long-term blaze is vital for raising young. Hilly areas make good salamander lairs, providing easy access to underground areas but still offering a good amount of fuel. The mining that sometimes happens in such terrain also attracts salamanders, and a cluster might try to take over a mineshaft to gain access to metal ore. The opportunity to work metal helps keep a salamander's mind off the alien environment in which it is trapped, and fortunate is the miner who can convince one to aid in smelting his ore.

SALAMANDERS' METAL WEAPONS CONDUCT THEIR HEAT FOR ADDITIONAL DAMAGE.

Mining operations also make mountains attractive sites for lairs. Stranded salamander clusters sometimes offer their metalworking expertise to dwarven clans in exchange for sanctuary and a semblance of normal life. Many dwarven clans regularly summon creatures such as salamanders or fire and earth elementals to help run their mining operations, and such spellcasting ability might also provide a means to return stranded salamanders to the Elemental Plane of Fire.

Perhaps the most homelike place that a stranded cluster of salamanders can find on the Material Plane is the smoking caldera of an active volcano. An added bonus is the prevalence of *portals* that usually link the Material Plane with the Elemental Plane of Fire in such environments. Experienced salamanders, especially nobles, know that the best chance of getting home is locating such a *portal* within a bubbling lava pool or a fiery jet of ignited gas.

KILLER CREATURE COMBOS

Salamanders are often found in the company of more powerful fire creatures. Many also command their own slaves.

A Red Dragon Wyrmling and Flamebrothers: Flamebrothers stranded on the Material Plane sometimes offer to watch over a red dragon's eggs or hatchlings in exchange for protection. A red dragon wyrmling raised with such creatures as its nannies and playmates not only develops a close attachment to them but also learns to exercise effective group tactics in conjunction with them. While the wyrmling uses its breath weapon, the flamebrothers attempt to flank or overbear opponents. A red dragon wyrmling and three flamebrothers constitute an EL 6 encounter.

A Salamander and Azers: Kept as slaves by many salamander communities, azers act as beasts of burden and blacksmithing assistants. Both salamanders and azers are kept as servants by the efreet. Whatever their association, these two kinds of creatures can cooperate to make flanking attacks, and both can take full advantage of their heat special attack by employing metal weapons and making grappling attacks. One average salamander and two azers are an EL 7 encounter.

Salamanders and a Fire Elemental: Kept as pets by the various denizens of their native plane, fire elementals make ideal guards for salamanders because they are often difficult to see when at rest in the fire sources in which they lair. Two average salamanders and a Large fire elemental constitute an EL 8 encounter.

A Noble Salamander and Rasts: Noble salamanders often travel the planes in search of hidden knowledge, and often such a pilgrim keeps rasts as watchdogs. These vicious creatures readily engage opponents in melee, allowing the salamander to hang back and use its fire-based spell-like abilities without fear of harming its pets. One noble salamander and a pair of rasts make an EL 10 encounter.

A Noble Salamander Sorcerer and A Young Adult Red Dragon: This pair makes a near-perfect match. The dragon looks to the salamander for guidance in the development of its sorcerous powers, and the noble takes advantage of the dragon's superior combat expertise and ability to act as a mount. Since these two creatures work together by mutual agreement, they split treasure, with the dragon claiming items that are too fragile to withstand the salamander's heat. A 5th-level noble salamander sorcerer and a young adult red dragon constitute an EL 15 encounter.

SALAMANDERS VS. PCS

The superiority of fire can be effectively demonstrated through combat, and salamanders enjoy destroying creatures that are clearly inferior. They usually target the strongest-looking opponents first, thereby prolonging the inevitable for the weaker opponents. As fire leaps from building to building, so too does a salamander pursue its enemies. The sections below demonstrate good uses of a salamander's abilities and are intended to help a DM run a salamander NPC.

A Warm Welcome: The touch of a salamander deals fire damage—1d6 points in the case of a flamebrother or average salamander and 1d8 points in the case of a noble. Salamanders capitalize on this characteristic by employ-

ing metal weapons that conduct their heat for additional damage. A dropped weapon no longer conveys the salamander's heat, but in an environment such as the Elemental Plane of Fire, a dropped weapon never cools.

Salamanders know what materials can and cannot withstand their intense heat. A favored tactic is to wrest a weapon or other object from an opponent's grasp with a disarm attack (using a wielded weapon or its tail), then either toss it into the nearest flames or keep hold of it. Items in the salamander's possession take fire damage each round. There is no saving throw, but object hardness affects the fire damage normally.

Abracadabra: A noble salamander has access to a number of spell-like abilities that it can use to its advantage. *Dispel magic* takes care of those pesky spells that adventurers like to use to protect themselves from fire. Thereafter, the noble salamander can use a *wall of fire* to divide and conquer. The creature can use *wall of fire* three times per day, and multiple barriers of this sort can eat up spells such as *resist energy* and *protection from energy* very quickly.

Flaming sphere is a good choice for setting opponents aflame, but only if the salamander can devote some time to directing it. Summoning a Huge fire elemental to keep opponents busy can provide such time, and it also ensures that the salamander has an ally for flanking purposes if melee combat becomes necessary.

Since a noble salamander has no fear of fire damage, dropping a *fireball* on itself is a smart way to take out multiple opponents in melee. Like *wall of fire*, this ability is usable three times per day. *Burning hands* is the least useful of the noble's abilities, since the spell's range doesn't exceed its reach with its tail or weapon. Thus, it is best kept as a last-ditch defense.

PCs VS. SALAMANDERS

With sufficient preparation, a party can survive and even triumph over an equivalent force of salamanders.

Turn Down the Heat: *Resist energy* and *protection from energy* are the most logical choices for self-preservation in combat with a salamander. Layer them on; they might not stack, but any melee combat is going to involve a lot of heat. Also, if a character is unlucky enough to be targeted by a noble salamander's *dispel magic* effect, chances are that at least one spell will survive.

A Cool Reception: Fight fire with cold. Salamanders have the fire subtype, which means they're particularly vulnerable to cold damage. *Cone of cold, Otiluke's freezing sphere,* and *ice storm* are all good offensive spells, and *ray of frost* is a good cantrip choice for low-level adventurers fighting flamebrothers, since it allows no saving throw if it hits.

Energy Substitution (a feat from *Tome and Blood*) allows spellcasters to change one energy type into another specified by the feat without using up a higher-level spell slot. Make *fireballs* cause cold damage, and watch the salamanders scatter!

From a Distance: The best way to avoid a salamander's constriction attack is to stay back. Of course, average and noble salamanders have damage reduction, so be sure to load up on magic ammunition and ranged spells. If you must close the gap for combat, use the Tumble skill to avoid provoking attacks of opportunity and try to maneuver for flanking bonuses. Also, you can try to get rid of a noble salamander's magic longspear by making disarm and sunder attacks.

Alacazam: If you're facing salamanders on the Material Plane, a cleric, sorcerer, or wizard can be your greatest asset. Forget trying to kill the fiery outsiders—just send them back to their home plane. Spells such as *banishment, dismissal,* and *holy word* exist for just such a purpose. *Dictum* or *word of chaos* can also achieve the same effect, but since salamanders can vary in alignment along the law-chaos axis, those spells carry an inherent risk of failure. In any case, salamanders don't have spell resistance, so the odds are on your side.

NPC SALAMANDERS

Salamanders can advance as outsiders, making the NPC classes poor choices. With all good saves, d8 Hit Dice, fighter base attack advancement, and 8 skill points per Hit Die, advancing as an outsider is a good choice even when compared to PC classes. A salamander that advances in a PC class should do so to take advantage of the class's special abilities. Below are some additional suggestions for making unique and interesting classed salamanders.

Barbarian: Barbarian salamanders embrace the destructive force of fire, channeling its all-consuming power into a rage that can terrify even their own kind. Such a character is a formidable force indeed, since the Strength boost provided by rage increases the damage for all its attacks and raises its grapple bonus for constriction.

Bard: Delicate instruments such as lutes, lyres, and wooden flutes cannot withstand contact with a salamander, and while the blaring of bugles or horns might provide a pleasing accompaniment to the crackling of flames, brass cymbals or iron bells would probably make better instrument choices for a salamander bard.

Cleric: It should not be surprising that salamanders feel a strong connection with divinity, given that they are creatures of fire and therefore divine in their own eyes. Salamander clerics

SALAMANDER FEATS

These feats are recommended for constructing unique salamanders. At the DM's option, the prerequisites may be adjusted to make these feats available to other races as well.

BURNING RAGE [General]
Your rage stokes the flames of your body's heat.

Prerequisites: Con 13, heat special attack, rage.

Benefit: While raging, the fire damage of your heat special attack increases by +1d6.

GOUT OF FLAME [General]
You gain a breath weapon usable once per day.

Prerequisites: Con 13, heat special attack.

Benefit: Once per day, you can regurgitate a mouthful of flaming bile and spit it at an opponent. Your breath weapon is a 15-foot line of fire that deals 2d6 points of fire damage (Reflex half). The saving throw DC is 10 + 1/2 your HD + your Constitution modifier.

TAIL SNAP [General]
You can use your tail to hurl a globule of fire as a missile weapon.

Prerequisites: Con 13, heat special attack, snakelike tail.

Benefit: As an attack action, you can snap your tail like a whip, hurling a flaming globe at a target up to 100 feet away. This ranged touch attack has no range increment, and the globe deals fire damage equal to that of your heat special attack. Physically tiring to perform, this attack can be used a number of times per day equal to 3 + your Constitution modifier.

can choose among the domains of Destruction, Evil, and Fire.

Fighter: Fighter is the preferred class for salamanders. Combat is the most direct way to demonstrate superiority over other beings, and in larger tribes, entire clusters might be trained as fighters. Levels of fighter can also allow a DM to give a salamander additional feats without sacrificing its current abilities.

Monk: A salamander monk makes a truly deadly opponent, especially since it has the Multiattack feat. Not only do monk levels boost the salamander's already impressive AC, but the additional unarmed attacks it gains are even more devastating with the added damage from its heat ability.

Ranger: Ranger is a perfectly reasonable class for a salamander, especially from the standpoint of favored enemies. Many salamander rangers would select outsider (fire) in order to combat azers and efreet, their most ardent competitors on the Elemental Plane of Fire. Still others might choose humanoid (human) to exterminate the arrogant creatures that trespass on their plane and drag them across reality with summoning spells.

Since bows and arrows cannot withstand their heat, most salamander rangers select the two-weapon combat style.

Rogue: The need for weapons that are effective against their predatory neighbors and the desire to keep such weapons out of the hands of others naturally lead to the development of salamander rogues. If the owner of a *frostbrand* sword won't trade for it and is too tough to kill, the only choice left is to steal the weapon. The rogue's evasion class ability is a great boon to salamanders because of their susceptibility to cold-based attacks. Sneak attacks can make salamander teams much more deadly, giving them the ability to deal regular damage, heat damage, and sneak attack damage all at once when flanking opponents.

Sorcerer: Sorcery is the most common form of arcane spellcasting among salamanders. The inborn talent for summoning and manipulating magical energy is considered a gift. An average salamander nearing its metamorphosis into a noble sometimes explores the magical side of its nature by taking several levels of sorcerer before gaining its spell-like abilities.

Wizard: Wizards are virtually unknown among salamanders because of the spellbook requirement. A rare few craft spellbooks out of thin sheets of brass embossed with the arcane symbols necessary for dweomercraft, but such a book costs three times the normal amount to create. Add to that the difficulty of obtaining new spells (because conventional spellbooks and scrolls are combustible), and the number of salamander wizards dwindles to a negligible level.

FORGET TRYING TO KILL THE FIERY OUTSIDERS. JUST SEND THEM BACK TO THEIR HOME PLANE.

The Nodwick Chronicles, Volume Two continues the saga of Nodwick the Henchman and his adventurer employers! Thrill as they battle evil deities, unravel the mysteries of alternate dimensions, grapple with cosmic power and delve into the dankest dungeons! Collecting issues 7 through 12 of the fan-favorite comic book, this volume is a must-have for hench-heads everywhere! Only $15.95, on sale this summer!

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The Ecology of the Satyr

Taking a light look at Mr. Fun himself

by Gordon R. Menzies

Art by Martin Cannon

The sounds of fighting drifted over the rolling, grassv hills, urged on by a playful wind. Adalia jerked her head in the direction of the noise; her long, thick braid flew off her shoulder and thumped heavily on her back. She was certain she heard it this time. No clang of steel on steel rang out, but the shouts and grunts common to any conflict were unmistakable. There were other sounds, too—husky voices that urged the combatants on. "Marsena, do you hear it?" she asked, breathless.

Marsena, the elder of the two and in her seventeenth year, had obviously heard the noises as well. She stared into the distance with wide eyes, her hands trembling as they clutched at her wooden crook. Like her sister, she was dressed in plain brown homespun, with her feet and shins protected by knee-high leather boots, as was typical of her calling as a shepherdess. "They could be robbers, Adalia, she whispered hoarsely. She looked away to see their flock drifting across the far hill. The sheep were moving steadily away from the sounds of the conflict but were at least not in a panic. Their two dogs, Coran and Pip, pranced around the dirty puffs of white, hedging them in but not impeding their progress.

"Let's go after the sheep," Marsena finished. "And then let's get out of here,"

"No! Let's go investigate—it might be a troop of elves!"

"Don't be silly! They aren't elves. . . ."

The words died on her lips as the same teasing wind that had carried the sounds of the fighting now brought a sweet strain of music to their ears. It was a quick, lilting little melody that rolled about the grass and tumbled down the hills. Marsena found herself wanting to dance after it, and a childlike smile crossed her lips before she could contain herself.

Perhaps these were elves . . .

The sounds of fighting continued but the music didn't stop. Instead the two moved together and merged, each complementing the other, each urging the other to an even sharper intensity. Maybe the noise was coming from a group of practicing acrobats and performers. Yes, that was it. Marsena could see their gaily colored tents even now in her mind.

Adalia's eyes were aglow with excitement. The 14-year-old had dropped her crook and was already hurrying across the green, dogs and sheep forgotten.

Marsena dropped her crook as well. "Adalia! No!" And her feet carried her swiftly after her sister—and toward the music and the gaily colored tents. . . .

Clack! The heads of the two combatants came crashing together, their horns locking for an instant. Horns! thought Marsena. ***They aren't elves or men at all!*** Stranger still, their lower portions were so very goatlike that it caused Adalia to gasp upon seeing them. From their hiding spot, the girls could see at least a dozen of the creatures. Most were capering about, drinking and shouting, either urging on the two who were fighting or else laughing at their efforts. One creature, his fur the purest white, was playing animatedly on a set of reed pipes, the source of the strange and wonderful music.

The two combatants circled one another as the girls looked on, then the larger stood his ground. He was a huge brute with black flanks, knotted muscles, and a close-cropped beard. Grinning at the younger, leaner creature who circled him looking for an opening, he laughed and caught the wineskin another had tossed him, and he drew a great mouthful. The younger leapt at him then, grasping him about the waist with strong arms, but the youth was in turn seized and lifted right off his hooves. He landed in a heap before the larger creature, who now sprayed the fallen one with the wine he had retained in his mouth.

The entire gathering roared with laughter, slapping their knees and clutching at their sides. The loser slunk away but returned almost immediately. His head lowered in respect, he knelt before the larger and offered him a newly crafted cudgel. For his effort, the weapon was accepted and he received a cuff on the shoulder that knocked him off his hooves again. Strangely though, he was smiling when he got up. The music began anew.

Marsena wanted to dance like she had never wanted to before, but even now faithful Coran was pulling on her clothing, her dress in his teeth, breaking the spell. Before the creatures caught sight of them, she dragged the younger girl away to tell the villagers what they had seen.

From "The Wildlands As I Remember Them," from the memoirs of Marsena Crostman, mayor of Arkright:

Satyrs are magical creatures whose upper bodies are almost perfectly human, except for their exceptional brawniness, their long ears, and the presence of two small horns on their foreheads. The lower body of a satyr is goatlike, the fur of which is generally a shade of brown or red but has been known to be black. Rare examples of white fur have also been recorded. Regardless of its coloring, the fur always matches that on the rest of the body. The horns and hooves are always jet black. The upper body, aside from being muscular, is also very hairy, and to satyrs beards are commonplace—the mark of an adult among the members of the race. Satyrs value their beards almost as much as dwarves, but beards never denote social status. Goatees are frequently worn. The faces of satyrs are quite handsome.

Most satyrs roam the woods and meadowlands in small, lusty bands[1], carousing and wenching wherever and whenever they can. They are overly fond of music and drink; it is a sad satyr who cannot carry a tune or hold his own in a drinking bout. Typical examples of the race will carry some sort of wind instrument and a wineskin before they even think of carrying a weapon. Of course, their ability to butt with their horns almost precludes this need.

There are no females of the race. Satyrs are born of a union between satyrs and dryads. Although satyrs frequently enjoy the company of females from other races (especially lonely human shepherdesses), for some reason the incidents of half-satyrs are extremely rare. This is good, for the typical satyr attempts to woo just about every female he meets.[2]

Little is known of the youngest years of a satyr[3], though they often recall being extremely shy as children (and just as powerfully inquisitive about their forest world). An adolescent satyr will generally seek out his father's band, and if he finds it or any other such band, the youngster is always accepted, having proved himself worthy simply by surviving. He will grow and mature quickly after this, being considered an adult and full member of the band at the age of 15 or so.

Obviously, given the male-dominated society satyrs live in, with no positive feminine influence save for those first years, they are always gruff, masculine creatures. They hide their true emotions,

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though they tend to be quite outgoing[4]. Satyrs don't understand male-female love beyond its physical aspect, and marriage is a totally alien concept to them—they are forever bachelors. No satyr could hope to restrain himself from the charms of a new female that happened along.

Relationships with other males are quite another thing. The physically strongest satyr in any band is always the leader[5]; druidic types[6] never rise beyond the title of "advisor," and even then they are rarely consulted, despite the respect the rest of the band holds for them (it is considered a sign of weakness in a leader to seek too much advice or magical assistance). The leader of the band has no verbal title to which he is referred, save when the band is dealing with other races. In this case, he would be given the title "Chief."

A leader reigns in one-year spans, renewed or lost each spring in a special ceremony known to the satyr as the Rutt. Basically, the Rutt is a trial of elimination through bare-handed combat among all mature members of the group. Satyrs consider the use of their horns legal in this contest. The battles are never to the death, as the intent is to humble the loser and acknowledge the superiority of the winner. Eventually, the overall leader is established and given homage by all, in the form of food and drink, musical instruments, weapons, and similar gifts a satyr would consider useful. The leader is also given first choice of all willing females the band comes across.

This type of conditioning affects the satyr beyond his natural social group. To entice a satyr to join a party of male adventurers, the respect that the satyr associates with friendship must first be established. This is done in only one way—the prospective "friends" must be battled to determine dominance (friendship will occur, all other things being equal, no matter who wins). However, if the satyr wins, he will expect to be considered superior to his friends in all ways, and he will want to make all the decisions for the group. Thus, a satyr will always consider himself better or worse than everyone else, fighting everyone he meets to establish this. Magic is disdained during such contests as much as is the use of weapons, as both are considered to be the mark of a coward. As during the Rutt, satyrs will not fight to the death during such battles. A party's alliance with a satyr will always be a rough-and-tumble experience at first.

Female humans, elves, and the like have an even more difficult time with satyrs, as they are considered good for one thing and one thing only. A female who cannot defend herself, or one who isn't obviously the partner of another male, will be courted tenaciously. The satyr will sing and play for her, vigorously proclaiming his love for her, though he would offer his affections just as copiously to any other female who happened by. Male defenders of a lady's honor will be battled to determine dominance, with the winner having the "right" to woo the female. Satyrs are completely unable to conceive of this as being wrong. Females who manage to put off the satyr's overtures are forever considered honorary males, as a "real woman" couldn't possibly turn the satyr down. This putting off may take some time, as every satyr considers himself a Casanova and will certainly be a problem in the meantime.

All satyrs are musically inclined, and many make their own "Pan pipes" from local materials. But once in a while, a satyr will craft and master a set of magical pipes[7]; the one who does soon rises to an exalted position within his band, though his chance at seizing leadership is no greater than others (resorting to the use of the pipes during the Rutt would brand him a coward). These magical pipes are known to cause listeners to fall asleep, be seized with fear, or to become entranced should certain melodies be played on them, but even without these effects, satyrs find the pipes useful in wooing women, making friends with other sylvan creatures, and threatening their enemies. A satyr lucky enough to craft a set of these magical pipes may never possess more than one, nor can he craft another for someone else. The construction of a set of pipes (magical or otherwise) takes a full week, wherein no other activities save the basic functions of living can be pursued. If lost or destroyed, another set may be made, but under these conditions only. No more than one satyr in any band will possess and be able to employ the magic pipes. If another happens to gain the ability, he goes off on his own to seek another "pipeless" band, into which he will always be happily accepted.

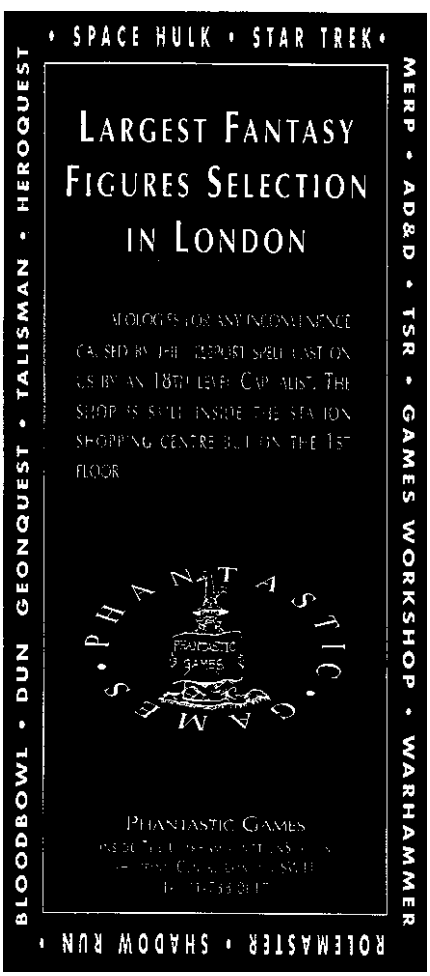
The pipes never give off a magical dweomer because in fact, the magic comes from the satyr's intuitive knowledge of music. The finely crafted reed pipes are merely a focusing agent for the magic. Many a thief has been disappointed after going through the dangers of obtaining such a set.

Sometimes a satyr, probably seeking more excitement in his life, will agree to join a group of adventurers. In general, a satyr makes for a tough opponent, so the presence of such a creature is rarely undesired in an adventuring party. His ability to survive and dwell in harmony with nature[8] makes his company a boon to those seeking to traverse a sylvan wilderness. Mind you, satyrs are rarely as reliable as a human ranger would be, or as reassuring as the presence of an elf. Satyrs have short attention spans; they are very much creatures of the moment and rarely plan ahead. Although they are suitable companions for a short stint, they can rarely stay interested in an adventure long enough to continue it for more than a week at most. They will certainly leave when it suits them, often without so much as a word of explanation.

However, the presence of a satyr will always mean one thing: a lot of fun. The satyr sings and dances on the gloomiest days, but this may well serve to irritate rather than cheer fellow adventurers. He is especially well received by those with the baser instincts of drinking and wenching in mind, for these are part of every good satyr's personality.

It would seem that satyrs have little time to spare for matters of theology, but they do have several holidays that pass as religious in some sense. The Festival of Pan generally follows the Spring Rutt in which the band leaders are determined. Pan is honored but once a year and is considered to be the patron god of wine and music. Individual groups of satyrs gather in secluded glens to hear humorous tales of Pan's many exploits, narrated by their druidic priest or by their leader if a druid is not present. Contests of music and drinking bouts follow this, the winners of which are crowned with wreaths of spring leaves. Furthermore, a great bonfire is built, into which are hurled skins of good wine and finely crafted musical instruments. This sacrifice of material goods brings an end to the ceremony.

Skerrit, the god of the centaurs, is also honored by the satyrs. They refer to Skerrit as the Hunter in the Green, and the



ceremonies dedicated to him take place each month on nights of the full moon. Satyrs band together in large clearings in isolated groves on these nights, with sometimes as many as a dozen different groups. Ritual mock hunts and fierce wrestling contests are held in the moonlight around a roaring fire. The winners that come out of these two events are called Hunters for the entire month to follow, the titles to be renewed or lost at the next gathering. Hunters are given choice food in the interim and are honored as the Chiefs personal bodyguards. Tales of the great hunting exploits of Skerrit are then related by the most prominent druidic priest present. These stories are followed by a fabulous feast of wild game hunted down earlier that day. Afterward, before dawn, the bands disperse into the trees.

As can be seen, though the satyrs are a flighty and frivolous race, they are well in touch with the land and their patron gods. Unlike many races, however, they unfortunately have no stories of creation—either of the world or themselves. Sadly, not even the satyrs themselves can give us any insight toward the secret of their origins.

Footnotes

1. Satyrs live to be over 200 years old. The age of any one satyr in a group may be determined by rolling 1d20, multiplying the result by 10, then adding 1d10 (with a 10 equalling a 0 on the last roll).

2. See DRAGON® issue #87, "The Ecology of the Dryad," and issue #109, "Hooves and Green Hair" for more on the relationship between dryads, satyrs, and humans.

3. Young satyrs reach maturity at about the same rate as human males, staying with their dryad mothers until they are about 12 years old. Then they are left in the care of their satyr fathers, who train them in all matters important to a satyr (e.g., wenching, drinking, frolicking, music making, etc.).

4. Because of the satyr's state of mind and social values, charm spells have quite interesting effects depending on the sex of the spell-caster. If a satyr fails his saving throw against a male spell-caster, he immediately attacks the spell-caster to establish dominance and is thereby acting accordingly to the "friendship" the spell implies. If he does make his saving throw, he might attack anyway—but the spell will ensure that the attack will be immediate.

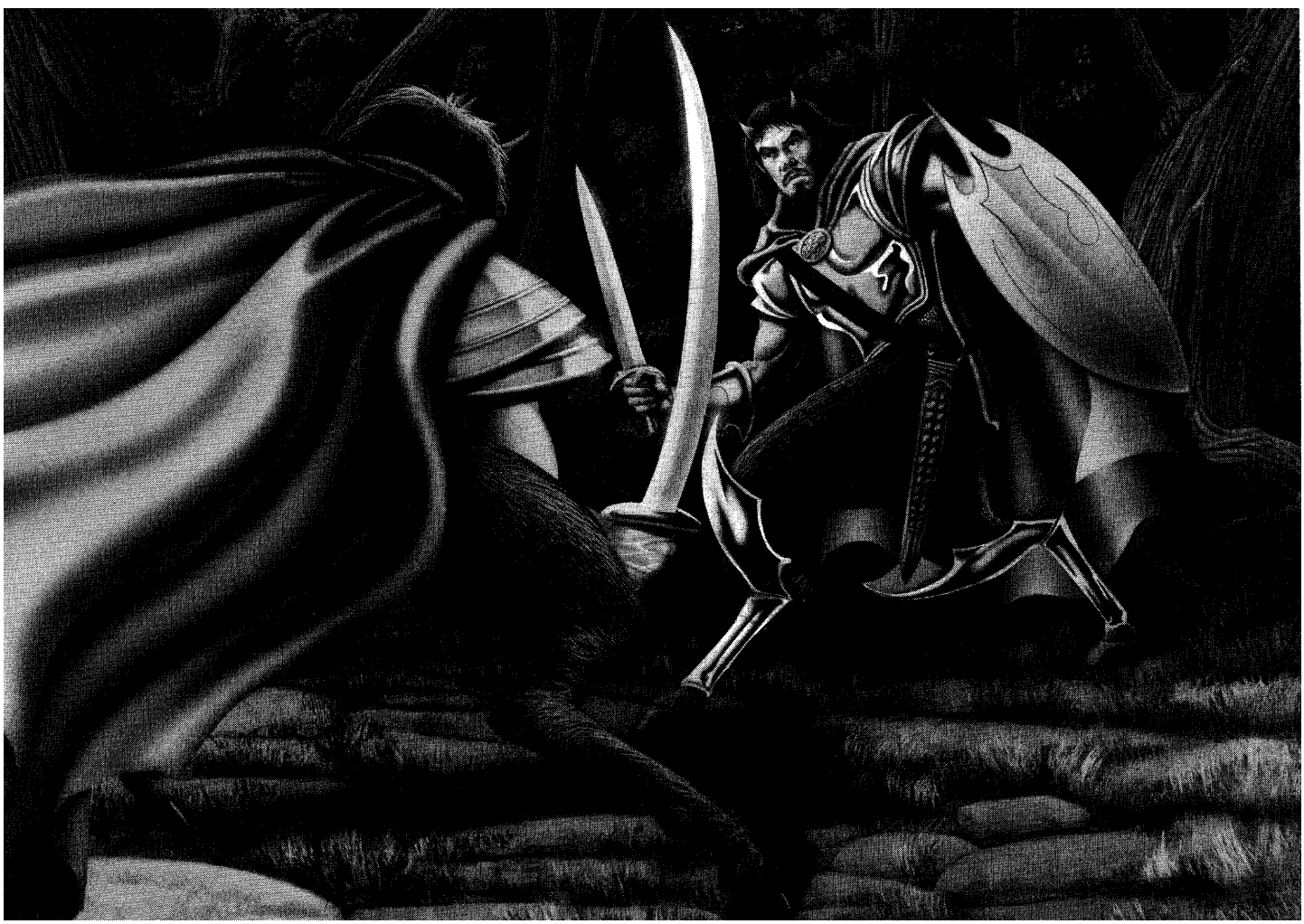
Failed saves against a female spell-caster means the satyr will be even more obnoxious in his attempt to woo her. Here the satyr will become the jealous lover, keeping all males away from his "true love." To reflect the satyr's spell-strengthened vigor, give him +2 on all attack rolls when battling "competitors." The lovesick creature will go to great lengths for his lady and will generally be as great a pain in the neck as possible.

5. Leaders (the satyrs with the most hit points of their bands) always have at least 16 strength, with a maximum of 18/50. Roll 1d6: 1-2, 16 strength; 3-4, 17 strength; 5, 18 (nonpercentile) strength; 6, 18/01-50 strength.

6. There is a 20% chance that any band will possess a "spiritual guide" among its numbers. This satyr is a special NPC shaman with either clerical or druidic powers of up to 6th level. Satyr shamans do not seem priestlike at all in behavior, as they uphold the "highest ideals" of satyrs everywhere—and one can easily guess what those "ideals" are!

7. Every satyr who tries has a 10% chance to be able to craft the magical pipes, but if there is already a magical piper present, few will feel the need to even try. Upon occasion (1%), a prospective musician crafts a set unintentionally, and he will then leave for another band.

8. All satyrs should have some tracking ability, at 20-80% accuracy. Satyrs have any of the usual bonuses or penalties associated with tracking creatures in the wilderness. Ω



The ecology of the

SEA LION

by Ed Greenwood

"What's this I hear about sea lions in the Realms being, ah, really some sort of aquatic lion?" I asked, as Elminster paused on the heels of a few rollicking tales of the deeps. The old sage blinked.

"Aye. . . . What other sorts of sea lions are there?" he asked suspiciously, no doubt thinking this would turn out to be another of my jokes.

I told him that seals in our world were called sea lions by some, and he snorted. "Why not just call them seals?" he asked, as though everyone in our world was crazy. (He could, I often think, be right.)

"Well," I continued, "are these sea lions — which we don't have here, by the way — important? I mean, in fable, land-lore, monster-slaying stories; that sort of thing."

The old sage thought for a bit and then nodded. "Ye remember the arms of Tethyr that I showed ye some time ago?" I did, and recalled aloud (as I pulled Elminster's sketch from my files) that there were sea lions in that coat of arms. Elminster nodded again.

"I'll tell ye," he said slowly, "the tale of Nearel and the sea lions." He coughed a few times and began sonorously.

"Of old in the land of Tethyr, there was a king, Mhoaran the Tusk-Bearded. A mighty man was he, tall and broad and thewed as a great hero — and coarse, fire-tempered, and brawling, to boot. He took his thronw by force of arms and held it for many long years despite the rebellious nobles of the land, who supported three surviving (and well hidden) kin of the previous monarch. These nobles managed to slay, usually by poison, any heirs Mhoaran fathered, until there was not a one of the nobles whom Mhoaran would trust. Moreover, three successive queens died mysteriously, and the lonely and bereaved king grew bitter, grim, and wild.

"He took to spiriting his sons away from their birth-beds and riding far from his court, offering lands, riches, and noble titles to commoners who would raise him an heir in secret. Many families accepted — but the king's enemies had agents, too, and these agents almost always found and slew both the royal infants and their foster parents. In all the long years, Mhoaran lost twenty-six sons and himself grew more feeble as, despite his precautions, occasional poisons did their work on him.

"Only two of his sons are known to have survived past childhood. One's lineage was suspected, and he was slain in combat while but an untried youth. The other one, Nearel, grew up in a fisherman's hut on the Sword Coast, where he helped his foster father with fishing — and with the capturing and taming of sea lions, which was the man's special interest.

"It happened that about fourteen years after Nearel's birth, King Mhoaran took ship north up the coast to Waterdeep, to meet with other rulers of the Realms. Fearing an attack, the king kept his vessel close to shore, slipping along by night and remaining, in safe harbors by day. Mhoaran's enemies were closer than the king had thought, and he was roused one night by the clash of steel outside his cabin door.

"Now, Mhoaran was a bull of a man, a fighter of awesome repute, even in the elder days of his reign. But he was only one, with his bodyguards dead beyond his door, and he faced nearly forty. He stood his ground in silence, in his darkened cabin, and answered not their taunts and threats, for he knew arrows would be his sure death if he opened the door or let light reveal him.

"With blade and axe he waited — and fell like a demon on those who picked his door-lock and slunk in. Lit torches were hurled into the cabin by those in the passage. Mhoaran wielded them like blazing clubs and one by one hurled them out the sea-windows of his cabin as he fought — until he stood again in darkness, surrounded by dead men: The king then piled corpses in the doorway, so that the light would not locate him clearly, and waited.

"Again the traitors charged in to slay the king; again he fought, and was sorely — wounded, but battled on in deadly silence, until the last of this group of attackers turned and fled. Mhoaran heard much heated discussion from the passage outside his chamber as the king tied garments on the worst of his wounds, but bled through the bandages, and grew weaker. He heard the traitors decide to burn him out, and he knew that they would in the end succeed. Quickly, before someone thought to send archers to the rails to loose shafts at him as he swam, Mhoaran slipped out through a sea-window and made for shore.

"The water was icy cold, and the king very weak. The weapons he bore dragged at him as he swam, and he was heard from the ship. Mhoaran spat silent curses at the waning moon, for it still cast a feeble light over the waves, and shafts began to hiss into the water near him. The shore was far off, and the king despaired — for he could hear a boat being launched, behind him, and when he swam on he saw in the moonlight another small boat ahead of him.

"For a moment he thought this second boat was someone sent out from shore to slay him, by some treacherous arrangement. But as it drew nearer he saw that it held only one man — a youth, and weaponless. The youth saw him and said, 'Who art thou? Cast away thy weapons and I will take thee in the boat.'

"Mhoaran was loath to let go his weapons, but his strength was nearly gone anyway, so he complied, giving his name but not his title. The youth took him aboard, rolling him into the bottom of the boat atop bulging sacks that reeked of fresh-slain cattle. The youth saw the small boat hastening toward them from the king's ship and said to Mhoaran, 'Who are these that would slay you?'

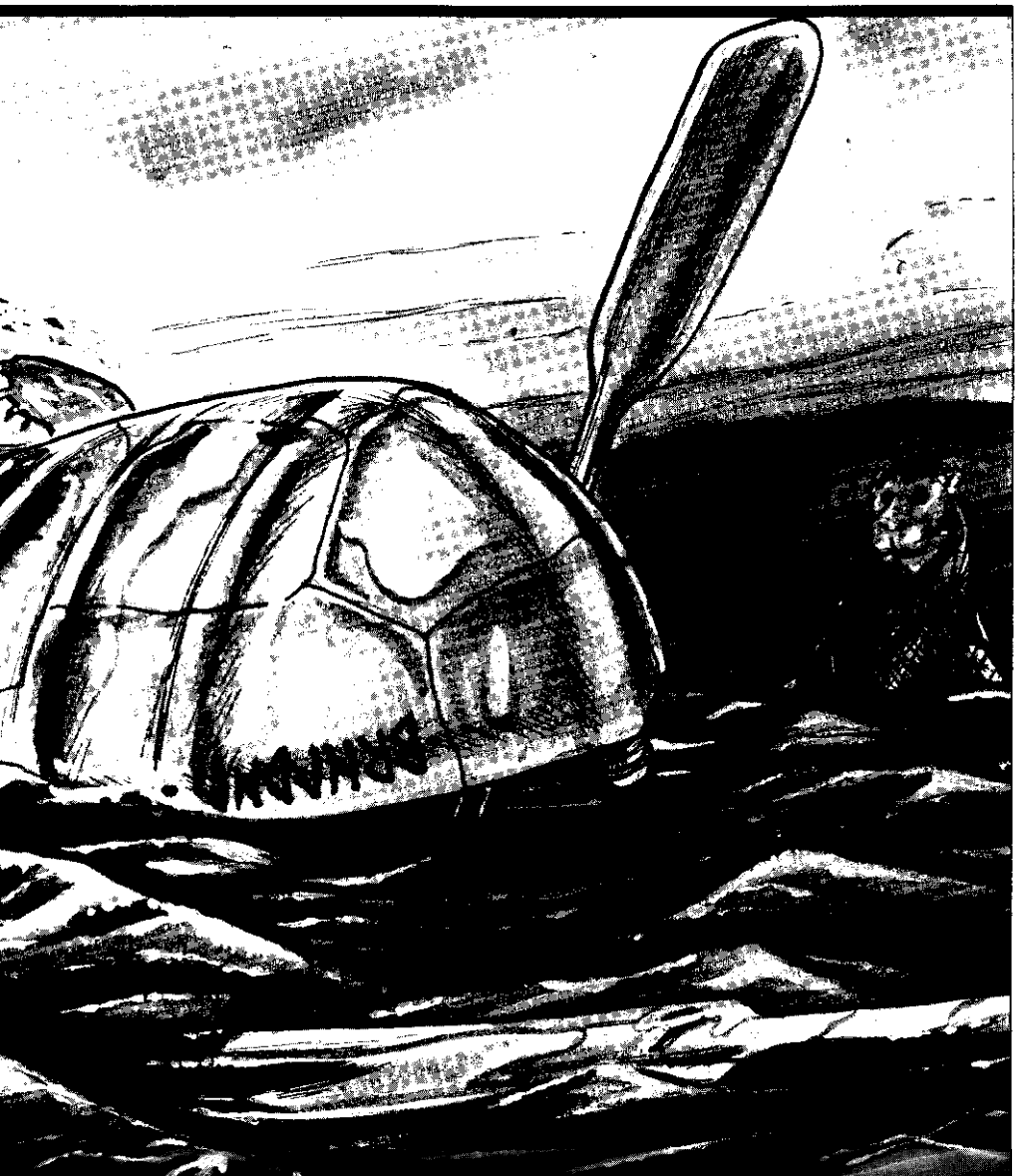
" 'Traitors,' Mhoaran answered.

" 'Traitors?' echoed the youth. 'To the king?'

"Mhoaran admitted his full identity, and the youth did not seem overly awed. 'If I save thee,' he asked, 'may I come to court? For I would be a swordsman.'

" 'Aye,' Mhoaran said. 'I can promise that. Wilt thou tell me thy name?'

" 'I am called Nearel,' the youth answered, and straightaway he leaned over the side of the boat while holding in his hand a short, flaring horn or trumpet carved of wood. He plunged his head into the icy waves and blew the horn, which made a deep, roaring noise. Nearel straightened up and turned, dripping, and warned, 'Stay away from the water,' as he untied a sack.



"Suddenly, the water around them boiled, and the king saw a huge curve of scales, dripping claws of fearsome size, and then one — two — four leonine heads rising out of the depths around them. Nearel raised the horn again and winded a deep, roaring bellow. This signal ended in a cough, and there came answering coughs and growls from the waves about them.

As an arrow slashed into the water nearby, Mhoaran realized that the boat crowded with swordsmen had drawn very close. Nearel stood up, hurled the contents of a sack toward the other boat, and roared again, this time in a high voice. Then, as Nearel ducked low to avoid flying arrows, Mhoaran saw the sea-creatures turn in the water and charge at the pursuing boat, trailing wakes like many small ships. In a moment there was a muffled crash, and then the full-throated roars of lions were heard in the darkness. Mhoaran made out the shape of the boat as it rolled over, and he heard the thrashing of men in the water, punctuated by an occasional scream. The lions dined, and all of the armed company perished, leaving the king and Nearel alone on the waves.

"Faint roaring could be heard beneath them, and the sea lions came up to the surface again, huge and fearsome. 'They yet want their dinner,' Nearel said, and began emptying sacks overboard. The king helped him until their boat was empty of meat, and deep purring was heard from all about. Then Nearel turned the boat about and rowed to shore. When Mhoaran laid eyes on Nearel's father, the king knew that he had found his own son.

"When Nearel came to court, he came by sea, standing on the backs of two sea lions. In later years Nearel fed his sea lions from the windows of his own tower, for the royal castle stands on a rock isle in a salt-water lake. And that is how the arms of Tethyr came to be supported by two sea lions."

We talked on late into the night, and hereafter follows what details of these creatures I could glean from Elminster.

Sea lions are large, powerful predators that inhabit undersea lairs (sometimes large wrecks in calm waters, but more often caves or rock clefts). They will move to another area if food becomes scarce or other predators too aggressive, persistent, and numerous. Sea lions are afraid of nothing, but they are inclined to be indolent — and thus, efficient killers and creatures who have no taste for fighting over food when it can be had elsewhere with less effort,

In a family or as a loner, a sea lion will hunt in a familiar area and rarely stray from it. The creatures are seldom a danger to humankind, demi-humans, or humanoids except in cases where they view individuals of such races as prey — a lone swimmer, for instance, or a small group of pearl divers.

Sea lions are useful, if tamed and properly trained, as aquatic guardians or hunters (sometimes for sport, as in the

island kingdom of Nimbral). Minstrels and bards sometimes refer to female sea lions (or, more carelessly, all sea lions) as "lyonesses"; hence the expression "like a merman riding a lyonesse," said of someone who sits unconcernedly in a sinking ship, or a vessel adrift. Many undersea creatures have been known to train sea lions; any such arrangement will suit the beasts because it enables them to live relatively free of pain and danger, and obtain, food more often and more easily than in the wild, so long as the sea lions get exercise and a chance to hunt for themselves fairly often.

Many men along the Sword Coast have trained sea lions, intending to sell the tamed specimens or to use them in salvage, fishing, and sea warfare. By the use of rewards (of food) and punishment (withholding food, expressing displeasure vocally), patient trainers can slowly steer a young sea lion's behavior toward more acceptable habits. However, adult sea lions can never be so trained by surface-dwellers; full-grown specimens will seek to slay any captor at every opportunity, heedless of their own safety.

Young sea lions will occasionally rebel in training; if they can be physically bested by the trainer (bad or lazy trainers clip a sea lion's ears to break its spirit), no harm will be done to the training process. If, however, the young creatures learn that they can defy their trainer with impunity, or prove often rebellious, they are unfit for training and should be released into the wild.

Few sages have examined sea lions, and fewer still observed them in the wild, but here follows what factual material Elminster has gathered:

Sea lions are robust, healthy creatures who usually die in combat; they rarely become diseased. Both sexes have manes, similar coloring, and scales over their entire body surface except for the head area. Their flipperlike forelimbs end in sets of claws (not retractile) that can do more damage than the strikes of a lion. Likewise, the bite of its strong jaws is more dangerous than the bite of a lion, A sea lion propels itself through the water by "rowing" with its forelimbs and sweeping its fluked tail back and forth. A system of gills enables sea lions to take in oxygen when underwater, but they can also inhale air as a lion does, which enables them to travel on the surface of the water for relatively short periods.

If healthy, sea lions mate every 9 months or so, the female giving birth 7-8 months later to 1-3 live, fully mobile offspring. Young sea lions are AC 8/6 when born (their scales are still flexible and soft), have 2 HD, move 14", and do damage of 1-3/1-3/1-8. Such young cubs are watched at all times by the mother (or, if in a family pride, 1-2 females) and kept in the lair, where they are fed by other members of the family that bring home their kills.

If the hunting is good, the young will grow rapidly; by 3-4 weeks of age, they will be AC 6/4, move 18", with attacks for 1-4/1-4/2-8 damage. For the rest of the first year of their lives, they remain at about this size, growing and developing internally. They learn to hunt during this time, always under the watchful eye of an adult female. The guardian keeps the young within a half-mile of the lair, nipping and roaring at cubs who do not want to be herded where she wishes them to go. In the following two years of life, sea lions begin to hunt alone (tentatively and carefully rather than boldly), and are identical to adults except that they have only 5 HD, gaining the sixth in the fourth year of their existence.

Most sea lions die violently and at a fairly young age, but some have been known to live more than eighty winters. The muzzle of a sea lion grows gray with age.

Sea lions usually live in family groups, known as prides, made up of 1 mature male, 1-2 young males, 2-4 mature females, and 1-3 young females. Old females will be cared for by the family until they die; old males usually die in battle. A young male either defeats the head of a pride to take his place, or is driven out to hunt alone until he can take or build a pride of his own.

Hunting packs may be a family pride (35% chance), but are more often (65%) adult males, sometimes accompanied by adult females or young males, who have gathered together under a strong leader to take on strong foes (such as sharks).

Adults will drag prey to their lair when it is unsafe or imprudent to eat where the prey was killed, or to feed young, but will not do this if it would reveal the location of the lair to a powerful foe. If a sea lion is hunting and there is more than one prey to be had immediately (when a group of whales is encountered, for instance), it will often try to disable a victim and then turn to fight others, rather than finishing off the kill. Thus, young sea lions in the second and third stages of growth sometimes hang about the edges of a battle, waiting to dart in and drag away disabled prey while the adults continue to fight off the more healthy foes. Sea lions never slay wastefully; they will kill enough to feed themselves (and their trainer or family, if any) and no more. Of course, one will fight incessantly if it is threatened by a group of adversaries and escape is difficult or impossible. Sea lions are intelligent enough to usually be able to sense when an enemy might be too powerful for them, and can certainly tell when a combat or battle is going badly, and will not hesitate to flee (if possible) under such circumstances.

The lairs of sea lions contain all manner of treasure that is not destroyed by water, usually including a great variety of small metallic litter — chiefly coins, but also many items of no appreciable value. Sea lions do not consider their treasure valuable, land will not fight to the death to defend it or their lair, although they will usually try to drive away any creatures approaching their lair in order to establish their territorial rights. ✕

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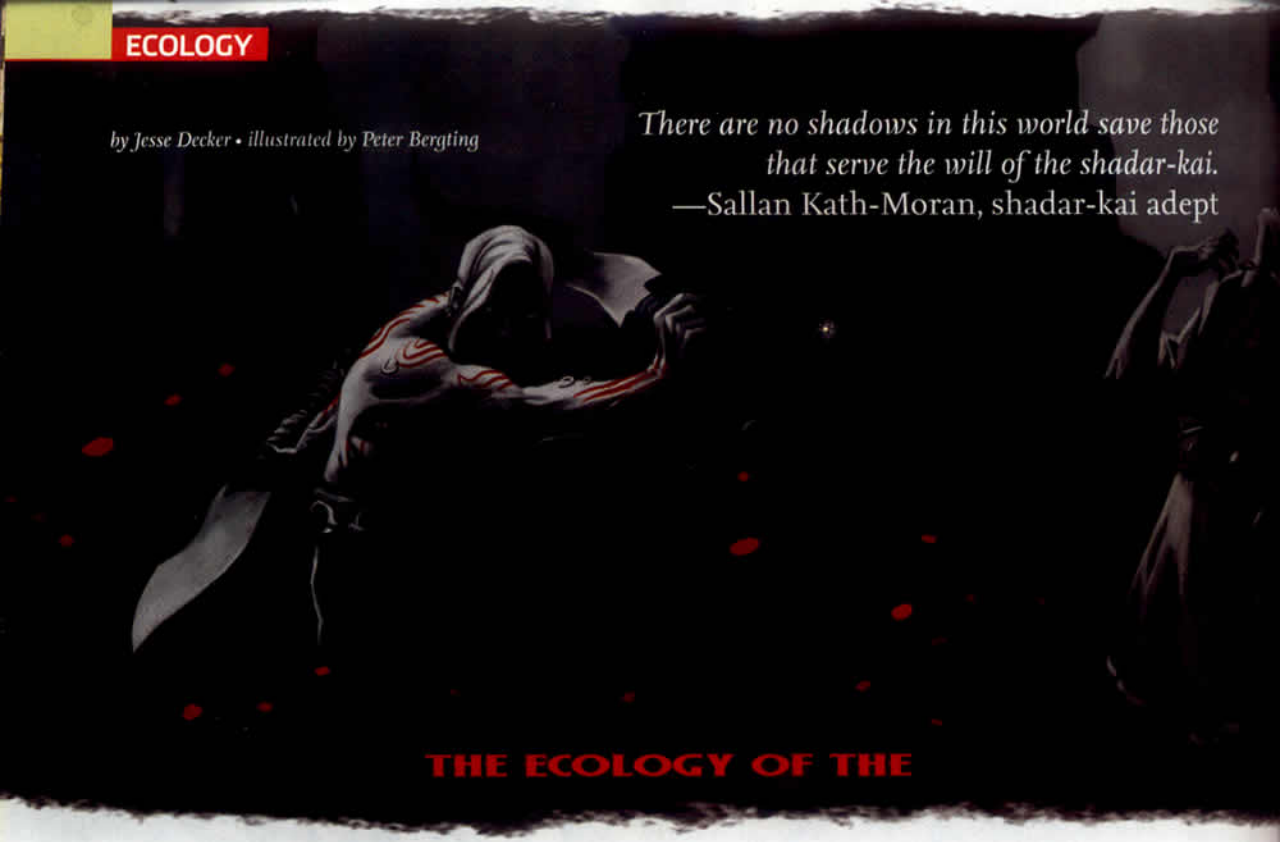
by Jesse Decker • illustrated by Peter Bergting

There are no shadows in this world save those that serve the will of the shadar-kai.
—Sallan Kath-Moran, shadar-kai adept



THE ECOLOGY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Cursed by shadow, the shadar-kai hunt in twilight. They seek revenge for some half-forgotten wrong, emerging to steal power and information then slipping back into the shadows. The shadar-kai, also known as the shadow fey, have a great affinity for subtlety, cruelty, and stealth, yet they also carry a deadly curse, a curse that dooms their souls to a netherworld of shadows. Like many fey, they are bound to nature and despise those who despoil it, but where other fey protect nature for its own sake, the shadar-kai do so that they alone might draw upon nature's wealth and power.

HISTORY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

What joy and light once dwelt within the hearts of the shadar-kai was long ago lost to the shadows of their own history. In the early days of the world the shadar-kai lived as other fey, bound in peace to nature and life. Yet always shadow and shadar-kai were as one, the pale-skinned fey harboring secrets of and influence over the mysterious Plane of Shadows. As eons passed and mortal creatures began to rise in power, the greatest spellcasters of the shadar-kai gazed deep into the swirling, timeless tides of that darkened plane, revealing a prophetic vision of nature pillaged by the mercurial whims of lesser races. The mighty among the shadow fey called for some strike against the races that would one day wreak this destruction, but the shadar-kai were never great in number and they could not through might or guile alone prevent the future they foresaw.

Thus, while their goal to prevent a ruinous future might have seemed innocent, their solution was not. Calling upon their innate intimacies with shadow and potent magical

skills, the shadar-kai sought a way to darken the world.

The legends of the shadar-kai tell of a hundred shadow fey—each a master of ancient magics—joining together to perform a ritual, one that would irreversibly bind the world of mortals and the Plane of Shadow together. From this twilight, their innate bond with shadow and their long-practiced rituals would give the shadow fey mastery over this new environment, allowing them to secure the sanctity of nature as they saw fit.

Yet even the shadar-kai could not see the dangers lurking within the shadow.

As their mighty ritual progressed, the shadow fey stared into the depths of the realm of shadow and learned that they as an entire race would become that place's conduit into their world. Forming a darkened nexus upon the Plane of Shadow, the shadow mages' magics bound the souls of every living shadar-kai to this single point. At the culmination of their great ritual, the very essences of the shadar-kai would drag this shadowy anchor into the Material Plane along with the entire dark realm, joining the two forever.

There were those, however, who opposed the shadow fey. Heroes of this forgotten age, servants of primeval orders, and outsiders guarding what their masters had created sought to stop the shadar-kai and their dark ritual. Through countless shadow fey guardians, these bygone warriors entered the Plane of Shadow and found the cyst the shadar-kai were creating, the nexus of extraplanar darkness bound to the very souls of the shadow fey. At the apex of the shadow mages' ritual the opposing heroes made a great and forgotten sacrifice, interrupting the rite to bind the two realms. The resulting magical backlash was

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check regarding shadar-kai. Those who study the magic of the natural world, the Plane of Shadow, and the most ancient of histories might possess this information.

Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
10	The shadar-kai are evil fey with a strange relationship to shadow and darkness.
15	Shadar-kai are extremely stealthy and skilled at attacking from the shadows. It is their stealth and cruelty rather than physical or magical might that makes them dangerous.
20	An ancient curse draws the souls of the shadar-kai to the Plane of Shadow, where they cannot escape without great magic. They make special devices called gal-ralan to help combat this curse.
25	The shadow curse affects the shadar-kai constantly, making them partially out of touch with the material world. Certain magic and rendering them unconscious can weaken the shadow fey and eventually banish them to the Plane of Shadow.

THE MAGIC OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Since the ritual that brought the shadow curse down upon them, the shadar-kai have struggled to escape its incessant pull, developing a variety of magic—like the galralan—meant to loosen its grip or strengthen their own waning abilities.

Shadowslip

Illusion (Shadow)
Level: Brd 3, Sor/Wiz 3
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 standard action
Range: Touch
Targets: Creature touched
Duration: 1 round/level
Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless)
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

Shadows twist and twine about the target, forcing many blows directed against it to go awry. The subject of this spell benefits from a 20% miss chance as if it had partial concealment.

In addition, any time the creature moves, it can move through the Plane of Shadow rather than through the Material Plane. Moving in this manner slows the creature to half speed, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The creature moves only through the fringes of the Plane of Shadow and cannot pass through any barriers or other obstacles on the Material Plane. The creature remains in the Plane of Shadow only while moving and returns fully to the Material Plane at the end of each move action.

Special: Shadar-kai under the effects of a *shadowslip* spell do not suffer the effects of the shadow curse. While any negative levels they had gained as a result of the curse previous to casting this spell still affect them, they cannot gain further negative levels from the shadow curse for the duration of the spell.

Shadowlight Oil

Shadowlight oil is a slow-burning oil that contains some small touch of the Plane of Shadow and can be burnt in any regular lantern. A lantern filled with shadowlight oil does not provide bright illumination over any area, but instead provides double the area of shadowy illumination that a lantern burning normal oil would. The table below summarizes the effects of shadowlight oil in normal lanterns.

Lantern	Bright	Shadowy	Duration
Common	n/a	60 ft.	6 hr./pint
Bullseye	n/a	240-ft. cone	6 hr./pint
Hooded	n/a	120 ft.	6 hr./pint

One pint of shadowlight oil weighs 1 pound, costs 5 gp, and requires a DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check to create.

titanic, scattering and killing countless shadar-kai and scouring both planes of any evidence of the sinister shadar-kai mages and the mortal realm's champions.

While the eternal twilight of the Plane of Shadow remained apart from the mortal realm, what ties the shadar-kai had forged could not be undone, only altered. The shadowy chains bound to the souls of the shadar-kai reversed their pull, dragging their very essences into the realm they had hoped to enslave, forever corrupting the bond into the dreadful shadow curse.

Today, their homes decaying and empty as their populations are claimed by a darkened netherworld, the shadow fey obsess over their past folly and failure. Turning crueler with each generation, the shadar-kai have largely become a race of scavengers and unrepentant murderers, all desperately searching for some means to keep their souls from the shadow's grasp.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

Shadar-kai stand slightly taller than the average human and move with a speed and grace that few mortals can hope to match. The slender shadow fey weigh about 10 pounds lighter than humans of equal height and their long limbs are swift and flexible rather than delicate. The shadar-kai have extremely keen vision, allowing them to see twice as far through shadow or weak light as even the most keen-sighted elves. Being fey creatures, shadar-kai have incredibly long life spans, possibly even bordering on immortality. Although no—or extremely few—shadar-kai still live who remember the time when the shadow curse was bestowed upon their race, there are many who heard the ancient tale from their ancestors first hand.

Darkness is always with the shadar-kai and their bond with the twilight is easy to see. Shadows seem to bend to conceal the soft movements of the pale fey and with the slightest effort they can wrap this shade around them. This almost physical manipulation of shadow allows the shadar-kai to be seen only when they wish, and even the most wary sentries have failed to notice groups of shadar-kai slipping by in the darkness.

Yet, despite their control over darkness, every shadar-kai lives in fear of the debilitating shadow curse and the ghostly Plane of Shadow. As muted visions and dulled sensations pervade the realm of shadow, the shadar-kai have found that vivid and sharp sensations serve as precious handholds to the Material Plane. While moments of ecstasy and joy might serve their needs, the embittered mindset of the shadow

SHADAR-KAI ON THE PLANE OF SHADOW

Only a small population of shadar-kai actually exists on the Material Plane, the vast majority having been drawn to the Plane of Shadow over the centuries. While shadow fey regain lost levels and abilities upon submitting to the shadow curse, this is of small comfort. Being fey, shadar-kai are creatures of the Material Plane, specifically bound by nature to the world they dwelled upon. Separation from this home is an endless torment and all shadow fey feel like devoted guards forcibly separated from their posts, ever awaiting news of some calamity they've lost all opportunity to oppose.

The shadar-kai of the Plane of Shadow are more subdued than their brethren who still struggle upon the Material Plane. While some still toil to find a way back to their natural homes, most have submitted to a kind of race-wide despair. Living either as crazed brigands or despairing vagabonds in the shadowy doubles of their ruined cities, no passion, happiness, or hope fills the lives of these fallen fey. While these shadar-kai no longer scar and torture themselves, their hatred of all humanoid races is even greater than that of those on the Material Plane, and travelers through their shadowy domains are mercilessly hunted and gruesomely punished. The merest suggestion of a way back to the Material Plane, however, results in the immediate attention—even subservience—of the shadow fey, although those who make and fail to follow through on such claims meet lengthy and unimaginably agonizing ends.

fey makes extreme pain one of the most useful tools for keeping their souls anchored to the mortal realm. As such, shadar-kai regularly scar themselves with deep and complex tattoos, pierce their bodies with hoops and nails, and cut their flesh with blades of cold iron—the bane of all fey. The last of the shadow mages have even invented wearable torture devices called gal-ralans, excruciating cold iron armlets enchanted to further aid their struggle to remain on this world (see page 151 of the *Fiend Folio*).

Shadar-kai hunt and eat much as many humanoids do. With their bodies numbed by the touch of shadow, they seek out the strongest flavors and tastes they can find. Even the most powerful spices seem bland and distant to the shadow fey, though, and few take to food with any joy. For shadar-kai, eating is but another reminder that they will someday be drawn into shadow.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SHADAR-KAI

The shadow fey were never great in number, raising only a handful of small hidden cites even at the height of their numbers. Once the shadow curse took hold the shadar-kai's sparsely populated holdings began to empty and decay. Now, what shadar-kai redoubts remain are elegant half ruined dwellings cut into the sides of shadowy cliffs and slender towers rising beneath the densest forest canopies, home only to the oldest and most crazed shadow fey.

In the centuries since the fall of their homes, the shadar-kai have lived on the fringes of other societies, clustered in small groups and cabals, often led by skilled shadow mages. These groups of spies, assassins, and the occasional spellcasters haunt the shadows, hunting for any means of escaping the shadow curse. Rarely numbering more than fifty members, they steal what they need to survive, eagerly attacking any humanoids they encounter along the way.

ADVANCED SHADAR-KAI

Desperate to make the most of their dwindling numbers, shadar-kai frequently train as assassins, rogues, and deadly shadow dancers. The most cunning of shadar-kai society take up the mantle of the shadow mage, wizards skilled in the arts of illusion and darkness. Some even adopt the shadow adept (see *Player's Guide to Faerûn*), daggerspell mage, or shadowmind prestige classes (both from the *Complete Adventurer*), giving them far greater control over darkness and their enemies' perceptions.

SHADOW MAGE AGAZTRE CR 8

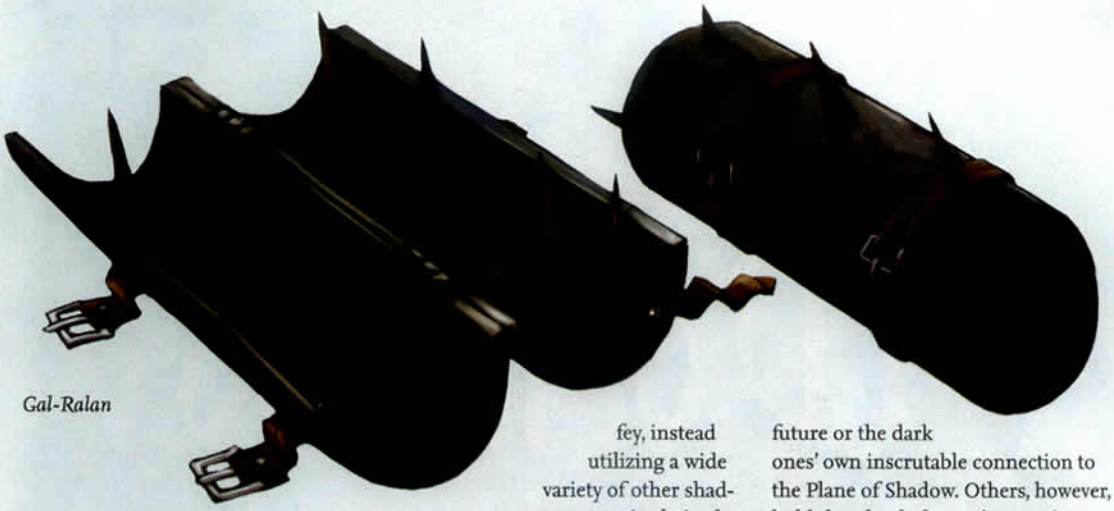
Male shadar-kai wizard 7
NE Medium fey (Extraplanar)
Fiend Folio 150
Init +3; **Senses** superior low-light vision; Listen +11, Spot +11
Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal, Sylvan, Undercommon

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 11
hp 28 (10 HD)
Fort +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +12; +2 bonus on all saves against death effects, energy drains, and the shadow curse

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee +1 *kukri* +8 (1d4/18–20 + large scorpion venom)
Base Atk +4; **Grp** +3
Special Attack sneak attack +1d6
Combat Gear *wand of magic missiles* (3rd, 22 charges)
Spells Prepared (CL 7th, ranged touch +8):
4th—*shadow conjuration* (DC 18)
3rd—*haste, keen edge, shadowslip*
2nd—*darkness, mirror image,* silent *magic missile, Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 15)
1st—*disguise self, mage armor, shield, ray of enfeeblement* (DC 14), *ventriloquism*
0—*daze* (DC 13), *ghost sound, mage hand, prestidigitation*
Spellbook all prepared spells; 0—all; 1st—*cause fear, grease, identify, unseen servant, shield, sleep*; 2nd—*blur, minor image, scare, sound burst, web*; 3rd—*invisibility sphere, major image*; 4th—*phantasmal killer*

Abilities Str 8, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 12
SQ hide in plain sight, shadow curse, summon familiar (Azae)
Feats Alertness, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (kukri), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain)[B], Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (illusion), Weapon Finesse
Skills Craft (alchemy) +11, Hide +13 (+23 in dark or shadowy conditions), Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +14, Move Silently +13 Search +11, Spellcraft +13, Spot +11, Survival +5 (+7 following tracks), Tumble +9
Possessions +1 *kukri, amulet of natural armor +1, +2 gal-ralan,* hooded lantern, 2 doses large scorpion venom (one on kukri, see page 297 of the DUNGEON MASTER'S *Guide*), 2 pints of shadowlight oil, spellbook, spell components
Azae, bat familiar: 1 hp, *Monster Manual* 268.

Despite the bloodthirstiness they indulge upon others, shadow fey bands are savagely loyal to one another, like traumatized siblings clinging to their orphaned brethren. Passions run deep between shadar-kai, but the heights of tenderness this might manifest as in some races instead gives rise to masochistic relationships, sometimes between merely two individuals but just as likely incorporating an entire band. These affairs culminate in agonizing orgies of tattooing, piercing, scarification, and mutilation. Yet, despite their painful nature, these trysts prove just as



Gal-Ralan

intimate and cherished to the shadar-kai as do the romances of other races.

As passionately as shadar-kai guard one another, centuries of loss and festering anger have left the shadar-kai intent on taking revenge on the civilized races that drove them to their doom. That the shadar-kai brought the shadow curse upon themselves is of little import to the cunning hunters and devious adepts of the shadow fey. It was the pain of nature giving way to younger races that caused the shadar-kai to seek aid in shadow and it is those younger races that the shadar-kai blame for their curse.

Regardless of their lack of race-wide organization, the shadow fey have universally adopted the spiked chain as their weapon of choice. Both a tool and a symbol of their wrathful crusade against the younger races, the shadar-kai delight in the spiked chain's versatility to mete out a variety of painful deaths, from brutal strangulations to slowly carved mutilations. As such, all shadow fey are skilled in the use of these weapons.

Enemies and Allies of the Shadar-Kai

As a result of their attempt to radically alter the natural world, even if just to protect it, shadar-kai are not well liked by other fey. While the shadar-kai still respect and honor their people and their courts, the shadow fey have been disowned from the hearts and minds of their brethren. As such, the shadar-kai have little to do with other fey, instead utilizing a wide variety of other shadowy creatures in their plots.

While shadow mastiffs most commonly appear alongside shadar-kai hunters, shadow asps (see *the Fiend Folio*) and creatures with the shadow template (see the *Manual of the Planes*) might also be trained to serve the shadow fey. Powerful shadow creatures, like darkweavers (see the *Fiend Folio*), shadow dragons (see the *Draconomicon*), and shadow fiends (see the *Book of Vile Darkness*, mature audience only) have also been known to bend shadow fey to their whims, at least for a time. Shadar-kai ally with humanoids only when it serves some greater purpose or to eventually betray and steal from them.

Of all the fey, only the murderous redcaps (see the *Monster Manual III*) willingly have dealings with the shadar-kai, but only out of their wild bloodlust and not out of any sense of kinship. Embodiments of rage and natural bloodletting, redcaps eagerly indulge the shadow fey's fall into frustration and revenge. Sadistic voyeurs, redcaps flock to groups of shadar-kai, opportunistically hoping to bathe themselves in the vengeful ways of shadow fey warriors.

Despite their overlapping tactics and abilities, dark ones (see the *Fiend Folio* and "The Ecology of the Dark One" in Dragon #322) and shadar-kai share a violent hatred of one another. While the dark ones revile the shadow fey out of jealousy and their isolationist tendencies, the shadar-kai seem to hold a deeper grudge. Some researchers speculate that this hatred perhaps ties to some new shadar-kai revelation of the future or the dark ones' own inscrutable connection to the Plane of Shadow. Others, however, hold that the dark ones' mysterious history might lie with the ancient mortal heroes who thwarted the shadar-kai adepts' dark ritual so long ago and that a potent racial enmity remains.

Shadar-Kai Tactics

As skilled as they are stealthy, many of a shadow fey's opponents never even see their attacker, at least not until they're restrained for a protracted and agonizing revenge.

Advanced Ambushers: Both cunning and stealthy, the shadar-kai use their hide in plain sight ability to launch surprise attacks whenever possible, appearing and sneak attacking only to melt into the shadows. The shadar-kai regularly repeat this tactic, dropping foes one by one over the course of multiple ambush encounters, each lasting little more than a single round. Such ambushes most commonly occur in shadowy surroundings as shadar-kai gain a significant bonus to hiding in such areas.

Cursed Combatants: Above all things, shadar-kai fear the shadow curse. Forced to make DC 15 Will saves or suffer negative levels whenever they are stunned, dazed, staggered, or unconscious, shadow fey adepts constantly seek out spells like *owl's wisdom* and magic items like *cloaks of resistance, periapts of Wisdom*, various *ioun stones*, and similar saving-throw augmenting and Wisdom-bolstering magics. Shadar-kai swiftly flee from opponents, making use of spells such as *daze, sound burst*, or *word of chaos* that capitalize upon this failing.

The Ecology

of the Shade

Outcasts in a shadowy world

by Dan Salas

The sleeping chamber was filled with shadows and formless black shapes. On the bed slept Carissa, the Lady of Graham Manor. Her young face was faintly lit by starlight from the single bedroom window. Until midnight, she slept undisturbed, exhausted from the day's events.

Suddenly she sat up, her wide eyes peering into the darkness. The change from dreams to shadowed reality was startling. Lady Carissa knew that she was a light sleeper, but only some nearby disturbance could awaken her so violently. The silence and blackness of the chamber only increased her nervousness. With damp hands, she reached over to her bedside table and spoke the words of a simple cantrip to light a candle. The small yellow flame did not completely drive away the darkness, but it was better than nothing. A wizardess had been able to teach her that much.

Carissa looked around as her eyes adjusted to the pale light. She saw the familiar furnishings, thick carpets, purple dragon sculptures, bright tapestries, and silk bedsheets. The heavy stones of the walls seemed to reassure her that the fortress was still strong. Then her gaze found the intruder, and she froze.

A man sat motionless in a chair across the room, dressed in gray and black. His face was partially covered by a black cloth wrapped around his jaw, and his eyes were hidden in the shadows of a black hood. He seemed more like a phantom than a man. Though his posture was not threatening, Carissa stared at him with a paralyzing fear. If she shouted for help, would anyone arrive in time? Was he an assassin?

The intruder held up one gloved hand. "Please don't call the guards," he said softly. "I've come to help you, not harm you."

Carissa's brow wrinkled. She thought that the voice sounded familiar, but she did not recognize the stranger. Being the lady of a large and powerful estate, she was even now recovering her wits and sense of command. She was on her own. "Who are you?" she whispered fiercely.

For a moment, the intruder did not answer. During this silence, Carissa noticed the dagger strapped to his thigh, the long sword at his side, and the studded leather vest under his dark cloak. Seeing that he was a warrior and not a night-demon, she gave him a steadier look.

"Tonight, I'm an advisor," he finally said. "I'm here to tell you about the man who wounded your beloved, Lord Graham."

Carissa perceived bitterness in the intruder's voice as he spoke the name of her husband. She did not understand his indignity, so she ignored it, trying to think clearly. "How do you know about my lords wound?"

"Right now, he lays in the chapel with your clerics. He'll live, this time. But you'll

need to know more about his attacker if you're to keep your husband in this world."

Carissa was taken aback. Maybe he was a spy. "You seem to know much."

"Then hear my words. Lord Graham's attacker is not a demon, nor is he a normal assassin. Your enemy is a shade."

A childhood tale drifted up from memory. "A shade?"

"Yes. Once a man, but now a creature of darkness. A shade is a person who has traded his soul to gain a permanent connection to the Plane of Shadow. There, the Positive and Negative Material Planes meet in the shadow of the Prime Material Plane. Do you understand what I mean?"

Carissa nodded, fascinated. She was a scholar as well as a noble, and her interest in the metasciences was drawn out by the mysterious intruder.

"A shade receives effects from the Positive and Negative Planes:' he continued. "From the Positive, he receives immunity from aging and disease, as well as powers of healing. To the Negative Plane, he loses his soul. His appearance becomes dark as night, and his personality becomes even darker."[1]

"Who would do this to himself?"

The stranger chuckled sarcastically, sadly. "Anyone who finds no joy in daylight and who cares nothing for the company of others. Anyone who would gladly trade his soul for the powers of the night."

The stranger slipped into brooding silence. Feeling awkward but less afraid, Carissa asked, "How is it done?"

"There are some clerics who will make the transformation for a price — usually 3,000 gold pieces.[2] I don't know the exact spells that are used, but I know that the person must be brought to the Plane of Shadow, where the cleric . . . slays him and makes the transformation.[3] The person is then a shade. He can never again be returned from the dead because he has no soul, no spirit. He cannot increase his skills.[4] He-cannot have children."

"There must not be many such people in the world."

Table 1
Shade Character Class

Die roll	Character class
1	Cavalier
2-7	Fighter
8-10	Magic-user
11-12	Illusionist
13-17	Thief
18-20	Assassin

Table 2
Shade Alignment

Die roll	Alignment
1-2	Lawful neutral
3	True neutral
4-5	Chaotic neutral
6-7	Lawful evil
8-9	Neutral evil
10	Chaotic evil

Note: Reroll result if it is inconsistent with the assassin character class.

"No, not many. The sacrifices are too great for most people to accept. But there are some . . ." [5] The stranger's mind seemed to wander as he spoke. Carissa listened attentively, unsure of the truth of his story, and increasingly doubtful of his sanity. "Not all shades are evil in nature, but none of them are actually good. The ones who changed from good alignment sometimes seek revenge against those who caused their misery. Lawful shades usually continue their war against chaos. Evil shades usually continue their war against everyone."

As the man's voice drifted off, Carissa decided to change the course of the conversation. "You were talking about my husbands attacker. . . "

"Yes, of course." The stranger seemed to regather his thoughts, and he spoke with new energy. "The attacker's name is Varian. This shade came to me four days ago and asked that I help him kill Lord Graham. He seeks vengeance for some personal reason. I refused his offer."

"How do we fight him?"

"Light is your best weapon. In bright light, a shade becomes weak, and is more vulnerable to magical attacks. Have your clerics cast continual *light* spells on lanterns. Leave no passage unlit that leads to your lord. In the shadows, a shade can transport himself to the Plane of Shadow, so you must keep Varian in bright light or in complete darkness. As a last resort, use a *holy word* to force him to return to the Plane of Shadow.

"Varian himself remains on the Prime Material Plane during daylight. He sleeps in the ruins of Thurid Castle. There you can trap him and kill him."

Carissa nodded. "If your words are true, you'll be richly rewarded."

The man snorted in disgust. "I don't want your gold."

"Then why have you helped us?"

The stranger sat in silence, his vision fixed upon her. Then he stood and walked slowly toward her. Carissa shrank back from him, preparing to call for the guards, but the intruder made no move for his weapons. Instead, he sat on the edge of the bed. Still, Carissa could not see his eyes.

"I've helped Lord Graham because I know that his death would ruin you. I don't want any harm to come to you, Carissa. I still love you, even more than I did ten years ago."

Suddenly she recognized his voice, recognized the figure under the black clothes, recognized his manner of moving and speaking. Her heart jumped and she cried out, "Dimitri!"

The man leaned toward her and extended a hand. With wild joy she moved closer to him, but then he grasped the candle flame and crushed it. Shadows filled the room again.

Her heart racing, Carissa waved a hand in front of her. Dimitri was not within reach. As she frantically relit the candle with her last cantrip, she thought of Dimitri: a lost lover from her past, an honorable man whom she had loved deeply before her father had wed her to Lord Graham. Her thoughts were dazed and tangled as the candlelight returned.

She looked quickly around the room, but Dimitri was gone. Carissa knew that he would not be back. In the silence of the flickering candlelight, Carissa covered her face with her hands and wept.

Notes

[1] A character who becomes a shade takes new personality traits, becoming sober, moody, cynical, and suspicious. Because of these traits, the character's charisma drops. To determine the exact penalty, divide the character's charisma score by three (rounding down), then

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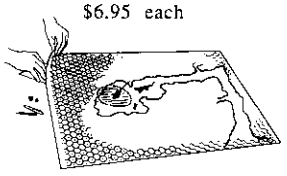

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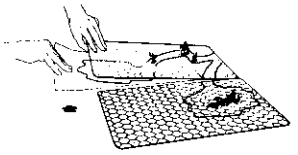

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subtract this number from the original charisma score to get the new charisma score.

The character's comeliness drops due to his new appearance: dark eyes, gray skin, black clothes, etc. Determine the comeliness penalty in the same way as the charisma penalty. Only drow elves are immune from the comeliness penalty, since the change in appearance leaves their skin no darker than before, and only affects their eyes and hair color.

[2] No cleric of good alignment will turn a person into a shade, whether the person is willing or not. A neutral-evil cleric is 50% likely to intentionally kill the character during the process, and a chaotic-evil cleric is 75% likely to kill the character. To perform the transformation, the cleric must be at least 10th level.

[3] The process for becoming a shade begins on the Prime Material Plane, where the would-be shade drinks lethal poison and dies. The cleric then uses *plane shift* to transport himself and the character to the Plane of Shadow. There, the cleric casts neutralize *poison* on the character, and then *imbue with spell ability* if the character is not a member of a spell-casting class. The cleric then casts *negative plane protection* to allow the forces of the Positive and Negative Material Planes to enter the character's body, thus causing the physical, psychological, and magical changes. At last, the cleric casts *raise dead* (this spell even works on elves and half-orcs due to the interference of the energies from the Positive and Negative Material Planes). The character must make a successful resurrection survival check or die again — permanently.

The character now needs to recover, as noted in the description of the *raise dead* spell. Afterwards, he is a full shade, complete with special powers, special abilities, and all other effects as explained in the *Monster Manual II* and in this article.

[4] A shade cannot gain experience points, cannot increase in class level or proficiency, and cannot gain new levels of spell ability. The mixture of the Positive and Negative Material Planes holds the shade forever at the same class level, also making him immune to magical increases or decreases in level.

[5] For the class of a random shade, roll 1d20 on Table 1. For the shade's alignment, use Table 2; roll 1d4 + 6 for assassins, or 1d10 for other classes. The shade's level and equipment should be chosen in accordance with the PC party's strength.

The ability scores of a shade can be determined by the chart on page 74 of *Unearthed Arcana.* Note that the charisma and comeliness scores need to be adjusted as with any other character who has become a shade.

When determining the experience-point value of an NPC shade *(Dungeon Masters Guide,* page 85), consider the shade status to be an exceptional ability. Ω

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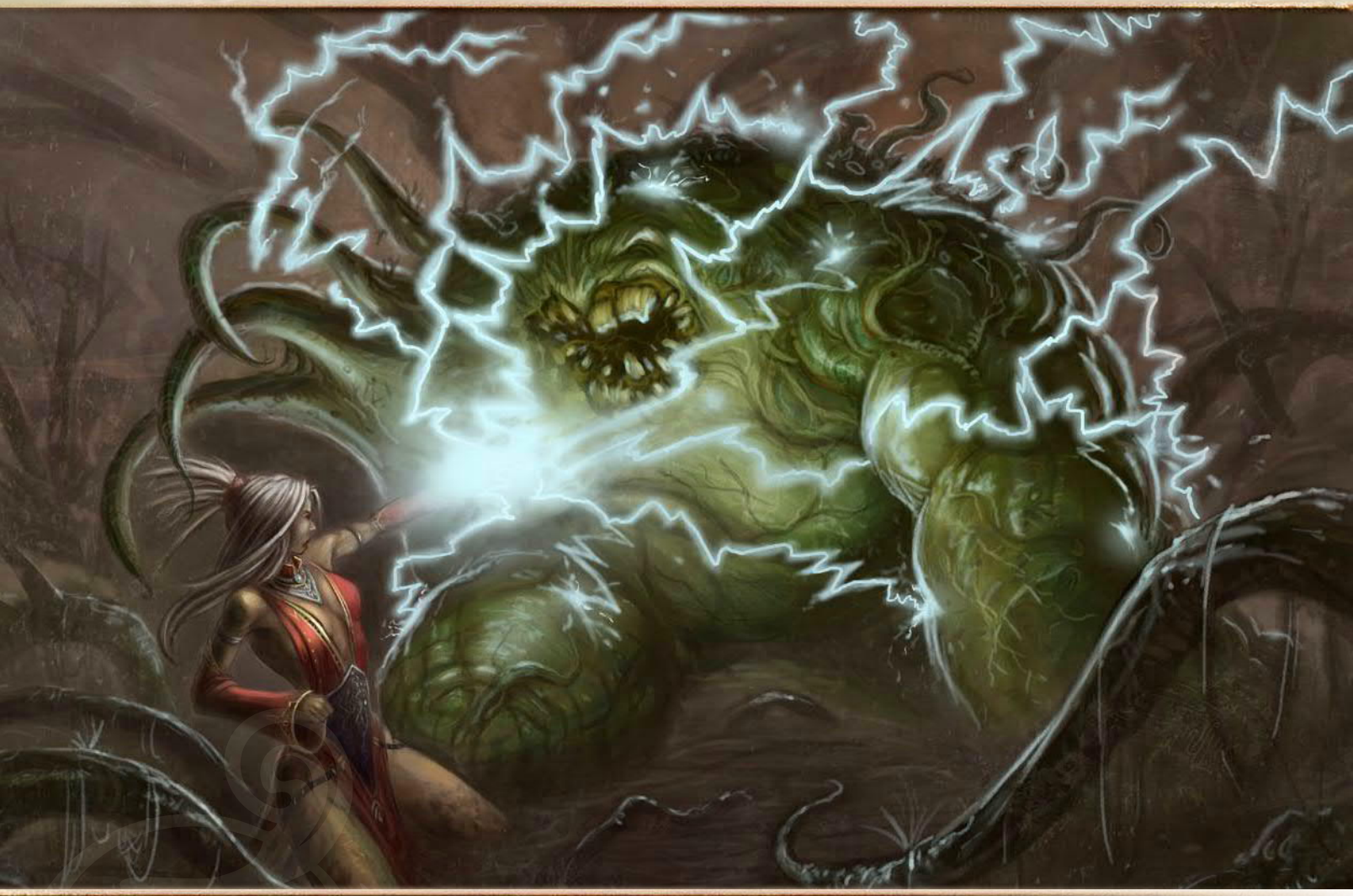


Shambling Mound

"Humans call them shambling mounds or shamblers, a descriptive if not too imaginative name, but if they have any name for themselves, no one has ever heard it. Horrific in appearance and often savage in aspect, shamblers are no mere dumb brutes, attacking with cunning and stealth and withdrawing into the deepest, darkest mires. Though dimly intelligent, their thoughts and motives are entirely alien, as is their bizarre physiology, and even what passes for their society when these abominations band together around great wetland mounds for purposes beyond imagining. Yet there is something strangely familiar about them..."

—Jathalara Varenthis, elven druid-sage

Easily dismissed as mindless plant creatures, shambling mounds are actually intelligent and capable of forethought and planning. Blending perfectly with their swampy environs, they are able to evaluate a target's strength, ambushing easy prey and quietly letting more dangerous creatures pass. More than once a heavily armored warrior has safely walked across a shambler's prone form, mistaking it for a hillock rising out of the marsh, only to hear the screams behind him as the monster grabs his trailing wizard or rogue ally.

Overview

Shambling mounds are almost universally disliked by every intelligent race, hated and feared not for their cruelty but for their remorselessness. They are a force of nature—a living storm of verdant flesh that rains death upon the just and unjust alike. Even animals, plants, and vermin are not safe from their predations. They are known to be intelligent, after a fashion, but rarely can they be reasoned with, bargained with, or even conversed with, and their cunning only makes them more dangerous. Blending

in as they do with the environment, they could be almost anywhere at any time, attacking without warning and not caring whether they leave survivors, so long as they acquire their next meal. Whether in the wilderness or in caverns beneath the ground, any pile of rot and fecundity, or any algae-filled backwater or ocean sargasso, might easily conceal a shambler lying in wait. Travelers' tales speak of the normally water-loving shamblers inhabiting even the driest of deserts; perhaps only the mountain peaks and high ice of the frozen north are free of their scourge.

Disturbing rumors persist of shamblers gathering in strange aggregations around great earthen mounds in the depths of marshes and jungles, and sages have long wondered whether there is some alien purpose at work. None have succeeded in conversing with these gathered shamblers, and the far more common solitary hunters seem to have no knowledge of the affairs of their brethren.

Many have speculated on the origins of this curious creature. While the existence of intelligent and carnivorous plants is no great mystery, the shambling mound is a puzzle indeed. Why is it so resistant to fire? Why the strange affinity for lightning? Why, as a plant, does it have a *brain*? Some sages theorize that the shambler is a product of fell sorcery, a strange mutational byproduct of uncontrolled magical residues, the realization of druidic experimentation in a new form of plant life, or perhaps a natural evolution of carnivorous plants. In truth, none of these are correct.

Ecology

Shambling mounds are strange creatures, more akin to an animate tangle of creeping parasitic vines than a single rooted plant. They are omnivorous, able to draw their sustenance from nearly anything, wrapping their creepers around living trees and drawing forth their sap, sending rootlets into the soil and drifts of rotting vegetation and sucking up raw nutrients, or even sinking their tendrils into deadfalls, snags, and logs to extract worms, insects, and other vermin by the hundreds from their nests. They are most feared, however, because of their affinity for flesh and blood. They are clever hunters, able to move with great stealth and lie for days on end without moving, waiting patiently for a potential meal, then lashing out with terrifying suddenness and catching their prey in their crushing grips. From there they literally pull the creature apart, drawing out fluids before breaking down flesh and bone over the course of days or weeks, leaving nothing behind.

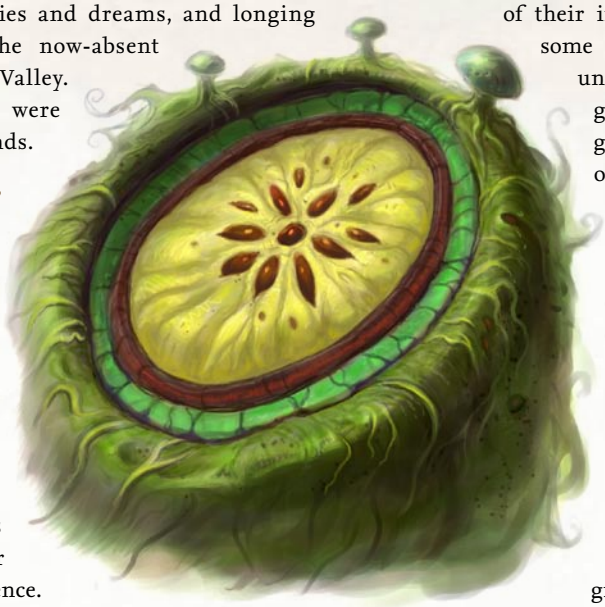
Shambling mounds are actually parasitic hybrid creatures whose origins lie far from the civilized parts of Golarion. The explorers who discovered this place are unknown, but fragments of their journals have been found in waterlogged chests retrieved from Azlanti ruins. Among the many places they sojourned, one they called "the Green Valley" seemed an idyllic setting, heavily overgrown with abundant forest and jungle, teeming with native fauna and yet seemingly easily tamed. The actual location of this place is lost—it might be another plane, a distant planet, one of the great Vaults of the Darklands, or possibly a pristine, untouched region deep in the Mwangi Expanse or a lush valley surrounded by snow in the Crown of the World. The explorers failed to realize that in this place they were an alien species, and an environment that appeared on its surface to be hospitable was far from it. Something in the area possessed a rudimentary sentience and awareness, and this strange intelligence perceived the intrusion of these visitors as a threat. Creeping vines embraced the travelers in their sleep, shedding psychoactive and mutagenic spores that infected the travelers' minds and bodies in an attempt to convert them into non-hostile symbiotic native lifeforms. Showing no outward signs of the psychic and physical seed growing within, the wanderers teleported freely back and forth to their home city, bringing back sketches, seeds, and other samples for further study.

Once they returned, however, a strange transformation began to occur. While in the Green Valley, the primal intelligence there slowed and guided the growth of the infecting spores; without this guiding mind, the impulses imprinted upon the seed took over and began to remake their hosts, mind and body. Many of those first explorers fled to the wilderness, partly out of an instinctive kinship for nature, partly in horror as the plant within began to devour and replace the flesh without. Humanoid features warped into twisted masses of vines and rot. Eventually, all semblance of the creatures they once were faded into a nightmare of vegetative horror, save their bipedal stance and vestiges

Symbiotic Swarm

Shambling mounds are themselves unpleasant opponents, but some shambling mounds live in symbiosis with swarms of insects, most often centipedes, skittering along the tendrils and vines that make up the shambler. Typically such a symbiotic swarm does not endanger creatures fighting a shambling mound, as too few of the centipedes run along the creature's surface to pose much of a threat. However, a target engulfed by the shambler's constrict attack is subject to the attack of a centipede swarm (MM 238), including physical damage, poison, and distraction. The swarm is considered to have total cover from attacks as long as the shambling mound is alive. If the shambling mound is killed, the centipede swarm boils up from its remains and attacks any creatures nearby. Add +1 to the CR of a shambling mound with a symbiotic centipede swarm.

of their brains and nervous system. The remnants of thinking brains and fast-acting nerves transformed under the influence of the spores into a network of greenish-gray fibers of amazing conductivity and capacitance, enabling them to process and hold great stores of energy, rapidly dissipating excess heat and able to channel and store vast amounts of electricity. These brain-like plant fibers also retained a degenerated remnant of their hosts' minds, tortured with the tattered remains of their memories and dreams, and longing for communion with the now-absent intelligence of the Green Valley. These tortured creatures were the first shambling mounds.



Habitat & Society

Shambling mounds are a strange amalgam of rootless parasitic plants, cursed with deeply ingrained instinctive drives and yet gifted with an inheritance of enough dim sentience to attempt to pursue these instincts, sometimes using bursts of creativity on the order of human-level intelligence. Shambling mounds are primarily simple creatures, and their basic requirements are primitive and natural—sustenance, safety, and procreation. The first two are easily satisfied at a basic level, as shambling mounds are capable of drawing sustenance from decaying vegetable matter, from drifts of composting leaves and rotting trees to the fetid muck at the bottom of a swamp. Shamblers can also turn light into food in the manner of most plants, though their mass and activity level usually means this is insufficient for all their needs; likewise, they do not require light, and are equally at home amidst the fungi forests of dank cavern systems deep below the ground as they are on the surface. Few creatures consider them worthy of a meal, even if they dared to challenge their might, and the shamblers' ability to blend in with the natural landscape or hide underwater enables them to easily avoid those few who might prey upon them.

The fact that they can survive without hunting raises the question of why they do it at all, and the answer is found in the third basic impulse—procreation. The alien flora that birthed the shambling mounds is inherently parasitic, and cannot reproduce without animate living tissue. A shambler must consume vast quantities of flesh, blood, bone, and especially humanoid brain tissue, which it absorbs not so much for sustenance as to sprout new rootlets, cyst-like tubercles, pulsing heartwood, and budded networks of plant-brain fibers. This last is what requires the greatest time and effort to create, both because its base components are such a small part of the body mass of its victims and because the high-capacitance tissue requires so much energy to be infused into it.

There is an exception to this limitation, and some shamblers have discovered it and in some way communicated this to their fellows. Elves, perhaps because of their inherent connection to nature or some link to the Green Valley, are a uniquely fertile medium for their growth— rather than having to grow an entirely new plant-brain out of digested matter, a shambler can directly convert an elf's brain and greater nervous system into plant-brain material, saving an enormous amount of time and energy. Where a shambling mound might need to consume literally a ton of humanoid tissue to bud an offspring, the fresh corpse of a single elf is sufficient for a shambler to create a full-size plant-brain, leaving only the (much less energy-intensive) process of growing the remaining body.

In any event, when a shambler has finally assembled enough stored base material to calve a new shambling mound, the "parent" finds a hiding place rich in vegetable matter and roots itself firmly, weaving and grafting the proto-shambler's vital elements into the available matter. After approximately a week, the new shambler detaches itself from the nest and leaves its parent behind. Within less than a day, the parent (now smaller by approximately a third) disentangles itself from the remains of the birthing mass and returns to its former activities. Each shambling mound is typically nomadic, wandering with the seasons and as it finds prey. Instinctively careful of overhunting a particular territory, shamblers tend to avoid each other. Chance encounters between them are rare, and shamblers usually ignore one another when they do meet.

Rarely, a shambler may possess an empathic affinity that draws other shamblers to it and enables them to work in concert. Some collections of shamblers simply repeat their usual imperatives on a larger scale, but others have a deeper purpose, trying to establish a connection with the foreign plant intelligence that created their forebears. They may seek this connection through meditation or through destruction of civilizations that they feel impede nature's ability to grow and thrive in its fullness. Some

shambling mounds engage cooperatively with intelligent creatures that can communicate with plants.

Campaign Role

Shambling mounds are excellent stealth and ambush predators in caves or wilderness, particularly where water or vegetation (or both) are present. While not brilliant, shamblers are far more intelligent than most simple brute monsters and should be cunning and canny enough to attack, retreat, and use terrain to their advantage. A shambling mound is a horrifying change of pace as a "moat monster" around a ruined keep or in an underground lake. PCs could come across a newly calved shambling mound and defeat it, only to have its parent rise the next day and begin hunting them.

A shambling mound might ally with druids or with intelligent races (such as lizardfolk) that venerate it or grant it offerings, while members of any race might beg heroes for help against a shambling mound preying upon their people. Sentient plant or fey creatures like dryads and treants might likewise request aid in ridding their forests of such a dangerous parasite, while an exceptional shambler may have discovered how to parasitically dominate such creatures and turn them to their cause.

Treasure

Shambling mounds are uninterested in treasure. What few baubles they keep are typically durable inorganic objects left over from their consumption of intelligent creatures. Fragile items end up smashed to pieces in their ungentle clutches, while organic items not torn apart or consumed by the shambling mound inevitably rot and decay swiftly in the muck and mire where shamblers live. As shamblers are usually nomadic, they rarely keep a lair in the traditional sense, so any coins or goods found nearby are generally from recent victims, or (rarely) lodged within the shambling mound's body mass, tangled amidst its tendrils.

Variants

The majority of shambling mounds live outdoors, most commonly in marshes, swamps, jungles, and well-watered forests. A shambling mound may have one or more of the following variant abilities.

Compressible Form (Ex): These shamblers are difficult to harm with piercing or bludgeoning attacks, gaining DR 10/slashing and taking half damage from falls. A compressible shambling mound also never suffers penalties for squeezing into a 5-foot-wide space, and gains a +10 racial bonus to Escape Artist checks (+10 for squeezing through a tight space).

Communion with the Green (Su): This variety of shambling mound is instinctively attuned to the essence of nature. It gains a +4 bonus to Charisma-based checks with plants and animals and gains the following spell-like abilities (caster level 8th): At will—*detect animals or plants, speak with plants*; 1/day—*barkskin, blight, command plants, diminish plants, entangle, goodberry, plant growth*; 1/week—*commune with nature*. The saving throws are Wisdom-based.

Greensward: The most tragic variant shambler is outwardly identical to a normal shambling mound (though they often fashion some of their body mass into a makeshift head and face). They are extremely rare humanoids (usually elves) whose minds, spirits, and consciousnesses have somehow endured and remained intact after a shambling mound kills and eats them. Lacking the power of speech, many are slain by their humanoid comrades as they return home in hope of a cure, but some few have managed to avoid hostilities long enough to manage

Stormstruck Shambler

You have been lashed by the power of the storm so many times that you retain a powerful affinity for it, able to draw upon your reserves of energy to strike enemies with living lightning.

Prerequisite: Shambling mound, must have been struck by lightning.

Benefit: As a free action, you may charge one of your limbs with electricity equivalent to a *shocking grasp* spell, dealing 5d6 electricity damage to a creature you touch, attack with an unarmed strike, or grapple. If making a touch attack, you get a +3 to your attack roll if the target is wearing metal armor. Each time you use this ability, you take 1 point of temporary Constitution damage; you regain these lost Constitution points at a rate of 1 per hour. You may use this ability a number of times per day equal to your hit dice.

Shambling Monolith

You are able to draw up available vegetation into your body mass and increase your size and strength.

Prerequisite: Shambling mound.

Benefit: As a full-round action, you may draw additional vegetable matter into yourself and increase your size, strength, and durability as if using an *animal growth* spell. At the beginning of each turn, you must succeed at a Fortitude save to maintain your increased size. The save DC is 10 if in forest or jungle and 15 if in a swamp or underground , and increases by 1 for each round that passes. If you fail the save, you collapse back to your normal size and are fatigued for 8 hours.

Special: You must be in forest, jungle, swamp, or underground terrain to use this feat. You cannot use this feat when you are fatigued or exhausted.

Suffocating Strangulation

Your constriction attack forces the air out of your victim's lungs and leaves him helpless and gasping for breath.

Prerequisite: Improved grab, constrict

Benefit: By making a successful grapple check, you are able to coil your natural weapons around an opponent's throat (or other breathing apparatus), crushing the breath out of him. The opponent cannot hold his breath and must immediately begin making Constitution checks at the end of his turn each round, starting at DC 10 and increasing by 1 each round. Failure indicates he falls unconscious at 0 hit points. Once the opponent is unconscious, you may choose to either damage him (requiring a grapple check) or continue to suffocate him (no check required); if you maintain the chokehold, on your next turn he drops to –1 hit points and is dying. If you maintain the chokehold on the following turn, he suffocates and dies.

Creatures that do not need to breathe are unaffected by this ability.

peaceful communication. Those unable to secure a *miracle* or *wish* to return to their own form have sworn to use their new forms to become defenders of the woodlands. Greenswards are usually chaotic good. They retain the memories of their previous life, but they cannot speak or cast spells. A greensward's Intelligence is +2 higher than a common shambling mound. (CR +1)

Spore Mound: Some shablers live in such close association with fungi and rot that they gradually become infested. These spore mounds look much like typical shamblers but are encrusted in morels, puffballs, and all manner of mushrooms. Whenever a spore mound is struck in combat, it discharges a cloud of yellow mold spores in a 10-foot radius (inhaled poison; Fortitude DC 15, initial damage 1d6 Con, secondary damage 2d6 Con). If exposed to direct sunlight, a spore mound's yellow mold is rendered dormant and does not discharge. Its spore discharge is suppressed for 1 round if the creature is struck by a fire attack that overcomes its fire resistance. (CR +1)

Tanglethorn Mound: Found only in arid regions, deserts, hills, and dry plains, tanglethorn mounds look like twisted masses of dry, thorny vines wrapped thickly around misshapen clumps of cacti. They deal slashing, piercing, and bludgeoning damage with their slam and constrict attacks, and their constrict attacks deal +1d6 damage. Tanglethorn mounds lack a swim speed but have a burrow speed of 10 feet and tremorsense out to a distance of 30 feet; they often lie in wait just below the surface, or with a portion of their body mass showing above ground, appearing like a normal thorny bush or cactus. Their racial bonus to Hide checks applies only in desert settings. (CR +1)

Shambling Mounds on Golarion

Shambling mounds have their origin with Azlanti explorers (or a rare alliance of Kyonin elves and Azlanti humans) who journeyed either to a primordial place on Castrovel—the Green Planet—a demiplane in the Ethereal Plane, or a remote region in Golarion, unwittingly bringing the seeds of their transformation back with them. Most shamblers on Golarion are solitary and nomadic, but there are several significant exceptions. In southern Kyonin, hundreds of shamblers have gathered under the banner of the demon Treerazer. It is unknown if he was the one who discovered the shambling mound's special affinity for creating spawn from elves, if one or more exceptionally intelligent shamblers discovered the link and offered their services to the great demon in hopes of exacting revenge upon the elves, or if the allied out of the belief that the demon can help them return to the Green Valley. PCs in Kyonin and surrounding lands might be surprised to find shambler shock troops intermixed with Treerazer's legions and minions.

Some shamblers eternally hunger for that lost sense of primal communion that instinct tells them was once theirs, casting their eyes to the skies, recognizing the green "star" Castrovel as significant, and pining for their lost home (whether or not that is actually their place of origin). Most, have no conscious recollection of the Green Valley, but nonetheless carry a terrible longing for the thing that was lost and a burning hunger that they must reach it once again for them to be made whole. These shamblers instinctively feel that to be at peace, they must build a community of plant-creatures on Golarion, awakening nature's heart and soul. To do this, balance must be restored, quelling all disruptions to the natural world and excising the tumors of civilization that wrack the health of the living planet.

The largest collection of shambling mounds, numbering in the thousands, lives in the Sodden Lands and the Mwangi Expanse. There, an exceptional shambling mound druid known as Zandghoreishi ("the Jade Prophet") has drawn great numbers of shamblers to his call. He has proclaimed that the annihilation of the nations of Lirgen and Yamasa and the flooding of their lands was but the first part of a cleansing wave that will clear the way for the planet's awakening. Large groups of shamblers have attacked and utterly destroyed many settlements throughout the region, and in each place they have formed the detritus of the devastated communities into large mounds in intricate shapes and forms. Whether these are intended as foci for primal natural energy or serve some stranger purpose is unknown. Thus far, the deserts of Garund appear to have contained the spread of the Jade Prophet's message and minions but there is quiet concern among some sages of the southlands as to the threat he might pose.

Shambling Mound

Rising up on two trunk-like legs, a deliquescent mass of tangled vines drips with slime, reeking of rot and fresh-turned earth as it lashes out with tendrils like mooring ropes.

Shambling Mound **CR 6**

N Large plant

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +8, Spot +0

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 9, flat-footed 20 (+11 natural, –1 size)

hp 60 (8d8+24)

Fort +9, **Ref** +2, **Will** +4

Defensive Abilities plant traits; **Immune** electricity; **Resist** fire 10

OFFENSE

Spd 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 slams +11 melee (2d6+5)

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

Special Attacks improved grab, constrict 2d6+7

TACTICS

Before Combat Shambling mounds can lie quiescent for long periods of time, attacking from the cover of water or foliage when creatures wander too close. Surprisingly stealthy for their size, they hunt with tireless hunger, often attacking when their quarry is asleep.

During Combat Shambling mounds seek to grapple foes and drag them away to be consumed. They switch targets if a given foe seems resistant to grappling.

Morale Shambling mounds are driven by primitive urges, but withdraw if below 10 hit points or if all foes prove resistant to grappling.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 10, **Con** 17, **Int** 7, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +15

Feats Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam)

Skills Hide +3 (+11 in swamps or forests), Listen +8, Move Silently +8

Languages Common, Elven, Sylvan; cannot speak

SQ plant traits

SPECIAL ABILITIES

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

Constrict (Ex) A shambler deals 2d6+7 points of damage with a successful grapple check.

Immunity to Electricity (Ex) Shamblers take no damage from electricity. Instead, any electricity attack (such as *shocking grasp* or *lightning bolt*) used against a shambler temporarily grants it 1d4 points of Constitution. The shambler loses these points at the rate of 1 per hour.

Skills Shamblers have a +4 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, and Move Silently checks. The racial bonus on Hide checks increases to +12 when in a swampy or forested area.

Ecology of the Sharn

by Brian R. James

illustrations by Eva Widermann

Lyrna could suppress her tears no longer. She wasn't the only one overcome by the senseless devastation around her. Others in the procession openly wept at the blighted sore their homeland had become. Where once stood rolling hills wreathed in verdant foliage now stood barren moorland—twisted and inimical to life. Behind her, the walls of Myth Akherynnar faded away into the cloying mists. She, the last scion of House Fathomlin, understood her duty well, yet the young elf knew in her heart it would be the last time she would set eyes upon the shining capital.

Whispering a prayer to the fey spirits, Lyrna tightened the grip on her staff and quickened her pace. With the blessing of the spirits, the elves would reach the Tosofome Caldera by dawn of the third day. There they would initiate the high magic ritual that would drive the Killing Storm back from whence it came—to the boughs of Aryvandaar.

The hiss of acid rain driven hard against her protective wards drew Lyrna back to the present. Looking around, she was momentarily shocked to discover she was no longer among the procession. Eyes widening, she saw that she was standing among the shattered ruins of Faer'tel'miir, ninety miles to the north. Yet how could this be?

Shock turned to mute horror as an oily abomination from out of her nightmares materialized from the wall before her, three eel-like heads turning to regard her despite their lack of eyes.

"Miyeritar is lost," intoned three distinct voices. "But through us your civilization can endure."

Lyrna found her voice at last, issuing a full-throated scream as oily black goo seeped up from the ground to engulf her.

Legend and Lore

Sharns are an enigma little understood by sages and rightfully feared by adventurers. Born of the last remnants of a dead world, these timeless beings embody raw eldritch might. They might rise to rule the mortal world, if they cared and could put their minds to it, but their agenda seems more sophisticated than temporal wealth or power. Their motives are alien and ever shifting. Some dare claim the sharns are insane. Sharns assert that what others call insanity is actually enlightenment.

Origin of the Sharns

Most aberrant creatures seem to lack coherent explanation, and the sharns are no exception. Long has their origin been shrouded in mystery, for the sharns never speak of it to nonsharns and no divination illuminates the truth. Some scholars cite the aberrant physiology and strange magic of the sharns as evidence of their link to the Far Realm. Yet the truth of their creation is more bizarre and complex than a mere link to the Outside.

Here the true origin of the sharns is revealed. Such truth is perilous lore indeed. Many have lost their sanity in an attempt to comprehend matters anathema to the mortal psyche.

The Shattering

Somewhere at the dawn of the cosmos, the elder god Tharizdun stretched forth his hand to clutch a shard of utter evil. This simple act exposed creation to the perverse remains of another universe that evil had destroyed. The power-hungry god was doomed to an eternity of madness, his mind shattered and scattered into other realities.

In one reality—the "true" universe known to mortals today—Tharizdun carried the crystalline fragment into the heart of the primordial vastness and planted it there, giving birth to the Abyss. This act awakened the elder primordials to the burgeoning power of the gods, and soon war raged across all creation. Tharizdun was ultimately imprisoned for his effrontery, and the gods gained the upper hand against the primordials. Since that time, the universe has enjoyed at least the seeming of an uneasy peace.

The End of all Things

How different might the world be today if the primordials had won the Dawn War instead of the gods? In such a world, would Tharizdun have avoided imprisonment to carry out his mad scheme to unmake the universe? Such a universe does exist. On the surface, it seems little different from our own, but peer a little more closely, and it quickly becomes apparent that something has gone horribly wrong.

All that was remains as a devastated world drifting within a decaying corpse of a universe. Skeletons of buildings, cities, and whole civilizations dot this world of dust and twilight. Jagged bolts of lightning illuminate the gray vault of the sky, born from ink-black clouds that circle the decaying world like stalking predators. Above the world hangs a feeble, collapsing sun, ringed by a halo of utter darkness.

Here Tharizdun's will is manifest in a world whose fate is dust and death. Between the booming thunder, the roar of unquenchable fire, and the violent cracking of the brittle earth, ethereal whispers echo from the void. These haunting wails emanate from the sharns, the last beings to bear witness to the end of all things in their version of creation.

Birthed of Doom

The sharns alone stand sentinel over this world of bones and ruins. Having achieved his ends, Tharizdun abandoned this universe eons ago. So mighty had the mad god become that he shed his divinity in a grand apotheosis, becoming something beyond a god—something perverse and outside the known.

The sharns remained as the sentient remnant of all Tharizdun had destroyed and abandoned—a collective of merged consciousnesses. For a time, forsaken and alone on a dying world, this chaotic amalgam watched and waited. It's unclear whether curiosity or boredom drove it to act, but soon the roiling amorphous form of pitch-black "sharnstuff" began to move across the brittle landscape. Something within drove it to explore and catalog the dying world.

To speed its study, the sharnstuff formed manifestations in the likeness of the tripartite Juna, extinct eel-like beings whose ruined metropolises dotted the otherwise lifeless world. Knowing their time to be short, these sharns gorged themselves on all the knowledge they could consume. Within a few short years, the sharns had acquired thousands of magic implements unearthed around the globe. With the eldritch artifacts and the latent divine energy infused in their skin, the sharns attempted a ritual to escape

Evolution of the Sharns

The sharns are the original creation of Ed Greenwood, and they appear briefly in the acclaimed AD&D® 2nd Edition adventure boxed set *Ruins of Undermountain* in 1991. Subsequent supplements, including *Netheril: Empire of Magic*, paint the sharns as adversaries of the malevolent phaerimm; the sharns' primary motivation was to prevent the abuse of magic and preserve the lore of doomed civilizations. In 2006, the sharns were central to the plot of the novel *Blackstaff* by Steven E. Schend, yet the true genesis of this enigmatic creature remained elusive. Now, in 2009, we bring the sharns into the core D&D® universe to share the spotlight with aboleths, illithids, and other memorable aberrant creatures.

their doomed universe. They succeeded and arrived deep in the Underdark of the known mortal world.

As the sharns moved into the known world, transmuted rock sent a blizzard of black sand billowing forth from a tear in reality. From within that nimbus of purple light, out poured pools of ebony goo containing, here and there, bizarre creatures that were black with three eyeless heads and odd tri-clawed arms. Eldritch reactions created towering crystals, luminous and mysterious.

Elder Elemental Eye

From his place of imprisonment, Tharizdun sensed the arrival of the sharns. He instantly knew these beings were of him and yet were not of him, and the paradox was delicious. With this fortuitous omen, the Chained God began a to call to the sharns. If they ever listen, who knows what could befall the world?

World of the Sharn

The world of the sharns, and the universe that encloses it, exists beyond the known cosmology. This universe once held its own Astral Sea, Elemental Chaos, Feywild, and Shadowfell. After eons of unchallenged dominion by an alternate Tharizdun, only the mortal world remains, itself a shadowy hulk of its former self.

World of Sharn Traits

Type: Mirror world on an alternate mortal world.
Size and Shape: Spherical world; bounded.
Gravity: Normal, with regions of elemental buoyancy where the world has begun to break apart into the void.
Mutability: Normal.

The only known method for traveling between the world of Sharn and the known world is through planar breaches, which occur within the Sharnlands in the Godless Deeps of the Underdark. Sharns create, guard, and maintain such breaches jealously.

Through similarly great feats of magic, the sharns have halted the total dissolution of their home world. The arcane expenditure necessary to forestall oblivion is immense and ongoing. Sharn arcanists perform the rituals daily. For this reason, most sharns encountered in the Sharn world are younger sharns. These scouts acquire magic items and assimilate the knowledge of the indigenous population to sustain the preservation of their world.

Sharn Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Dungeoneering check.

DC 20: The sharns live in the yawning depths of the Underdark in a region known as the Godless Deeps. There in the Sharnlands, the sharns live in great pools of black, amorphous goo. Immense caverns filled with intricate crystalline formations are common in this region, resembling the interior of a massive geode.

DC 25: Most elder sharns have retired to a state of eternal contemplation, leaving younger sharns to gather intelligence and defend the Sharnlands. These younger sharns take interest in the activities of mortals.

DC 30: Sharns are ancient aberrant creatures hailing from an alternate reality outside the known universe. Despite what most believe, sharns are not from the Far Realm.

DC 35: The sharns take their name from the dying world of their birth. Their signature tripartite form is an imperfect imitation of the Juna, an extinct species from the world of Sharn.

Physiology

Inquire about the sharns, and any sage on the world of Toril describes a bizarre creature with three eel-like heads and peculiar tri-claw arms. Yet this description does not represent the true form of this inscrutable being.

Skin of the Ancient Ones

In their natural state, sharns exist as amorphous pools of oily black ooze. This semifluid "sharnstuff" is slimy and cold to the touch. Through a minor act of conscious thought, a sharn can alter its composition and viscosity to adopt a physical form. The resultant form has no fine definition and maintains its signature oily black appearance.

Lacking a pulmonary system, sharns have no need to breathe. If submerged, they can remain underwater indefinitely. In fact, the sharns have no internal organs to speak of whatsoever. Flesh, nerves, and blood are alien to their aberrant composition.

Unable to reproduce naturally, sharns require hosts to join with symbiotes. Such assimilated creatures shed their individuality to join with the greater sharn community. Once an individual merges with the sharns, the process is irreversible except under extremely rare and specific conditions. Typically, the host is a willing participant, but sharns do not shy from forcibly assimilating an enemy if the threat is dire.

Effectively immortal in their natural state, sharns have been known to while away the years without ever stirring from their dark pools.

Manifestations

When a sharn manifests a corporeal form, it typically adopts its signature shape—massive tapered forms of amorphous flesh, jet-black and glistening as if coated with viscous slime and surrounded by a nimbus of

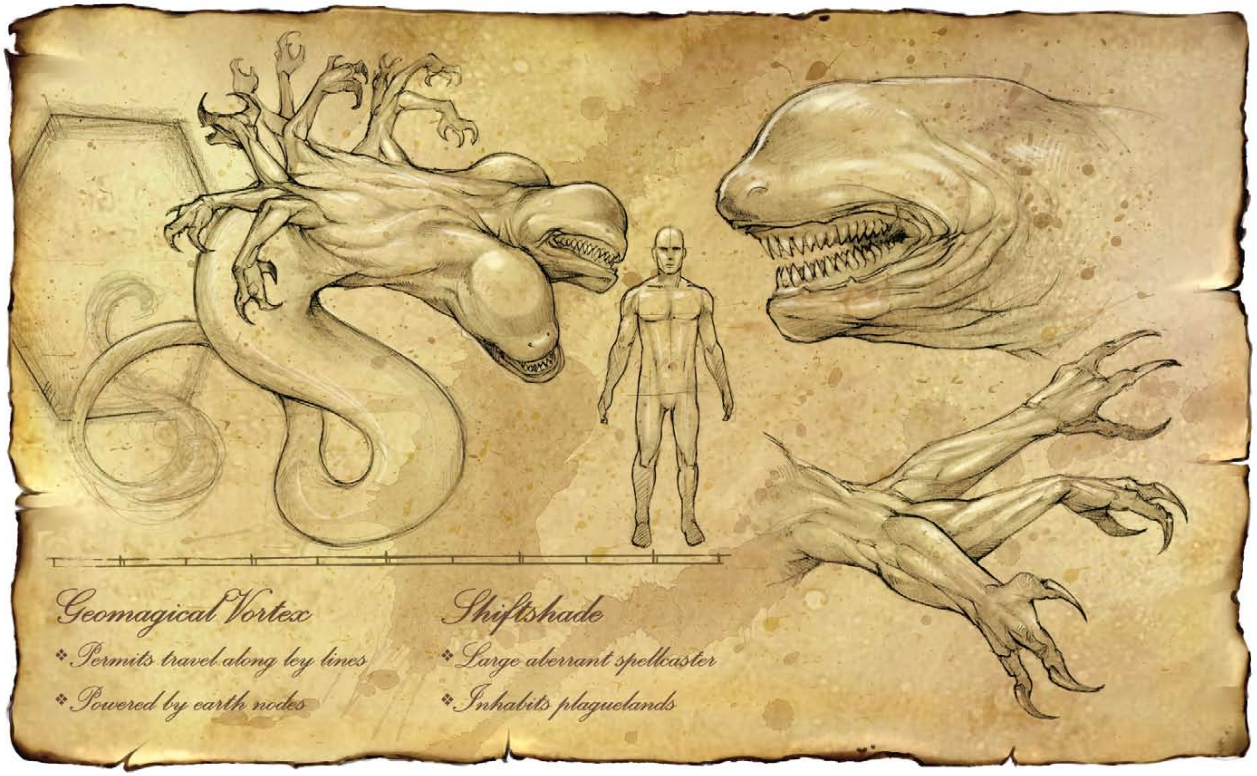
purple light. Their enormous bodies are studded with many tiny eyes that appear and disappear at random.

A sharn has three eyeless, eel-like heads, with large gaping maws filled with sharp, serrated teeth. The heads are capable of vocalizing, but sharns prefer their limited telepathic capabilities for communicating among themselves and seldom have a desire to speak with mortals. Some manner of arcane olfactory system grants the sharn a superior sense of smell.

Aside from its three heads, its peculiar limbs are another signature feature. These snakelike, flexible trunks end in an "elbow" where three humanlike forearms split apart from each other. Each arm ends in a humanlike hand topped with razor-sharp claws. Claws sprout and disappear along each of these bizarre appendages.

A sharn's heads and arms connect to a single trunk ending in a thick tail. Its streamlined torso can glide as effortlessly through water as it does air. Despite its fearsome teeth and claws, a sharn prefers to remain at range and attack through *hex portals*.

The manifestations most likely to be encountered in the world are known as blackclaws. Other varieties exist including the phaseblades, hexshadows, and the exceedingly powerful and rare shiftshades. As the caretakers of the rituals maintaining their dying world, shiftshades are masters of arcane might. These sharns appear much the same as blackclaws, though their constant state of temporal flux makes them appear as if they are phasing in and out of reality (which isn't far from the truth).



Culture

To outside observers, the sharns have a bizarre and alien culture. Sharn society is organized into subterranean communities called "pools," with no concept of social classes and no hierarchy to speak of at all. They do not concern themselves with faith or piety, nor do they covet wealth or power.

Their society is a bedlam of philosophical argument and social intrigue. Power struggles, based on ideological conflicts, are constant. This inward-looking focus does not prevent sharns from becoming embroiled in the affairs of other species, even across the planes. Exactly what their agenda might be in such cases is rarely obvious and rarely unified.

The sharns all have the same broader world-view and share a physical appearance, but they can take different paths to achieve common aims.

When a sharn is slain, however, the individual consciousnesses, at least three of which each being possesses, are lost forever.

Psychology

Despite their homogenous appearance and telepathic abilities, sharns do not operate as a hive mind. Sharns share a group consciousness that is as fragmented as any intelligence can be. Unable to operate with a single-minded purpose, the goals of the sharn appear ever changing and often contradictory.

Though they possess a paradoxical nature, sharns can work together in harmony for short periods of time, whereupon they strive for the same goal while anticipating and complementing each other's actions.

Spawned from a shared community, sharn manifestations are independent agents that can act upon their own desires and carry out their own agendas. Each manifestation has at least three entities, granting the sharns supernatural alacrity for decision-making. The more advanced a manifestation, the

more personalities it has. Multiple manifestations can act in concert, sharing a peculiar form of short-range telepathy among them.

A sharn fears little, but it is conscious of its own mortality. If a shiftshade is threatened with imminent death, it takes all avenues available to it to shift out of danger and return to its home pool. Each sharn represents the final legacy of a dead civilization, and the loss of even one sharn is a loss for the entire world.

Sharns have speak the language of madness, an inheritance of their origin. They can also speak any tongue known to their society when the need arises. When communicating with others, sharns commonly adopt complex multisyllabic names with little regard for the other's ability to pronounce it.

Their uniquely peculiar minds prevent attempts at mental contact unless the sharn wishes it. Those who have made such contact speak of a vast, turbulent ocean of consciousness upon which float tiny islands of individuality.

Magic

As beings from an alternate reality, sharns command strange magic unknown in the world today. The eldest sharns also employ unique items of power from their dying world—lesser artifacts brimming with alien power.

Earth Nodes

All sharns have a heightened ability to detect and activate earth nodes (see *Forgotten Realms® Campaign Guide* page 52 for details), but shiftshades take this mastery to a whole other level. Knowing exactly where these nodes are gives the sharns the appearance of having at-will teleportation powers. Their propensity for appearing and disappearing wherever and whenever they like makes sharns difficult foes to defeat.

Hex Portals

With fine manipulation of eldritch energy, sharns can create fissures in reality known as *hex portals*. Each portal is a small hexagonal window of light 3 feet in diameter that coalesces out of a swirl of purple motes. A sharn can maintain up to three of them at once, breaching nearly any ward or magical barrier. Opponents cannot attack a sharn through a *hex portal*.

Orb of Entropy

In addition to earth nodes and *hex portals*, powerful sharns have created this item for use by allies and minions, detailed below.

Orb of Entropy **Level 28**

The utter ruin manifest in Tharizdun's will swirls inside this globe of purest black. When activated, the orb is shrouded in a nimbus of purple light.

Lvl 28 +6 2,125,000 gp
Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus
Power (Daily ✦ Psychic, Zone): Free Action. When you use a power that creates a zone, you can activate this power to make it so that any enemy that starts its turn within the zone is dazed (save ends). The body of any creature killed within the zone is immediately destroyed.

Sharn of the Forgotten Realms

"Hundreds of sharns sloughed off their shimmering black skins, and many Faertelmin stepped from the darkness to reclaim their lives as elves, humans, dwarves, centaurs, and others. Know there are yet sharn in the Realms. They choose to remain as Rhymanthiin's defenders as well as defenders against corrupt magic across the Realms."

Origin

If the dark elves of Rhymanthiin are to be believed, the first sharns of Faerûn were in fact an inadvertent byproduct of the Dark Disaster—great killing storms sent against Miyeritar during the Third Crown War. As cloying mists and ichor-choked rains scoured the Great Sapphire Wood, three high mages led the last defenders of Miyeritar into the heart of the eldritch maelstrom to counter the dark ritual.

Indicative of their desperation, the high mages invoked the rare and perilous Ritual of Myriad, whispered to be legend even in the days before the Sundering. With unbridled magic pounding against defensive wards, the mages joined mind and body to birth the first *fhaorn'quessir*—a giant-sized, tripartite being of immense power—to walk Toril in millennia.

Yet even as the *fhaorn'quessir* moved to counter the eldritch bonds of the Killing Storms, something entirely unforeseen occurred. The eldritch bonds restricting the transformative magic to the high mages of the First Circle unraveled. Unfettered, lashing tendrils of wild magic quickly enveloped the Second and Third Circles as well. With nary a moment to scream, all ninety souls, the Last Defenders of Miyeritar, were themselves subsumed into the newborn entity.

With no arcane practitioners left to maintain the ritual, the *fhaorn'quessir* began to dissolve under the onslaught of the killing storms. Through fissures in the limestone bedrock, oily black rivulets converged and flowed, forming deep black pools of amorphous goo in the lightless caverns of the Underdark. There the formless *fhaorn'quessir* waited, its merged consciousnesses pondering the mystery of its existence as the centuries passed it by.

Custodians of the Weave

After slumbering for millennia, a discordant resonance in the Weave awakened the sharns and set them to their calling as custodians of the Weave. The Dark Disaster had burned an instinctive abhorrence to the abuse of magic into the sharn psyche. Magical devastation unleashed in Calimshan during the Shattering had cemented their resolve.

After that time, the sharns sent scouts throughout Faerûn to observe from the shadows, and when necessary, to strike out against those who would wield the Art for mass destruction. When the sharns couldn't prevent such atrocities, they sought to preserve dying cultures by permitting select individuals of the doomed civilization to join their collective.

The sharns' enmity against the phaerimm is well documented, driven by the latter's employment of *life drain* magic and the resultant desertification of the Anauroch.

Plaguechanged Sharns

The Spellplague changed most sharns, magical beings that they are. Their skin, once silver and black, now runs in metallic shades of blue. The typical nimbus of purple light now manifests as cerulean plaguefire dancing across their spellscarred bodies. The deep ebony sharn pools now bubble and writhe with cobalt radiance, agitated by wild magical currents flowing within them.

Worshiped as Spellplague avatars by a cult of spellscarred zealots, the Order of Blue Fire, these plague-maddened sharns are on a mad quest. Despite the plague's nature, the sharns view its chaotic tendrils as the last remaining strands of the true Weave, which is something they are desperate to preserve. As such, the sharn seek to nurture and spread active pockets of Spellplague.

To achieve this end, the sharns guide the Order of Blue Fire—a strained relationship at best. The simple truth of the matter is that the sharns don't play well with others. They prefer to follow their own shifting agendas at their own chaotic pace.

Sharn Alignment

In an upcoming *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* update, the sharn (page 266) will receive a revision in alignment to unaligned. This alters the plaguechanged sharns to the alignment they were always intended to have. Plaguechanged sharns are enigmatic and erratic, and they seek to spread the Spellplague, but they are no more evil than the Spellplague itself.

One might wonder why the sharn was ever published as chaotic evil. The answer to that weirdness lies in the early design for Fourth Edition, when we had a Chaotic alignment that meant "chaotic but not evil." I gave the plaguechanged sharns that alignment, because it made sense with their behavior. When the alignment system solidified, the sharn was then inadvertently switched to chaotic evil against the original design intent. The update and this sidebar correct that mistake.

—Chris Sims

Habitat

Sharn pools are typically underground in the Sharnlands and other regions of active Spellplague. A few of their kind, the eldest of the sharns alive today, remain as guardians living under the protective mythal of the Hidden City of Hope.

Rhymanthiin: The Hidden City of Hope stands as a testament to the fulfillment of Oacenth's Vow and Dragmar's Promise—a land where all goodly races of Faerûn can live and work together with common cause and unity. Nearly the size of Waterdeep, the streets and outer walls of Rhymanthiin are orderly, with clean lines and heavy block constructions. The great boulevards and defensive walls of the city have the black-as-pitch hue of the sharns, from which any of the three-mawed defenders can emerge. Rhymanthiin remains firmly anchored to the Feywild and invisible to most outsiders. Those who have not been welcomed into the city observe only miles of untamed wilderness where the city should stand.

Perhaps surprising to some, Rhymanthiin hosts the largest number of redeemed dark elves in all Faerûn, joining with their fey fellows to relearn the ancient traditions of their people. Sharns of Rhymanthiin stand apart from their kin in wider Faerûn. Untouched by the ravages of the Spellplague, they are one with the city, their bodies composing the streets and walls of the Hidden City of Hope.

The Sharnlands: In the Underdark, about 16 miles below the Gray Vale spreading southeast under the High Moor, lie the bizarre deeps known as the Sharnlands. These sprawling caverns, home to a great number of magical ley lines and earth nodes, run for miles through the deepest part of the Northdark.

Undermountain: In the depths of the Sargauth, below Halaster's Halls, lives a mysterious creature known as the Drowned Queen, an abolethlike being thought to have unusual magical abilities akin to those of the sharns. It is whispered that the Drowned Queen was responsible for the death of a Manshoon clone who sought to rule the Underhalls in the years following the Mad Mage's demise.

Plaguewrought Land: From the independent city of Ormpetarr, the Order of Blue Fire organizes Scar Pilgrimages into the Plaguewrought Land. Here, where the Spellplague is most active in all Faerûn, dozens of sharns dwell.

Halruaa: Much of the lore of Halruaa lives on within the few souls assimilated by the sharns before, during, and after that nation's destruction. Sharns are actively exploring the ruined capital of Halarahh in search of the *Zalathorm's Clockwork Sceptre*.

Sharn Variants

"Ye hearken, the three-souled-one shall lead them and the blasted heath shall impart wonders"

Sharn Blackclaw Powers

Sharn blackclaws are statistically identical to the sharn presented in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* (page 266), but they can command one or more alternative powers. You can choose any of the following replacement powers for the sharn presented in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*.

Plaguefire Maw

Substitute this power for the *leaping plaguefire* power.

Plaguefire Maw (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 2; three attacks, each against a different target within reach; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* Ongoing 5 fire damage and the target takes a –2 penalty to Will (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* Ongoing 5 fire damage and the target takes a –2 penalty to Will (save ends both) and target contracts level 11 Halruaan Consumption (see *FRCG* page 136).

Spellfire Aegis

Substitute this power for the *second wind* power.

Column of Spellfire (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Force**
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 5 fire and force damage. The sharn gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn. The sharn transforms into a 30-foot-high column of fire.

Bolt Barrage

Substitute this power for the *independent action* power.

Bolt Barrage ✦ **Force** (see text)
The sharn makes two ranged basic attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target and all enemies adjacent to the target are knocked prone.

Hex Step

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Hex Step (move; when adjacent to a *hex portal*; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports to any unoccupied square adjacent to a *hex portal* it created.

Psychic Displacement

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Psychic Displacement (immediate interrupt, when the sharn is targeted by a melee or ranged attack; recharge @6) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports 5 squares.

Swarming Hex Portals

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Swarming *Hex Portals*
The sharn gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against targets that are adjacent to at least 2 *hex portals*.

Sharn Symbiote

Sharn symbiotes are horrifying serpents of black ooze that spend their days within the gooey confines of inky, black pools unless provoked. Symbiotes are the only method of procreation for a sharn colony, though the sharns are usually meticulous when selecting those deemed worthy to merge with their collective consciousness.

Graft: Sharn Symbiote

A sharn symbiote envelops the host from head to foot in an oily-black second skin, which shifts and writhes when agitated. A graft is a template that introduces new mechanics onto an existing creature. They function like templates, but do not alter the creature's level, nor do they make it elite, but they do make the creature slightly more complicated and a little more powerful.

Prerequisite: 10th level

Sharn Symbiote — **Graft**

Senses darkvision
Languages telepathy 15
Immune petrification, polymorph
Psychic Slam (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 5; level + 2 vs. Will; the target is immobilized until the end of the creature's next turn.

Sharn Symbiote Tactics

Sharn symbiotes immobilize prey that stray too close with *psychic slam*. If other sharns are not nearby to deal with the intruder, the symbiote uses *seize host* to compel the enemy to withdraw from sharn lands. Only as a last resort does a symbiote assimilate its host, which risks introducing unfavorable qualities into the collective.

Sharn Symbiote — **Level 15 Lurker**
Large aberrant magical beast (blind, ooze) — XP 1,200

Initiative +17 — **Senses** Perception +6; blindsight 10, tremorsense 10
HP 119; **Bloodied** 59
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28
Immune gaze, petrification, polymorph
Speed 6

Slam (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 4 damage.

Seize Host (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+18 (+20 against immobilized creatures) vs. Reflex; ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends) and the target is grabbed.

Assimilate (standard; at-will)
Targets a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed; +18 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

Psychic Feast (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Targets the creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed; +18 vs. Will; 3d8 + 9 psychic damage, and the sharn symbiote regains 10 hit points.

Psychic Slam (standard; at-will)
Close blast 5; +18 vs. Will; the target is immobilized until the end of the sharn symbiote's next turn.

Host Before Symbiote (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack; at-will)
Requires a grabbed creature; the attack that triggered this interrupt targets a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed instead.

Symbiotic Link
If a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed is reduced to 0 hit points by either the *psychic feast* power or the ongoing damage from *seize host*, the creature gains the sharn symbiote graft, regains 10 hit points, and is dominated by the sharn symbiote (a condition that can be ended only by the Remove Affliction ritual).

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Skills Arcana +17, Insight +11, Religion +17
Str 21 (+12) — **Dex** 23 (+13) — **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 23 (+13) — **Int** 21 (+12) — **Cha** 24 (+14)

Symbiote

Symbiotes invade or join with a host creature's body, granting the host certain benefits in exchange for great protection. In some cases, however, the symbiote is little better than a parasite leaching off a host body until the symbiote can locate another.

When a *symbiotic link* is established, the symbiote joins with the base creature. In game terms, a *symbiotic link* is a graft, which is a minitemplate that you add to an NPC or monster (*Open Grave* page 216). Not only does a symbiote introduce an interesting story and visual element to an NPC, but it also grants the NPC an extra attack.

Sharn Phaseblade

Sharn phaseblades are lurking horrors that deliver precision strikes with their signature black blades; each blade trails wisps of shadow in its deadly wake.

Sharn Phaseblade Tactics

A sharn phaseblade uses *phase distortion* to keep away from its enemies and boost its next round's worth of attacks while delivering melee attacks through strategically positioned *hex portals*.

Sharn Phaseblade **Level 16 Solo Lurker**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 7,000

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 586; **Bloodied** 293
Regeneration 10
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune petrification, polymorph
Saving Throws +5 (+8 against fear effects, and against conditions that hinder movement); see also *independent consciousness*
Speed 4, fly 8 (hover); see also *phase distortion*
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

Phaseblade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Hex Portal (minor; sustain minor [see text]; at-will) ✦ **Conjuration**
Ranged 5; the sharn creates a hexagonal window of light that it can attack through as if it were in that portal's space. As a minor action, it can move one portal 4 squares. Portals don't block line of sight, line of effect, or enemy movement. A sharn can maintain up to three such portals at a time with a single minor action; it can close as many as it wishes with a free action.

Independent Action (standard; at-will)
The sharn makes two melee basic attacks. If a phaseblade and a bite hit the same target, that target is also dazed (save ends).

Phase Distortion (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn Phaseblade teleports 10 squares and gains insubstantial and phasing until the start of its next turn. Additionally, on its next turn the sharn Phaseblade gains a +3 bonus to attack rolls.

Double Actions
A sharn rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Each set of actions corresponds to a different consciousness. The sharn's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each of its turns.

Independent Consciousness
A sharn automatically saves against the dazed and stunned conditions, and against charm effects that a save can end.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Insight +12, Religion +18
Str 21 (+13) **Dex** 23 (+14) **Wis** 8 (+7)
Con 23 (+14) **Int** 21 (+13) **Cha** 24 (+15)
Equipment 3 kukris

Sharn Hexshadow **Level 19 Solo Skirmisher**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 12,000

Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +13; special senses
HP 682; **Bloodied** 341
Regeneration 10
AC 35; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 34
Immune petrification, polymorph
Saving Throws +5 (+8 against fear effects, and against conditions that hinder movement)
Speed 4, fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 2

Bite (minor 1/turn; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage.

Claw (standard; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 3d6 + 6 damage, and the sharn shifts 2 squares after the attack.

Lightning Ball (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 5; two attacks, each against different targets; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 6 lightning damage.

Hex Portal (minor; sustain minor [see text]; at-will) ✦ **Conjuration**
Ranged 5; the sharn creates a hexagonal window of light that it can attack through as if it were in that portal's space. As a minor action, it can move one portal 4 squares. Portals don't block line of sight, line of effect, or enemy movement. A sharn can sustain up to three such portals at a time with a single minor action; it can close as many as it wishes with a free action.

Hex Step (move; when adjacent to a *hex portal*; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports to any unoccupied square adjacent to a *hex portal* it created.

Independent Action (standard; at-will)
The sharn makes two melee basic attacks. If a bite and claw hit the same target, that target is also dazed (save ends).

Shadow Hex (minor; not usable when bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Conjuration, Illusion**
The sharn creates a shadowy illusion of itself, which occupies a space exactly as though it were the sharn hexshadow. The sharn and its illusion are considered to both be the same creature, sharing the same hit point pool and the same abilities, and each one takes one of the sharn's turns each round. When a sharn is bloodied, its illusion vanishes immediately.

Double Actions
A sharn rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Each set of actions corresponds to a different consciousness. The sharn's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each of its turns.

Independent Consciousness
A sharn automatically saves against the dazed and stunned conditions, and against charm effects that a save can end.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Insight +12, Religion +18
Str 21 (+14) **Dex** 23 (+15) **Wis** 8 (+8)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 21 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+16)

Sharn Hexshadow

Sharn hexshadows are masterful tacticians that can divide their forms to confuse prey and better position themselves for delivering deadly killing strikes enhanced by orbs of eldritch might.

Sharn Hexshadow Tactics

Sharn hexshadows employ *shadow hex* to confuse while unleashing crackling *lightning balls* and *independent actions* against their enemies.

About the Author

Brian R. James is a freelance game designer working exclusively for Wizards of the Coast. His credits include *Open Grave*™, *The Grand History of the Realms*™, *Forgotten Realms® Campaign Guide*, and the forthcoming *Underdark*™ supplement. You can follow Brian's random thoughts online at http://www.twitter.com/brianrjames.

Creature Codex:

by Johnathan M. Richards • illustrations by Dennis Cramer

THE ECOLOGY OF THE SHEET PHANTOM

The fever sent chills down Lord Scaumble's spine. He shivered under his thin blanket, teeth chattering as if it were already winter in the drafty old house. He considered lighting the fire but thought better of it: *Fuel costs money!*

"I'll tough it out. They'll see!" he muttered to himself. "Lousy healer, trying to charge me three pieces of gold for medicine! *Three!* Well, I'll do just fine without his overpriced potions. Besides, there's no telling what was in that bottle. Colored water, more than likely. The charlatan!"

Then another thought hit his fever-wracked brain. *What if it was poison?* The thought made sense to the ailing old man, for he knew that everyone was out to get his money. *Well, they'll have to do better than that,* he told himself. *Nobody's getting me that easily, and they won't get my money when I go. It's too well hidden, with far too many safeguards.*

The thought of his numerous traps put a wicked smile on Lord Scaumble's sallow countenance. With the clammy sweat of sickness dripping down his face, he closed his eyes and lay back on his tattered pillow. Muttering to himself, he dropped off to sleep, dreaming sweet dreams of his hidden darts, contact poisons, and falling block traps.

He never awoke.

Drake pointed at the silhouette of the abandoned house on the hill before them in the light of the full moon. "There it is: Scaumble manor." Jillian pressed close against him. Drake wrapped a protective arm around her, pleased at her reaction. He enjoyed the role of the brave, strong man.

"Nothing to be afraid of," he said. "I'm here with you. And nobody's seen crazy old Scaumble for months. The whole place is probably deserted."

"Do we have to go in?" Jillian asked.

"No, we don't *have* to. But we're going to, and I'll tell you why: They say Lord Scaumble's worth a small fortune. Nobody saw him leave town, so I figure he either snuck off somewhere for awhile or else he's dead. Anyway, I've got it from a reliable source that he keeps his money hidden in his house."

"Says who?"

"Let's just say a reliable source," repeated Drake, winking at Jillian. He had recently been invited into the local Thieves Guild and enjoyed dropping hints about his newfound prestige without naming names. Which was a good thing, since even members of the Upper Hand had been killed for blabbing.

"It's pretty run down," commented Jillian. "It doesn't look like the old man had any money at all, or he'd have been able to fix the place up."

"That's the whole point," argued Drake. "You don't want to advertise the fact that you've got money. Now come on. I want to give the place a once-over."

"Couldn't we come back in the daytime?"

"We could be seen in the daytime. Better to work in the dark. I brought a

1. **Sheet phantoms are created** when a thoroughly evil person dies in bed. The death need not be natural, as with Lord Scaumble's sickness; being slain in bed can do the trick as well. What matters most is that the person is evil and desperately does not wish to die, usually because there are matters to which he wishes to attend. Thoughts of vengeance often trigger the transformation into a sheet phantom, especially among those slain in bed.

   Some sages have speculated that the sheet phantom might be an undead form of a lurker above (a D&D monster from previous editions of the game). This is nonsense: Not only is the lurker above much larger than a sheet phantom, but it is found almost exclusively in subterranean environments. Sheet phantoms, on the other hand, begin their "unlife" inside a dwelling, usually a bedroom.
2. **Sheet phantoms move telekinetically** at a Speed of 20 feet (average maneuverability). When newly formed, they tend to move about as they did in life—that is, hovering above the floor at the same height as if they were still alive. As they learn more about their new forms, they gain the abilities of levitation and flight. Sheet phantoms can hover motionlessly in one spot if necessary. They often flatten themselves against a wall or ceiling and drop down upon their prey.
3. **Those who become sheet phantoms** after being killed in their sleep often sport impressive bloodstains on the fabric of their new "bodies."
4. **Although embodied in the linen** of a simple bed sheet, sheet phantoms can form invisible, ectoplasmic bodies that mirror the bodies they had in life. When such a humanoid body is formed, the sheet is

lantern for once we're inside. Now come on, we're wasting time."

Jillian shrugged and followed Drake up the path to the decrepit manse.

Lord Scaumble was amazed to find himself looking down at his own face. It was a face he was used to seeing every morning in his cracked mirror as he dragged his old razor across his chin. But this time it was different.

For one thing, his wart was on the wrong side. Scaumble had a wart half the size of a copper piece on the left side of his nose, and he scowled at it in the mirror every morning. Of course, in the mirror it looked like it was on his right side, but here it was on his left.

Even more disconcerting, his eyes were closed. That in itself was rather odd: How could you look at your own closed eyes? Then he realized with a start that his face was unnaturally still. He wasn't breathing!

It was at that moment Lord Scaumble realized he was dead.[1]

He sat up just then, knocking the thin blanket to the floor in the process. Looking down upon his frail form—his frail, dead form—he wondered just what he had become. A ghost?

draped as if over a human body,[4] standing in the reflection of Lord Scaumble's cracked shaving mirror.

How could this be? he thought. *How did I become trapped in my own bed linen?*[5] It made no sense. He stared at his reflection. *Come to think of it, how is it that I can see at all?*[6]

Puzzled, the sheet phantom floated back and forth across the bedroom, pacing, trying to put things together.

The doors were all locked. Drake expected that; in fact, he had even counted on it, for it gave him a chance to show off in front of Jillian. "Watch this," he said, spreading his tool kit on the back porch and selecting a lockpick by the light of the moon. Expertly sliding it into the lock, he wiggled it around, and ... nothing. "Wait a minute," he said. "Okay, I flick it just right, and ... this time for sure ... almost got it ... shoot." Jillian looked down at him, lips pursed, less than impressed.

"Let me try this one," Drake said, choosing another lockpick. "A quick twist, a little jiggle, and ... shoot. Okay, here we go ... no, wait a minute ... almost got it ... there!" He felt the lock give, pulled out his pick, and turned to Jillian for his well-deserved praise.

She wasn't there.

"Jillian?" called Drake quietly.

The door opened with a creak. Drake gasped in fright and jumped back a step before realizing it was Jillian herself in the doorway. "There was a broken window around the corner," she said. "Did I scare you?"

Drake bit back his anger and quietly put away his kit. Then, without a further word, he brushed past her and went inside. Jillian closed the door behind him. It shut with an eerie squeak, then all was silent.

Scaumble patrolled his house every night. He had become quite the creature of the night since his death; during the day, he became sluggish,[7] often spending hours upstairs in his bedroom simply watching his former body decay, a process he found quite fascinating. Flies had discovered his corpse soon after his death, and now it was riddled with squirming, white maggots. Lord Scaumble could only imagine the stench and was grateful that his sense of smell had not survived the trip into undeath.

The flies and maggots he suffered to live upstairs in his bedroom; after all, there was little they could do to his traps or his well-hidden money. He had found evidence of rats in the basement, though, and hunted them down whenever he could. He was worried about the rats; some of them were quite large and could conceivably set off one of his traps if they made their way upstairs, so he was ever on the lookout. Whenever a rat came into view, Lord Scaumble dropped his linen body onto the creature and wrapped it tightly within his folds, smothering it.[8] The death of each creature brought great pleasure to the sheet phantom, and in time he sought out the rodents for the delight of the kill as much as for the safety of his traps.

FLIES HAD DISCOVERED HIS CORPSE SOON AFTER HIS DEATH, AND NOW IT WAS RIDDLED WITH SQUIRMING, WHITE MAGGOTS.

He stood up—it felt as if he stood up[2]—and went to the mirror. He was shocked by what he saw.

Lord Scaumble was now, to all appearances, embodied in the stained, graying sheet from his bed.[3] He turned back to look at the bed. There was the blanket on the floor. There was his human body—no sheet. He turned back to the mirror. There was the sheet,

The lantern did little to illuminate the room. Everywhere there were shadows, as if the house knew of its master's death and refused to submit to the intrusion of light. Still, all Drake wanted was a quick look around. He seriously doubted he'd find Lord Scaumble's hidden treasure trove right away; this was more of a familiarization tour, as well

draped over it like a child in a Halloween costume. Forming such a body becomes second nature for the sheet phantom, and it can form or dissipate the body with a thought. The ectoplasmic body allows the sheet phantom to grasp small items (those weighing less than 5 pounds). Fine manipulation is not possible, for the invisible "hands" are covered with the fabric of the sheet. Thus, while a sheet phantom could pick up a candle, it couldn't light it with flint and steel or a tindertwig. It could push a book onto the floor but couldn't easily flip the pages.

The ectoplasmic "body" of a sheet phantom is not visible even to those able to see invisibile or ethereal creatures. It is closer to a field of energy than a physical object.

5. **Many sages speculate** that the bed linen acts as a resonator of psychic emanations, that during the hours spent in slumber the sheet becomes "imprinted" with the individual's life essence. This could be especially true if the person dies violently, as psychic phenomena have been traced to sudden violence.

6. **A sheet phantom sees and hears** as well as it did in life. It also has a limited sense of touch but is unable to taste or smell.

The sheet phantom has no facial features, with the exception of two glowing green spots that serve as its eyes. These "eyespots" appear only when the creature attacks, possibly to add to the terror of the victim. In any case, the sheet phantom's eyes can appear anywhere on its body. When floating with an ectoplasmic "body," the sheet conforms to the body's shape, and the eyes appear where one might

as a chance to impress Jillian. Unfortunately, his fumbling at the door had left her less than thrilled at his prowess. He'd have to find another way to get her to notice him.

Drake thought his chance had come when they heard the chittering and scratching of a rat—a rather large one, by the sound of it. Jillian pressed close to the young thief, throwing fearful glances all around her. Here's my chance, thought Drake, as he spotted the rat skittering across the floor.

Quick as a wink, Drake drew a dagger from his boot and let it fly. His throw was perfect, skewering the creature before it even knew what hit it. He put his hands on his hips and struck a confident pose, looking back at Jillian and expecting a look of deep admiration.

All he got was a look of disgust. "Ewww!" she cried. "Get it out of here!"

Disheartened, Drake recovered his dagger, wiped the blade on the rat's fur, and returned it to his boot. He kicked the dead rat out of sight.

"Do you think there are any more around here?" asked Jillian, swinging the lantern around worriedly.

"Probably," replied Drake. "Don't you worry, though. I'll keep you safe."

"Do you have any other knives?"

"Um, yeah ..."

"Let me have one, then. I'll feel safer—and not the one with blood on it. Yech!"

Drake pulled the small blade he kept sheathed at the back of his belt and passed it to Jillian, frowning at her lack of reassurance at his skill. This wasn't quite working like he had planned. He tried to focus on finding Lord Scaumble's loot. At least the night might not be a total loss!

"Let's try in here," he said, heading toward the kitchen.

Scaumble heard the voices downstairs and glided silently along the stairway. *So, looters have come at last,* he thought.

There were two of them, a man and a woman, both young. Lord Scaumble liked those odds. For a moment he considered allowing them to waste their time downstairs—all of the traps were upstairs, closer to the hidden loot in the attic—but the thought of two strangers going through his things infuriated the sheet phantom. He might have no use for kitchen cutlery in his undead form, but it was still his! Plus, if he allowed them upstairs so they could fall prey to one of his devious traps, he'd end up wasting at least one of them. Lord Scaumble realized that in his current form he'd be unable to reset the traps once sprung, so it was best to leave them as a last line of defense, to be used only if absolutely necessary.

With an urgency born of determination and hatred, the sheet phantom glided through the hallway and into the kitchen.

Pulling cobwebs from her hair, Jillian shrieked, "Ick! Spiders!" She had been checking out the walk-in pantry, hoping to discover a secret compartment.

Drake just shook his head and returned his attention to poking at the floorboards with his dagger, trying to find a loose one where Lord Scaumble might have stashed his loot. As a result, he didn't see the sheet phantom gliding up silently behind him.

Jillian did. "Drake!" she screamed, as the floating bedsheet spread out wide before dropping down on the unsuspecting thief. As it fell, Jillian caught a glimpse of hate-filled, green eyes glowing in the center of the sheet.

Despite Jillian's scream, Drake had no time to react before finding himself bound in a constricting mass of linens. He still had the dagger in his hand, but his arms were pinned at his sides.[9] He thrashed back and forth, kicking with his feet, but he couldn't escape.

Suddenly, a line of pain traveled down his right thigh as Jillian slashed at the creature with the small blade Drake had given her.[10] She cut a jagged slit in the animated sheet, enough to free Drake's right arm and allow him to wriggle free.

Drake managed to slip his head out from under the sheet and gasped for breath. He saw Jillian tugging at a corner of the sheet with all of her might, a look of fierce determination on her face. "Almost got it!" she cried with teeth clenched. Then, with a ripping sound, the creature was off of him, and Drake was free.

In the feeble glow of the lantern's light, Drake saw the sheet bob like a wild kite, Jillian still holding on to one corner. With an eerie grace, the thing spun around in midair, tattered edge flapping where Jillian's blade had cut Drake free,[11] and almost casually flipped over onto the young woman.

Time seemed to freeze for Drake. Propped on hands and knees in Lord Scaumble's kitchen, he was immediately aware of several things at once. Jillian had dropped her knife to tug the creature off of him; there it was on the floor at the edge of the lantern-light, stained with his own blood. The creature had wrapped itself completely around Jillian and was squeezing her tightly. Vaguely, he could hear her gasping and whimpering, as if from far away. Finally, his leg was still bleeding from where Jillian had gashed it cutting the monster off of him. It throbbed with a dull ache.

All of this took but a split second, and then Drake, with the quickness of his thief's training, had assessed the situation and come up with a plan of action. Limping, he got to his feet and hightailed it out the door, leaving behind his daggers, his lantern, Lord Scaumble's hidden fortune, and Jillian.

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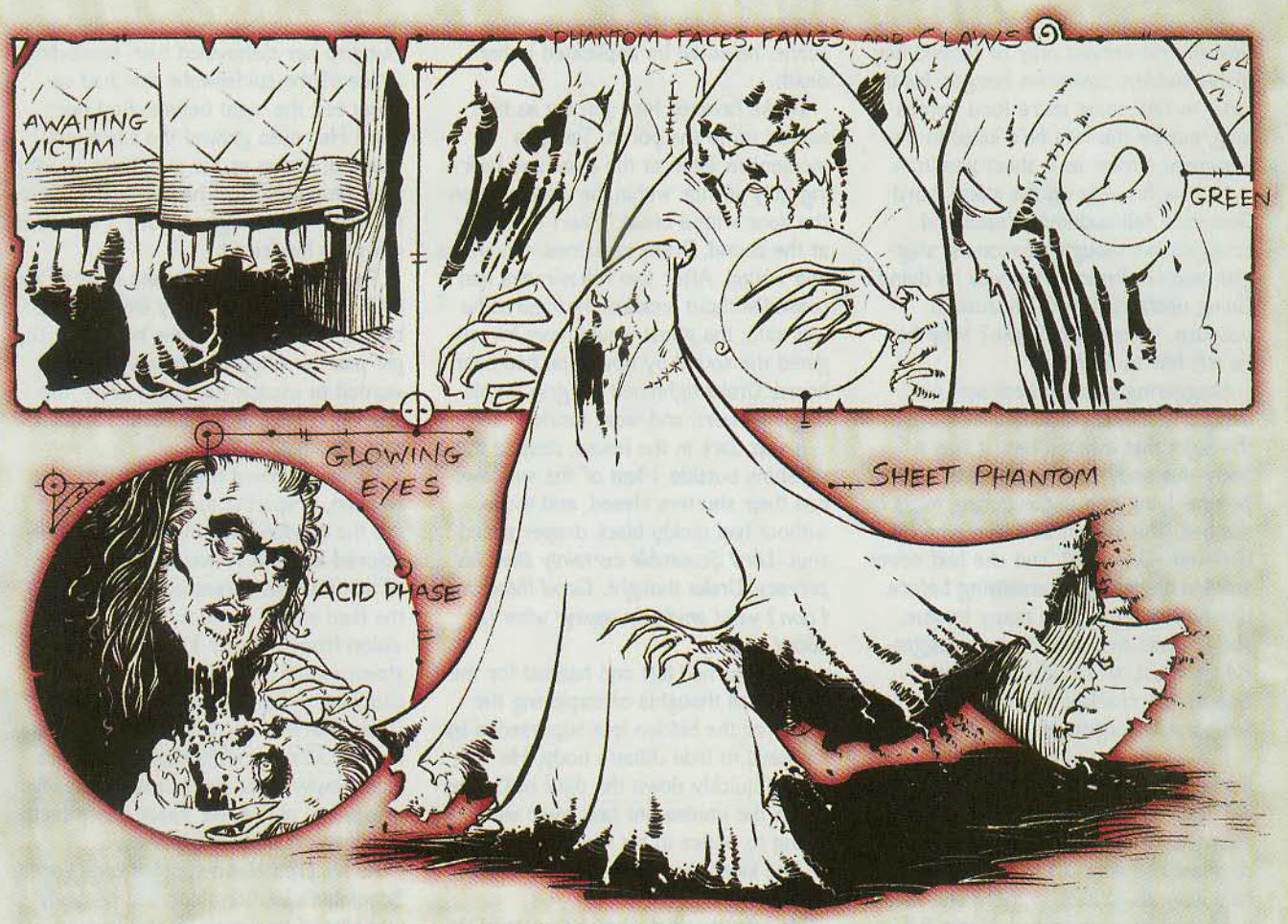
expect. When flattened against a wall or ceiling, the eyes are usually located at the center of the sheet, but this isn't always the case; the sheet phantom can cause its eyes to appear at a corner if it so desires. Furthermore, it can "throw" its eyes on either side of the sheet. When smothering a victim, the sheet phantom often focuses its eyes directly over those of its prey, watching the life snuff out of the victim's body as she suffocates, but the sheet phantom can project its vision outward if it hears the approach of another creature.

7. **Sheet phantoms are most active at night.** Exposure to sunlight slows them to half movement, and a sudden bright light (the casting of a *light* or *daylight* spell, for instance) causes them to recoil for 1d3 rounds.

8. **A sheet phantom must make** a normal attack roll when it drops onto a victim; success indicates it deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. (See Grapple on page 137 of the *PH.*) If the phantom wins the grapple check, it has wrapped its prey in the folds of its body and suffocation begins. The following round, the victim must hold her breath or begin to suffocate. (See the Appendix at the end of this article or page 88 in Chapter 3 of the *DMG.*)

9. **The victim of a sheet phantom's** suffocation attack can attempt to escape once each round. The victim and the sheet phantom make opposed grappling checks; success on the victim's part indicates freedom. (The victim has the option of using an Escape Artist skill check against the sheet



The terrifying sheet phantom has several weaknesses. Holy water, fire-based attacks, and natural sunlight all have adverse affects on the creature.

Scaumble stared into the woman's terrified eyes and saw the moment when life passed from her body.

This time, he kept his linen form wrapped tightly around his victim. If the looters had already begun to snoop around his place, he'd have to be ready for them. As it was, there had been just two of them this first time, armed only with daggers, and look at what had happened: He had been injured and one of them had escaped. He'd have to do better than that if he was to keep his precious hoard intact!

He had slain the woman shortly before midnight. He stayed wrapped around her dead flesh all that night, and well into the next morning. The sun was near its zenith when the transformation was complete, and Lord Scaumble stood up on two solid legs once again.[12]

It was good to feel solid flesh again! Lord Scaumble turned from the kitchen and staggered down the hall, eager to climb up to his bedroom and get a good look at himself in his shaving mirror.

On his way, he passed the dead rat that Drake had killed the night before. A strange sensation passed over him, one he had all but forgotten during his time as a sheet phantom. He grabbed the rat with twisted fingers whose nails had grown overnight into claws and bit into the animal's dead flesh with teeth that had likewise become sharp and pointed.[13] Hunkering down into a squatting position, he ripped apart the rat with relish, devouring it all, down to the bones. After he was finished, he slid his long, blackened tongue over his lips and grunted in satisfaction.[14] It had been—what?—months since he'd eaten, and

phantom's grappling roll. See Grapple on page 137 of the *PH*.) The victim cannot attack the sheet phantom unless he or she holds a Tiny weapon, like a dagger or knife, when first enveloped. Animals are allowed their normal claw and bite attacks.

10. **If a sheet phantom is attacked** while enveloping prey, the victim suffers the same damage inflicted on the sheet phantom. After all, the creature is comprised of only a single sheet of linen, which does little to protect the victim within. On the other hand, while sheet phantoms are immune to bludgeoning attacks, the victim has no such protection, and any attacks with a blunt instrument on a sheet phantom that has successfully grappled someone inflicts full damage to the victim.

11. **Damage done to a sheet phantom** heals over time, at the rate of 3 hit points per day. Of course, any physical damage to the sheet phantom's linen "body" is permanent (once cut or ripped, the sheet remains so), but this does not hamper the creature. Sheet phantoms do not feel pain.

12. **The transformation from sheet phantom** to sheet ghoul takes about 12 hours, during which time the life essence trapped in the sheet is transferred into the slain victim. As part of the transformation process, the fibers of the sheet break down and merge into the body, so the sheet ghoul often looks like it's covered in cobwebs. The change is completely optional on the part of the sheet phantom; it can release itself from its slain prey and remain a sheet phantom for as long as it desires or merge with its victim and become a sheet ghoul.

now the rat served only to remind him of his sudden, ravenous hunger. He'd have to find some more food before long, maybe the rats he'd killed in the basement earlier as a sheet phantom.

Making his way up the stairs, Lord Scaumble felt suddenly dazed and drugged, his thoughts becoming sluggish and confused. What was he doing? Going upstairs. Why? Because ... because. Where was Drake? Why had he left her to die?[15]

Staggering into the bedroom on instinct alone, Lord Scaumble froze at the sight that awaited him. It was a body—his body—no, she'd never seen it before—lying in a decomposing mess on the bed. The stench of corruption hit him—her—like a wall, and she had never smelled anything so tantalizing before. Licking her lips with a raspy tongue, she crossed the room to her maggot-ridden feast, all thoughts of Lord Scaumble's cracked shaving mirror temporarily forgotten.

Drake stood at the path that led to the old Scaumble estate, gathering his courage. He still didn't know what kind of ghost had attacked him, but he knew he'd have to go back in there and face it. He had come prepared: It was full daylight, so maybe the ghost wouldn't be around, but just in case he had a vial of holy water with him. He had also borrowed a magic short sword from one of his new pals at the Upper Hand. Perhaps "borrowed" wasn't the best word, but he'd get it back before it was missed. He was unsure what would be effective against the undead creature, and he prayed he had chosen his weapons wisely.[16] There wasn't anything else he could think to do, so he took a deep breath and headed down the path toward the Scaumble estate. After all, he had unfinished business at the manor.

If anyone found Jillian's body there, with his dagger and lantern at the scene, he could be implicated in her death.

Drake favored his right leg as he walked up to the porch. Taking a moment to listen at the door and hearing only silence within, he pushed open the door with a creak. Heart pounding at the sound, Drake remained motionless and waited. After two full minutes had passed without incident, he figured he was safe; the ghost would have investigated the sound by now if he had been heard. Drake tightened his grip on his magical sword and went inside.

It was dark in the house, despite the sunshine outside. Most of the windows had their shutters closed, and those without had moldy black drapes pulled shut. *Lord Scaumble certainly liked his privacy,* Drake thought. *Good thing, too. I don't want anybody seeing what I'm about to do.*

Drake turned left and headed for the kitchen, all thoughts of exploring the place for the hidden loot superseded by the need to hide Jillian's body. He walked quickly down the dark hall, eager to get the unpleasant task over with, failing to notice in his haste that the rat he had killed the night before was no longer there.

He was shocked when he entered the kitchen, for Jillian was missing. Puzzled, he scanned the floor, thinking she might have crawled away before the ghost finished her. Worse yet, what if she escaped? Escaped, and lived to tell how he had abandoned her? That wasn't going to be good for his reputation!

"Looking for me?" a raspy voice asked from behind him.

All of the hairs on the back of Drake's neck stood up. He knew what he would find if he turned around.

He turned around anyway.

Jillian stood before him, lips twisted in a hideous rictus of a smile. Her skin was a pallid yellow-white; ragged claws extended from her fingers. Loose fibers clung to her disheveled hair, reminding Drake of the spiderwebs that had so upset her the night before. And her eyes! Her eyes glowed the same evil shade of green as the two spots of light that the young thief had seen shining on the sheet-ghost, right before it swooped down on his friend.

The two stood at opposite ends of the kitchen, the sole doorway immediately behind Jillian. Drake knew he'd have to get past his undead companion if he wanted to escape the room alive. The sparkle in Jillian's green eyes told him that she knew it, too.

Drake tightened the grip on his weapon, preparing to strike. He never got the chance. Jillian opened her liver-colored lips and vomited forth a stream of acid.[17] Drake screamed in agony as the fluid struck his face, burning the vision from his eyes. He dropped his stolen sword and the vial of holy water, clutching at his wounded face. Blinded, Drake was thrown to the floor with ease. He felt Jillian straddle his body, rip his hands away from his face with a savage grasp, and plunge her razor-sharp teeth into the soft flesh of his neck.

As his life's blood spurted onto Lord Scaumble's kitchen floor and his body was ripped to shreds by the undead body of the friend he had betrayed, Drake's final, insane thought was: *Now I'll never get to find the hidden loot!* Then his consciousness left him forever.

Lord Scaumble, firmly entrenched in the ghoul-body of the female looter, smiled down at his handiwork. Oh, it had taken a while to get used to the idea of being in a woman's body, but he had gotten over the initial shock. He had two arms and two legs, sharp teeth and claws; what else could he ask for? Besides, female or no, the body worked just fine when it came down to what mattered: the rending of flesh, the crushing of bones, and the sucking of sweet, sweet marrow.

Most sheet phantoms eventually long to possess a physical form once again, though, and so take advantage of the opportunity when they can.

This aspect of the sheet phantom makes it unique among undead creatures, as the sheet phantom can be thought of as the "larval stage" of the sheet ghoul. Few undead beings have such a cycle in their development.

13. **A sheet ghoul attacks twice** each round with its jagged claws; each claw attack deals 1d3 points of damage. In addition, the creature bites for 1d6 points of damage. Unlike normal ghouls, a sheet ghoul does not cause paralysis with its touch.

14. **Though undead, sheet ghouls** have an appetite for both freshly killed prey and carrion. As with true ghouls, the flesh they eat maintains their undead bodies, and they have a limited time as undead before their bodies decompose. Sheet ghouls can expect to "live" for about 200 years.

15. **Shortly after transformation** into a sheet ghoul, the creature becomes bewildered as its undead mind tries to make sense of two sets of conflicting memories: those of the evil individual who became the sheet phantom and those of the victim whose body became the template for the ghoul. Of the two, the victim's memories tend to be vague and indistinct, as the sheet phantom's evil intelligence holds sway. In time, the sheet phantom's mind gains full dominance, but occasionally a stray memory from the victim makes its way to the surface of the creature's mind.

16. **Holy water is a potent weapon** against sheet phantoms: Because of their linen nature, they absorb liquids and thus suffer 1d4+4 points of damage per vial of holy water instead of the standard 2d4. Fire is

Sheet phantoms typically attack by dropping upon their victims and suffocating them.

He climbed the stairs up to his bedroom, deactivated the blade trap in the far wall, and opened the top drawer of his bureau. Pulling on a pair of thick leather gloves from long habit, he pulled down the cord to the trap door in the attic before realizing the contact poison on the pull-cord need concern him no longer.[18]

Once opened, the trap door extended to become a ladder. Throwing down his gloves, Lord Scaumble picked up the trophy he had brought upstairs with him and climbed into the attic. The room was lit only by the feeble rays of sunlight peeking through various tiny cracks in the roof. Lord Scaumble stumbled down the length of the attic, passing his riches: hundreds of thousands of coins, mostly copper, that he had stashed away over his three score miserly years. The coins were stacked haphazardly, spilling out of old flour sacks, overflowing from wooden crates, forming small piles throughout the cramped attic.

Making his way to the back of the room, Lord Scaumble placed his trophy gently on the top of the largest loose pile of coins and smiled appreciatively at the result. Drake's severed head looked sightlessly out at Lord Scaumble's hidden loot, eyes bulging out and bubbling from the sheet ghoul's acid attack.

"Enjoy the view," the undead creature cackled, then turned away and climbed back down to his bedroom to reset his traps and resume his vigil.[19]

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also effective against sheet phantoms. Any fire-based attack (normal or magical) inflicts an extra point of damage per die rolled. Although the size of the sheet phantom's body varies depending upon the size of the sheet, it is considered a Medium-size creature in combat.

On the other hand, as undead, sheet phantoms are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, *sleep*, paralysis, stunning, and disease. They are not subject to sneak attacks, critical hits, ability damage, subdual damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

17. **One of the major modifications** to the host's body during the process of transformation from sheet phantom to sheet ghoul is the development of acid-producing glands in the stomach cavity. A sheet ghoul can spit a thin stream of corrosive acid from its mouth to a range of 10 feet. The acid can strike only a single target and deals 1d8+1 points of damage (half damage with a successful Reflex saving throw). The acid is similar to the venom of many spiders, which begins breaking down organic matter so that the spider can slurp up the liquid remains.

Because of the extreme corrosiveness of the sheet ghoul's stomach acids, all ingested food is completely dissolved. Thus, although it eats prodigiously, the creature leaves no droppings.

18. **Sheet ghouls enjoy the standard** immunities of all undead.

19. **Sheet ghouls are solitary creatures** seldom found in any numbers. The only time several sheet phantoms are likely to be created simultaneously is during a plague. It is possible to imagine several sheet phantoms haunting the abandoned wing of a healing temple after such an outbreak.

APPENDIX: THE SHEET PHANTOM AND SHEET GHOUL

SHEET PHANTOM

Medium-Size Undead

Hit Dice	3d12 (20 hp)
Initiative	+3 (Dex)
Speed	20 ft., fly 20 ft. (perfect)
AC	17 (+3 Dexterity, +4 natural)
Attacks	Buffet +3 melee
Damage	Buffet 1d4+2 subdual
Special Attacks	Smother, improved grab
Special Qualities	Undead, darkvision 60 ft., immune to blunt weapons, weaknesses
Saves	Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +0
Abilities	Str 15, Dex 16, Con –, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 15
Skills	Listen +8, Move Silently +16
Feats	Blind-Fight

Climate/Terrain Buildings
Organization Solitary (1)
Challenge Rating 1
Treasure None
Alignment Chaotic evil
Advancement Range
4-6 HD (Medium-size); 7-9 HD (Large)

SHEET GHOUL

Medium-Size Undead

Hit Dice	4d12 (26 hp)
Initiative	+2 (Dex)
Speed	30 ft.
AC	16 (+2 Dex, +4 natural)
Attacks	2 claws +3 melee, bite +0 melee
Damage	Claws 1d3+2, bite 1d6+2
Special Attacks	Acid spray
Special Qualities	Undead, darkvision 60 ft.
Saves	Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0
Abilities	Str 14, Dex 15, Con –, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 14
Skills	Climb +6, Hide +4, Jump +6, Listen +10, Move Silently +8, Search +6, Spot +8
Feats	Multi-Attack, Weapon Finesse (claw)

Climate/Terrain
Any land or underground
Organization Solitary (1)
Challenge Rating 2
Treasure Standard
Alignment Chaotic evil
Advancement Range
5-8 HD (Medium-size); 9-12 HD (Large)

A sheet phantom is the undead manifestation of an evil person who died in bed, embodied in the bedsheet that covered the corpse. It has no facial features save two glowing, green eyespots. Sheet phantoms glide effortlessly through the air by an innate form of telekinesis.

Combat

Sheet phantoms attack by dropping upon unsuspecting prey and suffocating them in the folds of their bodies.

Improved Grab (Ex): A successful attack indicates the phantom deals normal damage and attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. (See Grapple on page 137 in the *PH*.) If the phantom succeeds at the grapple, it has wrapped itself around its prey. The following round, the victim must either hold her breath or begin taking suffocation damage. (A character can hold her breath for 2 rounds per point of Constitution. After this time, the character must make a Constitution check (DC 10) in order to continue to hold her breath. The check must be repeated each round, and the DC increases by +1 for each previous success.) If the victim runs out of breath, she falls unconscious (0 hp). In the following round, she drops to -1 hit points and is dying. In the third round, she suffocates. A victim can escape a sheet phantom's embrace by making an opposed grappling check or an Escape Artist roll against the sheet phantom's grappling roll. While encumbered, a victim can only use a Tiny weapon like a dagger, and then only if it was in hand when first enveloped by the sheet phantom. Damage inflicted on a sheet phantom while it encompasses a victim causes an equal amount of damage to the victim. Blunt weapons inflict full damage upon the victim but do not harm the sheet phantom.

Undead: Sheet phantoms are immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, *sleep*, paralysis, and disease. They are not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Weaknesses: For all their deadly suffocation ability, sheet phantoms have a number of weaknesses. Holy water inflicts 1d4+4 points of damage per vial on a sheet phantom instead of the standard 2d4 points of damage. In addition, all fire-based attacks (normal or magical) inflict an extra point of damage per die. Finally, sheet phantoms recoil from natural sunlight and bright lights (like a *daylight* spell). If exposed to direct sunlight, sheet phantoms take 1d3 points of damage. They move at half speed during the day.

Spawn

A sheet phantom can merge with the body of any humanoid it slays. The process takes about 12 hours, after which time the victim and sheet phantom transform into a sheet ghoul.

A sheet ghoul is the result of a sheet phantom merging with its humanoid victim. It looks like a normal ghoul, but closer inspection might reveal wispy strands of white material clinging to its face like cobwebs or a decaying shroud. This is the remains of the sheet phantom's linen form.

Sheet ghouls devour carrion and freshly killed prey.

Combat

Sheet ghouls rend with their claws and bite with their sharp teeth.

Acid (Su): A sheet ghoul's breath weapon is a fine spray of powerful stomach acid that inflicts 1d8+1 points of damage, or half that with a successful Reflex save (DC 14). The acid stream has a range of 10 feet and can target only a single victim. A ghoul can spray acid in melee combat, but it cannot use its bite attack if it uses the acid spray. Spraying acid is a ranged attack, so using this ability in melee combat provokes attacks of opportunity.

Undead: Same as sheet phantom.

Sheet ghouls are almost always encountered singly. They are shunned by normal ghouls and ghasts, who attempt to drive sheet ghouls away whenever they are encountered. This might simply be out of fear, but it probably also has something to do with the fact that a sheet ghoul cannot "propagate" its species the way ghouls and ghasts can. Since both ghouls and ghasts are often found running in packs, they have no use for an undead creature that is unable to expand the pack's own numbers.

Ecology of the Shoggoth

By Phillip Larwood
Art by Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein

The midnight mist thinned as the creature approached... an indescribable terror that seized my already overtaxed mind and left me shuddering with equal parts abject horror and breathtaking awe.

The creature before me was no ordinary fiend of the night, no simple ogre or demon emerging from the wafting miasma to rend my flesh or steal away my soul. No, this vast and ancient protoplasm seethed and roiled as if moved by otherworldly tides — it was the end of sanity and the beginning of madness.

When I screamed, it matched my cries with a voice that was my own.

Few creatures in the world inspire more dread than the shoggoth, a monster whose appearance causes rational minds to wither. Few can describe its demented inconceivable visage or the maddening cacophony that pipes from its many orifices. Despite the legendary horror of these creatures, few know their far-flung origins or the terrible connection that they share with all other life forms on the planet.

The Beginning

In ancient prehistory, a race of planar-spanning alien creatures known simply as the elder things ruled many worlds. Their power was akin to that of the ancient titans themselves. They stole the secrets of creation from the primordial gods to seed otherwise barren worlds with the first whispers of life, a grand experiment that would have far-reaching implications. On many worlds, this experiment was ultimately doomed to failure, yet occasionally, life did indeed take hold, and entirely new species rose up out of the primordial soup of creation to take over the land, sea, and air.

While life flourished on these worlds, not all of the organic material was used up in the act of creation. The elder things cast aside the leftover dross or slag, and it quietly sank into the lightless oceanic depths or was left festering in cyclopean caverns. Soon forgotten by those on the surface, this oozing afterbirth did not die but instead found a life of its own and flourished in the stygian darkness, becoming the first proto-shoggoths and oozes.

The Masters of the Shoggoths

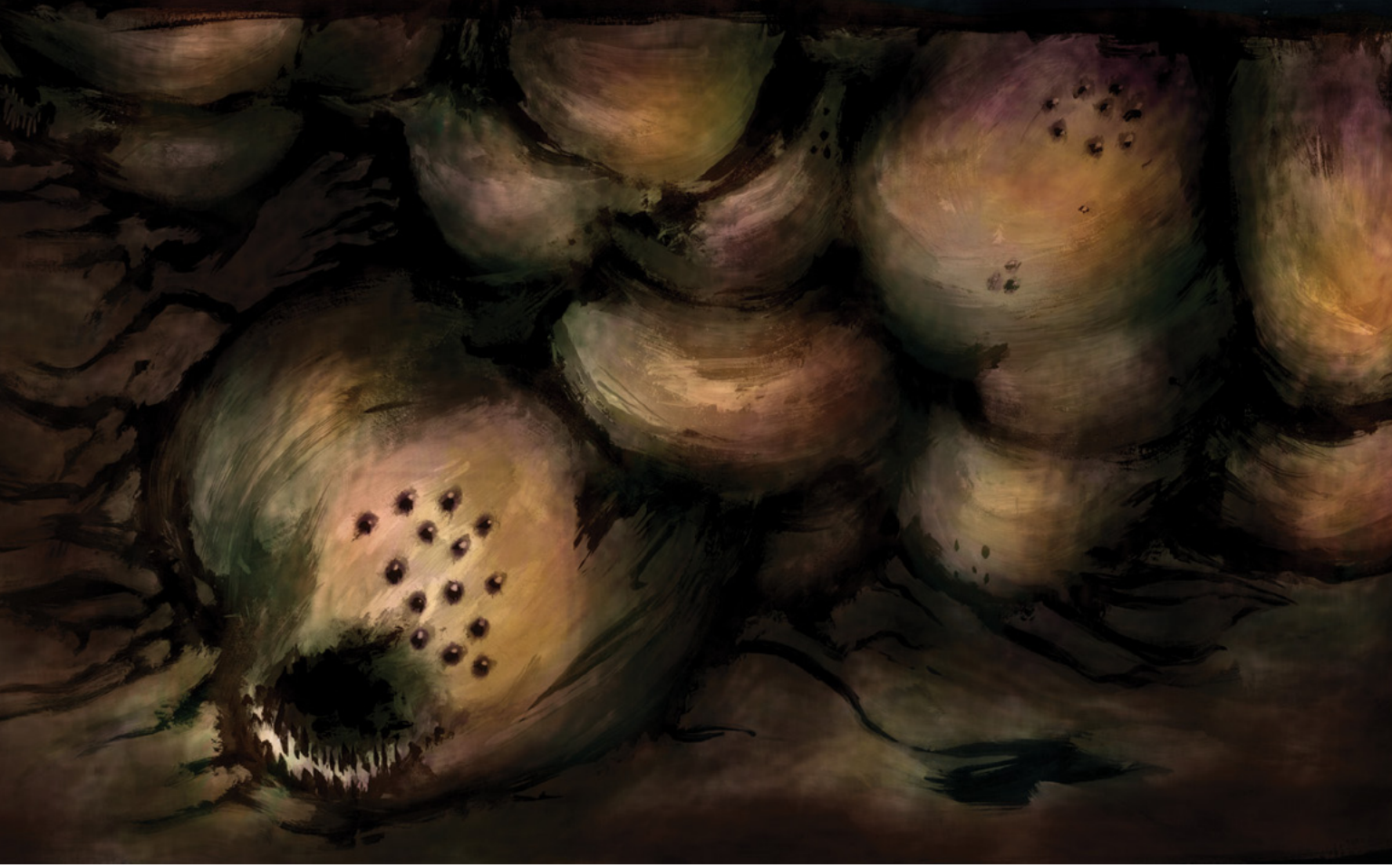
One of the first races to rise out of the stinking mire as a result of the grand experiment of the elder things were the aboleth, an evil ichthyoid race obsessed with enslaving other life forms. *[Editor: see* Sunken Empires *for more details on the aboleth's plans and magic.]* The aboleth inhabited many of the same environments as the proto-shoggoths and saw in the creatures a way of conquering the other races of the depths without endangering themselves. All they needed to do was bend the race to their demands. Given the great mental powers of the aboleth and the weak minds of the shoggoths, this task was no more difficult than drawing water over your gills—for an aboleth.

For countless millennia, the aboleth used the proto-shoggoths as their most powerful slaves, living siege engines capable of destroying anything in their path. Over that time, they continued to mold the shoggoths to their whims, transforming them into their current abominable shapes and increasing their size and power. However, this evolution also created a glimmer of intelligence in the shoggoth race, and the servitors began to resent the aboleth for their cruel and tyrannical ways.

When the drow and sahuagin arose to contest the aboleth for dominion over the oceans and underground depths, the shoggoths saw a chance to rebel against their terrible masters. The resulting slave rebellion unleashed such unmitigated destruction that the aboleth were almost wiped out; most fled into the Underdeep, the darkest ocean trenches. After it was over, the surviving shoggoths were free, so they slithered off into the darkness where they would never be controlled again.

Physiology

Few words can coherently describe a shoggoth's anatomy without falling well short of the mark, for the creature's form is so completely mutable that it changes almost by the second. While fundamentally an ooze like a black pudding or ochre jelly, a shoggoth can form mushy organs, throbbing sacks, eye-studded pseudopods, and weird toothless mouths from its central bulk, something beyond the grasp of most oozes. In addition, while most oozes have no Intelligence, shoggoths can think and even reason, allowing the creature to use simple



tactics and even long-term plans, a task likewise beyond most oozes.

The typical shoggoth is as large as a small cottage but can squeeze or expand its body into a variety of shapes depending on its needs. While a shoggoth does not have the fluidity of most other oozes, its body is plastic enough to move through spaces up to two sizes smaller without having to squeeze, and it can move through apertures up to three sizes smaller while squeezing. This allows the shoggoth to reach creatures that might otherwise think they are safe from the creature's hunger.

Like other oozes, shoggoths must constantly feed to power their immense bodies, engulfing and absorbing any organic matter they can catch. While most shoggoths have no particular preference when it comes to what they consume, some acquire specific tastes, including a taste for particular humanoid races, certain varieties of trees, or monsters such as chuuls and krakens. Like most other oozes, shoggoths produce little waste material and anything devoured by the creature is almost completely consumed and added to the creature's bulk.

Despite the shoggoth's strange physical features, the most startling aspect of its physiology has nothing to do with its appearance but is, rather, its ability to produce a startling array of sounds. Its vocal structure seems deceptively simple yet hides much complexity because of the way it can reshape itself. The shoggoth uses the strange piping orifices dotting its body to create its maddening cacophony and to reproduce virtually any sound they have heard. Indeed, shoggoths can learn to speak any language, given enough time and patience, and many ancient shoggoth specimens have been heard to speak a passable Abyssal, Draconic, or Undercommon.

Shoggoths are asexual and reproduce by budding, creating tiny shoggoths that are ejected from the main body in a frenzy of activity and obscene, almost orgiastic piping. Adult shoggoths quickly consume most of the young, but the fleetest and luckiest offspring survive to continue the species and pass on the collective memories of their ancestors.

Psychology

Many creatures are surprised to discover that shoggoths are thinking creatures capable of both speech and the ability to learn. Despite this, one should never mistake a shoggoth's intelligence or thought patterns with anything that can be interpreted or understood by humanoids, for the shoggoth's mind is a fractured and warped creation of terrible longing and rage—a mind that is completely insane.

While not evil, shoggoths are random and unpredictable in their actions. The only thing that can be predicted to a reasonable certainty is that they will try to eat anything they encounter. They are driven not only by an endless hunger but also by an abject loneliness resulting from their forced separation from the rest of creation, so they try to fill that void as best they can—by assimilating all organic matter. The greater tragedy, perhaps, is their futile attempts at communication: their maddening cries are simply poorly conceived attempts to make whatever is consumed understand the reason for its inevitable liquefaction.

One of the strangest aspects of

shoggoth psychology is the rare lucidity that their minds enter after they consume a creature with an Intelligence score of 13 or greater. This lucidity can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days (roughly 3d20 hours), but while it persists the shoggoth can communicate fluently with any creature that can understand the secret language Aklo and make rational and reasonable decisions. During these rare moments shoggoths converse with the cultists who revere them, and they have the wherewithal to create gibbering mouthers.

When the shoggoth's lucidity passes, it returns to its more typical behavior and, once again, consumes the cultists and others near it.

Gibbering Mouthers and Shoggoths

Sages have long postulated a connection between gibbering mouthers and shoggoths, hinting at a similarity in body shape and the maddening qualities of their incoherent murmuring. While weird curses and magical accidents have been known to create gibbering mouthers, the truth is shoggoths have a much closer connection to them than sages suspect they do. Most gibbering mouthers are literally shoggoth children; they are created during moments of shoggoth lucidity. At those times, the shoggoths have enough control over their powers to transform living creatures they have engulfed into smaller versions of themselves.

The process that transforms a living humanoid into a gibbering mouther is little understood, but it involves infusing massive amounts of living humanoid tissue with the chaotic essence of the shoggoth's own misbegotten creation. This attempt at creating life can only be achieved by a lucid shoggoth (see above), and seems to be driven by the shoggoth's need to share in the joys of creation. However, the results are never what the shoggoth wants: who knows what perfection it is striving for?

The shoggoth just as quickly slays most gibbering mouthers it has created, but a few of them serve the mad cults dedicated to the shoggoths or escape to terrorize the land. Often these gibbering mouthers possess abilities superior to those created through other means, such as increased size or power (giving the gibbering mouther the advanced or giant templates), immunities, or special attacks.

Shoggoth Cults

Very few creatures would ever willingly serve a shoggoth let alone worship one. However, several cults dedicated to these horrible oozes exist and may be found in places one would not normally expect them. Their names tend to the florid, such as the Cult of Evanescent Purity or the Mystic Order of the Primordial Star.

Most shoggoth cults spring up when a group of primitive and chaotic humanoids such as gnolls, orcs, or trolls discover a shoggoth and manage to placate the creature's incredible hunger. This usually involves feeding a shoggoth at least 300 day's rations to start (or 20 Medium-size creatures), and at least 20 day's rations (or 2 Medium-size creatures) each day thereafter. Cultists refer to this as the Great Feeding or the Great Feast.

The humanoids who know the secret of the Great Feast equate shoggoths with other powerful natural forces, such as hurricanes and volcanoes, and worship them for their destructive capabilities as living gods. Usually, the humanoids feed the shoggoth enough to keep it docile, but inevitably, the shoggoth destroys the tribe once the food runs out.

The more dangerous shoggoth cults occur when a group of degenerate humans, elves, or derro turns to the worship of a shoggoth, seeing them as living embodiments of some divine being, force, or principal.

These cults normally keep the shoggoth locked away in a great cavern or dungeon and feed it sacrifices taken from the local populace, slaves, or from other sources. Many of the cults also hunt down intelligent sacrifices (such as scholars, teachers, and wizards) to create lucid shoggoths, thus enabling them to breed gibbering mouthers or even take some of the shoggoth's bubbling protoplasm to infect themselves with its chaotic otherworldly taint. The most successful shoggoth cults actually worship a chaotic evil entity like Marbas (from Green Ronin's *Book of Fiends*) rather than the shoggoth itself, seeing in the massive ooze some aspect of their god.

Mouths of Madness

Usually a shoggoth's protoplasm is completely indigestible, but it can be imbibed if properly prepared by a skilled spellcaster. Those who survive the consumption of *shoggoth brew* form an empathic link with the shoggoth. From then on, these "mouths of madness" can withstand the maddening cacophony of the shoggoth and gibbering of any created mouthers and can communicate with the shoggoth without risk of being consumed.

This ability does not come without a price. Most mouths gain one or more physical or mental characteristics that mark them as aberrant creatures. These marks can include an extra lidless eye growing on a palm, an irrational fear of open spaces, bouts of homicidal rage, a small tentacle growing from an ear, or the like.

Shoggoth Brew

Aura faint transmutation; **CL** 7th
Slot —; **Price** 750 gp; **Weight** —

Description

Anyone drinking this foul-smelling black brew must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or become nauseated for 1d6 rounds and take 1d2 Strength damage. Those who fail the saving throw vomit up the mixture, rendering it useless.

Anyone who succeeds on the saving throw metabolizes the brew and forms an empathic link with the shoggoth the brew is concocted from. This empathic link has a radius of 1 mile and allows the creature to sense the shoggoth's presence and its general physical condition. The link also makes the creature immune to all *confusion* spells and effects, and it eliminates the risk

of the creature being attacked by the shoggoth the brew is concocted from or any gibbering mouthers it has spawned. Those who successfully drink shoggoth brew gain 1d4 random physical or mental changes and cannot directly harm the shoggoth the concoction comes from. Indeed, some become even more fanatical in their devotion to the terrible beast.

The effects of *shoggoth brew* are non-magical and cannot be dispelled. A *remove disease* spell cast on the victim breaks its effects, though any marks remain.

Construction
Requirements Craft Wondrous Item; **Cost** 375 gp

Variant Shoggoths

Despite their physical mutability, most shoggoths are identical in power and abilities, their reproductive cycle leading to physically identical children. Some variations in form and shape exist, and the most common variants are neo-shoggoths and proto-shoggoths.

Neo-Shoggoths: A new breed of shoggoth created by the derro (see "Ecology of the Derro" in *Kobold Ecologies*), neo-shoggoths have greater control over their bodies and can form slashing blades or piercing spines with their pseudopods. In addition, neo-shoggoths are more intelligent (with Intelligence scores of 10 or more) and can use their maddening cacophony in other, more dreadful ways such as demonic summonings, black rituals that warp space, and luring, hypnotic strains of baleful music that cause fear or insanity. Neo-shoggoths are still relatively rare and can only be found in the largest derro communities.

Proto-Shoggoths: Before the aboleths turned their arcane arts toward the shoggoths, they were little more than massive mounds of unthinking ooze driven by the basest destructive impulses. Some proto-shoggoths still roam the deepest and most inaccessible ocean depths or subterranean reaches, but most have been replaced by the far more dangerous true shoggoths.

Proto-shoggoths possess the powers of 15 HD black puddings but without the black pudding's highly concentrated acid, or the maddening cacophony power of regular shoggoths. Like shoggoths, they can constrict, engulf, and trample creatures, and random physical features in their otherwise amorphous pudding-like bulks include eyes, mouths, and strange malformed organs such as beating hearts or weeping bile ducts.

New Shoggoth Abilities

Neo-shoggoths, as well as ancient shoggoths, or those found on other worlds or planes sometimes possess abilities different from the norm. Some of these variant abilities are listed below.

Blood Drain (Ex) To make a shoggoth more like a gibbering mouther, a GM might want a shoggoth to drain blood from a victim instead of dealing acid damage. A blood-draining shoggoth does not deal acid damage with its engulf ability but instead deals 6 Constitution damage per round. As with the gibbering mouther's blood drain ability, the shoggoth does not affect creatures without blood such as constructs and elementals. This ability increases the shoggoth's CR by +1.

Breath Weapon (Ex) The shoggoth can breath out a 30-ft.-cone of acidic vapor once every 1d4 rounds as a standard action, dealing 15d6 acid damage to all creatures struck (Reflex save for half). The DC for the breath weapon is Constitution-based (Reflex DC 31 for an average shoggoth). This ability increases the shoggoth's CR by +1.

Spell-like Abilities (Sp) The shoggoth possesses 20 spell levels' worth of 1st-3rd level spells useable 3/day, and 20 spell levels' worth of 4th-7th level spells useable once/day. This ability increases the shoggoth's CR by +1.

Terrifying Cacophony (Su) Instead of the normal confusion effect, the shoggoth's cries frighten those who fail their save. This effect lasts 1d6 rounds. Those who succeed on the saving throw are shaken for the same number of rounds but cannot be affected by the terrifying cacophony again for 24 hours. This ability does not increase the shoggoth's CR.

Whispers from Beyond (Su) The shoggoth can direct its maddening cacophony at a single target within 60 ft. as a standard action. Any creature affected by the maddening cacophony (Will save DC 22 negates) is treated as if under the effects of an *insanity* spell and remains confused indefinitely until cured. A shoggoth that uses its maddening cacophony this way cannot use it against other creatures in the same round. This ability does not increase the shoggoth's CR.

Shoggoth Lore

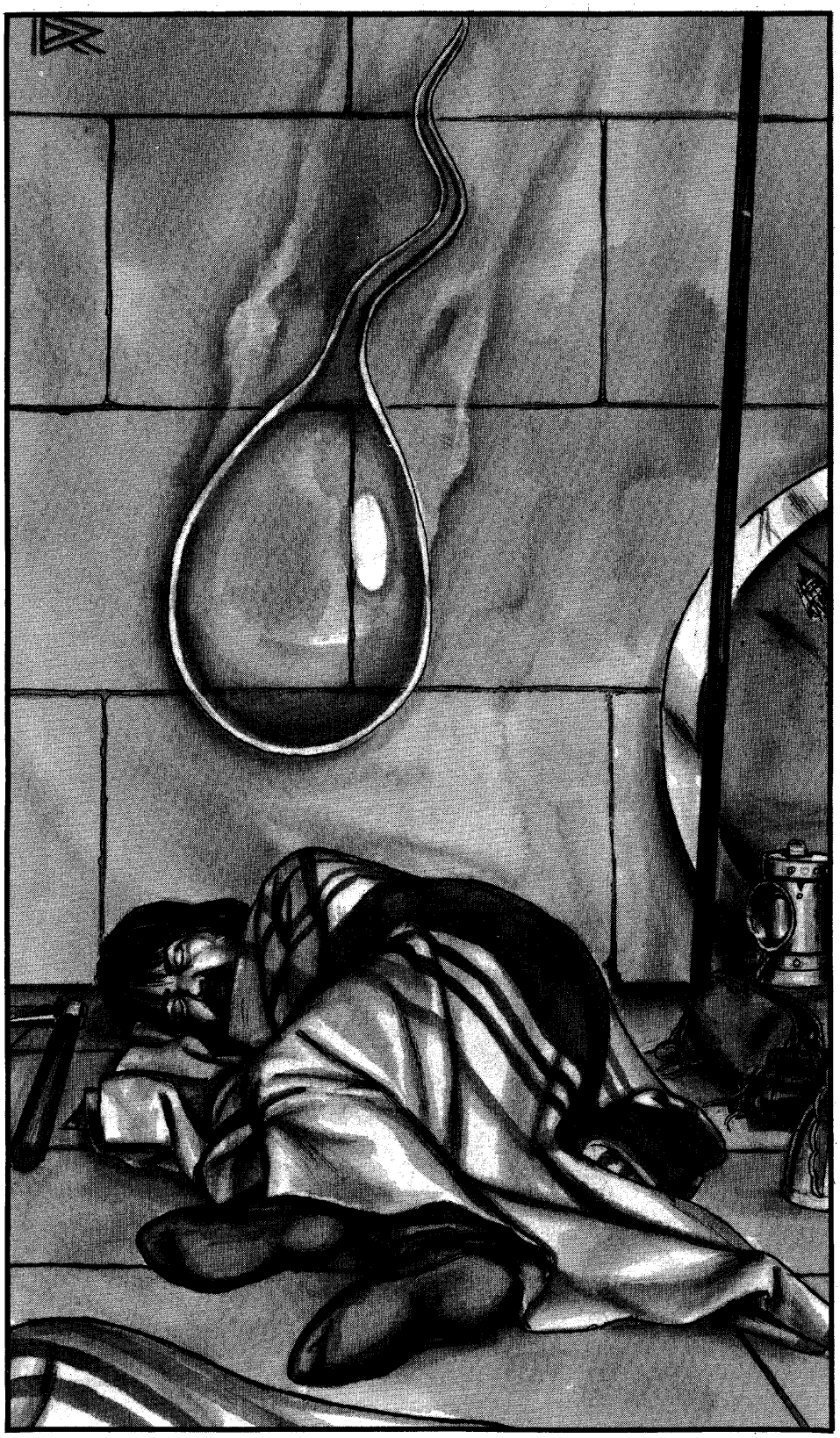
Characters with ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) can learn more about shoggoths. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information for lower DCs. Since shoggoths are extremely rare creatures, the baseline Knowledge DC to discover anything about them is 34 (15 + the shoggoth's CR of 19).

Table: Shoggoth Lore

DC	Result
34	Shoggoths are monstrous oozes that live in inaccessible regions of the world, particularly polar oceans and underground caverns. Shoggoths are vaguely intelligent and can constrict, engulf, and trample their prey. They can also produce a maddening array of sounds that drive creatures insane.
39	Gibbering mouthers and shoggoths are distantly related. Bizarre cults dedicated to shoggoths exist, and they are usually made up of primitive humanoids, humans, or derro. Shoggoths speak the secret language Aklo and were once slaves of the aboleth.
44	Shoggoths were created several eons ago by a race known as the elder things. Shoggoths can create gibbering mouthers under the right conditions, usually immediately after devouring sentient creatures. Derro cults breed powerful and closely related creatures known as neo-shoggoths.

The ecology of the slithering tracker

by Ed Greenwood



From the notes of the wizard Aluthandee:

It is called by such names as "The Invisible Death" or "The Creature That Follows The Doomed," and other fanciful phrases that suggest a thing of claws, fangs, and scaly limbs. When referred to by its mundane name, the Slithering Tracker is not nearly so imposing — and, indeed, it is not a vicious-looking creature, when it can be seen at all.

Close examination of the beast reveals it to be rather like a giant tadpole in appearance. Its transparent, semi-fluid jellylike body is customarily shaped into a blob with a long, sinuous tail. The body is amorphous, enabling it to pass through small gaps and holes, but it prefers to assume its tadpolelike form whenever possible.

Almost invisible and quite intelligent (especially for a slimelike creature), the tracker will lie in wait for prey in an advantageous location, such as in a cozy, apparently safe sleeping cavern, or at the bottom of a pit trap. It can grip and travel upon walls and ceilings and apparently can drop any reasonable distance without harm because of its form. When it moves, a tracker is almost silent except for the faint slither of its tail.[1] The creature exudes a very faint, sweet, "earthy" body smell, detectable only from inches away. The subtlety of its smell, sounds of movement, and appearance are such that it is virtually undetectable in the dimly lit subterranean areas it inhabits.[2]

A tracker feeds by first paralyzing an opponent with a fluid produced by its body cells, forcing this liquid into the victim through the pores of its skin, and then using a second fluid to actually erode the hide or skin of its victim, so that the creature can absorb the plasma from the victim's blood. Both the paralyzing substance and the fluid which effects the draining of the victim are produced automatically within the creature's body from any meal the creature consumes, the remainder of its fare being converted to energy for bodily activity, and sometimes being used to make itself stronger or larger. I know of no alchemists who can duplicate either of the tracker's fluids in the laboratory, but they eagerly make use of the former as an ingredient in the inks for the scribing of the paralyzation, *hold person,* and *slow* spells. Assassins, and alchemists in their employ, prize the skin-eating substance for use in the manufacture of caustic poison mixtures. These substances are present in each and every cell of the creature, and not collected in specific

areas or organs; however, they do readily settle and separate one from the other if a trapper's fluids are collected.

Trackers seem to prefer dwarves, humans, and giants as prey, in that order, over other creatures, presumably because of the physical make-up of their plasma.[3]

A tracker reproduces by budding. When specimens of full size gain further substance, they form excess body cells and place these in a pseudopod. All excess food (unless the parent creature is injured and reabsorbs these needed cells to maintain itself) is converted into more cells for this "bud." Such cells differentiate, and the pseudopod takes on the form of a second, miniature tracker joined to the first. When this is of sufficient size, the tracker produces brain-function cells for it, and these are passed into the "baby," which acquires limited sentience and begins to gain some control over its own form and actions. When it has mastered its form and gained strength, the parent tracker shakes free of it, and, after the initial shock of sudden, total self-control and loneliness, it will go its own way.[4]

Trackers are solitary, never merge with or fight other trackers, and inhabit a specific "territory" or range that they come to know very well, patrolling it regularly and recognizing instantly when some feature of it has changed. The tracker tolerates scavenger creatures who remove the bodies of its victims, but before abandoning a body it attempts to retain loose objects that might be recognized as treasure, so as to lure more prey in the future. A tracker lair is typically a tiny, irregular cavern too small for an attacker to effectively harm its occupant, located at the intersection of beckoning trails of treasure. A tracker can "burrow under" loose objects and carry them along for a distance before depositing them elsewhere, and in certain circumstances might lie dormant with treasure spread on top of itself.

A tracker's brain cells are located in various areas of its amorphous body; it has no special, vulnerable area. It can re-form if its bulk is separated in battle or misadventure, flowing together, or its various pieces attacking in combination, "like fingers of a closing hand," as the fighter Nerouth once put it. Such disembodied pieces will never voluntarily go off to seek their own territories; although they can survive permanently if of sufficient size, they will first seek to re-form once more into the full creature.

A tracker has apparently keen senses,[5] and once tracking intended prey by scent, will leave its territory and travel several miles, by dint of tenacity and perseverance in pursuit. It can think logically enough to deduce the probable destination of a target if the trail is wiped out by running water, heavy rain, or other means, but will not pursue if a large body of water intervenes, or if its quarry takes to the air.

Trackers seem to have a marked aversion to large bodies of water, but why this is so and precisely what effects water may have on them are matters unknown to this chronicler. Some sages (Vaelenbras of Waterdeep, for one) believe that trackers instinctively fear strong currents and coastal tides and breakers, which may have the power to tear apart and forever scatter their jellylike bodies, while others (notably Jarriven of Koss) assert that it is simple prudence: unlike those of the jellyfish, a tracker's fluid defenses may be weakened or dissipated entirely by water, and in such circumstances even small fish could readily devour it. (None of the adventurers I have spoken to will admit to success in neutralizing the creature's paralyzing fluids with water — but then, neither have I ever heard of a tracker being encountered, or attacking an adventurer, when the adventurer was immersed or swimming in water.)

A tracker will move into a heavily populated area if it can find a place for a good lair, where it believes it can remain undetected if it wants to. In pursuit of plentiful prey, it will leave its normal territory without hesitation — but will only do so in pursuit of men or larger creatures, and only out of starvation or desperation, not chasing off after every animal that happens past.

Whether these creatures can hear, and if so, understand speech, is a matter of great and continuing debate among local sages and naturalists. I suspect that they do hear, in a limited way, but no unquestioned proof has been set forth on either side of the debate. Much yet remains to be learned about this creature; my fragmentary researches have led my colleagues to give the creature yet another name — the "Aluthander," after me — and what little I have learned can be set forth on these few pages.

Notes

1. A slithering tracker forms a tail to aid it in rapid movement; the tail propels the creature along with a snakelike gripping and wriggling motion, at a rate of 12" per round. It will also form a tail — or two protrusions, at opposite ends of its body — with which to anchor itself by wrapping around objects, so that it can form a barrier across a hole or a trail to stop and entrap small animals. If it is not employing a tail, a trapper can only "creep" like an ochre jelly, at a rate of 3" per round. It will always form a tail and move faster than 3" per round when it is tracking prey; the tail will "disappear" when the creature attaches itself to a victim, or when the trapper is stationary for longer than one round.

2. Under outdoor conditions, not brilliantly sunlit, there is only a 5% chance of detecting a slithering tracker by normal visual means. This chance increases by 45% when the creature is on clear sand or stone of a solid color under bright sunlight. (Subtract 5% or 10% if the undersurface is mottled in hue or appearance, and further 5% increments as the light grows fainter or more diffused by overhead foliage, and for other conditions that inhibit full normal visibility.) A tracker is thus, at best, only detectable on a 50% chance — under *optimum* conditions — to anyone not having a means of detecting or contacting an animal mentality, or the ability to detect invisible (in this case, transparent) objects or creatures. No tracker will voluntarily put itself in such optimum conditions — few will even venture outdoors at all, if they can help it — and the chance for detection is usually much lower than the optimum 50%. A trapper's body takes on the same temperature as its surroundings; as such, the creature is not detectable by infravision except during one of its attacks, or for a period of one turn (10 minutes) after it has drained plasma from a victim.

3. A tracker requires 6 uninterrupted turns to entirely drain a paralyzed victim. It will not attempt its plasma-drain attack against a conscious target who makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation and is thus still mobile; in fact, it will not attempt to make contact with conscious, mobile targets of halfling-size or larger unless it is starving and desperate. If this happens, a mobile victim can easily and quickly (by pulling, scraping, burning, etc.) break a tracker's draining contact, leaving only a red, tender, non-bleeding area where contact with the tracker has resulted in the loss of skin layers. This reddened area is usually no larger than the circle described by an outstretched hand, and this is roughly the amount of exposed skin that must be available for the tracker to attach itself. The slithering tracker does not wrap itself around a victim, except possibly to curl its body around a patch of exposed skin on an arm, leg, or face; and it does not attach itself along the entire contacting surface of its body, even if a large area of exposed skin (such as a bare torso) is available. This is the main reason why it can be detached with relative ease.

A tracker will always attack sleeping or unconscious targets in preference to other sorts. A victim who is sleeping normally (not under a magical effect) will awaken on

A tracker will move into a heavily populated area if it can find a place for a good lair, where it believes it can remain undetected if it wants to.

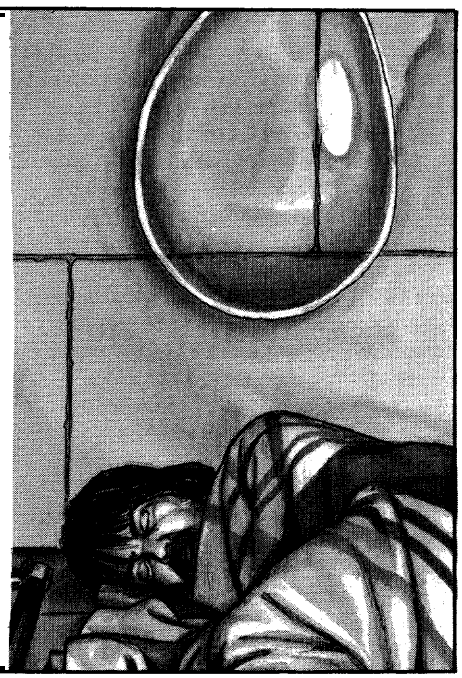
the round when the tracker attaches itself, whether or not the victim saves vs. paralyzation. An unconscious victim will not revive as a result of the tracker's attack, unless the victim would have regained consciousness anyway at some point during the 6-turn time span of the plasma drain. A victim who suffers the plasma drain will lose one-sixth of its then-current total of hit points at the end of every full turn following the onset of the attack (round fractions up) — for 5 consecutive turns; assuming the plasma drain continues uninterrupted. At the end of the sixth turn, the victim loses all remaining hit points down to zero. The tracker will detach itself at this point, and if unaided the victim will continue to lose hit points at the rate of 1 per round thereafter until one more turn has passed, at which point the victim (assuming a character or other humanoid) is dead.

The creature can always tell whether or not its paralyzation attack has succeeded, and it will not attempt to begin draining the plasma from an intended victim who makes his saving throw; instead, it will move away as rapidly as possible, trying to get out of range of a sleeping target before it awakens. The save vs. paralyzation — which any intended victim is entitled to — represents the chance that the intended victim has a temporary immunity to the tracker's fluids, because of the target body's present chemical balance, and because of the target's innate resistance to paralyzation attacks; this natural resistance is stronger for those of relatively high levels of experience or large numbers of hit dice. A target that has proven to be immune for the moment will not have to save again during the same engagement, and a tracker (unless desperate) is not foolish enough to attack the same victim twice in rapid succession. But if a target is attacked twice by different trackers, he must save twice to remain unaffected. A second save is required against the same tracker if a target meets the creature more than one day after the initial encounter.

4. "Full size" in this context means a creature with 5 hit dice, or 23+ hit points. A "baby" of 2 hit dice, or 9+ hit points, is of sufficient size to acquire brain cells and limited sentience. The production of a pseudopod and specialized brain cells is instinctive when the creature is under the right conditions — but only a full-sized tracker of 5 HD can reproduce in this fashion. A parent instinctively parts from its pseudopod when the latter achieves 3 hit dice size, or 14+ hit points.

If a tracker is split into two or more smaller portions, its disembodied pieces will seek to re-form if possible, searching around in a small area (about 12" diameter) for their fellows. These disembodied pieces can survive if of 2 hit dice (9+ hit points) or more, but if less than 2 hit dice, they will die in 12-31 (d20 + 11) turns from lack of a sufficent number and balanced order of body cells. Such "doomed" fragments will be ravenously hungry, instinctively seeking sources of plasma, and will attack all likely targets encountered (conscious or not) without caution — for if they absorb enough plasma, they may be able to grow to a stable size and survive.

The tracker cannot make abrupt changes of direction while in motion; to reverse its course it must come to a full stop.



5. Trackers have no eyes as such, but possess an infravisual sense that enables them to locate warm-blooded bodies in a 6" range. They are fairly keen receptors of odor, able to home in on body scents from 12" away with enough accuracy to discern the general direction they must take to keep on tracking their prey. They can sense even faint vibrations up to 16" away, even something as innocuous as the tapping of hard boots (but not soft ones) on a stone floor.

Appendix

A. The standard body size for a slithering tracker is 2½ feet, or (for smaller specimens) roughly ½ foot of length for every hit die. When at rest, the body is in a flattened spherical shape; when in motion, it takes on a teardrop shape, bulkier at the leading edge. The tail which the tracker sends out to aid it in movement is in addition to its body length, tapering away from the direction of movement for a length of 4 or 5 feet in a full-grown specimen. The tracker cannot make abrupt changes of direction while in motion; to reverse its course, or even to make a 90-degree turn, it must come to a full stop for one round and then start off in the new direction. When one is trapped or cornered, it will make the best possible use of its natural defenses (transparency, body flexibility, and near-silent movement) to attempt an escape.

B. Even if a tracker is detected once, that doesn't mean the creature will remain visible indefinitely. It is easier to see when it is moving (add +10% to +20% to the base chance of detection, depending on lighting and terrain), but still may be able to slip away from an attacker. It is very difficult to keep track of a tracker long enough to kill it with normal weapon blows, since several different strikes over a span of several rounds would be needed. One effective tactic is to immobilize the creature with *hold monster* or similar means, then successfully detect it where it lies (if that is not already known) and smash away. Of course, the tracker's natural transparency can be easily offset by dousing it with dye or covering it with soot or dust; this will not suffocate the creature or inhibit its movement, but will certainly make it visible to anyone within sighting range.

C. Two events can cause a tracker to be split apart in battle; in either case, a hit from a slashing weapon (short sword or larger) is required. If an attack roll is one less than the minimum number needed to score a hit, the tracker takes no damage but is split into two creatures of identical size and hit points. Or, if a hit succeeds and does at least 6 points of damage, the creature is split into two equal-sized pieces, each with half of the remaining hit points (assign odd hit points to one half or the other). Example: A tracker of 5 hit dice, with 26 hit points, is cleaved in half by a blow from a longsword that does 8 points of damage. The result is two smaller creatures with 9 hit points each, now effectively 2 HD monsters (figuring 4½ hit points = 1 hit die).

Note that when a tracker is forming a pseudopod, the entire body of the creature may have more hit points (and, effectively, more hit dice) than would otherwise be normally possible. A 5 HD tracker with maximum hit points (40) could form a pseudopod and nurture that tracker-to-be, until the "baby" acquires 14 or more hit points, at which time it will separate from the parent. In the meantime, the reproducing tracker would be treated as a monster of as many as 7 hit dice, with a possible maximum of 53 hit points.

D. A tracker can gain new hit points (or regain lost ones) by draining plasma from a victim, at the rate of 1 hit point per turn of

draining. (The rest of the plasma is simply used to enable the creature to "eat its fill" and maintain normal bodily functions.) Depending on its size (number of hit dice), each tracker has a maximum number of hit points it can attain. This figure is determined by rolling a die or dice every time the tracker qualifies to grow into a larger hit-dice category. The creature can then absorb hit points from its plasma drain until it attains that maximum figure. If a tracker has taken damage, "plasma points" are first applied to bring the creature back up to its maximum number of hit points. When there is no damage to be offset, these points may be used (by a 5 HD creature) to begin or accelerate the formation of a pseudopod, feeding it until it acquires 14 hit points (3 x 4½, rounded up) and thereby qualifies as a 3 HD monster that can live on its own. Hit points that cannot be applied for one of these specific purposes are simply "wasted."

Example: A tracker pseudopod has just reached 14 hit points and separated from its parent. The DM rolls 3d8 to determine the maximum number of hit points this creature can attain as a 3 HD monster; if the result is 14 or less, then the tracker is already at its maximum strength and will never grow any larger. If the dice roll is 15, 16, or 17, then that is the creature's maximum hit-point figure, and it can never be more than a 3 HD monster. If the roll is in the range of 18 to 22, the creature is able to attain that many hit points and, upon doing so, will qualify as a 4 HD monster. Upon reaching 18 or more hit points, the tracker is entitled to another d8 roll for additional hit points, and if the total of all the rolls is 23 or more, the creature will eventually be able to attain status as a full-sized 5 HD monster. Finally, when it gets to 23 hit points, it is entitled to one more d8 roll to determine the absolute maximum number of hit points it can attain. Note, again, that only a 5 HD tracker has the ability to form pseudopods and reproduce.

E. In general, the intensity of a tracker's appetite depends on how many hit points it currently lacks to fill its needs. A wounded creature, despite its condition, will be obsessed with bringing itself back to full strength — and trackers do *not* regain lost hit points by resting. As stated in note 4 above, tracker fragments of less than 2 HD will be ravenous, since they literally need food to have a chance of surviving. A tracker that is not wounded but has not yet attained its maximum potential strength (see the example in the preceding section) will hunger to do so, and will leave its territory in pursuit of prey. A creature currently at its maximum strength will not be eager to take chances, but won't turn away from a meal. In any event, a tracker must consume a full meal (one M-sized creature worth of plasma, or more) once per month, or it will lose hit points at the rate of 1 per day as its body begins to atrophy. And the more hit points it loses, the hungrier it gets. . . . □

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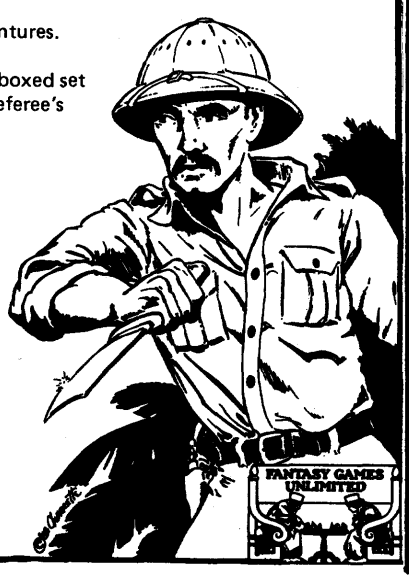

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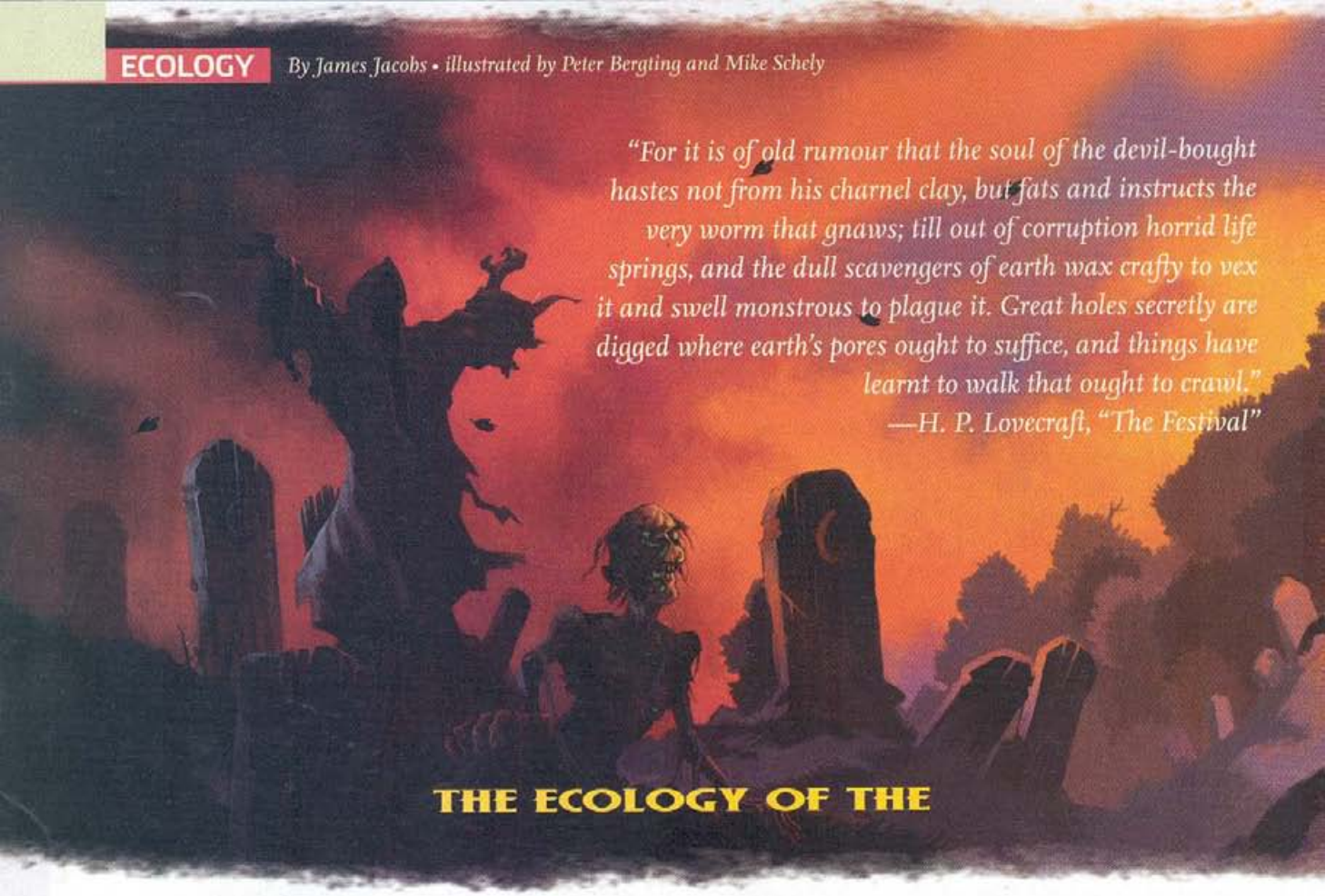


"For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fats and instructs the very worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl."
—H. P. Lovecraft, "The Festival"

THE ECOLOGY OF THE SPAWN OF KYUSS

The journals of Anadan the Reader make for singularly depressing yet morbidly intriguing study. An enthusiastic member of the crusading knights known as the Scions of the Hale, Anadan's surprisingly literate account of his group's encounters with the unliving contain valuable information on the behavior, combat tactics, and weaknesses of no fewer than seven undead breeds. Unfortunately for Anadan, it was this seventh undead, the spawn of Kyuss, that would prove to be not only his end, but the end of the Scions of the Hale. The last several pages of his worm-eaten journal tell of how his company was ambushed by a group of these horrific monsters, and how their very appearance drove fear into the hearts of many of his companions. Those who fled the combat were the lucky ones—they were able to live the rest of their humbled lives as broken men. The three who stayed to fight, including poor Anadan, managed to destroy the spawn, only to succumb, one by one, to the worms that infested their bodies during the battle—worms that leapt and lunged from the undead flesh of their enemies to burrow hungrily into living meat.

Anadan tells of how one soldier cut off his own arm at the shoulder to try to stave off the gnawing approach of a worm, only to bleed to death as a result. The other man, Anadan's captain, fled into the mist-cloaked bog and for the next several pages, Anadan writes of how the man's screams grew more and more frantic and incoherent until they suddenly ceased. Throughout the entire account, Anadan writes of how he can feel the worms inside him burrowing through his body. Anadan was not lucky enough to have an arm to lop off. His worms swam through his torso, upward, into his neck. The reader can see in his text when the worms reached his brain, for his writing slowly grows sloppy, his ability to spell degrades, and his very vocabulary becomes stunted and almost illegible as the teeming intruders did their hungry work. His last words (for by this point he had apparently lost the skill to scribe complete

sentences) are particularly chilling: "...captain... back... he see me... drool... not drool... worm... chew... no... me live... not want die... hurt... hrrrtttt... hhungrrrieee..."

Scholars and priests often refer eager adventurers who inquire about the undead to the journals of Anadan the Reader, for if they aren't warned off by Anadan's doom, they might learn a thing or two about perhaps the most terrifying and relentless enemy they'll ever face.

HISTORY OF THE SPAWN

The spawn began with Kyuss, an ancient priest of a forgotten deity who ruled an empire before the advent of modern civilization. Little remains in writing of the details concerning Kyuss and his rule, but it seems clear his skill at creating undead was unsurpassed. Eventually, the necromancer-priest vanished into parts unknown, leaving in his wake an empire of the dead. Yet while relatively little information survives to inform the modern scholar about the man himself, of his spawn much has been documented.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPAWN OF KYUSS

The following table shows the results of a bardic knowledge or Knowledge (religion) check related to the spawn of Kyuss. Any cleric, graveyard keeper, or scholar of necromantic arts might know some or all of this information, although those who don't know the true nature behind these undead sometimes (unintentionally) spread inaccurate information about them (as evidenced by information provided for a DC of 10).

Knowledge (religion)

DC	Result
10	Some zombies are just plain harder to kill than others. You can tell the really tough ones by the worms that infest them. Their wounds close up as fast as you can hack them apart.
15	Worm-infested zombies are dangerous, for there's a good chance such a monster is in fact a spawn of Kyuss, a disease-festering menace whose writhing green worms can transform those they infest into undead horrors.
20	A spawn of Kyuss exudes a supernaturally potent aura of fear. Worse, their touch not only infects victims with a terrible disease known as Kyuss' gift, but it can also infest others with the worms that gnaw on their bodies. The touch of silver and deft hands might pluck these worms away before they burrow into a victim's brain.
25	Magic that removes curses or diseases can save someone infested with the worms of Kyuss even if they have reached the victim's brain. Such a magic effect directed at the spawn itself can transform all but the most powerful into normal zombies.
30	Some of Kyuss' spawn are much more powerful than the typical spawn and possess strange powers like the ability to exhale clouds of noxious grave wind or the ability to spray the surrounding area with infectious worms. Not all spawn of Kyuss are humanoid in shape and might infest a variety of natural and monstrous forms.

The first reports of free-willed spawn of Kyuss came from adventurers who dared explore a forgotten and shadowed spur of the great Rift Canyon. Known now as the Wormcrawl Fissure, this region is reputed to have once been the seat of Kyuss' power. Certainly, the area was infested with his spawn. Strangely enough, explorers in the Amedio Jungle to the south began to report encounters with identical creatures in the western reach of the jungles.

As time wore on, the spawn began to appear in other regions as well, usually in large urban areas. These spawn were spread deliberately by cultists who proclaimed that Kyuss himself had not vanished from the world. Indeed, they believed that he had become a god, and it was their duty to spread his spawn throughout the world to herald his imminent return.

NECROLOGY OF THE WORM

Like most undead, the spawn of Kyuss have a host of potent supernatural abilities. They radiate fear, they cause disease with a touch, and they heal damage to their undead flesh with shocking speed. Yet their most notorious and fearful aspect isn't properly a feature of their undead bodies at all, but is in fact the source of their scourge.

The green worms that infest each spawn of Kyuss are not themselves undead. Rather, they are a strange symbiotic form of vermin that subsists upon the decaying flesh of the spawn. The worms are voracious, but as fast as they consume the flesh of their host it regrows and replenishes. Theoretically, if a spawn of Kyuss could be separated from its infesting host, its fast healing would increase dramatically. Fortunately, the spawn themselves are inexorably tied to their wormy symbiots and without one the other quickly dies. The spawn's flesh provides sustenance for the worms, while the worms provide—in some unknown way—the animating energies the spawn requires to exist.

Scholars and necromancers have long been fascinated with these worms. None have managed to keep a spawn animate after harvesting its

worms but the reverse is a simple task. A Kyuss worm plucked from the body of its host can survive for several minutes before it melts into a reeking green stain. At one end, the worm is a gaping toothy hole of razor-sharp teeth set in concentric rings around the inside of the throat. A Kyuss worm on the ground is nearly helpless; it cannot slither, instead moving impotently by violently flopping its body. A Kyuss worm goes dormant indefinitely if stored in a *potion of gentle repose*, yet rumors hold that the cult of Kyuss has perfected methods of hiding worms in other liquids as well.

When a Kyuss worm contacts living flesh, it enters a state of violent excitement. The worm's mouth unfolds around itself, turning inside-out and prolapsing so that the teeth along its throat become concentric rings of outward-pointing teeth that take up half its length. These rings of teeth then twist back and forth with such ferocity that the worm can drill through flesh and even bone with nauseating swiftness, slithering through tissue like a metal screw through soft wood. Although itself mindless, the worm's lower reaches are sensitive to nervous tissue and can feel the transmission of pain created from its fleshly burrowing as it is transmitted through the nervous system to the victim's brain. The worm follows these transmissions like a roadmap, unerringly arriving in the creature's brain only a few moments later.

Once the worm reaches the brain, its mouth reverts to its normal state and it begins to consume, slithering its way at random through the victim's mind as it consumes his memories, personality, and horror-filled final thoughts. The victim soon dies and the worm immediately begins to multiply inside the body's now empty skull via an unnaturally swift asexual process. As the number of worms exceeds the skull's capacity, they burst from the victim's mouth, eyes, nose, and ears. It is at this moment that the supernatural vermin transform the body into a new spawn of Kyuss. Additional worms immediately begin feasting on the victim's flesh and organs, while the original clot of writhing symbionts remain lodged in the undead creature's skull. While individually unintelligent, the worms retain corrupted fragments of the original creature's intelligence and memories. This nest of worms serves the creature as an unholy replacement for the devoured brain. Although this hivemind usually possesses only a fraction of the original creature's intellect, it is more than enough to give the spawn of Kyuss a sinister cunning and drive it to spread its taint among new victims.

CREATING A SPAWN OF KYUSS

Any evil cleric can create a spawn of Kyuss by casting *create undead* as long as he is at least 15th level. The material component for creating a spawn of Kyuss, however, is slightly different than normal. This version of the spell must be cast over the grave

KYUSS

Demigod (Neutral Evil)

Once an obscure deity associated with creating and mastering the undead, Kyuss and his cult are rising in prominence with the coming of the apocalyptic Age of Worms. Classically, his appearance has been likened to a gaunt man with hands of bone and eye sockets filled with writhing worms, but many religious scholars believe that Kyuss has shed all remnants of his once mortal body, and is now composed entirely of a humanoid-shaped mass of writhing green worms.

Symbol: A human skull with green worms writhing from the eye sockets and jaw.

Portfolio: Creation and control of the undead, decay, unholy transformation of the flesh, worms.

Domains: Corruption*, Death, Destruction, Evil.

Favored Weapon: Club.

Clerical Training: New cultists must drink a *potion of inflict light wounds* that contains a preserved Kyuss worm in a deadly ritual known as First Ingestion.

Quests: Kyuss encourages his cultists to not only lure powerful individuals to his fold but to trick members of other cults and religions into furthering his unknowable goals.

Prayers: Servants of Kyuss offer their prayers on a personal level once a month in a rite involving the ingestion of living worms.

Temples: Huge subterranean cathedrals and tabernacles dedicated to Kyuss exist in remote locations far from civilized lands.

Rites: Kyuss' cult anticipates the return of their god, a time they call the Age of Worms. In preparation, cultists undertake a variety of vile missions ranging from the creation of spawn of Kyuss to world-spanning manipulations.

Herald and Allies: Kyuss' herald is a undead terror known as Dragotha, once a red dragon and consort to Tiamat. Kyuss most commonly sends demons that bear the favored spawn of Kyuss template in response to *planar ally* spells.

* Consult the *Book of Vile Darkness* (mature audiences only).

of a killer who was buried without a coffin in unhallowed ground (a DC 25 Knowledge [local] check can usually determine if such a body lies near a specific settlement). If the caster has a preserved or live Kyuss worm he may substitute that for the 250 gp black onyx gem that is otherwise required to animate the body. As the spell is cast, the grave blooms with worms and maggots as the newly created spawn of Kyuss rises from within. Favored spawn of Kyuss cannot be created with this spell or with *create greater undead*; the secrets of their creation reside only with Kyuss and his most trusted minions.

FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

While the spawn of Kyuss are bearers and victims of their master's corruption, those who garner the demigod's favor are blessed by worms. Former fanatics, crazed visionaries, and purposefully sacrificed beasts, these favored spawn of Kyuss wreak his terrible will with an array of corruptive abilities. Found either alone or enslaved to the service of mad prophets, favored spawn take a vast array of forms and imply the demigod of worm's direct interest. In recent years appearances of the favored spawn have risen, evidencing the impending Age of Worms.

SAMPLE FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

MASTIFF OF KYUSS **CR 3**

Favored spawn of Kyuss fiendish riding dog
CE Medium undead
Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Listen +6, Spot +6
Aura fear (DC 13, 40-ft. radius)
Language Abyssal

AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 17
hp 13 (2 HD); fast healing 5; **DR** 5/silver
Immune undead traits
Resist cold 5, fire 5; **SR** 7
Fort +3, **Ref** +5, **Will** +2

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee bite +5 (1d6+6 plus worm plus Kyuss' gift) or worm +5 touch (special)
Ranged worm +3 touch (special)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +3
Atk Options smite good 1/day (+2 damage against good foes)
Special Atk create spawn

Abilities Str 19, Dex 15, Con —, Int 5, Wis 14, Cha 8
SQ infested skin, turn resistance +3
Feats Alertness, Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Track[B]
Skills Jump +10, Listen +6, Spot +6, Swim +5, Survival +2 (+6 when tracking by scent)
Possessions masterwork spiked studded leather barding

An unnaturally mangy mastiff skulks forward, much of its fur and flesh having fallen away leaving gaping, diseased holes. A sickly green light streams from its empty eye sockets and strands of writhing green worms replace drool in equally copious ribbons.

Plague-spreading hunters and harbingers of the demigod of worms, mastiffs of Kyuss stalk the enemies of their master's favored servants. Tireless and riddled with deadly Kyuss worms, a single mastiff might range over hundreds of miles, inevitably striking a single target with

precision or seeding its god's ruinous corruption throughout an entire offending town.

COMBAT

Mastiffs of Kyuss are barely-thinking killers, slaves to the wills of their masters. Their method of combat varies greatly depending on their commands, using their create spawn ability, fighting alongside pack mates, or avoiding confrontations depending on their orders' dictates. Mastiffs without instructions, however, know only the compulsion to spread their god's taint and seek to use their create spawn ability as often as possible.

Create Spawn (Su): Once per round as a free action, a spawn of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. See the following template for a complete description of these effects.

Fear Aura (Su): A mastiff of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. All creatures within a 40-foot radius must make a DC 13 Will save or be affected as if by the spell *fear*. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of the mastiff of Kyuss for 24 hours.

Smite Good (Su): Once per day a mastiff of Kyuss can make a normal melee attack to deal 2 extra points of damage against a good foe.

Infested Skin (Su): A mastiff of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square of the mastiff (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check) must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

CREATING A FAVORED SPAWN OF KYUSS

"Favored Spawn of Kyuss" (known simply as the "favored" to cultists of Kyuss) is an inherited template that can be added to any living, corporeal creature. A favored spawn uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to undead. Do not recalculate Hit Dice, base attack bonus, or saves. Size is unchanged.

Special Attacks: A favored spawn retains all the special attacks of the base creature and also gains the following special attacks.

Create Spawn (Su): Once per round as a free action, a favored spawn of Kyuss can transfer a worm from its own body to that of an opponent. It can do this whenever it hits with a natural attack or an unarmed attack, but it can also make the transfer by means of a successful melee touch attack or a ranged touch attack, hurling a worm at a foe from a distance of up to 10 feet.

Each worm is a Fine vermin with AC 10 and 1 hit point. It can be killed with normal damage or by the touch of silver. On the spawn's next action, the worm burrows into its host's flesh. A creature with a natural armor bonus of +5 or better is immune to this burrowing effect. The worm makes its way toward the host's brain, dealing 1 point of damage per round for 1d4+1 rounds. At the end of that period, it reaches the brain. While the worm is inside a victim, a *remove curse* or *remove disease* effect destroys it, and a *dispel evil* or *neutralize poison* effect delays its progress for 10d6 minutes. A successful DC 20 Heal check extracts the worm and kills it.

Once the worm reaches the brain, it deals 1d2 points of Intelligence damage per round until it either is killed (by *remove curse* or *remove disease*) or slays its host (death occurs at 0 Intelligence). A Small, Medium, or Large

creature slain by a worm rises as a new spawn of Kyuss (not a favored spawn) 1d6+4 rounds later; a Tiny or smaller creature quickly putrefies, and a Huge or larger creature becomes a normal zombie of the appropriate size. Newly created spawn are not under the control of their creator, but they usually follow whatever favored spawn of Kyuss created them.

If a creature is infested with multiple worms, a single *remove curse* or *remove disease* destroys all the worms infesting the creature at once.

A favored spawn attacking a helpless opponent may use its foul embrace ability instead of this ability.

Fear Aura (Su): A spawn of Kyuss continuously radiates a fear effect. This ability functions like a *fear* spell (caster level 7th, Will save DC 14 + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier), except that it affects all creatures within a 40-foot radius. Any creature that makes a successful saving throw against the effect cannot be affected again by the fear aura of that favored spawn of Kyuss for 24 hours.

Foul Embrace (Su): By pressing its face against a helpless victim, the favored spawn of Kyuss can infest the victim with a rain of 2d6 worms. This ability is treated the same as the create spawn ability, but a victim slain by the resulting infestation rises as a favored spawn of Kyuss rather than a normal zombie.

Kyuss' Gift (Su): Any creature hit by a favored spawn of Kyuss' natural attack or unarmed attack must succeed at a DC 12 Fortitude save or contract this supernatural disease. The incubation period is 1 day, and the disease deals 1d6 points of Constitution damage and 1d4 points of Wisdom damage. These effects manifest as rotting flesh and dementia. An affected creature gets only half the benefits of natural and magical healing, though a *remove disease* effect removes the affliction.

In addition to the previously described abilities, a favored spawn with 10 HD or more gains one of the following additional special attacks as a gift from Kyuss himself. Saving throws against these effects are against a DC of 10 + half the favored Spawn's Hit Dice + the favored spawn's Charisma modifier.

Infested Skin (Su): The favored spawn of Kyuss is so infested with worms that any creature that strikes it with an unarmed strike, natural weapon, or light weapon must make a Reflex save or a Kyuss worm is transferred to the attacker's body. Any creature that shares the same square as the favored spawn (such as might occur during a grapple, bull rush, or Tumble check) must make a Reflex save to avoid the same fate.

Noxious Breath (Su): Once every 1d4 rounds, as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can exhale nauseating vapor from its mouth in a 15-foot cone. All creatures in this area must make a Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds.

Wormburst (Su): Once per day as a standard action, the favored spawn of Kyuss can expel a 10-foot-radius burst of worms from its body. All creatures in this area of effect must make a Reflex save or become infested by 1d6 Kyuss worms.

Special Qualities: A favored spawn retains all the special qualities of the base creature and gains the following.

Damage Reduction (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss gains damage reduction 5/silver. If the favored spawn has 10 or more Hit Dice, this increases to damage reduction 10/silver.

Fast Healing (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss has fast healing 5.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A favored spawn of Kyuss has turn resistance +3.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +2. Favored spawn are undead, and as such do not have a Constitution score.

Feats: A favored spawn of Kyuss gains Improved Unarmed Strike as a bonus feat.

Challenge Rating: +2 (for creatures with 9 HD or less) or +3 (for creatures with 10 HD or more).

Alignment: Always chaotic evil.

AGES OF WORMS

Kyuss and his spawn first appeared in official D&D terms in 1981's *Fiend Folio*. Designed by Michael MacDonald, the nigh-indestructible sons of Kyuss were created by the then priest Kyuss for his own dark purposes. Since then, Kyuss' influence and his namesake minions have spread, appearing in numerous campaign settings, adventures, bestiaries, and—most unexpectedly—as the name of the rock band Kyuss.

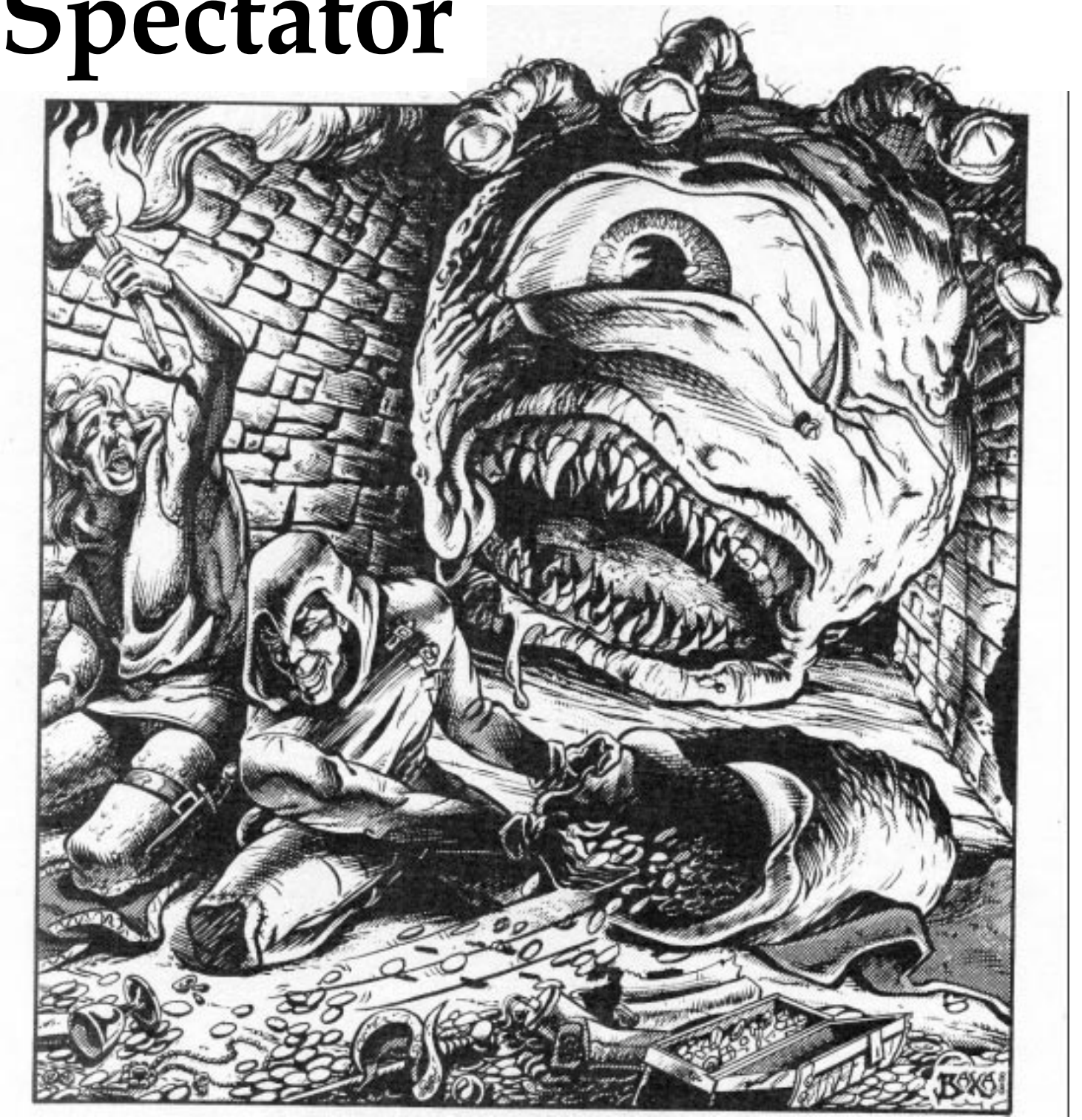
The minions of Kyuss have taken numerous forms since the *Fiend Folio*'s original sons of Kyuss, appearing most recently in the *Monster Manual II* as the spawn of Kyuss, in DRAGON #307 as the scion of Kyuss template, and in this article as the nauseating favored spawn of Kyuss template.

In all of their long history, though, the most epic of Kyuss' plots is unfolding now in DUNGEON's Age of Worms Adventure Path. As foul tidings coincide unlikely heroes stumble upon far-reaching plots of the foul demigod.

Further information about Kyuss, his various spawn and servitors, and their dark plots can be found every month in the pages of DUNGEON, DRAGON's ongoing "Wormfood" series, and the massive free *Age of Worms Overload PDF*, available at **paizo.com**.

by Dougal Demokopoliss

The Ecology of the Spectator



A promise made is a promise kept — for 101 years

From Curiosities of Other Worlds, *volume six, by Mage-Lord I. J. Jijaks of the Free City of Greyhawk:*

We now come to spectators, which dwell on the plane of Nirvana in either the Dominion of Lendor[1] or in the land of the modrons. The reader has no doubt read the basic description of these striking creatures in any one of the manuals and tomes that catalog the beasts of this world and others. Having performed the usual research required before summoning and interacting with these beholder-like beings, I am able to share my knowledge in hopes that it will prove to be of use to the reader as well.

Spectators are adapted to equal amounts of light and dark, heat and cold, and liquid and solid terrain. (Nirvana is perfectly balanced in all of these qualities.) Spectators have generous lifespans, and most of these creatures live over 1,000 years. Many of these spectators at any given time are guarding objects throughout the Prime Material plane, as they are often commanded to do so by high-level magic-users.

Spectators are summoned by the casting of a *monster summoning V* spell, accompanied by the sacrifice of at least three beholder's eyes. During the sacrificial rite, the beholder's eyes must first be annihilated — that is, the eyes must be ground into a fine powder, then burned into a black dust. This black dust is then soaked in oil and placed in a special magic circle. Next, the dust is set aflame. Finally, while the eye dust is still burning, a small bag is placed in the center of the magic circle and *monster summoning V* is cast by the magic-user. (The burning eye dust is used as a material component instead of a candle.) The bag opens a small one-way *gate* from Nirvana to the plane on which the spell is cast.

Three segments later, there is a chance that a spectator appears in the center of the magic circle; for each beholder's eye so sacrificed, there is a 10% chance that a spectator is summoned (thus, a base chance of 30% for three eyes). Three segments after the spell has been cast, the *gate* closes again. If summoned into a properly created magic circle, the spectator awaits instructions from its summoner (which invariably entail the guarding of some item or location). Inside this magic circle, the spectator is powerless to *teleport* to Nirvana, leave the circle physically, or use any other powers besides *levitation.* If the circle has not been created properly or if the circle is somehow broken before the spectator promises to complete its job, it *teleports* back to Nirvana. If the summoner gives the spectator a job besides guardianship, the spectator merely states it is unwilling to do so and *teleports* back to Nirvana as soon as the magic circle is broken. Even if the spectator is given a task concerning guardianship, it will instead *teleport* to Nirvana unless it actually promises to fulfill its task.

Spectators dislike guarding for beings of lesser races (i.e., the races of their human or demi-human summoners), so they always try to avoid such guardianship. However, a spectator will not return to Nirvana after it has made a promise to anyone, because of its lawful-neutral alignment; breaking a promise is considered chaotic behavior. A spectator prides itself on its guardianship and will refuse if a summoner tries to force it to do a job other than guarding. From the spectator's viewpoint, it is not lawful for the summoner to force the spectator to perform a job other than guarding, as spectators should be summoned only to guard.

Once the spectator takes its mission of guardianship, the summoning magic-user deliberately breaks the magic circle and frees the spectator, allowing it to move over to the treasure to be guarded. The creature is free after 101 years to return to Nirvana. A *permanency* spell has no effect on the circle or the duration of the spectator's guardianship.

As a guardian, a spectator's loyalty to its summoner's commands is absolute; it will guard the place or object for *precisely* 101 years. A spectator always knows when the 101 years of service have expired; this is tracked by the spectator's internal clock, actually a lobe on the spectator's brain that perfectly measures time.

When a spectator is guarding the place or objects to which it has been assigned, it will allow *no one* to pass that place or examine any objects it is guarding. At the time the summoner assigns the task, he can make exceptions to these rules, such as allowing certain individuals to circumvent these conditions. This rule applies even to the summoner himself. If the summoner breaks these rules himself, he will be attacked by the spectator.

When a spectator attacks, it launches spells from three of the four small eyes perched on stalks over its globular body. It also tries to keep out of melee range for as long as possible by using its *levitation* powers. A spectator will *teleport* to Nirvana if all of its eyes have been blinded, but if encountered in Nirvana itself and if all of its eyes have been blinded, the spectator attacks with its toothy maw.[2]

To a spectator, killing a creature for reasons other than self-defense or duty is viewed as a chaotic act. Under a spectator's sense of justice and law, all creatures have the right to live, so long as they do not interfere with the spectator's duties. If a spectator accidentally kills a creature for reasons other than self-defense, it usually wills itself to die, directing its brain's powerful energies against itself.

Spectators have two social classes, upper and lower. Lower-class spectators live in otherwise uninhabited sections of Nirvana in the Dominion of Lendor or in the "modron disk," each residing alone in a small, vertical cave which is dug out with the spectator's mouth. Upper-class spectators are those who directly serve Lendor or serve as guards for the modrons. These spectators are more lawful and philosophical than their lower-class counterparts because they have usually been educated by their masters to uphold their ideals. In order to become a guard for the modrons, a spectator must *paralyze* a modron rogue unit (using one of its attack eyes) and turn it over to the local pentadrone regimental headquarters (the modrons' law enforcers). Lendor chooses only the most powerful and intelligent spectators to serve him.[3]

Unlike modrons, spectators are not completely lawful neutral, although upper-class spectators come very close to this ideal. Lower-class spectators have slightly lawful-good tendencies, while upper-class spectators are more strictly lawful neutral. Because of its personal honor, a spectator will not attack a *paralyzed* or helpless enemy unless the spectator was attacked by trickery or by very cruel means.

Spectators have little personal ambition; perhaps their only true goal in life is to serve the forces of law as well as possible. Since modrons are completely lawful neutral, most spectators want to serve the modrons. The greatest pleasures of a spectator (and perhaps its only pleasures) are to thwart chaos, especially modron rogue units, and to guard and defend.

What little is known of the internal anatomy of the spectator is presented here as well. This information on its most unique body organs was collected from the works of several wizards and priests who voyaged to Nirvana and took part in the dissection (with permission) of a spectator slain by a rogue modron unit.

Levator magnus: The levator magnus is a small, highly magical sphere in the center of the spectator's brain (which itself lies at the center of the spectator's round body). This organ gives the spectator its ability to *levitate* in any direction at 100′ per minute. No magic negates this effect, although physical forces resulting from magic use (such as those created by a *gust of wind* spell) hamper this activity. The juices drained from this organ are sometimes used as a component in the ink of a scroll of *flying* or *levitation.*

Brain: The spectator's brain has the power to generate a magical force using psionic energy, though the spectator has no true psionic powers as such. This magical force is divided into two branches of power: magical and antimagical. The magical power travels through special nerves to the monster's top four eyes, which convert the power into spell-like effects. The antimagical power is carried by nerves directly to the creature's large eye, causing any spell that strikes the eye to reflect back to the caster. The juices drained from the spectator's brain can be used as a component in the ink of an *antimagic shell* scroll. (It is to my understanding that the higher sorts of modrons will actually sell or barter the bodies of slain spectators to those who would make use of the corpses for their research, and even some spectators will likewise bargain

away the bodies of their kind.)

Thought-energy enhancer: This organ multiplies the psionic force generated in the brain and relays it to the spectator's eyes, providing their powers.

Stomach: Food and water created by a spectator's first eye is usually directed inward through a large passage leading directly to the stomach, where it is digested. If the spectator wishes, food can be created by that eye to feed someone else.

Skin: The skin of a spectator is thick, lumpy, rubbery, and grayish, with many blood vessels protruding from its surface. If a spectator is killed but not severely damaged, the skin can be removed and fashioned into a suit of armor by an experienced armorer. The resultant suit is in all respects the equal of leather armor and is sufficient in size to be of use to a dwarf, gnome, or the like.

Little else about these beings is known to me. I am at a loss to know how they reproduce, what they have in the way of religion (though I suspect they worship Primus or Lendor in their own fashions), or even if they have a loose culture. I never got around to discussing these matters with the few spectators I had occasion to meet. ,I have even heard that a breed of spectators lives in the sea, though this report is surely based upon a mistaken identification of an eye of the deep. Perhaps someone more learned than I can fill in the details another day. . . .

Game information

When a spectator reaches 1,000 years of age, its four eyes grow very large, and its body becomes small and shriveled. After three months in this state, the spectator has only 3 + 3 HD; after six months, it has only 2 + 2 HD, and its four eyes are twice as large as they were originally. By this time, the spectator must retire permanently to a cave it has dug, since it can no longer *levitate.* Upper-class spectators serving the modrons are thrown out of the upper class at this age, but Lendor's spectators are allowed to stay in his palace until their deaths. In three more months, the spectator's body is extremely small and shriveled with 1+ 1 HD, and each of its small eyes has developed four tiny eyestalks. Finally, when a spectator reaches 1,001 years of age, nothing is left of its body. At this time, its four eyes fall off their stalks to become 1 + 1 HD spectators.

These "newborn" spectators have the power of the eye from which they came plus *levitation.* They stay in the cave in which they were born for one year, gaining an extra eye power and 1 + 1 HD every three months. The spectator with the *create food and water* ability shares the food it creates with the others. In the last three months of the spectators' stay in the birth cave, each gains the antimagical power of the large eye. When the spectators are fully developed after one year, they leave the cave to build lairs of their own. Spectators under one year of age or over 999 years of age are immune to the *monster summoning V* spell.

SEARECHTER (Marine spectator)

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *Body 6, eyes -1, eyestalks 8*
MOVE: *–/20"//40" (B in water, E in air)*
HIT DICE: *6 + 6*
% IN LAIR: *35%*
TREASURE TYPE: *See below*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1 bite*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-2*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *50%*
INTELLIGENCE: *High to exceptional*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful neutral*
SIZE: *L (5½' diameter)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Special*
Attack/Defense modes: *Nil/nil*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *VII/865 + 9 hp*

Among a select few wizards (usually those from coastal cities or who are masters of summoning), there are rumors of a race of marine spectators dedicated to slaying eyes of the deep. In the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting, these are the elven and human wizards living on the Spindrift Isles. The Suel god Lendor, believed to be an Arch-Mage by many, taught the inhabitants of the Spindrifts how to summon spectators. Spectators living in Lendor's stronghold heard these rumors of their marine cousins and passed them on to their summoners.

Although there is such a creature as the marine spectator, it is cautious and actually avoids eyes of the deep. These marine spectators are also called sea spectators, spectators of the sea, or (most commonly) searechters. They dwell in the depths of the ocean and are very rarely encountered, and then are nearly always mistaken for eyes of the deep.

If a wizard reseaches the means of summoning a searechter, he finds that one can be summoned by the casting of *monster summoning VII* spell, with three small eyes from an eye of the deep employed in place of three beholder's eyes. The wizard must cause the searechter to appear underwater or it will not be brought forth. Few sorcerers has ever tried this summoning because of the difficulties in obtaining the proper material components.

Searechters have six small eyes on the end of six eyestalks and one large central eye which functions as does a spectator's Each of its small eyes has a spell-like function, explained as follows. Each power is usable three times per day and functions as if cast by an 8th-level spell-caster.

Eye no.	Spell
1	*Airy water*
2	*Airbolt* (new spell)
3	*Charm monster*
4	*Fear* (as wand)
5	*Water breathing*
6	*Paralyzation* (as wand)

In front of each of the searechter's eyes is a thin, clear shell that has a magical equivalence to + 3 metal. If the searechter is killed, this "eye crystal" can be removed and fashioned into small weapons such as dart tips and dagger blades of + 3 value. Likewise, if a strap is somehow attached to the large eye crystal, it can be used as a + 3 (and transparent) small shield. Nonetheless, it is difficult to cut and melt this material in order to fashion it into weapons or defensive items. Finding a way to do so is difficult and should be left to the discretion of the DM.

Any attack made upon a searechter has a 50% chance of hitting its body, a 25% chance of hitting its large eye, and a 25% chance of hitting one of the six small eyes on top (with, in the latter case, an 80% chance that the attack hits an eyestalk and a 20% chance that it hits one of the small eyes directly; which eye is hit is determined at random). A successful hit upon one of the small eyes blinds that eye and

Airbolt (Alteration)
Level: 3 Components: *V*
Range: *1"/level* CT: 3 *segments*
Duration: *Instant.* ST: *None*
AE: *One target*
Explanation/Description: By means of this spell, a magic-user is able to create a concentrated blast of air roughly 3" in diameter. Using only verbal components, this spell utilizes the air around it and focuses it into a powerful beam that may then be directed by the spell-caster. Although this spell works underwater (where oxygen exists in a hydrogenated form), it will not work in a vacuum. *Airbolt* may be used as an offensive weapon, a powerful version of *gust of wind,* or a modified *push* spell. Because of the spells concentrated beam, only one creature or item may be targeted per spell. Damage for this spell is 1d6 per level (or 2d6 per level underwater, due to the greater ability to concentrate the spell in this medium). A saving throw vs. spells allows the one attacked to take half damage. The spell-caster blows a puff of air as this spell is cast.

With regard to the searechter, *airbolt* has a range of 6" in water and 2" in air, and it does 6-36 hp damage in water and 3-18 hp damage in air. The *airbolt* is not as potent in the air because it diffuses, whereas the spell is enhanced by the dense medium of water. A saving throw vs. spells allows the target creature to dodge a portion of the spells blast. The bolt is guided by sight, so a blinded searechter cannot cast this spell.

ruins its power until it regenerates. Eyestalks take 5 hp damage before being severed, but the eyestalk and the eye on the end regrow within one day. The large eye takes 5 hp damage until it is destroyed and takes two days to regenerate.

A searechter never voluntarily goes out of the water and only rarely enters waters less than 15,000′ in depth. For every 1,000′ closer to the surface than 15,000′, the searechter takes 1 hp damage per turn; above the surface of the water, it takes 2 hp damage per round. This is a result of the expansion of the searechter's internal gases. These damage figures are given in case the searechter is somehow brought into shallow waters or to the surface. In the water, searechters are very agile; however, in the air they have less movement control because of the damage they take from being out of water and because of their increased speed.

Searechters usually live in small sea caves, but there is a 25% chance they will live in different lairs. Roll the percentile dice on the following table to determine the lair of each:

1d100	Lair
01-75	Small sea cave
76-85	Sunken ship
86-90	Ruins or abandoned lair
91-96	Extensive cavern
97-99	Labyrinth of vortexes to or from the plane of Elemental Water
00	Vortex leading to the water-filled caverns under Lendor's stronghold on Nirvana

Ruins or abandoned lairs could include a ruined storm giant palace, morkoth lair, triton stronghold, sea dragon lair, aboleth city, kraken lair, and many others. A vortex is a gateway leading to or from another plane. If the vortex leads to the plane of Elemental Water, there is a 50% chance that water flows into it (creating a whirlpool) and a 50% chance that water rushes out of it, filling the worlds oceans. If the vortex leads to Lendor's stronghold, it will be full of water and without current; this is the gateway by which Lendor. brought searechters to this world.

There is a 75% chance that a searechter has some creatures enslaved by its *charm monster* ability. The slaves are usually humanoid in appearance, such as sahuagin. Slaves hunt for and protect the searechter. There are usually 2-12 hit dice of slaves, but usually no one creature with over 4 HD (2 HD is the average slave's level). Searechters do not usually have treasure except that of their slaves or the treasure in the sunken ship or ruins they may inhabit.

The coloration of a searechter is either dark blue or black. Its body is similar in appearance to an eye of the deep's, with three eyestalks on each side of the body and two fins on its back like the wings of a messenger monodrone.

Footnotes

[1] See DRAGON® issue #86 for more information on the Suel deity Lendor.

[2] The spectator attacks with only a -2 on its "to hit" rolls because of its ability to psionically sense intelligent opponents, though the spectator does not have any other psionic abilities. In this manner, the spectator gains an accurate idea of where its enemies are located. If the spectator is attacking a creature with no brain, such as a golem or a skeleton, it suffers the usual -4 penalty on "to hit" rolls.

[3] When a magic-user summons a spectator, the DM should roll percentile dice to determine the class of spectator. A roll of 01-75 means a lower-class spectator appears; a roll of 76-99 means an upper-class spectator appears; and a result of 00 means the magic-user has summoned one of Lendor's favorite spectators (which has 36 hp and high intelligence). In this latter case, Lendor will eventually come to the Prime Material plane, release the spectator from its bondage, and return to Nirvana with his elite spectator, without bothering the summoner further. Ω

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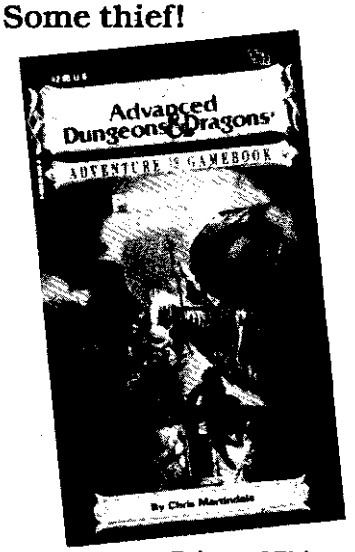

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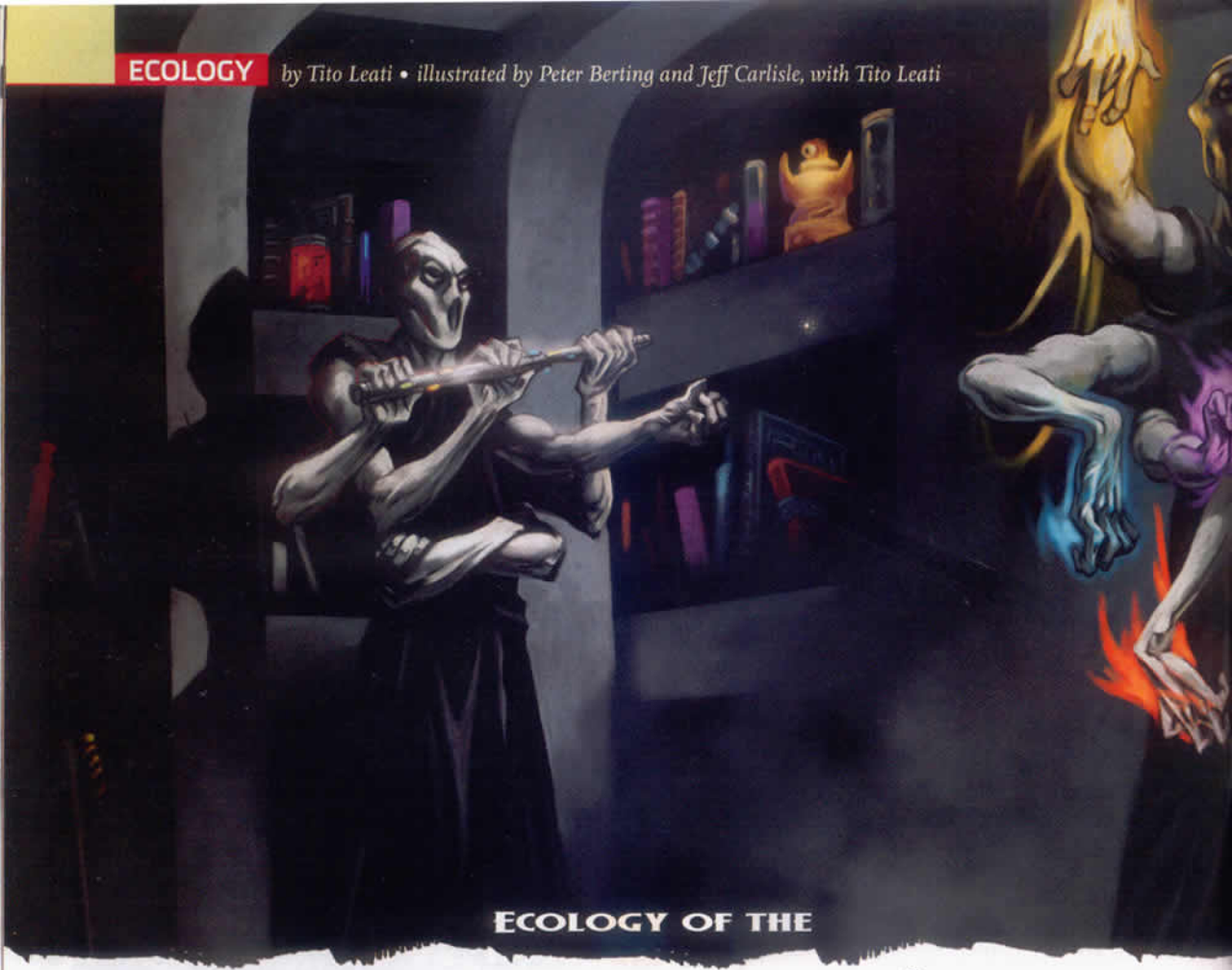


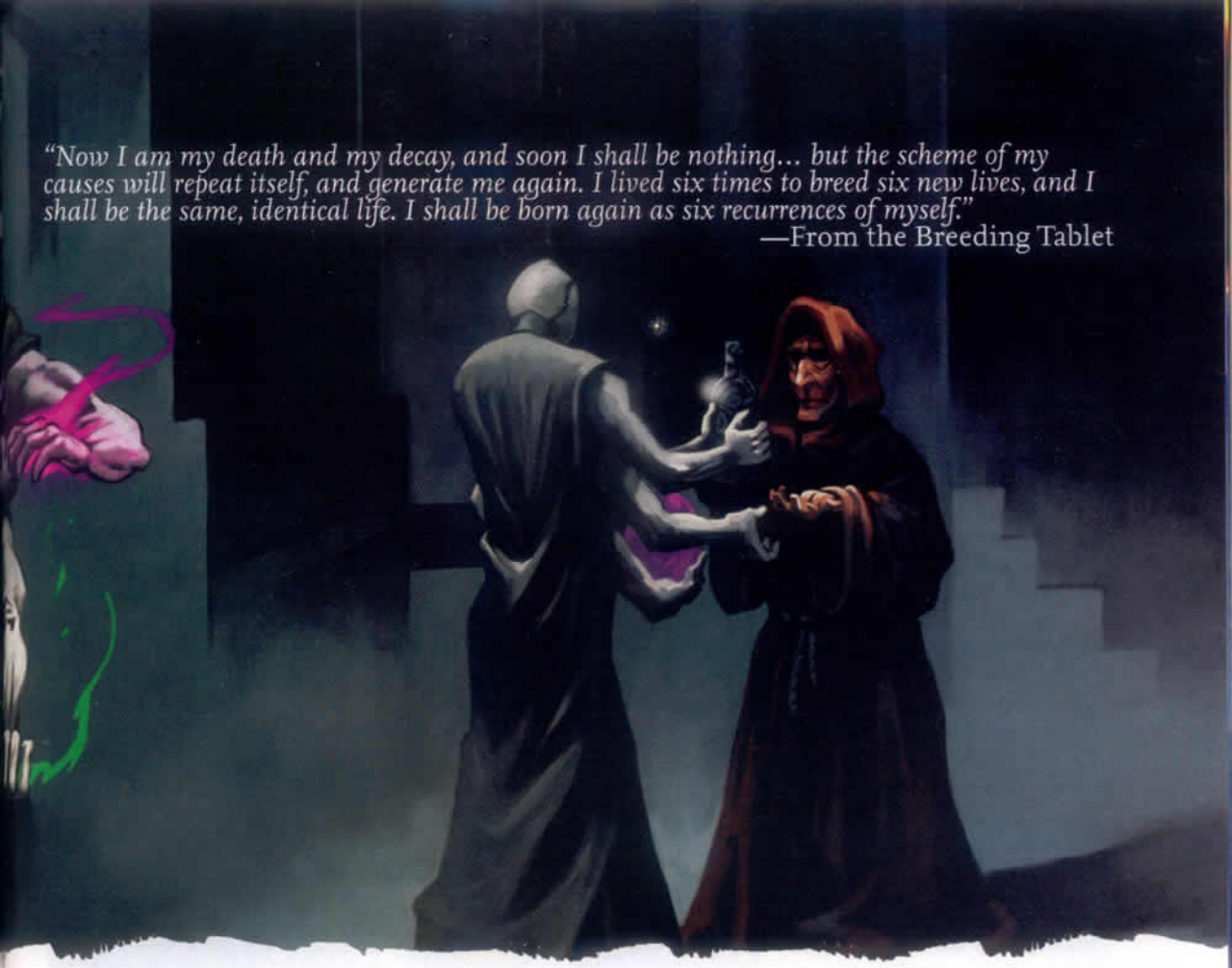
ECOLOGY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Magic is the birthright of many creatures; powers in excess of most mortals' abilities that seem to grant them dominion over lesser races. Dragons, beholders, titans: these beings all manipulate the world through magical might, but none hold mastery over and refine their powers to the degree of the enigmatic and elusive spell weavers. Natural sorcerers, as potent as they are alien, spell weavers are the orphans of an ancient empire, ruined seemingly by happenstance. Collectors, traders, and instigators, spell weavers ever seek a way to reshape the present, which has perhaps gone terribly wrong.

HISTORY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Only seen on rare occasions, and always because of their involvement in some scheme to obtain magic items by trade, persuasion, or force, spell weavers are a mysterious race of powerful sorcerers. These elusive beings evidence the last descendants of an ancient, magically advanced empire that, millennia ago, spanned numerous worlds and planes.

In this forgotten time, the spell weaver empire consisted of a vast league of colonies, called nodes, which spanned the multiverse. Huge pyramids of stone and steel powered



by gigantic magical furnaces, these nodes were widely separated, often with only one existing on any single world or plane of existence. All of them, however, connected to one another through a complex matrix of magical portals. Thus, each node served as a huge planar travel installation, capable even of instantly moving with all of its inhabitants to other locations or planes.

The so-called spell weaver empire was largely a noninvasive one—an advanced community of intellectual watchers who only occasionally subjugated more primitive creatures to carry out menial chores and hard labor. What few races they encountered that posed threats the spell weavers gifted with powerful magic items and artifacts, allowing these cultures to destroy themselves from within (an act some spell weavers still practice in modern times). Yet, above all, the spell weavers were interested in semantics, a subject they had researched for thousands of years, traveling through the multiverse to meet and observe nearly every culture imaginable. Through the tireless study and practice of innumerable symbol and language codes, the spell weavers learned to avail themselves of their physical attributes and natural talents like no other race, developing an uncanny telepathy and the ability to cast multiple spells at once.

Few know if the spell weaver plan to acquire total knowledge of all existing communication was their ultimate goal or if they had some other purpose. What is known is that, at the height of their prosperity, the spell weavers conducted a grandiose and dangerous experiment, possibly an attempt to alter reality across the entire multiverse. This experiment, however, met with tragic failure and caused a catastrophe of colossal proportions. For unexplained reasons, the furnaces within every spell weaver node exploded one after the other in a terrible chain reaction, obliterating the pyramidal colonies and all their inhabitants within seconds, effectively purging the multiverse of the spell weaver empire in a single moment. Only the few members of the race who were away from the nodes survived, becoming the ancestors of all modern spell weavers.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Averaging 5 feet in height and 100 pounds, spell weavers are six-armed alien-looking creatures. Their genderless bodies are smooth and hairless, varying between numerous shades of gray and occasionally splotched or speckled with light colors such as beige, pink, or yellow. Their necks are long and exceptionally nimble, allow-

ing spell weavers to turn their heads completely around with no effort. Further adding to their alien nature, spell weaver blood is metallic blue in color, similar to quicksilver.

All spell weavers carry chromatic disks, thin, 6-inch-diameter circular objects made of a silvery substance that is stronger than steel. At a spell weaver's will, the disk can change color and show a variety of patterns and designs on its dark surface. These objects are intimate creations of spell weavers, actual living extensions of their beings. In the rare case that a chromatic disk is lost or destroyed, a spell weaver can quickly replace it through meditation, exuding blood and fluids from the palm of its hands in the form of a metallic resin. The resin is manipulated to form the disk shape and solidifies quickly. This process takes only an hour but leaves the spell weaver exhausted.

Spell weavers are extremely long-lived creatures, with a lifespan near six centuries. Age does not seem to significantly affect their physical abilities, and only lighter skin tones distinguish older individuals from younger ones. Aging, however, is directly tied to reproduction for spell weavers in a complex and mysterious pair of rituals.

Upon reaching the end of its life—a time spell weavers seem to instinctually know—an elder spell weaver can rejuvenate its body through a special hibernation trance requiring the draining of a near-priceless amount of magic items. In preparation, the spell weaver sacrifices the energies within its accumulated magic treasures, destroying them to create a cylindrical "coffin." It then finds a secure location, as the rite leaves it effectively helpless for the trance's entire duration. Upon sealing itself within the coffin, the spell weaver enters a state of suspended animation from which it cannot be awakened. This process usually takes only a month, but sometimes lasts far longer, with evidence of spell weavers languishing within their coffins for centuries at a time. At the end of this ritual, the spell weaver is physically restored, its skin darkened and its life renewed for another six centuries. This restorative process only seems to function for spell weavers, yet even so they keep its specifics a mystery from all other races. This trance only functions six times, providing no benefit beyond that. Despite their lengthy lifespans and these renewing trances, however, spell weavers are far from immortal.

To reproduce—an act that is for spell weavers little more than a final act of self-regeneration—an elder specimen who has gone through all six rejuvenation processes may perform a complex, ritual self-sacrifice that results in the "birth" of six new adult spell weavers. The rite requires a special array of breeding vessels found only in a few rare spell weaver sites. To perform the ceremony, the parent creates six new chromatic disks and places them into the vessels where the new individuals form and grow in a few hours. During that time, the parent dies and decays, eventually disappearing into nothingness. The newborn spell weavers rise from the vessels with the full memories and mental abilities of the parent.

Spell weavers do not speak, for their law forbade speech millennia ago as part of the training to develop their telepathic faculties. They seldom emit noises, and only as a consequence. When they suffer pain, for example, they might squeal or grunt in a high-pitched tone, but nothing more. Spell weavers have their own incredibly complex language of clicks and whistles, which they know only from distant memories. In modern times, the spell weaver language is experienced only in its written form, as node hieroglyphs.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SPELL WEAVER

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (nature) check related to spell weavers. Those most likely to know such information are the few people who have researched the ancient spell weaver empire or have knowingly done business with them. Other sources of information might also exist near the site of a node's destruction, wastelands usually marked by a crater or rift of some sort.

As spell weavers are an extremely rare race, Knowledge checks resulting in less than DC 15 reveal no information about them. Also, considering their ancientness and magical aptitude, DMs might wish to change the skill check required to learn about spell weavers from the standard for monstrous humanoids—Knowledge (nature)—to Knowledge (arcana) or Knowledge (history).

Knowledge (nature)

DC	Result
15	Spell weavers are exotic, six-armed sorcerers who constantly search for magic items.
20	Spell weavers are silent and aloof creatures. They sometimes enslave physically powerful monsters to serve them. Spell weavers excel in magical combat and can sling many spells simultaneously.
25	Spell weavers are powerful telepaths, although they seem to shun contact with all but their own kind. Part of spell weaver communication relies on the shifting colors of their strange chromatic disks.
30	Spell weavers can rejuvenate themselves multiple times, each potentially living multiple lives. New spell weavers are spawned through a complex ritual in which an elder spell weaver dies.
35	The telepathic powers of spell weavers includes the ability to read the "memories" of certain magical objects. Their race-wide search for such items is likely tied to some greater, mysterious purpose.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE SPELL WEAVER

Although they still comply with the dogmatic prohibition not to speak, modern spell weavers are free from the rigid social structure of their ancient empire. Sometimes a few individuals band together to pursue the common goal of acquiring magic items, but most members of the race are essentially loners.

Spell weavers have two complementary ways to communicate exclusively among themselves—a sign language that makes use of their flexible neck and six hands and a visual language based on the colors of their chromatic disks. Both of these communication methods can convey very complex and articulate meanings, and are totally incomprehensible to other races. They are not redundant, though, for through the combination of sign language, chromatic disks, and telepathy, spell weavers can deliver hours of explanation and dialogue in a few minutes.

Spell weavers have no religion and actively shun the worship of deities, refuting these beings' divinity and mysteriously hinting at some undermining secret of their powers. Despite this disbelief, spell weavers do revere their ancestors and often meditate to better understand the will of past generations. As all spell weavers share the memories of their forebearers, this spirituality is less like actual devotion and more a kind of pious reminiscence.

During these recollections, spell weavers often recall the Time of Nodes, the golden age of their race when their pyramidal cities still existed. They refer to the catastrophe that wiped out their empire as the Disjunction, and the following age, up to the present day, as the Scrabbling. In the hopes of restoring this Time of Nodes, spell weavers seek out particular magic items or, more specifically, ancient gems imbued with "memories" that spell weavers can telepathically read. By inspecting these rare and specific gems, many spell weavers try to collect pieces of what they call the Code of Reversion, a magical formula devised before the final experiment that destroyed the spell weaver empire. The pieces of the formula were psychometrically inscribed on a series of precious stones for security reasons, and distributed in multiple copies to different keepers throughout the empire. Any spell weaver could activate the formula, but it had to read and memorize all the pieces first. The Code of Reversion essentially formed an incredibly powerful multipart spell, designed to revert time in the entire multiverse to the point when the formula was inscribed. Aware of the risks involved in their final experiment, the spell weavers devised the Code of Reversion as a chance to restore their empire if something went wrong. The catastrophe, however, exceeded their worst expectations, and the inscribed gems were scattered and lost. As such, no spell weaver has yet been able to locate and perform the Code of Reversion. Even the spell weavers are not sure if a complete copy of the formula has survived, and most gems suffer gaps in their memory that cannot be filled. Needless to say, the successful activation of the Code of Reversion would inevitably mean the erasure of thousands of years of history and the effective annihilation of all present things.

Not all spell weavers obsess over the past, however. While some accept the

The tablet illustrates the spell weaver breeding
Top Left - a spell weaver goes through his six
(numbered with the canonic senary numerals)
Top Right - the elder spell weaver produces six
disks and places them into as many breeding vessels
the disks shine in the middle of the vessels.
as spell weaver embryos develop overhead:
the frontal position of the elder spell weaver signifies
Bottom Left - the newborn spell weaver
(their life cycle marked "zure") are grown to full adults.
NODE NUMBERS
SPELL WEAVER NUMERALS
SAMPLE NUMBERS
CRADLEDAL SPELL WEAVER
SPELL WEAVER/NORRA
COMMON
37
1243
378
NODE HIEROGLYPHS
SAMPLE CYPHER TRANSCRIPT
This phonetic transcript is part of the results of a
comprehend languages spell cast on a spell weaver tablet.
The results change from tablet to tablet, however, and
interpreting the text is always a matter of intuition and luck.
The language of the tablets seems to imply a system of
encoding patterns stored in the brain,
which are perfectly natural to spell weavers,
but totally alien to other creatures.

NODE HIEROGLYPHS

The node-dwelling spell weavers of ancient times used special hieroglyphs to record the specifics of their lives, their travels, and their research. Since most spell weaver tablets date to this Time of Nodes, they are often blackened and badly damaged. The spell weavers of modern times rarely use node hieroglyphs, but can still understand them perfectly. The hieroglyphs can be read aloud with spells like *comprehend languages*, but the text is encoded in a way that its literal translation inevitably reveals nonsense to non-spell weavers. To successfully make sense of the text, a reader must succeed at a DC 25 Decipher Script check in conjunction with *comprehend languages*.

Spell weavers sometimes illustrated their tablets with simple line block drawings. The tablet presented here is the Breeding Tablet, one of the most famous spell weaver documents ever discovered. It shows the sequence of a spell weaver's six-life cycle and its final self-sacrifice.

ruin of their civilization and attempt to live peacefully, others strive to rebuild the spell weaver empire. To them, the greatest impediment to renewed spell weaver mastery is the world's infestation by innumerable humanoid races, which dominate it through their verminous fecundity alone. Hearkening back to offensive strategies utilized during the Time of Nodes, these spell weavers are all too glad to supply such races with the instruments of their annihilation.

THE DISJUNCTION

No spell weaver or researcher from any other race knows what accident caused the ruin of the spell weaver empire and brought about the end of the Time of Nodes. While spell weavers acknowledge that their leaders were attempting some far-reaching magical feat, they remain universally secretive of its specifics. Two commonly held possibilities follow:

Ascension: Through their study of language, spell weavers discovered the prime form of communication, words of reality capable of manipulating all existence. Revealing that deities were little more than bickering entities with knowledge of this language, the spell weavers attempted to take their place among the powers en masse. Their intentions discovered by the existing deities, these covetous beings warped the spell weavers' attempt to elevate the population of an entire node, creating a magical backlash that rippled through and destroyed the spell weaver empire, along with all knowledge of the prime language.

Unification: Spell weavers came to believe that, at the beginning of creation, all of the planes and countless worlds were in fact one single, balanced reality. This equilibrium, however, was shattered by the mercurial whims of the deities. Traveling to all of these fragmented existences and creating their nodes as anchors, the spell weavers hoped to cast a multiverse-spanning spell capable of drawing the shattered planes back together. The power of infinite infini-

NODE NUMBERS

Numbers—especially the number six—are sacred to spell weavers, and they have a senary numerical system. Spell weavers also have a decimal system, developed to cooperate with the nerra (the enigmatic rulers of the Plane of Mirrors; see page 127 of the *Fiend Folio*) at some point of their history. The purpose of this cooperation was the construction of a mirror-based, short-range teleportation device. This device consisted of several pentagonal gates that connected spell weaver nodes with selected locations in the surrounding areas. Successful transit through the gates was achieved by navigating through a maze of extradimensional rooms, using a numerical code for direction (see the *Shackled City Adventure Path* for more on this and other spell weaver artifacts).

LEGENDARY SPELL WEAVER ELDER

Advanced Spell Weaver of Legend Archmage 3
Medium Outsider (Augmented Monstrous Humanoid, Native)

Hit Dice: 3d4+30d8+198 (340 hp)
Initiative: +13
Speed: 30 ft.
Armor Class: 38 (+9 Dex, +10 natural, +6 armor, +2 deflection, +1 insight), touch 22, flat-footed 29
Base Attack/Grapple: +31/+34
Attack: Slam +34 melee (1d6+3)
Full Attack: 2 slams +34 melee (1d6+3)
Space/Reach: 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks: Frightful presence, spell-like abilities, spells
Special Qualities: Arcane reach 30 ft., chromatic disk, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 5, fire resistance 10, immune to mind-affecting effects, mastery of elements, mastery of shaping, reflective hide, shielded mind, spell weaving, SR32, telepathy
Saves: Fort +20, Ref +30, Will +27
Abilities: Str 17, Dex 28, Con 23, Int 22, Wis 19, Cha 32
Skills: Concentration +26, Diplomacy +23, Knowledge (arcana) +37, Knowledge (planes) +15, Listen +20, Move Silently +20, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +48, Spot +37, Tumble +15, Use Magic Device +44
Feats: Empower Spell, Improved Initiative (B), Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Skill Focus (spellcraft), Spell Focus (conjuration), Spell Focus (evocation), Still Spell
Epic Feats: Automatic Quicken Spell (0-3), Epic Spellcasting, Improved Metamagic, Multispell (x2)
Challenge Rating: 21
Treasure: Ring of protection +2, ring of minor fire resistance, dusty rose ioun stone, cloak of charisma +2, gloves of dexterity +2, amulet of health +2, wand of cure serious wounds
Alignment: Usually neutral

Frightful Presence (Ex): All creatures within 20 ft. must make a DC36 Will save or become shaken for as long as they stay within 20 ft. Creatures with 30 HD or more are immune.

Reflective Hide (Su): This monster of legend has a permanent *spell turning* effect.

Spell-like Abilities: Always active – *see invisibility*; at will – *detect magic, invisibility*; 1/day – *plane shift*. CL35.

Spells (6/999/887/767/3): As 35th-level sorcerer, DC21 + spell level +1 for evocation and conjuration spells (*). It can cast 3 epic spells per day. It can cast 3 quickened spells per round (excluding spell weaving) and all 0th-3rd level spells are automatically quickened. All metamagic spell level adjustments are reduced by 1 (min. +1).
Typical Known Spells: 0th – *acid splash**, *detect poison, read magic, dancing lights**, *ray of frost**, *ghost sound, mage hand, message, open/close*; 1st – *burning hands**, *magic missile**, *obscuring mist**, *ray of enfeeblement, shield*; 2nd – *locate object, hideous laughter, mirror image, touch of idiocy, scorching ray**; 3rd – *greater mage armor** *(already cast), fireball**, *fly, suggestion*; 4th – *locate creature, charm monster, fire shield**, *greater invisibility*; 5th – *cone of cold**, *feeble mind, teleport**, *wall of force**; 6th – *chain lightning**, *disintegrate, greater dispel magic*; 7th – *finger of death, force cage**, *mage's sword**; 8th – *maze**, *polar ray**, *trap the soul**; 9th – *gate**, *meteor swarm**, *time stop*; Epic – *let go of me, lord of nightmares**, *ruin*.

For other spell weaver abilities, see the following page. High arcana abilities are detailed in DMG.

BATTLE WEAVER

Some spell weavers train themselves to make use of an extra pair of hands in combat.

Prerequisites: Spell weaver, Str 15.

Benefit: Spell weavers with this feat gain two additional slam attacks. These additional attacks are primary attacks and have the same attack bonus as the spell weaver's other slam attacks.

Normal: Spell weavers can normally only make two slam attacks.

Special: A spell weaver can take this feat twice, allowing it to make use of all six arms in combat. This feat makes spell weavers eligible for the Multiweapon Fighting feat (see page 304 of the *Monster Manual*).

ADVANCED SPELL WEAVER

Seeking to master greater magic, most spell weavers advance as sorcerers or wizards, making the archmage or nearly any prestige class from *Complete Arcane* natural paths for many. Adhering to a strict atheism, spell weavers never advance as clerics. More martially minded spell weavers benefit greatly from the eldritch knight and spellsword (see *Complete Warrior*) prestige classes.

SCHAVRA **CR 12**

Spell weaver fighter 4

N Medium monstrous humanoid

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Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., telepathy; Listen +11, Spot +11

AC 27, touch 12, flat-footed 25

hp 85 (14 HD)

SR 21

Immune mind-affecting effects

Fort +8, **Ref** +9, **Will** +14

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee *+2 spell storing longsword* +15/+10/+5 (2d6+6/18–20) and 3 *+1 longswords* +14 (2d6+5/18–20)

Base Atk +14; **Grp** +16

Special Attack spell-like abilities, spells

Combat Gear *potion of bull's strength*

Spells Known (CL 16th, ranged touch +16):

6th (5/day)—*chain lightning* (DC 20), *wall of iron*

5th (6/day)—*cone of cold* (DC 19), *prying eyes, telekinesis*

4th (6/day)—*confusion* (DC 17), *dimension door, fire shield, stone skin*

3rd (6/day)—*dispel magic, fly, haste, rage*

2nd (6/day)—*alter self, blur, web* (DC 15), *resist energy, scorching ray* (DC 16)

1st (6/day)—*burning hands* (DC 15), *identify, jump, magic missile, shield*

0 (6/day)—*dancing lights, detect magic, flare, light, mage hand, message, ray of frost, touch of fatigue* (DC 13), *resistance*

Spell-like Abilities (CL 16th):

Always active—*see invisibility*

At will—*detect magic, invisibility*

1/day—*plane shift*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 16

SQ chromatic disk, immunity to mind effects, shielded mind, spell weaving

Feats Battle Weaver, Empower Spell, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, Multiweapon Fighting, Spell Focus (abjuration), Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Penetration, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (long sword)

Skills Climb +12, Intimidate +15, Jump +10, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge (history) +15, Knowledge (religion) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +15, Listen +13, Search +9, Spellcraft +19, Spot +14, Use Magic Device +14

Possessions *+4 mithral shirt, +2 spell storing longsword, 3 +1 longswords, amulet of natural armor +2*, chromatic disk, backpack

Chromatic Disk: Schavra's chromatic disk holds ten additional spell levels of energy. By holding the disk in one hand the spell weaver can cast a spell that it knows and expend spell levels from the disk rather than from its number of spell slots

Shielded Mind (Ex): Shavra's mind cannot be read by any means. Those that try must make a DC 17 Will save or be *confused* for 1d6 days.

Spell Weaving (Ex): Shavra can cast multiple spells at a time as long as the sum of their spell levels are equal to or less than the number of hands it has free.

Telepathy (Su): In addition to the basic effects of telepathy, Shavra can communicate by thought with any other spell weaver within 1,000 miles.

ties proved too great for even the bold spell weavers, though, and their first trial wiped their empire from the reality they hoped to save.

SPELL WEAVER RUINS

Ravaged by the Disjunction, the ruins of spell weaver nodes are thousands of years old—relics of an empire lost to time. Extraordinarily scarce, multiple nodes rarely exist on a single world and never on the same continent.

Every node has a similar structure, with a main pyramid that towers more than 500 feet tall. At the top perches a great crystal lamp once capable of illuminating the surrounding landscape with a pulsing azure light. With all probability, these lamps acted as a magical homing beacon for other spell weaver planar travel facilities.

Inside, the most important room of any node was the breeding chamber, the home of the magic cylinders necessary for spell weavers to reproduce. Only a few of these rooms survived the Disjunction intact, and they are desperately sought out and jealously guarded by modern spell weavers. Secondary to the breeding chamber was the mortuary, a many-floored hall that protected spell weavers undergoing their rejuvenating stasis. Deeper than these rooms slept the heart of the node, a gigantic magical furnace. While those in every node ever discovered have been destroyed, an active spell weaver furnace is capable of producing effects on par with the powers of the deities. As such, spell weavers throughout the planes dream of finding a near-mythic live node furnace.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, the Tortured Lands and the Fallen Lands both make likely spots for spell weaver ruins. In EBERRON, a spell weaver node might appear somewhere in the Demon Wastes or deep within mysterious Xen'drik. The *Shackled City Adventure Path* and the adventure "The Spire of Long Shadows," in DUNGEON #130, also suggest further spell weaver plots and designs.

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Scott Rosema

THE ROBED FIGURE approached the cave, careful where he placed his feet lest a loose pebble give him away to the great beast that dwelt inside. Even though he had never stepped foot in the vicinity before, he knew the cave like the back of his hand, courtesy of many stealthy visits experienced through the senses of a homonculous.

He stood a moment at the cave's entrance, allowing his vision to adjust to the gloom of the interior, then moved quietly inside. He could hear the soft, rhythmic sound of the creature's breathing just up ahead: good, he was asleep. That would make it all the easier.

Taking a side passage away from the beast, the wizard followed its crooked, meandering way until he was certain he was out of the creature's range of hearing. Ahead was a fork in the tunnel; he knew that if he took the left branch he would find himself in the creature's treasure hoard. He knew, also, that the beast had placed several *glyphs of warding* to protect his treasure, and while it would be child's play to move past the creature's feeble defenses, he preferred his own intricate plan. Why steal from one, when there was treasure from many to be had? The wizard seated himself against the rock wall of the cavern and began the words to his spell.

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Great Andrumache snored contentedly, enjoying his midday nap. An androsphinx, he was leonine in build, save for the hawk wings folded upon his back and his bearded human face, currently resting on one cheek in gentle repose upon his front paws. He was much bigger than a lion, reaching a good eight feet tall when standing upon all fours. Like true lions, he lived in a warm climate and chose to spend the hottest part of the afternoon napping in his den.

Currently, Andrumache was enjoying a pleasant dream, reliving a glorious kill when he had swooped down from the sky onto an antelope that had been entirely unaware of his presence. As he tore pieces of flesh from the antelope's haunch, his dream took a sudden turn, changing from a re-enactment of something that had actually happened to something altogether new.

A globe of flame streaked across the sky and landed in a fiery conflagration at Andrumache's feet. The androsphinx could sense the heat of the flames, but he felt no pain. A figure took form, coalescing from the flames to become similar in shape to Andrumache himself, only larger, with wings of fire and a mane of flames circling his ancient face.

"Andrumache," the flame-sphinx bellowed, "You have yet to mate. I know your reluctance, but think upon this: by the cruel dictate of fate, there is only one female sphinx, the gynosphinx, Yet there are three male sphinxes: the wicked hawk-headed hieracosphtnx, the bestial ram-headed criosphinx, and the noble androsphinx.

"Nature decrees that whenever a gynosphinx mates with either a hawk-head or a ram-head, she will bear a male child resembling its father. It is only through the union of androsphinx and gynosphinx that either of these two sphinxes is born. Without such unions, both the androsphinx and gynosphinx would perish from the world, bringing the hieracosphinx and criosphlnx to extinction soon afterward.

"The time has come for you to fulfill the duty you owe to your bloodline, Andrumache. Tomorrow, I will send a female to you. Do not disappoint me." The flame-sphinx started to fade from view.

Just as suddenly, it returned. "Oh, and I might just pop in on you myself, Andrumache. Do not look for me in this form, for I shall be wearing another."

Again, it faded from view, and the small fires that had started at its first appearance went out as well, leaving the puzzled Andrumache and his antelope alone in the silence of the dream.

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The next day, the robed figure trekked through the woodlands, stopping only to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief and take a long draw from the waterskin at his belt. As he replaced the stopper, he heard a sound from just ahead. *Ah,* he thought, *right on schedule.*

Cresting a small rise, he saw a large, leonine creature pushing dirt with its front paws to cover up a hole.[1] Its features identified it as a sphinx: the lion's body, covered in tawny fur; the powerful, brown hawk-like wings, with feathers shading to a light, creamy tan at the tips. And the creature's head made perfectly clear its exact genotype: It was a criosphinx, with curling, spiral horns jutting from its curly-haired ram's head.[2] Somehow sensing the robed human's approach, the monstrous sphinx spun around to face him.

1. Criosphinxes live in warm, woodland regions and tend to be wanderers, disdaining pemranent lairs. For this reason, they bury their treasure in the ground, often having several caches spread over a considerable amount of land. They have a remarkable memory in terms of keeping track of their buried loot, able to head directly to the location of a cache they buried decades before.

"Ah," said the criosphinx. It curled its lips up in a parody of a human smile, exposing numerous sharp teeth, seeming somewhat out of place in its ram's mouth.[3]

"Hello," began the wizard. "My name is Ulrubio—"

"All the same, I think I'll just call you 'Dinner.' It rather simplifies things, don't you agree?"

"Ah, yes, I see," said the human. "Of course. I seem to remember something about sphinxes being man-eaters. But don't you have to ask me a riddle or something first?"

"I'm sorry," replied the criosphinx. You seem to have your sphinxes mixed up. The female sphinx is interested in riddles; I, as a male, am far more interested in dinner. Which is to say, 'you.' " He took a few steps toward the wizard, padding forward in feline grace, then stopped short. "Unless, of course, you wish to purchase your safe passage?"

"By all means," replied the wizard. "How much do you want?"

"How much do you have?" asked the sphinx pleasantly, the glitter of gold shining behind his eyes.

Well, uh, actually, nothing on me at the moment, just now."

"What a pity," exclaimed the sphinx with a sarcastic sigh, and crouched down, preparing to pounce. "I'll tell you what, though, I'll give you a head start."

The wizard held up his hand to the crouching criosphinx. "Wait! A thought occurs to me!"

The creature relaxed its muscles and stood up to its full height, where it could look down at the robed figure before it. "Yes?" he asked impatiently.

"Perhaps I could direct you to a gynosphinx. Would that buy my life?"

The creature narrowed its eyes and bent its head so that it could look directly at the human. "You know where there's one to be found?"

"Yes, as it happens, I do," replied the wizard. "Only there remains one slight problem . . ."

"Yes?"

"She's been captured by another sphinx. He looks like you, only not quite so big and he has a bird's head."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the criosphinx. "Not a problem at all!" Suddenly, a thought struck him, and he posed a question. "There's just the one of him?"[4]

"Just the one male, yes, and the one female."

Well then, you're in luck, human. Simply tell me where they can be found, and I'll be on my way."

The wizard gave the sphinx directions to an abandoned temple, half-buried in the desert sands, several hours away by air. As the sphinx stretched its wings for flight, the wizard called out a question of his own.

"How is it that you can speak the language of mankind? I thought you could talk only to others of your kind, and to animals."

"Nonsense! If that were so, how could I bargain with such as yourself?[5] Now enough, I must be off. You may tell others that you had the unique experience of surviving an encounter with Great Rameses."[6]

As the wizard watched the criosphinx become a distant speck in the distant sky, he smiled to himself and said, "All the same, I think I'll just call you 'Dullard.' It rather simplifies things, don't you think?" Then he cast a spell and teleported away.

The wizard appeared on a hill and found himself in the presence of another sphinx. This one had the feathered head of a hawk to match his wings, and the body of a lion elsewhere. It glared at him, but made no move to attack.

"Well?" asked the wizard. "Have you thought it over?"

"Yes," replied the sphinx.

"And?"

"I agree to your terms. I will be your riding mount, and you will provide me the location of a mate and half of any treasure we earn together."

"Excellent! My name is Malrubio, whom you may address as 'Master.' " He reached inside his robe and pulled out a leather bridle.

"I will do no such thing, nor will I wear that. This is a partnership of equals."[7]

"Indeed. Well, I'll have no need of this, then, will I?" The wizard tossed the bridle on the ground. "You may call me Malrubio, then. And what shall I call you?"

"My name is Warhawk."

"Well, Warhawk, if you won't wear a bridle, perhaps I'll at least be able to talk you into wearing a set of saddlebags. They will be handy in transporting your treasure from its current location to your new home on the lands surrounding my castle estate."

"Agreed."

"Speaking of which, where is your treasure presently kept? I ask only because it might be a day or two before we can transport it, and I'd hate to see it uncovered in your absence."

The sphinx gave a quick look over to its right, to another hill where its nest was located?[8] "It's safe enough," he responded.

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2. A criosphinx is born without horns, but they develop rapidly during its first year of life and then with increasing slowness thereafter. Each year another ridge of new growth appears at the base of the horns, and it takes about 12 years before the horns start to spiral forwards. A criosphinx's horn can be used as an alternate material component for the *shout* spell.

3. While the criosphinx's head is that of a herbivorous ram, it has the appetite of a carnivore and the teeth to match. Its sharp teeth are used to rip chunks of meat from its prey (after which it swallows the pieces whole, but the criosphinx does not use its teeth in combat, preferring instead to rely upon the sharpness and swiftness of its claws and the powerful butting ability of its horned head.

4. Hieracosphinxes are the only type of sphinx which commonly band together in any numbers (they are found in groups of 1-6), preferring the "strength in numbers" strategy when attacking. Both androsphinxes and gynosphinxes prefer a solitary existence, and criosphinxes tend to remain on their own as well (although occasionally, when searching for a mate, several of the beasts will follow each other, each hoping to take the gynosphinx as his own when, and if, she is ever found). Note that the "No. Appearing" entries in the MONSTROUS MANUAL have inadvertently been switched between the gynosphinx and criosphinx; gynosphinxes are encountered singly, while up to four criosphinxes can be found traveling together looking for a mate.

5. It only makes sense that a criosphinx is able to speak the Common tongue, as well as the language of sphinxes and that of the animals, for it has a higher Intelligence rating than a hieracosphinx, 20% of which can speak Common. Also, in the description in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome mention is made of it bargaining with other beings, a difficult process were it not able to speak the Common language of the region.

6. It is a common practice for criosphinxes to add a descriptive adjective to their name: hence, Great Rameses, Bold Necrotiki, Swift Ibericus, and so on.

7. It is not unknown for a hieracosphinx to join in partnership with powerful evil beings, but while they're willing to serve as flying steeds, they dislike being treated as if they were mere horses. Furthermore, they are contemptuous of those weaker than themselves and will take advantage of any weakness they see in their "masters." They will remain loyal only as long as they fear their master's power; otherwise, the "master" is likely to end up as the hieracosphinx's next meal.

8. Perhaps because of their partial hawk heritage, hieracosphinxes prefer to lair in nests. Due to their large size, they make their nests on the ground, often at the base of a large tree, or against a large rock outcropping where they are afforded some protection from above. Hieracosphinx nests are simple structures made of broken tree branches, grass, dirt, and occasionally the bones of their prey. The nest serves no purpose other than providing the hieracosphinx with a place to sleep and an area in which to hide its treasure, which is often buried underneath the nest site or simply piled up against the walls of the nest.

"That's all I wanted to know," replied the wizard. "Shall we go?"

"Where to?"

"Why, to find you a mate, of course. I intend to live up to my part of the agreement, after all."

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"That's it below," said the wizard.

"I don't see her," replied Warhawk. He circled the structure, gradually spiraling down lower, searching eagerly for any sign of the gynosphinx the wizard said lived there. *If he's lied to me,* thought the sphinx, *I will chew him in half.*

The temple building lay half buried by an enormous sand dune. It was impossible to judge its size based only upon the part of the structure that was visible.

"Land over there, on the side. We don't want her catching sight of you and escaping. I'll go in and get her to come out, and then you can grab her."

"Why don't I just go in and get her?"

"Because she's on her home ground in there! There's no telling how many traps she has set up, to stop amorous swains like yourself from having their way with her."

"What'd you call me?"

"Just land."

Warhawk did as he was told, and the wizard dismounted. "Now stay here, and keep your eyes open! Be ready to take action, but by all means, don't come inside the building! It's far too dangerous." And with that, the wizard walked up to the ancient structure and entered it.

Again, he was familiar with the place even though this was his first time actually inside; homonculi made excellent spies. He let his eyes adjust to the gloomy interior, then went deeper inside.

The roof of the structure was supported by massive marble pillars. The majority of the building consisted of a single huge, open room, with several smaller rooms in the back. Reclining on the floor near the back of the room was a gynosphinx. The wizard had a hard time making out details in the dim light, but the voice was unmistakably female.

"Who is there?"

"It is only I, Bellrubios, an explorer and wanderer, a seeker of fabulous treasures."

"Alas, the treasures here have already been claimed by me. You have traveled in vain. Unless there is some service you seek from me?"

The wizard stroked his chin, as if in deep thought.

"A magical item you wish me to scrutinize for you, perhaps?" prompted the sphinx. "A curse you need removed? I assure you, I can offer reasonable rates."

"Actually," replied the wizard, "there is one thing . . ."

"Yes?"

Well, I understand you sphinxes are well-known for your wisdom. Perhaps you could tell me what ails my griffon. He seems to be pining for something, but he refuses to speak of it, and its beginning to affect his performance. Would you be willing to come outside and look him over?"

The gynosphinx's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Your griffon speaks?" she asked.

"Indeed he does. I'd be happy to introduce you to him." The wizard stepped to the side and extended his hand toward the outer doorway of the half-buried temple.

"No need," replied the sphinx, and growled softly to herself under her breath, activating a *clairvoyance* spell.[9] Suddenly she sprang to all fours, muscles tensed for action and eyes glaring with anger. "You fool!" she hissed. "That's no griffon—it's a hieracosphinx!"

"Really?" asked the wizard, feigning surprise. "But he swore that he was a griffon. It looks like we've both been duped! What do you think he wants?"

"Idiot! Keep your voice down! He wants me, of course. I should rip your heart out for bringing him here!"

"Really, I don't think that will be necessary. Tell you what, maybe it would be best if we just left." With that, the wizard headed for the entrance, but he stopped at the doorway and looked back into the darkness at the gynosphinx. "I don't see what the problem is, though. You're both sphinxes, aren't you?"

"He is a hieracosphinx! An abomination!"

"Well, what about a sphinx with a head like a ram?"

"They are little better than animals. I would as soon mate with a goat as with a criosphinx."[10]

The wizard peered out the doorway, squinting at the open skies of the desert. "Well, here comes one now," he said.

Great Rameses glided down to the desert floor, shrieking a challenge in the language of sphinxes to the hieracosphinx he found guarding the abandoned temple, just as the wizard had said.

"Vile abomination! Begone from here, lest I slit your belly with my keen horns! Flee back to the hills, and leave the gynosphinx to your better!"

"Never!" responded Warhawk. "She was promised to me, and I'll kill any who try to take her from me!" He flexed his wings and prepared to take to the air, where he knew he would have the advantage.[11]

Great Rameses struck at Warhawk with his head, butting against the hieracosphinx's side with his horns. Warhawk twisted to the side and bit at the criosphinx's shoulder with his sharp beak. The two wrestled back and forth, trading rakes with curved claws until both were bleeding from many wounds. Still they gave no quarter and spouted vile insults at each other between grunts and howls of pain.

"Sparrow!"

"Lamb!"

"You know, I feel just terrible about this," said the wizard, watching the two males in their life-and-death struggle. "Who do you think will win?"

9. Gynosphinxes are able to cast the following spells once per day: *detect magic, read magic, read languages, defect invisibility, locate object, dispel magic, clairaudience, clairvoyance, remove curse, legend lore,* and are able to use each of the sym*bols* once per week. These spells are part of the magic inherent in the gynosphinx, and require no material components or spell books. The same is true of the androsphinx, who is able to cast spells as if he were a 6th-level priest. The androsphinx prefers to use his spells for healing and defense and will almost always draw his spells from the following spheres: All, Animal, Guardian, Healing, and Protection.

10. As far as mating goes, the gynosphinx is restricted to the three types of true male sphinxes: androsphinx, criosphinx, and hieracosphinx. The so-called "dracosphinx" (see the *Monstrous Compendium® Annual, Volume Two,* page 104) is not a true sphinx but is named because its "winged lion" build gives it the appearance of some type of sphinx. Dracosphinxes, however, are hybrid creatures, possibly a magical merging of a red dragon and an androsphinx, but the race has two separate sexes and is mutually infertile with the true sphinxes.

Similarly, the "astrosphinx" (see *Monstrous Compendium 9: Spelljammer Appendix* under "Sphinx, Astro") is not a true sphinx, either. Several clues include the fact that it's covered in scales, has human hands, and its wings are bat-like instead of feathered. Whatever being created and named these creatures had only a vague understanding of the true sphinxes' physiognomies.

11. Although the smallest of the male sphinxes, the hieracosphinx enjoys the fastest airspeed and maneuverability of any sphinx (Maneuverability Class C, or D if being used as a riding mount). Again, this is no doubt due to the creature's hawk-like nature and build.

The gynosphinx had crept up beside the wizard and watched. "In a one-on-one struggle, the criosphinx usually wins. It is larger and can inflict greater damage with its horns than the hieracosphinx can with its beak."

"Then the criosphinx will win your hand." In the light of the doorway, he got a better look at his companion. She stood a good seven feet tall, with a human face, neck, shoulders, and breasts. The rest of her body was that of a lion, with large wings sprouting from her shoulders. "Uh, I guess paw," he amended.

"Not if I can help it," she said, and moved past him out the doorway. "I can escape while they battle, and hopefully put enough distance from the winner between us for me to remain free."

"But where will you go?" asked the wizard, worry carefully placed in his voice. "Perhaps you could take shelter with Andrumache; he might offer you protection."

"Who is this Andrumache?" asked the gynosphinx suspiciously, keeping a wary eye on the progress of the battle between her two rival suitors.

"He's another sphinx that I know of. Looks kind of like you, but, of course, he's a male."

"An androsphinx?" shrieked the gynosphinx. Could it really be? Tell me where he can be found!"

The wizard gave her precise directions to Andrumache's cave, and she was off like a shot, all but ignored by the other two sphinxes fighting over her. Shaking his head, the wizard headed back into the temple. From his robes he pulled out a *portable hole.* Unfolding it, he reached inside and pulled out his homonculous. Handing the little creature the *hole,* he set him off on his tasks. "It's in the room on the left," he advised. "And mind you, watch out for the *symbols."* As the little creature fluttered off, he called back to it, "And make sure you get everything! I don't want even a copper left behind this time!" Then he went outside to watch the progress of the battle.

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Andrumache paced back and forth in his cave. He enjoyed his solitude and privacy, and he was loathe to give it up. The thought of sharing his cave with a gynosphinx for the years it would take to produce a cub[12] and raise it to maturity sent him into a state of mild panic. Still, the god in his dream was right: as an androsphinx, he had the duty[13] to perpetuate the race. He might not like it, but those were the facts of life. Without such sacrifices, the great race of the sphinx would soon perish.

A speck in the sky grew closer, and Andrumache could see the form of a gynosphinx take shape. *Tomorrow, I will send a female to you,* the sphinx-god had said. As she came to a landing outside his cave entrance, Andrumache let out a big sigh of resignation. *Maybe the years will pass quickly,* he hoped, and led the female into his cave.

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The homonculous dragged the *portable hole* up to his master. "Finished already?" the wizard asked. "All right then, in you go." The construct jumped into the *hole,* and the wizard refolded it and placed it back inside his robes.

He returned his attention to the fighting sphinxes. They were both sorely wounded, yet neither would yield. The insults had stopped, as neither had the breath to waste. The gynosphinx had predicted Warhawk's defeat, though, so maybe he should take some action. With a mental shrug, he cast a series of *magic missiles* into the criosphinx's side. As battered as the creature already was, that was enough to finish him off, and he plopped to the ground with a wet thud. Warhawk stood panting, catching his breath.

"Let's go," said the wizard, preparing to mount his aerial steed.

"Go?" squawked Warhawk. "I'm not going anywhere but inside to claim what's mine."

"She's not there anymore! Didn't you see her fly off while you two were fighting over her?"

"What? Why didn't you stop her?" demanded Warhawk.

"How? My spells are mainly lethal. I could have killed her, perhaps, but I didn't think that was the desired result. Still, cheer up, I know where she is headed. I, uh, cast a spell of location on her. We can catch her if we hurry."

"Very well," agreed Warhawk. He bent down so the wizard could climb onto his back. "Where is she headed?" he asked as he took to the air.

"To a deserted cave network she knows about. There's only one entrance and exit, so you'll be able to trap her in there."

Warhawk found the strength to fly a little faster.

"Quiet now, or you'll ruin it!" the wizard whispered. "She's in there, on the right, probably fast asleep. Off you go, now." As the hieracosphinx raced off down the tunnel to the right, the wizard shook his homonculous out of the *portable hole* and set him to work once more. "You know the drill," he instructed, then waited for what would happen next.

It wasn't long in coming. He heard Andrumache bellow in outrage, "YOU DARE?" There was a squawk or surprise from Warhawk, and then a vicious roar that sent shivers down the wizard's spine, even as far away as he was.[14] There came a shriek of terror from Warhawk and another bel-

12. Although androsphinxes don't particularly like gynosphinxes—they especially dislike that the females are smarter than they are-they are loyal to them until their offspring is grown. The union of an androsphinx and a gynosphinx results in a single cub of either sex. Regardless of the child's sex, it is raised lovingly by both parents.

On the other hand, when a gynosphinx gives birth to either a hieracosphinx or a criosphinx, the cub is immediately abandoned and left to fend for itself. A gynosphinx will not kill her own offspring, even unwanted ones, but she will do nothing to help it to survive. The father takes over the task of training the young cub to speak, fly, and hunt.

13. Duty is one thing an androsphinx takes seriously. As the guardian of the sphinx race, an androsphinx will go out of its way to see to the safety of the other sphinx sub-races, even the hated hieracosphinxes, when they are attacked by other creatures. Hieracosphinxes certainly do not share this concern for androsphinxes and will attack an androsphinx if they have sufficient numerical superiority and it appears that they might be able to kill him. They see the androsphinx as an enemy that must be destroyed if at all possible; androsphinxes see the hieracosphinx as a misguided creature that must be led onto the path of goodness by their own example.

14. The roar of an androsphinx is terrible, but the creature must be angry in order to use it. The first roar causes all creatures within 360 yards to save vs. wands or flee for three turns. If the androsphinx roars a second time, everyone within 200 yards must save vs. petrification or be paralyzed with fright for 1d4 rounds, and those within 30 yards of this louder roar are deafened for 2d6 rounds. Further provocation can elicit a third, even more powerful roar, forcing everyone within 240 yards to save vs. spell or lose 2d4 points of Strength for 2d4 rounds. In addition, all within 30 yards of the androsphinx during its third roar are knocked over and suffer 2d8 hp damage and must save vs. breath weapon to avoid being stunned for 2d6 rounds, unless they are over eight feet tall. Stone within 30 yards of this final roar will crack unless it saves vs. crushing blow.

low from Andrumache, this time even louder. The wizard ran for the cave's entrance. He saw the hieracosphinx dart by in a flash of feathers and take to the air. After peeking down the corridor to ensure that the androsphinx wasn't within sight, he cast a *fireball* spell at the fleeing sphinx before it moved out of range. Warhawk exploded in a puff of orange fire and flames.

There was the click of nails on stone, and the wizard acted quickly, throwing an illusion of flame around his head and creating fiery wings from his back. Andrumache came into view around the curve of the cave tunnel, saw the wizard, and came to a stop. "My lord," he said, bowing his head.

"You have done well, Andrumache," said the wizard. "Now return to your mate, and do what must be done. I am proud of you, my child."

The winged creature bowed again, and returned the way he came. The wizard let out a long breath—that had been close!

The homonculous returned soon after, dragging the *hole.* "Excellent," said the wizard. "You've got the shovel?" The spindly creature stuck its head and arm into the *hole* and pulled out a hand shovel as big as it was. "Then let's go," said the wizard, stuffing the *portable hole* back into his robe. "First you've got the criosphinx's treasure to dig up, then we'll head over to the hieracosphinx's nest and pick up what he's collected. All in all, not a bad day's work." He activated a quick spell, and the robed figure teleported away.

Andrumache and his new mate didn't notice. They had other things on their minds.

Both Johnathan M. Richards and his wife Mary enjoy studying about ancient Egypt and one day hope to see the real Sphinx in person. In the meantime, they often enjoy a good game of Senet, a board game once played by the Pharaohs, which uses throwing sticks

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THE ECOLOGY OF THE STEEDER

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by Phil Robb

GUNDARR CROOKNOSE walked down the twisting passageways of the Underdark, trailing behind his mentor, Mordik, and the human slave they had brought along for the menial work. The slave, a ragged man captured by the duergar months ago, carried a torch and a pile of sacks. He shuffled along, weak from hunger and the demands of his present masters.

Gundarr reached up and slapped the slave on the head absently as they walked, spurring him on to faster speeds. "Move along, slave," he grumbled, but his mind wasn't really on it. Today was the day: he'd receive a mount of his own, and begin his training as an elite *kavalrach* — a spider-rider. It was an honor bestowed upon few duergar, for steeder mounts required an outpouring of resources over many years, and each duergar community could afford to keep only a limited number in their stables. Therefore, steeders were reserved for the toughest and most deserving of the duergar warriors, and he, Gundarr, had proven his valor as a fighter time and time again.

The trio turned a final corner, and Mordik raised his hand to signal them to stop. "There," he said to his pupil, pointing to the end of the cavern ahead of them. "We've come just in time."

Gundarr pushed the slave to one side and peered ahead, eager to spot his mount. Instead, he saw only a pile of several dozen eggs, each about a foot in diameter.[1]

"What trick is this?" he snarled at his mentor. "Where is my steeder?"

"In time, Gundarr, in time. Watch, for even now she comes to greet you." As he spoke, several of the eggs pulsed, as the creatures within pushed against their tight prison walls with their legs and bit at them with their mandibles.[2] One egg split open, revealing the gangly newborn form within.

It was a giant spider, nearly two feet in diameter once it stretched out its eight hairy legs, each still dripping with slimy egg fluid. Orange-tan bands circled its appendages at the joints, and its eight eyes glinted glossy black in the torchlight. Otherwise, the creature's body was a dark gray, matching both the stone around it and the skin of the two duergar who watched it. It raised its first set of legs high and opened its mandibles, ready to strike.

Other eggs were breaking open. The newborn spiderlings crawled into their new environment, the black and gloomy Underdark that would be the whole of their world for their entire lives. Gundarr watched them spill forth with resentment and hostility. By all the gods of battle, he expected a fully-grown battle mount, not some tiny weakling fresh from the egg!

"We'll save the biggest three females," said Mordik. "The others go into the pot."[3] Gundarr drew his sword and started for the spiders, eager to spill some blood. "Wait," Mordik cautioned, "They'll do your work for you."

As if obeying Mordik's command, one of the newly-hatched spiderlings rushed at the first-born. As if sensing the motion,[4] the first-born spun around and met her enemy head-on. Their legs intertwined as they grappled for position, each spider trying to impale the other with its wicked fangs.[5]

1. Female steeders lay clutches of 10-40 eggs at a time, usually hidden in the backs of their burrows. The eggs are webbed together in an egg sac, which protects them from the elements and small predators. Unlike many spiders, this is the only time steeders use webbing. The female guards the egg sac until they hatch (usually about seven weeks), although sometimes the eggs are taken by the duergar and used as food.

2. Like many spiders, the steeder is born with "egg teeth," special ridges along its pedipalps (the small leglike appendages on either side of its mouth) that assist it in cutting its way through the egg. These are lost during the steeder's first molt.

3. In addition to being used as riding mounts, steeders serve as a food source for the duergar that raise them. Keeping a full-grown steeder takes time and effort, and the duergar are careful to allow only as many steeders as they can use for mounts to survive beyond hatchling stage. The others are slain and eaten.

Since female steeders grow to be larger than the males (this is true of most spider species), the duergar prefer to use females as mounts. A few males are kept alive at all times to ensure future generations—while also used as riding mounts, they are usually held back from battle. Many male steeders end up as beasts of burden, hauling carts back and forth through the streets of a duergar city. When strapped to a cart, the male steeder is unable to perform the lengthy leaps for which steeders are renowned.

4. Spiders have fine hairs growing over their legs. These hairs, called trichobothria, are each set into a pit with nerve endings on all sides. In this way, the slightest movement in the air shifts the position of the trichobothria, and the spider is able to pinpoint the source of the movement. This specialized sense allows the spider to "see" around it in areas with little or no light, and makes sneaking up on one next to impossible unless some magical means of becoming ethereal is used. Invisible creatures cannot escape detection from a steeder (or any other spider, for that matter).

5. This is common after a hatching. It's nature's way to ensure that only the strongest and fastest steeders survive. Out of the original batch of eggs, only about half survive the initial feeding frenzy. The newborn spiders stop fighting only after there are enough dead to feed those still alive. After feeding, the survivors each go their separate ways and seek out a lair of their own, lest they be attacked by one of their siblings the next time he or she gets hungry.

As more spiders crawled out of their eggs and joined the battle, Mordik, Gundarr, and the slave watched carefully.

"All right, that one, that one, and, let's see . . . that one over there," said Mordik, pointing out the toughest fighters. Gundarr waded into the struggling spiderlings, cutting left and right with his sword, leaving a pile of bodies in his wake. Only the three singled out by his mentor were spared. The slave dragged the bodies to the side and started sorting them, obviously unnerved by the way their legs kept twitching, even after death.

The first-born had killed her opponent. Using her front pair of legs to keep the enemy at bay, she had set her four back legs firmly in place on the cavern floor and used her remaining pair to flip her foe onto its back. Then she leapt upon it. Her vicious mandibles slashed open the creature's unprotected underbelly. Blood spurted from the wound, staining the cold stone floor. The spiderling kicked feebly, and died. Only then did the first-born spin to face the two duergar and the human.

Gundarr had finished his carnage and was wiping the milky blue spider blood from his blade, a dark scowl on his face. Mordik helped to drag the dead over in a pile. The slave gingerly approached the first-born's kill, as if to take it. The creature immediately assumed the fighting stance. When the wide-eyed human made no move to back off, the steeder attacked, fangs open wide to devour this new prey. The slave screamed and backpedalled out of range.

"No, leave that one," called Mordik. "She's earned it." The slave backed away even farther, behind Gundarr, eager to be away from the living steeder. The steeder returned her attention to her prey and started feasting.[6] Nearby, her two surviving sisters each did the same.

"You didn't say I'd be getting a newborn," grumbled Gundarr to his mentor. "How am I to ride something that small into battle?"

"You're not ready to ride into battle, Gundarr," cautioned Mordik. "By the time you are, your steeder will be big enough, never fear. All kavalrachni begin with a newborn. You will be no different. Now grab that sack, and let's go."

Gundarr gave his mentor a murderous glance, and stooped to pick up one of the two sacks filled with the dead spiderlings. The slave toted the other on his back. Gundarr slapped him in the side of the head for good measure on his way past, but felt no better for it. His mood was as black and evil as the Underdark that had spawned him.

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Later that night, the two duergar sat in a warrior's den, drinking tall mugs of ale distilled from poisonous g'shnakki mushrooms. "How long until she can be ridden?" Gundarr asked of Mordik. "I wish to begin training at once!"

"Fool, you are in training!" laughed Mordik. "For the next year, you will remain close to your new mount. You will feed her. You will take your own meals in her cavern. You will sleep in her presence. In time, she will learn not to try to eat you. The two of you will form the bond necessary if you are to work together as one unit. After a year, when she has molted twice and grown large enough to support a rider,[7] only then will you ride your steeder."

"A year? I wish to ride now!"

"Should I find someone with more courage to make it through a year of hardship?"

Gundarr growled deep in his throat and slammed his fist down hard on the table. "I will be a kavalrach!" he snarled. "Question my courage again, and I'll rip the beating heart from your body!"

Mordik chuckled into his ale.

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"What will I do here for a year?" demanded Gundarr. He and Mordik had taken Gundarr's mount to a small side cavern, sealed off from the rest of the duergar tunnels by a series of metal bars hammered into the floor and ceilings. Access was through a barred cell-door. The room inside was cramped. From the rear of the cavern, a slow but steady dripping foretold a year of cold, wet, misery.

"I have already explained. You will bond. She will learn to tolerate you. In return, you will no doubt learn to sleep lightly." Mordik chuckled to himself. "You will also have time to practice your mental disciplines, to master the meditations you have been taught in order to boost your psionic potential."

"What about food?"

"Every two weeks, the slave will be sent to feed your mount."

"Every two weeks? What about me?"

"There is a small pool of water in the back of the cell, and I believe some of the fungus in your cell is edible."

Gundarr scowled. "I do not laugh, Old One."

"Good. Kavalrachni must be a hearty lot. Surely the thought of roughing it for a year isn't souring you on the idea? If you lack the courage, I can find another to take your place . . ."

Gundarr's scowl deepened. He bared his teeth, but said nothing.

"Good. I leave you to it, then. Good luck, Gundarr. See you in a year—unless you beg for release before then." And with that, Mordik swung the door closed and latched on a thick padlock. Gundarr watched him leave, equal parts hatred and determination burning in his eyes. He ground his teeth. His hands clenched and unclenched into fists at his side, as if he could feel Mordik's throat in their iron-hard grasp. It was almost a relief when the steeder attacked him, slamming him face-first into the bars. He whirled around in time to grasp the creature's mandibles, already poised to pierce his midsection. Blood pooled

6. Steeders have no poison attack, but this does not mean that they have no venom. Like all spiders, the steeder has venom glands leading to its fangs, and while weak enough to prevent it from being used in battle, after the prey has been slain the venom is coated over the victim's body. It begins to dissolve the softer tissues of the prey, liquefying them so the soupy mixture can be sucked back up by the steeder. The process is a slow one, and steeders do not like to be interrupted during feeding.

After the victim is dissolved, all that remains are the harder structures: bones, teeth, exoskeletons, carapaces, and any clothing, armor, and items carried. These items might be found in a "wild" steeder's lair; those domesticated by duergar or other species tend to have such valuables taken from the lair. Treasure means nothing to a steeder in any case.

7. Steeders continue to grow throughout their lives. Like all arachnids, they have hard exoskeletons which do not grow in size. Instead, once the creature becomes too large for its exoskeleton, it molts: the exoskeleton splits down the middle and the steeder shrugs out of it like a hand pulling out of a glove. The new layer of exoskeleton underneath is somewhat softer (the steeder drops to AC 5 for a full day immediately after molting), but hardens quickly.

Steeders molt twice a year for the first two years of life. After that, they continue to grow but at a slower rate, molting once a year for several years, then every second or third year after that. Male steeders live for about 35 years, and females occasionally reach 50, although this is rare—they are usually slain in battle before that.

in his torn palms, spilled to the floor. The pain kept him focused. He devoted the whole of his attention to wrestling the creature off him and subduing it without causing it permanent damage. His brain shifted focus: gone were thoughts of Mordik, replaced by thoughts of survival, of how best to sleep without being devoured during the next year.

Battle had always been good for Gundarr's peace of mind.

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"Now watch," said Mordik to his apprentice as. he slowly approached the steeder. He carried only a metal spear, which he held upright as a staff. As he neared, the creature turned to face him, keeping her eyes on him.[8]

The duergar started tapping with the butt of his spear. He set up a rhythm, repeating it over and over as he closed with the steeder. She in turn remained transfixed, allowing his approach.[9]

She had grown in the past year, molting twice as she outgrew her own outer skin. Now about four feet in diameter, it was time to begin her training as a riding mount.

Gundarr had grown as well, not in stature but in maturity. He was no longer the impatient hothead eager for the immediate gratification of his desires. The year spent in isolation had hardened him, focused him. Months of forced combat in close quarters and a limited food supply had burned off any excess fat, leaving only layers of rock-hard muscle. His gray eyes were colder, more intense. They darted all around him, constantly taking in his surroundings as if to make up for a year of the same old sights. He stood straight and proud. He was a survivor.

Spear still tapping a tattoo upon the stone floor, Mordik stepped up to the steeder, then slid over to her side. There was a crackling of mental energy as Mordik used his innate enlarge ability to increase his size. His body, armor and spear expanded equally in all directions until the steeder's body reached just above his knees. He straddled the beast, then reduced in size until he was sitting comfortably on the creature's back, on the part where the cephalothorax meets abdomen. He tapped the same rhythm on the creature's back as he sat there. "And that's how you do it," he said to his student.

"An animal friendship spell would have been much easier," said Gundarr.

"Only if you want to be dependent upon a spell each time you wish to ride a new mount. And if you have the proper materials, and the hour to cast the spell. You won't always have those luxuries in the heat of battle. No, it's best to get them used to being ridden without spells. Train them once, and they're yours for life. Now you try it."

Mordik dismounted and passed the spear to his student. If he was going to learn to ride his steeder, this was the first step. Gundarr took the spear and started pounding it on the ground.

"Not too hard or too fast," cautioned Mordik. "You must get it just right, if you want her to remain still while you mount. Break the rhythm, and she'll turn on you as you approach, no matter how well you've bonded. Slow down. That's it."

Gundarr slowed the tempo and made it successfully to the steeder's side. He enlarged, climbed on, then grinned with pride. "Got it!" he said, reducing back to his normal size.

"Tap!" shouted Mordik. "Don't forget to tap!" It was too late. Gundarr had ceased tapping and the steeder was no longer receptive to advances. Unable to reach its own back with its mandibles or any of its legs—it leapt.[10]

The creature landed on the cavern ceiling. Gundarr was not so lucky. He fell off the beast in midair, landing hard on his side and rolling over a few times before coming to a stop. The spear went clattering down the corridor.

"It's a good thing she was fed last week,"[11] said Mordik, shaking his head sadly, "or you'd be spider food right about now." Gundarr groaned and looked up at the steeder on the ceiling, front legs raised straight out in the defensive stance as if concerned that the young duergar would somehow follow her up to the ceiling and attack. Her body touched the cavern ceiling, her six other legs bent well beneath her, ready to spring her forward into pitched battle. Her deadly mandibles were spread wide open, ready to deal maximum damage to any who would oppose her. Her hair stood on end, eagerly sensing any motion her glistening black eyes might fail to detect. The steeder was otherwise motionless.

"Fetch the spear. We are done today," suggested Mordik. Gundarr sighed, dusted himself off, and complied with his instructors command. The steeder remained on the ceiling, observing them both.

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"The day has come for the creature's first saddle," Mordik informed his student. Their human slave stood hunched over under the weight of an elaborate leather construction. Numerous straps hung down from all directions. "Saddles are an important part of a kavalrach's equipment," Mordik continued. "Without them, the

8. Steeders have eight eyes. Two of them are rather large and face forward. The other six are arranged in a semi-circle, three on either side, around the top of the steeder's cephalothorax. These simpler eyes are only used to detect movement, whereas the larger two provide eyesight equivalent to that of a dwarf (including 60' infravision).

9. The rhythmic beating plays a part in the steeders' courtship rituals. The male beats on the ground with his pedipalps, declaring his interest in the female. As he approaches, he shifts the object of his tapping from the ground to the female's carapace, then interlocks his front legs with hers, rears up, and hooks his legs over her fangs. Once she's in position, he transfers sperm from his pedipalps (placed there earlier, well before the courtship dance began) to a seminal receptacle in an epigastric furrow underneath the female's midsection. That done, the male scrambles to safety, since he's performed his function and is now expendable, at least in the eyes of the female.

The duergar take advantage of the preprogrammed courtship rhythm, known instinctively to all steeders, to allow them to get close enough to mount one. Of course, this only works on the females.

10. Steeders combine the attributes of several types of spiders. While being predominantly a giant version of the tarantula, they differ from that species in their leaping ability. Steeders can leap up to 240 feet in any direction from a standing start, once every three rounds, even while mounted. This, plus their ability to stick to any surface if even one of their eight feet is touching it, allows them to escape from nearly any deadly situation. Steeders move at half-speed when walking along walls or ceilings.

Duergar take advantage of these abilities by constructing elaborate saddles for their mounts which enable them to remain seated even while the steeder is bounding through the air or walking upside-down along a cavern ceiling. The saddles are equipped with numerous straps keeping the rider in place; once strapped in (a process which takes 2-4 minutes, depending upon the experience of the rider), it is virtually impossible to dislodge the duergar from his steeder. The saddles do have a "quick-release" system, allowing the duergar to dismount relatively quickly (in one round) if the need arises.

11. Like most spiders, a steeder can go for weeks or even months between meals. Due to the liquefied nature of their food, they can go for up to a year without water. Duergars feed captured slaves to their steeders every two weeks or so.

steeders are as dangerous to us as they are to our enemies."

"I remember well," replied Gundarr, thinking back to when he had been first thrown three years ago.

"These saddles are expensive and difficult to make. Only the larger steeders, those big enough to ride into battle, wear one. No need to waste time and resources on a smaller saddle when the creature won't last long in battle. Plus, she'd soon grow out of it when she molted. Now give it here, slave." The human complied quickly. Although a foot and a half shorter than the slave, Mordik held the heavy saddle without effort.

Gundarr knew that there would be no trouble saddling the steeder. She had spent the last four years in the company of the two duergar and their human slave and no longer considered them a threat.[12] Under Mordik's instruction, Gundarr plopped the saddle upon her back, then crawled underneath to tighten all of the fastenings. "From this day forward, she'll wear the saddle every hour of every day," said Mordik. "It will be a second skin to her. It won't be removed until she molts—and then she'll be fitted with a saddle one size larger."[13]

When it was in place, Gundarr approached and mounted easily. He no longer used the rhythmic pounding trick to approach the creature—she had long ago accepted him. They were a team now, rider and steed. Now that she was saddled, their training would continue, advancing to the next stage.

Mordik showed Gundarr how to strap himself in, and demonstrated the quick-release function. "Tomorrow, your real training begins," he said with a smile.

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Gundarr rode his steeder into the battle arena and faced Mordik, mounted on a much larger beast. Each had a metal prod in his hand, with a leather cord wrapped around his wrist to prevent it from being dropped and lost.[14]

"What about weapons?" asked Gundarr, eager for battle training.

"Weapons come later," replied Mordik. "We start with controlling the steeder's movements. In battle, this must become fluid. You must direct your steeder without conscious thought. We'll spend the next few months practicing control, so put away thoughts of weapons training until then. No, don't give me that look.

"Now then, hold your prod in your off hand, freeing your weapon hand. We'll begin with the basics. To move your steeder forward, use your prod here. To turn, a quick jab here, on the side. That's right, like that . . ."

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Gundarr led the half-dozen goblin slaves into the battle arena and locked the gate behind him. "Go to the far side of the cavern," he commanded. "There you will find a chest. Open it."

Warily, the goblins did as commanded. Once they were halfway across the cavern, he signaled to his steeder, and she approached him, allowing him to mount.[15] Gundarr secured himself into the saddle, feeding the leather straps through the metal rings attached to his drab plate mail armor specifically for that purpose.

"There are weapons inside the chest," continued Gundarr. "Arm yourselves. I offer you your freedom today, slaves!"

The goblins looked up, astonished at what they were hearing.

"The key to the gate is on my belt," said Gundarr. "To earn your freedom, you need only kill me and take the key from my lifeless body." He smiled evilly.

Across the cavern, the blood rushed from the goblins' faces. As the mounted duergar sped across the cavern floor, they hurriedly snatched up weapons and tried to organize a hasty defense.

It did little good. Control prod in his left hand, Gundarr sent his steeder straight into the center of the mass of goblins, sword cutting a bloody swath through them. Two swipes of his blade brought down as many goblin slaves. After passing through them, he prompted his mount to leap to the ceiling, in part to protect him from goblin retaliation, but mostly to practice the maneuver. The remaining goblins ran in different directions. It was pointless, though, for the locked gate was the only way out of the arena. From his vantage point looking down, Gundarr smiled a wicked smile. *Now this was training!* he thought.

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Gundarr was ecstatic. The thrill of battle was upon him. He sent his steeder speeding along the cavern ceiling, above the pool of water. Gundarr knew a slip on his mount's part would plunge them both into the water—which could easily mean his mount's death[16]—but he had complete faith in her abilities. Three more kavalrachni followed him, mounted on their own steeders—his strike team. He had made it to a position of command within the elite spider-riders, and gloried in the prestige and honor it brought to his name. No longer was he Gundarr Crooknose: now he was Gundarr Kavalrach, Strike Team Leader!

They passed the underground pool, rounded a corner, and found their prey: a group of svirfneblin returning home from their patrol. One of the lead/members looked up at the last minute, perhaps catching a glimpse of movement, but it was far too late. Gundarr's steeder was already in flight, landing on the lead svirfneblin and biting down with her fangs. The little svirfneblin tried to squirm free, but she had him in her first pair of legs, from which there was no easy escape.[17]

The other steeders in Gundarr's strike team dropped down from the

12. Steeders in the wild are solitary creatures and do not form lasting relationships with other beings, not even their mating partners. (More times than not, the female will attempt to devour the male immediately after mating.) The female will guard her egg sac until the newborns hatch, but from that point on, they're on their own. A rider/mount "partnership" must developed slowly over the course of many years.

13. This, of course, is the simplest way to determine if an encountered steeder is wild or domesticated—domesticated ones will always be saddled if they are large enough for battle training. The exceptions to this rule are the males, but they are usually kept confined to prevent their escape and/or death at the hands of one of the Underdark's many dangers.

14. In a pinch, these control prods can be used as a weapon, causing damage as a club. All duergar spider-riders are considered proficient in their use—this is, in effect, a bonus weapon proficiency.

15. Steeders are intelligent creatures, and those that go through the years of training that kavalrachni and their mounts do can be taught to recognize several hand signals. These usually consist of the following commands: come here, remain where you are, attack that enemy, fetch that object.

16. Steeders breathe through holes in the sides of their abdomens, so they will never willingly enter water, as it is much easier for a steeder to drown than a humanoid—it doesn't do a spider any good to hold its head above water, and it is unable to close off its air-intake holes. A steeder immersed in water drowns in 1d3 rounds.

cavern celling and attacked as well. The disorganized svirfneblin had little time to react before being overpowered. Some broke ranks and tried to flee, but ran straight into Mordik and his own band of kavalrachni, who had approached the svirfneblin party from the other direction. With nowhere to turn, they did their best to make a stand, but between the steeders' wicked fangs and the duergars' equally wicked blades, they didn't last long.

The blood of the Deep Gnomes splattered on his battle armor, Gundarr gave a throaty roar and voiced his pleasure. "Useless gnomes!" he cried. "Worthy only as food for our mounts! Let's see if the pitiful weaklings had anything of value." He dismounted and began looting the nearest corpse, looking for the gems he knew the Deep Gnomes often carried. The other duergar followed suit. Gundarr's steeder, meanwhile, chose a svirfneblin corpse and began to feed.

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This wasn't supposed to happen! thought Gundarr as his sword swung left and right, cutting a swath among his enemies. For years, his band of duergar kavalrachni had preyed upon the nearby races of the Underdark with virtual impunity. None could stand against the steeders and their duergar masters. Until now, that was.

None of the duergar had expected an attack from a bunch of svirfneblin, especially since they had been historically more interested in mining than in combat. The attack and sheer numbers of the invading svirfneblin force had taken the duergar community by surprise, and the earth elementals summoned to aid the Deep Gnomes certainly didn't help the duergars any.

Mordik had led the kavalrachni to their mounts at the first sounds of battle, and they flanked the enemy. The strategy worked well, for the steeders were able to maneuver on the ceilings out of the range of the svirfneblin warriors' weapons and position themselves to best advantage before striking. Gundarr's steeder had killed six of the deep gnomes before the sheer number of them swarmed over her; he had been forced to jettison himself from the steeder's saddle and fight his way back to safety. His sword was slick with the blood of his enemies, and his muscles ached from the hours of endless combat, but at long last it seemed that the enemy had been driven back. The svirfneblin attack had done great damage to the duergar community, but not as much as they had hoped, and they were forced to retreat.

Gundarr looked over the battlefield, picking his way past dead duergar and svirfneblin both until he found what he was looking for. There she lay, his first steeder, legs still twitching in death, pierced a dozen times over by the Deep Gnomes' sharp picks.

"You served me well in life," Gundarr said to his faithful steeder. "Now, in death, you shall serve me one last time."

She was delicious.[18]

Johnathan M. Richards admits that he isn't really that big a fan of spiders, although he does have nearly twenty years' worth of Spider-Man comic book lovingly stashed away in his library closet.

17. A steeder's first attack in combat is with its front legs; if successful (requiring an attack against AC 10, adjusted for magic and Dexterity only), the sticky pads on the steeder's feet prevent the prey from escaping. A victim can escape by making a Dexterity or Strength check at -10. One attempt can be made each round, but the steeder receives an automatic bite attack for 1-8 hp damage each round the victim is held. While held, the victim is at -2 to attack and damage rolls.

Due to special hairs on the steeder's pedipalps and feet, the creature is able to taste what it touches. Once a steeder has tasted something good in its forelegs, it usually won't let go until it has killed its victim.

18. A few final words about the steeder: the creature is listed in both the *Monstrous Manual™* book (under "Spider," on pages 326-327) and in the *Monstrous Compendium Volume Two* (under "Dwarf, Duergar"). A quick perusal of these works will show a number of differences in the steeder's statistics. No doubt this is a result of trying to generalize the listings for the giant water spider, flying spider, giant trap door spider, and steeder into one listing in the *Monstrous Manual* book. While this saves space and allows a greater variety of monsters to be included in its pages, it doesn't accurately reflect the steeder's statistics as shown in the earlier work. For those interested in the comparison, here are the differences between the steeder's statistics:

	MC2	M M
INTELLIGENCE:	Non- (0)	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil	C
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	2-20	1-8
MOVEMENT:	12	3, Web 12
HIT DICE:	4	4+4
THAC0:	17	15
SIZE:	M (4' high, 8' long)	L(8'-12' diameter)
MORALE:	11	13
XP VALUE:	120	975

The steeder works well no matter which set of statistics are used, although "purists" should note that the ones from *Monstrous Compendium Volume 2* are probably more "accurate." The Intelligence rating of "Low (5-7)" should be used, however, as steeders are intelligent enough to serve as riding mounts, a fact agreed upon in both works. Also, if using the statistics from the *Monstrous Manual* book, disregard the movement rate. Steeders cannot move In webs and have a movement rate of 12; this is mentioned in the description of steeders on page 327.

Body parts from steeders can be used in the creation of *slippers of spider climbing* and *boots of striding and springing*. They are not used in creating *cloaks of arachnidia* because of the steeder's lack of a dangerous venom and its inability to travel over or to produce webs.

Bloodthirsty

THE ECOLOGY of the Stirge

by Tim Richardson

illustrated by Tom Baxa

It should have been a time of celebration for the settlers of Albanner. The warm, moist breezes of spring swept away the lingering cold of winter. The houses and cabins of Albanner now stood open, embracing the new spring. Rows of corn and chew-leaf had been planted, and they thirstily drank the sunny rays of Father Tirador. It should have been a time of joy, not of mourning.

So Jenner of Northreich reflected as he looked down upon the settlement. Those brave farmers, induced by a forbearance of the Kings tax, had left the lands of the North Realm, which slept nearly eight months beneath the bitter snows of Northor, Heart of Winter. The longer growing season of the south drew first the farmers, and then the shepherds, who would buy less fodder for their flocks. Jenner, a soldier from the King's own garrison in Northreich, had been sent here to protect them. And he did—or had.

They had lived through the winter, had endured the floods brought by the melting snows, and had driven away the great herds of frost-tail deer that threatened their precious corn and profitable chew-leaf. Jenner and his handful of men-at-arms, carrying steel and the Kings Writ, now faced a more horrible, unseen enemy, one who fed not on crops but on shepherds.

With a sigh, Jenner resumed his climb up and away from the village, into the grassy hills where the shepherds watched over their flocks. He met Legrin just above the village. Legrin was an old Northman, worn by the winds of time but yet unbroken. He chewed a large wad of the leaf grown in the village below and spat it over his left shoulder upon taking Jenner's hand.

"Dal kahr," Jenner said, offering the traditional Realmic greeting.

Legrin nodded and spat again. "There are many dead now, Realmsman," was his only reply.

Jenner nodded grimly.

The first was the boy, Heb. Found him with a few of his flock—entirely drained of blood. They had puncture wounds, like an awl would make? Legrin removed a new wad of the slick, green leaf, put it in his mouth, and chewed thoughtfully for a moment. Motioning for Jenner to follow, the Northman walked as he related the terrible story.

"We lost sixteen sheep—all drained o' blood with them queer wounds. There's them that say its the vampire, but I never heard of one that drank from one great tooth, or one that et sheep's blood neither." Jenner nodded his agreement. "It's no vampire. And it doesn't sound like anything I've ever heard of-or seen."

"Three nights ago," Legrin continued, "we found seven bodies—the whole Tallman family from old Gebrik to little Saysha. She hadn't even seen her second summer yet.

"Curious thing was that none o' their sheep was touched.[2] That's how Enlieg found 'em—their whole flock jest up and wandered into his pastures. And they was livin' quite a pace from where we first found Heb." The Northman gestured with his head, indicating a rocky crest rising above the other hills. Jenner immediately recognized its strategic value: high ground, easily defensible. To a shepherd, though, it was just a place to watch over the flocks.

"They call it 'Heb's Crown' now," Legrin said quietly. "We got excited then, seven of our own done in like that, and we was …" the old man swallowed a bit of the leaf, and his tale was momentarily halted by a throat-tearing cough. After a moment, he continued, ". . . wonderin' what to do an' all, when Val, one of the boys, came back, bloody as the day he was born."

Two young men, Val and Nured, had taken it upon themselves to explore Heb's Crown, hoping to find some clue that would explain the death of their friend. Only one still lived who could tell of their gruesome discovery.

Jenner clung to the vague hope that Legrin's description of the wounds was an exaggeration, but he had grown to learn that Northmen were incapable of hyperbole. It was an accurate, if not understated, account of the true events.

It was near sunset when the pair reached Commonfield, a large and relatively flat plain northeast of Albanner. Ten large, make-shift shelters housed the two or threescore shepherds. Nearly three hundred sheep milled about, creating an odor impossible to describe, and only slight less easy to tolerate.[3] "Well," remarked Legrin unnecessarily, "here we are."

The pair picked their way down onto the plain, and Jenner risked a look back toward the rock formation that overlooked the other pasture. It was about half a day's walk from Commonfield,

1. The wounds left by a stirge are very distinctive, anyone who has encountered them before will not fail to recognize them again.

2. Stirges prefer the richer blood of omnivores, especially humans and demi-humans. Their typical prey is a herd or flock of herbivores—like sheep or deer—but they will quickly change their feeding habits to accommodate their preferred prey.

3. Stirges have an acute sense of smell that allows them to locate and track herds of their prey—like sheep or deer. Their superior eyesight and infravision also assist them in hunting their prey.

probably not much faster on a horse because of the rougher terrain above the plain. The men of the camp were standing around watching the women load more wood into a pile that, when the sun set in the west, would burn brightly long into the night. They watched Jenner carefully as he approached, their stern faces grim and protective. Their weapons were those of shepherds: wooden cudgels and stout clubs. Jenner doubted that there was any blade larger than a knife in all of Albanner.

"Dal kahr," Jenner said, offering the first of the men his hand. The Northmen muttered among themselves, and some spat wads of chew-leaf over their left shoulders. None took the offered hand. Perhaps, Jenner mused, that was how Northmen said hello. He chose to act as if he believed it.

"My friends, I am here to help you. Good Legrin has been kind enough to explain the trouble you face, and I give you my word as the Kings man that I will make it so that none of you, nor your families, need fear any more." All in all, Jenner was rather impressed by the confidence he displayed.

The men looked hopeful for a moment and shuffled their feet. "Don't stand around like ninny-goats!" admonished Legrin sternly. "It'll be dark soon, so see to your folk!" They dispersed quickly, moving with the confidence of men who knew that something was being done to protect them against the terrors of the night. One Northman stepped forward, nodded shortly to Legrin, and spoke in a deep, rich voice. "I am called Gillum. My boy Val is the one who saw the demons."

"What!" exclaimed Legrin and Jenner almost at once.

Gillum nodded once and spat over his shoulder, a curious custom whose meaning Jenner was becoming impatient to learn. "My boy, Val, said that the things were demons. Had faces like swords, with huge glittering eyes. Little ones, with wings, they hung upside down in caves like bats, but they gots two pairs o' talons. He's got the marks on his back to prove it. He said there's more'n a thousand of 'em livin' beneath Heb's Crown."

"Gillurn, yer mouth is runnin' far today. You know there ain't no demons, and they're sure ain't no thousand of 'em. Why, they'd have killed us all by now."

"That's what my boy says, Legrin. And I'll not have you callin' him a liar." Gillum bristled at the older man's rebuke.

"Gentlemen," interrupted Jenner, "let's fight against the things, not over them."

The Northmen regarded the Realmic soldier for a moment as their mouths worked away at the chew-leaf. "He's right. Gillum, accept muh apologies." The two men spat in their hands and shook on it. Jenner barely repressed a shudder of revulsion. "I'm thinkin' that you'll want to talk to the boy," added Legrin.

"Yes, I think that would be wise," replied Jenner, moving to follow Gillum to the center row of tents. The large tent was made of wool, a plentiful commodity among the Northmen of Albanner. Treated with protective oils, the roof was rendered practically waterproof, and the thicker woolen walls retained heat during the winter. An old woman, bent with age, was applying a poultice to a young man stripped to his small-clothes lying on a make-shift bed. The "boy" was larger and more muscular than his father—a tall young man who showed the promise of a warrior. He was pale and his breathing quick and shallow.

"Val," spoke Jenner softly. "My name is Jenner of Northreich. I am one of the Kings men. Do you remember me?" The boy nodded weakly. "That's good. Your father and old Legrin tell me that you are a very brave young man—that you went into the cavern under Heb's Crown to find out what has been attacking your flocks." Val nodded again, wincing at the pain of recollection. "Tell me what you saw, Val."

The boy opened his eyes, which, despite his grievous wounds, were bright and alert. The entrance to the caves below the Crown was low, sir. It ran straight, though. Me an' Nured was wadin' ankle-deep in guano—I thought it was bats at first, and said as much to Nured. Still, though, by the light of the torches it looked awfully red—and it was goopier, more like mud.[4]

"I think it was pools of blood, drippin' from their fang, sir." This quiet assertion startled Jenner visibly, earning him a stern glance from the old lady. "Well, sir, the demons was hung from the ceiling, like bats. Only they wasn't bats. They had one long tooth, long as a dirk. Their eyes was big and round, like a bugs'. They had four talons, small, but real sharp. Them's what they use to hang on to you whiles they drain the blood right out. They got wings, too—feather ones, though, not like a bats. That's how I knowed they weren't none."

Jenner calmly examined the boy's wound. The claw marks were on the boys' back, indicating that the creatures were small. It was the "stab" wound that was the worst; it was several inches deep and did indeed look like it had been made by an awl or poniard. The wounds and the boys story confirmed Jenner's fear—he was dealing with something completely unknown to him and the Northmen.

The boy spoke again, "A few of the things flew at us right away and got me. Nured splattered one with his club and almost knocked my head clean off. That's when we started to run-but Nured fell and half a dozen of the things was on 'im before I could turn around.5 Two more stuck on me, one on my thigh, and this 'un here." He indicated the wound Jenner had examined. "Well, sir, my father says I did right by leavin' Nured . . ."

"You did, Val," Jenner said, before even the father could rumble his assent. In the corner of his eye, he saw the old woman smile her approval. "You needed to tell what you had discovered—don't blame yourself for Nured's death. You may have saved the life of everyone here."

"That's what my father said . . ."

"Just tell me what else happened, Val. Everything you can remember."

Well, sir, it was late afternoon, and the sun was still out. I managed to tear the one thing off my leg and ran as fast as I could until I collapsed." Jenner marvelled at the boy, as he noticed the chunks of flesh and muscle missing from his thigh—the boy had indeed torn it away with considerable strength. "I yanked its sticker out, but I couldn't pull it off my shoulder. I jest fell down on top of it, holdin' its sticker—it was soft, and I couldn't break it—so I held it away from

4. Stirges move around a great deal in following their prey, but often return to the same roosting sites year after year, where they may remain for as long as a season. Though not migratory, they will follow the migratory patterns of their primary prey. Common stirges defecate in their roosting areas, and, as Val noted, their guano is blood-red and tends to be more liquid than solid, The protein-rich guano, over time, hardens into a clay-like substance that, if broken or granulated, makes excellent fertilizer for crops.

5. A stirge colony can communicate simple ideas—like danger and where to find food and mates—through movement and a series of chirps. Stirges can and will alert the rest of the colony to danger and potential food. Often, as was the case with Nured, several will attack one target. Stirges do not attempt to assist each other like a wolf pack in any coordinated way, but their superior sense of smell allows them to recognize the smell of wounded prey. me smell of blood and fear draws the monsters to attack. Once the stirge has attached to their prey they ignore everything but a direct attack until they have drunk their fill.

me. Eventually it let go and flew off, back into the cave.[6]

"I don't know what they are, sir, but I sure hope you can do somethin' about 'em."

"Don't you worry, Val," Jenner said, standing and grasping the boy's hand. "With what you have told me, we can take care of these things once and for all. You have done a great service for us all, Val, and I shall see you rewarded. You are a good Kings man. It would not surprise me if one day you were to wear steel." Val smiled and returned the grip as well as he was able before the soldier left, followed by Gillum and Legrin.

Outside, Gillum spoke. "You did my son a great honor, Realmsman. Thank you."

"I spoke the truth, Gillurn." Jenner considered the problem and made a quick decision. "I will stay tonight with you and your flocks. Tomorrow I will return to the village for the rest of my men, and we will either seal the cave or destroy these things. In the meantime, I would like to examine the sheep that were killed by these creatures."

The dry husks of the livestock had many wounds, all of which matched those of the boy Val. The blood had been drained completely. Jenner was glad that the bodies of the Tallmans had already been cremated; even his own military objectivity was shaken by the off-handed way Legrin mentioned how quickly the bodies had burned—"jest like dry kindlin'."

The night passed without incident.[7] Jenner was pleased to see that Gillum had spread the news of his words to Val. The Northmen were a very patriotic people who revered their King. His remark that someday Val would wear steel was an honor to all of them.

Jenner left Commonfield shortly after dawn, arriving in Albanner just after midday. No sooner had the Realmsman arrived than he was accosted by Roveer d'Alindanzar, an Alian merchant who had underwritten much of the cost of the new settlement. Alians, hailing from the great jungles far to the southwest were preeminent merchants of the lands, known as much for their financial acumen as their untrustworthiness. Roveer, like most Alians, was a small, thin man whose dark hair and copper skin made him stand out among the tall, fair-haired men of the North Realm. His eyes were bright, almost feral, and his face seemed to wear a mask that was always smiling. "Well, Jenner? What foul beast is plaguing the imaginations of our shepherds this week?"

"Roveer, I haven't the time to fence words with you today. They, we, have a serious problem. Some kind of bat that drains the blood of its prey."

The Alian looked skeptical. "Come now, Jenner! Surely the crags of Albanner are not infested by vampire bats?"

"I doubt it—unless there's a variety with only a single fang as long as a dirk."

Suddenly Roveer was all business, "What do you mean?"

Jenner, suppressing his irritation, briefly explained the boy's story and his own examination of the carcasses. "I can only guess what kind of monsters these are, but they've got to be destroyed if Albanner is going to make it. These things are killing our people."

"Indeed, they are, Jenner. Indeed they are." The little man looked thoughtful and continued, "I believe these things are spear-beak[8]—you would call them stirges in this part of the world."

"Stirges?"

"Yes, yes," said Roveer with a sigh of exasperation. "They're some bizarre hybrid of bird and insect.[9] A large mosquito with feathers, if you will. In the jungles of Ali they grow to be quite large, and I understand they may be poisonous—a toxin that deadens the nerves, like a leech.[10] In the deserts, I hear there exists a wingless variety with six legs—more like an insect than a bird, really. It hops after its prey, you see.[11] In any case, they drink until they're full of blood, then sleep for a few days until they're hungry again."

The Alian now had Jenner's full and undivided attention. "The ones you describe seem quite small, compared to the Alian spear-beaks, but I imagine they are the same in most other respects." The little man looked seriously at Jenner, You'll have to kill them, you know. It could be quite dangerous to my investment here."

Resisting an urge to slap the man, Jenner growled, "I had reached a similar conclusion. My men and I are going to the cave tonight."

With a moments pause, Roveer shook his head, "No, Jenner. I can't permit it. You wouldn't reach the cave until after sunset, and the spear-beaks are most active at night. They live in colonies, you see, which may contain several scores of the beasts. During the day, they are more sluggish, and you and your steel-encased compatriots should find them easy work. Make sure you put on as much steel as possible; the little monsters have a talent for finding the chinks in your armor. They can sense heat, and their eyes are very large, like an insects, giving them keen sight, even in total darkness."

"You will not permit —"

"Oh, settle down, Realmsman. You know as well as I do that I'm making sense. You'll need to brief your men, pack up some supplies, and go traipsing off across the high plains to get to the . . . Crown, you said?" Jenner sputtered something incomprehensible. "I think I'll go along, too. Now, don't object, my friend. It is my duty to all of Albanner."

Jenner couldn't seem to speak, but just stood, quivering in astonishment.

"Shouldn't you notify the villagers here?" prompted Roveer. "I can only assume the shepherds are taking precautions, but it would be a grave disservice if the spear-beaks were to attack here tonight instead of the flocks. I guess we should have paid more attention to the deer herds."

"What?"

The deer, Jenner, the deer. The spear-beaks range for up to a full mile, and they must have been feeding on the frost-tails. You do recall those carcasses we found that were freshly killed, but all dried out? And no meat missing—just the blood! We really should have noted that

6. Stirges need not always be killed to be removed. At the DM's discretion, he may allow a Strength check or appropriate saving throw to rip the creature from his body (causing damage) or, with successive Strength checks or saving throws, to pull the stirge's penetrating proboscis from his flesh. Make a normal Morale check when this occurs, if the stirge fails, it drops off and seeks a new victim. Note that the victim should not be able to attack with a weapon while holding back a stirge. This struggle will prove to be more exciting than your average hack-and-slash session, particularly for low-level or green adventurers.

Stirges, except in the cases above, check for Morale as a group, which is higher (10) than the individual Morale listed in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL®* tome, as long as half the colony is still alive.

7. Stirges will sleep off the effects of their feeding as per the guidelines in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome.

8. Stirges in various campaign worlds have many different names and the DM is encouraged to invent his own for the campaign. "Spear-beaks," "blood-birds," and "devil-birds" are common names for the stirge.

9. Stirges are a queer hybrid of bird and insect. It is believed by sages who study fantastical creatures that they were originally crafted by vampiric wizards to throw hunters of the undead off the track. Others surmised that they were created long ago by a group of evil wizards, who gathered them by the millions, like locusts, and set the monsters on the enemy armies arrayed against them. The remnants of these stirges adapted themselves to the wild and spread across the lands.

10. The larger jungle variety of stirge does possess such a toxin, as is alluded to in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL, VOLUME I.* The statistics for this creature appear on page 46.

11. The desert stirge is described on page 45.

earlier, but there were always so many other pressing concerns. The frost-tails were supporting the entire colony."

"Well, of course!" Jenner spat. Quickly he regained control of himself, and, at the same time, cursed the unwholesomely clever Alian. "All right, Roveer, we'll do it your way. I'll send a runner to let the shepherds know what we intend to do, until then, keep out of the way."

Roveer smiled, "Of course, my dear friend." Jenner glared at him for a final time before spinning on his heel and shouting for his men-at-arms. Roveer was then left to his own reflections. The spear-beaks, he reasoned, hadn't fed for nearly seven days—since the Tallmans. There couldn't be all that many of the creatures, or else greater numbers of people and livestock would have been lost. Seven days. Still smiling, Roveer began to whistle happily.

The very next day, as the fiery globe that was Father Tirador inched above the horizon, Jenner led his six Realmsman to the base of Heb's Crown. Little Roveer, the Alian merchant, trailed behind on his stout pony. They reached the base of the crown just before midday and quickly located the cavern.

"All right, Realmsmen. The creatures will be hanging from the ceiling. Once we get inside—load the crossbows. We'll fire off one volley, and that should bring the house down." Jenner grinned tightly and continued, "If one of you gets stuck, fall back immediately! Good Roveer will cut it off with his blade."

The Alian looked ridiculous—covered head-to-toe with leather armor, leaving only his thin face visible. He drew a nasty-looking dirk and added, "Don't try to be brave, my friends. The longer they stay attached to you, the weaker you become."

"Right," agreed Jenner to the assenting murmurings of the men. "Let's go."

The eight men carefully entered the cavern, and were instantly assaulted by the scent of blood. The cavern floor, as Val had said, was deep with the creatures' blood-red guano. Roveer paused to ignite his torch, and, seconds after it was lit, a loud chirping, similar to that of a cricket, echoed through the cavern.[12]

Crossbows at the ready, Jenner and his men advanced with caution as the chirping grew louder. It did indeed sound like a thousand of the monsters awaited them. Suddenly, a number of the creatures flew down upon the advancing men. Two quarrels were loosed before Jenner could yell, "Hold your fire! We won't hit them in the air! Spread out and draw your steel!"

"Don't yell!" screamed Roveer, forgetting himself in the excitement. "They'll pinpoint us and the whole colony will attack!" He hoped fervently that the spear-beaks had fed last evening, and that most would be sluggish and slow to attack.[13]

Almost as one man, the trained Realmsmen drew their swords; four of the monsters were sliced out of the air in quick succession. They were slow and clumsy fliers—bloated with the blood of recent victims. They quite literally burst, splattering blood all over the armored men. Quickly, the warriors entered the main chamber. Val had indeed exaggerated the number of the beasts, there were little more than a score of the beasts hanging above. They were all very awake—the chirping in the cave was deafening. Seven quarrels were loosed, and seven stirges died. The flock dropped, as one, and attacked. The fight was brutal and short. The stirges, slowed by their heavy meals, could not elude the singing steel of the Realmsmen. One of the older men, Sarich, slipped in the guano and fell to his knees, exposing the back of his neck to the blood-suckers. No sooner had one of the stirges attached himself, than Roveer leapt forward, applying his torch to the bird, whose feathers became engulfed in flame as it released its death grip.[14]

Sarich, only singed, looked at the Alian with something akin to respect. There were no other wounded; the stirges had been slow and seemed to have trouble locating a target for attack. Jenner was pleased with the afternoon's results. "Excellent, gentlemen! Let's make a casual sweep of the cavern, make sure we haven't missed any, and then get out of here!" The soldiers responded with a mighty cry and set about making a periphery search.[15] Another pair of soldiers hefted a guano-encrusted corpse—Nured the shepherd. His father, Jenner knew, would want the body for a proper burial. Roveer handed his torch to Sarich and left the cavern, tracing his way back to the base of Heb's crown.

It was still early afternoon when Roveer emerged and surveyed the valley of Albanner. Turning in the other direction, toward Commonfield, he noted a large column of smoke. Smiling quietly to himself, he began to peel off the leather armor. After a few moments, Jenner himself emerged from the cave, carrying one of the creatures. His pleased smile and triumphant eyes did not move the Alian to guilt, but rather to curiosity and wonder that a warrior could be so naive.

The stirge had a wing-span of about two feet, and its entire body was covered with rust-red feathers. The "beak" hung limp from its face; when feeding the sharp point was plunged into the victim's flesh with the stirges' strong neck muscles. Its talons were a milky yellow. "Ugly, aren't they?" noted Roveer, indicating the bulbous eyes. "Just like a fly."

"Roveer," began Jenner seriously, "I'll confess I don't like you all that much, but we are all indebted to you for the knowledge of these stirges. You've saved lives."

"We were lucky that the spear-beaks had fed. It made our jobs easy." The Alian looked meaningfully at the smoke rising from Commonfield.

Jenner saw that smoke, and instantly understood—"jest like dry kindlin'" is how Legrin had put it. "You knew they would feed last night," he said in a quiet voice.

Roveer, however, was all smiles. "Now, my dear Jenner, how would I have known?" So saying, the Alian walked off to retrieve his hobbled pony.

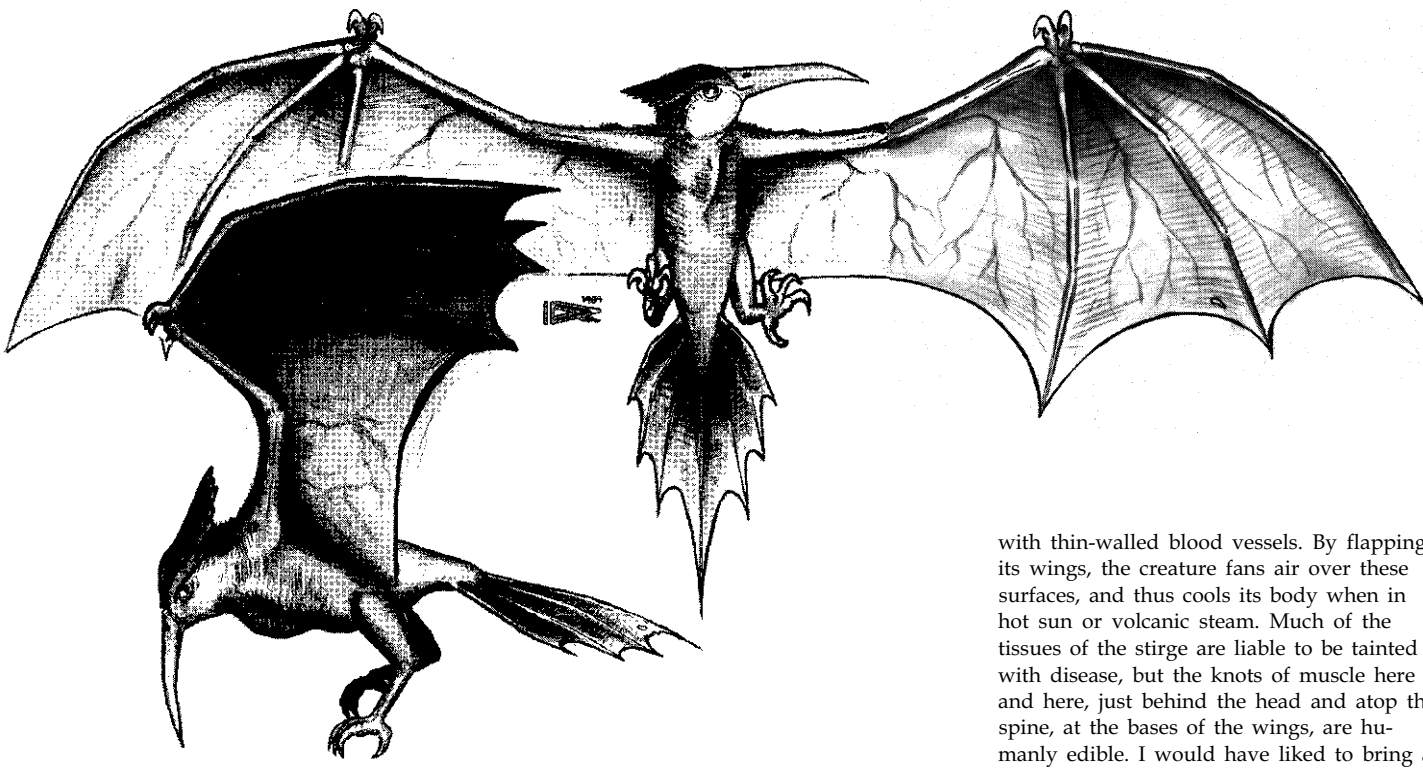
Tim Richardson now resides in Virginia, where he is interning with the Senate Republican Policy Committee in Washington, DC.

12. The chirping alerts the others to danger and potential prey. Stirges who are "sleeping off" their latest meal are slow to react. See also note 13 below.

13. In addition to the surprise roll penalty described in the *MM,* I recommend penalizing their initiative roll by -2, and reducing their THAC0 to that of a 2-Hit Die creature. The maneuverability class of stirges drops to D following a full feeding.

14. Directly applied, flame always forces a stirge to release its prey and make a Morale check, but the flame must be applied to the attached creature, which inevitably damages the victim as well.

15. A more thorough search might have located a few clutches of eggs. Like birds, female stirges lay eggs—between four and 12 at a time. They are typically buried by the female in the guano of the colony's roosting area. Mating among stirges is a communal affair, with many males and females mating repeatedly twice a year—once in the early spring and again in late summer/early fall. The parents leave the eggs buried and abandon them. The eggs hatch in about three months. less than 20% survive into adulthood, feeding off the guano itself for several days until they are strong enough to fly and search for food on their own. Often, the young will kill each other for food. The young that do survive will either form a new colony or join the next one that enters the roosting area. Stirges reach full growth after about eight months and can have a life-span of five to six years.



The ecology of the stirge

by Ed Greenwood

From an address by the naturalist Elmdaerle to the assembled Guild of Naturalists in Arabel:

". . . Understandably, little research has been done on the life and habits of that disgusting and dangerous creature, the stirge. I have endeavored to learn what I can of them, and have, as you can see, brought along a specimen.

"No, no, it's quite dead. . . . The stirge, as we all know, subsists entirely on a diet of blood, and will attack all warm-blooded mammals, although it seems to prefer man. Quite often, stirge swarms follow herds of domestic or nomadic animals — cattle, caribou, and sheep being most often afflicted; and where such herds are, one should always expect to meet, and be prepared for, these little fellows. Caravans, traveling pilgrims, and even armed war-bands have been harried through wilderness areas by large flights of stirges; we've all heard the gruesome stories of drained, white victims and a few lucky, narrow escapes. I've studied these creatures for some time, to get at the truth — and the tales and legends, I fear, are not far wrong.

"In flight, the stirge is highly maneuverable[1], and groups of them are capable of cooperative unison attacks and mid-air actions. As you can see, it is really little more than an expandable blood-bag with wings, eyes, and claws — for clinging onto prey — and a long, hollow needle-beak or proboscis, admirably suited for drawing blood. This specimen appears to be of about average size, measuring just under one foot from top of head to tip of tail, and with a wingspan of just less than three feet. The wings may look unusually large, but if they were smaller, the stirge would not be able to maneuver as well as it does when its body cavity is filled with blood.

"The proboscis, properly treated, can serve as a sharp but brittle stabbing weapon, much favored, I am told, by goblins and similar unpleasant creatures. When the stirge is alive, the proboscis contains at its tip a supply of clear liquid, produced in the stirge's body and steadily replenished; this is an anti-coagulant, which mixes with a victim's blood to keep it from clotting in the proboscis or in the stomach where it ends up. The stirge, because of its diet, can transmit diseases — malaria, for instance — from one victim to the next.[2]

"Ingested blood passes straight into the stomach. This serves as a storage bag which the creature always tries to keep at least partially full. From this reservoir the creature draws small quantities into lesser cavities located just beneath its backbone. There its body processes convert blood sugar into body energy, and ingested blood into plasma balanced for its own bodily use, so that it can replace its own lost blood and hasten its recovery from wounds.[3]

"The interior of its wings is interlaced with thin-walled blood vessels. By flapping its wings, the creature fans air over these surfaces, and thus cools its body when in hot sun or volcanic steam. Much of the tissues of the stirge are liable to be tainted with disease, but the knots of muscle here and here, just behind the head and atop the spine, at the bases of the wings, are humanly edible. I would have liked to bring a prepared, sample meal with me tonight, but I was unable to procure fresh stirges — and once a stirge's legs have stiffened after death, no part of its body is safe to eat.

"The creature's claws are not strong enough to be effective weapons for the beast, but they are firmly embedded in its legs and at the midpoint of the leading edge of its wings, and they enable the creature to maintain; tenacious hold once it has attached itself to its prey. The claws serve some cloth-makers and workers for carding wool, brushing away hairs from garments, and so on. They are not strong enough for the fanciful uses attributed to them in the tales of thieves — they are far too brittle and small to serve as grappling hooks for climbing-lines.[4]

"Stirges swarm to attack prey, which is why they are so feared — one can be a formidable foe, but a large group can be deadly to even well-defended creatures. Stirges usually lair in forests, disused castles, or caverns, and may incidentally possess treasure from victims who have fallen to them therein, or from hoards laid down before their arrival, but they are not intelligent enough to value, or bargain with, treasure as we know it. A ranger of my acquaintance tells me that stirges in deep woods like to drive prey into tangled ravines, so that the victims cannot escape readily, or find steady footing, room, and balance to defend themselves properly — and any treasure carried by these unfortunates may well be found among their bones at the bottoms of these ravines.

"Although a thirsty swarm of stirges may seem endless when they're all swooping down at you, typically only three to thirty nest together in a colony, from which they fly out in all directions to find food, usually in groups of three. By means of wagging their probosci, stirges can communicate that

food or a dangerous enemy has been found, its direction, size or strength, and a degree of excitement or urgency regarding the desired reaction of the whole swarm. If a flight of three stirges finds prey, they will circle to observe it, and then two will harry, chase, or if it is strong merely fly along observing it, while the third stirge flies for home. Its message will spread via all the stirges it meets, and to all who call in home at the nest, and they will gather in a group to seek out the prey and kill it. Small prey is merely attacked by the hunting threesome for their own gain, and they give its location only later, if blood yet remains for their fellows.[5]

"Winter cold does not seem to affect stirges in any way, and they breed freely throughout the year. They reproduce by live birth, in litters of one to three young, with a gestation period of six months. Males and females are outwardly identical in size and appearance to our eyes. The tiny young cannot fly properly, but only glide, and are carried on the mother's back for up to four months, until their blood-drinking from prey[6] provides sufficient nourishment for them to grow to about half of adult size. Then they can maneuver on their own, and in another three months at most they reach full adult size.

"I suppose that most of you have never seen a young stirge, and I regret that I could not procure one to bring as a specimen. The adults, however, you all should know: pests feared by man and beast alike. My colleagues Ainsbrith and Bremaerel of Westgate are experimenting with poisoning stirges, but so far report limited success. Just as they are apparently immune to the diseases they transmit, so are they unaffected by the same poisons that harm us; the creatures seem both adaptable and of rugged constitution.

"And that, fellow naturalists, is a brief look at the stirge. As more information becomes available, I will share it with the group, and I will expect each of you to do the same."

Notes:

1. Stirges are flight class A; if their wings are damaged and/or they are fully bloated with blood, and/or they have only 1 or 2 hit points, they may be reduced to Flight Class B or C and 16" or 12" aerial movement rate, at the DM's option. A mother with young on her back (see text and note 6 below) is penalized even further, dropping down one more flight class and another 4" in movement rate, compared to what she would be if she were not so encumbered.

2. Diseases contracted from stirges will almost always affect the "blood/blood-forming organs" of the body (see DMG), and be of the *acute* type. There is a 5% chance for any adult stirge to transmit a disease to its victim on a successful hit.

3. Stirges can always regenerate lost body parts (over a period of 1-3 months) or heal even the most severe wounds (replacing up to 4 lost hit points every 24 hours), so long as their heads and spines remain relatively undamaged, and food — i.e., fresh blood — is plentiful.

4. Stirge claws resemble the better types of fish-hooks, in that they are both hooked and barbed, curving to a point, which has a side-fin or point projecting backward from its tip toward its shaft, in the same way that the edges of an arrowhead form two points facing back toward the flight-feathers. In a live (un-stiffened) stirge, these barbs are not rigid, but can be retracted into the claw by means of strong cartilage-and-muscle linkages — thus, a stirge can hook itself into a victim through gaps in metal armor or by

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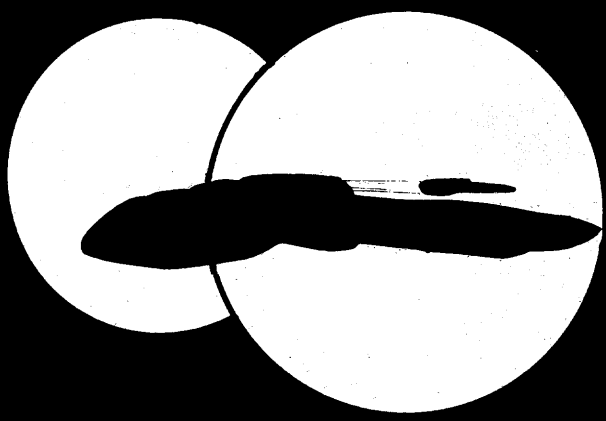

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simply piercing leather or lighter clothing, so that it cannot be torn free except by also tearing away parts of its victim's flesh (1-2 points of damage per claw torn out, 4 claws per stirge). In determining whether or not a stirge's attack is successful, consider a missed "to hit" roll as indicating that the creature's claws failed to latch on to the intended victim or victim's clothing/armor. If a stirge hits successfully, it has grabbed on with its claws and struck with its proboscis in the same round; generally, a stirge's proboscis can strike into or through any surface on a victim that its claws can attach to. Immediately after death, a stirge's muscles relax, and it ceases both to drain further blood and to hold its barbs in — but if it is not removed from its victim within 4-6 turns, and is allowed to stiffen while attached, the barbs will have been extended again as the stirge's muscles convulse, and the body of the stirge will then *have* to be torn free of its victim, doing damage as specified above. If it is attached to armor, but not flesh, then the creature will be easily shaken or pulled loose by normal movement when its muscles are relaxed.

5. As many as six stirges can comfortably (for the stirges, that is) attach themselves to the body of one man or other M-sized creature at the same time. Sometimes more than six will do so, but usually only if the entire swarm is very thirsty, if the victim is a solitary creature, and if the victim has enough blood (i.e., hit points) so that each of the attackers can drain at least a little blood. A charitable DM might rule that each stirge after the third one attacking a single target does so at a cumulative -1 "to hit" (-2 for the fifth, -3 for the sixth, etc.), because the target is, in effect, smaller since other stirges are already attached.

Stirges will attack the trunk of a victim's body in preference to the extremities, since the target area is larger, and those who sink their claws into a victim's back will be virtually immune to counterattack by the victim himself. A companion can try to attack the stirges on a victim's body, but if he misses such an attack and rolls 4 or more under the number needed "to hit," he hits the victim instead of the stirge, and the weapon strike will do half normal damage (round down) to the victim. The first successful attack by a stirge will be upon a victim's back 66% of the time (4 in 6 chance), or else on the front of the torso. If the first attack hits the front, the second successful attack will always be on the back. After that, other stirges will attach themselves to the extremities — but must always hit the victim's original armor class (not AC 10, even if the arm or leg being hit is unprotected). This "hit location" determination is useful in knowing whether a stirge's claws are embedded in armor or flesh.

A stirge filled with its quota of blood can subsist on that nourishment for as long as 72 hours, and can go another 24 hours without food after that before starving to death. However, stirges will instinctively seek out new prey starting 36 hours after their last "full meal," at which time they will have digested half of their full capacity.

6. Although a litter of young stirges (stirgelings) can number as many as three, a mother can only carry two offspring on her back while they mature. The other one must survive on its own, or perish; other stirges will not transport the young in place of the mother. For every eight stirges encountered in a single group, whether in their lair or otherwise, one of those creatures will be a mother bearing 1 or 2 young on her back. When a mother carrying stirgelings scores a hit on prey, the young on her back can begin attacking on the round following her initial hit. Attacks from young are at -2 "to hit," they do 1 point of initial damage from the proboscis, and drain 1-2 hit points of blood per round on following rounds, becoming sated at 6 hit points' worth. The mother must be detached (killed) to stop the young from draining. If she drains her full quota of blood, she will remove her proboscis but remain attached to the victim until she feels her young also pull free, signaling that they have also drunk their fill. Stirgelings can easily be torn free from their mother's back, and typically have only 1-4 hit points. Stirges who fall from their mother's back without being slain will die unless they can find food (usually by crawling into burrows to attack young woodland animals).

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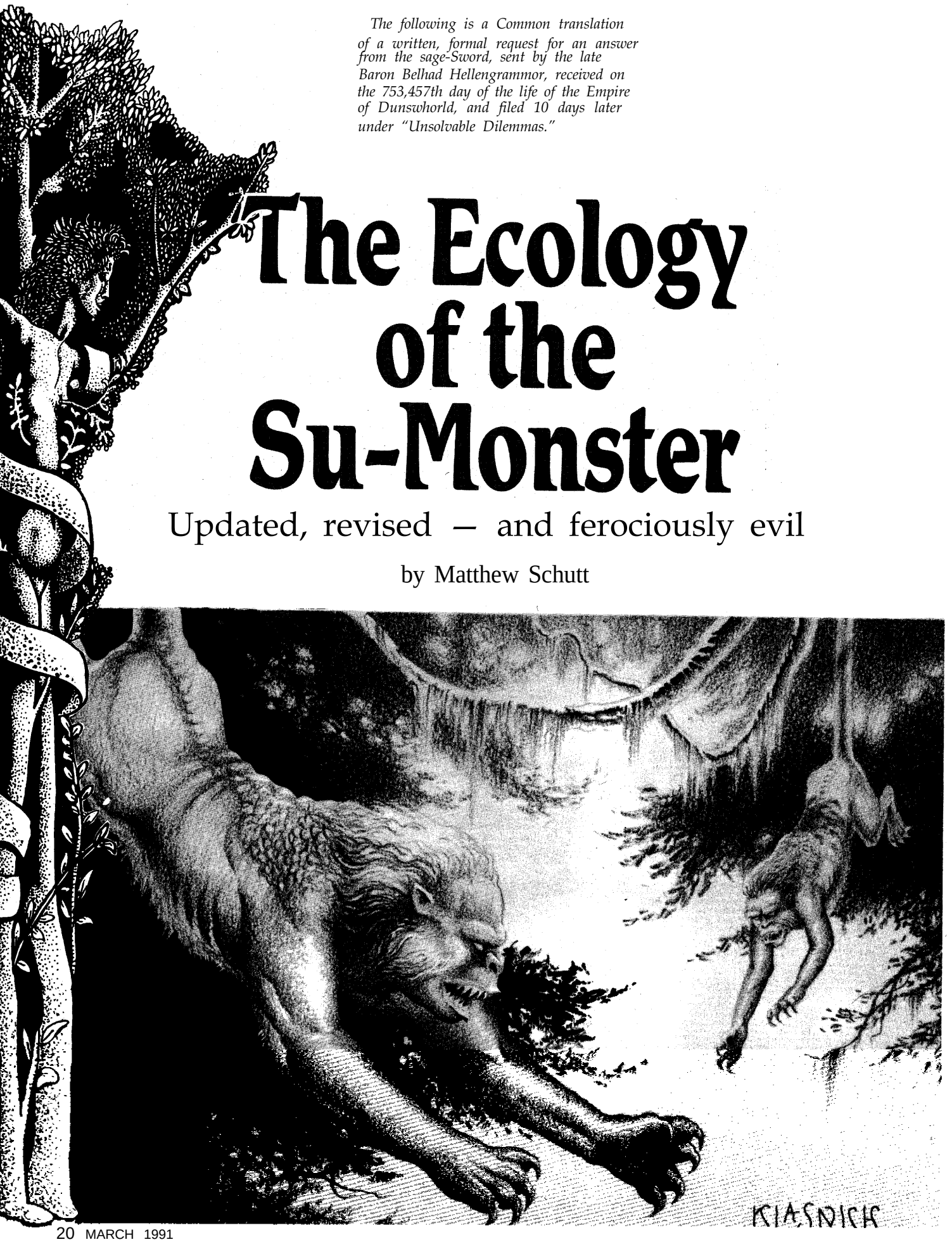
The Ecology of the Su-Monster

Updated, revised — and ferociously evil

by Matthew Schutt



Artwork by Robert Klasnich

Please forgive any niceties of etiquette that may be compromised in this letter, but I am a desperate man and my desperation overrides diplomacy. As required, I will give details of my problem so that you may take into account every possibility in the solution I hope to receive. Also included with this message are the necessary and proper payments to do honor to the personage of an artifact and sage.

My dilemma: My barony has been denoted as "cursed" since its inception, and now the source of this curse is slowly destroying the fabric of this state. The barony of Hellegrammor is largely covered by a rugged, dense expanse of forest. This provides for a breed of people who are rough and well suited for the wilderness, such as trappers and hunters. Still, this race of outdoorsmen is losing a war against the wretched devils that inhabit the woods. The common name for these devils is the su-monster.

I am no naturalist, but knowledge of these creatures is common in Hellegrammor. They are the constant "black news" in every day's report, just as if we were at war or troubled with a plague. Thus, my family members have always been experts on this macabre subject, seeking some weakness to expose, some Achilles' heel to sever and end the monsters' apparent indestructibility. I will tell you what I know of them, gained by stealth and magic.

Su-monsters are filthy gray creatures, like large monkeys, quadrupedal in form, with rounded apelike muzzles and tails the length of their bodies. Adult males are, on the average, 5' long and 110-130 lbs. in weight, while females are slightly smaller and weigh 15-20 lbs. less than males. These monsters can live up to 30 years, but this is the exception rather than the norm. They are almost skeletal and always appear starved.

Their hides are normally dark gray, to blend with the dun of dawn or twilight. This color varies, from the almost black members of the deeper woods to the whitish-gray devils of underground caverns. Their faces and tails are always black, and their paws are a fierce crimson, as if stained by their bloody habits.

Despite their large size, most su-monsters are tree dwellers; even when underground, they prefer to make their lairs near the ceiling. This mode of life would not be possible without their prehensile tails, which are used as extra limbs. This tail is incredibly powerful, capable of holding the monster's own. weight plus that of any large prey, in the grasp of its claws. The monster also uses its tail in balancing, maintaining posture, and even communication. The way a su-monster holds its tail indicates its emotional state and social rank in a complex set of gestures that my family and others have carefully documented.

Su-monsters live in small groups, called cadres or enclaves, though it might be more correct to call them families, for that is what they are in a literal sense. A few families may join together to form larger groups, but the social structure within these groups is loose. Feuds over potential mates, slain prey, territory, etc., occur constantly. They have the same unruly nature as many humanoids: rule by the strongest, usually a male. These leaders never last long, and "leaderless" enclaves are common.

These unholy families are incredible hunting units. They can smell prey over a mile away, and their other senses are also acute. I've noticed that these senses grow even more sensitive in the colder months. They have had long ages to improve their ambushes, which occur primarily at dusk or daybreak. Belying their chaotic nature, su-monsters can organize a complicated ambush, perfectly timed by way of communication with certain calls and howls. These and other factors contribute to the fact that su-monsters, unlike other natural hunters, succeed in hunts more often than they fail.

The su-monster's menu is long, as they are omnivorous and are active all year round. They feed upon just about every animal in the forest, including other carnivores, insects, and humans, demi-humans, and humanoids. Their diet is balanced by grasses, lichens, and berries. Despite their looks, I have never known a su-monster to die of starvation.

Curiously, su-monsters rarely touch any prey in a lame, aged, or sick condition; nor do they touch carrion. They are neither stupid nor compassionate. Rather, I would say they prefer meals that go down fighting, boosting their appetites with combat. Then again, they may just prefer healthier meals. (This strange aversion does not extend to sleeping travelers, though.)

Su-monsters customarily devour a kill in one sitting. What cannot be eaten, they bury, often leaving no trace of their kills. Minor treasures from past kills may be found throughout the forests of my barony, just beneath the grounds surface.

Su-monsters are active sporadically, being neither truly nocturnal nor diurnal. They may sleep 3-4 hours at a time, then stay active for 6-7 hour intervals. They have no preference for day or night, and are able to see just as well at either time with enhanced night vision and color perception by day. When awake, su-monsters are incredibly aware and active—lethargy does not exist in these creatures.

These monsters breed throughout the year and have gestation periods of about 6-7 months, with infants being born singly. The parents are totally devoted to their young. The young depend on the adults for food, protection, and transportation, and stay with their mothers for at least two years. Males never abandon their mates, once chosen, and seem to share an equal burden of protecting and feeding young su-monsters. Transportation is left to the mother; each young clings to its mother's back as she moves from tree to tree. As mammals, the young are fed by the mother's milk.

So far, I have neglected to speak of the su-monsters' deadliest talent. It is complicated to explain, and not much is known of it. This talent is a unique psionic attack, used only in the presence of others possessing psionic talents. Debates over its exact workings have been waged for years, with little progress. At first, it was thought the su-monster had a special psionic defense, reflecting back psionic attacks onto the user. This idea has been abandoned, however, as many non-psionicists and psionicists merely using a defense mode have been attacked in this manner.

Naturalists have examined the opened brains of the few su-monster corpses acquired by royal forces, and found no abnormal organ or development to explain this psionic prowess. The brain is, however, very much like our own, being highly convoluted and nearly the same size. This worries me. Only a tiny percentage of humans have psionics, but all adult su-monsters express this talent. What special knowledge do they possess?

In any case, I am no expert on the art of mind talents, but I do suggest that no psionics be included in your solution. In the past, people have lost their psionic talents, have been enraged to insanity, and have even been killed while attempting to use psionics on su-monsters.

The su-monsters have the intelligence of primates, the cunning of canines, and the physical power of the ursids (bears). Because of its speed, strength, intelligence, high durability and adaptability, ambush techniques, and brain-talent attacks, my great-grandfather referred to the su-monster as the "perfect carnivore." Even the barbarians in the area, who call it "ape-bear" and "wolf-in-the-treetops," show the creature the appropriate amount of fear and respect.

Su-monsters have no natural enemies, and man provides them with only a minor nuisance. Long, vengeful campaigns have been held to wipe out these beasts, but those quests are still unfulfilled. I led a great many of these awful crusades personally, when I learned first-hand the ways of the su-monster. My hunting groups were plagued by an inexhaustible supply of problems, most caused by the monsters themselves.

The search for their dens was not a simple one, though they commonly take the form of hollow trees somewhere near fresh water. Also, our projects were delayed in the winter months, due to a lack of food. The su-monsters had no such trouble, as they had the simple task of seeking out and devouring small animals while they hibernated. Because of their aversion to carrion and ill or wounded animals, traps and poisons would have to be used very cleverly.

Then, of course, there is the su-monster's ambush. Our hunting group lived in a perpetual state of paranoia, with sentries staring wide-eyed into the pressingly thick foliage, trying to discern shadow from su-monster. And then instantly, without warning, a cadre of the creatures would drop from the branches, hanging by their tails, and rake at our ears and bite at our scalps. It was difficult telling who was hunting whom.

The su-monsters also made constant raids on our encampments, usually during the day while we were out "hunting" them. Posting sentries helped little. They also have opposable thumbs, and their clawed digits are so dexterous that they can undo basic latches and uncomplicated knots: Our camps were more often destroyed than set.

Su-monsters move surprisingly well on the ground, so our plan of driving them from their trees with fire was useless. They are also accomplished swimmers, as we discovered when driving the grounded creatures to the shore of a lake, where we thought we had them trapped. And when our dogs gave chase into the water, the su-monsters gleefully took the time to drown the whole pack.

I apologize for the nature lesson and the melodramatics, but I wanted to leave no room for misconceptions. Su-monsters thrive on them. The other lords, my bordering associates, believe I have a useless obsession with these monsters. They, of course, may speak freely and boldly while their lands are hilly, treeless grasslands, no place for a su-monster. They do not receive countless reports from villages and towns about the mayhem caused by these monsters. They don't have to put up with clownish opportunists, who wish to put their greedy hands into the barony's coffers with their special ideas on the su-monster's destruction (all have failed miserably — su-monster harpoons, indeed!) They are not kept awake at night by the sounds of the monsters carrying away livestock and babes with chaotic, cheerful abandon. They did not witness the death of their eldest son, being dragged up into the dark branches while the beasts howled with what seemed to be laughter.

Su-monsters have our intelligence but not our civility. They have no cities of their own but are slowly taking over mine. Many at my court are predicting the day when the su-monsters will swing freely from the chandelier in my own dining hall. If not rushed, your aid may be too late to save my homeland, much less my sanity.

I await your assistance, and remain your respectful and obediant servant, etc.

Appendix & footnotes

The AD&D® 2nd Edition statistics for the su-monster were published in PHBR5 *The Complete Psionics Handbook,* released in February. Some basic statistics are reproduced here: IN average; TR C,Y; AL C(E); AC 6; MV 9; HD 5 +5; THAC0 15; #AT 5; Dmg 1-4/1-4/1-4/1-4/2-8; SA/SD psionics, ambush (-4 to victim's surprise), females can attack hasted for 6 turns if young are attacked, males attack *hasted* for 4 turns if females are attacked; flesh is poisonous (save vs. poison or fall ill, no healing for one week); SZ M; ML 8-10; XP 650; PHBR5. Psionics: Level 2; Dis/Sci/Dev 3/1/3(2/5); A/D PsC,MT,PB/nil (immune to attack); Score = Int; PSPs 120; powers: enhancement (no cost), psionic sense (always on, no cost); 10% chance of one extra science, two extra devotions in psychometabolic discipline. All other notes given in this article are unofficial additions that may be used by DMs as desired.

The su-monster's movement rate of 9 is the same in the trees, on the ground, and in the water. In the trees, though, it may travel at MV 15 for 10 rounds up to three times per day.

Having the constant advantage of elevation, su-monsters may be given a +2 bonus to avoid being surprised in heavily forested regions.

The su-monster's favorite attack method is hanging by its tail and attacking with all four claws, as well as its jaws. One su-monster can normally attack only one target, unless a group of targets are unmounted and crowded within a 5'-diameter area. In this upside-down fashion, the su-monster's attacks are all upon the head and upper body area. If the victim is wearing a helmet, the armor class of the head is the same as that of the body, minus any shield and dexterity bonuses for the first round of attacks. The head is AC 10 (for the first round only; dexterity modifiers apply thereafter) if no helmet is worn.

Another common attack form used by su-monsters, especially when dealing with a small number of opponents, is the use of overbearing and grappling. The creatures dive from their vantage points and attempt to knock victims down, holding them prone for other attackers. If a successful overbearing attack is made on a mounted character, the character takes 1-4 hp damage and must save vs. petrification or be stunned for one round, unable to regain his feet after being thrown. Pummeling attacks are used only rarely by su-monsters and then only with small, hard objects, like large rocks and sticks. They are medium size to determine overbearing attack modifiers. For the rules governing unarmed combat, see pages 59-60 of the 2nd Edition *Dungeon Master's* Guide.

Su-monsters that have lived several generations in or near human or demi-human populations may learn to wield weapons crafted by these populations. A su-monster can use its tail with such care so as to wield either a hand axe, dagger, knife, or sap. The su-monster can attack only once with a weapon and cannot use its claw or bite attacks in rounds in which it uses a weapon. Also, su-monsters suffer a nonproficiency penalty of -3 when a weapon is used.

While they may flee combat, su-monsters do not surrender (they have no understanding of this concept), nor can they be subdued. If captured, a su-monster thrashes in its bonds until it mortally wounds itself. Ω

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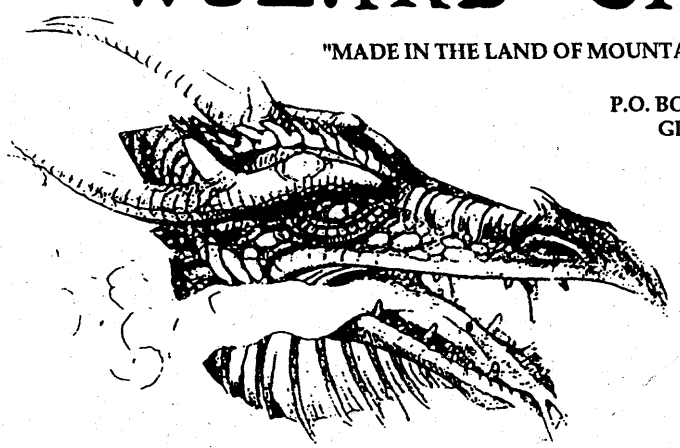

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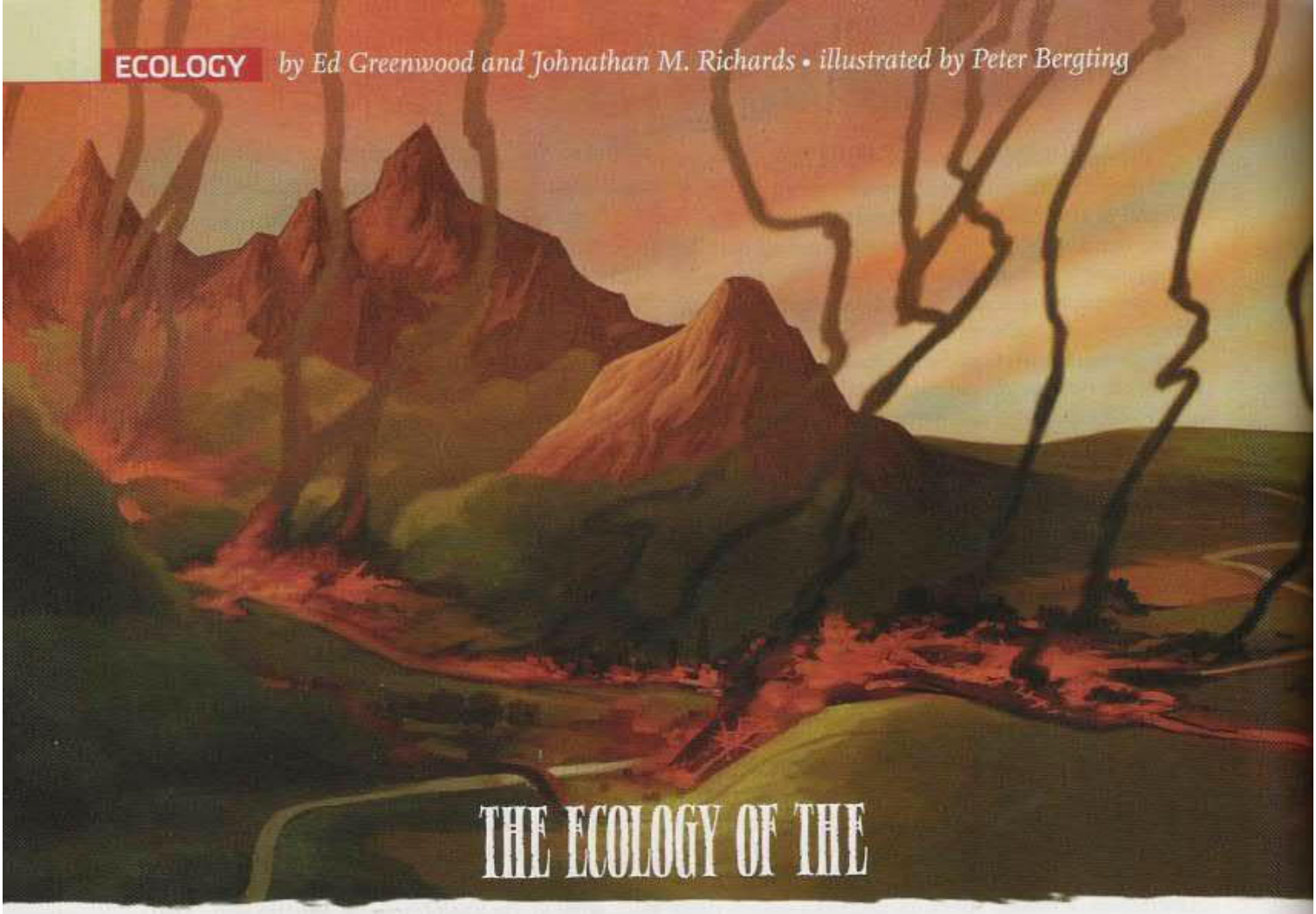

THE ECOLOGY OF THE TARRASQUE

Ancient, ageless, and unstoppable, all know to fear the unrelenting devastation that is the tarrasque. A creature of legend, associated with the greatest of heroes and the darkest of times, little is known of the beast widely held as the greatest of monsters. Reports of the monstrosity's powers and ways to slay it have changed over time, but tales of its brute destructive force remain ever constant. Yet, even the least likely rumors and purported banes are comforts for those who must face that which is ruin unleashed.

TARRASQUE HUNT

Bam-bam-bam! Dreelix slammed the gavel down hard three times in rapid succession. "This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened," he intoned.

He pressed on with uncharacteristic haste: "We'll worry about the normal preliminary stuff later. What I want to know—" and here his eager gaze fell upon Willowquisp, Spontayne, and Buntleby, to whom he had given an assignment the previous meeting—"is what can you tell me about the tarrasque?"

HISTORY OF THE TARRASQUE

Some of the oldest elven records are *ahlrekauth*, or "speaking gems." The few magically-accomplished elves and human loremasters who can awaken such stones hear voices of elves dead for eons, telling tales so old that the worlds those speakers inhabited have themselves died, crumbling to dust around extinguished stars.

One such gem holds an account that might describe the first appearance of a tarrasque, in a kingdom of elves, half-elves, humans, and halflings known as Aeritueur. This is its tale:

The Starfall Shield gleamed and sparkled day and night. The mightiest spell-crafting Aeritueur had ever seen—a wall of devouring magics to keep the Orgog and the Gnawing Ones out, that the valiant strength of our land not be sapped in ceaseless fighting against such marauding monsters. There was much rejoicing, and wonderment at the titanic achievement—particularly after the fell dragon Larau Thoon sneeringly

dived deep into the Starfall, only to be caught, held frozen, and slowly melted away, despite every magic the wyrm hurled. Truly the Starfall was a barrier beyond compare, that girt fair Aeritueur on all of its mountain flanks, to keep us all safe.

Yet at the rising of the third moon after the crafting of the Starfall, something emerged from the dark woods in its most remote location, in the demesne known as Rondaeral, for he who lorded over it. An elf in tatters, with a shattered arm and so wracked with pain that he could scarcely shuffle, appeared out of the dying sparks of a *farstride* spell, to gasp out that Rondaeral was gone, devoured with all his household by a gigantic thing, a beast of great jaws that tore through castle towers and hill-tombs with ease, hurling down Rondaeral's castle and the town of Phondaeray around it.

"Rondaeral is laid waste," said he, "for the creature ate every shining knight who rode against it, without pause nor prudence, as it stalked on down the road devouring every elf, horse, housecat, and passing beast in the hamlets of Tauront, Aladriel's Gate, Narnath, and Luel's Tomb. I fled before it, and in the market-town of Oraunghglieir only just found time enough to prepare the *farstride* casting that brought me here, as it gnawed and clawed its way through the buildings toward me, dashing down shops and turreted mansions alike with great sweeps of its tail. A hail of arrows they hurled against it, and a bright lance of brilliant-armored knights, and it ignored the one and smashed the

KNOWLEDGE OF THE TARRASQUE

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (arcana) check as it relates to the tarrasque. Information about the tarrasque is often held by scholars of ancient history, lore books from fallen kingdoms, and wild-eyed refugees many pray are mad. The tarrasque appears on page 240 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (arcana)

DC	Result
30	The creature you face is none other than the tarrasque, a powerful monster known for its unstoppable destructive capabilities.
35	The tarrasque sleeps for months or years at a time, awakening for several days between slumbers. During such time, it attacks and destroys all that it sees.
40	Mere sight of the tarrasque when it attacks can inspire terror in those who witness its destructive abilities, and its thick carapace keeps it safe from most spells.
45	The tarrasque has the most powerful regenerative abilities known, and can regenerate even after succumbing to a *disintegrate* spell or a death effect. The only known way to permanently destroy the tarrasque is to use a *wish* or *miracle* spell immediately after rendering it unconscious.

other with its talons ere eating the remnants. So much I saw before my magic snatched me away."

Now in the bright court of Shelarralieir, Highqueen of Aeritueur, tall and wise courtiers scoffed at this telling. Oh, their swift spells told them the one in tatters truly believed what he said—but they held that he must have been driven mad, or been enspelled, to see things far from the truth.

Yet no sooner had they dismissed his words than the chamber where farstriders appeared rocked at the arrival of a fair elven knight in scorched and riven armor, whose pleas for aid were shouts none could ignore. From Lothaund this one came, and he cried that they had seen Oraunghglieir torn apart and toppled from afar, and mustered all the battle-might of Lothaund, mages and swordwielders alike, to make war on whatever had hurled down Oraunghglieir.

A great beast they saw, stalking toward them like a wingless dragon larger than any seen before, ponderous and slow.

At first they could scarce believe that this one beast, however monstrous, could alone have been the bane of Oraunghglieir. Yet they hurled their spells at it, rode at it with lance and sword, sought to pierce it with volleys from their greatbows, and even spell-hurled savage monsters into its path, to force it to fight them—yea, even great dragons!

But the Great Beast devoured and slew and prevailed, laying waste to all before it, until it came at last to Lothaund, and breached its walls, and started to hurl it down. Thousands of elves perished fighting it, and more fled, this knight among them.

This time the wise courtiers looked troubled, and did not scoff when this sorry knight warned them that the bright court could not be saved, and perhaps not even Aeritueur itself.

War-trumpets blared and spells cried warnings afar, calling all the mailed might of Aeritueur to fight this one foe.

Yet even as a realm rose up in alarum, swords flashing, the Great Beast strode out of riven Lothaund and into the nearest mountain—into it, sinking down into the solid stone as a swamp-snake glides down under inky waters. As suddenly as it had come, the Great Beast was gone.

For the first time. For all too soon, it came again.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE TARRASQUE

By its physical build alone, a tarrasque might easily be mistaken for a dinosaur, towering more than 50 feet tall and measuring at least 70 feet from nose to tail. It stands upright on its powerful hind legs, with its body thrust forward and its long tail providing a counterbalance. In general stance, it moves much like a tyrannosaurus, although its front limbs are significantly larger: while a tyrannosaurus has stumpy forelimbs unable even to reach its own head, the tarrasque's arms are long enough to touch the ground as it stands erect, and in fact the creature has been known to "knuckle walk" in the manner of some apes.

TARRASQUE PLOTS

The tarrasques is legendary for its single-minded rampaging and the fearsome destruction it wreaks. Here are a few ways to introduce this destroyer into a campaign.

Arcane Glutton: A sudden surge in spellcasting or the use of a rare magic item in an area "awakens" a tarrasque. It cuts a path of destruction toward the center of the heaviest magic use, devouring all living things. It continues its rampage until either it is sated or no magical source exists in the region for it to consume.

Artifact's End: The PCs come into the possession of a powerful but evil magical treasure that can only be destroyed within the tarrasque's stomach. Unfortunately, the tarrasque was last spotted mere months ago and is not likely to reawake for years.

Defending the Realm: The tarrasque has a special relationship with a kingdom, serving as its monstrous defender. Stealing a crown or other royal regalia, spilling royal blood on a throne, or slaying or kidnapping royalty causes the appearance of a tarrasque that stalks those responsible.

Ritual of Ages: A group of nihilistic tarrasque monster cultists (see *Dragon* #296) seek to permanently awaken and worship the tarrasque as it brings about the end of civilization.

Covering the tarrasque's dorsal half is an exceptionally thick, highly reflective armored carapace covered in massive spikes, while twin horns of similar size and shape jut forth from the creature's head. The horns are used offensively, while the carapace serves a defensive role—not only against physical attacks, but also against many magical attacks as well.

The tarrasque's carapace has been described as looking like "melted diamond" (by those lucky enough to have encountered the creature and lived to tell the tale), which accurately describes the carapace's toughness, reflectivity, and overall smoothness. In truth, the tarrasque's carapace is not made from diamond—melted or otherwise—having a unique composition.

The bodily processes of a tarrasque can readily digest all organic matter, living and dead, creatures and plants—even wood that has been painted or varnished. The lone destroyer's immunity to poison leaves it unharmed by dyes, paints, molds, other growths on decaying organic matter, and so on. A tarrasque has an expanding gullet that holds creatures and objects swallowed whole, which tumbles such devoured items around and around in a continuous spiral, working them down into a succession of three stomachs. These stomachs are among the most effective destructive engines in the multiverse and little—even the most powerful magical artifacts—can survive within.

The uppermost stomach is a hot, wet place of tumbling stones and internal spines (the stomach wall seems lined with thousands of bony knife-blades) that breaks down large objects; its walls are durable and very strong, with moving knots of muscle that can literally punch, squeeze, and claw at swallowed items. This stomach can shatter large rocks down into smaller stones, break clods of earth into scattered motes,

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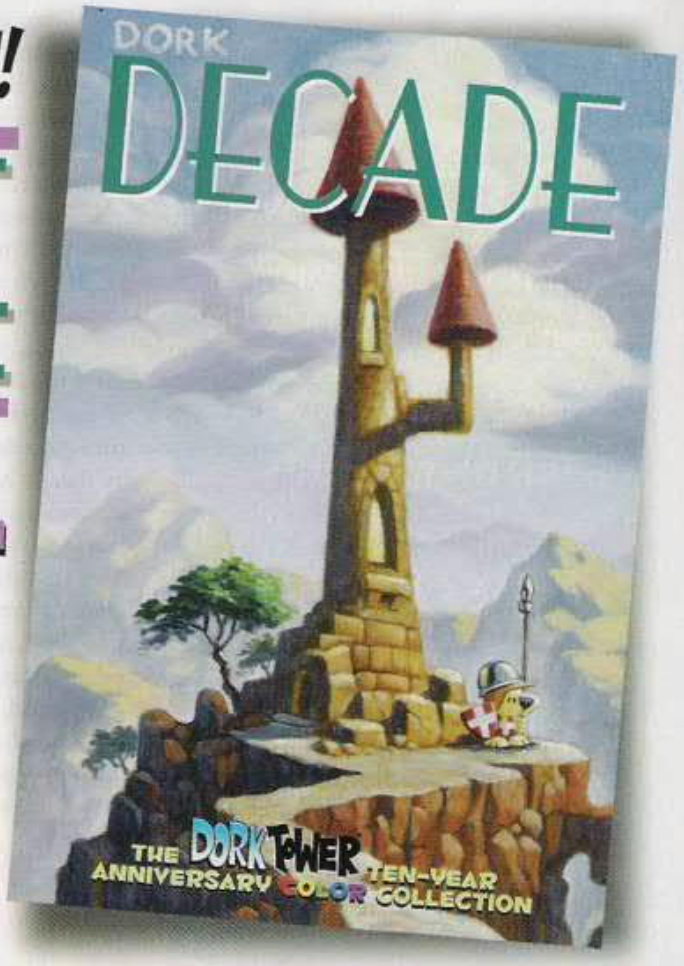
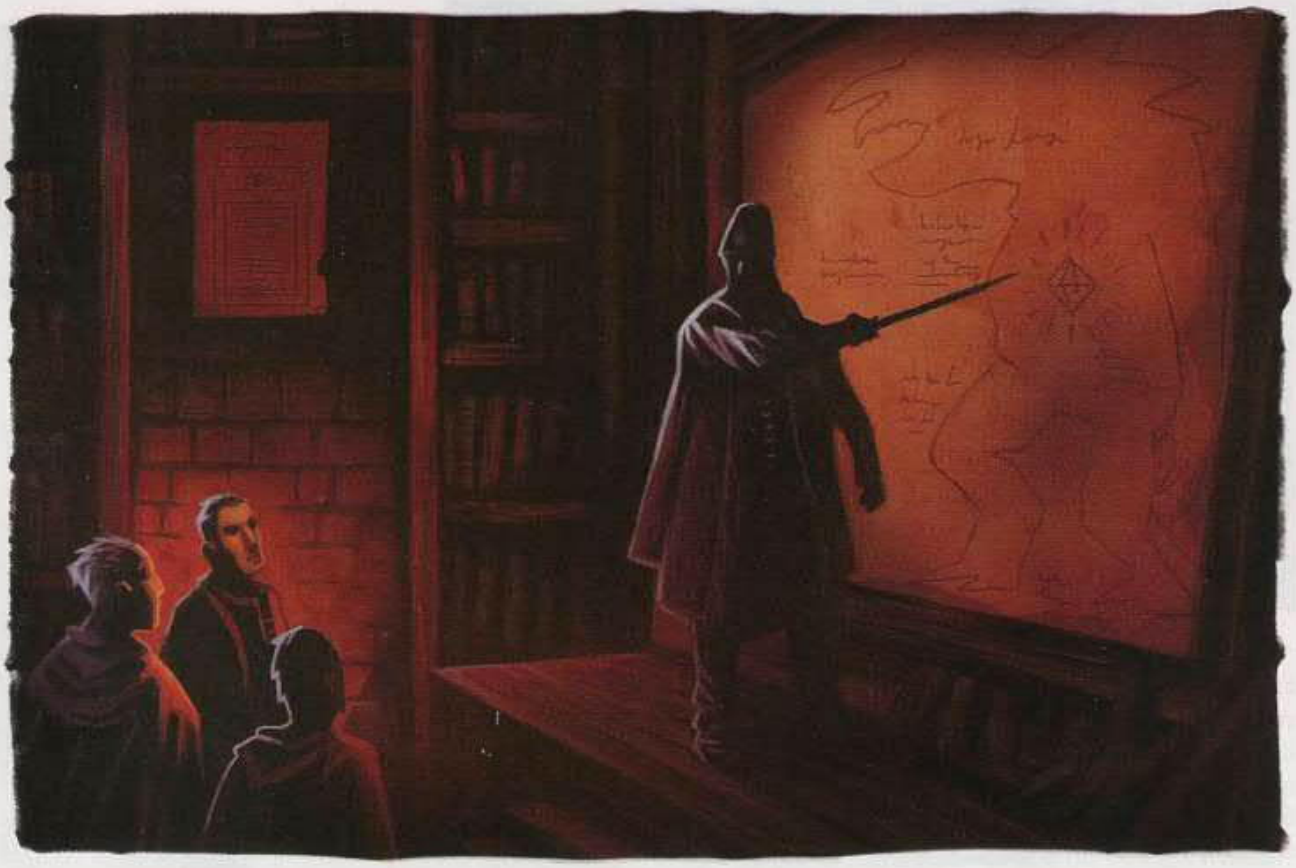




crack bark and bones, dismember bodies, and puncture containers so as to spill out and separate the contents. Belts and ropes are typically sawn into shorter lengths in this stomach, and glass is shattered. Metal items and glass shards are typically moved on swiftly to the deeper stomachs.

The middle stomach of a tarrasque is a churning, energetically pulsing fleshy cauldron of corrosive acid. Unique in all the planes, this fluid possesses a disjunctive property, capable of stripping the magical powers from consumed magics. Here everything breaks down.

The last stomach of a tarrasque is a long, winding, rhythmically-thrumming tube of great heat, where anything that survives the previous stomachs—typically only the strongest and rarest metals—meets its end. The acidic slurry boils off and is absorbed by the creature.

It takes a tarrasque mere moments to force what it consumes through its devastating digestive process. Despite the swiftness of this metabolism, the vast majority of the energy is stored. While it takes a great deal of food to keep an active tarrasque sated, tarrasques are actually quite docile—this stored energy sustaining them through deep, decades-long hibernations.

When preparing for such a hibernation, a tarrasque employs one of its most unusual and rarely witnessed abilities. Once fully glutted and ready to go back to sleep, a tarrasque gains the ability to earth glide in much the same way as xorns do: it burrows through stone, dirt, or any sort of earth except refined metal or continuous veins of pure metal as easily as fish swim through water, without disturbing or dislodging anything or leaving a tunnel or hole in its wake. This lets the beast access subterranean caverns its bulk would normally not allow it to reach. Lacking a large enough cavern to lair in, it can earth glide until buried, to "be at one with the stone" (sharing space with solid rock, a condition referred to as "arnstone" by some dwarven sages). This is why there is so much debate and mystery surrounding the location and nature of a tarrasque's lair.

While in arnstone state, a tarrasque does not suffocate, but sinks rapidly into a torpor in which its bodily processes slow and it hibernates until the need for new nourishment awakens it into the "burrowing" state again. In damp rock, where mineral-laden waters percolate, and with a belly filled with the ruins of a large town or city, this need might not arise for as long as 50 years. In dry or caustic rock, or if a tarrasque is disturbed by tremors (including the relatively minor vibrations of nearby rock or creature movements), shifts in temperature, or actual wounding (direct damage from the pick of a dwarf prospector or the weapon of an adventurer, for example), awakening might come much sooner.

A tarrasque's carapace and outer hide are clearly visible to earth gliding or quarrying creatures who reach one's immediate vicinity. Earth gliding creatures cannot glide into or through the volume of earth or rock occupied

by an arnstone tarrasque; its body seems "solid" to such creatures, who are deflected aside from it.

A tarrasque comes out of torpor with astonishing speed if disturbed, typically taking only 1d4+1 rounds to become fully aroused. While awakening, a tarrasque has the same properties and vulnerabilities as when sinking into torpor. A waking tarrasque is unpredictable; it might move away from the disturbance, turn to confront it, or "flee" at high speed for some time and then try to settle down into torpor again.

Psychology and Society of the Tarrasque

A tarrasque's actions are all driven by one need: nearly insatiable hunger. It has an intellect just above that of an animal and instinctively sees all other creatures as food. (Of course, it also sees trees and plants as food, buildings as food, rocks and dirt as food, and so on.) Given its powerful regenerative abilities, it has little to fear from combat with most creatures, and even those that have the capability of killing it—like high-level spellcasters—don't register as anything other than another type of potential food. Thus, a tarrasque never retreats from battle, no matter how events might turn against it.

A tarrasque is by no means an evil or vindictive force. It is no more a source of evil than a hungry wolf or lion, although this view is difficult to maintain by those whose homes, families, and entire lives have been destroyed by such a ravenous beast. The only real enmity the tarrasque ever feels toward its living victims is reserved for creatures capable of flight. Since the tarrasque has no method of ranged attack, any creature capable of flying beyond its reach has nothing to fear—a fact that annoys a hungry tarrasque to no end.

Once the tarrasque has its fill—a process that can normally take up to a week, during which time it remains completely awake and continually alert—the creature begins to get drowsy and prepares for a long sleep. So long as it is not currently in battle (as its primitive brain refuses to allow it to depart from a fight while there is still living morsels to ingest), it finds the nearest chunk of solid rock big enough to support its massive bulk and settles down within for a lengthy hibernation.

Advanced Tarrasque

The tarrasque is widely held as the toughest monster in Dungeons & Dragons, despite there being creatures in the *Monster Manual* of higher CRs, not to mention dozens of other deadlier beasts in other books. As the tarrasque can be advanced to have any number of Hit Dice, presented here is a CR 30 version ready to challenge even epic-level heroes.

The Tarrasque **CR 30**
Advanced tarrasque
N Colossal magical beast
Init +7; **Senses** scent; Listen +25, Spot +25

AC 40, touch 5, flat-footed 32; Dodge
hp 1,539 hp (78 HD), regeneration 40; **DR** 15/epic
SR 32
Immune ability damage, disease, energy drain, fire, poison
Fort +50, **Ref** +39, **Will** +28

Speed 20 ft.
Melee bite +89 (6d8+19/16–20/×3)
and 2 horns +87 (2d8+9)
and 2 claws +87 (3d6+9)
and tail slap +87 (4d8+9)
Space 30 ft. **Reach** 20 ft.
Base Atk +78; Grp +94
Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Multiattack, Power Attack; improved grab, rush, swallow whole

Abilities Str 48, Dex 16, Con 39, Int 3, Wis 14, Cha 14
SQ augmented critical, carapace, frightful presence
Feats Alertness, Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Armor (×5), Improved

Natural Attack (bite), Improved Natural Attack (claws), Improved Natural Attack (horns), Improved Natural Attack (tail slap), Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness (×6)

Skills Listen +25, Search +16, Spot +25, Survival +21 (+23 following tracks)

Regeneration (Ex) No form of attack deals lethal damage to the tarrasque. The tarrasque regenerates even if it fails a saving throw against a *disintegrate* spell or a death effect. If the tarrasque fails its save against a spell or effect that would kill it instantly (such as those mentioned above), the spell or effect instead deals nonlethal damage equal to the creature's full normal hit points +10 (or 1,549 hp). The tarrasque is immune to effects that produce incurable or bleeding wounds, such as mummy rot, a sword with the wounding special ability, or a clay golem's cursed wound ability.

The tarrasque can be slain only by raising its nonlethal damage total to its full normal hit points +10 (or 1,549 hit points) and using a *wish* or *miracle* spell to keep it dead.

If the tarrasque loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1d6 minutes (the detached piece dies and decays normally). The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, the tarrasque must hit a Huge or smaller opponent with its bite attack. It can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can try to swallow the foe the following round.

Rush (Ex) Once per minute, the normally slow-moving tarrasque can move at a speed of 150 feet.

Swallow Whole (Ex) The tarrasque can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of Huge or smaller size by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d8+8 points of crushing damage plus 2d8+6 points of acid damage per round from the tarrasque's digestive juices. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 50 points of damage to the tarrasque's digestive tract (AC 25). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hole; another swallowed opponent must cut its own way out. The tarrasque's gullet can hold 2 Huge, 8 Large, 32 Medium, 128 Small, or 512 Tiny or smaller creatures.

Augmented Critical (Ex) The tarrasque's bite threatens a critical hit on a natural attack roll of 18–20, dealing triple damage on a successful critical hit. Improved Critical doubles this to 16–20.

Carapace (Ex) The tarrasque's armorlike carapace is exceptionally tough and highly reflective, deflecting all rays, lines, cones, and even *magic missile*

spells. There is a 30% chance of reflecting any such effect back at the caster; otherwise, it is merely negated. Check for reflection before rolling to overcome the creature's spell resistance.

Frightful Presence (Su) The tarrasque can inspire terror by charging or attacking. Affected creatures must succeed on a DC 36 Will save or become shaken, remaining in that condition as long as they remain with 60 feet of the tarrasque. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Skills The tarrasque has a +8 racial bonus on Listen and Spot checks.

"...That's all the information we have," explained Willowquisp, closing his oversized tome of unusual creatures. "Might I inquire as to your interest? Surely you don't intend a tarrasque hunt?"

"Why not?" asked Dreelix, puffing out his chest. "We are, after all, the renowned Monster Hunters, and the tarrasque is merely an oversized monster. You yourself said it could be killed with two spells in quick succession, a vindication of the power of spellcraft over brute force if ever I heard one."

"We'd be well out of our league..." began Spontayne.

"Pshaw!" scoffed Dreelix. "Two *wish* spells and we're in business!"

"Sadly," pointed out Spontayne, "*wish* is beyond our capabilities."

"So we take some money out of the coffers and pick up a couple of scrolls," dismissed Dreelix. "No big deal." At that, Grindle the Coin-Counter expelled an involuntary "Eep!" As the Association's treasurer, he was well aware of the current sad state of their coffers.

"What, may I ask, is the sudden fascination with killing the tarrasque?" asked Buntleby.

"As it happens," replied Dreelix, "I was cleaning out my study, and discovered this ancient tome from my old mentor." He pulled a dusty manual out from under the head table, opening it to a diagram of the fabled beast and flipping it around so the others could see. While Spontayne and Willowquisp leaned forward to examine the book, Buntleby instead studied their illustrious President. Dreelix seldom mentioned his old mentor, preferring that others assume he had never needed such assistance in mastering—if that was indeed the appropriate word—the wizardly arts. For him to so casually mention he had once required tutoring could only mean his attention was focused elsewhere.

"Look at this passage here," Dreelix said, pointing at a fading section. "Killing the tarrasque releases a fortune of diamonds hidden in its shell!"

"Why would it have diamonds in its shell?" queried Spontayne, puzzled.

"It's not as easy as you make it out to be," scowled Buntleby. "The tarrasque isn't a piñata—you can't just whack it open and get your toy surprise."

"In any case," scoffed Willowquisp, "This book is rather outdated. It was useful for its time, but now the 'facts' contained therein are considered to be mere legends and fables nowadays, nothing more."[1]

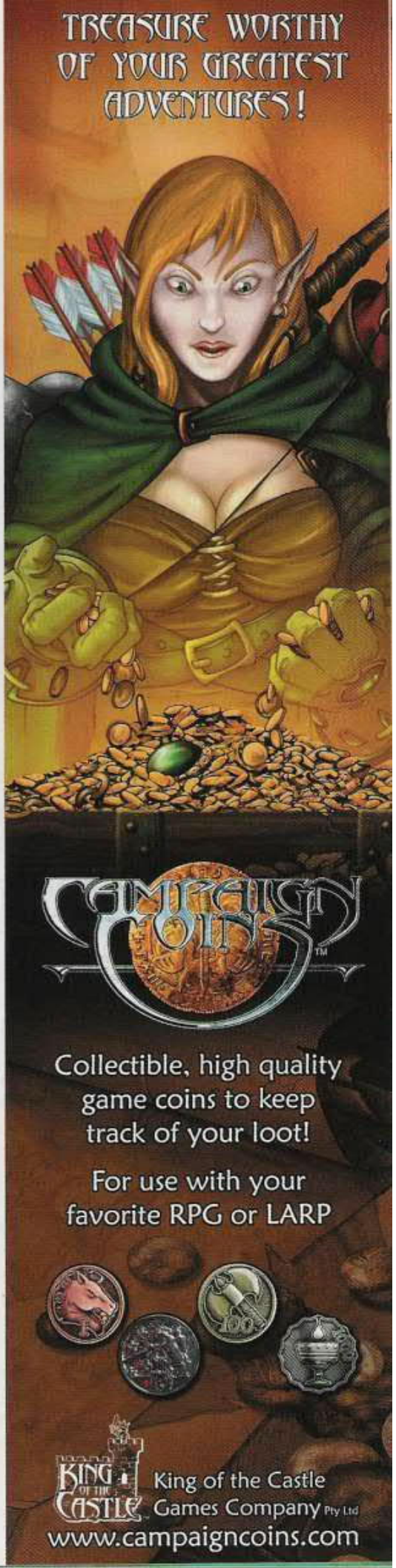
"Hmmph!" glared Dreelix, grabbing back his tome.

"Tell you what," suggested Spontayne. "If you can find it, we'll kill it."

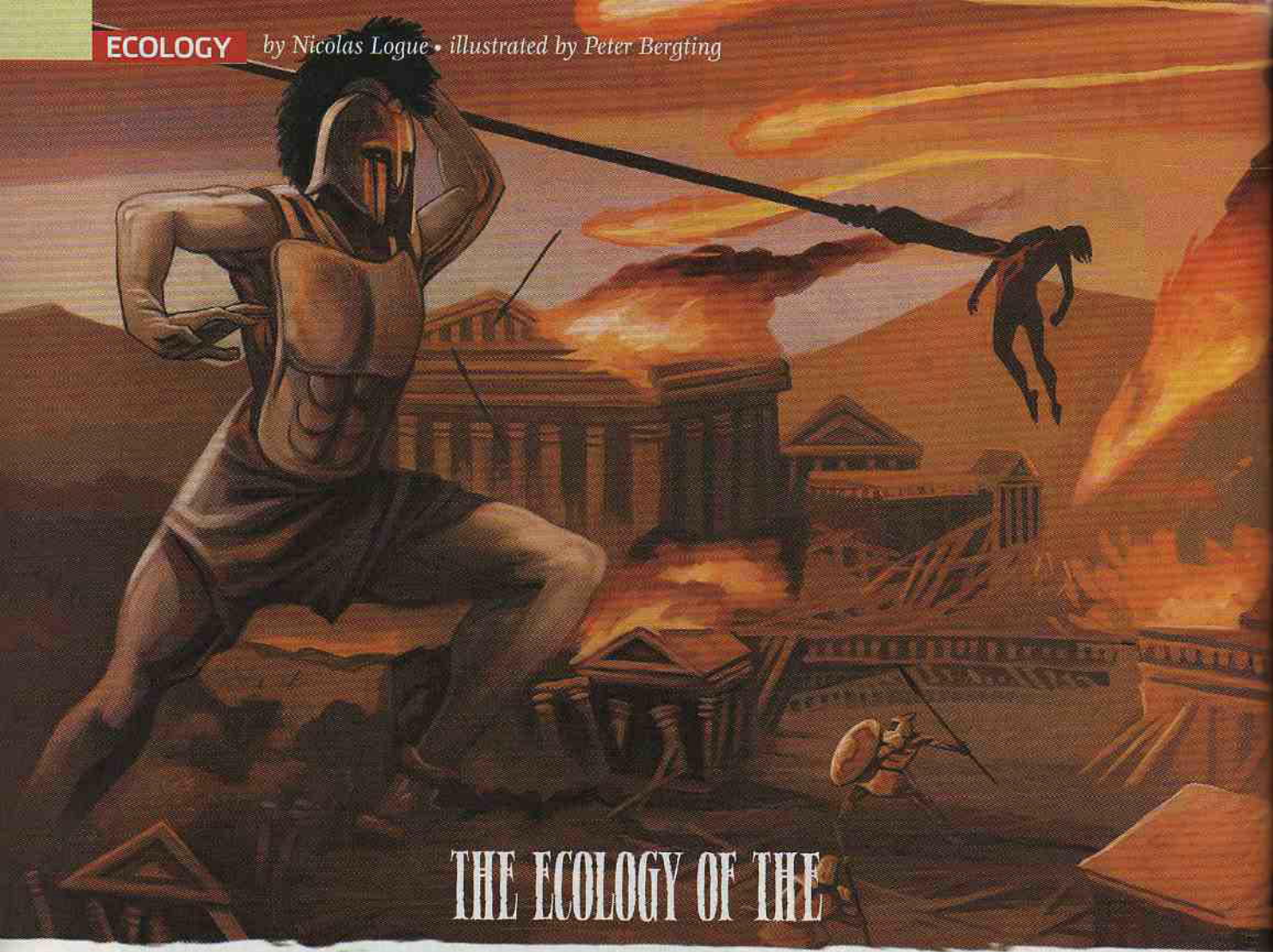
"Hmmph," Dreelix repeated, then pressed on with the rest of the evening's agenda.

NOTES

1 Apparently Dreelix's tome is similar to the 1983 version of *Monster Manual II*, written by Gary Gygax for first edition AD&D. In that venerable work—the tarrasque's first appearance in D&D— treating the monster's carapace with acid and heating it in a furnace yielded 10d10 diamonds valued at 1,000 gp each!



by Nicolas Logue • illustrated by Peter Bergting



THE ECOLOGY OF THE TITAN

"I will advance a terrible right arm
"Shall scare that infant thunderer, rebel Jove,
"bid old Saturn take his throne again."
—"Hyperion," John Keats

Few beings can contend with the children of the multiverse. What are even angels or demons—mere spawn of mortal virtues and vices—to do in the face of a titan's godlike fury? Dragons, as old as mountains and wise as the wind, are revealed as mewling babes when matched to a titan's timeless intellect. Immortal, brimming with untold power, and as unpredictable as a storm-tossed sea, the titans are feared even by deities, and are understood by few. Theirs is a tale of divine battle, deific vengeance, and eternal exile. Cast out of paradise to brood, rule, and destroy, they walk the world. Only fools do not bow before them or flee at their approach.

HISTORY OF THE TITAN

In a time before time, long before the churning cosmos found its form, gods and goddesses reached into primordial chaos and sculpted perfection from its mutable essence. Thus, the titans were born. The deities adored them more than creation itself. The titans' every whim was doted upon. Their wishes were granted even before they formed in their minds. As time wore on, the titans grew more demanding of their deific progenitors. No boon seemed too great to ask.

The titans rose to a respected place at their masters' sides to help rule over creation. As feuds broke out among the gods and goddesses, the titans led their divine armies in battle. The mightiest among them grappled with deities, proving victorious on too many occasions to comfort godkind at large. As the greatest titans realized their power rivaled the gods, their demands became increasingly unsettling.

Eventually, the titans committed offenses their makers could no longer ignore. The titans created children of their own nearly equal to themselves in glory and power, birthing the first giants into the world out of shards of their own celestial essence. The titans loved their new children as dearly as the gods once lavished affection upon them. They promised their offspring an entire plane of existence, a world where the giants would rule as deities in their own right.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE TITAN

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to titans. Information about titans is most likely to come from servants of ancient deities, planar scholars, and residents of Arborea or Carceri. The titan appears on page 242 of the *Monster Manual*.

Knowledge (the planes)

DC	Result
31	This gigantic creature is a titan, a being of fickle whims and unbridled power. This result reveals all outsider traits.
36	Titans are incredably strong, capable of destroying nearly anything they encounter with their physical strength and magical prowess. This result reveals several of a titan's noteworthy spell-like abilities.
41	The titans were among the first creations of the deities and rebeled against them. Those who survived this war were scattered across the planes.
46	Cronus, the most powerful of the titans, still rages against the deities in a Carcarian prison forged millenia ago.

The gods were outraged. The power to create was theirs alone. The deities looked on the giants as abominations and their fury was boundless. Still, they could not bring themselves to punish their beloved titans. The deities offered a compromise: they would spare the giants but cast them down to the Material Plane, not to rule, but to exist among thousands of other lesser races. The deities had began to regret their mistake in creating children rivaling themselves in might and begat

POWER OF THE TITANS

Some titans possess unique sets of spell-like abilities different from those given in the *Monster Manual*. These titans lose *etherealness, levitate, meteor swarm, persistent image,* and *summon nature's ally IX* but gain the following spells in their place.

Stormbringer: Some titans are tied to the fury of the storms. They gain the following spell-like abilities:

At will–*control weather, gaseous form, water breathing, wind wall*
3/day–*whirlwind, wind walk*
1/day–*storm of vengeance*

Iconoclast: Refusing to be shackled or controlled, some titans possess powers that make them impossible to manipulate.

At will–*break enchantment, freedom of movement, greater teleport*
3/day–*mind blank, destruction*
1/day–*freedom*

new offspring, far inferior to the titans in power. The titans were not satisfied. Their rage at the offer was doubled by the gods' designs to spawn new children to vie with the titans. The titans saw the creation of these new races as an attempt to supplant them. For the first time, the titans felt their place in the cosmos threatened. They raised their mighty fists against their divine masters. The gods found themselves under attack.

The heaven-shaking conflict that followed lasted an age. Thousands of titans and hundreds of gods perished before the conflict finally came to a halt. The face of creation was savaged, and the multiverse nearly unraveled. Finally, though, the gods emerged victorious.

Realizing they could never risk such a cataclysmic event again, the deities convened a divine tribunal and after much deliberation decreed the titans would be scattered across the infinite planes—the most dangerous among them imprisoned on Carceri for all time. The gods and goddesses also summarily hurled the giants to the Material Plane, robbing them of any vestige of divinity. Those few titans who stood by their makers during the war earned reprieve and were allowed to remain on Arborea. Slowly they earned back their fickle divine masters' trust, while their brethren were condemned to wander for eternity, forever scorned by their deific parents.

PHYSIOLOGY OF THE TITAN

Titans are specimens of absolute physical perfection. They are the pinnacle of might, agility, mental acuity, and will. Their form is a mirror to glory. The vainest mortals labor through staggering regimens of exercise and employ epic magic in hopes of even drawing close to the physical magnificence and comeliness of titankind. These sad fools always fall dismally short. Titans' muscles are denser than adamantine and more pliable than the supplest bamboo. They see in the dark as well as any fiend, and in light a hawk is nearly blind by comparison. When pleased, their voices are like honey poured over a golden lute's strings. When enraged, their bellows shatter mountains and shout-down any tempest's thunder.

Among the strongest of any other creatures, titans delight in their varied prowess. They revel in their near-godly might and enjoy flouting their physical superiority over creatures twice their size. Titans take great pride in besting gargantuan dragons in contests of physical mastery.

Titans are as eternal as their divine masters. They do not age, nor do they require sleep or sustenance, although they often enjoy rich food and guzzle barrels of sweet-nectar spirits for sheer pleasure alone. More malicious specimens enjoy eating those who dare an audience, casually picking them up and pulping their heads as a man might enjoy a succulent grape.

PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY OF THE TITAN

Titans were birthed from raw chaos. There is no constant by which one might rate a titan's emotions, and predictability is definitely not among their flaws. For a titan, a morning of towering rage begets a mirthful midday meal, and an evening of unquenchable lust. What pleases them one moment is just as likely to draw their ire the next. Parlaying with a titan is dangerous, and pity those who must negotiate terms with these frenzied forces of the universe. A titan's courtesy might be more civil than any king's at first, but guests can never tell when their hosts might take it upon themselves to mash them flat, just to see what shape the stains their pulped bodies make on the floor.

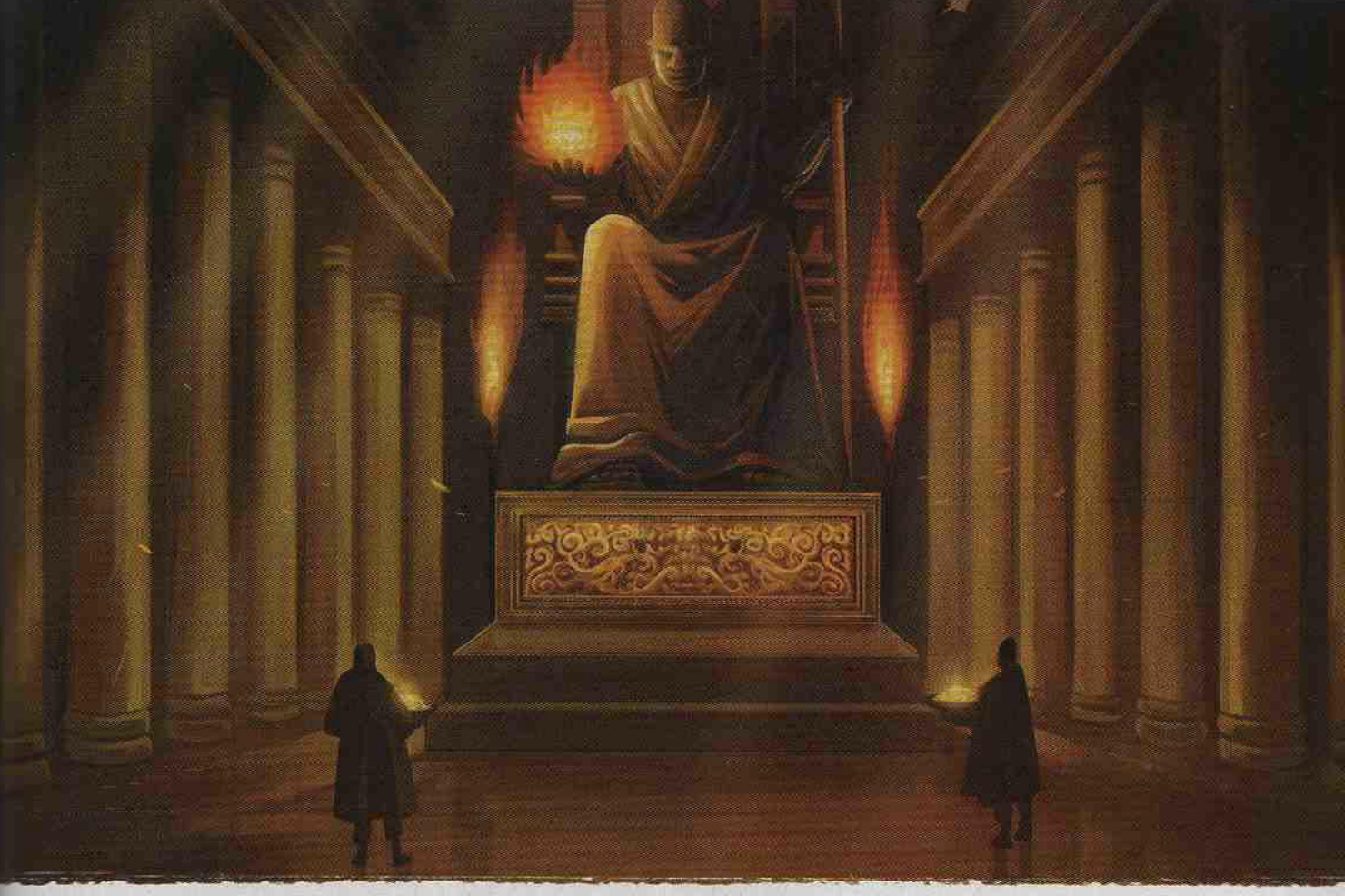
The only exception comes when titans treat with one another. For some inexplicable reason, titans (even those with divergent takes on good and evil) regard each other with great civility and respect at all times. No titan knowingly crosses another unless a direct challenge is made. These challenges are almost always accepted. When titans clash, the world trembles and others would do well not to come between them.

A key factor in titans' views of the world is their immortality. They are timeless and have existed since the dawn of creation. They have watched civilizations rise and fall, borne witness to the extermination of entire races, and seen gods dethroned. They are blessed with a god's lifespan and unburdened by any responsibilities of divinity. Needless to say, little surprises a titan and nothing impresses one. A novelty they have not before witnessed, with which to stave off the tedium of eternity, is worth more than a mountain of diamonds. Many bards risked their lives in attempts to earn a titan's favor with an unheard tale or song. Most ended up smeared into gory paste as punishment for their failure.

Titans believe (rightly so) that they are superior to all mortal beings. They love to challenge mortals to impossibly difficult (and often deadly) competitions. Defeating a titan in one of these contests earns respect—and a possibly a boon.

ADVANCED TITAN

Cronus first gained his moniker of God-slayer after he castrated and killed his



own father, Uranus, a god of the Sun. His act of patricide ignited the war between gods and titans, and Cronus led his people's revolt for centuries. He felled more than one hundred gods in personal combat. He basked in the fiery rays of Pelor's hottest flames, mocked Obad-Hai's mightiest blast of tree-rending wind, and fought five thousand passes with Heironeous and Hextor long before the half-brothers forsook their kinship and swore eternal enmity. His fury could not be slaked, and time and time again he repelled the gods' assaults and shattered every attempt of theirs to imprison him.

Finally, the deities bent their ear to Kurtulmak, cunning kobold god of traps, who concocted one of the most brilliant snares ever conceived. The gods ambushed Cronus en force. While the dwarf gods drew his ire, Boccob, Garl Glittergold, Olidimmara, and Wee Jas wove their most powerful enchantments, melded flawlessly with potent illusions. Fharlanghn leveled powerful translocation magic upon the titan as well. Cronus was instantly transported to a powerful prison the gods prepared in Carceri. There, Cronus, his mind vexed and eternal form weakened by powerful spells and illusory effects, believes he still wages his war against the gods. For millennia he has "battled" in a dreamscape of the gods' collective design, ensorcelled for all time.

Or so the gods hoped. They believed eventually the titan would tire of his war or, better, be slain in phantom combat. Instead, Cronus has fought through the ages, brutally slaying the gods one by one in his phantasmal prison. The gods watched grimly as each of them fell to Cronus' glaive, and now their numbers dwindle. If the titan slays every phantom god, the potent magic befuddling his mind might crumble. When it does, Cronus' rage at the gods' trickery promises their doom. He will shrug off the mighty shackles of Carceri's greatest prison and regain his powers to menace the heavens. The gods have seen their doom in their own illusionary trap, and they fear they might not be able to stand against Cronus. Perhaps a band of mighty champions whose powers rival the deities themselves are creation's only hope.

CRONUS **CR 56**

Advanced titan barbarian 20, legendary dreadnought 10

CE Gargantuan outsider (chaotic, extraplanar)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 feet.; Listen +64, Spot +61

Languages Abyssal, Common, Celestial, Draconic, Giant

AC 64, touch 9, flat-footed 61; Dodge, Mobility; improved uncanny dodge

hp 1,578 hp (61 HD), fast healing 3; **DR** 15/lawful, 23/—

SR 32

Fort +54, **Ref** +31, **Will** +37

Speed 70 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee *+15 Colossal adamantine glaive* +99/+94/+89/+84 (6d8+58/19–20/×3 + 2d6 + DC 69 Fort save or die)

Space 20 ft. **Reach** 20 ft.

Base Atk +56; Grp +97

Atk Options Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Power Attack, rage 6/day

Special Actions unmovable 2/day, unstoppable 2/day

Spells-like Abilities (CL 20th) 1/day—*Bigby's crushing hand* (DC 27),

EPIC FEATS EXPLANATION

Cronus employs several feats from the *Epic Level Handbook*, here is a brief summary of their effects:

Chaotic Rage: Your weapon deals +2d6 points of damage while you rage.

Damage Reduction: You gain damage reduction 3/—. This feat stacks with itself.

Devastating Critical: When you score a critical hit with the weapon you have selected, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + 1/2 your character level + your Str modifier) or die instantly. Creatures immune to critical hits can't be affected by this feat.

Epic Weapon Focus: Add a +2 bonus on all attack rolls you make with the selected weapon.

Fast Healing: You gain fast healing 3.

Overwhelming Critical: You deal +1d6 points of extra damage on a successful critical hit. If the weapon's critical multiplier is ×3, add 2d6 points of extra damage instead.

Terrifying Rage: Any enemy that views you while you are raging must make a Will save opposed by your Intimidate check or become panicked (if it has fewer Hit Dice than you) or shaken (if it has Hit Dice equal to or up to twice yours) for 4d6 rounds.

gate, maze, meteor swarm (DC 27)
3/day—*etherealness, word of chaos* (DC 25), *summon nature's ally IX*
At will—*bestow curse* (DC 22), *chain lightning* (DC 24), *charm monster* (DC 26), *cure critical wounds, deeper darkness, fire storm* (DC 26), *greater dispel magic, hold monster* (DC 23), *invisibility, invisibility purge, levitate, persistent image* (DC 23), *unholy blight* (DC 23)

Abilities Str 69, Dex 16, Con 50, Int 20, Wis 28, Cha 27

SQ change shape, greater rage, mighty rage, outsider traits, oversized weapon, shrug off punishment, thick skinned, tireless rage, trap sense +6

Feats Awesome Blow, Blind-Fight, Chaotic Rage, Cleave, Damage Reduction ×4, Devastating Critical (glaive), Epic Weapon Focus (glaive), Fast Healing, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (glaive), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Overwhelming Critical (glaive), Power Attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (*chain lightning, firestorm, greater dispel magic*), Terrifying Rage, Weapon Focus (glaive)

Skills Climb +61, Diplomacy +33, Hide +16, Intimidate +72, Jump +66, Knowledge (history) +37, Knowledge (religion) +25, Knowledge (the planes) +25, Listen +64, Move Silently +34, Survival +41 (+43 on other planes), Swim +55, Spot +61, Tumble +39

Possessions *+20 masterwork breastplate, +15 adamantine glaive, ring of epic protection +7, belt of epic strength +12, ring of regeneration, wings of flying*

Rage (Ex) When he rages, Cronus's stats change as follows.

AC 62, touch 7, flat-footed 59
hp 1822
Fort +58, **Will** +41 (+45 versus enchantments)
Melee *+15 Colossal adamantine glaive* +103/+98/+93/+88 (6d8+62 +2d6 against creatures of lawful alignment/19–20/×3 + 2d6 + DC 69 Fort save or die)
Grp +101
Abilities Str 77, Con 58
Skills Climb +65, Jump +70, Swim +59

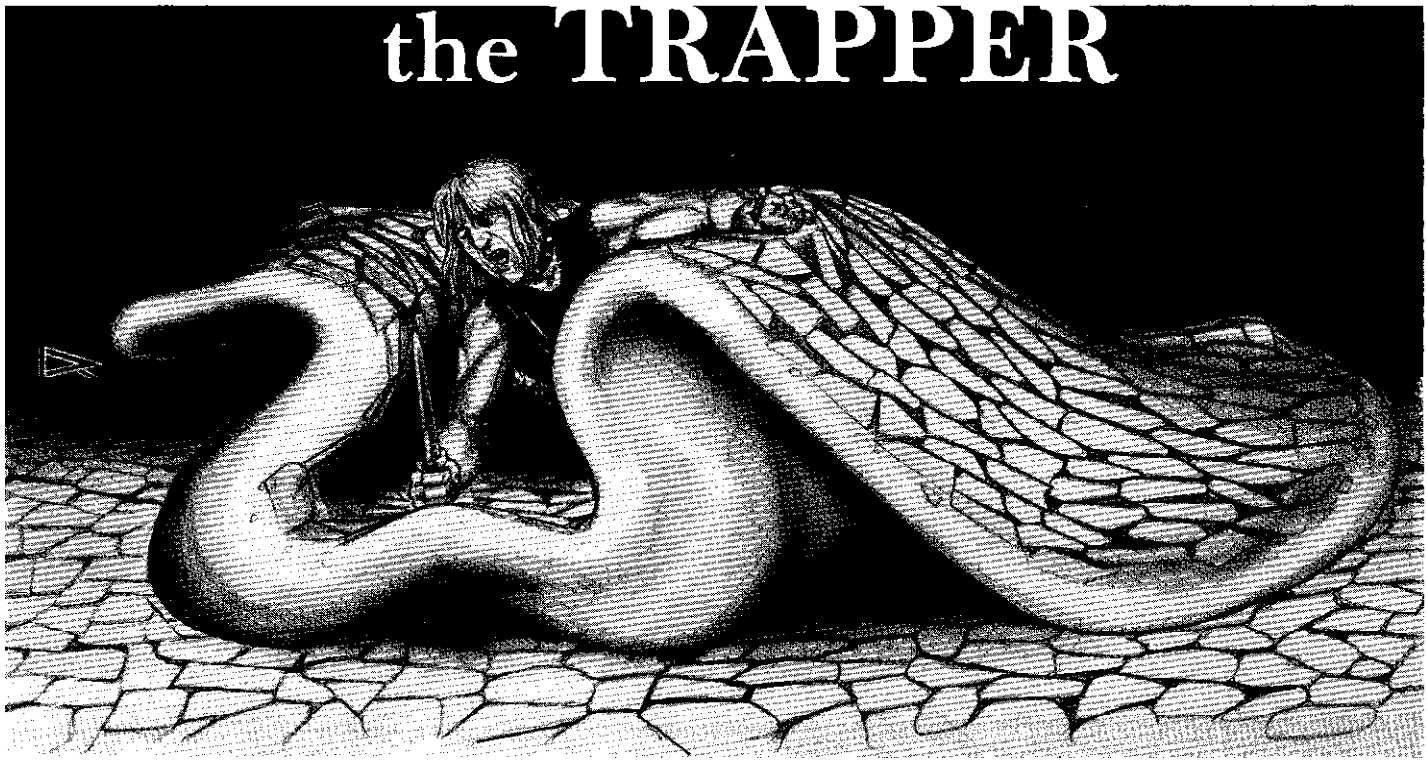
Unmovable (Ex) Twice per day, Cronus can add a +20 bonus to: avoid being grabbed with the improved grab ability; avoid the effects of a bull rush, trip attempt, or similar effect; a Strength check to avoid being moved physically or magically; or a saving throw.

Unstoppable (Ex) Twice per day, Cronus can add +20 to his Strength check to break or burst a door or item, make a DC 32 Strength check to break a *wall of force*, or apply a +20 bonus on a single attack roll.

Change Shape (Su) Cronus can assume the form of any Small or Medium humanoid. He retains his oversized weapon special attack regardless of form.

Oversized Weapon (Ex) Cronus can wield an oversized weapon one size category larger than himself (Colossal) without penalty.

The ecology of the TRAPPER



by Ed Greenwood

"Yes, I can tell ye 'bout the Crushing Death — oh, I may not look like anything much now, boy, but in my day I was a fierce and bold sword-swinger, afore that beholder took off my arm, here . . . oh, yes, big it was, and strong, and we who went up against it just as foolish and headstrong and stuck-up-nosed as you and your friends are now. . . Ah, it's gold ye have fer me? Good, good . . .a respectable sum — and fer that ye'll have a respectable tale. Listen, then — and mind ye, this is as true as I know.

"The Crushing Death in yonder hole is nothing more than a gigantic trapper — yes, I see ye've heard of *that* name. Mind ye, this one is old, and big; it's been there fer twenty winters at least now, to my certain knowledge, and a lot I've seen go and try to kill it — but I've not seen 'em come out again. But never mind that fer now. I must be earnin' me gold, so listen:

"A trapper is a thin, flattish critter, big enough to cover the floor of a good-sized roomy. Its top, the part ye'll see first, looks and feels like stone, as though lots o' flags was laid down, with little ridges and lines just like the real thing.' It's tough an' horny, not real brittle like rock, an' some — dwarves 'n' stonecutters, mostly — can tell it's not stone when they hit it or try to take out a chip.[2]

Under its top layer it's a soft thing, somethin' like a jelly-fish, that can change shape and slide around to fill holes and lay on top o' rough ground, bones or such, so the top of the trapper seems to be flat and level, like the floor — until it's too late.

"Yep, they slide around, and that's how they move from place to place, but ye'll never see one move like that when it knows ye're around — they can feel when ye walk on 'em, but sometimes I think they know when ye're comin', too.[3] Your trapper will lay still, jus' like a part of the floor, mebbe with a special little hump in the middle that looks like a box, or somethin' else it thinks you'd like, and when ye reach fer the box, it'll close up around ye an' squeeze ye jus' like yer hand squeezes a piece o' ripe fruit. So, keep a few staves and bars in hand, or ye'll have no room to use your weapons.[4]

"What's that? . . . Well, I never heard o' someone findin' it in time — it can spread itself out almost as thin as parchment at the edges, so ye can't tell where the trapper stops and the real stone starts, unless ye get down an' take to chippin' an' pryin' at the edges, but then the thing'd jus' roll up around ye, an' it'd be all over . . .

"When it takes victims, the trapper crushes 'em to death, twistin' around so's they can't move an' squeezin' the breath right out of 'em. Then somehow[5] it gets the body an' other stuff from its topside to its underside, an' it eats what it wants an' keeps or leaves the stuff it can't eat. The thing forms its body around the stuff 'neath it, but stays flat an' hard on top, so ye can't tell the stuff is there by lookin' or walkin' across the trapper.[6] If ye think ye're standin' on one, an' it hasn't made a move fer ye yet, stamp down hard an' jump about — the floor won't give, but ye might hear snappin' an' crackin' from underneath if the bones 'n' other stuff give way. Then ye better jump quick, or ye've had it!

"The trapper eats what it catches by oozin' out some kind o' burnin' fluid it makes inside itself, but this fluid only comes from the underside, so's when yer trapped at least ye don't have to worry 'bout that, too. If it gets on top o' ye, alive or dead, the fluid won't hurt right away, but don't let it in yer eyes — it can blind ye fer days if a lot gets in there. Back when I had me two good arms, I pulled a feller out from under the edge of one just in time.' He was wet, but he had his eyes closed from bein' knocked out, and the fluid didn't have time to burn 'im. Don't try to save the stuff if ye manage to get some — when the thing's dead or when the fluid's taken out of it, somethin' goes with it, and no matter how ye mix it, or what ye pay your alchemist, the killer juice is just so much sewer-water.

"I seen somethin' more, too — somethin' ye don't hardly ever see, how a trapper makes little trappers. It don't mate, it just eats an' grows an' eats an' grows till it's too big. Then it splits into a lot of little trappers — I said I seen it, and I seen it, I tell ye! — and they all go off their different ways, to find new huntin' grounds.[8] They kin hide, changin' color to match the ground they're on[9], till they find a good place . . . so, ye won't see one just comin' down the street, but if ye go in there, over yonder, an' poke around a bit inside that cavern, ye might not find the big one ye're lookin' for — but if ye see a little one, be sharp, 'cause there's

bound to be three or four more jus' like it creepin' around hereabouts, an' not a cave or ruined hall'll be safe till they're all dead.

"Good luck to ye all — ye'll be needin' it soon, I think! And if ye do come back, wander in here an' tell these old ears how ye killed it — an' I'll give ye this gold right back as payment for the tale! "[10]

Notes

1. The top surface of a trapper is dense, horny (not brittle), and effectively as hard as stone. It is shaped in irregular, flagstone-like plates or lumps. The trapper absorbs heat and vibration, and thus suffers only half damage, at most, from actual fire; it won't be harmed by normal pressure from being walked upon or prodded, nor does it give appreciably underfoot. It is also resistant (half or no damage) to cold and cold-based attacks; its metabolism does not need a particular body temperature to function, and chilly underground environments are its normal habitat.

2. Small parts of a trapper's rocky surface can be chipped away without the creature being harmed noticeably (no visible wound occurs, just an apparent cavity in the rock); the stony substance grates or rings, like actual rock, when it is struck. Characters who are very familiar with stone (dwarves, gnomes, miners, stonemasons, and sculptors) can usually tell immediately that something is not right when they test the surface — by chipping or striking it, but not merely walking upon it. Characters not familiar with stone may (5% chance) sometimes realize that they have attacked something alive, but trappers are not easy to detect, even when they are being looked for.

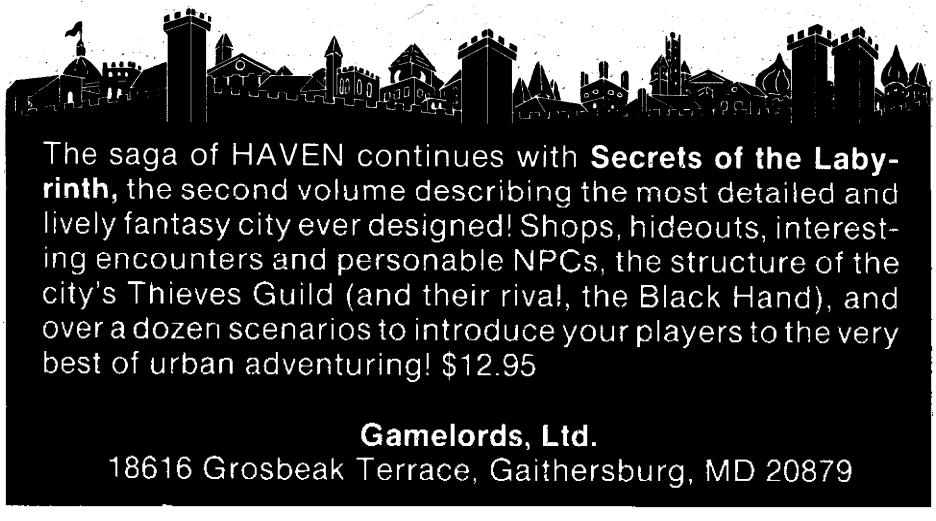
Infravision will clearly detect the underside of a trapper if the creature is viewed from beneath (through a hole, for instance), rolled up around something, or when the underside is revealed around its edges when it moves. (When it is stationary, the hard top surface covers all of the edges.) The heat-absorbing top surface of a trapper is not revealed by infravision; it always matches the temperature of its surroundings, absorbing excess heat (or reflecting most of it, in the case of flame or extreme heat used as an attack form) and simultaneously transferring it, along a one-way path, to the underside. In its reaction to extreme heat or cold, the top layer acts as a barrier and a permeable membrane at the same time.

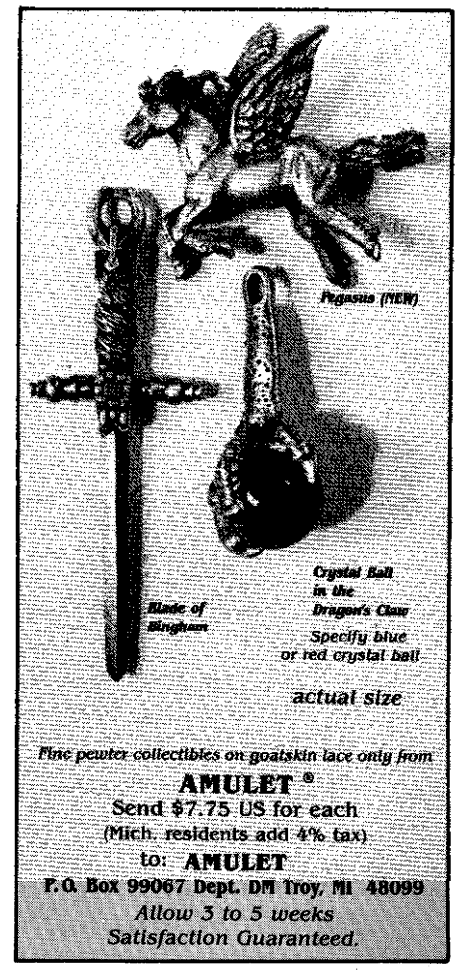
3. A trapper can sense — and, because of its high intelligence, usually interpret — even the slightest vibrations, such as a mouse running across its surface; the hard top surface transmits these vibrations to sensory organs in the actual body of the creature before the vibrations are dissipated or absorbed. The trapper is apparently not sensitive to sound waves or odors, but it can sense light up to 4" (40 feet) distant. Light-sensitive patches on the top of a trapper report the presence of light to the trapper's brain, which acts in conjunction with these patches to govern the shifts in color that a trapper's body is capable of (see note #9). The patches can detect very small amounts of light — flickering torchlight or narrow lantern beams, for example — in an area that is otherwise dark, but cannot sense the presence or location of prey by this means if the entire vicinity is illuminated, such as in daylight or when a *light* spell is in use. Also, full illumination makes it more difficult for a trapper to quickly shift color without being noticed as it moves onto new surfaces. For these reasons principally, trappers prefer to dwell in dark places, and almost always underground.

4. Iron bars or even stout staves will provide a precious few rounds of "safety" from a trapper's attack, if at least one of them is close at hand so it can be used to obstruct the creature's attempt to close around a victim (as a piece of wood might be jammed into a creature's mouth to keep it from closing its jaws). While this bar or staff is in place, the character(s) it protects can still wield weapons against the trapper. Thrusting and piercing weapons are the most useful in this case, since they are used along the axis described by the bar or staff. Weapons that slash or smash are not as effective (-2 on damage, but a minimum of 1 point of damage per hit) because the wielder doesn't have room to swing the weapon with full force. In some cases, common sense must prevail in determining whether a weapon is wholly or partially effective; long pole arms, for instance, would probably be useless.

A bar or staff used as an obstruction (DM's decision as to what is suitable) will automatically afford one round of safety for the character(s) it is protecting. Thereafter, the object must save vs. crushing blow once per round (as "hard metal" or "thick wood," as appropriate), with a cumulative penalty of -3 per round to the die roll beginning with the second save. Thus, a staff of thick wood will "survive" for as long as five rounds before the pressure of the trapper's muscles on its ends will cause it to snap or slip out of position. (The first round of protection is "free"; thereafter, the staff must make saves of 10, 13, 16, and 19 to remain intact and in place for the next four rounds. On the following round it will need to save with a 22, which is impossible unless the save is made at a bonus.)

5. Apparently our grizzled old adventurer has. never seen exactly what a trapper does with the prey it captures. When a trapper's victim is suffocated, or when the victim takes enough damage to be rendered unconscious or killed, the creature relaxes its hold on the prey and then flexes and moves in such a manner as to slide out from underneath the body. Then the creature reverses direction and moves back on top of the victim, loosely encasing it in the more pliant undersurface of its body. This underside is subject to attack by characters outside the trappper whenever the creature is wrapped





around someone or something. However, the underside is just as hard to damage as the top side; lying just beneath the tough, leathery "skin" covering the underside is a network of strong muscles which, when they are tensed, are just as difficult to penetrate with a weapon (AC 3) as the top side is.

6. When a trapper moves on top of an object, it can use its pliancy and its amorphous nature to "flow" over and around the object, varying the thickness of its body (if desired) to keep the hard top surface even and level. The top surface will not give way under the force of foot-stomping or jumping, but in places where objects lie beneath it and relatively close to the top surface, some of the force of those blows will be transmitted through its body to the objects below, and those objects will crack or shatter if they are fragile enough. As noted by the old adventurer (and the Monster Manual), the trapper can also exercise the ability to form its body into shapes that appear to be lying on its top surface. Sometimes, the creature uses an object it is concealing as a foundation for one of these "sculptures" — for instance, using a broken pillar or a log as the basis for an extension that looks like a stone bench.

7. The trapper consumes its prey by moving on top of a victim (see note #5) and then exuding an acid-like enzyme that breaks down organic matter. The chemical reaction caused by the fluid does not begin until after a victim is exposed to it for five rounds (which is why our hero was able to rescue someone "just in time"); then it begins to burn and corrode, doing 6 points of damage per round to any victim that is not already dead. A single man-sized creature can be entirely consumed in this manner in 2-4 turns; one L-sized creature or a small group of M-sized victims will take 6-9 turns to be consumed.

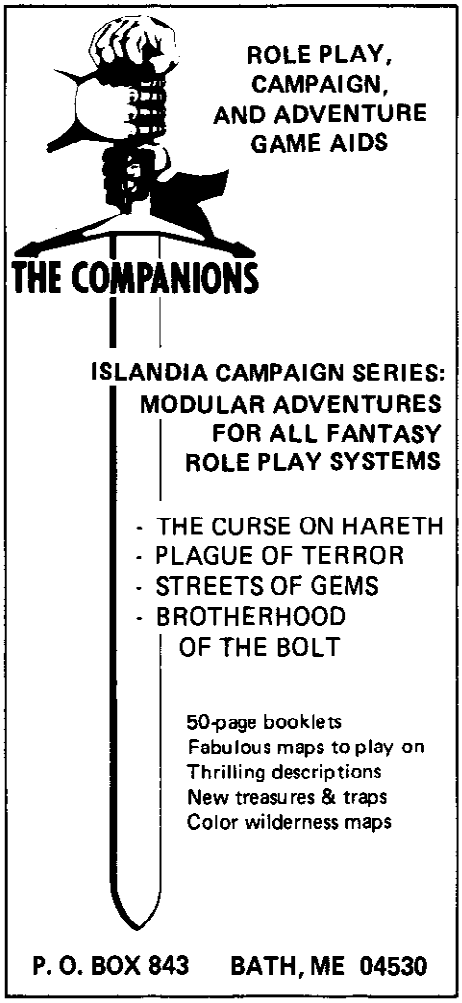
When it "eats," the trapper re-absorbs the digestive enzyme along with the substance it has acted upon, and then the nutrients and the enzyme are separated during its digestive process. The fluid finds its way back into the sacs in which it is contained, until more prey is to be consumed. The enzyme loses its potency within seconds when it is exposed to air, which is why a victim can be rescued without suffering damage from the acid, provided the chemical reaction has not already begun. The enzyme has an immediate effect only if it gets into a victim's eyes, in which case the victim (if he survives) is totally blinded for 1-4 days thereafter; a *cure blindness* or *heal* spell, or similar magic, will offset this effect.

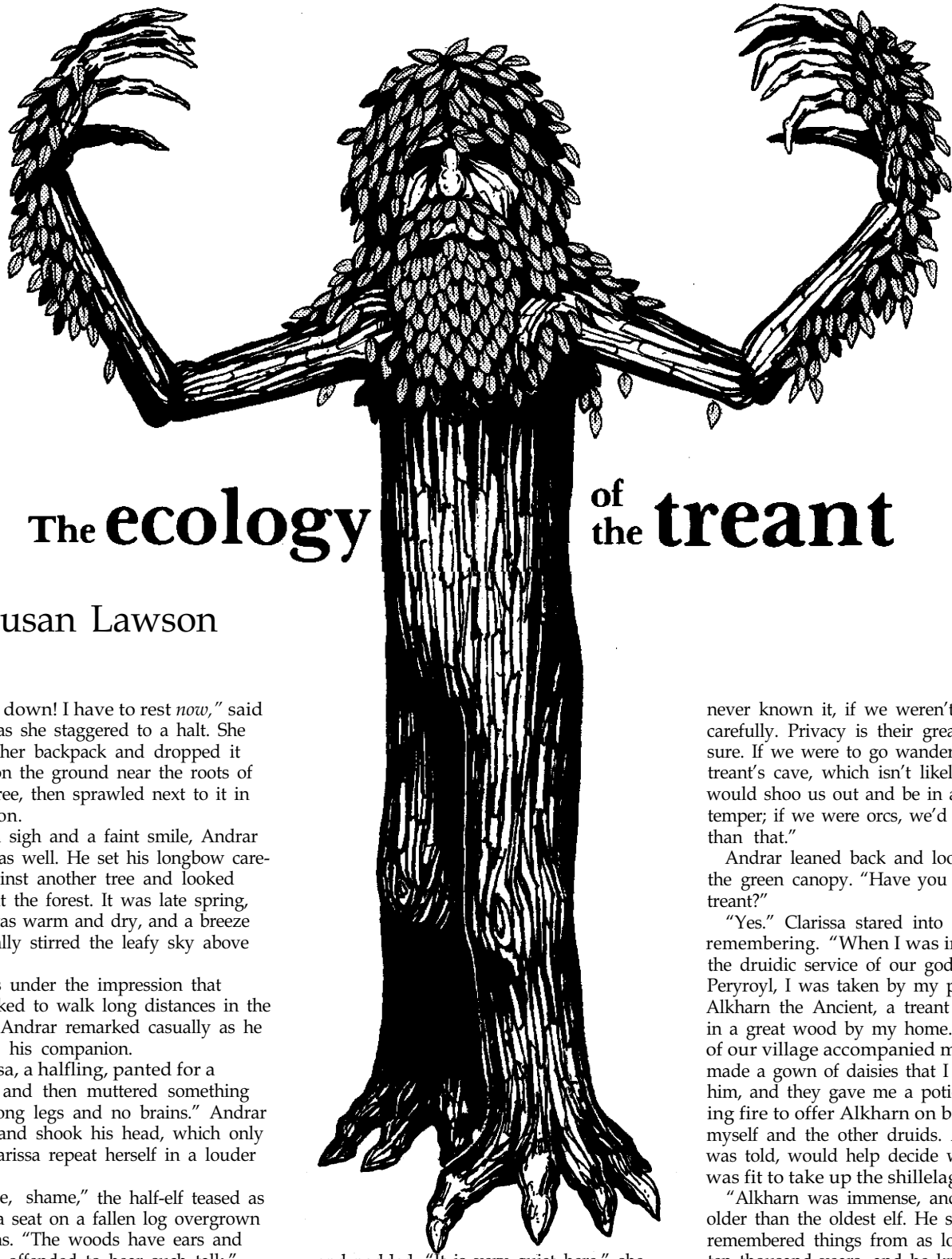
Again, note that a trapper is highly intelligent and will act accordingly — it will not attempt to "eat" anything but motionless (unconscious or dead) victims; it will not try to trap something in its top surface and consume something else beneath it at the same time, because the digestive enzyme loses its "power" when the underside is exposed to the air. The creature is never ravenous (it can survive for days or even weeks without a single "square meal"), but neither is it ever satisfied; as soon as one meal is finished, it is ready and quite able to consume another.

8. The activities of a trapper are controlled through its network of nerves, which gather together into three or more centers or nodes. One of these, the dominant, sentient directive center, is the creature's brain. This brain is highly developed, particularly in mature trappers — able to receive and interpret sensory input, and capable of decision-making. (If a trapper senses the presence of a large party of adventurers, it can and often will choose to lie quietly to avoid the possibility of being slain, rather than attacking.) As a trapper grows larger and older, its secondary nerve centers grow and develop until they also achieve sentience — whereupon the trapper splits into three or more little trappers. These instinctively move away from each other to establish their own territories; one will not knowingly locate next to another trapper. It is not known if trappers fight over territory or prey, but they seem to avoid each other whenever possible.

9. A trapper can alter the color of its top surface (the underside is always a sickly mottled pinkish and greenish-white) by producing pigmented liquid that it stores in bag-like organs within its body and forces by muscular action to and from its "stone" surface. Unlike the digestive enzyme (see note #7), this liquid does not lose its special properties when exposed to the air, so it can be salvaged and used (see note #10). The trapper's natural, unaltered top-side color is that of its underside, only slightly more brown-grey. It can shift hues through browns (sometimes with traces of dark green) to greys, all the way to jet black — but it cannot make its top surface glossy or smooth. It can never be white, translucent, or transparent as a result of pigment shifts. Trappers can exist under water, and are known to lie inches deep in partially flooded rooms or caverns; in such cases, they are virtually impossible to detect.

10. Speaking of gold pieces, adventurers who are victorious over a trapper will be rewarded if they think to recover some of its pigmentation liquid. It will fetch a handsome price (about 6 gp per pint) in quarters where it is known as an ingredient in the making of a *robe of blending*, and as an alternative ingredient in the manufacture of various spell inks (such as that for *Bigby's crushing hand).* Any portion of trapper flesh (the underside) can be used in the making of a *rug of smothering*, *rug of welcome*, or *net of entrapment.* Some magical practitioners have claimed, in writing, that intact trapper brains (preserved in vessels of nutrient liquids) can be linked to doors, pit traps, deadfalls, treasure niches, and the like so as to control their operation, but details of such arrangements and the process of establishing them (if they do indeed exist) are unknown to most magic-users at the present time. ♈





The ecology of the treant

by Susan Lawson

"Slow down! I have to rest *now,*" said Clarissa as she staggered to a halt. She unslung her backpack and dropped it heavily on the ground near the roots of an oak tree, then sprawled next to it in exhaustion.

With a sigh and a faint smile, Andrar stopped as well. He set his longbow carefully against another tree and looked around at the forest. It was late spring, the air was warm and dry, and a breeze occasionally stirred the leafy sky above them.

"I was under the impression that druids liked to walk long distances in the woods," Andrar remarked casually as he surveyed his companion.

Clarissa, a halfling, panted for a moment and then muttered something about "long legs and no brains." Andrar grinned and shook his head, which only made Clarissa repeat herself in a louder voice.

"Shame, shame," the half-elf teased as he took a seat on a fallen log overgrown with ferns. "The woods have ears and might be offended to hear such talk."

"They do, for a fact, and I don't care," said Clarissa. She sat up and shrugged out of her green cloak. "I hurt all over from trying to keep up with you. We're not going to a party or something; we're just here to look for mistletoe. We don't *have* to hurry."

Andrar grinned at her again. "I apologize," he said, then continued in a less serious tone, "Do you really think the trees can hear us?"

Clarissa rubbed her shins as she looked around at the seemingly endless wood, and nodded. "It is very quiet here," she said. "We've seen no sign of evil in this forest, and the trees are well tended. No broken limbs, no blight, the undergrowth is thinned away, and there are no signs of fire damage anywhere." She paused, both for a breath and for effect. "Treants. At least one travels here, probably more."

Andrar looked around with considerably more interest now. "Can you tell where they are?"

The young druid shook her head. "*They* know where they are. We could have passed a dozen of them already and never known it, if we weren't looking carefully. Privacy is their greatest treasure. If we were to go wandering into a treant's cave, which isn't likely, they would shoo us out and be in a bad temper; if we were orcs, we'd be worse off than that."

Andrar leaned back and looked up into the green canopy. "Have you ever met a treant?"

"Yes." Clarissa stared into the distance, remembering. "When I was initiated into the druidic service of our goddess, Sheela Peryroyl, I was taken by my parents to see Alkharn the Ancient, a treant who lived in a great wood by my home. The druids of our village accompanied me. They made a gown of daisies that I wore to see him, and they gave me a potion of resisting fire to offer Alkharn on behalf of myself and the other druids. Alkharn, I was told, would help decide whether I was fit to take up the shillelagh.

"Alkharn was immense, and he was older than the oldest elf. He said he remembered things from as long ago as ten thousand years, and he knew the names of all the kings of the land in all that time, of every race. In order to help him recall them all, he had made the names into a long verse, a memory-helper . . . a nem-something . . ."

"Mnemonic," offered Andrar, proud of himself. If Clarissa noticed the smirk that came over his face, she ignored it.

"That's the word I was looking for. It was a *great* poem. Alkharn said that treants have to create these poems. They have long memories anyway, but they live so long that they'd still forget things if

it wasn't for their mnemonics. I remember part of what he recited to me:

'Hero-king, Telaring, silver-eyed, elven- born,
Goblin-foe, steady bow, ruled long the North.'

"The poem went on and on. It was almost frightening to think of all the ages of time he had seen, and how things had changed so much since his earliest memories. He knew more about his own woods, though, than about any human or elven empires. The rest of the world was a vague memory to him, but Alkharn knew the names of every tree in his wood, and all the ones that had been there since his time began.

"He even recited part of his great poem where he had remembered the names of the trees he had met, but he said it all in his own language and I couldn't understand a word of it. When he spoke to me in my language, it was in a slow and rhythmic drone that I had trouble understanding, but it sounded very relaxing."

Clarissa absent-mindedly smoothed the hair on her feet and brushed the dust from her legs as she continued. "Alkharn said that treants knew many languages, even those of the bears, the birds, and the druids. He told me about the special language that treants share with trees and other treants — nothing spoken, but they wave their limbs and leaves, and touch and make rustling sounds, and all of it just to say 'Hello, how are you?' "

Andrar broke in, remembering one of Clarissa's earlier remarks. "Why did you say treants lived in caves?"

"They don't, really; they live in the outdoors most of the time, but groups of treants keep large caves, in which they store mementoes, brew their drinks, and stay safe from their most feared enemies, lightning and fire. The treants know that fire is often good for a forest, but this is true only for those forests that have no treants moving about to clear away thick undergrowth and decayed wood."

For a moment Andrar was silent, then thought of a story he heard long ago. "My father once told me there was great power in the drinks of the treants. Some who were allowed to drink from their wooden bowls found that they grew stronger, or that they could speak with plant life, and some lived far longer than they and others expected them to. My father said that one of his friends drank from a treant's bowl when he was wounded, and found himself healed of his injuries within seconds."

Clarissa nodded. "Your father's friend was blessed to share drink with them. Only those they trust completely are allowed to do that. Usually, they don't even communicate with ordinary folk, unless one is of the druidic profession like myself, or perhaps a ranger-type, or a bard, and they generally prefer to share their forests with elves, rather than humans or dwarves — or even halflings."

"I didn't think that treants were able to create magical things, though," said Andrar. "That has always confused me. How can they make these potions?"

Clarissa chewed her lower lip, searching for words. "It's hard to say, and I guess no one really knows *exactly* how. Treants make their potions from their own living sap, and add many sorts of materials that they find in the forest or receive in trade from friends like elves and dryads. Some say the drinks must age for many years before they are ready to be consumed. The effects the potions have upon people like you and me are probably related to the effects they have upon the treants themselves. A draught made to give a treant energy would gift me with the strength of a giant. I could throw boulders, bend bars, poke bothersome companions in the nose . . ."

Andrar grinned and tossed a twig at her. "Have your fun. But tell me more. Where do treants come from?"

"They just appear, as far as anyone knows. A young tree that has grown up straight and strong might someday start waving its two largest branches like arms, blink two eyes that were once just thin spots in its bark, and shuffle forward on a trunk that has split into two legs. When it does these things, it has become a treant, but no one — not even the oldest elf or the wisest druid — can predict if any particular tree will do that.

"Any sort of tree can become a treant, and treants have seeds like a tree. But those seeds do not grow into treants. The seedlings grow into trees, and only a few of them ever develop into treants. Then, as a treant gets larger and much, much older, it reaches a time when it turns back into a tree once more, forever. It takes thousands of years for a treant to pass to this stage, and they do not fear it as we fear death. For all we know, they simply fall asleep and dream, for as long as their tree-lives continue.

"This very tree," she said, patting a gnarled and dirty root beside her, "may once have been a great treant. The tree is certainly big enough, and the trunk seems to have a division where legs might have been, here near the base." Clarissa gave the root a final absent-minded pat and then stood up abruptly. "Well, that's all I have to say, and we're supposed to be looking for mistletoe."

Andrar, now the reluctant one, got to his feet slowly, then turned and on impulse called out to the forest. "Hail, treants! My blessings for your work! The gods grant that you may yet walk another thousand years among us!"

His exhortation over, Andrar reached for his bow — and froze. A rustling sound grew in his ears. The leaves above the halfling and the half-elf moved as if stirred by a quick wind, and then the sound rose into a storm of nature-noise: branches rippled, squirrels chittered, and birds called out to one another. The two travelers felt no breeze against their faces, yet the blast seemed to stir every tree in the wood. After a few minutes, the display subsided except for the calls of the excitable sparrows and larks.

Clarissa's eyes were wide. "By Sheela's daisies! They *did* hear us!"

"I thought you *knew* they were listening," said Andrar, just as shocked.

"I was just guessing, or hoping," she said, picking up her pack slowly. "No need for us to be afraid. The treants are watching out for us, and they wanted us to know that. They just startled me." She hoisted her backpack onto her shoulders and sighed. "Back to mistletoe hunting."

With some of their composure restored, the companions set out again into the woods. This time, it was Clarissa who remembered her manners. She paused at the edge of the clearing they were leaving, picked a daisy from her pocket, and tossed it back the way they had come.

"Good-bye! We'll be back sometime!" she called. Then she and Andrar disappeared into the trees.

APPENDIX

The list below can be used to determine which potions are found in a treant lair, and what their effects on characters would be if they were consumed. Note that any of these treant "drinks" can affect any character who imbibes one, regardless of class.

1. *Extra-healing*
2. *Giant strength* (Hill, Stone, or Frost)
3. *Growth*
4. *Healing*
5. *Longevity*
6. *Plant control* (this potion has no effect on treants or trees con trolled by treants)

Treants vary widely in appearance, having variable numbers of branch-like fingers or root-like toes, different types of leaves, and so forth. Individual personalities may vary widely as well, from joyful and outgoing to quiet and introspective.

The only substance besides their potions that treants consume is pure water, which they drink through their "feet" (roots) and mouths. They have no great like for other liquids, and cannot tolerate salt water. Drinking is important enough to them that their words for "understanding" and "listening" are derived from their word for "drinking."

One of the greatest gifts that may be offered to a treant is a *potion of fire resistance.* In exchange for such, treants may offer their services, anywhere within their woods, to good or neutral characters. This offer will be quickly and forcefully revoked if the recipients are careless with fire, cruel to the forest, or prove themselves later to be of evil intent.

Treants and algoids will cooperate if both reside near a lake or swamp. The algoids' immunity to *fireballs* and *lightning bolts* makes them valuable allies. m

Sensitive subjects

THE ECOLOGY OF THE TROGLODYTE

by Spike Y. Jones

illustrated by James Holloway

"I thank you, gentlemen and ladies, fellow members of the Korbelian Order of Magecrafters, for allowing me time for this presentation, and for your attendance," he said, peeking out at his audience from behind the pillars at the edge of the darkened theater's stage, "I must further inconvenience you by asking that you refrain from the casting of any light-producing spells for the duration of the seminar. They would . . . detract from the display.

"As I am not often found here in Khanahr, permit me to introduce myself," he said, his barely visible outline stepping from the wings to stand in the darkness at center-stage, "I am Farrand Two-Spell, a wizard of good standing in this Hall."

"A technicality," remarked one audience member, sotto voce.

"Some few of you," Farrand continued, "may be familiar with my name by way of the spell I designed years ago, jokingly referred to by some as *Farrand's freeloader,* but more properly named *Farrand's cognitive conveyance,* and that dweomer has a role in the story I am about to tell you. Until recently, I had amused myself by seeking the answers to problems unsolved by my predecessors, including even the archmage Korbel himself, but now I have come across a problem of my own which I ask your help in dealing with.

"Some centuries ago, a sage by the name of Arneerus, compiled a lexicon of the troglodyte language." At this moment, a troglodyte appeared to the left of Farrand's position, apparently from nowhere, advancing menacingly towards the audience and then blinking out of existence, only to reappear in its original position.

"A beginner's illusion", heckled the same voice in the audience, "there's no sound, and the animation is hardly lifelike. It couldn't convince an ankle-deep farmer, let alone a trained wizard."

"And," continued Farrand without pause, almost as if he hadn't heard the remark, "he was surprised to find that troglodyte speech apparently traces itself back to a highly degraded form of a primitive lizard man tongue."[1] A second creature then appeared, a lizard man poised on Farrand's other side, going through the same short rush at the audience before instantly returning to its place.

"Arneerus was surprised, because all of the anatomical sciences seemed to show that the two reptilians were no more closely related than humans and gnolls." As he spoke from his shadowy position, the reptilians on either side began to strike poses that mimicked each other and displayed the differences between their body structures.

"A second peculiarity that the sage pointed out was that troglodyte speak their own, lizard-man-derived language and absolutely no other. The language of the lizard man has evolved somewhat since it was learned by the trogs, changing in some aspects. At that point, the two beasts proceeded to intone pairs of words in their languages to show both the similarities and the differences.

"Sound. Nothing spectacular about that," sneered the heckler.

"There's nothing spectacular about a cantrip," commented a mage near the man, sparks dancing on his fingertips, "until I employ it on you."

"On no occasion has it been recorded that a troglodyte learned even a single word in a foreign tongue. Even when lizard men adopted from humans the common word 'halfling' to describe that race," (the lizard man made a smooth but recognizable reptilian parody of the word, after which the illusory figure dissolved into the surrounding darkness), "the trogs coined a phrase to cover the new species from other lizard man words: 'bad smelling little humans'," (a phrase which was followed by the troglodyte figure making a similarly long speech).

"In addition, there were numerous troglodyte words, apparently of trog, not lizard, origin, that simply baffled Arneerus. This, combined with the mysterious lack of many basic lizard man adjectives and adverbs, made his Beginner's *Troglodyte* a primer for a pidgin-troglodyte at best. No one has yet managed to decipher even a single of these extra terms, and woefully few new words have been discovered to fill these gaps. But flawed though it is, it has remained the essential tract used by those desiring to communicate with those creatures even to this day, centuries later.[2]

"Seeing the gains to be made by the man completing the translation of Troglodytian, I set myself diligently to the task.

"At first, I explored a number of blind passages that I should have had the sense to avoid entirely. After all, if the accomplished lexicologist Arneerus had forgotten to try a *comprehend languages* or tongues spell on a captured specimen, then I might as well try speaking the common tongue to them and hope he'd

Continued on page 82

1. The relationship between the troglodyte and lizardman languages is only a slight one, more easily detectable by linguists than by adventurers. If a character speaks either of these languages, he will be able to understand 10% or less of the other. While the troglodyte language can be transcribed by others, troglodyte themselves have no concept of written records.

2. That version of the troglodyte language which can be taught to humans and the like expresses less than 50% of the total content of troglodyte speech. Exceedingly simple statements, such as 'I surrender', 'you surrender', or 'I kill you', can be translated, but complex, intricate discussions are impossible.

overlooked that obvious avenue as well. And my results duplicated those of Arneerus; even the more powerful of the two spells left inexplicable gaps in its translations, gaps that corresponded to the gaps in Arneerus' lexicon.

"Taking my studies to the field, I went to a wild area a day's travel from my home, the place from whence my cap tured subject had originally been taken. After preparing a secure hiding place for my body, I cast my *cognitive conveyance* on the troglodyte and then released him, so that I could, from within his mind, follow him to his home and experience his interaction with others of his kind in a natural setting, hoping thus to learn the intricacies of his language. Although I counted Troglodyte among the languages with which I was as fluent as any other human, I supplemented my fluency with a *comprehend languages* and the most powerful *extension* spell of which I was capable, the better to interpret the missing nuances of the language I was sure I would soon hear.

"After only a few minutes of travel on the part of my host, we crossed a field of wildly growing roses to enter a honeycomb of tunnels inhabited by a community of almost three score of these creatures."

Slowly, a dim image of a branching tunnel made itself visible to the right of Farrand's still-shadowed and stifflymotionless form, moving and changing to match the description his monologue made. And the whole while, the slightly more animated image of the troglodyte stood to his left; a constant reminder of what the audience was watching for.

"The first thing that I noticed as we entered the caverns was darkness," Farrand said as the illusion of the craggy lair disappeared from his right. "Although I would have panicked on my own, my host's mind was entirely at ease, and it was not long before I realized that the darkness wasn't as unrelieved as it had first appeared. Various patches of the darkness slowly grew into wispy, red clouds and other shapes, and I realized what the misty redness was. Under more pleasant circumstances, I had used the *cognitive conveyance* to experience a number of things through the eyes of a young, elvish woman of my acquaintance, and this recalled one of those experiences; infravision."

"Something smells off in here," commented the heckler quietly enough not to raise the ire of his neighbors.

"For those of you who have infravision, what you enjoy is but a pale reflection of the infravision of a troglodyte," Farrand said, as a series of shifting pictures in numerous subtle shades of red, orange and yellow filled the space to his right, "I estimated that troglodyte could differentiate temperatures as little as a tenth of a degree apart, so that surfaces that would appear uniformly cold to even an elf's eye, such as the ceiling, wails, and floor or a rock tunnel, would reveal enough thermal variation to allow a troglodyte to navigate as well as a human on a moon-lit night.

"Of course, such navigation took some getting used to, as infravision is not a fast-acting sense like our normal vision is, but this didn't seem to bother the troglodyte at all because, much as we use hearing as an adjunct to our sense of sight, his infravision was secondary to his sense of smell.

"Corners in the tunnels were marked off by scent-markers and we could even smell around corners if we were downwind of them, more than once detecting approaching trogs long before we could see or hear them. Conversely, my host tended to be more cautious approaching corners we were upwind of, as neither his infravision nor his keen sense of smell afforded him any advantage in such a situation.[3]

"I stayed with my host for a considerable time experiencing many little details of his normal life. I ate a meal of raw meat with him, raw because troglodyte shun cooking fires or other sources of heat sufficient to blind their infravision.[4] I relaxed with him by smelling samples from a collection of flowers, rocks and furs, each scented subtly different in ways our language hasn't the vocabulary to describe.[5] And we talked with other troglodyte.

"At first, the conversations were just as confusing from the inside as they had been in all my previous attempts; I again heard nearly incoherent conversations in which key words, descriptives, and even whole sentences seemed to be missing. The troglodyte talked about things common to all species: their previous meals, their . . . uh . . . mating successes, their possessions, etcetera, but they left out important details like whether they liked the taste of the meal, what their mate looked like, or even exactly what possessions each one had.

"But the key to the missing words came when I realized the name of the individual I was being conveyed by. I never heard his name spoken, but more than once, at a point in the conversation when a name would have been expected, I smelled a curious blend of fragrances. It took a number of repetitions before I had both separated the different scents, and realized that these scents were the name of my host in the real language of the troglodyte. His name was Rose-Boiled Cabbage-Mild Skunk, and this was all accomplished by the troglodyte's bodies manufacturing these scents and releasing them into the air as if they were words!

"For a time I was stunned by this, but afterwards, I was able to decipher a large number of other words. For every word that is missing in their spoken vocabulary, there is a corresponding smell to take its place. There are smells for objects, places, persons, animals, and even emotions. Apparently, the original language of the troglodyte was entirely olfactory, and the verbal component was only borrowed from the

3. Because smell is such an important part of troglodyte sensory input, the arrange their lairs to facilitate the distribution of important scents. Caves are selected or modified so that the primary direction of air circulation is from the main entrance towards other, smaller exits and air vents, so that the foreign scents of intruders will be wafted to the defenders almost immediately. The savagery that troglodyte display when attacking humans has lead some to assert that they hate humanity, but the situation is actually the opposite. Humans smell and taste especially savory to troglodyte (human scents being used as superlatives when discussing other meats in the troglodyte scent-language), causing them to react with particular vigour and violence when those scents are sensed.

4. It is because of this avoidance of fire that troglodyte are generally armed with stone weapons, and that they raid the communities of other races in order to get worked metals for themselves. They are incapable of forging their own metal weapons, as their infravision is blinded by the searing heat of a forge.

Instead, they make most of their weapons by stone-chipping, an activity they can accomplish with minimal light and a keen sense of touch. Their javelins are all wood except for the head which they make from sources as diverse as well-crafted human spears and points broken off of daggers. The javelins are not spectacular of themselves (in fact, they look somewhat crude in many cases), but troglodyte are so skilled with this weapon that trogs have bonuses both to hit and in damage with them.

It is also because they cannot process their own steel that its possession is considered a sign of status and power within their communities; as the only way they can get metal is through combat (what would they offer in trade?), its possession is a sign of a warrior's prowess.

5. While magical translation aids, such as Comprehend Languages or Tongues spells, can make the spoken words of intelligent creatures understandable to the caster, they do not give him any new communicative abilities he did not previously possess. In the case of communicating with troglodyte, a human spell-caster doesn't gain an improved sense of smell from casting a Comprehend Languages spell, nor can the spell's magic invent new words to cover concepts unfamiliar to the caster, such as the thousands of variations of scent that only a troglodyte can differentiate.

lizard man in order to give them some form of ability to communicate with those outside of their own race.[6]

"Once I had firmly grasped this concept, and had learned enough of it to form a base for a new treatise on troglodytian conversation, I made ready to abandon my host's body and return to my own, safe in the woods outside. Even more stunning than the discovery of the secret of the troglodyte language was the realization that I couldn't extricate myself from my host! There is a time-limit involved in the use of the *cognitive conveyance* such that it becomes progressively more difficult to end the spell as time goes on. And I had apparently been so engrossed in the wonders of troglodyte sensibilities and society, that I had failed to keep track of the passing hours; I was trapped."[7]

"Hey, the smell's getting worse," exclaimed the heckler, "I think he's brought the worst part of the troglodyte cave back with him to prove his silly story."

"If you think that this speech is merely an attempt to authenticate some claimed discovery," responded another of his fellows, "then you're a greater fool than Farrand is about to reveal himself to be."

"At first, I didn't panic. I merely paused for a few moments to renew my mental energies, and then tried again to escape my prison, but to no avail. As my repeated efforts proved fruitless, I changed the direction of the task I set myself. Instead of trying to escape my host, I tried to invade him entirely, hoping to take over the mind and body I had passively shared up until that moment. I spent more than a few frustrating days trapped voiceless and bodiless within the beasts mind and at times it felt like he would eject me from his mind to go none-know-where, but I finally succeeded; I became the mind of Farrand Two-Spell, saddled with the body of a troglodyte named Rose-Boiled Cabbage-Mild Skunk.

"This accomplished, I exited the complex (incidentally called Roses In Profusion by the troglodyte, from which all of the tribe members drew part of their name; the field of roses cultivated outside the cavern being a signpost and beacon for the benefit of travelling troglodyte), to retrieve my body, return home, and solve this new predicament.

"The journey was more difficult than one would readily imagine. While my troglodytian body could see well

Continued on page 86

6. This scent language is central to the troglodyte, and apparently evolved from such basics as the similarity of scents within a clan or family, the easily identifiable scents of fear and passion, and the common animal ability of tracking other animals by the foreignness of the other's smell.

Among troglodyte, the scent-language is so versatile that it takes precedence over all other forms of communication. Guards cry out alarms in a shrill olfactory "voice" without making a sound, thereby alerting other troglodyte within smell range (about 20' away per round as the smell drifts, to a maximum of 80', after which it blends in too well with the background scents to be identifiable) without alarming relatively smell-blind humans. In fact, the overpowering stench that can reduce a human opponent to weak-kneed vomiting during combat with troglodyte, is merely the build up of olfactory battle-cries, combat orders, screams of rage, pain, and hunger, and other smell/phrases which are spoken/emitted in such profusion that the combined smell overpowers non-troglodyte.

In fact, a similar effect would occur at any time troglodyte 'speak' too fast for the ventilation in their lairs to accommodate, the equivalent of the noise level in a crowded room full of humans, something which can cause headaches even to the participants. Even a single troglodyte can cause such a build-up of smells, if he is kept in a poorly ventilated area for extended periods of time.

When fighting troglodyte place increasingly more stock in this form of information gathering rarely making any noise, in order to concentrate on the immediacy of scent; they pay as much attention to what they see during combat as humans do to what they hear. Thus, light would have to be particularity bright (eg: a Light spell cast directly on their eyes) to cause them significant discomfort, and this discomfort is only half what other subterranean beings suffer from in similar circumstances (-1 to their "to hit" rolls and armor class, or no effect if a saving throw vs. spells is successful), causing effects more akin to deafness than blindness for a human.

If fighting under conditions in which their sense of smell is overwhelmed (eg: if their opponents have spread skunk oil in the vicinity, or if they've set a number of different things aflame, releasing thick clouds of multi-scented smoke), they will put more stock in their infravision or their weak normal vision, but if anything threatens these senses as well (such as Light or Wall Of Fire spells), they will immediately retreat.

As they can easily tell which of their opponents are the most afraid of them by the fear scents all release, they will usually concentrate their attacks on the most fearful, which usually proves to be a good tactic as these are also the weakest of their enemies. (In game terms, the DM should require Morale rolls when NPCs face troglodyte, not to have them run away, but merely to determine which is the most fearful. In the case of player characters, the DM should judge on the basis of known PC abilities, and on the reactions of the players.)

Illusions without scent components have no effect on them in combat and not much in other conditions. They have +8 on their saving throws vs. illusions without olfactory components under normal circumstances, and +2 on saves vs. those with scent components unless the caster is sufficiently familiar with the scent to duplicate it exactly. An illusion of another troglodyte will not be believed under any circumstances if it is not accompanied by scents proper to the occasion (ie: even a perfectly duplicated battle-scent won't fool a troglodyte during a non-battle oriented encounter). And even the best illusion of a troglodyte is unlikely to be believed for more than a few rounds, as the real troglodyte might eventually begin to wonder why his 'friend' is constantly repeating the same scent phrases over and over again.

7. For those daring enough to use it, here is the spell that Farrand used to trap himself with:

Farrand's Cognitive Conveyance
(Necromantic)
Level: 4
Range: 5 feet/level
Components: V,S
Duration: Special
Casting Time: 1 round
Area of Effect: 1 Creature
Saving Throw: Special

Similar to a *magic jar* spell, the cognitive conveyance allows one's mind to enter the body of another creature, but unlike that other spell, it does not remove the original "occupant" from his position. Instead, the caster "shares" the victim's body, seeing through its eyes, hearing through its ears and even thinking with its brain to a certain extent. This effect is put to a number of uses by spies, scouts, and even the simply curious.

The victim of the spell must be within the listed range at the time of casting, and as long as the two bodies are both within the casting range, the caster will be able to see through both sets of eyes at one time, and can control his own body with some minor difficulty. The caster and his host can move any distance away from the caster's body without negative effect, but if separated by more than the spell's range, he loses all sensory or control contact with his own body (which goes into a deep coma but is otherwise unharmed) until such time as the bodies re-enter the spell's range.

The duration of the spell is unlimited, but this is not an unmixed blessing. As time goes on, the caster slowly loses touch with his own body and becomes more attuned to the body he "rides in". Every hour spent sharing another's mind and body removes the caster 5% from his own body, so that he will have lost 25% control of his body's actions after 5 hours, and after 20 hours, he will not have any contact at all with his original body, being fully integrated within his hosts consciousness.

The subject/victim of the spell gets no saving throw to resist it, but in order for the caster to sever the spell and return to his own mind and body, the caster must make a saving throw, rolling the percentage of control he retains of his own body or less to return to normal. Thus, after 5 hours in the hosts mind, the caster must roll 75% or less to return to his own body; after 20 hours he will find himself irrevocably trapped.

If this should happen, the caster will find that he slowly (at a rate of about 1% per hour) gains control of his hosts mind and body. The host will likely have been unaware of the casters intrusion until this point, but if the trapped caster attempts to flex his mental muscle, forcing the shared body into actions the host hadn't intended, there may be a struggle for control, with the caster having to roll the amount of control he has or less to take over the body entirely. If he fails, he loses all control and must begin working at control from 0% again. A patient prisoner will wait over four days (i.e. 100 hours) without attempting a takeover, thus virtually assuring himself victory with a 99% chance of taking over (as a roll of 00 always results in a failure).

If control is established, the hosts mind is not eliminated, it is merely locked securely within the mind of the new controller, and the host-turned-prisoner can begin his own attempts to overthrow the Freeloader, starting at 0% chance, and working his way up 1% an hour until he makes his own attempt at control. The flip-flop cycle of owners can continue until either one gives up, or the caster is finally returned to his own body.

To lose control of your body to an invading mind is a traumatic occurrence. Thus, any time complete control is wrested by one of the two minds, the loser must roll his Wisdom or less on 1d20, or else be driven insane by the shock. If one of the two combatants goes insane, the other gains uncontested control of the body, until such time as the insane mind is restored to sanity.

Once a caster has become trapped in the subject's body, the spell cannot be cancelled by any simple means such as a *dispel magic* spell, and the subjects lifeforce becomes so attached to the host body that it is curiously resistant to even a Magic Jar spell. Those concerned speculate that it would take at least a *limited wish* to free the conjoined minds.

If the caster manages to gain complete control of the body, he can treat the body as his own in all ways; he will be able to cast spells as per normal, and will possess all his own mental facilities, along with the physical capabilities of the body.

enough in the light of day, it seemed difficult to recognize landmarks I had passed but a few days before. I kept forcing my body to look around for familiar sights, while it kept trying to sniff about for smells which might have been familiar to Rose-Boiled Cabbage-Mild Skunk, but which would have provided me no guidance at all even if I had found any.[8]

"Due to the sensory difficulties of the trip, and the fact that my troglodyte body was forced to carry my still-living but mindless and failing human body, the one-day trip to my home ended up taking almost three.

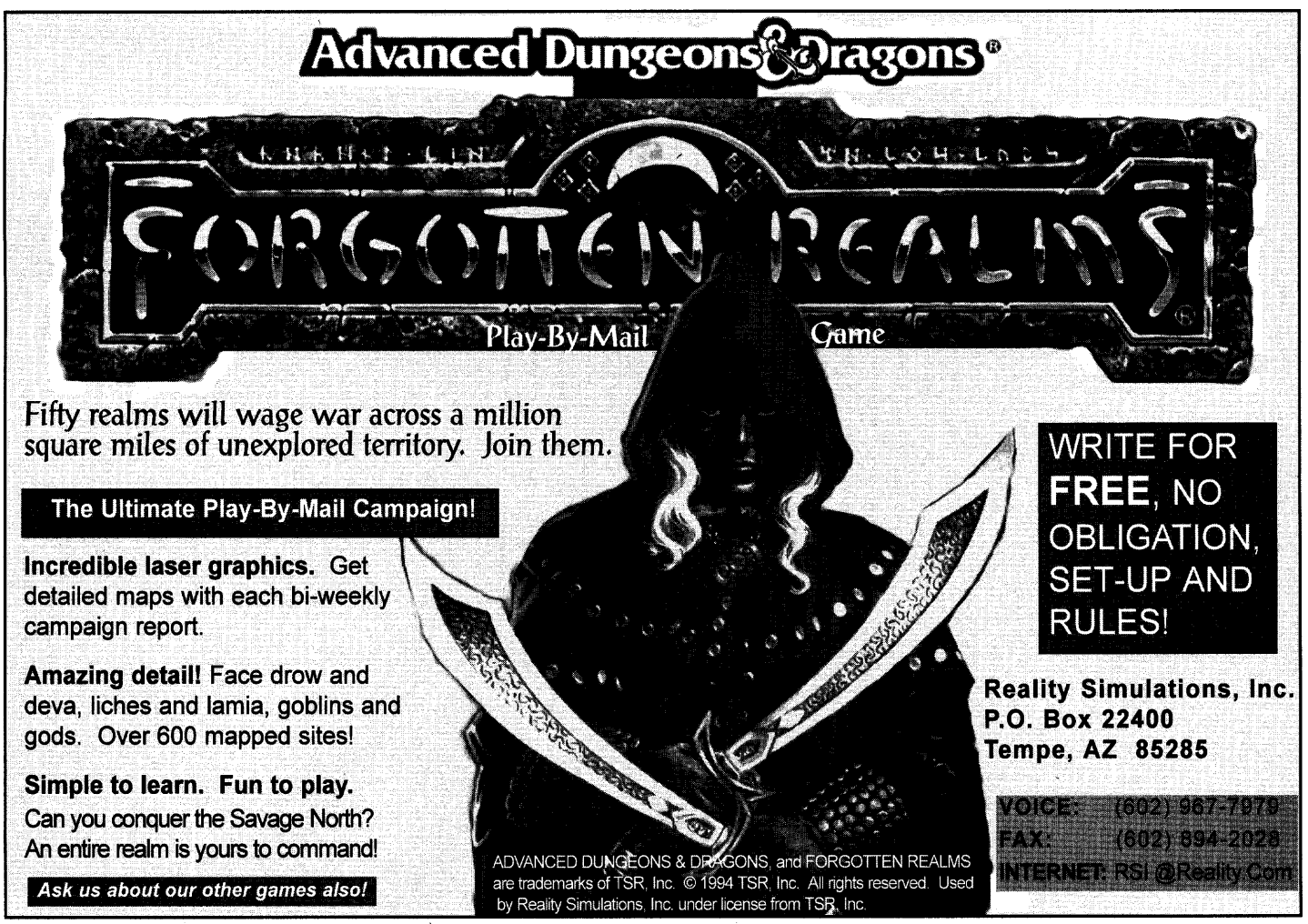
"In my chambers, I pored over the notes I had made during the creation of my *cognitive conveyance* spell and, unfortunately, assured myself of what I had feared most during my week-long ordeal."

Indeed, the smell in the closed theatre had been getting more and more oppressive as Farrand's story went on, and now even the more forgiving members of his audience were starting to take up the hecklers restless muttering. Of a sudden, the lights in the theater lit up, and the scenic illusions that Farrand had been maintaining to his right to show his route to Khanahr faded and disappeared under the lamp's onslaught. But surprisingly, the illusion of the troglodyte that had been standing to Farrand's left for the whole lecture seemed no less solid now than it had before. And Farrand himself seemed oddly awkward as he stood there, moving only occasionally and jerkily as he spoke.

"Since returning from Roses In Profusion I have tried every spell I thought would help, but none have shown any promise or effect. When I first entered *Farrand's cognitive conveyance* in the rolls of this Order's additions to magecraft, some of you warned me about the dangers of employing new magics without proper tests and controlled experimentation. I stand before you now, having delivered my *programmed illusion,* moving and speaking through the use of *telekinesis* and *ventriloquism* spells, to offer all of the profits from my upcoming volumes on the language of the troglodyte to the mage-brother or sister among you who can free me from this damned, stinking reptile's body and make me again the man I was!"

Spike Y. Jones would like to thank Kimberly F. Marshall, Dale A. Donovan, Roger E. Moore, and Mark Goldberg for their help at various stages in this article's evolution.

8. Just as troglodyte don't recognize any written form of their language, they don't make use of sketched maps. If a troglodyte is to make a trip into a strange region, another, with past experience of the area, will emit an olfactory sketch of the route, describing the succession of scents that the traveller should encounter along the trip; visual landmarks are only used as a supplement to the olfactory, or when they are obvious enough to be used day or night.



MONTE

Malignant Growth

The Ecology of the Troll

by Paul Leach · illustrated by Monte Moore

Trolls are bestial giants driven by unrelenting hunger, occupying a niche between animal predators and the rest of giantkind. These rubber-skinned brutes prize strength, and they lust for slaughter and destruction, caring little for anything else. Secure in the knowledge that most creatures cannot inflict lasting injuries on them, they fight fearlessly. Despite these characteristics, trolls have the capacity to reason, and they can think beyond their next meal—although when one is at hand, they tend to concentrate on it to the exclusion of everything else.

It's easy to come to the conclusion that trolls aren't much more than regenerating eating machines, but the role they play in your campaign doesn't have to be as simple as that. They can be found skulking about the wilderness alone or in small gangs, but they are also encountered in the service of evil humanoids, giants, or even more powerful monsters. Exceptional trolls that advance in character classes can be encountered as well; most often they are leaders or otherwise special members of a tribe, but they might also be unique NPC enemies or allies.

Trolls in the World

Trolls live in every climate on the surface and inhabit the Underdark as well. They typically operate within a 10-mile radius of their lairs, although those that live in subterranean areas are often more restricted in their excursions. They are not overly territorial with creatures other than trolls, considering any creature willing to place itself within the reach of their claws and teeth a good thing. They often live semi-nomadic lives, moving on when they have depleted a nearby settlement of all humanoids and domesticated herds, and if wild fish and game are scarce. Unless driven away by powerful enemies, a troll will most likely return to its former haunts when food is plentiful again.

Trolls have no natural enemies, but some monsters prey on trolls like they would any other creature. Only a few of these actually give a troll cause to fear for its life: ankhegs, dragons, oozes, remorhazes, and purple worms. Any creature large enough to swallow a troll (whole or in pieces) and digest it with strong stomach acids encourages caution in a troll. Trolls are fearful of incorporeal undead as well, especially shadows. Most good races seek to kill or drive away trolls whenever they encounter them, as it is a fair assumption the trolls will eat them if given the chance.

A Troll's Life

The natural lifespan of trolls is approximately 100 years, and they reach maturity after just 10 years, although they can hunt and fend for themselves within a year after birth. The young learn mostly by harsh experience, but they are taught to fear fire and to revere only the evil gods they emulate, namely Vaprak the Destroyer and Erythnul the Many. Trolls grow up nasty and determined, scornful of other races, whom they consider food.

A troll's ability to express itself is often limited to asserting dominance over the weaker members of its tribe through violence, although some like to draw on cave walls or other similar surfaces as a pastime. The drawings (etched in charcoal, blood, clay, or filth) are usually scenes of hunts or wars, and they often contain references to the dark gods the trolls worship. Trolls do not typically engage in crafts of any sort, most of them not even bothering to fashion crude garments for themselves.

Much of their activities focus on acquiring food, whether exploring their habitats for sources of meat, preparing ambushes, or actually tracking prey. These hunters tend to be nocturnal, but they can be active any time of the day. Their scent and darkvision abilities allow them to hunt prey at night, when some of their intended meals might be at a disadvantage. If possible, a hungry troll will attempt to consume a meal on the spot, but it will take food back to its lair if necessary.

Trolls mate irregularly, and their birth rate is low as a result. The courtship ritual is initiated by a dominant female and is often nothing more than a brawl with any competing females to impress prospective mates. Sometimes the female presents her intended with a kill

for them to share (a troll otherwise never shares a meal if it can help it). A mating is most likely to produce offspring when the mother has access to enormous amounts of food, since pregnant trolls become even more hungry and vicious. The year-long gestation rarely results in more than one troll newborn.

Wealth

Trolls do not normally learn a craft, nor do they engage in commerce or till the soil as a way of life. They collect treasure, usually by theft or plunder, but sometimes they earn it. They don't view coins as a means to acquire material comforts and goods, but as something to measure their power and worth. Trolls love magic items, and they are considered more valuable than platinum coins when it comes to measuring one's worth, especially if the item can be used as a powerful weapon to intimidate other trolls.

Society

Troll society is limited to small clans or even single families, as they are too chaotic and violent to sustain order in a larger group. Small family groups allow for manageable hunting parties and provide some kind of mutual protection for the individual members. As females are stronger than males, most clans are matriarchal.

Inter-tribal relations are normally limited to random meetings to share news or to trade males or valuable magic items. In other societies, family members are ritualistically given to other families in formal fosterage or marriage alliances. Most clans do not trespass on another clan's territory unless spoiling for a fight. Temporary agreements can be reached when fighting a common enemy or if there is plenty of humanoid prey to go around.

Troll culture and history is maintained through oral tradition. Each clan attributes a divine origin to its founder, with its Great Mother often being a daughter of Vaprak. They believe themselves superior to the other giant races because they have maintained their connection to the primal, chaotic forces of the earth by emulating its ability to destroy and regenerate. Several giant mythologies acknowledge elder creator gods, many of whom are no longer actively worshiped. The trolls are no different, and their legends speak of a dark Earth Mother.

Lairs

Troll dens are often a series of two to four connected natural caverns. They do little to improve the living conditions in their caves, although they might conceal or bar the entrance to their lairs. They generally look for caves that have small mouths (about 5 ft. x 5 ft.) and narrow, winding entry tunnels. Trolls typically disguise the entrance to their lairs with large boulders or a pile of earth and brush. Trolls like dens that offer strewn boulders or stalactites and stalagmites, as they can use these to set ambushes, and the tribal adept can fling spells while protected by their cover.

Trolls prefer caves that have two entrances, especially if they allow the trolls to leave by one and easily return by the other. Such a troll den presents a greater threat to adventurers, since they might find themselves quickly cut off from escape once a troll circles

around behind them. The second entrance to a troll's lair is usually a natural crevice or shaft, as it can also serve as a trap to unwary adventurers. A troll can turn the shaft into a trap simply by not disguising its tracks when returning from hunting and then making sure its trail leads over the brush-covered hole. The trap can be made more dangerous by setting wooden spikes or even a *glyph of warding* on the cave floor.

Killer Creature Combos

Trolls are often found in the company of other creatures, either serving as henchmen and servants or as partners.

Troll and a Trap: Trolls aren't particularly concerned with falling damage, so they are often willing to grapple a PC and take the foe over the edge of a pit or cliff. A single troll and a 60-foot-deep pit trap is an EL 6 encounter.

Troll and Troglodytes: A troll can add some extra muscle to a troglodyte encounter. With the troll's good Fortitude saving throw, it's not likely to succumb to their stench. Although these two species don't normally associate with one other, the drow often employ both races, giving them cause to work together. This group might be found in drow service, or they might simply be veterans who have left the drow but continue to work together. A troll and six troglodytes make for an EL 7 encounter.

Ogre Mage and Trolls: An ogre mage might use trolls to soften up its opponents while it remains invisible, waiting for an opportune moment to cast *cone of cold* into the melee (the trolls don't like this, but they can regenerate the damage). If the PCs easily resist the trolls' attacks, the ogre mage makes its cold attack before the trolls take too much damage. Otherwise, it waits until the PCs are thoroughly weakened before it frosts them and charges into melee. An ogre mage and three trolls is an EL 10 encounter.

Drow Wizard and Trolls: An 8th-level drow wizard could support her troll servants (four regular trolls and one 4th-level troll rogue) in combat by keeping the PCs occupied with her strong defensive position while she sets them up for an ambush. Surrounding herself with her regular trolls, she casts *minor globe of invulnerability* to protect them from magical fire attacks and mind-controlling spells. She casts *fly* and *improved invisibility* on the troll rogue so that it can deliver sneak attacks to the PC spellcasters. The wizard further assists her trolls with such spells as *bull's strength, haste,* or *protection from elements.* This is an EL 12 encounter.

Fire Giant Cleric and Trolls: A 5th-level fire giant cleric might deploy his troll slave guards (six regular trolls with a 7th-level barbarian leader) against the PCs. He uses *protection from elements* to ward himself against cold-based attacks, and he casts *resist elements* on the troll barbarian to help against fire-based attacks. The remaining trolls simply work to distract the party and help the giant and the barbarian make flanking attacks. This is an EL 16 encounter.

HALF-FIEND/HALF-TROLL

Vs. PCs

Troll combat tactics revolve around their multiple attacks, regeneration ability, and their hunger. They rarely use weapons, as their natural attacks are comparable, if not superior, to most weapon damage. The exception is a troll that has received special training and taken a level in a character class, or if the weapon is magical and particularly powerful. Trolls typically don't have a reason to hang back from a melee unless prevented from closing by fire or other powerful barriers.

The information below describes how best to use a troll's abilities and tactics, and is intended to help a DM run a troll NPC. Players should skip this section and instead read the Vs. Trolls section later in this article for information on battling trolls.

Entrapment: Trolls like to set ambushes if the terrain allows, attempting to herd prey into a dead end or over a deep pit. This tactic is most often used in their cave lairs and is easily accomplished by overrunning the PCs and cutting off their only means of escape. When hunting humanoids in the wilderness, trolls might be patient enough to wait until their prey reaches difficult or impassable terrain, such as rivers, thick brush, or canyons. When the trolls' patience runs out, if they get too hungry, or if they suspect they have been detected by their prey, they give up on the ambush and simply charge.

Into the Fray: The overrun tactic mentioned above has other uses, as it is a good way to reach enemy spellcasters who use magical fire. Most trolls are not concerned about provoking attacks of opportunity when they charge the front rank of warriors. As trolls have extended reach, they can also do some damage to PCs who hope to gain protection behind the group's fighters.

Bring 'Em Down: After charging in to reach its prey, a troll usually attempts to grapple it. With the troll's high Strength, it's likely that the troll will succeed. It can then use its natural attacks with grapple checks, following up with its rend ability.

To Each His Own: There is little cooperation among trolls, each being concerned with feeding itself. Trolls rarely give aid to their allies unless they are following the commands of a fearsome leader.

Trolls With Class

There are some trolls who stand out above the others in brute strength, intelligence, or determination. These trolls seek specialized training and advance in character classes. While a troll can take a level in any class, assuming it meets the alignment and ability requirements, trolls generally only train as barbarians, clerics,

ROCK TROLL

fighters, and rogues. Below are suggestions and tactics for NPC trolls that have levels in these classes.

Barbarian: This class is well suited to trolls, the ability to rage and quickly pursue fleeing opponents at 1st level makes these monsters more menacing than usual. For their feats, troll barbarians tend to take Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Run, and Weapon Focus (claw). Climb, Swim, and Wilderness Lore are the best skills for a troll barbarian, as they allow the creature to better navigate natural obstacles between it and its prey.

Cleric: Only exceptional trolls take a level in this class, mainly because of the high Wisdom required to cast even the weakest divine spells. Most clerics are leaders of their small tribes. Their spellcasting abilities offer them more flexibility than the battle tactics used by most trolls, but like other trolls, they eagerly jump into melee combat as soon as possible. They cast protective spells on themselves before combat and then proceed to attack enemy spellcasters or exceptionally dangerous fighters with offensive spells. Once they have exhausted their repertoire (it's possible a troll might withhold a spell or two), they make melee attacks. Clever clerics who've encountered adventurers before might employ special tricks, such as using the ready action to cast *shatter* on the first PC to pull out a flask of alchemist's fire, causing the PC to suffer a direct hit when the flask explodes in his hands. The PC's problems are compounded if he carries other flasks, as they are subject to the spell's radius. Trolls with access to *summon monster III* are likely to bring a water elemental to the fight, giving some measure of control over PC pyrotechnics. Troll clerics often cast *hold person* on fighters and other strong melee-minded opponents, but some trolls attempt to use this spell against spellcasters, hoping to overcome a good Will save for a very dramatic success. Troll clerics do not worry about missing any early kills, as they have sufficient power to force lesser trolls to give up a meal.

Troll clerics favor the Combat Casting feat, but they've also been known to take the Brew Potion and Empower Spell feats, along with any of the feats commonly taken by troll barbarians. They allot most of their skill points to Concentration but occasionally take ranks in Knowledge (religion) and Spellcraft.

Trolls prefer spells that protect them from fire and acid, enhance their combat abilities, and harm enemies. Outside of their ability to rebuke undead, troll clerics do not care much for spells that combat or create undead; they don't hunt undead for food, and they don't leave much of their victims to animate. Many troll clerics worship either Erythnul or Vaprak, allowing them access to domains that support bloodletting, with most choosing Evil and War (Erythnul's clerics) or Destruction and Strength (Vaprak's clerics). Like PC clerics, trolls might choose to worship religious concepts, but care should be taken in allowing domain choices to favor game advantages over good roleplaying. For instance, the Water domain is appropriate for scrags (aquatic trolls), but to give it to a land troll seems only like a way to give it the ability to rebuke fire creatures.

Listed below are common spell choices for a troll cleric of up to 5th level.

0: *inflict minor wounds, resistance;* 1st: *bane, bless, divine favor, doom, endure elements, magic stone, protection from good, shield of faith, summon monster I;* 2nd: *bull's strength, darkness, endurance, hold person, inflict moderate wounds, resist elements, shatter, summon monster II;* 3rd: *deeper darkness, dispel magic, glyph of warding, inflict serious wounds, prayer, protection from elements, stone shape, summon monster III.*

Fighter: This class is not as popular with trolls as the barbarian class, but its disciplined style appeals to trolls that serve as mercenaries to hobgoblins and fire giants. Troll fighters take many of the same feats as troll barbarians, but especially Power Attack, Cleave, and Great Cleave. Many also take the Weapon Specialization (claw) feat. Troll fighters spend their skill points on Climb, Jump, and Swim, rarely taking ranks in any other skill.

Rogue: The ability to make sneak attacks and evade *fireballs* comes in handy. A troll rogue usually spends most of its skill points on the Hide and Move Silently skills, and a few clever rogues use the Craft (trapmaking) skill to set traps in their lairs for unwary adventurers.

VAPRAK THE DESTROYER

Vaprak is the chaotic evil patron deity of trolls and ogres, and he embodies the strength and ferocity that both races find appealing. Other giants worship him as well, especially brutish ettins and hill giants. The Destroyer appears as an extremely large troll (about 15 feet tall) and his claws are stained with the blood of those he has slaughtered. Vaprak is worshiped in caves and where the enemies of his followers are killed and eaten. His clerics have access to the domains of Chaos, Destruction, Evil, and Strength. The claws is his favored weapon.

PC Trolls

This is not an easy race to integrate into a campaign, especially if most of the PCs are from the standard races listed in the *Player's Handbook*. Since they have an ECL of 11, the PC troll should be introduced only when the other characters are of similar level. A PC troll shouldn't be restricted to the chaotic evil alignment, but even a good troll will be viewed with suspicion and hatred by most civilized folk. Trolls are not socially acceptable except in the

roughest of company, such as mercenary or adventurer bands. If traveling alone, a troll PC should expect to be driven from town.

A troll might take a chance outside of barbarian lands to amass wealth, fame, and power to enable it to better control its savage kin when it decides to go back home (not unlike some half-orcs). A small kingdom bordering monster-inhabited lands could be a source of employment, offering coins and cattle to gain a mercenary who is intimately familiar with the kingdom's enemies. As another possibility, the troll might join the PCs in a quest against a common enemy.

Vs. Trolls

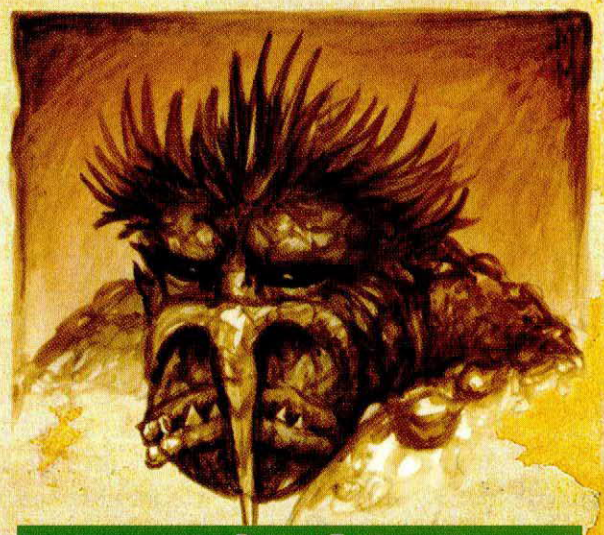
Trolls rarely show restraint when given the opportunity to eat humanoids. Adventurers willing to go on troll hunts often find themselves as the quarry. With luck, the right armory of spells and weapons, and some good strategic planning, your adventuring company can defeat these monsters, or at least escape with their lives.

Preparation

Although fire and acid are what ultimately destroy a troll, every member of an adventuring party can contribute to the demise of this bloodthirsty, regenerating foe.

Fire spells: *Fireball* is an excellent choice to use against trolls, but there are other fire-based spells to employ against these brutes. Area effect spells are best, such as *acid fog, fire storm,* and *flame strike.* If these spells aren't available, cast *web.* Once the troll is trapped by the spell, any member of the party can quickly set the creature on fire with a simple torch. *Flaming sphere* is useful for impeding trolls, and *fire shield* and *wall of fire* might keep them at bay, or at the very least, do some damage to them if they can't be swayed from charging in to eat your PC. *Fire seeds* and *glyph of warding* (set for fire damage) are useful to cover a retreat or set an ambush, as is *fire trap* if there is a door between you and the trolls. Don't forget *burning hands, flame arrow,* or *flame blade.* The Empower Spell feat improves these damaging spells. Since trolls don't have great Reflex saves (only +4), they will take the heat most of the time.

Other spells: Trolls have poor Will saves but great Fortitude saves, so take advantage of spells that require Will saves. Some that are useful for incapacitating or driving away trolls include: *charm monster, fear, hold monster, sleep, slow,* and *suggestion. Command* and *color spray* are good for only a short while, but they are still handy at times. Surprisingly, *bestow curse* might be the best spell for knocking out trolls; with their low Intelligence and Charisma scores (typically a 6 for both abilities), a failed save drops a troll to 0 points in either ability, putting the monster in a "comalike stupor," (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Used cleverly, an illusion can save the day by drawing the trolls away from the party or into a trap, but don't forget that they have the scent ability or your illusion might be useless.



Fiendish Troll

Melee: When fighting a troll, it is important to have feats and weapons that cause a lot of damage, otherwise it's almost impossible to keep up with the troll's regeneration ability. The Power Attack feat is a must, and Weapon Specialization, with its additional +2 to damage, is useful for fighters. Greatswords and greataxes are ideal for close combat, but don't underestimate longspears and polearms, which are useful for their reach capabilities. Preventing just one of the troll's claw attacks from hitting can save a character from the troll's deadly rend attack, so good armor or magic protection is paramount. Dwarf and gnome fighters get a +4 Dodge bonus against giants and should have a healthy number of hit points to boot, making them ideal companions to have around when hunting trolls.

Ranged Attacks: Most normal missile attacks are worthless against trolls unless they are followed by some of the more powerful tactics and attacks listed above; it does no good to rely on only shooting a handful of arrows at a troll, because before you can do more damage on your next turn, the troll has most likely regenerated and is back to its normal hit point total. Flasks of alchemist's fire and acid are noteworthy exceptions to this guideline, despite their short range. Tanglefoot bags can be useful as well.

Coup de Grace: Be sure to save some fire and acid for coup de grace actions on fallen trolls. Only an attack that deals normal damage to a troll (fire and acid) can be used for a coup de grace.

Tactics

Once you find some trolls, or they find you (as is most often the case), the encounter will likely continue until the trolls are completely wiped out or flee when they come to the conclusion they are truly outmatched and you can destroy them. Don't expect parley attempts to bring much success unless you back it up with magical mind control or obvious raw power.

Fire Away: Use long-range fire attacks on any trolls you encounter. This causes them normal damage not subject to their regeneration ability. If you cannot blast them with high-damage, area-effect spells, consider concentrating weak fire attacks against one or two trolls instead of trying to reach the entire gang. Area effect spells are most efficient when the trolls are squeezed into confined tunnels and dungeon halls.

Within Claw's Reach: It's wise to take advantage of ranged fire attacks when fighting trolls, but don't be afraid to put tough fighters right next to them. Fighters should be backed up with a second rank of characters who have

Slime Troll

reach weapons and spells. Be sure to save the alchemist's fire for desperate situations: Unless your melee combatants have hit points to spare, they'll want to avoid splash damage. If it is possible to surround a troll, do so unless it opens you up to flank attacks. If you have no other choice but to let the fighting front ranks administer a torch or acid coup de grace, sacrifice the next melee attack and chance an attack of opportunity from the next troll; if the downed troll regenerates back to 1 hp, he inflicts as much damage as the fresh troll.

Attack, Evade, or Feign Retreat: If your party can reduce the trolls' ranks or at least a lot of their hit points with ranged attacks, consider charging the trolls while they are weakened. If you need to fall back due to losses or you want to trick your enemy and feign retreat, spellcasters can make things unpleasant for pursuing trolls by using the *glyph of warding* and *fire seed* spells. This is a good time to counter attack if the trolls are sufficiently damaged, even if you do intend to run again.

Defensible Positions: Don't let the trolls push you into a dead end or surround you. Once they've managed to do so, you have no choice but to fight your way through them. If a troll manages to get in close to your spellcasters while others are attacking your fighters, your spellcasters might have no other choice but to hit the nearby troll with melee weapons or magic spells that hit only one target. Meanwhile, the other trolls don't have to face the attacks of your spellcasters while they chew up the fighters. This is a good time for the rogue to make some flank attacks; it should be the rogue's responsibility to provide security for the spellcasters.

THE SAVAGE CLAW

The savage claw (cleric/barbarian) is a religious devotee who revels in divinely inspired rages. A savage claw worships either Vaprak or Erythnul, assuming the title of Savage Claw of the Destroyer or Savage Claw of the Slayer, respectively. A savage claw is often the leader of his tribe and sometimes has enough power to rule several tribes of trolls and ogres, at least for a limited time.

At lower levels, the savage claw spends more time focusing on his cleric levels, although he does take a level of barbarian early in his training. This progression allows him to gain spells quickly and improve his weak Will save while still gaining the ability to rage. As the savage claw advances, he follows a more even progression of training, alternating between the cleric and barbarian classes. This progression works well since most trolls do not have the necessary Wisdom scores to take full advantage of the more powerful cleric spells.

Savage claws usually begin combat by placing protection spells upon themselves or targeting enemy spellcasters with offensive spells. They then fly into a rage and hurl themselves into melee.

SAVAGE CLAW STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

(Compared to the single-classed barbarian)

Advantages

Ability to cast spells

Better Will saves

Disadvantages

Fewer hit points (this is not a big disadvantage considering a troll's starting HD, Constitution bonus, and regeneration ability)

Can't rage as often

Does not gain access to barbarian's higher-level abilities

SAVAGE CLAW ADVANCEMENT

Level	Class Level	Base Attack	Fort	Ref	Will	Abilities Gained
1	Clr 1	+0	+2	+0	+2	0- and 1st-level spells, rebuke undead
2	Clr 1/Bar 1	+1	+4	+0	+2	Rage 1/day, fast movement
3	Clr 2/Bar 1	+2	+5	+0	+3	Feat
4	Clr 3/Bar 1	+3	+5	+1	+3	2nd-level spells
5	Clr 3/Bar 2	+4	+6	+1	+3	Uncanny dodge
6	Clr 4/Bar 2	+5	+7	+1	+4	Feat
7	Clr 4/Bar 3	+6/+1	+7	+2	+5	
8	Clr 5/Bar 3	+6/+1	+7	+2	+5	3rd-level spells
9	Clr 5/Bar 4	+7/+2	+8	+2	+5	Rage 2/day, Feat
10	Clr 6/Bar 4	+8/+3	+9	+3	+6	

Troll

"I have removed and stored so much of my captured troll that I have enough pieces to make ten, yet still I find myself stymied. Every bit of skin, every organ, every tissue, removed and regrown, to no useful result. For weeks I've tried to create a new one out of severed parts, a wholly unique second troll, but the experiment yields only a lifeless mimic of my patient.

"What subtle factor is missing? Where is the divine spark that separates a cold husk from a living creature?

"A wonder of the gods, these trolls. Terrible, but fascinating."

—The journal of Dr. Bensi Skule

The trolls of myth lurk under bridges to grab unwary passersby and feast on their flesh, then skitter into dark caves before the first rays of sunlight make their skin solid as stone. As with most myths, these are based on several facts regarding real trolls and their cousin species.

Overview

Although the relationship remains long forgotten to all but the most learned scholars, trolls are distant cousins of hill giants. Their regenerative abilities long ago set them apart from their dim-witted relatives, and their tendency toward a solitary lifestyle drove them deeper into the wilds to seek larger and more lucrative hunting grounds. Male trolls see themselves as predators at the highest rung of the evolutionary ladder and rule their hunting grounds with unquestioning violence. Female trolls see themselves as protectors, brutally responding to any perceived threat to their young.

Trolls are a complex race with a well-established social order and a kind, even caring system for raising their young. This dichotomy of violence and nurturing seems

alien to humans, who see trolls as nothing more than unstoppable monsters. Female trolls gather together in wandering groups that rarely stop for more than a few days at one location. Females raise the younglings, teach them to fight and hunt, and prepare them for adult life. Males are solitary creatures, afflicted with wanderlust once they reach adulthood. If a male resists his instinct to roam, the female trolls forcefully eject him from the group, sometimes killing him if he aggressively refuses to leave. This is done to protect the younglings—a troll male is the ultimate hunter and kills and eats even his own children as easily as he does a deer.

It's these wanderlust-afflicted males, near starvation and unable to find a suitable hunting ground, that stumble into remote farmsteads or attack sparsely populated rural communities and spur myths of terrifying trolls that come in the night. These encounters between civilized humanoid societies and trolls are rare, but when they occur, they feed fear and hatred in the hearts of civilized men.

Ecology

Trolls are large, lumbering giants that stand taller than men, although their hunched posture tends to make them appear smaller. When provoked to combat, they launch upright, puffing up their chests, stretching out their huge arms and bellow ear-piercing challenges. Trolls are quick to aggression, fearsome in a fight, and able to move faster than their size suggests. One moment, they slouch along a forest path, and in the next they are smashing through trees, their hooked snouts filled with the smell of their prey's fear.

A typical male troll weighs 300 pounds and stands 8 feet tall when fully upright. A female troll is much larger and much more dangerous. Females can weigh as much as 500 pounds and have been reported as tall as 10 to 12 feet. Female trolls are just as fast and strong as the males, but their size adds a whole new level of terror when one crashes out of the tree line. Males and females have slight physical differences outside of height and weight. Both sexes typically possess green skin, but males tend toward lighter green to yellow variations, whereas females have deep jade to almost jet-black skin. Males have smaller eyes, heavily lidded beneath thick brows, with crisp facial features and small mops of weed-like hair atop their heads. Females have large, bulging eyes, softer-featured faces, and thick, dark hair stretching to their shoulders.

Regeneration sets trolls apart from other giants. Where their larger cousins developed cautious demeanors, as their sheer size in relation to the world around them is often a source of injury or death, trolls fear nothing. If a troll falls off a cliff, its mangled and broken body eventually restores itself. If a troll attacks an armed explorer wandering through its territory and the explorer cuts the troll's arm off, the severed limb either grows back or the troll simply picks it up off the ground and reattaches it. This boon instills a great deal of confidence in trolls—a confidence that defines them both as individuals and a social group. They've moved farther into the wilds than most of their cousins, fearing none of the monsters and horrors that exist in the dark places of the world.

There are two phases in a troll's natural development: youngling and adult. As younglings, male and female trolls learn to hunt and fight together. Upon maturity, though, everything changes. Female trolls reach their child-bearing maturity around age 12. Newly matured females give off a scent that adult males can smell up to 50 miles away. This causes every adult male that picks up the scent to immediately leave its hunting grounds and seek the cause of its sudden mating instinct. Males trickle in and follow the female groups from a distance—if they stray too close without proving their dominance, the females viciously attack and chase off all potential suitors. Since males spend their entire adult lives as solitary hunters, its no wonder that these gatherings of males often lead to the ripping apart of several males before one proves worthy of breeding. After a time, the strongest male is allowed into the female group to breed. Once the event is over, however, the male must flee or face terrible pain and possible death. Adult males attack and eat troll younglings, which is why female groups eject them when the males reach full maturity at around age 15. The instinct to protect their younglings is strong in troll females. They are quite aware that trolls can be burned, starved, drowned, and destroyed, and they have perfected the use of these methods in defense of their family units.

Females breed only once and give birth to sets of younglings—typically two to three, although sometimes as many as five. A newborn troll weighs around 50 pounds and stands about 3 feet tall. They can walk immediately at birth and their instincts to kill and hunt are strong from day one. Stories of small trolls attacking livestock in outlying communities are laughed off as tall tales, but it's entirely plausible that a newborn troll might wander from the main group to seek food on its own.

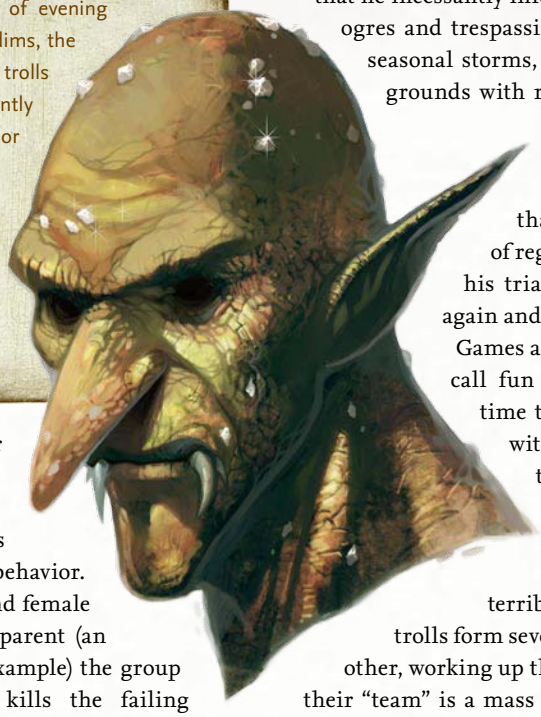
Habitat & Society

From birth, trolls of both genders are raised by the females. The mothers and sisters of troll social groups form simple, multi-family hunter-gatherer bands that wander the primeval forests and high mountains far from civilization. Young trolls are taught to hunt and survive in the wild and are subjected to daily attacks by their peers and elders. It's completely normal for a youngling to find himself ambushed by others of his group and to have to claw and bite his way to freedom. Weakness has no place in these troll groups and as nurturing and kind as the troll mothers

Rock Trolls

Many have attempted to experiment on trolls over the years, and the rock troll is one of the few successful strains. Rock trolls are much larger than their brothers, their bodies having been fused with flecks of granite, shards of diamonds, and veins of iron. Their blood was replaced with an alchemical solution that enhanced their regenerative powers, their skin hardened like steel, and their speed increased with secret blood magic. The alchemical solution in their blood had a dire side effect, though: during the day, it reacted to sunlight and sent a toxic hormone flowing through the veins of the rock trolls. After a few minutes beneath the burning sun, the creatures slow and eventually stop, descending into hallucinatory trances. As the shade of evening approaches, and the light of the sky dims, the hormone production stops and rock trolls can move again. Rock trolls frequently subjected to multiple days of this stupor eventually permanently turn to stone.

Since their creation, rock trolls have been ruthlessly hunted and destroyed. Because of their long life and regenerative properties, they rarely feel the urge to breed, and most believe their extinction is imminent.



are to their children, a deformed or weak youngling is destroyed without a glimmer of remorse.

This violent troll lifestyle has resulted in an interesting culling behavior. Weakness is feared in both male and female trolls and once signs of it are apparent (an older female who can't hunt, for example) the group immediately abandons or even kills the failing member. Because of this, trolls rarely grow to what scholars would consider old age—generally, trolls live to be about 40 years old. Trolls are still subject to some of the risks that humans are: they can be killed by viruses that inhibit their regenerative abilities, and drowning, fire, and acid put an end to trolls in quick order. Starvation can also end a troll's life. A full-grown adult troll needs up to half its body weight in food every day. After only a few days without sufficient food, a troll's regenerative abilities cease to function. Once it loses its regeneration, a troll quickly succumbs to starvation or other natural hazards. Troll family groups sometimes bind weak trolls, dump them into pits, and leave them to starve to death. More often, a weak or ill troll is simply drowned.

Male trolls prefer caves or thick, dark wooded glens for their homes. Sometimes they build crude structures out of salvaged wood and metal, and they even occasionally build their ramshackle hovels beneath bridges or overhanging cliff ledges. These domiciles serve only as bases to which the males can return with captured prey to consume away from the elements. Female trolls sometimes drag around captured tents or pull carts filled with wood to use for building rough structures to house the younglings. Trolls can survive any weather thrown at them, but they find several days of sleeping on the ground while hail, snow, and rain pound away on their flesh to be uncomfortable, and they prefer shelter in which they can escape the weather.

Trolls believe that a greater demon named Urxehl created the world and populated it with them. Urxehl is a cruel god, though, and troll faith is based on the premise that he incessantly infests their hunting grounds with ogres and trespassing humans, pounds them with seasonal storms, or tears through their hunting grounds with roaring forest fires (forest fires, of course, being the one thing trolls fear). Even more frightening is the troll belief that Urxehl gave them their powers of regeneration so they might survive his trials and live on to be brutalized again and again.

Games and activities that humans would call fun are not something trolls take time to consider. They are consumed with the need to hunt, leaving little time for other diversions. Troll female groups have one game (of sorts) that they play every spring solstice to honor their terrible demon god. Two lines of trolls form several yards apart and stare at each other, working up their aggression and hatred until their "team" is a mass of frenzied berserker rage. The team mentality ends the moment one of the trolls breaks his or her line and charges at the other one. There seems to be no obvious starting point—a troll simply feels her rage wash over her and throws herself at the other group. The result is chaotic troll melee where limbs are severed, bodies torn apart, and eyes gouged out—even some rage-induced cannibalism occurs. When it's over, one troll stands less injured than the others, all of whom lay strewn about the battlefield crawling toward severed limbs or gathering their entrails and stuffing them back inside their punctured bellies. Once everyone has recovered, they quietly go about their business.

Trolls rarely interact with other species. Females are known to trade captured equipment and gold to gnolls in exchange for their slaves (which the trolls eat), and troll tribes have allied with ettins and hill giants to protect their hunting grounds. Individual males sometimes hire

themselves out to gnoll bands as guards and enforcers in exchange for food. These are exceptions, though—odd occurrences that stray outside the troll norm. Although trolls see any creatures invading their territories as threats, they see ogres doubly so. A lone ogre wandering through a male troll's hunting ground or crossing the path of a female group is a sign of impending disaster—for the ogre. Ogres are stupid brutes, prone to play with their food and kill it for sport just as often as to eat it. Large ogre tribes can eradicate an entire region's food supply, causing starvation and extinction for resident trolls. Trolls have learned over centuries to immediately destroy ogres and their outposts whenever discovered. Males repeatedly attack ogre enclaves, wandering off when wounded, only to return immediately after regeneration to attack again. Ogres lack the intelligence to effectively fight a troll assault, and even a single troll can seem like hundreds when it flees a bloody mess and comes back 10 minutes later fully recovered. Ogres scare their children with tales of massive troll armies waiting to destroy ogrekind—and if trolls had armies they would gladly fulfill those nightmares.

Campaign Role

A solitary male troll brutally protecting his territory always makes for a good wandering monster encounter. Since males seek stable hunting grounds, they can be found in cave networks, dungeon complexes, forests, low mountain foothills, and anywhere large numbers of other creatures live. These encounters should always be frightening—a male troll feels no fear, after all, and should immediately plunge into the party and tear PCs limb from limb.

Young males, freshly ejected from their childhood wandering groups, can also make for interesting encounters in rural villages or along caravan routes. The young male encountered thusly is likely near death from starvation and desperate for food. A starved troll doesn't have full use of its regenerative abilities, so this can serve as an encounter 1 CR lower than the standard troll—a horrific sneak peek at what fighting a troll is like.

Female trolls and their family groups can be the basis for an entire adventure. The PCs could be hired by village elders to find a particularly troublesome group and either convince them to relocate (not likely) or simply destroy them all (a difficult task). These groups can also make for fun high-level encounters, as the PCs have to fight back wave after wave of adult females and younglings that find the PCs threatening.

Treasure

Troll males never intentionally collect treasure. They exist only to hunt, but do tend to drag their victims back to their lairs for consumption. A vanquished male most likely has a trash heap somewhere near his lair, full of battered armor, weapons, and gear mixed with bones and sinew. The longer the troll has lived there, the more likely he's killed someone carrying items of value and has unknowingly tossed this treasure into the trash. Troll males do collect ogre skulls as trophies and wear them when attempting to woo females.

Female trolls tend to be a little more intelligent than the males and keep gold, armor, and weapons for trade. In a typical female traveling group, there are two or three bags of items taken from raids the females use to trade for slaves or tools. The chance of finding a rare magic item is always greater with female groups, as they might actually wear some of the shiny things found on their victims, not knowing the items' real value or purpose.

The Troll of Absalom

Some 20 years ago, Dr. Bensi Skule—an alchemist from Absalom—traveled far into the northern reaches of Avistan in search of plants, minerals, and creatures upon which to continue his bizarre experiments. Near the Worldwound, his party came upon a scorched troll camp and found a newborn troll male near death from starvation. Dr. Skule was elated—the opportunity to experiment on a creature with such regenerative powers could provide the great discovery he was searching for. He nursed the youngling back to health and returned to his Absalom lab to begin his experiments. The young troll grew into a large, adult male troll whose only life experiences involved being dismembered, slashed, bled, operated on, and generally mistreated. When Dr. Skule was murdered for his massive debts, the troll science project did the only thing he knew: he became Dr. Skule and continued experimenting on himself. Fearing that he would be destroyed if caught wandering the streets of Absalom, the new Dr. Skule hired a force of street urchins and runaways to run errands for him and gather information. He continues his captors' experiments, hunched over complex alchemical machinery, surrounded by shelves full of his preserved limbs, organs, and skin tissue. The urchins call themselves Skule's Army and have turned into a complex underground network of information brokers. The new Dr. Skule, although hidden, is the heart of this network and uses the sale of key bits of rumor and speculation to fund his obsessive research into the source of his natural abilities.

Variant Trolls

The natural healing powers of trolls, combined with their long history, has led to a number of different breeds, some of which are summarized here.

Moss Trolls: In the deepest equatorial jungles of Golarion exists an ancient cousin of the modern troll, long thought extinct. Called moss trolls, these precursors are more plant than giant. They stand barely taller than a

Troll Augurs

The trolls of Golarion worship a greater demon named Urxehl, a being they believe created trolls and placed them on Golarion to live out lives filled with pain and suffering. Tragically, Urxehl gave trolls their regenerative abilities so they could survive Urxehl's trials and live on in suffering worship of their demon god. Occasionally, Urxehl rewards his followers by granting a troll the Gift of Sight. Called augurs, these trolls gather together and work out of rogue settlements like Kaer Maga or the Vile Fortress in eastern Vudra. They slash open their own abdomens and wrench out their entrails to read the future in the quivering innards. There are rumors that troll augurs are immune to fire and acid, although no one has yet put those rumors to the test.

Gift of Sight

Sometimes trolls are granted limited powers of divination by their demon god, Urxehl.

Prerequesites: Troll, patron deity Urxehl.

Benefit: You can read the future by cutting open your abdomen and pulling out your entrails. This is a full-round action that deals 6d6 points of damage to you. This functions as the *divination* spell, using your Hit Dice as the caster level. You can perform this ability no more than once per day.

human and weigh around 100 pounds. Thin, branch-like arms stretch the length of their body and end in curved, wicked claws that sprout from their fingertips like thorns. Their bodies resemble a humanoid shape of green jungle foliage and their eyes are hidden beneath a heavy brow and thick, bushy green eyebrows.

Moss trolls live in pods numbering as few as six to as many as 100. Long ago, their pods roamed the world's temperate and tropical forests and jungles and dominated the food chains there. Now, their numbers have dwindled, and they've become prey to larger, faster denizens of the humid rainforests of Golarion.

These bipedal plants exhibit similar traits to trolls: they regenerate wounds, they use their claws to deliver terrifying rend wounds during combat, and they know no fear. They also have a few key differences: they're smaller and their bite delivers a debilitating poison that attacks the nervous system (Fortitude DC 15; initial 1d6 Dex and secondary 1d6 Dex).

Scrags: Scrags dwell their entire lives in freshwater aquatic environments such as lakes, rivers, and stagnant ponds. They're only vaguely related to trolls, bound in myth by the similar regenerative properties of both races. Scrags are air-breathers, more like frogs than humans (or even trolls), and their regenerative abilities only work when fully submerged in water. Scrags become increasingly uncomfortable the longer they stay dry, and after a few days outside of their habitat, they become sluggish and confused, eventually dying if not fully submerged or doused in water again. This limitation has kept scrags from becoming a larger species, and as a result it's rare to even see a scrag in the wild. Scrags are thieves, obsessively collecting shiny objects to store beneath the surface of their home lake or river, and they often attack passing caravans or unwary fishermen if they see something desired for their collection. Thin, hunched creatures that vaguely resemble their troll cousins, scrags differ in that their skin is slippery green and their backs possess long rows of sharp, defensive spines that start at the base of their necks and bristle down to their lower backs.

Trolls in Golarion

Wandering bands of troll females can be found throughout the continent of Avistan. They tend to stay away from civilization and are usually found in the wilds north of the River Kingdoms, in and around the Menador Mountains, across the Storval Plateau in Varisia, or roaming the mountains and forests in the northern kingdoms. These regions also have thousands of individual troll males who have staked out hunting grounds ranging in size from a few miles in Varisia to hundreds of miles in the lands north of the River Kingdoms.

In southern Vudra, far to the east of Avistan, lives the largest tribe of trolls on Golarion. Called the Mistshaper Trolls by locals, these trolls are ruled by a huge troll female named Xelnud. Xelnud is 2 feet taller than any of her tribe and weighs nearly twice that of the next largest troll. It's rumored among her followers (quietly—as it is best not to anger Xelnud) that she entered into a pact with Urxehl and became his lover in exchange for her mutated size and stature. Xelnud's style of leadership brooks no discussion and no disloyalty, and she tortures and ritually starves any troll stupid enough to oppose her. Her viciousness and fanatical devotion to Urxehl has led her to believe that she's the demon god's agent on earth. She plans to gather together all the trolls of the world to destroy civilization and restore Golarion to a dark, brutal state like it was during the Age of Darkness. Although this task is impossible, her delusions of grandeur might have dire consequences for the people of Vudra and the surrounding nations.

Names

Troll names are typically simple combinations or corruptions of their parents' names.

Male: Alrekr, Brokk, Durtl, Gulurd, Hakon, Havart, Lunt, Odell, Odurx, Prek, Sigurx, Tarll, Urx, Volurd, Wekk

Female: Asta, Berg, Delli, Eydis, Halsan, Invarr, Kelda, Onun, Terghel, Unni, Urtha, Volhel, Volu, Xel, Xelnud

TROLL

Lumbering out of the trees is, upon first impression, an enormous human with broad, thick shoulders and two solid, tree-trunk arms stretching down to almost drag on the ground. At further glance, its skin is a sickly, greenish hue and its eyes are pools of inky blackness. Its face is long and angular, with a solid, pointy chin and a crooked, hawkish nose, and its hair looks more like a mat of forest weeds and rests tangled and greasy on its heavy brow. There is an air of unsettled violence about it—its hands end in razor-sharp claws and its body seems taut and agile despite its size.

We've all heard troll stories—"Argo and the Troll," "Droan o' the Bogs," "The Brambleman"—but they're more than just old yarns, they're lessons. Everyone ends the same way, in acid or in fire. Acid and fire. Don't forget it. It might just save your life.

TROLL **CR 5**

CE Large giant

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 90 ft., low-light vision, scent; Listen +5, Spot +6

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 14 (+2 Dex, +5 natural, –1 size)

hp 63 (6d8+36); regeneration 5 (fire/acid)

Fort +11, **Ref** +4, **Will** +3

OFFENSE

Spd 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +9 (1d6+6) and bite +4 (1d6+3)

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

Special Attacks rend (2d6+9)

TACTICS

During Combat Trolls are single-minded berserkers in combat: they attack the nearest foe without hesitation and don't stop until that foe is down.

Morale Because of their regenerative abilities, trolls are fearless. Even flames or the presence of acid don't slow them down—they always fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 14, **Con** 23, **Int** 6, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 6

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +14

Feats Alertness, Iron Will, Track

Skills Listen +5, Spot +6

Languages Giant

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Regeneration (Ex) Fire and acid deal normal damage to a troll. If a troll loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 3d6 minutes. The creature can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Rend (Ex) If a troll hits with both claw attacks, it latches onto the opponent's body and tears the flesh. This attack automatically deals an additional 2d6+9 points of damage.

The Ecology of the Umber Hulk

A three-quarter-ton rock drill with a bad temper

by Tony Jones

The following was taken from Creatures of the Earth's Deeps, ***by the sage and wizard Archmyel:***

The umber hulk is one of the more powerful and dangerous underground denizens. Although only infrequently encountered, umber hulks have become well known because of their distinctive appearance and the ferocity of their attacks on adventurers. I have heard numerous stories of small bands of umber hulks destroying larger parties of experienced adventurers, leaving nothing but dropped weapons and debris behind.

Umber hulks are extremely large, bulky creatures often standing nearly three yards tall and over one and a half yards wide. Their powerful arms end in hands with claws like iron that are capable of ripping through solid stone quickly. The rest of their stout bodies are very muscular, but because of their weight (1,500-1,750 lbs.) and size, umber hulks are slow, awkward creatures. Such a creature's mouth is filled with many small teeth, but the major damage is inflicted by the umber hulks two sets of mandibles.

In addition, the umber hulk has two sets of eyes, one on the outside of its flat head and the other in the middle of its forehead. The eyes on the outside of its head are white with black irises, while those on its forehead are purple with yellow or amber irises. The creature lacks a nose but breathes through gill-like structures on its almost nonexistent neck, evidence of a possible previous aquatic existence. It can thus eat and breathe at the same time. The color of the umber hulk's tough hide is black but lightens to a grayish or burnt brown hue on the head and front. The mandibles and claws are ivory colored. Adventurers have been known to mistake umber hulks for some other type of creature at a distance of 15 yards or more because of their dark coloring.

Umber hulks are, as noted earlier, well known for their ferocious attacks on adventurers—particularly humans, which are relished.. Using their powerful claws and great strength to rend opponents, they have been known to kill with a single attack, literally ripping their foes in two. These monsters usually prey on other subterranean creatures like anhkhegs and small purple worms, against which the umber hulks developed their powerful offensive array. It is said that umber hulks allow themselves to be swallowed alive by great purple worms for the thrill of "tunneling out" and slaying the worms.

Umber hulks use their great claws and strength to good advantage in the subterranean areas they haunt. The area surrounding an umber hulk's underground lair is crisscrossed with numerous tunnels, making it difficult for other creatures to find the lair itself. Some of the tunnels are dead ends, while others lead back to their points of origin in very roundabout fashion. All such tunnels are well known to the umber hulk, which uses these passages to catch victims by outflanking them.

The reverse also holds true, as the umber hulk can use its many tunnels to elude determined pursuit. While it is not impossible to hunt down a fleeing umber hulk, it is difficult even for experienced trackers such as rangers to do so as it leaves few tracks on rocky floors. The umber hulk also could lead pursuers around in circles long enough for others to join it and turn the tables on its hunters. In dire circumstance, an umber hulk will go to an area with a deliberately weakened ceiling, so it may cause a cave-in and later escape. Deliberately caused floods are also possible, as the umber hulk can breathe water for short periods (up to 10 minutes).

Umber hulks are very destructive creatures that will always attempt to destroy what they cannot use. Thus, any clothing found in the lair will be shredded, armor torn and dented, weapons broken and useless. Umber hulks are wanton killers whose courage is not always overcome by self-preservation. They will almost immediately attack any creature they deem weaker than themselves. Only the sight of gold or platinum, in very large amounts, will halt their attacks once begun.

The most dangerous aspect of the umber hulk is its two sets of eyes. Should any creature of even slight intelligence meet the direct gaze of an umber hulk, it becomes instantly befuddled, often attacking its companions or standing dazed as the creature advances. This "gaze of confusion" is magical in nature and is constantly in effect. Other umber hulks are immune to the effects, which affect the victim's brain through the optic nerve in a manner which I have yet to discover. The effect seems to be created by the pair of eyes in the forehead, for the vodyanoi, the umber hulk's marine cousin, lacks this set of eyes and the peculiar gaze. The victim recovers shortly, usually within a few minutes, unless the monster has eaten him.

Both male and female umber hulks appear the same externally, equal in size and ferocity. However, female umber hulks are much rarer than the male, with only one umber hulk in four being female. For this reason, the males are very protective of the females, often sacrificing their own lives in the females' defense.

Little is known about how umber hulks reproduce. The female bears her young live a year after mating, producing one to three "hulklings." The young are quickly able to move about and defend themselves, developing all of their special powers with great rapidity. The mother is especially dangerous during this time, as she will hunt down and kill as much food as possible to feed her young, who eat voraciously. After two years, the young umber hulks learn to hunt at their mother's side. Those that have survived this long are considered mature adults in every respect. After a few months more, the young leave, and the mother may start another litter. Male umber hulks live an average of 50 years; females, 75 years.

Like most underground creatures, umber hulks have more highly developed senses of smell and hearing than eyesight, and they use the former two senses when searching for prey, tracking and fighting without penalty for darkness. However, their eyesight is not bad, and umber hulks have no trouble seeing prey at normal distances. Like most underground creatures, umber hulks dislike bright light, but they suffer ill effects only from the brightest sources. Umber hulks venture above ground only at night and only when des-

perate for prey.

Umber hulks are reasonably intelligent creatures and have developed their own spoken tongue. The language is fairly easy to learn and understand as it conveys only limited information, but only magical intervention ***(clairaudience*** or spying while ***invisible)*** permits anyone to hear the language used. However, "Hulkish" is difficult to actually speak as umber hulks make some sounds that are impossible for humans to duplicate. It is a very direct, concrete, brutal tongue as befits their nature. The umber hulk also uses various grunts, hisses, and gestures for added emphasis when speaking, as well as mouth, mandible, and eye movements.

Though umber hulks are basically loners, they will sometimes cooperate with other evil creatures, including evil humans, if paid in gold and platinum or, possibly, human victims. They will serve in any capacity—as guards, part of a main attack force, even as manual labor—as long as they receive their gold and are not expected to risk their own lives in vain. They will not venture above ground for any price and are therefore of limited use. Their fickle nature causes them to turn on their "masters," often for no reason.

This begs the question, of course, of what umber hulks do with their monetary gains. No one knows, though not all umber hulks seem to value precious metals. It may be that they use their gains as part of their economy, if the rumors of their cities beneath the earth are true, or it may be that the umber hulks consume such metals for dietary reasons (finding coins to be excellent gizzard stones). None can say.

The lair of an umber hulk is a large, spacious cavern or room, the walls of which are always covered by marks from the umber hulk honing its claws or possibly from having carved the cave from the stone itself. Attached to the large cavern are numerous smaller rooms of storage for what few personal items, such as treasure and food, such monsters accumulate. All the rooms will be littered with the remains of previous victims brought here for leisurely consumption. The treasure cave is usually hidden by rocks and debris, with simple but deadly traps such as rockslides. Small items can be found scattered throughout all rooms—curios that caught the monster's interest, such as peculiar gems or devices from a past victim.

Dead umber hulks (the only good ones, some say) have numerous uses. The hide of an umber hulk is extremely tough and damage resistant. Some underground races, notably kobolds and goblins, cure the hides of umber hulks and make armors and shields out of them. (Although they would not dare to attack a living umber hulk, these races recover their prizes from beasts slain by disease, age, or adventurers.) The hard mandibles are

Illustration by Thomas Baxa

used as hand-held weapons, and the claws are turned into spiked clubs and maces. The eyes from the forehead are often needed by magic-users for potions and magical inks, and they can be sold for a profit to alchemical shops or wizards' guilds.

Though it poses little threat to normal human existence, the umber hulk is a notable danger to those who venture beneath the earth in search of adventure and riches. It makes the life of a farmer much more attractive.

Gaming notes

Most umber hulks have strengths of 19, equal to a hill giant, but one in 20 has a strength of 20 and does 1d6 + 6 hp damage with each claw, rather than the 3d4 hp damage listed in the ***Monstrous Compendium.*** If the umber hulk's strength should be reduced, claw damage should be reduced accordingly. Damage done by the mandibles remains the same.

The effects of an umber hulk's gaze are like the effects of a ***confusion*** spell lasting 3d4 rounds, affecting as many victims as are looking at it within 40' of its front. Umber hulks themselves are immune to the effects of the gaze, as are vodyanoi, creatures already suffering from ***confusion,*** and ***mind-barred*** victims. Use the following chart (from the description of the dracolisk in the ***Monster Manual II,*** page 55) to determine the chances of meeting an umber hulk's gaze:

Character is—	Chance to meet gaze
Surprised	7 in 10
Viewing monster	3 in 10
Attacking normally	3 in 10
Avoiding gaze	1 in 10

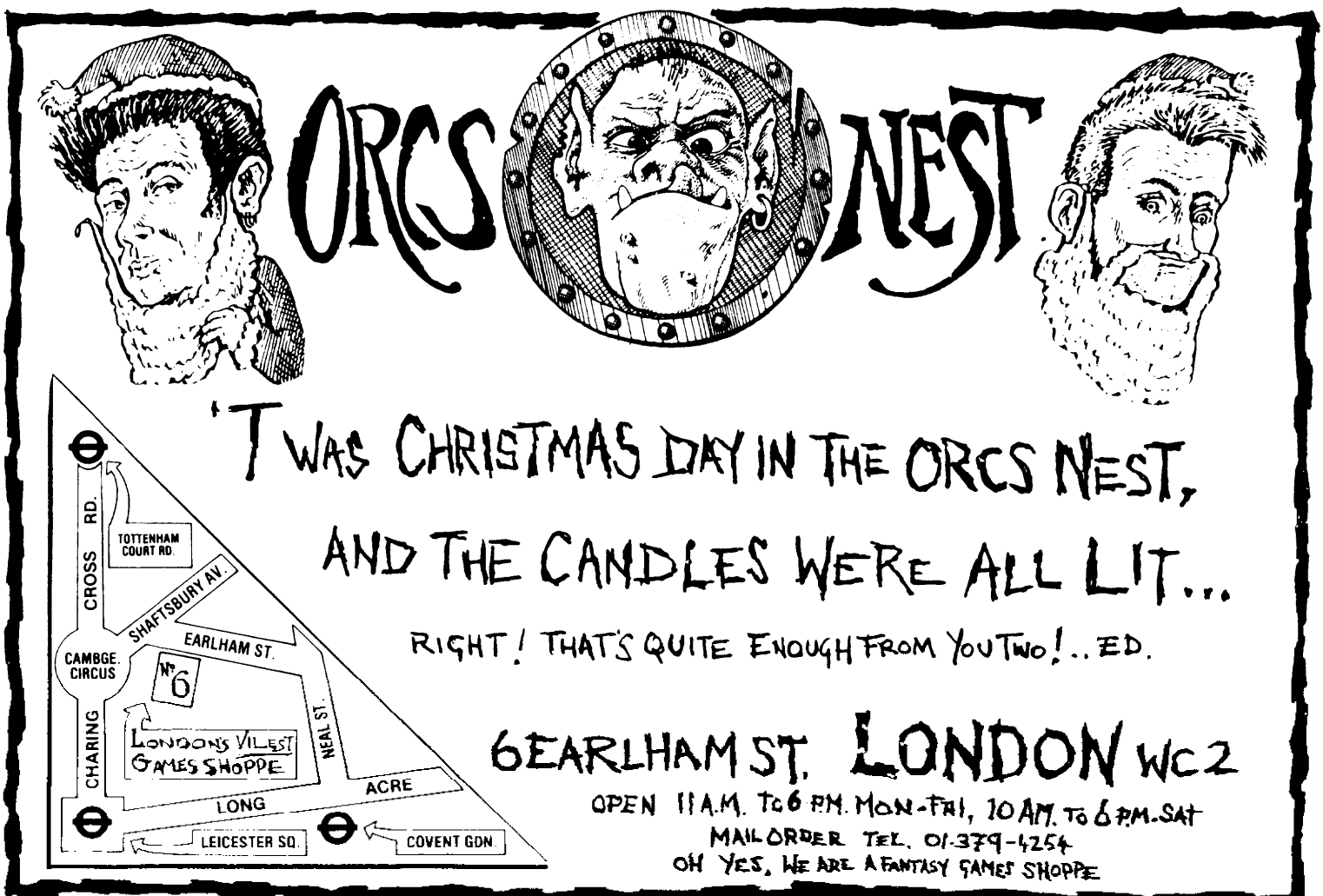
When born, umber hulks are helpless, but by three months of age they have 1 + 1 HD, are 1' tall, and do 1d4/1d4/1d2 hp damage with claws and mandibles. They grow thereafter at the rate shown in the Umber Hulk Growth Table.

Extremely bright light, such as sunlight, causes the umber hulk to take a - 1 penalty to hit and to saving throws.

The claws and mandibles of dead umber hulks do 1d4 hp damage per blow when used as weapons. Armor made from the hides of umber hulks is AC 4 and resembles a suit of plate armor. The eyes from the forehead can be worth 100-400 gp apiece to the right people. Ω

Umber Hulk Growth Table

Age	Hit dice	Claw damage	Mandible damage	Duration in rounds of *confusion* gaze
0-2 mo.	1 - 1	-	-	-
3-5 mo.	1+1	1d4	1d2	1d4
6-8 mo.	2+2	1d4	1d3	1d4
9-11 mo.	3+3	1d6	1d4	1d4
12-14 mo.	4+4	2d4	1d6	2d4
15-17 mo.	5+5	2d4	1d6	2d4
18-20 mo.	6+6	2d6	1d8	2d4
21-23 mo.	7+7	2d6	1d10	2d4
24 + mo.	8+8	3d4	1d10	3d4



The ecology of the unicorn

by Roger Moore

"You would know about the unicorn?" asked the dryad. Her green eyes widened. "You are a hunter?"

After I assured her that I bore no weapons or armor, and sought to learn about the unicorn for my own curiosity, the dryad looked at me with head tilted. "Most of the mortal folk hunt the Free One for its horn, the magical horn, they would slay it, take its horn, iron in their hands and ice in their hearts, and we who loved it are left with the body, such is the way of the mortal folk. Long the Free One runs, far the Free One travels, deep the Free One hides from the mortal folk. The horn is its heart as the unicorn is the forest's heart, would you run if mortals chased you for your heart?" In such a way did the dryad speak, her words and sentences running together like water in a stream.

I bowed my head to hear this; I was not a killer. It seemed the dryad saw this: she bade me sit with her on a mossy stone for a while, and she told me of the unicorn.

The unicorn, she said, is many things. No two people will see the same unicorn, though one may be seen by many. Mortals see it and call it shy, fierce, proud, free, the spirit of magic, the spirit of unconformity, the symbol of purity, truth, change, goodness, chaos, innocence, grace, beauty, secrecy, and a thousand other things. There is truth in each of these, but each of them alone is not enough, and all the words that could be spoken would not a unicorn describe.

To human eyes the unicorn is less like a horned horse than is generally believed; it is smaller and more graceful than a horse, and far more beautiful. Unicorns are generally white in color, though some claim to have seen gray, black, silver and gold ones, and one or two adventurers speak of spotted ones. Their horns are most often a mother-of-pearl color, giving off a rainbow of hues in the sunlight; again, there are reports of silver, gold, and black horns as well. The cloven hooves of the creature are gray or silver. All unicorns have a wild silken mane that flashes in the wind as they run, a tail like a lion or wild boar, and a beard like a goat. Some say, though, that the strangest part of a unicorn is its eyes, for they are many colors at once and change even as one looks at them. No one can well remember the color of a unicorn's eyes.

You will find in the world learned sages who tell you the unicorn is not exceptionally bright, and that if you could converse with one you would get little more than if you'd spoken with an average man who had lived in the woods all of his life. Yet little do mortal folk know of what a unicorn truly thinks. They are older than the calendars most mortals keep, and wiser than most sages. Their knowledge is not of building fires and laying stone, but of the nature of living things, the wisdom learned from watching the stars pass in the night, the endless cycle of nature repeated again and again yet differently every time. They know what is in the heart of a man or a woman, and can read meaning into the turn of the wind, the fall of a leaf, the sigh of a child, meanings no one else knows. Dearly they love secrets, and dearly they keep them.

It may be said that a unicorn lives for itself. It will defend its wood and its friends, but it exists for its own sake and serves no one but its own will. Even magic is powerless to control them; their wildness is too great to be constrained by a dweomer. They eat when it pleases them and sleep when they like; they feast on tender grasses and honeysuckle, sweet roots and bark, and some say they can draw energy from drinking the winds if they need. It is known that the best place to see a unicorn is near a still pond, for they love to look at themselves reflected therein; a vanity, perhaps, but they are entitled to it as well as anyone.

It is true, too, that unicorns are strong. Theirs is an endless strength; they may run for days without tiring at full speed, passing the winds and flashing through even the densest forest growth. "Chasing the unicorn," the common folk say when they mean someone is wasting time; "catching a unicorn," they say of someone doing the impossible.

The powers of the unicorn's horn are debated by serf and king alike. It is known that unicorns cannot be poisoned, and that the horn will protect a man, though to lesser effect, from toxins of all kinds. Yet there are always tales of other, hidden magicks that the horn can perform. A ranger will remember a unicorn coming upon him as he lay dying in the woods of a goblin's arrow; the unicorn but touches the infected wound and it is healed at once. A lost child, when found, will tell of seeing a "one-horned deer" who cured his sicknesses from eating wild mushrooms or berries with a tap of its horn, then guided the child home again. There is even a legend that two lovers, chased into a forest by their enraged families, fell from a low cliff and one of them was slain; the survivor would have died of grief but heard a low sound, and beheld a unicorn coming, who touched the other one once and restored the lost one to life before fleeing. What can be made of all this is beyond even the sages to say; but clearly, one should never take a unicorn for granted.

A unicorn runs more like a deer than a horse, travelling in great leaps that clear the height of a man at times. Because of their speed, there are precious few creatures who will ever get close to one without its permission, and fewer still since unicorns have a magical intuition about the approach of anyone who has evil thoughts or has the intention of harming them. Unicorns avoid all but those of good heart and those who love the forests; the rest see little more than their tails flicking as they leap into the distance, and often they will see nothing of them at all; unicorns love to hide and can be more quiet than an empty cathedral when they want to be.

No one knows how old unicorns become. The dryads say that it is rarer for the moon to turn blue than for unicorns to mate, and the birth of a foal is cause for riotous joy among all the inhabitants of a unicorn's wood. Some elven folk remember tales of their ancestors of generations before, telling of the same unicorn those elves see now, which if true means that unicorns live for thousands of years. The dryad I spoke with had known two unicorns, and neither of them knew how old they were, much less how much time had passed since the week before. If time means little to elves, it means nothing at all to unicorns, and each day to them is special and new. The chaos in them casts boredom aside; a unicorn can watch the same event over and over, and each time will see something new about it to hold its interest.

Who befriends a unicorn? Everyone knows that a maid, old or young, who is good at heart will stand a fair chance of seeing and perhaps even touching a unicorn. Sometimes it happens that the maid may even gain the unicorn's agreement to serve her as a steed, and the unicorn will be faithful to her for as long as the maid is good; the unicorn will suffer no one else to ride it, however, and may not even let the maid ride it if the maid comes to believe she is the unicorn's master. No one is the master of a unicorn.

Druids also like unicorns, not so much for their goodness (druids also like green dragons) but because unicorns are so

much a part of the forests the druids protect. At times a unicorn may give aid to a druid, but always it is because the unicorn chooses to do so, not from any compulsion the druid may exert by charm. Rangers and unicorns seem to do well together, and unicorns will even let themselves be seen by male rangers and touched by them, though only female rangers may ride them. Good bards are known to chase after unicorns, and mad chaotic bards as well; the sight of a unicorn brings bards to tears, and they will write volumes and volumes of poems and tales and songs about their beauty, and recite them every chance they get.

Of the true woodland folk, faeries and elves are among a unicorn's closest friends, and some of them even have speech with unicorns. Dryads, satyrs, nymphs, pixies, and sprites see them often enough, and it is said that treants, who may be the only beings to live longer than unicorns, know more unicorns personally in their lifetimes than any human could guess at. All of the true wood folk except the evil ones love the unicorn and would throw down their lives for it, and even the evil ones would not cause it harm; unicorns are fearful when aroused for fighting, and have slain ogres and worse with a single thrust of their whorled horns.

Who is a unicorn's foe? It is true that they avoid all who are evil, and who would cause them harm. Yet it is also true that those who are selfish and petty, who desire dominion over their fellows, and who are blind to the goodness and innocence of childhood will never see the horned one. If one cannot see beyond the reach of his own grasping hands, he will wander the forests of the world and see nothing at all but trees.

Such was the tale the dryad told me, and I was utterly silent as I heard it, and afterward. I felt the wonder in me rising and my thoughts were adrift; the dryad seemed to know it and she laughed.

"Stranger, I have told you that a thousand words could not say what the sight of one unicorn can, and you look as if you've seen one a'ready."

"Your story has caused it," I replied, embarrassed. "I am no one like a bard or a prince or a ranger; I am a wanderer and the road is my home. I have heard many tales and seen many strange beings in my years, but never such a creature as you have told me."

The dryad's eyes twinkled merrily. "And if you were to see one, what would you do?"

I thought for a moment and laughed myself. "In truth I have no idea. Perhaps all in all, I would do nothing but wonder at it. Beautiful things are rare in the world, and, for myself, to be lucky enough to see a unicorn would be all I could ask."

"Lucky thou are, then," said the dryad. "Look over your shoulder, slowly and with care." Her eyes were shining like stars and her face glowed with awe. She was looking behind me.

For all of my life I remembered that moment, as I watched her face and it dawned on me what she meant. In that moment I had an awareness of someone near me, very close to me, someone I had sought all my life. Even though I am older now than almost any man, I still remember the last few seconds before I turned around, and in the light filtering through the leaves and in the silence of the primeval wood, beheld the unicorn.

APPENDIX

Unicorns are also known as alicorns, monocorns, and have the technical name of *monoceros* in sages' texts.

If desired, the awe effect of seeing a unicorn may be simulated by giving them a charismatic power that causes all creatures and beings with less than one hit die to be rendered immobile upon seeing one for 1-3 rounds; more powerful creatures will be able to act normally, but the sight of a unicorn will still affect them deeply in some manner. Good beings will love and admire them, neutral ones will seek to control or capture them, and evil

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ones usually hate them, for the unicorn's beauty reminds them of the ugliness of their souls.

Unicorns may be treated as having a 25 wisdom for purposes of immunity to *charm* and *hold* spells or powers, as per the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Cyclopedia; *animal friendship, snare, trip,* and *sleep* spells, as well as any other enchantment/charm spells, do not affect them either. They will note a *hallucinatory forest* for the illusion that it is. Being immune to *death* spells covers all enchantment/charm, conjuration/summoning, or necromantic spells that cause death with or without saving throws (including *finger of death, destruction, symbol of death,* and *power word, kill).*

If desired, a unicorn may be able (once per day or less often than that) to simulate one beneficial clerical spell of any level with a touch of its horn. The effect of this touch will take place instantly. Unicorns will only use this power if another creature or being is *in extremis;* DMs should use this power with care.

The *dimension door* power of a unicorn will only rarely be used, but it takes effect instantly at the unicorn's desire. A unicorn could, for instance, vanish just a moment before being struck by an arrow or weapon if it was aware of the object's approach, and could even evade a *fireball* as it travelled on its way.

The druid spell *call woodland beings* is not considered a *charm-type* spell; it does not put the unicorn under any compulsion to obey the druid, any more than any other creature called must obey the druid. A summoned unicorn will be aware that a druid is "calling" for assistance and may decide to help (represented by the saving throw vs. spell). In no case will a unicorn approach nearer than 24" from a druid if the presence of any enemy (an evil character or a hunter of unicorns) is sensed, and a unicorn will *dimension door* away if necessary to escape a trap.

Interestingly, lower-level druids have a marginally better chance to summon a unicorn for aid (using *call woodland beings)* than higher-level druids; this says something (indirectly, at least) about the unicorn. The way the spell is moderated, a lower-level druid has a better chance of *failing* to attract those woodland creatures mentioned ahead of the unicorn on the list, which means the chances for that druid to *succeed* in calling a unicorn (the last entry in the sequential list of possible creatures) are correspondingly better. And in the long run, a unicorn is more liable to heed the summons of a lower-level druid because (a) the druid is relatively more likely to need help and (b) a lower-level druid would not be seen as much of a potential threat to a creature as powerful and versatile as the unicorn. ♍

–for Cassandra and all the others, with our love

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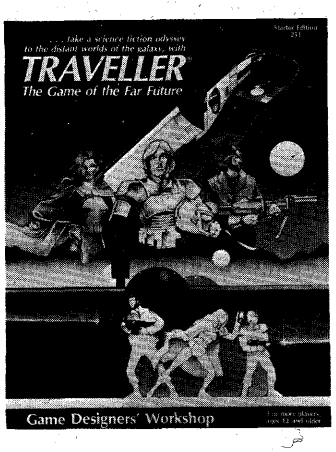

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Ecology of the Vampire

By Tim and Eileen Connors
Art by Pat Loboyko and Marc Radle

On the dark side of a mountain, a small shack hides in a forest of evergreens. The sweet smoke of boiling sap rises from its chimney and joins the night. Inside the cabin, a woman licks blood from her fangs and rises from a dying man on the floor. Blood trickles from the twin puncture wounds at his neck. Somewhere outside, wolves announce a midnight hunt. And solitary birches, thin and pale, bleed their sap into buckets.

The woman smiles. A perfect night.

When darkness falls, vampires rise from their graves to gorge themselves on the blood of the living. Their fountain of youth flows through the veins of men, and their immortality comes with the curse of a doomed soul. These are creatures from the Old World. They took our ancestors by the throat. And tonight, they eye our children from the mist.

Becoming a Vampire

When a humanoid or monstrous humanoid dies from a vampire's bite, the curse of vampirism quickly corrupts the corpse. The silver cord that ties the victim's soul to its body does not snap as it should, and the soul remains tethered to the dead vessel, slowly filling with blood lust. The soul struggles against the cord and reaches for the afterlife, but its silent screams are in vain. The gates of heaven and hell diminish as blood lust slowly reels the cord-strangled soul back into its corpse.

One to four days after the victim's death, a new vampire or vampire spawn rises as a mist around its grave. A victim with less than 5 HD rises as a vampire spawn. A victim of 5 HD or more rises as a vampire.

Vampires may also be born. A pregnant woman who survives a vampire bite has a 25% chance of birthing a dhampir—a free-willed half-vampire child. Because dhampir have a penchant and ability to kill vampires, most vampires are careful to shun pregnant victims. For this reason, vampires find the scent of a menstruating woman particularly attractive.

Male vampires who are fully fed may mate and sire children with a living female. This happens infrequently because the female must not only conceive willingly but must also survive a difficult and bloody labor and supplement the babe's milk with her own blood. Vampires who sire in this fashion are often new vampires who, within days of their own "birth," return to their homes and mate with their living wives. Babies are invariably dhampir. These half-vampire children grow into their powers over time. While young, most do not realize the significance of the bats that nest in their attics or the wolves that shadow them in the forest.

Physiology

Before a vampire rises for the first time, any maggots or bacteria infesting the corpse erupt through the skin, shrivel, and die. Wounds close and heal. When the "newborn" vampire emerges from its grave, it easily passes for the living creature it once was. Indeed, it appears at least as healthy as it did the day it died. This allows many new vampires to masquerade as living humanoids and move unnoticed among the populace. The act of feeding reveals the charade, however; the creature grows its fangs and snarls like a predatory wolf.

With the exception of their hair and nails, vampires never grow, gain weight, or age. A boy turned into a vampire at age 6 appears remarkably unchanged four centuries later. Nevertheless, vampires are not timeless. Decay devours them with patience. In another four centuries, the child vampire's skin tightens over a bony frame, his eyes shrink to opals, and his nose blackens and sloughs off. He stands supernaturally still, and a chill precedes him when he moves. At this stage in his unlife, no creature would mistake him for anything other than the undead predator he has become.

The powerhouse of every vampire is a heart that never beats. Capillary action carries consumed blood along constricted veins to the heart. Here, tongues of negative energy lap it up and vomit raw power through the vampire's arteries to its muscles. Well-fed vampires enjoy prodigious strength, lightning fast reflexes, keen intellect, sharp senses, and irresistible charm.

To keep its negative energy at peak levels, a vampire must feed daily or succeed on a Failure to Feed roll. This DC 15 Fortitude save must be made every day the vampire goes without blood (cumulative +1 DC/day). Once fatigued, the Failure to Feed DC increases to DC 20 and the check is made once per week to avoid exhaustion (cumulative +1 DC/week). The first successful blood drain attack reduces exhaustion to fatigue. The second removes fatigue.

Not just any blood will strengthen a vampire. Dried blood, bottled blood, and the blood of a dead creature do not sustain a vampire. These sources no longer carry the necessary component—vitality. Vital blood is adrenaline-rich blood that the victim's heart pumps directly into the vampire's mouth.

Taste derives from the strength, passion, and emotional state of the victim. Some vampires swear that blood suffused with love is liquid ecstasy. Others prefer to terrorize their victims—sometimes for days—before digging their fangs into a vein coursing with adrenaline and flavored with fear. Vampires can survive on live animal blood, but it lacks the sweetness that the blood of an intelligent creature, capable of deep emotion. On the other hand, the blood of a raging lion far exceeds the vitality of that of an infirm human. This is why vampires hunt rather than farm bedridden humans. It is, also, why vampires do not prey on the same victim repeatedly. The blood sours as the victim's strength ebbs.

Psychology

A new vampire reflects on its living memories as through the blackest of moods. Vampirism connects the creature to a gestalt evil, perverts the creature's personality, and crushes its moral compass. Every character flaw, weakness to temptation, and evil proclivity heightens and fills the void left by virtue. The vampire lives unchecked by conscience and driven by its lusts. The noble, romantic vampire of bardic song may exist, but far more common are hateful creatures willing to tear the heart out of any maiden they meet.

Vampire personalities vary from bestial to aristocratic, and many vampires can operate at both ends of the spectrum. Every vampire considers itself superior to living creatures. Those of the bestial persuasion become apex predators. Those with aristocratic backgrounds revel in finery and debauchery under the guise of charismatic nobility. Occasionally, haughtiness leads a vampire to underestimate the living, but most often, its sense of superiority is entirely justified.

Blood lust gnaws into every aspect of a vampire's psychology. A vampire can never conquer or quell its need to feed, and the constant urge for blood distracts the vampire and forces him to live in the moment. Only well-fed vampires can contrive and execute plans that do not involve feeding or protecting or expanding their blood territory. Centuries of blood addiction eats at their minds the same way decay ultimately consumes their bodies. Even the most successful vampire eventually goes mad from blood lust.

Vampires have no fondness for change, and they endure the passage of time as a necessary evil. Venerable vampires have little patience for novelties such as automatons or clockwork magic, and the vampire hunter can exploit such ignorance. Old World vampires dress in outdated garb and follow the old ways. To look in their thirsty eyes is to see ancient cities long blown to dust.

Society

A new vampire lives under the command of the vampire who sired it and remains enslaved until the sire's destruction. Each enslaved vampire can sire and enslave vampires of its own, creating a pyramid of control called the Tree of Chains.

A free-willed master vampire commands his entire Tree of Chains with as little or as much direction as he pleases. His tree's growth is limited only by the fact that no vampire can enslave more than twice its own HD worth of "children" at any one time. Any child that would exceed this limit rises as a free-willed vampire or vampire spawn. A vampire can voluntarily free an enslaved child to make room for a promising new child, but more frequently, the ruling vampire kills the existing child and all of that child's progeny to reduce territorial competition. This pruning temporarily reduces the tree's strength but promises stronger future growth.

The Tree of Chains and blood territory play key roles in vampire society. The lowest vampire caste includes new free-willed vampires with no Tree and no territorial claims. Such vampires typically grow their Trees on the fringes of vampire society or in uncommon territorial niches. A coffin among the boxes of a gypsy caravan might quickly grow into a Tree of Chains composed of the entire gypsy band, or a group of outlaws might find they hunt for blood rather than coin.

Such a tree represents the next lower caste in vampire society—a master vampire whose territory cannot support his tree. To secure fresh blood, the master vampire must branch into a populated area, and that means challenging another master vampire for territory. These challenges rarely succeed, because most populated areas are controlled by the next and highest-level caste—master vampires with Trees of Chains large enough to defend their territory but lean enough and disciplined enough not to outgrow it.

The highest-level caste includes the ancient vampire clans, who have long-established traditions and territories. Like crime families, each clan claims one or more of the world's major cities as its blood territory. The clans ally, challenge, and avenge each other frequently, and vampire wars unfold in the shadows of urban centers.

Clan-Specific Powers and Weaknesses

Vampire clans often enrich their lines by passing traits to their spawn. Just before the potential child loses consciousness from blood loss, the vampire opens one of his own veins—usually on his chest—and forces the victim to drink. Days later, the risen child enjoys one of his sire's at-will abilities (equivalent to the power of a 3rd level spell or less for unwilling victims and a 4th level spell or less for willing victims).

Through this ritual, the Blackcloak Clan has granted countless generations with the ability to fly. Woes betide the manor that discovers a swarm of Blackcloaks wheeling about its towers. The Northwinds Clan moves inside icy clouds of fog that freeze and shatter foliage as they pass. And once a Shadowlicker has tasted a person's shadow, it can enter the person's residence without the normally required invitation.

Detecting a Vampire

Vampires rise from their graves and travel in mist form, neither disturbing their gravesites nor leaving tracks. Vampire hunters must rely on secondary clues. A cemetery with its holy symbols thrown down, laden with ground-hugging fog, or devoid of birds may harbor a vampire. But which grave holds the vampire? To find out, different villages follow their own folk traditions with varying degrees of success. In the Margreve, a naked virgin male rides a white stallion over the gravesites. Wherever the horse bucks wildly, a vampire is sure to lie.

Coffins. Not all vampires rest in coffins or sleep buried in graveyards. Any box that blocks sunlight, keeps out running water, and lies atop the vampire's native soil suffices. Urban vampires lair in sewers, abandoned warehouses, attics, and any other dark, infrequently visited nook. Vampires who live in perpetually dark areas and who do not prepare spells have no need to retire to their coffins daily. Some vampires carry their coffin in a soil-lined bag of holding. A vampire hunter has little hope of finding the resting place of such a vampire directly.

Magic. The Silverblood Dhampirs, a society of vampire-hunting clerics, lo-

Living under Vampire Rule

North of the Margreve, in the Imperial Principality of Morgau and Doresh, vampires roam openly and rule proudly. Depravity, decadence, and the worship of dark gods abound. Here, the living are little more than property, drained and dispatched as the vampires see fit.

Many living slaves long for their masters to drain them of blood, so they can escape the "tortures of the living" and gain social status as vampires. Vampire masters occasionally grant such rewards. If the slave is clever, he makes some plans before he receives the death-bite, such as hiring assassins (or do-good heroes) to kill his sire after the planned death-bite. This frees the slave-turned-vampire from mental enslavement on the master's Tree of Chains.

The Imperial Principality frequently hosts hunts in its hills and forests and stages gladiatorial fights in its cities. In these spectacles, living combatants clash, and vampires cheer and salivate at the blood that sprays into the stands. This foreplay lasts for hours before culminating in a vampire's blood drain of the winner and the lucky winner's rise into the ruling class.

Once a year, tradition demands that a vampire elder free the winner rather than kill him. An arcane tattoo forever marks the champion and grants him perpetual freedom from all vampire predation. One of these lucky souls recently emigrated to the Free City of Zobeck where he runs a gladitorial pit under the kobold ghetto.

cate vampires by starting at the graveyards. If the Silverbloods are lucky enough to find a vampire spawn, they kill it and then cast *speak with dead* to find out who the spawn's sire was. In this way, they slowly climb the Tree of Chains until ultimately confronting the master vampire.

Reflection and shadow. Like heaven and hell, light refuses to recognize the vampire's cursed soul and does not honor the vampire's presence with reflection or shadow. To avoid detection and the bitter reminder of their cursed existence, vampires shun environments with mirrors, pools, or sources of bright light.

Odd conditions and traits. Other vampire traits include wearing of foreign or old-fashioned garb, never eating or drinking, walking with supernaturally quiet footfalls and having terrible halitosis. A watchful hunter can notice these signs with a successful Spot of DC 15 + the CR of the vampire. Even under overcast skies, vampires infrequently appear during daylight hours.

Repelling a Vampire

For all their power, vampires have significant, exploitable weaknesses.

Alchemy. Vampires cannot tolerate the smell of garlic, wild roses, or rowan berries and will not enter an area laced with them. In vampire-plagued villages, wreaths of garlic bulbs hang on doors, and villagers perfume themselves with concentrated rose oils for the fortnight following a funeral. These protections encourage a browsing vampire to go to the next house, but they do not thwart a vampire who is determined to take a particular victim. Such a vampire need merely make a Will saving throw with DC 20 for garlic, DC 24 for rose oil, or DC 19 for rowan berries to bypass the barrier; even with a successful save, the vampire takes 2d8 damage for passing such a barrier.

Conviction. More powerful apotropaic objects include mirrors, holy symbols, and religious relics. When someone presents these objects with conviction as a standard action (with a successful Knowledge (religion) check of DC 15 + the CR of the vampire), the vampire recoils with a hiss of disdain. The vampire may not touch, engage in melee, or come within 5 ft. of someone brandishing such an object. Vampires in this situation use their domination ability to crush the will of the presenter. If successful, the vampire forces the presenter to throw the object aside and attack his comrades instead.

Authority. Vampires cannot enter a home or other building without first being invited by someone with the authority to do so. Once invited, future visits require no further invitation unless the owner sells or otherwise relinquishes the property to another party.

Consecrated land. Despite popular folklore, vampires may enter consecrated areas. For instance, in what later became known as the Blood of the Empty Mass, villagers in Godfrey's Hollow slew their parish priest after they discovered him retiring to a coffin beneath the rectory.

Running water. Vampires cannot cross running water unless carried across in their coffin or conveyed by ship. Folk magic descended from elvish vampire lore suggests that this is because running water is pure and incapable of holding magic or curse. The desert preachers of the Golden Goddess teach that baptism through running water is the door to Heaven—a door forever closed to the vampire. Communities have long exploited this vampire weakness to great effect, banishing vampires to islands when

Vampires in the Real World

Dr. John Polidori's *The Vampyre* published in 1819 introduced and popularized the charismatic, sophisticated vampire that continues to dominate contemporary fiction. The historical vampire that had entire nations staking and beheading corpses was quite a different beast.

Prior to the acceptance of germ theory, many people blamed vampires for the sudden deaths of multiple family members. The first to die must have become a vampire, for why else would the family be chosen to suffer a similar fate? Hard-hitting diseases such as tuberculosis that plagued victims with pallor, fatigue, and night sweats—sure signs of a vampire's work—fanned the flames of vampire hysteria.

In 1190, William of Newburgh wrote in *Historia rerum Anglicarum* that "one would not easily believe that corpses come out of their graves and wander around, animated by some evil spirit, to terrorize or harm the living, unless there were many cases in our times, supported by ample testimony." Indeed, the idea of vampirism was so powerful, widespread, and enduring that it survived the Enlightenment, when the West discounted so many other creatures and folktales.

In Eastern Europe, communities took time-honored steps to prevent or thwart vampirism. Corpses were buried upside down so that they would dig down instead of up. Pottery emblazoned with "Jesus Christ conquers" was placed on the corpse's chest. Gypsies drove iron needles into the corpse's heart. As recently as the 19th century, Romanians placed garlic in the deceased's mouth and shot bullets through the coffin. For resistant cases, they dismembered and burned the body, mixed the ashes with water, and administered the concoction to family members as a cure-all.

After Austria gained control of northern Serbia in 1718, officials noted the locals' practice of exhuming bodies and testing them for vampirism. If the cadaver appeared well-fed (plump with decomposition gases), displayed lengthened nails or teeth (receding cuticles and gums), or showed signs of blood drinking (bled from the mouth), the corpse deserved a vampire's death. Someone, often a relative of the deceased, took up a mallet and drove a stake through the corpse's heart, puncturing its bloated chest and releasing a violent burst of foul gas and blood. To be absolutely certain of the vampire's destruction, they severed the knee tendons, beheaded the corpse, and spiked the body to the earth.

they cannot be killed. In the Northern Wastes, meltwaters flowing around ice caves form effective vampire prisons. And until the recent quake, the Vaults of al-Kupa were lined with shelves of glass globes, each composed of a mantle of holy water everflowing around an imprisoned ancient vampire in gaseous form.

Saving Souls

When someone dies from a vampire bite, friends and family have little time to save their loved one's soul. If they destroy the sire before the deceased rises as a vampire in 1-4 days, vampirism never settles on the corpse and the deceased's soul remains free. However, if their loved one rises as a vampire, no mortal magic can break the curse of vampirism. The family has only one choice. To save their loved one's soul, they must first destroy him.

Slaying a Vampire

When a vampire is destroyed, the silver cord binding the soul to the undead body unravels and snaps. The curse of vampirism dissipates, and the freed soul passes on. Thereafter, resurrection and true resurrection can recall the soul to life if the soul is willing.

Immersion. Immersing a vampire in running water reduces its hp by one third of its normal total per round. Once immersion reduces the vampire to 0 hp, the vampire is destroyed.

Sunlight. A vampire exposed to direct sunlight teeters on the agonizing cusp of destruction. It may take a single move or standard action. If the vampire does not escape the sun's rays in the next round, it is destroyed. The Grisal dwarves, who defend the Ironcrag's northern border from vampires, harness the sun's power in another way. Their Sun Axes, empowered daily with the dawn's first rays, are said to slice through vampires like razors through butter.

Damage. When a vampire is reduced to 0 hp, it automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. If it does not reach its coffin home within 2 hours (or 9 miles), the vampire is destroyed. Once at rest in its coffin, the gaseous vampire lies helpless for 1 hour, after which it gains 1 hp, reactivates its fast healing, and is no longer helpless.

Staking the heart. Pounding an ashwood, hawthorn, or rowan stake through a vampire's heart instantly slays the creature. The late vampire hunter Frangorn Nith gained fame for using a unicorn horn with equal success. Vampires are well aware of the danger that staking poses and many wear breastplates or employ *stoneskin* to protect themselves. Advanced gargoyle vampires and others with significant natural armor are particularly difficult to stake.

Staking a vampire slays it but does not destroy it. The vampire returns to life if the stake is removed, even after the body has long reduced to dust and blown away. More than one adventurer has regretted removing a curious stake from its wedge between the flagstones. To prevent the vampire from returning, wise vampire slayers decapitate the creature and fill its mouth with garlic or holy wafers.

Vampires of Legend

Twelve clans descend directly from the ur-Vampire Lucien Twice-Fallen, and at the top of each of their Trees of Chains sits a Vampire of Legend. These vampire lords were ancient when half the world's religions were new. Holy relics melt against their foul skin, and running water stagnates and blackens before they ever step foot in it. Skies darken in their presence, and every light source grants them a shadow that moves, detaches, and attacks as they command. Stakes splinter against their chests.

Like major artifacts, each Vampire of Legend has a specific means of destruction. With a bit of creativity, enterprising GMs can develop entire adventures or even campaigns based around the destruction of but one of these Vampires of Legend. enterprising GMs can develop entire adventures or even campaigns based around the destruction of but one of these Vampires of Legend.

Vampire Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (religion) can learn more about vampires. When a character makes a successful skill check, reveal the following lore, including the information from lower DCs.

Table: Vampire Lore

DC	Result
10	Vampires are cursed undead creatures with an insatiable thirst for blood. They avoid mirrors, garlic, rowan berries, and wild roses.
15	A vampire can be destroyed by sunlight, decapitation, or a stake through the heart.
20	When reduced to 0 hp, a vampire becomes a mist that floats back to its coffin. Here, it reforms into its physical body and lies helpless for 1 hour.
25	Vampires infrequently travel more than 9 miles from their coffin, because this is the maximum distance they can travel as mist.
30	Many vampires have clan-specific powers, weaknesses, or traditions.
35	The PC learns a clan-specific trait for the clan being researched.
40	Vampire society is organized into a "Tree of Chains," in which the greater and elder vampires dominate a succession of spawn down to the newly spawned. To follow this chain to its head, clerics use *speak with dead* on destroyed newer vampires.

Chapter Eight

Vampire

"What? I don't compare to the beauties of Caliphas?" she dared, her cool breath on my neck, startling me with her closeness.

In truth, she didn't compare. Even through her arresting vermilion gown she was naked, her boldness and fire making her so, nothing like the precocious, empty-headed debutantes of the capital with their painted-on faces and poisonous whispers. Her intentions were obvious and overwhelming, and with the wound of Duristan's loss there was little I could do to resist those eyes, that skin, those lips. I tried to mutter something, but even to myself it sounded like nothing more than a moan of consent.

The last thing I remember was glimpsing the glow of jaundiced eyes through the crazed salon glass and a fanged sneer that followed me even into darkness.

—Ailson Kindler, *Galdyce's Guest: Feast of the Nosferatu*

Priests often call death a release, a liberation from the bonds and concerns of life, allowing one to pass on into a state of rapture. In the vampire, such comforting words take on a terrifying cast, for once freed from the fears and cares of the living, only the basest hunger and unsatisfied lusts survive, desires that transform even the most virtuous souls into monsters.

Any discussion of vampires is one tainted by ages of lore and fiction, where superstition and fantasy muddle life-sparing fact. The truths of these horrors lie riddled with contradiction: vampires are dead, but live on; their bodies are cold, yet their beauty never fades; they sow suffering and death, yet they bear the faces of friends. While much is made of the ability of holy talismans, coffin dirt, hawthorne stakes, and sunlight to combat and destroy these undead, in practice there is no such thing as a common vampire, nor one that is not aware of its vulnerabilities and won't summon lifetimes of experience to continue its deathless rampage. Only an understanding of the goals and fundamental natures of these elusive undead might aid one in deterring their undying appetites, yet even then, all the resources of the living stand wanting when compared to the unnatural might and ages-old cunning of these princes of the undead.

Necrology

Even given the wide range of folklore and legends in various cultures, few fail to possess at least passing knowledge of the vampiric cycle of predation and rejuvenation. While fireside tales do much to spread general details, such can hardly be relied upon when identifying one of these undead, and even less so when combating them.

The ultimate fear of vampires rises from their storied kiss, the bite and telltale marks that spread death and the dark curse of unlife. As the most discussed and feared power of these unliving hunters, vampires' pronounced fangs draw the blood of the living, allowing the vampire both to feed upon the vital fluid and, more terrifyingly, to create more of its kind from its victims. Though this is not an uncommon trait of the undead, in vampires such corruption finds refinement, affording them the choice of slaying their victims outright or resurrecting them, as either deathless thralls or true vampires. The distinctions between these similar abominations escape most would-be hunters, yet two distinct types of vampire exist: true vampires and vampire spawn (also known as vampire thralls, slaves, or brides). While details of true vampires dominate discussions of these terrors, the secondary vampire spawn is often entirely overlooked. These lesser yet still exceptionally dangerous vampires possess many of the strengths and weaknesses of their creators, yet lack true vampires' lordly domination over base creatures of the night, their power to transform into beasts, and their ability to create more of their kind. Typically, too, these spawn come from mortals without the willpower or exceptional character that would attract vampires to remake them as peers rather than servants. Thus, vampire spawn are bound to the will of their masters, being slaves to their whims, typically exhibiting no more control or ambition of their own than feral ghouls or untamed hunters without the control and foresight of their masters.

Much mystery surrounds the properties of a vampire's bite, the fanged kiss through which they drain the blood of the living. Debates extend even unto the manner in which vampiric fangs aid in feeding, whether they merely serve as tools to start blood flowing or siphon blood themselves. Regardless of such particulars, the effects of a vampire's bite remain the same: gradual weakening unto death. While most vampires visit their victims night after night, draining them of their vitality little by little, some gorge themselves, drinking away an entire life in a single feast. It is from such deaths that new vampires might arise—though victims physically unfit for the transformation might still resurrect as mere vampire spawn. With such in mind, many vampires drain mortals near to death, but allow them to succumb to death from mere weakness and wasting, not the act of being drained directly. Thus, vampires choose who they pass their curse onto, avoiding the hindrances and evidence that multiple members of their kind sometimes present.

Draining blood is not the only way new vampires are created, however. Little known is the fact that the very touch of the vampire can drain one's power and weaken one's resolve—a condition that seems to be more a manner of fundamental deterioration than mere physical draining. Rarely used by vampires except in desperate conflicts, as it supplies them with no vital blood, their energy-sapping touch can easily extinguish a life, and from such withering deaths new vampires arise, cursing even the most exceptional souls to an existence as undead slaves.

The act of draining blood serves vampires as more than merely a method of creating new servants. Although none can truly say what drives these undead to thirst for blood, a vampire's lifelike appearance and the liquid source of mortal vitality are inseparably intertwined. Despite their own confessed need for blood, even unto nightly feeding, vampires held captive can seemingly go for months, even years, without drinking—yet the transformation this hunger causes is terrifying. Vampires deprived of blood gradually lose their lifelike appearance, withering into corpses ravaged to the extent time would naturally intend. In addition, the obsession with blood comes to dominate their starved psyches, driving them to the brink of madness and, in cases of extreme deprivation, irretrievably over it. Although their physical abilities seem unimpeded, their ravenous states cause them to forget much of the pomp and charm associated with their kind, revealing them for the nightmarish ghoul-kin they truly are. Those allowed to drink over the course of several nights regain their appearance and control, but the experience proves so physically and

psychologically painful—likened to dying again with every moment—that no vampire would willingly endure it.

Beyond the need for sustenance, vampires possess baser requirements to continue their undead existences. To rest, heal, and avoid the destructive properties of sunlight, vampires keep coffin sanctuaries. These resting places serve as a place for the undead to reconstitute if wounded and find a measure of the death-like repose they require to sustain their nightly hunts. All vampires have a unique connection with their coffins, preventing any common wooden box from sustaining them. Such a resting place must hold a personal connection for its user, typically being the coffin it was interred within, that of a family member, one that bears the grave dirt of its homeland, or a perfect facsimile of a lost coffin. Should its coffin be destroyed, a vampire goes to great lengths to find or create a new one that satisfies its deathly needs. Exactly what such needs are, however, varies between individuals, and only a tenacious hunter might reveal the specific mystery of a vampire's resting place.

The powers and methods of destroying a vampire also vary widely, both among individual vampires and in tales of these creatures. These undead are often described as holding power over vermin and nocturnal beasts, summoning such creatures forth and transforming into their shapes, or even discorporating into creeping mist. More exotic reports even tell of vampires controlling the weather, spreading disease, or taking on the appearances of living individuals. Such abilities and mastery of form make these undead notoriously difficult to detect, track, and defend against. Those who must, however, are confronted with equally varied advice on these menaces' vulnerabilities, ranging from wooden stakes through the heart to the abjuring properties of certain plants. Although no weakness can be called universal, most vampires truly are scorched by sunlight, weakened by rushing water, and immobilized—but not vanquished—by a stake through the heart. Yet even these supposed truths cannot be relied upon in every case, as vampires make for cunning, adaptable, and varied opponents. Typically, a vampire's weakness lies within its own history, and while the accounts of successful vampire hunts might suggest tools and practices to prepare those who would combat these horrors, in truth, little besides a patient mind, tenacity in the face of terror, and the grace of the gods can assure a vampire's final destruction.

Habitat & Society

Just as the facets of the vampiric mindset defy reliable generalization, so too do details of their nightly habits. Perhaps the sole truth that applies to all vampires is their fundamental difference from other undead. While lingering souls and unquiet corpses typically tarry in haunts forsaken by the living, vampires seek out avenues coursing with vitality, their existences sustained by robbing life from the living one sanguine splash at a time. Thus, just as vampirism might be likened to a disease, vampires plague mortal civilization, following, feeding upon, and spreading through it wherever it might arise. Typically, vampires prefer to hunt within sizable urban centers where they might blend in and their depredations might be disguised. Smaller communities can rarely satisfy a vampire's hungers, and feeding upon or driving away all the residents of an area serves these predators no better than a farmer who consumes his entire harvest before winter. As such, all but the most feral vampires strive to exercise subtlety and self control when it comes to their nightly feasts, so as not to deny themselves future prey. Only in the rarest situations might a vampire be able to exist in seclusion, and typically only then with complex arrangements to provide them with the endless stream of living blood they require.

In their interactions, either with the living or others of their kind, vampires prove just as likely to parody what they remember of mortal relations as to abandon such conventions entirely. Such translates into the manner in which these terrors hunt, either hiding as serpents within the shadows of mortal society, or prowling like wolves at the edge of civilization, picking off the weak and unwary who cross their paths.

In the case of vampires who infiltrate the streets and shadows of their former homelands, many go to great lengths adhering to what they perceive as the height of their chosen culture's society. In their undead egotism, most remake themselves as aristocrats or other elite, allowing themselves to hollowly enjoy in death what petty comforts they relished or longed for in life. In their socialization, such vampires wear the facade of dignity and culture, many becoming quite adept at passing as obscure nobility through centuries of such mimicry—though their manners often seem outdated or from another time. Yet even such etiquette merely serves as a mask, a pleasing visage that, when exposed by hunger or rage, reveals the unnatural predator within.

At the other extreme, many vampires completely divest themselves of their past mortality, letting all suggestion of reason, patience, and presentation drop away. While some continue to exist merely for themselves, becoming lords of their own private worlds, others lack the ambition or desire to master even themselves, degrading into little better than beasts, driven on only by their nightly hungers.

Which path a vampire chooses to spend its immortality pursuing varies largely depending on its psyche in life. Most fail to acclimate to their unliving states, especially those turned to undeath against their wills. Individuals with hearts and mindsets too virtuous or rigid to survive by feeding upon their former families and neighbors often starve, murder themselves, or go insane, rampaging until their hungers or conspicuousness destroy them. Such crazed undead might be pitiable, but rarely does any vestige of their former mortality survive, granting such terrors merely additional masks behind which to hide their monstrous hungers.

With powers godlike in comparison to those they possessed as mortals, most vampires are arrogant to the extreme. Such extends to their interactions with both the living and the dead. As such, vampires rarely fraternize with one another except in a master-slave arrangement. Should two vampires meet by happenstance, differences of personality and methodology typically predispose these undead to rivalry if not barefaced loathing. Should two vampires manage to overcome their initial distaste, seeing their own hungers reflected in another typically leads to deep-seated revulsion, both for their companion and themselves, which might only be satisfied by distance, or better, destruction. Thus, only when a vampire can look upon others of its kind as inferior servants, masters to replace, or evils to temporarily suffer might such abominations survive one another.

Campaign Role

With their innate strength, powers of manipulation, and elusive natures, vampires easily find their ambitions leading them into a diverse array of nighttime plots. While many monstrous creatures have limited possibilities for lairs and menace, vampires offer great range with both their variety of forms and their ability to hide among the living. When considering how to introduce vampires into a campaign, the GM should choose which form he wishes these undead stalkers to take, the most typical options being hunter or mastermind.

As hunters, vampires take the form of predators classically found in folklore, corpses driven by their lust for blood to prey upon the living. Both vampire spawn and full-fledged vampires fill this role well, hunting the living with either bestial savagery or the cunning of an ancient assassin. In most such plots, survival motivates these deathless killers, their predation either blatantly suggesting the modus operandi of their kind or being intentionally disguised and thus mysterious. The mere revelation of a vampire within a community's midst easily flows into a hunt for the creature's identity and subsequent slaying, drawing elements of urgency and mystery into any campaign. GMs might tailor the resulting evidence to the personality and goals of their vampiric villains, leading their PCs into the chateaus of sinister recluses, the haunted ruins of supposedly dead families, or even the forgotten warrens of feral vampiric clans.

As masterminds, vampires might become as deadly and varied in their goals as any other high-powered monster or villain. The type of creature a vampire was in life and the skills it possessed often color its plots in undeath: a warrior turned into a vampire might still attempt to bring ruin by the sword, while a vampiric wizard might prove as magically adept and knowledge-hungry as any lich. By warrant of their variety, true vampires better fulfill the role of schemer and manipulator than their more feral spawn. When in such a role, a vampire's hungers are typically secondary to their greater plots, and as such, these needs are less likely to be given away, often fulfilled quietly or by the hands of a subordinate. Thus, only once a party is well invested in combating the depredations of such a villain might they come to realize his accursed nature.

Vampiric Breeds

Unlike the appellations of many undead, the name "vampire" can apply to a wide variety of terrible creatures, this undead affliction proving variable to such an extent that numerous distinct types of vampires reputedly exist. While these unusual vampires might pervade the tales and fears of secluded or exotic regions—and even outnumber more typical vampires in such areas—they are generally far more reclusive than their better-known and more populous cousins.

Aswang: A terrifying breed of vampire typically haunting lands of the distant east, aswangs only arise from female victims. While these cunning undead predators fear no light and appear relatively human by day, they possess significant shapeshifting powers, undergoing a monstrous transformation, in which they grow terrible wings, claws, and a long, sharp tongue which they use to feed upon flesh and hearts—especially those of the young or unborn. Seemingly related to these grotesque undead are the dismembered manananggal and penanggalan, horrifying vampiric witches that respectively abandon their lower bodies or all but their heads and dangling entrails as they take to the hunt.

Dhampir: Known as ghoul-blooded or half-vampires, those cursed to live as dhampirs know a miserable half-life. Born from mothers infected with vampirism in the final days of their pregnancy or sired by freshly spawned vampire fathers, dhampirs live with the curse of vampirism in their mortal blood. Although the taint grants these rare souls eerie abilities, such as sensing nearby undead, so too are they cursed with a measure of their accursed parents' ravenous natures, making many just as dangerous as vampires themselves. (The dhampir appears in the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary II*.)

Nosferatu: Thought by many to be bearers of an ancient strain of vampirism, nosferatu possess many traits common to vampires, yet notably lack the immortal youth and vigor of other breeds. With strange similarities to and powers over beasts and vermin, these reclusive, withered vampires typically avoid interactions with the living except those who fall victim to their eerie powers of mind control. Yet, despite their age and dreadful manipulations, nosferatu are a waning breed,

with none known to be able to pass on their monstrous curse and thus create more of their kind. (Nosferatu are described in detail in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #8.)

Vrykolakas: Bestial creatures, vrykolakas lack all the pride, romanticism, and seductive qualities of other vampiric breeds. Similar to ghouls yet far more cunning, these animalistic, shape-changing corpses rise from their graves by night to haunt the living and spread a terrifying, life-draining disease. Bereft of numerous vampiric weaknesses, they prove notoriously difficult to kill and can easily scour the life from overconfident hunters or entire unwary communities. (The vrykolakas appears in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #29.)

Variant Vampiric Abilities

Just as various breeds of vampires exist, so too does diversity exist within regional or otherwise related groups of such undead.

Ancient Youth (Su): A vampire with this ability transformed into one of the undead at a very young age, and has been trapped within an adolescent body for an existence possibly measuring in centuries. Vampires with this ability are size Small and gain a +4 bonus on all Bluff checks. (+0 CR)

Mastermind (Su): Vampires with this ability can have a number of enslaved spawn totaling four times its total Hit Dice. In addition, the vampire chooses one of the following three abilities: clairaudience, clairvoyance, or telepathy. Depending on the ability chosen, the vampire can hear what its spawn hears, see what it sees, or communicate telepathically with it. The vampire may exercise or end its use of this ability as a standard action and maintain its connection to its spawn for as long as it wishes. A vampire may only use this ability with one spawn at a time. The vampire and vampire spawn must be on the same plane for this ability to function. While using this ability, the vampire enters a catatonic state similar to its daily rest and is treated as helpless, though it is alerted to any jarring noises, the presence of any visible creature within 5 feet, or any damage that befalls its body. (CR +0)

Noble Dead (Su): A vampire with this ability possesses an ancient and legendary bloodline. He gains a +2 bonus on all Diplomacy checks, which increases to +4 if being utilized against another undead creature. In addition, he gains channel resistance +6, and the DC of his dominate ability increases by +2. (CR +0)

Sunlight Resistance (Su): This ability provides a vampire a measure of resistance against sunlight. On the second and all later rounds of exposure to direct sunlight, the vampire takes damage equal to one-third of its maximum hit points and is destroyed if this brings it to 0 hit points. The vampire is staggered on any round it is exposed to direct sunlight. (CR +0)

Swarm Form (Su): As a standard action, a vampire with this ability can change into a bat swarm, centipede swarm, rat swarm, or spider swarm. The swarm has a number of hit points equal to the vampire, and any damage done to the swarm affects the vampire's hit point total. While in swarm form, a vampire cannot use any of its natural or special attacks, although it gains the movement, natural weapons, and extraordinary special abilities of the swarm into which it has transformed. The vampire also retains all of its usual special qualities. While in swarm form the vampire is still considered to be an undead creature with its total number of Hit Dice. A vampire can remain in swarm form until it assumes another form or retakes it original form (a standard action), or until the next sunrise. (CR +0)

Known Vampires

Untold populations of bloodthirsty undead hunt Golarion by night. Noted here are but two of these undying predators.

Galdyce: The aged viscount of the Ustalavic county of Amaans long sated his lusts among the peasantry of that mountainous region, claiming bride after ill-fated bride in a supposed attempt to father a male heir. Revealed as a nosferatu, Galdyce was supposedly slain in 4685 by the adventurers Duristan Barlhein and Ailson Kindler, leaving the Vale of Red Breath and the nearby village of Sen's Pass to return to a sleepy existence. In recent months, though, mysterious lights have been spotted among the half-ruined Castle Galdyce, leading many to fearfully whisper that the dreaded viscount or one of his terrible brides have returned home.

Jhalhasef: The Merchant of Life serves as a broker between the traders and alchemists of Merab and the ghouls of Nemret Noktoria in the Darklands deep below Thuvia. The dark-robed vampire seeks out dread secrets among the ghoulish scholars, trading them to the surface for prices paid in gold bars, amphoras of human blood, and veiled wagons bearing moaning cargo.

Sample Vampire

Few could conceive of a more charming, high-spirited pair than the aristocratic artist Lady Lauris Sankairn and her lifelong friend and bodyguard Audbrey Aldamori. Supposedly the last heir of a tragically small Galtan family, Lauris claims to be touring the finest cities of Taldor, Andoran, Cheliax, and points beyond in indulgence of her life-loving, adventuresome spirit. The pair have become popular additions to many a posh social circle, proving adept at art, drink, song, and whiling away evenings with tales of scandals and misadventures past. Despite their charm, the doting couple—quick to note their not wholly platonic yet still welcoming relationship—have greater goals than merely an endless stream of freewheeling revels. In truth, Lady Lauris is the vampiric spawn of Aldamori, a vampire who had preyed upon the aristocrats of Galt for centuries. With the coming of the Red Revolution, though, the vampire found much of the noblesse—the only mortals he deigned to dine upon—carted off as fodder for the guillotines. After abandoning the country, he and his most beautiful slave have continued to tour the Inner Sea under the guise of avant-garde fops for over 40 years, sampling the elite of numerous counties and leaving a trail of misfortune in their wake.

AUDBREY ALDAMORI, VAMPIRE ARISTOCRAT CR 14

XP 38,400

Male human vampire fighter 11/aristocrat 2

LE Medium undead (augmented)

Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 18, flat-footed 22 (+4 armor, +2 deflection, +5 Dex, +1 dodge, +6 natural)

hp 145 (11d10+2d8+76); fast healing 5

Fort +11, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7; +3 vs. fear

Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4; **DR** 10/magic and silver; **Immune** undead traits; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10

Weaknesses vampire weaknesses

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 *keen rapier* +23/+18/+13 (1d6+11/15–20) or slam +19 (1d4+7 plus energy drain)

Special Attacks blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate (DC 20), energy drain (2 levels, DC 20)

TACTICS

During Combat Audbrey first attacks spellcasters using energy drain and then uses dominate on melee targets.

Morale Audbrey fights until forced into gaseous form.

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 20, **Con** —, **Int** 15, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 18

Base Atk +12; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 36

Feats Alertness[B], Bleeding Critical, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes[B], Critical Focus, Dazzling Display, Deadly Stroke, Deceitful, Dodge[B], Greater Weapon Focus (rapier), Improved Initiative[B], Lightning Reflexes[B], Mobility, Power Attack, Shatter Defenses, Spring Attack, Step Up, Toughness[B], Weapon Focus (rapier), Weapon Specialization (rapier)

Skills Bluff +29, Diplomacy +13, Disguise +13, Fly +9, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (nobility) +15, Perception +26, Sense Motive +17, Stealth +24, Survival +10; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Bluff, +8 Perception, +8 Sense Motive, +8 Stealth

Languages Common, Hallit

SQ armor training +3, bravery +3, change shape (dire bat or wolf, *beast shape II*), *gaseous form*, shadowless, *spider climb*, weapon training (light blades +2, natural +1)

Combat Gear *potion of inflict moderate wounds* (3), *potion of nondetection*; **Other Gear** mithral shirt, *+1 keen rapier*, *cloak of elvenkind*, *belt of incredible dexterity +2*, *brooch of shielding* (101 charges), *ring of protection +2*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Blood Drain (Su) Audbrey can suck blood from a grappled opponent; if he establishes or maintains a pin, he drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution damage. Audbrey heals 5 hit points or gains 5 temporary hit points for 1 hour (up to a 145 temporary hit points) each round he drains blood.

Change Shape (Su) Audbrey can use change shape to assume the form of a dire bat or wolf, as *beast shape II*.

Children of the Night (Su) Once per day, Audbrey can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms, or 2d6 wolves. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve him for up to 1 hour.

Create Spawn (Su) Audbrey can create spawn out of humanoids he slays with blood drain or energy drain. The victim rises from death as a vampire in 1d4 days. This vampire is under Audbrey's command and remains enslaved until its master's destruction. Audbrey may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than 26 Hit Dice; any spawn he creates that would exceed this limit become free-willed undead. Audbrey may free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new spawn, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.

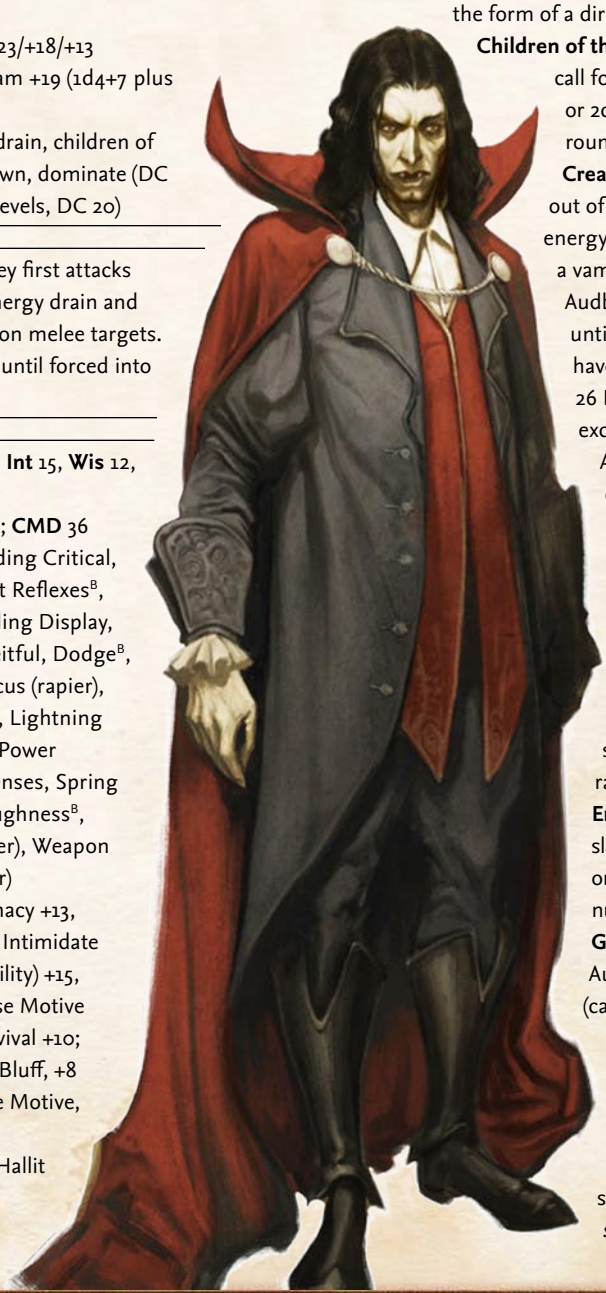
Dominate (Su) Audbrey can crush a humanoid opponent's will as a standard action. Anyone he targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under his influence, as though by a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Energy Drain (Su) A creature hit by Audbrey's slam gains two negative levels. This ability only triggers once per round, regardless of the number of attacks Audbrey makes.

Gaseous Form (Su) As a standard action, Audbrey can assume *gaseous form* at will (caster level 5th), and can remain gaseous indefinitely, with a fly speed of 20 feet and perfect maneuverability.

Shadowless (Ex) Audbrey casts no shadows and shows no reflection in a mirror.

Spider Climb (Ex) Audbrey can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effects of a *spider climb* spell.



Chapter Nine

Walking Dead

"You want to dig a grave good and deep, so's they don't have too easy a time climbing back out. And make sure that coffin's nailed tight before you drop it in. Hardwood's best, good oak or cedar, but most folks'll want to save a few coppers and just go with pine. I'd say more than half the walking dead in these parts came out of shoddy coffins and shallow graves, but what can you do? Now if you see one of 'em wandering around, don't lose your wits. Them zombies're usually pretty slow, and a good whack or two to the side of the head with a shovel'll usually put 'em down again. O' course, if it's one of the fast ones, there's naught else to do but run and hope you're faster than it is. How fast you think you are, boy, eh?"

—Efram Gall, gravedigger, Twisted Tree Necropolis

Grinning skulls of bleached bone. Empty eye sockets aglow with pale, unholy light. Slack masks of rotting flesh, devoid of human emotion and intelligence. These are the faces of the walking dead, clattering skeletons come to life and corpses risen from the grave, shambling mindlessly forward, hungry for human flesh.

Skeletons and zombies are the most simple, and therefore the most widespread of all the undead. Little more than dead bodies animated through foul necromantic rituals, skeletons and zombies are usually just unthinking automatons, mindlessly following their creators' commands. Fearsome exceptions do exist, however—skeletons and zombies who have somehow managed to retain the intelligence and cunning to fanatically wage war against the living.

The walking dead normally serve as the simple tools of evil priests and wizards who have animated cadavers through the use of spells such as *animate dead*. While most skeletons and zombies are the products of such necromantic magics, other methods of creating the walking dead have been recorded. Rare alchemical concoctions can rot the flesh or melt it from bone, and give the corpse some semblance of life. Certain powerful curses can also cause a person to rise as a zombie upon death, often to take revenge on those still living.

However, skeletons and zombies have also been known to arise spontaneously, usually as a result of another powerful undead creature nearby. Certain areas with a strong necromantic aura or a history of killing—such as battlefields and long-forgotten sacrificial altars—or places where a significant number of people have died violently, as with a mass grave or the sites of massacre, can spontaneously produce the living dead as well. Undead generated by such processes are masterless and follow no commands, though they may display an instinctive ability to work together or with more intelligent undead, at least as far as their simple consciousnesses can comprehend.

Necrology

An animated skeleton looks exactly like the skeleton of the creature it was in life, completely stripped of all muscles, organs, and flesh. If a corpse is animated as a skeleton, all of the flesh falls from its frame, leaving just bare bones. In some cases, the skeleton's empty eye sockets glow with a pale, sickly light. Beyond that, there can be considerable differences in the appearance of skeletons. The bones of newly created skeletons may shine white and smooth, while those of older skeletons are often cracked and yellowed with age. Zombies, on the other hand, keep the flesh on their bones, but it often festers and rots, becoming chunks of putrescence that eventually fall from their bodies.

Skeletons are surprisingly quick, and some still bear broken armor and weapons. In contrast, most zombies are sluggish and slow, but incredibly tough, and rely on their fists to bludgeon opponents. Both types of walking dead are difficult to hurt—swords do little against the hardened bones of skeletons, while bludgeoning and piercing weapons have little effect on a zombie's decaying flesh. These undead monstrosities typically ignore wounds that would kill a human, and must literally be dismembered before the negative energy animating them dissipates.

The walking dead have little impact on their environment, unless ordered to scour an area by their creators. Although unintelligent, they do seem to possess an instinctive hatred for the living, and usually attack even if not given the order to do so. As undead, skeletons and zombies have no need of food, but unsettling reports continue to surface of zombies devouring the brains of those they kill, though the reasons behind such disturbing behavior are not clear.

Habitat & Society

Zombies and skeletons frequently inhabit the same environments they did in life, although they are most commonly found in crypts, tombs, ruins, graveyards, and necropolises. Cheap and relatively easy to create, the walking dead are often used by evil necromancers to guard their lairs, and are a regular feature of evil temples, particularly those dedicated to gods of death. An overzealous creator may end up with more undead than he can control, resulting in "wild" undead that roam far from where they were created.

As mindless corpses, skeletons and zombies possess no social structure. Everything they do is at their creators' whims. In the absence of a master, a solitary individual may claim territory of a sort—a single crypt or a short section of dungeon hallway—guarding it and attacking any living thing that trespasses. Zombies often congregate in packs, but this seems to be an instinctive hunting reflex rather than a conscious decision, as even when found together, the walking dead do not coordinate their actions or attacks.

Occasionally, a large mixed group of skeletons or zombies spontaneously arises, usually at the site of a particularly bloody battle or other scene of carnage. These armies of the walking dead, known as legions, are rolling catastrophes that massacre everything in their path. With no living master to direct them, the army's deceased generals often become skeletal champions, holding fast to their intelligence and leading the legion as they did in life. In some cases, they continue to follow the orders they were given while still alive, but more commonly they set out on a campaign of senseless slaughter and destruction. Living armies frequently prove no match for the relentless, untiring onslaught of an undead legion, which can devastate vast swaths of countryside, depopulating entire villages and adding the slain to their ranks. Fortunately, such spontaneous legions are rare occurrences, and usually disband of their own accord once their mindless fury has been spent, or when they have achieved whatever mysterious goal was the impetus behind their genesis in the first place.

The Nature of Evil

"Skeletons and zombies are evil, even though they are mindless. This is because undeath itself is a naturally evil force, just as fire is naturally hot. While life and death exist in a cycle, neither is inherently good or evil, for creatures must die to feed others and make room for new life, which in turn must die to make room for even newer life. Undeath, by contrast, is a perversion of the natural order; an endless state that is neither life nor death, and a power that only corrupts and consumes. Vampires and brain-hungry zombies cannot create new life or sustain other life, they can only destroy life and propagate their kind until the world is filled with undying predators and no prey. Even things built with the power of undeath are merely perversions and mockeries of life, whether an animate corpse or an intelligent palace made of bones.

"This is not to say that all necromancers are evil or the school of necromantic magic is inherently evil. Necromancy spells manipulate the power of death, unlife, and the life force—the magic of death and the magic of undeath are two different things. A *circle of death* spell uses the power of death to snuff out life, but it is no more evil than stabbing a creature with a sword. Some argue that magic is just a tool, and how a tool is used determines whether the act is good or evil, but a counterargument holds that some tools are specifically designed to be used for evil, like implements of torture. Worse, some tools are inherently evil, and want to be used for evil. If fire always burned the innocent and spared the guilty, fire would be evil. Undeath is an inherently evil source of power, designed to corrupt and destroy life for no purpose other than hatred and because it can. There are exceptional, intelligent undead that are not evil, just as there are extremely rare demons and devils who become good, but evil is the norm because their essence is evil."

—Dhauken Tor, First Speaker of the Wise Council of the Arcanamirium, Absalom

While the mindless undead themselves worship no gods, those who create them commonly venerate one of three unholy faiths. The Pallid Princess Urgathoa, goddess of disease and undeath, remains the most popular choice among necromancers, and many of her priests regularly create undead, particularly favoring plague zombies. Other necromancers pay homage to Orcus, the Prince of Undeath, demon lord of necromancy and the undead, though his cult is small in comparison with Urgathoa's. Finally, many necromancers seeking eternal unlife, as well as those few walking dead who have retained their minds, often follow the tenets of the Whispering Way in their quest to achieve the ultimate state of lichdom. Of course, the follower of any evil deity (or tolerant neutral one) may create undead, resulting in Abadaran vault guardians, Gorumite war-skeletons, and so on.

Campaign Role

Traditional humanoid skeletons and zombies are most frequently used as low-level minions, disposable enemies that heroic PCs can destroy without remorse or quarter. They offer little threat at higher levels, and are often easily destroyed by the channeled energy of a party's cleric. Used properly, however, the walking dead can be challenging opponents at all levels of play. Besides using variant skeletons and zombies with new abilities to surprise players, remember that other non-humanoid monsters can become walking dead as well. Skeletal champions mounted on warhorse skeletons, demonic or infernal zombies, skeletal dinosaurs come to life, giant zombie rocs, or even intelligent skeletal dragons might make for interesting undead opponents.

Large numbers of undead can be an additional challenge. A skeleton may have only 4 hit points, but when the PCs are all that stands between a horde of a hundred skeletons and the residents of a hapless village, they may not seem like such easy foes after all. A whole crypt or dungeon full of undead soon exhausts a cleric's channeled energy, requiring the PCs to come up with more inventive ways of overcoming the infestation of walking dead.

Faces of Death

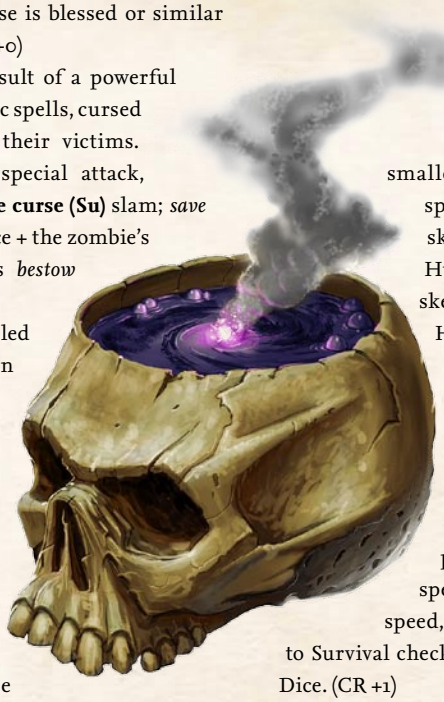
The simple, tottering skeleton and mindless, shambling zombie are the stereotypical image of the walking dead, but these undead horrors come in highly variable forms. Bloody skeletons, burning skeletons, fast zombies, plague zombies, and deadly intelligent skeletal champions are the best-known variants, but the walking dead are a diverse lot, and many more varieties might stalk moonlit graveyards and haunted crypts, each possessing its own strange and unique abilities. Although some common forms are listed below, in many cases these variant abilities may be applied to either skeletons or zombies, unless common sense dictates otherwise (such as a gasburst skeleton). Likewise, except as noted, the following variations can be stacked with one another—it's possible to have an exploding acid skeleton, for example.

Acid Skeleton: The bones of an acid skeleton constantly ooze caustic acid. An acid skeleton's melee attacks deal an additional 1d6 points of acid damage, and anyone striking an acid skeleton with an unarmed strike or natural attack takes 1d6 points of acid damage. Acid skeletons lose their immunity to cold but gain immunity to acid. An acid skeleton's Charisma is 12. Other energy types, such as electric skeletons or frost skeletons, can be applied in a similar fashion. (CR +1)

Alchemical Zombie: This zombie has been created through alchemical processes rather than necromantic magic. As such, positive energy has less effect on it, giving it channel resistance +2. Its alchemically treated flesh is also more resistant to damage, granting it an additional +2 bonus to its natural Armor Class above that which it gains based on its size. (CR +1)

Brain-eating Zombie: These terrifying zombie variants feed on humanoid brains. They gain a bite attack that deals damage based on the zombie's size, and the grab special attack, usable against opponents of the zombie's own size or smaller. When an opponent dies, the zombie uses its next turn to feast upon its victim's brain, making spells that require a complete corpse (such as *raise dead*) useless. Anyone killed after being bitten by a brain-eating zombie rises as a brain-eating zombie in 2d6 hours unless the corpse is blessed or similar preventative measures are taken. (CR +0)

Cursed Zombie: Created as the result of a powerful curse rather than through necromantic spells, cursed zombies can bestow a curse upon their victims. A cursed zombie gains the curse special attack, delivered with its slam attack. **Zombie curse (Su)** slam; *save* Will DC = 10 + 1/2 the zombie's Hit Dice + the zombie's Cha modifier; *frequency* —; *effect* as *bestow curse*; *cure* —. (CR +1)



Exploding Skeleton: Also called "bone bombs," an exploding skeleton detonates in a burst of razor-sharp bone fragments when it dies. Anyone within 10 feet of the skeleton when it is destroyed takes 1d6 points of damage per hit die of the skeleton (minimum 1d6). A Reflex save (DC 10 + 1/2 the skeleton's Hit Dice + the skeleton's Cha modifier) halves this damage. Bloody, burning, and multiplying skeletons cannot be exploding skeletons. (CR +0)

Gasburst Zombie: These bloated zombies are filled with toxic gas. When a gasburst zombie dies, it explodes in a cloud of noxious vapors which fill a 10-foot cube surrounding the zombie. Gasburst zombies are commonly filled with burnt othur fumes or ungol dust, but any poisonous gas may be used. Gas burst zombies have DR 5/ piercing instead of DR 5/slashing. (CR depends on poison used, usually +1)

Host Corpse: This skeleton or zombie has been infested with a swarm of vermin or Tiny undead creatures that it releases from its body. Skeletal hosts often hold carrionstorms (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #2) or bat swarms in their rib cages, while zombie hosts frequently carry locusts or flesh-eating cockroach swarms (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* volume #13) inside their rotting husks. Acid, bloody, and burning skeletons cannot be host corpses. (CR +0, with the swarm's CR counting as a separate creature)

Magus: These variant skeletal champions and zombie lords are minor spellcasters (typically 5th-level or less) that have retained both their intelligence and their spellcasting abilities. Magus skeletons and zombies gain Silent Spell as a bonus feat. (CR +1 plus caster level)

Mudra Skeleton: Sometimes known as "whirlwind skeletons," mudra skeletons are created with four or more arms, each capable of wielding a weapon. A mudra skeleton's Dexterity increases by +4 (instead of +2), and it gains Multiweapon Fighting and Weapon Finesse as bonus feats. (CR +1)

Multiplying Skeleton: This fearsome skeleton variant grows into more skeletons if destroyed. When a multiplying skeleton is destroyed, its bones reform 1d4 rounds later into two smaller multiplying skeletons with half the Hit Dice of the original. Each resulting multiplying skeleton continues to reform into smaller and smaller sizes. A Colossal multiplying skeleton splits into two Huge skeletons, a Gargantuan skeleton becomes two Large skeletons, a Huge skeleton reforms as two Medium skeletons, and so on, until the skeleton's Hit Dice can no longer be halved or the resulting skeletons would be Diminutive or smaller, at which point the skeletons are finally destroyed. Bloody, burning, and exploding skeletons cannot be multiplying skeletons. (CR +1)

Relentless Zombie: These have all the powers of fast zombies, and also gain a Climb speed equal to half the base creature's land speed, the scent special ability, a +4 racial bonus to Survival checks to track by smell, and two additional Hit Dice. (CR +1)

Skeletal Archer: While not as intelligent or skilled as skeletal champions, skeletal archers are nevertheless a welcome addition to any undead army. Skeletal archers gain Point-Blank Shot and Precise Shot as bonus feats. (CR +0)

Zombie Lord: Zombie lords are the fleshy counterparts to skeletal champions, rare zombies who have somehow managed to retain their intelligence. Use the normal zombie template for the zombie lord's Armor Class, base save bonuses, speed, melee attacks, base attack bonus, and damage reduction. Use the skeletal champion template for the zombie lord's Hit Dice, skills, and ability scores. Zombie lords gain channel resistance +4 and Toughness as a bonus feat. A zombie lord does not gain the staggered special quality. (CR as a zombie of the same Hit Dice +1.)

Known Walking Dead

The following are some of the more notorious walking dead of Golarion.

The Army of Erlexian Thool: Known as the Sorcerer of Barrow Knoll, this tiefling necromancer claims to be the scion of a powerful Gebbite Blood Lord and the demon lord Zura, the Vampire Queen. Regardless of the veracity of such grandiose assertions, Erlexian is obsessed with all things undead. Driven

Facets of Fear

As plague ravages a town and the bodies of loved ones, friends, and neighbors pile up in the streets, what could be more natural than the fear of those corpses somehow coming to life, rising from the dead to claim you as one of their own? Death is the great unknown, the one thing all people fear, and the concept of returning from such a state turns the hearts of men and women to ice.

In areas devastated by pestilence and disease, the dead can sometimes outnumber the survivors, leading to the fear that the walking dead will overrun the living in a "zombie apocalypse." And as more people fall victim to the terrifying plague, the number of walking dead continues to increase. Civilization is a fragile thing, and in the face of such an unprecedented, unstoppable threat, can society truly hold itself together? Or is it doomed to fall beneath the claws and teeth of the dearly departed?

The fear of the walking dead is also the fear of becoming one of them—a mindless slave under the control of someone else. A person transformed into a zombie loses his freedom, his individuality, his conscience, and some might say his very soul. And not even death can save you from such a fate, because your final reward—a peaceful death and a heavenly afterlife—is also taken from you. Becoming a member of the walking dead means nothing less than a horrific, unending life without hope of rest.

from a succession of cities across Avistan for grave robbing and suspected murder, Erlexian now makes his home in a crumbling tower on the outskirts of the River Kingdoms village of Barrow Knoll. Having exhausted the supply of cadavers from the many surrounding tombs that give the village its name, Erlexian turned to the living inhabitants of the town, demanding each household supply him with one fresh body or face retribution. Fearing the powerful wizard within their midst, the terrified villagers had little choice but to comply. Barrow Knoll is now a gloomy, troubled place, almost deserted, as Erlexian's undead minions patrol the village every night, capturing anyone who strays out of doors in order to fuel their master's mania. Meanwhile, Erlexian concentrates on his depraved experiments, surrounding himself with zombie footmen and skeletal servants created from the village's unfortunate populace.

The Blazing Cavalier: Though his original name has been lost to history, the burning skeletal champion known as the Blazing Cavalier was once a hero of the Shining Crusade, a member of the famed Knights of Ozem. In one of the Knights' many battles against the Whispering Tyrant, the warrior was slain by the witch-king, incinerated in eldritch fire until nothing but charred bones remained. So dedicated was he to his cause, however, that not even death could stop the knight's righteous fury. His skeleton rose from where it had fallen, still burning, and he rejoined the fight. After Tar-Baphon's eventual defeat, the Blazing Cavalier vanished into the Hungry Mountains, but reports of a flaming, armored knight patrolling the mountains and fighting orcs, undead, and other evil creatures have surfaced again and again over the centuries. Popular tales in Lastwall say that the Blazing Cavalier is waiting for Tar-Baphon's inevitable return, at which time the knight will face the Whispering Tyrant before the gates of Gallowspire one last time and slay the lich lord once and for all. Only then will the Blazing Cavalier crumble to dust, finally at peace.

The Gillamoor Plague: Following the Goblinblood Wars, many of Isger's villages fell to fire or the sword. Gillamoor, near the charred eaves of the Chitterwood, was one of the lucky ones to survive that devastation, but recent reports from merchant caravans reaching Elidir bear disquieting news. Something evil has befallen the village of Gillamoor, and the normally fearless caravan guards of Druma's Mercenary League turn white-faced and trembling as they recount how the village's residents have apparently transformed from simple peasants into ravenous, undead monsters, fiendishly quick and devilishly hard to kill. Rumor now has it that Gillamoor has been quarantined, and that the Isgeri army is looking for volunteers to enter the village to end the threat.

Leylani Marakhoum: Fifty years ago, the young, beautiful, and narcissistic Gebbite aristocrat Leylani Marakhoum was horrified to see her beauty fading with age. A casual follower of the Whispering Way, Leylani decided to preserve her beauty by becoming a lich. Unfortunately, having dropped out of the Mortuarium, Leylani's magical skills never surpassed those of an apprentice, and her amateur rituals only resulted in transforming her into a magus zombie, a rotten corpse with none of the power or prestige of a lich. No longer the popular socialite of her youth, Leylani now spends her days religiously applying *unguent of revivification* and other more mundane cosmetics in a vain attempt to stave off the decay of her disintegrating, putrid flesh. Insane with jealousy, Leylani has begun secretly murdering attractive young debutantes and animating them into ghastly, mindless zombies under her control.

The Sleeping Knights of Ras-Jajan: When the self-styled Necromancer-King Ras-Jajan attacked Absalom in 3692 AR, he and his undead army were soundly defeated. Although the would-be conqueror's body was never found, he left behind his fortress, one of the many siege castles littering the Cairnlands around the city. The sole survivor of an adventuring band that braved the depths of Ras-Jajan's Refuge reported seeing row upon row of skeletal warriors, archers, and charioteers in a vast chamber beneath the siege castle, armor and weapons in perfect condition, apparently waiting for their master's command to rise and march upon the city once again. Rightly concerned with the threat this undead legion poses, the Church of Pharasma sent two expeditions into Ras-Jajan's Refuge. When both of them failed to return, the Chamber of Ecclestials washed their hands of the matter, leaving Absalom's Grand Council and the Eagle Garrison to deal with the Sleeping Knights and the siege castle's many wards and guardians.

Sample Walking Dead

The Isgeri village of Gillamoor has been afflicted with a horrifying plague that is quickly turning the entire populace into mindless, ravenous zombies. Unknowingly carried by an itinerant Ustalavian peddler, the affliction spread quickly through the town, infecting nearly everyone who came into contact with it. The few surviving residents huddle fearfully inside their homes behind makeshift barricades, while the undead corpses of their former neighbors prowl hungrily outside in search of fresh brains to devour.

On the orders of the Steward of Isger, the Drumish merchant caravan who first brought word of the plague was slain to a man to prevent the spread of the contagion. Fortunately, Gillamoor sits well away from the vital trade routes of the Conerica Straits, so the authorities believe the plague is still constrained to the village itself. Already undermanned and underfunded, the Isgeri army has been unable to do anything to address the problem, other than to post notices at crossroads that Gillamoor is under quarantine, and offer a reward of 5,000 gold pieces to anyone who can cleanse the village of infection. Of course, destroying over 500 zombies is no mean feat even for a skilled adventuring group.

GILLAMOOR PLAGUE ZOMBIE **CR 1**

XP 400

Relentless brain-eating plague human zombie

NE Medium undead

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 22 (4d8+4)

Fort +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

Immune undead traits

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft.

Melee slam +6 (1d6+3 plus grab), bite (1d6+3 plus grab)

Special Attacks brain-eating, create spawn, death burst, disease, grab, quick strikes

TACTICS

Before Combat Gillamoor plague zombies shamble about like normal zombies, only using their full speed if attacked or if they are in charge range of an opponent.

During Combat A Gillamoor plague zombie focuses all of its attacks on a single opponent, attempting to bite and grab the victim to feed upon its brain. It pursues its chosen quarry until either the prey or the zombie is dead.

Morale Gillamoor plague zombies fight until destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 14, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 18

Feats Toughness[B]

Skills Climb +11, Survival +0 (+4 when tracking by scent)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

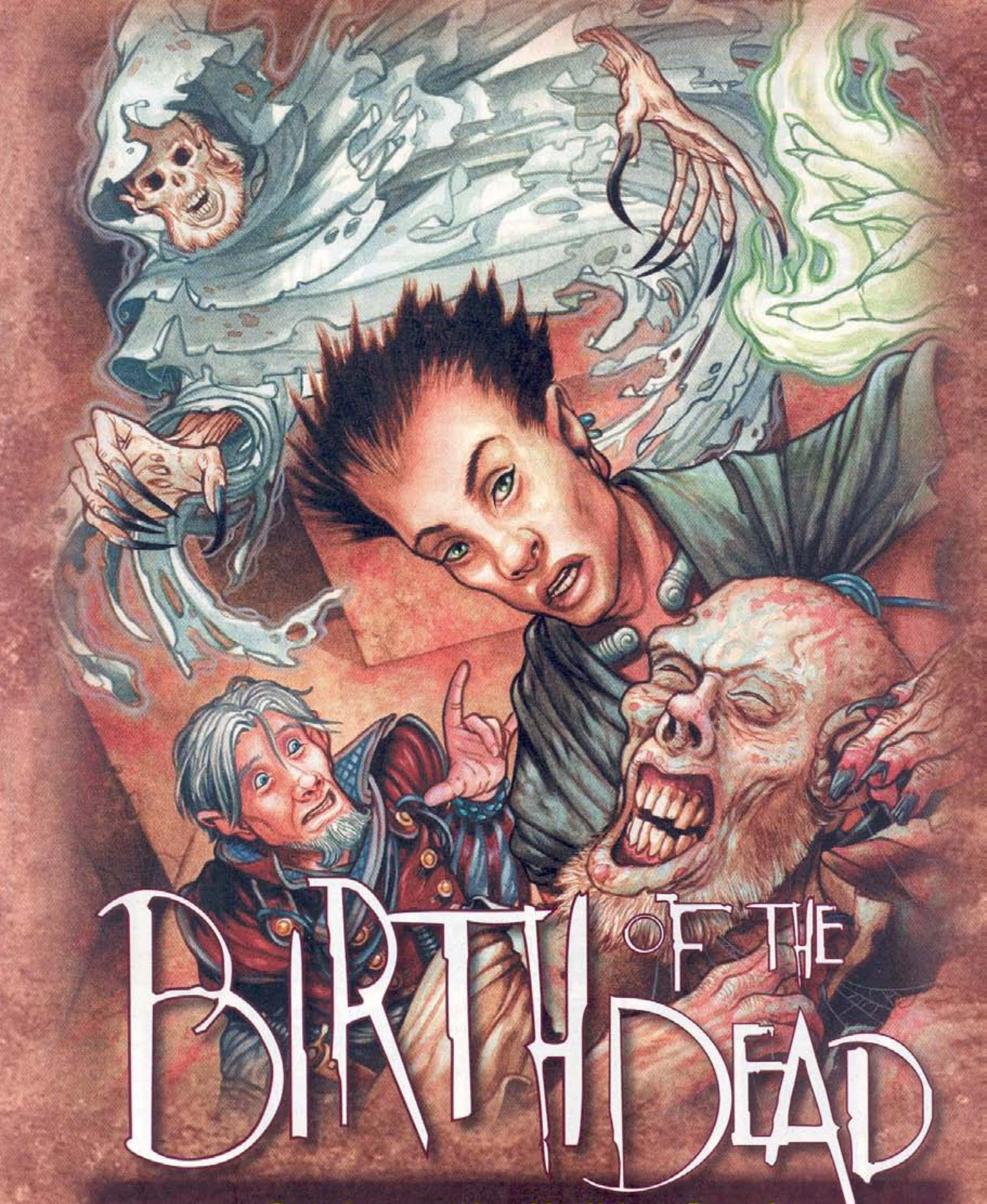
Brain-eating (Ex) After killing a target, the zombie uses its next turn to eat it's victim's brain. This prevents raising the body from the dead by any method that requires an intact corpse.

Create Spawn (Su): Anyone killed after being bitten by a Gillamoor zombie rises as a Gillamoor zombie 2d6 hours later unless the corpse is blessed or similar measures are taken.

Death Burst (Ex) When the zombie dies, it explodes in a burst of decay. All creatures adjacent to the zombie are exposed to its disease as if struck by a slam attack and must make a Fortitude save or contract zombie rot.

Disease (Su) The zombie's natural attacks carry the zombie rot disease. *Zombie rot*: slam—injury; *save* Fort DC 12; *onset* 1d4 days; *frequency* 1/day; *effect* 1d2 Con, this damage cannot be healed while the creature is infected; *cure* 2 consecutive saves. Anyone who dies while infected rises as a Gillamoor zombie in 2d6 hours.

Quick Strikes (Ex) Whenever the zombie takes a full-round attack action, it can make one additional slam attack at its highest base attack bonus.



BIRTH OF THE DEAD

Origins of the Walking Dead

BY ARI MARMELL • *ILLUSTRATED BY JEFF LAUBENSTEIN*

Dungeons & Dragons boasts an astounding number of undead, some from ancient myth, others from the fiendish imaginations of the game's creators. It can be difficult, however, to justify so many different varieties in a campaign world. Unlike other monster types, undead do not procreate in the traditional sense. They are created either through necromancy or some terrible deed. It's fairly easy to imagine how a wight, ghoul, or ghost might arise, but what could cause a body to rise as a nightwalker? A boneclaw? A devourer?

This article offers a brief look at most of the undead from the *Monster Manual* (omitting only skeletons and zombies, mindless undead who exist only as puppets), and a selection of undead from other bestiaries. Each entry covers what conditions generally lead to the creation of that particular undead, as well as mentioning the traditional methods (such as through an attack and by spell). Although the deities mentioned below are specific to the core D&D setting, they are easily replaced with comparable gods in Eberron, the Forgotten Realms, or any other campaign.

Allip

Tezra sobbed silently as the rusty razor slid across her wrist. It rasped as it cut, but at least the sound drowned out the voices. It was only a momentary respite. She felt her life drain slowly from her wrist and she knew as she stared up at a ceiling that the voices would never trouble her again.

Then she was looking not up at the ceiling, but down at her bloodless, tear-streaked face. Tezra floated up and back, through the walls of her tiny home, her sobs turning to manic laughter none would ever hear. She would no longer suffer from the voices. She had become one.

It's no wonder that undead are often cruel, for undeath itself seems to possess an innate sadistic streak. How else to explain that those who have arguably suffered most should find their agony prolonged even after their last attempt to end it? The allip is the spirit of someone driven to suicide by madness, yet even death cannot quiet the madness that afflicts it. Some suggest that the allip is not truly hostile at all, but simply cannot understand that it only harms those to whom it reaches out for help in its lingering, lifeless confusion.

Suicide need not be the individual's conscious goal, so long as it can be directly attributed to the insanity. For instance, someone who jumps from a tower out of depression qualifies, but so does a madman who perishes after gouging out his own eyes in order to escape his hallucinations. Further, someone found shortly after death and offered a respectful burial is not likely to become an allip; only those who lie unfound for days or longer seem to linger as undead. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 10.

Bodak

"There are experiences worse than confronting demons," Jozan whispered to the tombstone by which he knelt. Only a date and name was carved upon it: Regdar.

"Like what, Jozan?" the soft voice of his elven companion asked from behind him.

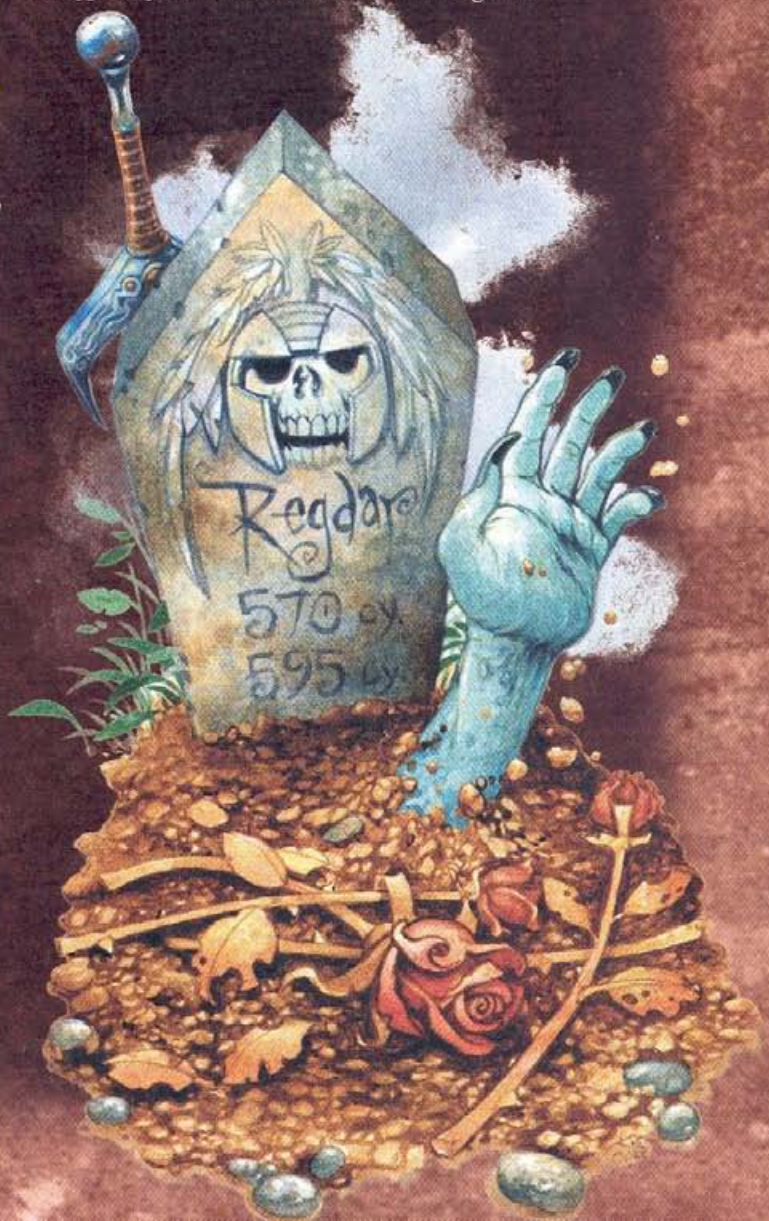
"Burying your friends afterward." The cleric stood, and sadly brushed the dirt from his knees. "Come, Mialee. It may not be very priestly, but I could use an ale or six."

The pair turned to leave, unaware of the subtle shifting of the dirt behind them, the faint scratching that heralded the rising of the body beneath the earth.

Oh, there were worse experiences than confronting demons, all right. Such as confronting the friends you thought you'd buried.

Bodaks are "the undead remnants of humanoids who have been destroyed by the touch of absolute evil." Typically this means that bodaks are created by other bodaks through their death gaze, but other methods exist as well.

More than just undead, bodaks are slightly fiendish as well. A bodak might rise when an outsider with the evil subtype slays a humanoid creature with negative



energy, a necromantic spell, or a death effect. The responsible fiend gains no control over the bodak, but few fiends take objection to unleashing yet another uncontrolled evil upon the world. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 28.

Bone Naga

"Is this something we're going to have to worry about?" Regdar asked, pointing to the serpentine skeleton draped over the altar. He glanced down toward the fresher corpse at his feet and scowled. "We barely beat a living naga. I don't want to face an undead one."

"I think not," Naull told him, examining the ancient runes carved into the chamber's walls. "I'm no necromancer, but I know something about death magic. There's no way this naga was strong enough to cast the necessary spells."

As if in response, the skeletal monstrosity raised its head with a sepulchral rattle.

Bone nagas are created from, and usually by, other nagas (most frequently dark nagas). Dark nagas know of a ritual to create a bone naga using *animate dead*. The ritual requires numerous components, including the ocular fluids of a divine caster and a sentient reptile. These can come from the same creature, if appropriate. Only taught to dark nagas, this rite contains a number of special somatic components that humanoids cannot emulate.

It is rumored that some free-willed bone nagas also possess the ability to perform the creation ritual and actively seek out their living brethren, enslaving them in undeath. Source: *Monster Manual II*, page 35.

Boneclaw

Ember struggled against the spell that held her, but to no avail. To have entrapped her so completely the spellcaster must be powerful indeed, for her body and mind were trained to shrug off such magics.

She could see little of the chamber. The walls flashed red in the light of a nearby fire, and she could see the legs and lower torso of the fiendish hag she had just slain.

"I should thank you, noble warrior." The voice behind her was cold, lifeless. "You have brought to me everything I need. I could not have done this without you."

A small horde of tiny creatures—wererats, Ember realized—scurried into sight and set about stripping the flesh from the hag in long strips, their bright knives glinting in the firelight. When they set about stripping Ember's flesh from her, beginning with her hands—hands that could shatter stone—Ember couldn't even scream.

Created as an immortal weapon, only the most abominable rituals birth boneclaws. The rite calls for the skeletons of Large, magic-using, humanoid-shaped creatures (such as ogre magi and certain types of hags). It infuses them with negative energy, strips them of most of their remaining flesh, and grafts additional bones to their body—mostly around the fingers. These additional bones must be cut from the flesh of living victims.

This rite requires the spells *create undead* (caster level 15+) and *greater magic fang*. Druidic magic is essential to the ritual, making boneclaws exceptionally rare even compared to other created undead. Source: *Monster Manual III*, page 17.

Charnel Hound

In a wave of destruction, dirt erupted from a hundred graves and then a hundred more. From each crawled the corpse that dwelt within, propelled by a malignant will. Naked skulls and fleshy visages seemed to gape open in horror as they dragged themselves in a mockery of infancy. Where they met their joints shattered and their bones clenched to one another. In the mass of writhing decay, a dog-shaped figure began to form.

The first charnel hound formed from the corpses of one particular cemetery, located behind a secret shrine to Nerull the Reaper. Seeing the horrific beast in action, necromancers determined to develop charnel hounds of their own. Early tests resulted in uncontrollable horrors (to say nothing of the deaths of many of the experimenters), but sadly, they finally succeeded. No longer the province of deities alone, mortal spellcasters have unlocked the secrets to charnel hound creation.

The ritual requires 200 corpses, the spell *create greater undead* (caster level 20+), and unholy unguents worth 15,000 gp (in addition to the standard components of the spell).

On occasion, charnel hounds arise without a mortal creator, spawned by the vile will of a deity even as the first such horror was created by Nerull. Source: *Monster Manual III*, page 26

Crawling Head

"This is different," Gimble muttered to Hennet, holding his torch high to stare at the strange icons carved into the wall. "Up to this point, it's all about mummification. We've seen that before, but look here!"

The sorcerer looked. The walls displayed primitive pictographs, but there could be no mistaking what they were meant to convey. Priests stood around a figure chained to an enormous slab. Scattered about him were the remains of numerous smaller beings. The chained figure thrashed while two priests stuffed strange items into his mouth and a third stood by fingering a saw-bladed axe.

"What in the name of all the hells were they doing here?" Gimble asked.

"I don't know," Hennet told him, "but whatever it was, it happened beyond this next door."

The first crawling head was created deliberately years ago, constructed from the severed head of a hill giant by a necromancer later slain by his own creation. Since then, giant necromancers have adopted the practice of creating crawling heads, although some humanoids still do so as well. The rite requires *create undead* and the sacrifice of a giant who just fed on at least three sentient beings.

Unfortunately, crawling heads are notoriously free-willed. Every day, at sunset, there is a 1% chance of the head breaking free of its creator's control. Once lost, control can never be restored and the crawling head likely attempts to destroy its creator. Source: *Fiend Folio*, page 35.

Crimson Death

Lord Varvain shrieked as the stake penetrated flesh and cracked ribs. So great was the agony, he actually prayed that this one would kill him.

It did not. It slid through the vampire's torso and into the cypress on which he hung, missing his heart by inches—as had the previous stakes that even now held him aloft.

"You swore you would spare me." The voice was hollow and emotionless. It echoed from a swirling mist, pink-tinged, that might once have been the face of a beautiful woman. "Then you swore you would change me, to be as you are. You should have kept your promise."

"Please..." The great vampire lord, scourge of a dozen villages for half as many decades, could only whimper. "Kill me..."

Varvain shrieked once more as the stake punctured his stomach, nailing him ever more tightly to the tree.

"Perhaps tomorrow, my 'lord.' First, I think you should watch me feed."

Legends tell that a crimson death is born from the destruction of a strong-willed vampire. This is not, in fact, the case. Crimson deaths might form from anyone who dies via exsanguination and whose body is then consumed or destroyed. A traveler in a marsh sucked dry by leeches and then consumed by other swamp creatures might rise as a crimson death. Similarly, a vampire who drains a victim and then cremates the body to prevent it from rising as another vampire might provoke the manifestation of a crimson death. The same hatred and iron will required to create ghosts or wraiths is necessary for the formation of a crimson death. They favor swamps and other misty regions due to their ability to easily hide in such environments, and not due to any necrological aspects of their condition. Source: *Monster Manual II*, page 53.

Death Knight

"Foul Lord of Brine, Ravager of Worlds, hear the call of your faithful, degenerate servant." He knelt before the two-faced idol, its twin tentacles on either side of his head. His black armor weighed heavy upon him, and he could hardly hear his own prayer for the sounds of battle. He heard Alhandra's voice and knew he could not defeat both the paladin and her companions.

Yet although he prayed, great Demogorgon sent no sign.

With a shout of rage, he sent the idol skittering across the floor with the back of his fist and rose to fight his final battle. He knew not, as he stormed from the chamber, that the Prince of Demons had not abandoned him at all. No, Demogorgon had great plans for him—he just needed to die first.

Great warriors in life, most death knights are favored servants of evil, but some served the forces of good as paladins, tragically fallen from grace not long before dying. Most served archfiends, as opposed to evil deities, and in fact the demon prince Demogorgon is credited with creating the first such horror. Some warriors seek out the undead existence of the death knight, but a mortal cannot perform the ritual without assistance. The transformation requires the active assistance of a powerful fiend. On rare occasions, death knights occur spontaneously upon the death of a favored servant of an archfiend or evil deity. Finally, and even less frequently, death knights might arise as the result of a curse. If an innocent dies due to a fallen paladin's actions, that individual might pronounce a dying curse that results in eternal unlife for the former champion of light. Source: *Monster Manual II*, page 207.

Devourer

Hennet did not know how long it had been since the thing that lurked in the endless Astral Plane had attacked him and Naull. He knew only it must have been a long time, because he was hungry. Oh, so hungry.

He looked down at Naull, felt her soul screaming from within him, screaming at him by name. He knew he should feel bad about what he'd done, but he couldn't remember why. He only knew that he was grateful to have found her, although already he wondered where he might find his next meal.

While devourers can be created deliberately by spellcasters using *create greater undead*, this is not the only way they manifest. If a humanoid traveling on the Astral Planer or Ethereal Plane is slain by a negative energy effect, she might rise again as a devourer. The combination of negative energies and the ambient forces of those planes combine into a mystic aura unlike any other, causing the body to warp and grow. The devourer becomes a permanent conduit to the Astral or Ethereal Plane, which constantly siphons off the negative energy animating it. Due to this effect the devourer starves if it does not absorb the lives of others. The deceased's physical body becomes the devourer, so the undead appears on the Astral or Ethereal Plane if the individual physically traveled there, but if projecting her Astral form, her physical body—and thus the resulting devourer—remains on the Material Plane. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 58.

Drowned

"Please, you have the cargo! There's no need to do this! Please!"

Allaris, unable to tell where his tears ended and the ocean spray began, cringed

against the cold metal of the anchor as the bearded pirate leaned over him, grinning a gold-toothed grin.

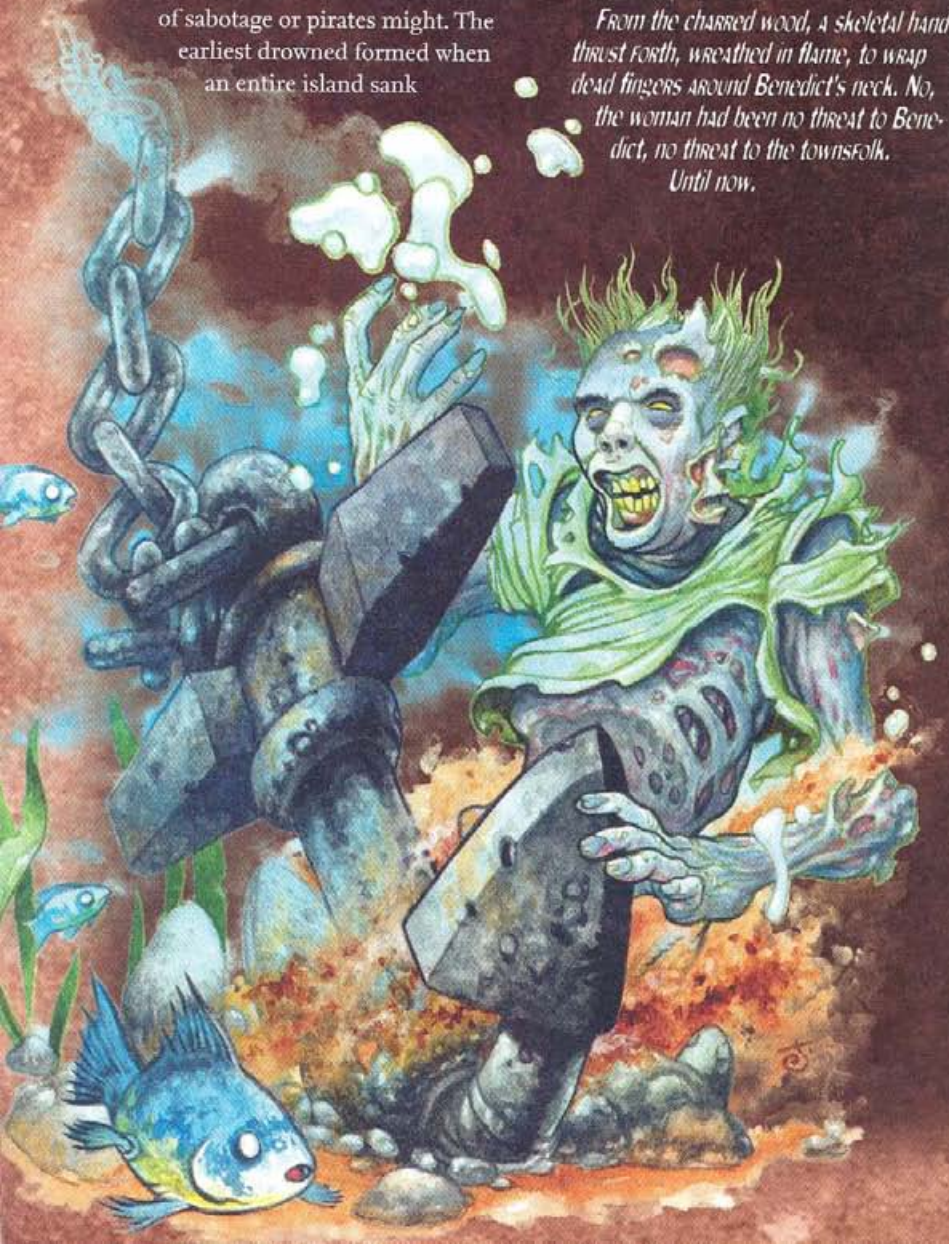
"There's every need to do this," he chortled, once more testing the ropes that bound the merchant to the iron weight.

"Gods, why?"

"Because it's fun."

Allaris screamed as the anchor dropped, choking as the seawater flooded his chest. Then it was his lungs that screamed, but they too eventually stopped.

Clearly, not all who drown become undead. Drowned appear when people perish beneath the waves specifically due to the actions (or negligence) of others. A ship that sinks due to storm damage does not transform those onboard into drowned, but one that sinks because of sabotage or pirates might. The earliest drowned formed when an entire island sank because of the foolish efforts of a powerful mage to enslave the sea god, and it is his curse that continues to form these undead today. Source: *Monster Manual III*, page 46.



Effigy

"It is done." Father Benedict turned to face the gathered crowd, most of whom still stared at the gruesome figure tied to the smoldering stake. "She has been purified, cleansed by the divine flame. No longer shall her vile witcheries bedevil our town. We are safe once more."

Benedict laced his fingers and smiled benignly at the townsfolk as they filed from the square. The harlot had been no witch at all, but her sacrifice would buy him time to deal with the real culprit without his people turning on him. His position was secure, and he—

From the charred wood, a skeletal hand thrust forth, wreathed in flame, to wrap dead fingers around Benedict's neck. No, the woman had been no threat to Benedict, no threat to the townsfolk.

Until now.

Like so many undead, effigies form from the hate and rage of a dying individual. Such people must die under circumstances wherein they believe they have been deprived of their rightful due by the actions of others. For example, someone murdered on the verge of completing a major ambition or gaining a windfall might become an effigy. In addition, an effigy can only form if the individual died by fire, such as a *fireball* or *flame strike* spell, or a dragon's breath. This factor, far more than any other, explains why ghosts are more common than effigies. Source: *Monster Manual II*, page 89.

Famine Spirit

He could feel himself dying.

The filth stung his wounds, making them fester, yet he dared not leave the shelter of the sewer. The guild still sought him, would kill him to prevent him from revealing what he knew. If only he had refused to help them—but the riches they'd offered were so great and he had so little.

Another day. Just another day and they would have moved on to some other district. Another day, and he could leave these accursed sewers and start anew somewhere else.

He didn't know he had been telling himself "just another day" for weeks on end. He didn't know that he was long dead, dead of starvation and want. He didn't know that when he finally found the strength to walk again, it would be as something utterly inhuman.

Not everyone who dies of hunger becomes a famine spirit. Specifically, someone must spend much of his life hungry or otherwise wanting for basic necessities. Potential sources include people living in poverty or who dwell in famine-prone areas. The individual must, near the end of his life, have had the opportunity to raise himself from his current state, perhaps to acquire riches or move to more fertile lands. This

chance must be snatched away by the actions of another person or sentient being, thus causing the individual to perish not only of starvation but also of frustration and cruelly shattered hopes. Only when all these conditions are met, a truly strong-willed individual becomes a famine spirit. Source: *Monster Manual II*, page 96.

Ghast

The first had been legitimate. After the fifth week of being stranded in the damned mountain pass one of them had to go or they'd all have died. The taste had awakened something in him. The second, the third, the fourth—they didn't have to die. The hand could have waited another few weeks before making that decision again.

Unfortunately, the others had found him leaning over his sister's body, chewing the flesh from her bones. He'd never even had the chance to raise his head before the smith had crushed it with a hammer.

Rising later that night, he found that death hadn't done a thing to dull his new-found hunger.

The best-known methods for creating a ghast are through *create undead* and by contracting ghoul fever. A third method exists, however. If someone who might spontaneously become a ghoul at death dies while actually in the process of consuming humanoid flesh, he instead rises as a ghast. Like their lesser cousins, ghasts are a literal manifestation of cannibalism. While ghouls often consume their prey alive simply because it's expedient to do so, ghasts actively enjoy the torment and horror caused by the slow consumption of a conscious victim. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 119.

Ghost

"Mister, can you help me?"

Regdar stopped and peered in through the open doorway. He couldn't see much in the darkness beyond, but the voice was clearly that of a little girl. "What's wrong, kid?"

"I went to tell Mommy I was feeling better, but something's wrong. I can't reach her, and she won't wake up when I call."

The old fighter's heart sank. This kid had probably just lost her mother, and didn't understand. Still, maybe the woman was alive, maybe he could bring her to the temple in time to do some good. Steeling himself, Regdar stepped inside. "Take me to her," he ordered.

For just an instant, he felt a small hand take his own, and then pain flashed through his body, from his fingers to his heart. Even as he collapsed to his knees, chest too tight even to shout, he felt the "hand" pass straight through his flesh, and he heard the little girl sigh.

"Oh, drat. I can't reach you either."

Ghosts are perhaps the most paradoxical of the undead. Held to the Material Plane through raw emotion, ghosts possess a burning need to complete some task or remain near some person or place. While love and determination are often the driving motivations behind a ghost's existence, ghosts invariably turn into beings of hatred and stasis, destroying all who would interfere in their eternal existence even as they desperately seek a way out of it.

The majority of ghosts have some task of great importance left undone. Possibly as simple as exacting revenge on whoever killed them, or as complex as completing the translation of a dead language, ghosts can often be destroyed only by completing whatever task they left unfulfilled. Further, all ghosts believe they died violently or of unnatural causes. A woman who dies of old age probably doesn't become a ghost, unless she believes she was poisoned. Similarly, those who die of illness rarely rise as ghosts unless they believe the plague was deliberately spread. The truth of the matter is unimportant; only the individual's strongly held belief matters.

In a few rare instances, the ignorant or innocent might remain as ghosts without even realizing they are dead. These ghosts can be even harder to destroy, for they cannot rest until they understand and accept the fact that they have died. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 116.

Ghoul

It just hadn't occurred to him.

Lidda had been dragged into a hidden passage, but Redgar hadn't seen by what. He'd followed her in and found a band of foul undead already leaning over her, chewing on her, ripping her flesh. He'd torn into them with a shriek of rage, and the sheer impact of his attack had scattered them long enough for him to scoop up the halfling and carry her away. There he'd camped for days, waiting for her to snap out of the fever that wracked her body.

Regdar just assumed it was an infection brought on by the filthy nails and teeth of the creatures. It never occurred to him to think that, just maybe, the illness she'd contracted was anything more.

Now, as he lay paralyzed, the corpse of his best friend slowly eating his left leg, he had nothing left to do but think about what he'd done—and what he would soon become.

Ghouls most often result from an infection of ghoul fever or the *create undead* spell. In some instances, however, individuals who spent their lives feeding on others spontaneously rise as ghouls. This "feeding" can be literal, such as habitual cannibalism, or figurative, such as a tax-collector who takes more than the law requires so he might feed his avarices. Only those who commit these acts personally risk becoming a ghoul. A distant lord who commands his soldiers to rob the peasants blind is not at risk, but a greedy landlord who charges poor families every copper they own and then cheerfully evicts them certainly is. Some see the transformation into a ghoul as a curse from the deities, punishment

for a life of greed and sin. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 118.

Huecuva

"Damn you, Heironeous!" Sir Abran Shar, paladin and lifelong servant of the god of valor, railed at the heavens, his holy symbol falling from slack fingers to the dirt at his feet. The shambling undead closed in from all sides, undaunted by his failed attempt to drive them back.

They had failed utterly, as had his efforts to heal his beloved Tricia. She lay dead beside the corpse of Abran's brother Varin, together even in death. Abran could have forgiven Tricia for the affair, but his brother? A betrayer who shared his blood? Varin had earned Abran's sword in his back. Surely Heironeous could not hold that against him, not after a lifetime of service!

"Damn you, why have you forsaken me?" Abran felt the first of the zombies tear into his flesh, felt himself falling before the endless onslaught.

Legend tells that a huecuva results from a curse levied on fallen clerics, druids, monks, and paladins. As punishment for their heresies, their patron deities condemn them to a state of eternal undeath.

In truth, this is only partially correct. Most deities who count paladins and druids among their servants are unlikely to inflict such an undead horror upon the world. Indeed these fallen souls are cursed by their patron—but that curse is simply the complete abandonment of the former servant's soul, leaving him open to whatever evils might lurk in the depths of his spirit. Eventually, these evils consume him, leaving little but resentment and loathing for the deity that once favored him. Only then, when such powerful hate mingles with lingering divine energy does the fallen faithful become a huecuva. Source: *Fiend Folio*, page 94.

Lich

The venerable mage screamed as the magic flowed through him, tearing him apart from within. His body quaked with the palsy that had threatened to rob him of his spells, yet his fist remained clenched around the tiny metal box that was his salvation—and his curse.

For just a moment, as he convulsed and the few remaining hairs fell from his head, his eyes widened in horror. A part of him suddenly realized what he was about to lose, and his soul quailed at the thought. The dying part of him was the same part that cared. Before he could even draw breath to scream, it was gone, and he needed to draw no breath at all.

As the quintessential "self-made" undead, a lich is a spellcaster who becomes undead through a complex ritual that takes years of research and careful experimentation. This involves the creation of a phylactery, a vessel to contain the lich's essence. The process requires Craft Wondrous Item, 120,000 gp, and 4,800 XP. Discovering the proper formulas and incantations to create a phylactery requires a DC 35 Knowledge (arcane) or Knowledge (religion) check. This check requires 1d4 full months of research. Note that this check represents starting from scratch and can be bypassed entirely if the knowledge is available (such as through a tome or tutor).

Perhaps the most common form of the accompanying ritual for arcane liches—although not the only one—involves the spells *create undead*, *magic jar*, and *permanency*. The comparable rite for clerical liches involves *create undead*, *harm*, and *unhallow*.

Some sages worry about the fact that

the rite to become a lich varies and exists in so many combinations. It almost seems as though some greater power wanted to make it relatively easy for those who wished to become liches to do so. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 166.

Mohrg

The cheering crowd all but drowned out the thump of the trap door beneath Cairan's feet and the snap of the noose around his neck. His tongue protruded from his lips like an eel, seeming to twitch of its own accord. Tordek watched impassively as the murderer's feet kicked twice, and then fell still. The dwarf moved to go, then glanced back. Surely it was a trick of the light, a shadow in the rising sun, but Cairan's tongue seemed almost to protrude further still from his slack mouth. Concerned, and unable to press through the throng, Tordek turned from the courtyard and raced to the nearest temple.

When he and the cleric returned, forcing their way through hordes of screaming people and confused guards, the courtyard was empty but for a dozen blood-stained corpses and an empty, swinging noose.

Mohrgs are mass murderers or similar villains, but not all dead murderers become mohrgs. To become a mohrg, a killer must not only fail to atone for his crimes, he must intend to kill again. In other words, only murderers whose sprees are interrupted by death rise as mohrgs. A hanged killer possesses a better chance of rising as a mohrg than one slain through any other means. Even the wisest sages maintain no real idea why this should be, although some speculate it is because hanging is often considered the most dishonorable means of execution.

Only the spell *create undead* can form a mohrg from a corpse that is not a murderer. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 189.

Mummy

Neblin hastily translated the inscription on the dusty tomb walls. "They stand before him in his eternal house, behind him, and to either side. They are ever watchful, although they sleep, Anubis shows to them their foes."

"Wonderful" shouted Tordek, while busily chopping away at the dry corpse bent on crushing his skull. "Read faster!"

Stuttering, Neblin continued, "They are loyal to Akht-Thukonin, Emissary of Twice-Living Osiris, And the gods will carry them on swift winds to strike down whomsoever shall desecrate his home."

"I thought you said there would be some way to stop them—" Tordek shouted just as one of their stone hard fists slammed into the side of his head.

Normally formed via ancient burial rites, the process to create a mummy

involves complex spells, chants, and designs. The mummification ritual entails the removal of internal organs and the slow drying and desiccation of the corpse. In many ancient cultures, mummification is reserved for royalty. In others, bodyguards and servants become mummified as well, in order to better serve in the next world. Most mummification rituals do not result in undead—merely desiccated corpses. Those that do produce undead creatures often intend to do so from the outset, using *create undead* to create guardians or undying minions.

On very rare occasions, an individual might spontaneously rise as a mummy. If a person dies in a state of anger and hatred and if his body is naturally mummified or preserved, due perhaps to exposure to great heat and dryness, the individual might reanimate and seek to destroy the object of his rage. These "natural" mummies lack the funerary wrappings of standard mummies, and can easily be mistaken for other forms of corporeal undead. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 190.

Nightshade

Mialee sank to her knees, exhausted, as she allowed the gate to close. Even over her panting breaths she could hear Jozan limp up behind her. "We did it, Mialee. A dozen years, but Regdar is avenged."

The elf looked up through strands of blood-matted hair. "It was a near thing. We couldn't have beaten that demon."

"We didn't have to." Jozan looked at the spot where the gate had stood. "Even fiends can have the life sucked out of them. That's a world of pure anti-life. Nothing can survive that."

The cleric was right, of course. Not even the great fiend could survive the Negative Energy Plane. As those energies invaded its body, turning it into something other than what it had been, it clung to its hate, determined that—living or dead—it would make those mortals pay for what they had done.

Nightshades were entities of pure evil even before they became undead. They result when outsiders with the evil subtype are continually subjected to negative energies long after death. The type of nightshade the fiend becomes is determined by adding up its Hit Dice and its Charisma modifier. If the total is 10 or less, the creature cannot become a nightshade. From 11 to 18, the creature might rise as a nightwing; 19 to 26, as a nightwalker; and 27 or more, as a nightcrawler. Nightshades, although intelligent, remember only pieces of their existence before becoming undead and retain none of their special abilities. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 195.

Shadow

With a shout of fury, Krush forced Sir Baras's blade aside and drove his axe into the blackguard's collarbone. Had the knight of Hextor been fully capable, Krush could never have beaten him. After Naull had struck Baras with a deep violet ray, however, the barbarian had found himself the blackguard's equal. Baras's eyes went wide, and then clouded as the life drained from him.

"Told you not to interfere," Krush grunted between gasps, spent by the fury of battle.

"You were losing," the wizard told him simply.

"Nah. Lulling him. False sense of security."

Still arguing, the pair moved from the torch-lit chamber. In the flickering firelight, Baras's shadow remained against the wall. It had not fallen when the knight collapsed, and now it moved silently, purposefully, after the worn adventurers.

In ancient times, before the development of *create greater undead*, the first shadow arose. Shadows spontaneously manifest when someone dies due, at least in part, to her own physical weakness. A warrior slain after rendered helpless by a *ray of enfeeblement* spell, an old woman murdered because she lacked the strength to fight back or scream for help, or a rogue slowly eaten by rats after incapacitation by poison might become a shadow. These creatures

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lack the intelligence, purpose, and force of will possessed by ghosts. All a shadow understands its own weakness, and it must strengthen itself by stealing the vigor of others. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 221.

Spectre

"It is done!" Regdar raised the severed head of the assassin in one hand, his bastard sword clenched tightly in the other. Behind him, the other members of the duke's court clustered around him fearfully. Before him, floating in the entrance to the great hall, hung the spiritual image of the duke himself, slowly descending toward those huddled below.

"Your murderer has been discovered and slain!" the fighter continued, fighting the urge to flee from the hovering apparition. "Surely you need kill no one else to slake your thirst for vengeance! You can move on to your well-earned rest!"

For long moments, the spirit hovered motionless. Then, with a bone chilling laugh, it drifted forward with its arms outstretched.

Spectres might almost be described as "proto-ghosts." When not created by spells or the touch of another spectre, they manifest in a similar fashion to ghosts. They rise from the violent death of someone who lacks the requisite strength of purpose to become a true ghost, yet who possesses sufficient will and fury that they cannot move on. They become an instrument of wrath and vengeance, lacking any goal or task whose completion might eventually allow them to find rest. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 232.

Sword Wraith

"The battle's over. The battle's over."

Mialee rocked back and forth, sitting on a fallen log, arms wrapped around her knees, whispering to herself. "The battle's over."

In all her years, fighting monsters and the armies of evil, she had seen nothing like it. Hordes of fiends, flights of dragons, and an endless sea of black-clad orcs all lay in heaps around her. She overlooked a massive field carpeted in corpses and drenched in blood so deep that not a blade of grass could clearly be seen. She lived, only because Tordek—now laid out upon that field—did not. The spear had been meant for her, not for him.

Mialee screamed as pain lanced through her back and side. She turned as she tumbled from the log, and stared up in horror at the blood-soaked beard and lifeless eyes of Tordek.

The battle is never over.

Like a ghost, a sword wraith is driven by a single-minded ambition that lingers after death—in this case, the desire to continue battle, to shed more blood. Unlike the ghost, however, the sword wraith's purpose might not actually be his own. The bloodlust and dark desires of his fellow soldiers often mixes with the sword wraith's own. Thus, the purpose that drives a sword wraith might belong to any one of the soldiers lying dead on the field, or might even be an entire platoon's combined discipline and love of carnage. This can sometimes create sword wraiths from the noblest commanders and the lowliest scouts. Source: *Fiend Folio*, page 173.

Vampire

"They buried him face down?" Lidda asked, her voice puzzled.

"That's right."

"Why?"

Jozan shrugged at the halfling. "Because suicide is an affront to his god, and those who kill themselves might rise again, their desire for death met instead with eternal suffering. By burying him facedown, the locals hope that he will simply dig himself deeper when he attempts to claw his way out of his coffin, rather than escaping and feasting on them."

"Weird. So what's the problem?"

The cleric pointed to a burial plot in the center of the cemetery. The stone marker was askew, the earth piled in heaps.

"Clearly, it didn't work."

Almost everyone knows that vampires spawn other vampires, but myth and legend present many other possible origins for these infamous undead. In cultures that believe suicide is a sin, anyone who takes his own life might rise from his coffin as a vampire. Those who make deals with entities of evil and gods of death, seeking power or immortality, often become vampires, their desires granted in a most twisted fashion. Also, someone

who might otherwise spontaneously rise as a ghoul, slain specifically through negative energy or the result of a curse, might instead rise as a vampire, a drinker of blood rather than an eater of flesh. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 250.

Wight

It had been so long since Lady Anara could just relax.

For so many weeks she had dwelt in hiding, watching over her shoulder for the lover she'd scorned to marry Lord Hirritz. It was only after she left him that she learned what had happened to his last four paramours—for he had tried to do it to her as well.

The Watch had finally run him to ground and cut his throat on the spot. She no longer had to worry about footsteps in the middle of the night, of the feel of a cold chain around her neck. Lady Anara could finally relax.

"Hello, my love." The voice drifted to her from the doorway, a voice made hoarse by a severed windpipe. "I've missed you."

Wights, unless created by other wights, are animated almost entirely by their desire to do violence. Just as ghouls arise from those who feed off others, wights result from the deaths of individuals whose sole purpose in life was to maim, torture, or kill. Simply coming from a profession that requires one to kill, such as a soldier or gladiator, is not sufficient; the individual must harbor a true love of carnage and take intense pleasure in ending life. Wights arise only when the person died frustrated, unable to complete a murder he had already begun, or unable to find a chosen victim. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 225.

Wraith

"Gimble, look at this." Hennet lifted the hand of the desiccated corpse, sending a puff of dust into the air.

The gnome bent, eyes narrowed. "Gods, Hennet. His fingertips are missing!" Indeed, even the bone was worn smooth, as though the man's fingers had been sanded down.

The sorceress nodded, then pointed to the largest piece of stone that, until the pair of explorers broke it in, had been a wall. Several shallow grooves marred the stone, the dried blood of centuries ago still faintly visible within.

"He was entombed alive in here," Hennet whispered. "Can you even imagine what that must have been like?"

Behind them, a dark form slid from the shadows, a dark form with the silhouette of the corpse they studied. Soon, it swore, they would not have to imagine.

Like spectres, wraiths are the spirits of those who died under horrific circumstances, but who lack the strength of purpose to return as ghosts. Whereas spectres are born from sudden acts of violence, wraiths result from slow, lingering deaths. Someone bricked up inside a wall and allowed to starve, or slowly poisoned, is more likely to return as a wraith than a spectre. Those wraiths who do not arise spontaneously result from the touch of other wraiths or from the *create greater undead* spell. Source: *Monster Manual*, page 257.

The Ecology of The Wemic

The best of both halves: the lion-men

by J. F. Keeping

Report from the High Scholar Thothus of the Temple of Thoth, to the King of Khemara, Ramnius:

It was six passings of the second moon ago that you, Sire, sent me on a mission to study the lion-folk who have long inhabited the savannahs on our southwestern border, to determine if they might make suitable allies in our ongoing conflict with the Kyrian barbarians. I am now ready to make my report.

Known variously as lion-men, lion-centaurs, and jungle centaurs (a misnomer, for they inhabit only grasslands), the lion-folk are called by scholars wemics, a rendition of their name for themselves. As we all know, wemics have the appearance of lions with human torsos, arms, and heads where the lions' heads should be, like to lions as centaurs are to horses.[1] Their lion parts are identical to those of true lions, covered in soft coat of golden-brown fur, with tails ending in tufts of dark-brown hair. The human portions are particularly muscular and hairy, and head hair is worn long in both sexes. Such hair is softer in texture than a male lion's mane. Males have thick, dark-brown manes that run down their backs; females have pale golden hair Their faces are basically human, but with forward-thrust jaws, pointed ears (placed high on the head) that can move like those of a cat, and sharp feline teeth. Their eyes are feline as well, with pupils that contract to a slit in the day and open to great orbs at night, affording them excellent night vision.[2]

Their grooming is something over which the lion-folk are very careful. The males, in particular, seem almost foppish by our standards, though I have learned firsthand the dangers in showing amusement at this. They spend hours brushing and cleaning their fur (with crude brushes, not their tongues), and the males are almost obsessive in caring far their manes. Manes are combed, braided, dyed, and even decorated with jewelry on special occasions. The wives of married wemics help in mane-dressing, with the result that the patriarch—the leader of a band of wemics, having several wives—has the best-kept mane in the group. To insult one's mane is considered cause for a duel among the lion-folk.

The lion-folk roam temperate and tropical grasslands in hunter-gatherer bands usually called prides. Each pride consists of about a dozen males, one or two dozen females, and as many as a dozen young, age five years or less.[3] A number of loosely related prides in an area make a tribe (see below). Wemics are carnivores, but they cook meat and know how to preserve it with salt and various spices and herbs (they have acquired a taste for hot spices, in particular). They hunt often, for their active lives require them to eat twice as much as other humanoids of their size and weight.

Hunting reveals the personalities of the lion-folk. They constantly seek intense emotion and excitement, as found in love and battle. They express their emotions in roars and yowls of anger, sadness, or happiness. They fear nothing except boredom, and respect courage, loyalty, and honor above all else. They are always truthful, never hide their feelings, and always keep a vow until death. This remarkable honesty may be in part explained by their tails. Like domestic cats, wemics show their emotional states with their tails: held high for pride, hung low for fear, slashing for anger, tapping for annoyance, etc. Thus they see no use hiding their feelings when their tails betray them.

Tasks among the lion-folk are strictly segregated between the sexes. Males hunt while females guard the cubs; males make weapons and other metallic items while females make the tents and blankets; and so forth. Female wemics are more conservative and controlled than their male counterparts, more prone to contemplation than rash action. But they are no less fierce when their young are threatened, and they, too, believe in conspicuous displays of emotion. Although prides are led by males, wives are a leader's most valued advisors (polygamy is practiced among the lion-folk but is permitted only to their leaders).

Courtship among the lion-folk is slightly different from our own. Although the male pursues the female, it is the female who makes the choice of her mate. The lion-men are forever grooming, strutting, and dueling to prove themselves the best consort. This is the reason why only wemic leaders have more than one wife: The lion-women are very practical and always choose the strongest and wisest mate, and who would be stronger or wiser than the pride's patriarch?

Like humans, wemics mate at any time of the year. The gestation period is six months. Twins and triplets are not common but are not as rare as with humanity. The cub is born with its eyes open, like a human baby, and grows at a remarkable rate. They are weaned at six months, then taught the skills of the pride by their third year. A father will teach his son, and a mother her daughter. Parents love their children immensely. By the time he reaches maturity, at age six or seven, a lion-man is 7′ long with a 3′ tail, standing at least 6′ tall and weighing almost 600 lbs. Females are slightly smaller, being 6′ long and 450 lbs., on the average. A wemic's life expectancy is 40-50 years spent in an intense, energetic lifestyle. Few males reach this age, however, for when a lion-man feels his strength and speed weakened by age, he grows increasingly reckless in combat, until he is killed. The females are more responsible but do not begrudge their husbands this final honor. Old males can be as warlike and foolhardy as young males, both groups eager to prove themselves.

The renown that the lion-folk enjoy as

Illustration by Stephen Schwartz

hunters is deserved. They are faultless trackers, using both their excellent noses and their knowledge of animal lore.[4] They are as silent as any great cat and are able to conceal themselves from sight in their native grasslands. They have learned to use herbs to disguise their scent. They can run at up to four times their normal speed for bursts of two minutes or less, and are able to leap 10′ up or 30′ forward while standing, or 50′ forward with a running start. They are clever hunters—hiding by a waterhole to leap upon approaching prey, or having one of their number circle around a herd to startle it into running upon the waiting spears of the other lion-men. Against larger opponents, they use ropes to entangle the legs, then leap upon the prey, hanging on with their claws and striking at the head with their spears. Even giant animals like the elephant will fall to the skill of these hunters. Although the pride I stayed with, the Long Claws, hunted zebras and antelopes (the wemics' major prey) and an occasional elephant, the patriarch, Wind-Chaser, spoke of tribes that hunted the great hornless rhino-the baluchitherium—and I had no reason to disbelieve him.[5]

Wemics consider hunting and battle to be almost the same thing. Against less intelligent foes, they use the same tactics as they use when hunting. Their other favorite tactics include pretending to charge a battle line, then leaping over the line to land atop the unprepared troops behind it. Or they may pretend to retreat, letting the attackers run onto the spears of other wemics hidden in the brush. Often they will leap over fleeing foes to attack them by surprise from the front and cut off their escape. Their roaring is enough to unnerve most soldiers and rout all but the best-trained animals.[6] (I was unable to question them further on their battle tactics, for obvious reasons.) But even without strategy, they are formidable in combat. Their human parts can withstand wounds that would kill most men instantly. They have the intelligence of men with the speed, strength, and agility of the great cats. If they could be persuaded to join our armies, we would have an unbeatable force.[7]

The lion-folk have a great respect for skill and strength in combat, but despite this, their feelings toward other races depend mainly upon whether or not those species are a threat to them. The stories of their hunting and eating humans are completely untrue; they do not eat sentient creatures and can find far easier prey than humans. The Lion Wars of 626-642 were caused by our settling of the southern plains, which they interpreted as a threat to their territory. Note that there have been very few incidents between our races since. They have little interest in humans as a rule; indeed, they cannot usually tell humans and demi-humans apart, calling us all "the half-people." They respect the tabaxi and bear them no enmity, because the cat-men inhabit jungles and are therefore no threat to them. War-like humanoids, particularly the tasloi, are hunted for sport; the lion-men consider them cowardly and very delicate (they die from wounds that would only annoy a wemic). Lions, oddly enough, are the lion-men's greatest enemies. Lions inhabit the same land and hunt the same animals, so they are the lion-folks competitors. For this reason, wemics attempt to drive off or kill any lions found in their territories.

As may be said of our own species, the lion-folks greatest enemies are themselves. Although prides within the same tribe do not fight among themselves, wemics of different tribes fight over land and prey constantly. This is considered quite normal by all, and the males enjoy the battle greatly. However, there is rarely lasting resentment between the tribes, and the females and young of a conquered tribe become full members of the conquering tribe without prejudice. Conquered males may join their conquerors' tribes, but must pass through torturous rituals and complete quests first. Otherwise, they are banished or slain.

As may be expected, the patriarch of a pride of wemics is the strongest male,

selected by ritual unarmed duels. However, when a number of related prides (usually from 3-30) band together to form a tribe, the leader of one pride is elected by the others to be the tribal leader, or chief. He retains the position of patriarch of his own pride as well. Rarely, a number of tribes (as few as two or as many as eight) will band together under a great hero who becomes their king, forming a clan or nation. The tribes, naturally warlike, are held together by the king's great charisma and reputation, and usually return to their former fragmented state after his death, unless the king's son is his equal in heroism and charisma[8] The wemics' greatest accomplishments and proudest history occurred under the banner of their few kings; surely Your Highness knows of the time that, under Twoclaw, the lion-folk conquered our unprepared ancestors in the years 489-555 and forced them to build their only city, which now lies ruined in the desert but is said to still contain the treasures taken from their human slaves.

Communication with the lion-men is hampered most by their peculiar language. Indeed, I was unable to talk with them at all without the aid of my spell of *tongues.* Their speech is composed of growls and screeches, impossible for us to understand, let alone imitate, though they are able to master the Common tongue with little difficulty. The males have deep, growling voices, while those of the females are yowling and purring. Every human child knows of the lion-man's terrifying roar and hearty laugh, but few seem to know of their women's skill at singing. These songs are composed not of words, for a skilled lion-woman can make her voice sound like bells, a flute, a lyre, or all three at once. All lion-women are taught to sing at an early age. They create their own songs as well as learn the hundreds of songs the wemics have for everything from hunting to raising children to marriage. These songs are a very important part of religious festivals; consequently, all wemic witch doctors are female.

This brings us to the subject of religion. Wemics revere the Cat Lord, and several of their heroes (usually their ancient kings) have achieved semidivine status. They often swear by these—e.g., "By Swift-Tail's mane!", or ("By the claws of Redlegs!" However, they are not very reverent, and aside from annual festivals, they offer little homage to their god. Consequently, witch doctors often find themselves as doctors and diviners more often than priests. Their greatest witch doctors (by my estimate) have acquired powers not much less than those of His Reverence, Thurgood II, our High Priest, and they share a small degree of my own talents as a sorcerer.

As to their origins, the lion-folk that I knew claim to be the descendants of a band of mighty human warriors who worshipped the Cat Lord. In reward for their valor, these warriors were given speed and strength equal to their courage, becoming half-man, half-lion. The lion-folk recognize their connection to both men and lions, but consider themselves a separate species, better than both. As to the truth of this—who can say?

Wemics lack a written language but are skilled artists, and they record their thoughts and deeds through paintings and carvings. Weapons are carved into the shape of slain enemies; shields are painted with scenes of great battles, and tents with family history. Each pride has several rolls of painted hide detailing its history and beliefs. These are carefully guarded. When a pride is conquered, these rolls are burned, symbolizing the death of the pride as an entity.

Wemics care little for magic. They are more interested in the skills of the warrior. Rarely, a patriarch may possess a magical weapon or shield, recognizing its useful qualities, but that is all. The lion-folk do appreciate the beauty of gems and jewelry, and they may keep coins they find as trade goods for humans. (Your Highness may wish to know that the wemics with whom I stayed claimed that they traded with some of our outlying villages even when we were at war with them.) Treasure found or plundered is considered the property of the finder.

The main vice of the lion-folk is their overindulgence in alcohols. *Mal,* a fermented melon, and *grum,* fermented coconut juice, are their favorites, but they also enjoy human liquors. At victory celebrations, the whole pride-males, females, and children—may drink themselves into a stupor. At these times they can be dangerous, attacking playfully and killing without meaning to do so. They have little foresight or wisdom in this regard, to my sorrow.

In conclusion, I can positively state that the lion-folk would make excellent allies. However, enlisting them as troops will be difficult. They are reluctant to leave their lands or join in a battle which does not concern them, despite their love of combat. Their respect must be earned, not bought, and there are very few humans who live up to their standards of military prowess. Wages would also be a problem. They could be paid in gems, jewelry, and other items of beauty, but the price would probably be too high to be practical. Great gifts of art and treasure might persuade them into signing a mutual defense treaty, but that is something for diplomats and not scholars. I suggest we keep relations with them peaceful and pursue trade with them, except in the matter of alcohol. And we should be neither too weak nor too strong in their presence, to strike the proper balance of respect and threat. My task is done.

Continued on page 54

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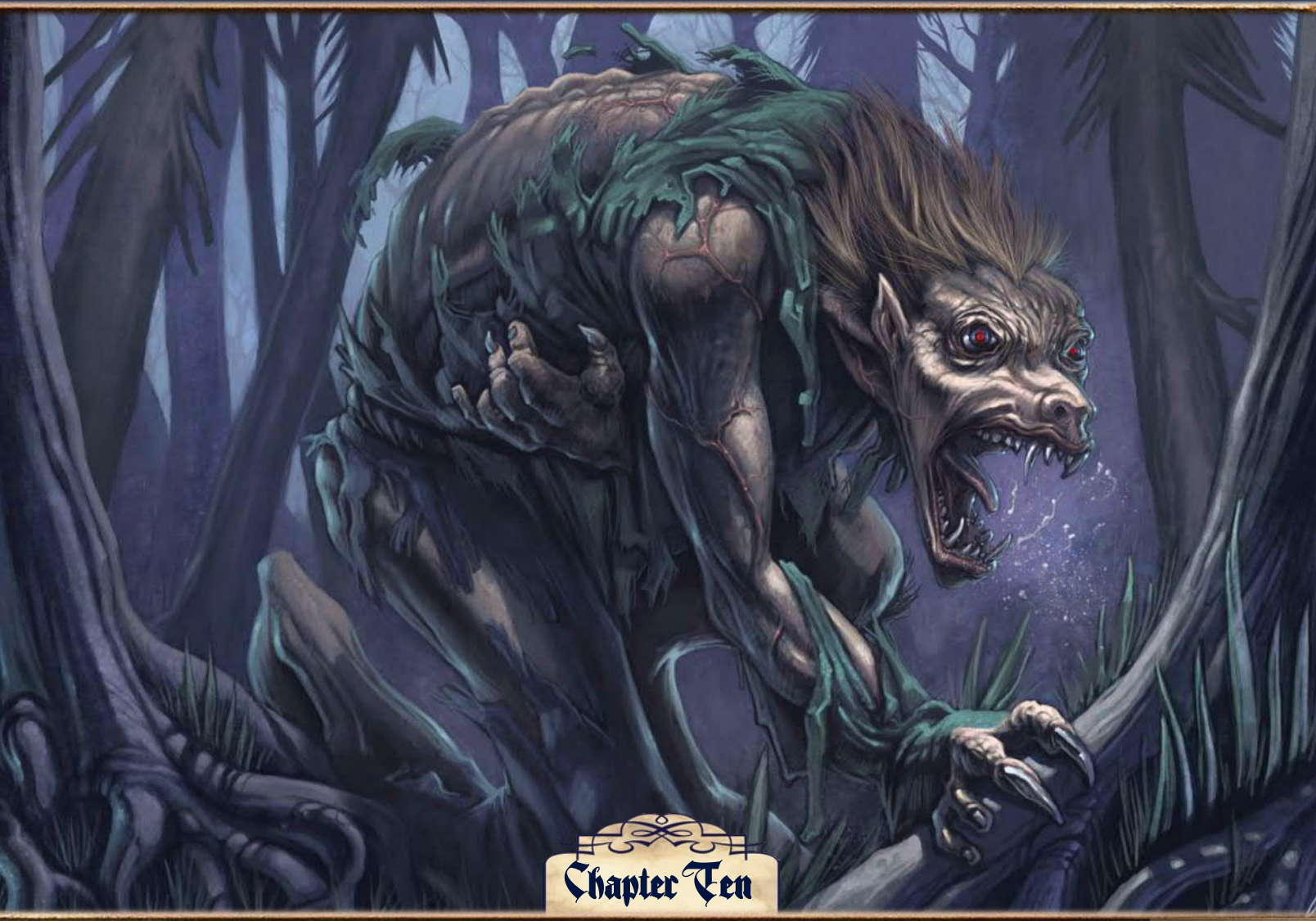

Chapter Ten

Werewolf

"Look up in the sky at the moon, full and swollen like a gravid bitch. Can you feel its pull? Can you feel the blood pounding in your veins, full of life, full of power? It won't be long now. Don't fight it. You can't win. You are the beast now. Take a deep breath. Taste the wind. Smell that? It's the scent of fresh meat, the sweet reek of fear. Fear of you. There's only two kinds of creature in this world for you now, boy, predator and prey. You're the predator, everything else is prey. Soon, you'll feel their hot lifeblood gushing between your teeth, their flesh ripping beneath your claws. Go, now. Hunt. Revel in the savagery. Slake the blood-thirst for tonight. And tomorrow night, you'll do it all over again."

—Brogai Navratil, Arthfell werewolf, to one of his new "pups"

Men who can turn into beasts, werewolves prowl the dark fringes of civilization, culling the weak and unwary from the larger human herd. These ravenous creatures are victims of the curse of lycanthropy, consumed by a rage not unlike that of some barbarian warriors, but with a maleficent twist. The bestial desires of a rabid wolf course through their veins, driving them to acts of barbaric cruelty and animalistic fury. Most of these individuals embrace their savage hungers, becoming evil monsters that stalk the night. An unfortunate few vainly struggle to fight the curse, but these are inevitably consumed by the beast within, giving in to the thirst for blood and slaughter.

Werewolves come in two varieties, natural lycanthropes (those born with the condition) and afflicted lycanthropes (those who contract lycanthropy as a curse or disease from another werewolf). Natural werewolves have complete knowledge of their state and perfect control over their abilities. Afflicted werewolves, on the other hand, often change form involuntarily, an event usually triggered by the full moon. While in animal form, they frequently lose their identities and retain no memories of their actions.

All werewolves can change into three different shapes: a normal humanoid, a wolf form, and a terrifying hybrid humanoid-wolf shape. A werewolf in humanoid form blends easily into civilized society, and the simple peasants of frontier villages know that any stranger's face could hide the predator in their midst. In wolf or hybrid form, a werewolf becomes highly resistant to damage—only magic and weapons crafted of silver can harm them with any degree of success—but its humanoid shape possesses no such immunity. Regardless of its current shape, a werewolf reverts to its human form when slain.

In contrast to other lycanthropes, werewolves take a much more direct interest in their victims. A wereboar might keep to its forest, attacking trespassers out of aggression rather than maliciousness, or a wererat may lurk in the sewers, only occasionally murdering an innocent when the opportunity presents itself, but werewolves stalk their prey with the chilling patience of a careful, intelligent hunter. They delight in terrorizing their victims, prowling around their villages and homes, or even better, hounding them to the point of exhaustion, howling dreadfully to the moon to instill debilitating horror before closing in for the kill.

For all their prowess at hunting, however, werewolves are also savagery and violence personified. When their urges overtake them, the quiet hunter becomes a mindless beast, reveling in wanton destruction. Like a rabid wolf who preys upon a flock of sheep, slaughtering far more than it can eat for the sheer pleasure of it, a werewolf doesn't need an external reason for its rampage—the hunt *is* the reason, and anything unable to defend itself from the werewolf's depredations is prey. A rough woodsman, a simple peasant girl, or an innocent child are all fair game for the werewolf's bloody sport.

Ecology

In their humanoid form, werewolves are indistinguishable from any other members of their race, although natural werewolves and those who have been afflicted for a long time may have or acquire wolfish features. According to folklore, natural werewolves tend to look somewhat feral, with a full head of shaggy hair and a wild look in their eyes. Other traits include eyebrows that meet together, index fingers longer than the middle fingers, curved fingernails, odd birthmarks on the palms, or a loping, lupine gait. Some superstitions even claim that a werewolf in its human form can be recognized by bristles of hair under its tongue, a vestigial tail, or cutting its skin to reveal fur in the wound.

In wolf form, a werewolf looks like a normal wolf, albeit a large and powerful specimen. A close look at the creature's eyes, however, may reveal its true nature, as they often glow red or yellow with an inner fire and display a spark of unnatural and cruel intelligence. In its hybrid shape, a werewolf resembles a human-sized wolf walking upright on two legs (but occasionally running on all fours). While a werewolf in hybrid form has the bite of a wolf and sharp claws, it is also able to wield weapons in its clawed hands.

Lycanthropy itself is an affliction somewhere between a curse and a disease. To a natural werewolf, of course, it is simply a trait inherited at birth, but to an afflicted werewolf, it's an unnatural malady. The curse of lycanthropy is transmitted through a werewolf's bite. Only a true, natural werewolf can pass along this curse; the bite of an afflicted werewolf is no worse than that of a normal wolf.

Once contracted, the disease shows no symptoms until the next full moon, when the beast within first overcomes the afflicted person and she changes into her animal form. The stress of combat can also trigger these changes. Most afflicted werewolves remember nothing of these episodes and wake up far from home the next morning, perhaps covered in the blood of those they slaughtered and with a profound feeling of melancholy or depression. Those few who do remember their actions and embrace their newfound power soon find themselves consumed by the evil and fury their new form incites. Once an afflicted werewolf truly accepts the curse, the beast has won.

Magic provides the best cure for lycanthropy. A *remove disease* or *heal* spell from a powerful cleric has the best chance of success, but such remedies must be sought within 3 days of infection. *Remove curse* and *break enchantment* magics can also be used, but they are only effective during the time of the full moon, when the werewolf is at its strongest. A dose of wolfsbane (*Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook* 560), also known as monkshood, can also cure the affliction, giving the target another saving throw against the affliction. Fresh wolfsbane works best, but the plant is poisonous and has a chance of killing the recipient rather than curing him. Of course, natural werewolves cannot be cured of their condition.

Superstitions and Safeguards

Besides the standard cures, many folk remedies exist for curing lycanthropy, though most healers and priests discount such treatments as ignorant superstitions. One common belief is that exhaustion can cure a werewolf. Afflicted werewolves (or those thought to be infected) are often forced to toil at hard labor without rest, thus tiring the beast and purging it from the victim's body. Another commonly accepted remedy is immersing a werewolf in holy water during a new moon.

Other so-called "cures" include the presentation of holy symbols, particularly those of gods of animals or healing, such as Erastil and Sarenrae; driving nails (often silver ones) into the werewolf's hands or paws; striking the werewolf forcefully on the forehead with a dull knife; or even addressing a werewolf by its given name three times in succession.

A final remedy is skinning the werewolf in its hybrid or animal form, thereby separating the wolf from the man. One wonders, however, what sort of werewolf would be docile enough to allow such a procedure, or whether the unfortunate sufferer would survive the "treatment."

Many strange beliefs exist for safeguarding oneself from the predations of werewolves. Wolfsbane proves most successful, as it has a reputation for repelling werewolves as well as curing the affliction of lycanthropy itself. Holy symbols and holy water remain popular defenses, even though werewolves are not undead and have no known vulnerability to such instruments. Because silver is known to harm werewolves, some people favor wearing silver jewelry for protection from werewolf attacks. Wealthy villagers also spread powdered silver outside doors and windows to keep werewolves at bay. Rye, mistletoe, and the berries of the rowan tree or mountain ash are also believed to be effective. Whether these remedies and wards have any actual effect is up to the GM, though PCs should be able to research them and come to their own conclusions.

Habitat & Society

While werewolves may live anywhere, from towns and cities to sparsely inhabited forests, natural and afflicted lycanthropes frequently lead very different lives. Afflicted werewolves, fighting a terrible disease that turns them into ravenous beasts, tend to be solitary individuals, living in self-imposed isolation either to avoid discovery or in an attempt to protect family and friends from their own bestial urges. Alone on the frontier, many turn to banditry to support themselves. Natural werewolves in human form live just as humans do, while those who prefer their beast shapes might live in a cozy wolf den, although the comforts of civilization, such as soft beds and warm fires, usually draw them back to human society.

A rare few afflicted werewolves manage to keep the beast at bay, retaining their own personalities and morals while struggling with the bestial urges that threaten to consume them 3 nights a month. Pariahs within werewolf society, these good-natured werewolves frequently lead lives just as secretive and hidden as their evil brethren, as few towns suffer the continued existence of a known werewolf in their midst. To their misfortune, most such werewolves find that people react with alarm and prejudice regardless of the werewolf's true intentions.

Natural werewolves have long since grown accustomed to the hatred and fear their presence engenders, and those who dwell in civilized lands often lead normal lives within human society, attempting to blend in as much as possible. Such quiet, peaceful existences are often short-lived, however, as the beast within cannot be denied for long, and these werewolves' idyllic lifestyles usually end in blood-drenched frenzies. In the hinterlands, natural werewolves habitually gather into packs, either of other werewolves in areas where lycanthropy is widespread, or as leaders of packs of normal wolves.

Whether in human, hybrid, or wolf form, natural werewolves can communicate with wolves and dire wolves, allowing them limited control over these beasts. Afflicted werewolves only have this ability in their hybrid and wolf shapes; in their human forms, they possess no special empathy with wolves. Stories persist of werewolves who can also talk to dogs and other canines, and legends speak of particularly powerful werewolves who are able to speak with more unusual lupines such as shadow mastiffs, winter wolves, and worgs.

Werewolves who have embraced their bestial nature sometimes worship the demon lord Jezelda, Mistress of the Hungry Moon. Especially prevalent among the werewolves of Andoran's Darkmoon Vale and Lozeri in northern Ustalav, Jezelda's faithful hate non-werewolf lycanthropes in particular, and go to great lengths to hunt and slay those heretical abominations. Less-devout werewolves may venerate other gods—Lamashtu, Rovagug, and even Urgathoa, in her aspect as goddess of gluttony.

Even rarer than afflicted werewolves who maintain their good alignment, a few legendary natural werewolves known as the Hounds of Good are said to exist. While not an organized order or society, these paragons of righteousness nevertheless dedicate themselves to the fight against evil. Most people dismiss them as myths, but ancient texts refer to the Hounds of Good as creations of the slain beast-god Curchanus, charged with hunting down and destroying demons, devils, and other creatures of evil.

Campaign Role

Although werewolves are ravening killers, their role as deceitful hunters can also be played up in a campaign. PCs tasked with investigating a series of unexplained murders might, after a string of red herrings, find a werewolf

responsible—either a natural werewolf in full control of itself and willingly indulging its thirst for blood and mayhem, or an unfortunate afflicted werewolf with no recollection of its gruesome activities.

Alternately, a werewolf could stalk the party through the wilderness, making hit-and-run attacks (maybe picking off a hireling or two) before fading back into the darkness beyond camp. Even worse, one of the PCs' hirelings or cohorts could be afflicted with lycanthropy and be behind the attacks. The killer must be stopped, but now the goal becomes curing the enemy instead of killing it.

Infecting a PC with lycanthropy is another way of introducing werewolves into a campaign, but care should be taken to keep the game focused. The werewolf template provides a character with a great number of abilities and immunities that can soon overshadow other players' characters, but the werewolf and his allies must deal with his indiscriminate fury and lack of control over his form. Even the most tolerant allies are likely to grow tired when the werewolf turns on them in the middle of battle or runs off in the night during an unexpected transformation.

In these situations, the focus should be on curing the character of lycanthropy. Perhaps wolfsbane doesn't grow in the region, and there are no high-level priests available to remove the affliction. The PCs need to search for an alternative cure, perhaps even hunting down the werewolf responsible for the affliction in the first place. In this case, the search for a cure becomes a very personal quest. Of course, dealing with the effects of alignment change as a result of lycanthropy can be an interesting roleplaying opportunity as well, especially if the afflicted character is a good cleric or paladin who must atone for the crimes they committed while not in control of their actions.

Known Werewolves

The following lycanthropes have a particularly bloody history or reputation.

Brogai Navratil: This blackhearted natural werewolf brigand ranges throughout Darkmoon Vale in central Andoran, occasionally retreating to the Wolfrun Hills for refuge during the vale's frequent purges of lycanthropes. A grizzled veteran of constant skirmishes with both the Fangwatch and the Diamond Regiment, Brogai once took a silver arrow in the eye, a wound that has never fully healed, leaving him with just one burning yellow eye in beastform. Brogai delights in attacking isolated farms and logging camps, spreading his "gift" to unfortunate woodsmen and loggers, and forcibly inducting them into his pack of bandits when they change at the next full moon.

Wolf's Ear: The Varisian town of Wolf's Ear squats beneath the dark eaves of the Churlwood on the banks of Ember Lake. Once a colony of relatively peaceful lycanthropes, Wolf's Ear was ravaged when Magnimar and the Church of Erastil "eradicated" lycanthropy in the town in a bloody pogrom. The fact that most were-creatures simply went underground is an open, though never spoken, secret. Werewolves make up the majority of lycanthropes in Wolf's Ear, and have become adept at keeping their true natures hidden from outsiders. Usually content to subtly undermine Magnimar's authority in the region, they could prove a serious threat if their territory or autonomy were encroached upon, a fact not lost upon the lord-mayor of Magnimar. Recently, a rebellious pack of werewolves, led by a disgruntled young woman named Ruxandra Katranjiev, has begun calling for more open action against Magnimar as well as purges of non-werewolf lycanthropes from Wolf's Ear. While thus far only a fringe group, their influence on the future of the region remains an open question.

Ylva Skallagrim: A tall, red-haired Ulfen woman, Ylva is a natural werewolf said to take the shape of a mighty snow-colored wolf. A legend in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, Ylva leads a dozen chosen berserker warriors she has afflicted with lycanthropy, called the *Ulfhednar*. Ylva and her band sail a longship decorated with a snarling wolf figurehead instead of the traditional dragon's head, raiding and plundering coastal villages from Kalsgard to Magnimar, along with their pack of winter wolf allies. Feared up and down the coast of the Steaming Sea, Ylva, according to some reports, has her eye on becoming a Linnorm King herself, and perhaps intends to claim the empty throne of Trollheim.

Other Lycanthropes

Werewolves are not the only kind of lycanthrope, of course. Although similar in many ways (the ability to change forms, harmed by silver, etc.), these other lycanthropes have their own clearly defined roles, habitats, and societies.

Far to the north, great werebears prowl the cold forests and tundra, hunting and killing evil creatures wherever they find them. Though often irascible, most werebears are honorable and virtuous, and can make powerful allies for those able to get past their gruff exteriors.

Facets of Fear

Human beings are fond of taming nature, of leaving their mark on the wilderness in the form of farms cleared from primeval forest or towns and cities erected where once only animals used to live. But for all the trappings of civilization, the night still waits with hungry eyes and wicked claws. Werewolves personify the fear of the beasts that howl in the long, dark winter nights, and prowl hungrily outside doors and windows that are locked and barred against the savage wilderness.

From the harsh, frozen north to the gentle climes of the south, wolf attacks on livestock are a widespread fact of life in a fantasy world (though the number of non-rabid wolf attacks on humans is historically negligible). To the simple peasant or herdsman, wolves are a plague upon humanity, killing livestock and (reputedly) lone travelers gluttonously and without remorse. What could be worse, then, than a wolf who can take human shape?

In addition, people naturally fear those who are different in some way. An unfortunate person who has trouble controlling his emotions might be suffering from psychological problems, but to an uneducated villager, an easier explanation is that he is possessed—perhaps a wolf in human form. A cold, calculating, but all too human serial killer is hard to imagine, but fear and superstition can easily create a monster that stalks the night. Livestock die and people go missing, and everyone wants a scapegoat to hold responsible. Where a simple animal or human explanation no longer suffices, people turn to the supernatural, and werewolves are there to take the blame.

Wereboars are as ill-tempered as the wild swine whose shape they take. Preferring peace and solitude, wereboars are not normally evil, desiring only to be left alone, but ferociously charge and attack anyone disturbing them or invading their territory. Some clans of hill giants are known to suffer from the curse of lycanthropy, changing into gigantic, though dim-witted, dire boars.

The most urban of all lycanthropes, wererats frequently make their living on the fringes of civilization, skulking and scavenging in the sewers and slums of cities. Wererats are opportunistic assassins, and while they have no qualms about killing, they are a cowardly lot and attack only if they can do so with no danger to themselves, or if the odds are overwhelmingly in their favor.

These are simply the most common varieties of lycanthrope. Sleek and powerfully built weretigers stalk the jungles and tropical forests of the eastern lands of Vudra and Tian Xia, while wereleopards hunt the veldt of Katapesh and Nex. From Osirion and Thuvia come tales of werehyenas, werejackals, and even werecrocodiles. Less credible rumors speak of goodly wereravens, dwarven and gnome werebadgers, and alluring elven werefoxes, though the veracity of such claims is suspect at best.

Sample Werewolf

A resident of Wolf's Ear, Ruxandra Katranjiev was afflicted with lycanthropy at an early age. Always a rebellious sort, she chafed under the restrictions imposed upon the town's lycanthropes by its elders following Magnimar's "cleansing" of Wolf's Ear. A few months ago, Ruxandra claimed to have received visions from Jezelda, Mistress of the Hungry Moon, instructing her to drive out all non-werewolf lycanthropes from Wolf's Ear and throw off the yoke of Magnimarian imperialism. Banished by the town's more moderate leaders, Ruxandra now lairs in the tangled depths of the Churlwood, and has attracted a small but fanatical gang of followers who support her goals.

The pack commits heinous crimes that they can pin on non-werewolves, and use intimidation and fear tactics to cow the more peaceful residents of the town. Currently, Ruxandra is trying to collect enough silver weapons to arm her followers so they can purge Wolf's Ear of all non-wolf lycanthropes in an orgy of blood and carnage, leaving nothing but her own kind.

Ruxandra is a dusky Varisian woman, with dark hair and eyes, and intricate tattoos of glowering eyes, bloody teeth and claws, and wolf motifs covering her arms. She favors elaborately embroidered hunting outfits in red and blue, and wears many bangles and other jewelry. Always accompanied by her black wolf Fane, Ruxandra believes she has been chosen by Jezelda to do the demon lord's work on Golarion, and tolerates no challenges to her leadership or her visions.

RUXANDRA KATRANJIEV (HUMAN FORM) CR 5

XP 1,600

Female human cleric of Jezelda 1/ranger 4

CE Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger)

Init +7; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +9

Aura chaotic, evil

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+5 armor, +1 deflection, +3 Dex)

hp 36 (1d8+4d10+10)

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee +1 *alchemical silver scimitar* +5 (1d6+2/18–20), mwk alchemical silver kukri +5 (1d4+1/18–20)

Ranged mwk composite shortbow +8 (1d6+2/×3)

Special Attacks channel negative energy (1d6, DC 10, 3/day), favored enemy (humanoid [human] +2), favored terrain (forest +2)

Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 1st)

1st—*magic fang*

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 1st)

1st—*cause fear* (DC 12), *disguise self*[D], *divine favor*
0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 11), *guidance*, *resistance*
D Domain spell; **Domains** Animal, Trickery

TACTICS

Before Combat Ruxandra casts *divine favor* and *magic fang* upon herself before combat.

During Combat A coward at heart, Ruxandra prefers to ambush foes and attack from a safe distance. If wounded, she flies into a rage and shifts into her hybrid form to attack in melee, focusing her attacks on any non-werewolf lycanthropes present. She normally casts spells only in her human form.

Morale If reduced to less than 10 hit points, Ruxandra flees.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +4; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 20
Feats Double Slice, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting
Skills Intimidate +8, Knowledge (geography) +7, Knowledge (nature) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Perception +9, Stealth +11
Languages Common
SQ aura, change shape, copycat (1 rounds, 4/day), hunter's bond (wolf companion, Fane), speak with animals (4 rounds/day), track, wild empathy
Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of longstrider*; **Other Gear** *ring of protection +1*, *+1 mithral chain shirt*, *+1 alchemical silver scimitar*, masterwork alchemical silver kukri, masterwork composite shortbow (+2 Str), arrows (20), 721 gp

RUXANDRA KATRANJIEV (HYBRID FORM) CR 5

XP 1,600

Female human cleric of Jezelda 1/ranger 4
CE Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger)
Init +7; Senses low-light vision, scent; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+5 armor, +1 deflection, +3 Dex, +4 natural)
hp 41 (1d8+4d10+15)
Fort +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4
DR 5/silver

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 alchemical silver scimitar* +6 (1d6+3/18–20), mwk alchemical silver kukri +6 (1d4+2/18–20), bite +2 (1d6+1 plus trip)
Ranged mwk composite shortbow +8 (1d6+3/×3)
Special Attacks channel negative energy (1d6, DC 10, 3/day), favored enemy (humanoid [human] +2), favored terrain (forest +2), lycanthropic empathy
Ranger Spells Prepared (CL 1st)
1st—*magic fang*
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 1st)
1st—*cause fear* (DC 12), *disguise self*[D], *divine favor*
0 (at will)—*bleed* (DC 11), *guidance*, *resistance*
D Domain spell; **Domains** Animal, Trickery

STATISTICS

Str 17, **Dex** 16, **Con** 16, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +4; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 21
Feats Double Slice, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting
Skills Intimidate +8, Knowledge (geography) +7, Knowledge (nature) +7, Knowledge (religion) +3, Perception +9, Stealth +11
Languages Common
SQ aura, change shape, copycat (1 round, 4/day), hunter's bond (wolf companion, Fane), speak with animals (4 rounds/day), track, wild empathy
Combat Gear *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *potion of longstrider*; **Other Gear** *ring of protection +1*, *+1 mithral chain shirt*, *+1 alchemical silver scimitar*, masterwork alchemical silver kukri, masterwork composite shortbow (+2 Str), arrows (20), 721 gp