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# KNOCKSPELL™

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Issue No. 6

## ISLES ON AN EMERALD SEA II

an adventure by Gabor Lux, page 14

## THE BODY IN THE STREET

fiction by Al Krombach

**Plus:**

**City Source: Byzantium**

by Matt Finch

...and many more features from Old-School gamers like you!



# This Issue of KNOCKSPELL

## Credits

**Editor:** Matt Finch

**Cover Artist:** Hugh Vogt with James D. Kramer

**Designer/Composer:** James D. Kramer

**Interior Artists:** Gabor Lux, Jason Sholtis, Stefan Poag, Matt Finch, John Larrey

**Cartography:** Jason Sholtis, Matt Finch, Gabor Lux

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## Editor's Note

*by Matt Finch*

As always with Knockspell magazine, this issue is tremendously, but cheerfully, late in coming. In between this and the last issue we have seen several old-school gaming conventions held, various teapot-tempests emerging and receding on the blogosphere, and a number of modules released for out-of-print fantasy RPGs and their retro-clones. There were four OSRIC (AD&D) releases from Joe Browning's Expeditious Retreat Press (*The Forsaken Sepulcher*, *The Secret of the Callair Hills*, *The Riddle of Anadi*, and *The Obsidian Sands of Synbrates*), *The City of Vornheim* and the Grindhouse edition of *Lamentations of the Flame Princess* (game), the Black Blade Publishing printings of OSRIC and *Monsters of Myth*, the fourth printing of the *Swords & Wizardry* Core Rulebook, not to mention new issues of NOD and FightOn! (sigh...our magazine "competitors" are prolific, of high quality, and constantly manage to meet their deadlines). On the Frog God Games front, of course, there was the big announcement that Necromancer Games will be publishing a *Swords & Wizardry* collected edition of Necromancer's famous monster books *Tome of Horrors* I, II, and III. Ordering of printed books has already closed out, but when the book is ready the pdfs will also be available, and will continue to be so indefinitely. Frog God Games also continues to expand the vast array of modules for *Swords & Wizardry* and OD&D, with *Hex Crawl Chronicles II* (*The Winter Woods*), *Culvert Operations*, *Morning of Tears*, *The Heir of Sin*, *Pains of Scalded Glass*, and *The Hollow Mountain*. *Shadowbrook Manor*, by Patrick Kennedy, was published for the *Labyrinth Lord* (B/X) system in addition to *Anomalous Subsurface Environment* by Patrick Wetmore.

One very cool thing that has been done recently is a wiki that compiles house rules for old-school fantasy RPG gaming. Take a look at <http://campaignwiki.org/wiki/LinksToWisdom/HomePage> and browse around.

This list only scratches the surface of what has been done in the last few months; I didn't list off anything that has been done for science fiction games, and there are unquestionably several projects and products that I've missed in making the list – apologies to anyone that wasn't mentioned here! Frankly, the tide of new materials for old gaming has become so vast that it's impossible for me to keep up with it. I recommend taking a look at the Underdark Gazette, a blog by James at <http://underdarkgazette.blogspot.com/>. The Underdark Gazette usually has a weekly feature mentioning the various products and blog-posts from the week that are worthy of note. The very concept of listing products from a single week would have been mind-boggling back in 2005, when a new module came out perhaps once every three months, if we were lucky!

We've come a long way, baby!

– Matt Finch

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## In This Issue

Although in my opinion it's a bit silly for a magazine to say what's in an issue when the reader is holding it in hand and fully capable of seeing what's in there by dint of flipping a few pages or looking at the table of contents, it makes a bit more sense in these days of the internet, when many prospective buyers are looking at a couple of online preview pages and can't flip through the entire thing. Visually, one of the most striking things in this issue is Jason Sholtis's treasure map, a one-page cornucopia of ideas illustrating the maxim that a picture is worth a thousand words. We also have, for the first time ever, a piece of fiction, written by the inimitable Al Krombach of *Beyond the Black Gate*. In general, I have strong reservations about mixing fiction and gaming resources, but the quality of Al's story overcame that editorial prejudice, and I'm proud to include *The Body in the Street* as part of this issue. We also have two different interpretations of how a bard class might work for the *Swords & Wizardry* game, provided by Tenkar and Tavener. I love it when we have the opportunity to present two different interpretations of a character class side-by-side, because such articles are much greater than the sum of their parts when the reader can compare, contrast, select, and modify elements of the two different interpretations.

Adventures? Of course! This issue contains an adventure module by the famous Gabor Lux, a fourth piece in his *Isles on an Emerald Sea* collection. As always, Gabor's writing is fueled by the same eerie energies that served as daemons for the writing of Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft. You have to read Gabor's modules to really understand what I mean by that, but fortunately you can take a look at one right in this issue! John Stater, who is coming to be known as the hardest-working writer in the Old School Renaissance, makes his first appearance in this issue with the *Catacombs of Ophir*, found below the surface of the City of Ophir. The Smith/Lovecraft vibe is strong in this issue of *Knockspell*, because Mr. Stater serves up just as sorcerous a brew as Mr. Lux.

There's also a lot of other great material in this issue, from lockpicking to Byzantium, from random flaws to psionics. We have tables for generating random orcs, there are new magic items and monsters of all kinds, and much more! You're in for a treat with this issue!

# FROM KUROTH'S QUILL

by Allan T. Grohe Jr. (grodog)

“From Kuroth's Quill” is my regular *Knockspell* design column covering the elements of adventure design (and more-specifically dungeon design, given my interest in that topic). I will also wander through the design of spells and magic items; monsters, traps, tricks, and treasures; PC and NPC classes; planes and pantheons; and likely other topics as well. In the articles, I hope to provide practical examples that will be useful in campaign play, to show theory in action.

## The Shadow Master, Part 1

*Spiders on the thrones*

*Kas is casting bones*

*Shadows shadows*

*The stars all drown*

— *Keoish children's rhyme*

Shadow masters are a sub-class of magic-users; their spells focus on the shadowy spaces between light and darkness. To be a shadow master, a character must have a minimum intelligence of 15, dexterity of 13, constitution of 13, and charisma of 14. Shadow masters do not gain an experience point bonus for high ability scores.

While shadow masters share many characteristics with both magic-users and illusionists, until they reach mid- to high levels, they are weaker than magic-users, and generally equal to, or slightly weaker than, illusionists. To compensate for their narrow magical range, shadow masters progress quickly in both casting ability and in level advancement.

Like magic-users, when a shadow master attains the ability to cast fourth level spells—at 6<sup>th</sup> level (Murkyosian)—he or she may concoct potions and scribe magical scrolls. Similarly, when a shadow master gains sixth level spell casting abilities—at 11<sup>th</sup> level (Shadow Master)—he or she may manufacture and enchant magical items which are related to light, darkness, and shadow.

Demi-human shadow masters are treated as a magic-user or as an illusionist to determine their allowable multi-class options. Shadow masters who multi-class or dual-class as thieves, assassins, monks, or bards receive a +15% bonus to Hide in Shadows rolls, in addition to any other racial or dexterity bonuses that may apply.

Shadow masters are able to use magic items usable by magic-users or illusionists, with the following restrictions:

- All potions not restricted to fighters only
- Magic-user and illusionist scrolls which contain spells usable by shadow masters, and all protection scrolls

- All rings
- The following rods, staves, and wands: rod of absorption, rod of beguiling, rod of cancellation, and rod of rulership; staff of command, staff of power, and staff of striking; wands of conjuration, enemy detection, fear, flame extinguishing, force, illumination, illusion, magic detection, magic missiles, metal and mineral detection, metal command, negation, secret door and trap location, wonder
- Miscellaneous magic items and artifacts usable by every character class, as well as those usable by magic-users in general (but not a cyclocone, the various elemental summoning devices, robe of the archmagi, or robe of stars)
- Magical weapons usable by magic-users

**CHARACTER RACE TABLE II: CHARACTER CLASS AND LEVEL LIMITATIONS**

Class of Character	Racial Stock of Character						
	Dwarf	Elf	Gnome	Half-Elf	Halfling	Half-Orc	Human
MAGIC-USER							
Shadow Master	no	11	8	8	no	no	U

**SHADOW MASTER TABLE III:**

Experience Points	Experience Level	4-Sided Dice for Accumulated Hit Points	Level Title	Shadow Master Spell Level						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0-2,125	1	1	Prestdigitator	2						
2,126-4,250	2	2	Darkling	2	1					
4,251-8,500	3	3	Dimmerist	3	2					
8,501-16,500	4	4	Duskorian	4	2	1				
16,501-30,000	5	5	Gloomist	4	2	2				
30,001-55,000	6	6	Murkyosian	4	3	2	1			
55,001-85,000	7	7	Gloamist	4	3	3	2			
85,001-125,000	8	8	Tenumbralist	5	3	3	2	1		
125,001-180,000	9	9	Shade	5	4	3	2	2		
180,001-265,000	10	10	Penumbra Master	5	4	3	3	2		
265,001-415,000	11	10+1	Shadow Master	5	4	4	3	2	1	
415,001-635,000	12	10+2	Shadow Lord	5	5	4	3	2	2	
635,001-855,000	13	10+3	Umbral Master	5	5	4	3	3	2	1
855,001-1,075,000	14	10+4	Umbral Lord	5	5	4	4	3	2	2
1,075,001-1,295,000	15	10+5	Umbral Lord (15th level)	5	5	5	4	3	2	2

(continued)

**Racial Stock of Character**

Class of Character	Duergar	Drow	Svirfneblin	Alignment Requirements
MAGIC-USER				
Shadow Master	no	12	8	Any non-good at start

**SHADOW MASTER TABLE I: HIT DICE, SPELL ABILITY, AND CLASS LEVEL LIMIT**

Class of Character	Hit Die Type	Maximum Number of Hit Dice	Spell Ability	Class Level Limit
Shadow Master	d4	10	yes	none

**SHADOW MASTER TABLE II: ARMOR AND WEAPONS PERMITTED and WEAPON PROFICIENCY TABLE**

Class of Character	Armor	Shield	Weapons	Oil	Poison	Initial Number of Weapons	Non-Proficiency Penalty	Added Proficiency in
Shadow Master	none	none	dagger, dart, staff	yes	?*	1	-5	1/6 levels

\* Evil shadow masters may use poison if permitted in the campaign by the referee.

220,000 experience points per level for each additional level beyond the 15th.  
Shadow Masters gain 1 h.p. per level after the 10th.

Spells in **bold** are new or modified from their original versions, and are detailed in this article. Spells in *italics* are reversible.

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## First Level

### Distort Shadow (*Alteration and Phantasm/Illusion*)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 1"/level  
**Duration:** 1 day/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1 shadow  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 5 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Negates

This spell allows the caster to alter the shape of the shadow cast by the target creature; unwilling creatures are entitled to a saving throw, which negates the spell if successful. The caster may shape the shadow in any manner desired, within the same size category of the creature. After attaining 6th level, a shadow master may distort a shadow up or down one size category (from S to M, from M to L), and at 11th level may distort shadows across two categories (from S to L or vice-versa). The shadows of perytons cannot be affected by this spell. Rumors speak of high-level shadow masters able to curse victims with permanently-distorted shadows. The material component is a small globule of mercury, rolled in soot.

### Gloom 15' Radius (*Alteration*)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 2"/level  
**Duration:** 1 turn/level  
**Area of Effect:** 15' radius sphere  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 1 segment  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell creates a globe of dense shadows, within which the effects are treated as one-half that of magical darkness (all attacks are at -2 to hit). Thieves and others able to *hide in shadows* do so at a 35% bonus. Use of this spell will enable higher-level shadow masters to summon shadows from the area of effect, for example. *Gloom 15' Radius* is negated by *light*, *continual light*, and *darkness* spells. The material component is one ounce of fine black charcoal dust, blown into the air at the end of casting.

### Light (*Alteration*) Reversible

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 3"  
**Duration:** 5 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1" radius sphere  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, this spell is identical to the first level cleric spell of the same name (q.v.). Note that the spell is reversible, and has no material component.



### Obscure Shadow (*Alteration*)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** Touch  
**Duration:** 5 rounds + 2 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** One creature or object  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Negates

This spell completely hides the shadow of the creature or object touched by the caster, rendering it unseen unless viewed with *true seeing*, *witch sight*, a **gem of seeing**, or similar magics. The shadow master must touch the target; unwilling targets require a successful to hit roll to be touched, and are allowed a saving throw to avoid the effect.

### Protection from Light (*Abjuration*) Reversible

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 3 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** Creature touched  
**Components:** S  
**Casting Time:** 1 segment  
**Saving Throw:** None

*Protection from Light* creates an aura of light-masking around the recipient of the spell, which provides a +2 on saving throws against light-based attacks, including *light*, *continual light*, the sunburst from a wand of illumination, the strobe attack from an eye of the deep, as well as against attacks for which light is an integral component (*hypnotic pattern*, *rainbow pattern*, hypnosis from a *prismatic sphere* or *-wall*, the web of a hypno-spider, etc.). When cast upon a shade, the spell improves the light conditions one step closer toward optimal (i.e., it improves "bright light" conditions to "average light"

and “night/dark” conditions to “underground torchlight”, etc.). The reverse of the spell, *protection from darkness*, provides the same benefits against darkness-based attacks, including *creeping darkness*, *curtain of darkness*, and other attack forms for which darkness is an integral component.

### Shades' Sight (Divination and Alteration)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 2" + 1"/level  
**Duration:** 3 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1" wide path  
**Components:** S, M  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell allows the caster to see through any shadows within the area of effect, as if he or she were looking outward from that location. Using *shades' sight*, the caster can scan enemies from around a corner 35 feet away, or look from another shadow to the one where he is concealed to determine how well he is hidden. The spell does not grant additional sight capabilities, but if the caster possesses natural or magically-granted *infravision*, *ultravision*, *x-ray vision*, *clairvoyance*, eyes of the eagle, etc., then such vision functions in conjunction with *shades' sight*. While under the effects of *shades' sight*, the caster is in a slight trance (+1 in 6 chance to be surprised, and -1 penalty to reaction adjustment), but he can, at will, employ his normal vision without cancelling the dweomer (the penalties remain, however, while the spell duration is in effect). The material component is an oil created from shadow ichor and carrot juice, rubbed onto the eyelids.

### Shadow Trap (Illusion/Phantasm and Alteration)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 1"/level  
**Duration:** 6 turns + 1 turn/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1"x1" area/level  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 2 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Special

This spell is often used by fleeing shadow masters to distract pursuers, since *Shadow Trap* creates an aura of danger and uneasiness within the proscribed area of effect. The area must be shadowed (so not in total darkness or bright light). Victims that fail their saving throw see vague but unsettling shapes out of the corner of their eye, as if lying in wait or hiding in shadows—they naturally stop to defend themselves from such attackers (a one-round delay). When observed directly, naturally nothing is seen. A fresh saving throw must be made each round that a victim is within the area of effect; making one saving throw does not prevent a PC from failing the next. Each additional failed saving throw beyond the first adds one round to the time that the PC pauses to look around, examine his surroundings more closely, and

prepare for attack against the nebulous foes. If this spell is used in conjunction with *Guards and Wards* or *Control Light*, victims save at a -4 penalty.

### Unseen Servant (Conjuration/Summoning)

**Level:** 1  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 3 turns + 1 turn/level  
**Area of Effect:** 3" radius from caster  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 5 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, this spell is identical to the first level magic-user spell of the same name (q.v.). Note that there is no material component.

## Second Level

### Banish Shadow (Abjuration, Alteration)

**Level:** 2  
**Range:** 6" + 1"/level  
**Duration:** Permanent  
**Area of Effect:** 8"x8" area, 1 shadow/level  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 6 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Negates

This spell is a more powerful version of *obscure shadow* (q.v.); creatures or objects that succumb to the spell permanently lose their natural shadows. The caster may affect up to one creature or object per level of the caster, and may mix and match creatures and objects within the area of effect. Shadows banished in this manner may be recovered with a *remove curse* cast by a cleric of 11th level or higher, a magic-user of 12th level or higher, or a shadow master of 11th level or higher.

If employed against an undead shadow (q.v.), the shadow master may target up to one shadow per level, and rolls on the clerical turning table using his or her shadow master level in lieu of cleric level. Any result of T or D permanently banishes the shadow(s) back to the Demi-Plane of Shadow. A shadow master may also attempt to banish other creatures native to the Plane of Shadow, as long as they qualify as Special undead—a successful turn result of T or D will similarly return such creatures to their home plane.

### Grasping Shadows (Alteration)

**Level:** 2  
**Range:** 4" + 1"/level  
**Duration:** 2 rounds + 1 round/level  
**Area of Effect:** One shadow  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell animates and distorts a shadow into long and ropy strands or tentacles, which extend up to 2 feet per level of

the caster within a 4" radius of the target, in order to grapple and hold one or more targets. The caster creates one *grasping shadow* per 2 experience levels (i.e., a Tenebralist animates four 16-foot-long shadow strands), and each attacks once per round as a monster with HD equal to the highest level spell the shadow master may memorize. If an attack is successful, the target is unable to move further than 5 feet from the *grasping shadow*, although he or she is not otherwise *held*. If the attack roll was 5 or higher than the required to hit number, or a natural 20, the *grasping shadow* begins to strangle the victim, who will die in 3–6 rounds unless rescued. Victims trapped by *grasping shadows* may break free by rolling two successful strength checks to open magically *held* or *wizard locked* doors; the successful checks may be accumulated over a number of rounds. Attacks against grappled victims gain a +1 bonus to hit, due to their limited mobility.

#### **Inhabit Shadow** (*Alteration*)

**Level:** 2  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 3 turns/level  
**Area of Effect:** 2" radius + ½"/level  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 6 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Negates

This subtle spell enables a shadow master already in *shadow form* (or any creature with similar capabilities) to merge into a target creature's shadow within the area of effect. An unknowing or unwilling victim is allowed a saving throw against spells; if successful, the shadow master may not inhabit that shadow until the next dawn. If the target fails his or her saving throw, the shadow master slips into the victim's shadow, and is, for all intents and purposes, a natural part of that shadow: the shadow master goes where the target (and his or her shadow) goes. While the spell is active, the caster may attempt to inhabit one target shadow per three levels of experience. When used in conjunction with *shadow form*, *inhabit shadow* extends the duration of the former while *inhabit shadow* remains in effect; if the *shadow form* spell has expired, and the caster fails to inhabit a target's shadow, then the extended *shadow form* spell and *inhabit shadow* spells end simultaneously, and the caster resumes normal form within 5 feet of the target shadow he or she was unable to inhabit. The material component is the shell of a small hermit crab, filled with 100gp of powdered jet. The shell is then sealed with wax, into which a rune of possession is inscribed.

#### **Shadow Images** (*Phantasm/Illusion and Conjuration*)

**Level:** 2  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 5 rounds + 2 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1" radius/level  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell is a variation on the second level magic-user spell, *mirror image* (q.v.), and behaves in the same manner in most respects. *Shadow images* move as the caster does within the area of effect, and each will be destroyed when struck for more damage than half of the caster's levels in hit points (round down).

#### **Third Level**

#### **Negative Plane Protection** (*Abjuration*)

**Level:** 3  
**Range:** Touch  
**Duration:** 1 round/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1 prime material plane creature  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 7 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, this spell is identical to the third level clerical spell of the same name (q.v.).

#### **Shadow Monsters** (*Illusion/Phantasm and Evocation*)

**Level:** 3  
**Range:** 3" plus 1"/2 levels  
**Duration:** 2 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 4" radius  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Special

Except as noted above, this spell is identical to the fourth level illusionist spell of the same name (q.v.). Shadow masters may create 1.5 times their level in hit dice of *shadow monsters*, which are 30% real for purposes of hit dice, damage scored, etc. Their armor class is 9 if recognized as an illusion.

The material component is any area of shadows within the spell's range.

#### **Shadow Strike** (*Alteration*)

**Level:** 3  
**Range:** ½ "/ level  
**Duration:** 1 round/level  
**Area of Effect:** One creature  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 5 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Negates

This spell creates a sympathetic link between the target's shadow and his physical body, so that attacks made against



the shadow will affect the person unless they succeed in a saving throw against spells. The victim's shadow armor class (sAC) is 10 minus his or her dexterity bonus (if any); normal or magical armor and shields have no effect upon sAC, but their magical bonuses from protection devices (rings, cloaks, etc.) function normally. All weapons and spells are able to affect the victim of *shadow strike*. If this spell is cast upon a shadow master employing *shadow form*, it forces the target to revert back to his normal form.

## Fourth Level

### Black Tentacles (Conjuration/Summoning)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 1"/level  
**Duration:** 1 round/2 levels  
**Area of Effect:** 10 square feet/level  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 1 round  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, this spell is identical to the fourth level magic-user spell of the same name (q.v.). The material component is one bristle from a tenebrous worm per level of the caster; each bristle must be clipped from a still-living 'worm, and then pickled for a week within a solution distilled from the essence of nightshade and crystallized honey.

### Control Light (Alteration)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 1"/3 levels  
**Duration:** 1 round/level  
**Area of Effect:** ½" radius/level  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

*Control Light* allows a shadow master to manipulate the flow and intensity of light and darkness within the area of effect. Using this spell, multiple areas of light and dark could be produced, and maintained with minimal concentration by the shadow master (move at up to 6" speed, no other spell casting, if damage is taken or a saving throw is failed then his concentration is broken). In addition, spells and spell-like effects based on light (such as *faerie fire*, *rainbow*, *starshine*, *moonbeam*, *sunray*, *dancing lights*, *prismatic wall*, etc.) can be wrested from the control of the original caster at a base 50% chance, +/- 3% per level of difference between the levels of the original caster and shadow master. The material component is a ring forged from white gold and black adamantite, fashioned into a round spiral helix, with a minimum cost of 15,000gp; the ring is reusable.

### Creeping Darkness

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 5"/level  
**Duration:** Concentration plus 8 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 3 cubic feet/level  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell is a variation on the fifth level wu jen spell, *creeping darkness* (**Oriental Adventures**, page 88), however several major differences exist in this version:

- the spell is unaffected by wind
- has a movement rate of 9"
- continues to move in the direction of its last command when the caster ceases to concentrate (concentration may be maintained as long as the shadow master does not attack or cast another spell, does not fail a saving throw, takes no damage, and moves no faster than 6" per round)

All creatures within the *creeping darkness* must save vs. spells or suffer the effects of a *fear* spell (q.v.), as they blindly attempt to escape its depths. If someone attempts to prevent their flight, feared victims attack them with berserk fury (+2 bonus to hit and damage, -3 penalty to AC). The material component is a shadow (the monster) which has been ritually entrapped within a smoky glass or crystal sphere; the sphere is hurled by the caster into the center of the area of effect, where it shatters, consumes the shadow, and releases the *creeping darkness*.

### Phantom Steed (Conjuration/Phantasm)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** Touch  
**Duration:** 6 turns/level  
**Area of Effect:** Special  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 5 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, this spell functions the same as the third level illusionist spell of the same name (q.v.). In addition, shadow masters gain the following benefits when casting *phantom steed*:

- At 8<sup>th</sup> level, a shadow master using *phantom steed* may choose to summon a shadow mastiff (MM2 page 48). The mastiff will have +2 hp per HD (up to maximum hp), and will faithfully serve the shadow master for the duration of the spell; it will fight on his behalf as well.
- At 13<sup>th</sup> level, the shadow mastiff may transport itself and its master to the Plane of Shadow in four segments, if the caster so desires.

If the shadow master wishes to summon the shadow mastiff, the material component is a black leather dog collar, inset with pieces of jet (with a cost of 500gp).

### Protection from Light 10' Radius

(Abjuration) Reversible

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 2 turns/level  
**Area of Effect:** Creature touched  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 8 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

Except as noted above, *protection from light 10' radius* is identical in all respects to a *protection from light spell* (q.v.).

### Shadow Bolt (Evocation)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 2" plus 1/2"/level  
**Duration:** Special  
**Area of Effect:** one creature  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** 1/2

This spell generates a black, pulsing bolt of shadowstuff which will remain in existence for up to one turn per level of the caster. When used, the bolt strikes at its target with incredible velocity (96"). The shadow bolt strikes at +3 to hit due to its speed, and the caster's Dexterity bonus (if any) also applies. If the target is not struck, the arrow continues on a straight-line course out to its maximum range, and may strike an unintended target. The target hit takes 1d6 damage per level of the caster; a successful saving throw against spells reduces damage by half. The material component is a drowic hand crossbow dart, steeped in the ichor of three shadows, and kept away from any light brighter than a torch.

### Shadow Form (Alteration)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 1 turn + 1 round/2 levels  
**Area of Effect:** Caster only  
**Components:** S  
**Casting Time:** 1 segment  
**Saving Throw:** None

This spell transforms the shadow master into a two-dimensional shadow, in a manner similar to both the third level illusions spell *wraithform*, and the seventh-level magic user spell *duo dimension*. The caster may change his or her shape as per the spell *distort shadow* (q.v.). Due to the extraplanar nature of the spell, the caster cannot be attacked directly by physical weapons (cold iron, silver, magical, or otherwise). If attacked by the shadow of the weapon, the caster gains a +2 bonus to armor class and saving throws against such attacks, and if the attack is successful, normal damage and effects

apply. Most attack spells such as *magic missile*, *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *ice storm*, *cone of cold*, etc. are similarly less effective (-2/die of damage rolled against magic missile; against other damaging spells, a successful saving throw reduces damage to one-quarter, while a failed save indicates half damage); non-damaging spells function normally against the caster.

### Shadow Magic (Phantasm/Illusion and Evocation)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 3"/level  
**Duration:** Special  
**Area of Effect:** Special  
**Components:** V, S  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Special

Except as noted above and below, this spell is identical to the fifth level illusionist spell of the same name (q.v.). In the hands of a shadow master, *shadow magic* may be used to create any of the following quasi-real spells: *burning hands*, *magic missile*, *acid arrow*, *flaming sphere*, *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *minute meteors*, *ice storm*, or *cone of cold*. If the victim realizes that the spell is illusory, then it inflicts only 1-2 points of damage per level of the caster, regardless of which spell was cast.

### Shadow Shield (Abjuration)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 0  
**Duration:** 2 rounds/level  
**Area of Effect:** 1" radius sphere  
**Components:** V  
**Casting Time:** 3 segments  
**Saving Throw:** Special

This dweomer surrounds the caster with a sphere of utter blackness which cannot be seen into or divined into from outside by any means (*clairvoyance*, *clairaudience*, *wizard eye*, *x-ray vision*, and *true seeing* and similar spells and effects notwithstanding). The shadow shield also provides complete protection against directed light attacks, such as *chromatic orb*, *color spray*, *sunburst*, and *prismatic spray*. Individuals attempting to cross into the shadow shield must save vs. spells twice. If the first saving throw is failed, the victim is blinded for one round per level of the caster; if the second saving throw is failed, the attacker suffers from *fear*, as per the fourth level magic user spell of the same name.

### Shadow Weapon (Evocation)

**Level:** 4  
**Range:** 1"/2 levels  
**Duration:** 1 round/level  
**Area of Effect:** Special  
**Components:** V, S, M  
**Casting Time:** 4 segments  
**Saving Throw:** None

When casting completes, the shadow master coalesces a weapon from nearby shadows, similar in nature to the seventh



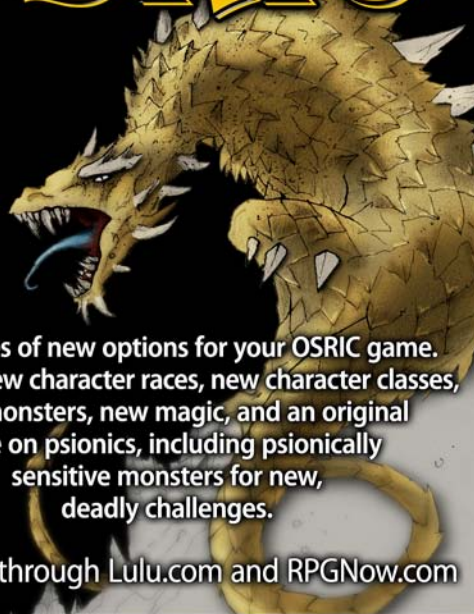
level spell *mage's sword* (q.v.). The caster directs the weapon's movements with the material component (see below), and attacks as a fighter equal to one-half his magic-user level (a 14th level shadow master attacks at the 3/2 rate as a 7th level fighter). A *shadow weapon* counts a +2 weapon for purposes of what creatures it may strike in combat, although it has no effect upon undead or other non-corporeal or non-living creatures (such as golems, molds, etc.). Shadow weapons are able to strike creatures existing in full or in part in the Prime Material and Ethereal planes, as well as the Demi-Plane of Shadow. Instead of inflicting damage, however, a *shadow weapon* drains the physical strength from its victims: upon each successful attack, targets struck by the spell must save vs. spells or lose 1 point of strength for every four levels of the caster (do not round—drop all fractions). Fighters with exceptional strength that fail their saving throw drop from 18+ directly to 17 strength, and then downward. Humanoid targets drained to a strength of less than 3 cannot move and are effectively paralyzed; those drained to strength 0 are killed, and will rise as shadows in 2-5 rounds, under the permanent control of the caster. Such victims cannot be raised from the dead without a *wish*.

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Victims with magically-augmented strength (*strength* spell, **girdle of giant strength**, etc.) remain unaffected by the spell until they are slain; victims wearing **gauntlets of ogre power** remain unaffected by the spell until their strength drops below three (since they only imbue the owner's hands, arms, and shoulders with ogre power). Drained strength returns according to the following table:

Strength Lost	Duration of Strength Drain	Recovery Notes
1-3 points	1 day per point lost	No activity restrictions
4-6 points	1 week per point lost	Normal, non-adventuring activities permitted
7-9 points	2 weeks per point lost	Bed rest required
10+ points	1 month per point lost	Remove Curse from an 12 <sup>th</sup> level caster required before healing can begin

In addition to the shadows necessary to cast the spell, each caster must choose a particular weapon as his personal shadow weapon when he or she first learns the spell, and this selection cannot be changed—thus one shadow master may wield a shadow sword, while a gnomish shadow master/assassin wields a shadow dagger. The material component is a replica of the caster's chosen weapon type, assembled from the bone shards of victims slain by shadows, and then fused with black mithral. The component must be forged by a master craftsman, at a cost of 3000-5000gp, and is reusable.

**Summon Shadow** (*Conjuration/Summoning*)

- Level: 4
- Range: 4" + 1"/2 levels
- Duration: 2 rounds + 2 rounds/level
- Area of Effect: Special
- Components: V, S, M
- Casting Time: 4 segments
- Saving Throw: None

Except as noted above, the spell is otherwise identical to the fifth level illusionist spell of the same name (q.v.). A shadow master employing this spell summons one shadow per two levels of experience.

**Transmute Flesh to Shadow** (*Alteration*) *Reversible*

- Level: 4
- Range: 5" + 1"/level
- Duration: Permanent
- Area of Effect: Special
- Components: V, S, M
- Casting Time: 4 segments or 1 turn
- Saving Throw: Negates

This dweomer turns its victims into living shadow. If the target fails its saving throw, it must roll for system shock survival (q.v., *constitution* and *polymorph other*). A failure indicates that the target is slain and melts away into the shadows, while

success means that they have survived the transformation. Survivors take on all of the characteristics of an undead shadow (q.v.), with their normal statistics, class and level, hit points, etc. 0-level humans turned into shadows may be turned as such, while classed survivors are turned as specials. Their base armor class is 7, and dexterity and magical bonuses apply; armor and shields no longer improve AC, but magical plusses from the items do—a fighter with 15 dexterity and platemail +1 is AC 5. This spell is employed during the rituals required to create a shade (q.v.), although the specifics of that process have been lost for centuries. The reverse of the spell transforms shadows into flesh. If cast upon an undead shadow, if it fails its saving throw it is destroyed; if cast upon a shade, and it fails both magic resistance and saving throw, and its system shock survival check, it is returned to a normal racial form and loses all shade abilities. The material component is a black cloth cut


in the shape of a humanoid figure, and soaked in the blood of any shadow-based creature. The reversed form requires blood from the original race of the target creature; the blood is sprinkled on the target of the spell.

**Part 2 of the article** will appear in *Knockspell* #7, and will detail spell levels 5-7, as well as some new multi-planar poisons for evil shadow masters, and some new monsters native to the Demi-Plane of Shadow.

Section 15:

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Allan is known online as *grodog*, where he publishes a website featuring *Greyhawk* D&D content, as well as his non-gaming writing (poetry, personal essays, and literary scholarship), and the usual fan ephemera. Allan co-founded *Black Blade Publishing* in 2009 with Jon Hershberger. He lives in Wichita, Kansas, with his wonderful wife Heather, their games-playing boys Ethan and Henry, and their cats Percy and Jasper. 

# RANDOM ORC GENERATOR

by Robert Lionheart

**W**hat is an Orc? For purposes of this article, I define “orc” as any overused brutish humanoid monster that often appears in great numbers. The problem with overused monsters is they lose their fear factor. If every such monster encountered has the same stats, weapons, tactics and motivation, boredom for both referee and players is the inevitable result.

This random generator can be used to easily enliven encounters with savage men, goblins, gnolls, ogres or even giants. Grab 3D6 and assign one die each to Drive, Armament and Extras. Drive describes the motivation and focus of the monsters under the basic assumption they are evil and chaotic foes. Armament gears them with weapon and armor which perhaps defines their tactics. Extras rounds out the monsters with something unusual. Roll the dice to determine how this fresh band of foes is different from those orcs your brave adventurers butchered last week.

## Drive

### 1. Insanity

These orcs are nuts. They are delusional, psychotic and may even start attacking each other. They hear voices, speak

gibberish, and scream at random. Are they possessed? Have their minds fallen to weird magics in the area? Or can you hear some wisdom hidden in their babbling?

### 2. Greed

Greedy orcs are cowards, thieves and looters. They want to take what others possess, but not at the loss of their own blood. Do they shadow the party through the dungeon, waiting for their moment? Or do they offer to join the party only to betray them? All orcs are selfish, but these are truly obsessed with larceny, jealousy and avarice cravings.

### 3. Pleasure in the Pain

These orcs are wildly thrilled to ecstasy when they harm others and perhaps whenever they too bleed. They are extremely loud during battle, taking every opportunity to grunt, growl and bark out what they are feeling. Some may even learn key words in other languages, just to make sure their foes know what is being screamed. Their thrills are the battle and the bloodletting, much more than the killing or the victory.

### 4. Hunger for Flesh

Hungry orcs kill to eat. They may even eschew weapons to just bite foes. They focus on the weakest targets and flee



once the victims are snatched from the battle. Their only goal is to put meat back on the menu! Perhaps cannibalism brings madness that can only be satiated by eating more and more flesh. These orcs are not just hungry. They are afflicted with a ravenous and consuming need to devour the living.

#### **5. Disciplined**

Disciplined orcs serve a master who has instilled fear, order and maybe some loyalty into the brutes. They follow commands, keep battle ranks and act as an organized unit instead of random berserkers. They often wear common insignia, tattoos or other sign of solidarity. Their leaders may even bark orders in a terse battle language, using words unknown to even those who casually understand the orc tongue.

#### **6. Cunning**

Cunning orcs are those few who have learned from experience how to survive and perhaps even win against adventurers. They are the most dangerous orcs because they will use tricks, traps and tactics including parley and retreat. They are not geniuses, but they are veterans of a dozen battles.

## **Armament**

#### **1. Naked**

Naked orcs are degenerate savages. At best, they will remember to bring a club and pick up a shield from their last kill. Most just want to bite, grapple, kick and pummel. Perhaps they have evolved (devolved?) with thickened hides, clawed hands and sharper fangs? Maybe someone (or something) within this dungeon experimented upon them?

#### **2. Scavengers**

Scavengers are poorly equipped, wearing makeshift armor and using whatever they could scrounge from their kills as weapons. Their armor will be barely held together scraps of this and that. Spiked clubs, rusted knives and spears are common weapons.

#### **3. Slashers**

Slashers carry the biggest weapon they can, usually a pole arm or two-handed great weapon. Some may fight two handed, such as hand axe and sword. Armor is usually heavier since they don't carry shields. Slashers are more aggressive than others of the same Drive.

#### **4. Skirmishers**

Skirmish orcs prefer javelins, throwing spears, maybe even a bow. They wear light armor to maximize mobility, but most carry a shield and light hand weapon for the inevitable melee. Skirmishers enjoy ambushes, ranged battles and

guerrilla tactics. Does their presence mean these are scouts for a larger warband nearby?

#### **5. Tank**

Tank orcs wear heavy armor. They wear at least chain mail, usually with more metal bits bolted on. Great helms and gauntlets are common. They favor large shields and reliable hand weapons. Knowing they are encumbered and clanky, tank orcs choose fights where brutal bashing can overcome stealth and speed.

#### **6. Kitchen Sink**

These orcs love to shop! Like adventurers, they carry packs and sacks full of tools, trinkets and goodies. They frequently carry a plethora of weapons, both melee and ranged and perhaps flaming oil. They are the opposite of scavengers, as their equipment is frequently good quality. Their resources allow them to mix tactics and battle options. Is their gear looted? Or are these orcs more "civilized" than others?

## **Extras**

#### **1. Slaves & Prisoners**

Orcs are fond of enslaving the weak. They use them like severely abused hirelings. The slaves carry torches and supplies (not treasure). Unfamiliar dungeons can be dangerous for orcs too, so slaves are good for testing dangerous areas for traps! And don't forget the Stockholm syndrome! A freed slave might be less grateful than you originally hoped.

#### **2. Maps**

Orcs are not dwarves. They may live in the underworld, but they lack the brains to remember all the twists, turns and passwords. Wandering is fine for a few days, but eventually even the most savage orcs miss their lairs. Also, orcs are not competent map makers or scribes, so their squiggles and notes may be dangerously flawed. Also "maps" do not have to mean drawings, but could be a journal or even a set of keys.

#### **3. Bloody Trophies**

Hey, isn't that the head of the missing duke? Orcs are fond of collecting skulls and many consider anything killed to be good eating. The contents of an orc's trophy bag may give adventurer's an idea about some of the other threats in the area.

#### **4. Beast Companions**

If encountered outdoors, these orcs may have riding mounts. Most likely, the mount will match the quality of the rider so that tank orcs will have warhorses adorned with chain barding while insane orcs might be riding backwards. Indoors, these orcs may have the equivalent of war dogs, but possibly more fantastical pets like giant centipedes, a killer bee or giant rat.

## 5. Something Odd

These orcs are carrying some item that does not make sense. Perhaps each one has sack of sand with pieces of a broken mirror inside or all their wine skins are Elven, brand new and never used. Whatever it may be, the “something odd” should puzzle and confound the adventurers. Is it just orcish superstition? Or is the item important in the grand scheme of the adventure?

## 6. Important Loot

Orcs have an uncanny ability to not recognize value. They know a glowing sword is good stuff, but a stack of scrolls is just kindling and ancient copper coins from a lost empire are just chucked in with the rest. This is a boon for the referee who can have one good item show up in their treasure instead of a few coins on each slain orc.

# Random Examples

Random tables are just a springboard for your imagination. Here are a few examples of orcish encounters I generated with a handful of dice and some daydreaming. Now its your turn to add some terror, confusion and fun to your next battle!

## Goblin Rats

*Hunger for Flesh / Naked / Beast Companions*

Goblin Rats are survivors of a bizarre arcane experiment to create burrowing troops by drowning feral goblins with the liquidated essences of giant rats. The result are shaggy tailed humanoids with teeth and claws consumed with the need to eat the warm flesh of anything except their own kind. They often travel with giant rats who treat them with deference and empathic communication. They could easily be mistaken for wererats.

## Archers Of The Broken Idol

*Greed / Skirmishers / Important Loot*

The favorite prey of these inhuman hunters are traveling merchants and wandering tinkers. The rogues hide in trees with two full quivers and rain death with clever ambushes. Most of their loot is simple trade goods, but they recently killed a cursed thief carrying a jade horn snapped off an ancient and sinister idol.

## Metal Heads

*Pleasure in the Pain / Tank / Bloody Trophies*

This trio of strange ogres wear shining chain mail, massive helms with iron gauntlets and greaves, all adorned with cracked skulls and hundreds of bones hanging off their shoulders and belts. Chains of bleached skulls drag behind them like a necromancer’s wedding gown. Their broadswords and towering shields are meticulously licked clean for splattered blood is sacred only in battle.

## Devout Outcast

*Disciplined / Scavengers / Slaves & Prisoners*

Tribal war saw the ascension of a inhuman warlord who demanded worship of his strange god. Those few orcs who refused to abandon their ancient gods were cast out. These fanatic acolytes rallied around their shaman and survived as primitives in the wilderness. The outcast orcs wear armor of hide and bark with weapons of stone and wood. They recently came upon a shipwreck and enslaved the survivors to help them build a new temple.

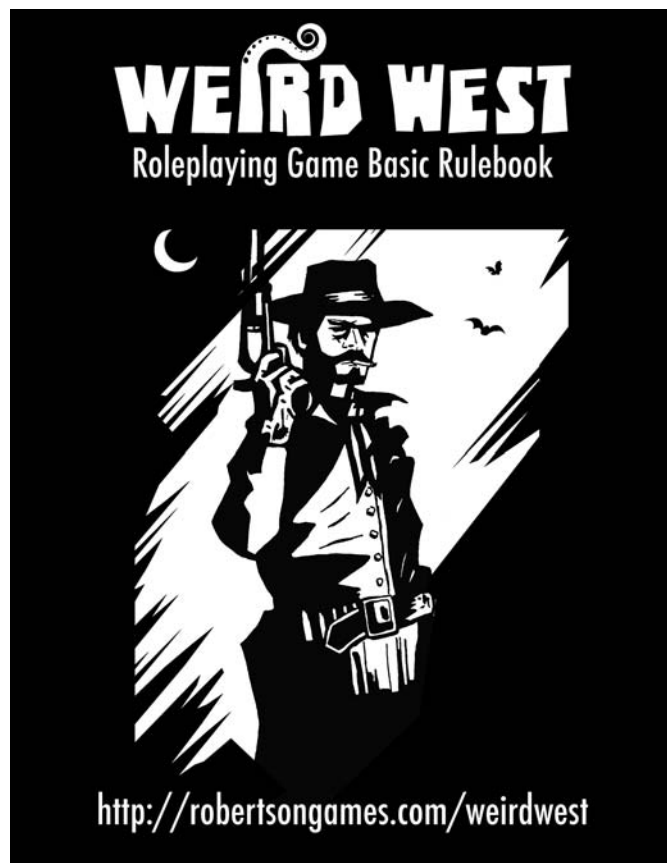
## Orc Dwarves

*Insanity / Slashers / Something Odd*

Days ago, these orcs broke into a dwarven hearth and stole the wee children. Their guardian fought bravely, and in death called down a strange curse. Now, these orcs believe they are dwarven mothers. Each carries a papoose with a baby dwarf and wields axes and hammers on their quest to “go home”. They only speak in their bastardized version of dwarven, hate all orcs, goblins and elves, but need help finding the nearest dwarf stronghold.

*OGC Disclosure: The rules described in this article are Open Game Content, and the remainder is Product Identity.*

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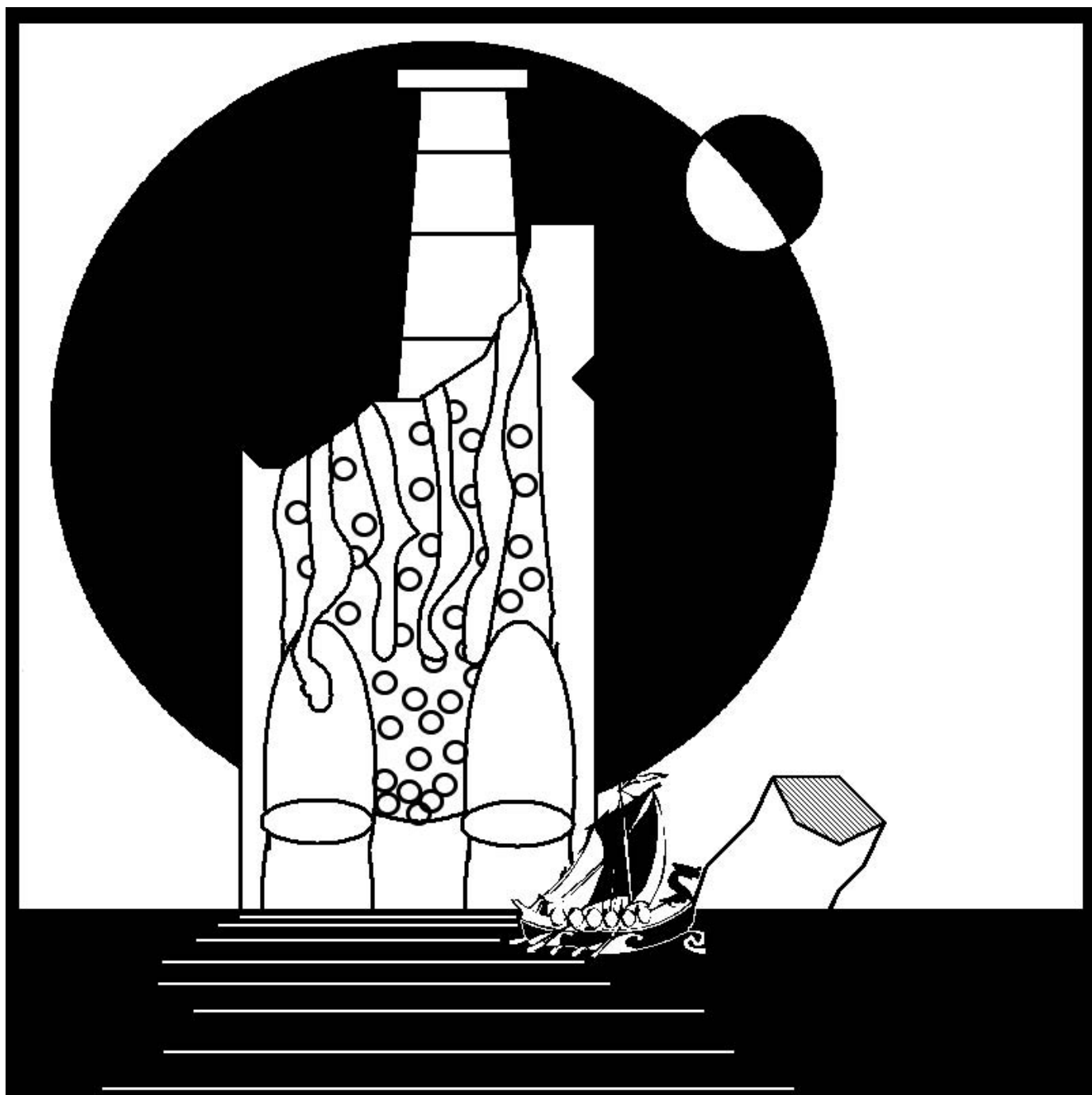




# ISLES ON AN EMERALD SEA IV

An Adventure by Gabor Lux

*Playtesters: Gabor Acs, Kalman Farago, Laszlo Feher and Gabor Izapy*



## The Isle of Molonei

So it came that Dodekabyros the master mage, bored with the tedium of power and attendant immortality, turned his attention to a new, ambitious project. With his force-globe and destructive spells, he enslaved the stone age civilisation inhabiting the archipelago near his tower, then started to put his extravagant ideas into motion. With his synthesisers, he reconstructed the primitive race, and with the fertility-enhancer named fecundin, accelerated their life-cycle. Thereafter, he issued an edict to his dazed subjects: the total population of the four islands would hereafter be fixed at 240, no more and no less. The differences would have to be eliminated by war, or fireball bombardment from Dodekabyros' force-globe, soaring like an immortal, unsailable god over the multitudes.

Three centuries later, the war of the primitive wretches continues, and the population of the four islands (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta) is in accordance with the edict due to incessant bloodshed and the cruel whims of Dodekabyros. However, not long ago, an error occurred in the plan when an unforeseen event transpired in Alpha's ecosystem. The balance of power in the archipelago quickly fell apart, and now a war of extermination, more cruel than any seen before, is brewing as Dodekabyros watches the developments from the top of his tower.



**Cavemen (sample of 40):** HD 2+2; HP 13, 8, 15, 6, 10, 11, 6, 10, 15, 13, 11, 10, 9, 10, 15, 6, 10, 10, 15, 12, 8, 12, 9, 8, 10, 7, 17, 6, 6, 18, 16, 11, 10, 13, 10, 15, 15, 8, 14, 14; AC 13; Atk club 1d6+1 or stone knife 1d4+1 or bola 1d6+1; SV 16.



**A. Alpha:** The incident had occurred on the northernmost island. The cavemen successfully cracked the brass casing of an ancient preserve capsule full of pollen and plant matter, unleashing a wave of zombification and the hyper-spread of parasitic plant life on the island, which has so far only been checked by the sea.

Every day spent on the island, as well as confrontation with the inhabitants, necessitates a saving throw to avoid pollen contamination. Without receiving a *cure disease* spell, contamination is fatal within 1d2+1 weeks and turns the subject into a debased, mindless vegetable horror. There are 15 “zombies”, 10 zombie-plant hybrids and 10 killer vines prowling the island territory, with a 1:2 probability of a random encounter every hour. Not far from the abandoned village, the broken wreck of the enormous brass capsule (40' diameter) lies half buried in a hillside, a source of deadly peril but potentially also valuable rare metals.

**Zombified Cavemen (15):** HD 2; HP 6, 10, 6, 11, 11, 16, 10, 8, 12, 12, 15, 11, 12, 3, 8; AC 12; Atk slam 1d8; Spec immune to mind-affecting spells, not an undead; SV 16.

**Hybrids (10):** HD 3; HP 10, 11, 9, 13, 14, 12, 10, 20, 16, 16; AC 15; Atk slam 1d8 and vines 1d6+entanglement; Spec strangle 2d6/round, immune to mind-affecting, cold and electricity, ½ damage from fire, not an undead; SV 13.

**Killer Vines (10):** HD 4; HP 12, 22, 27, 26, 23, 10, 20, 19, 21, 22; AC 15; Atk vine 1d6+entanglement; strangle 2d6/round; SV 9.

**B. Beta:** This island had been inhabited by the strongest tribe, fulfilling a balancing role between Alpha and the two southern islands. With Alpha's fall and the arrival of murderous flora with wind-borne pollens, they have become hopelessly weakened, and their final destruction is only a matter of time. The population of the island is 40; their chieftain, Lorg Grome, a powerful mutant recognisable by his scaly yellow skin and unnaturally wide, teeth-filled mouth. The wilds are currently populated by 11 killer vines.

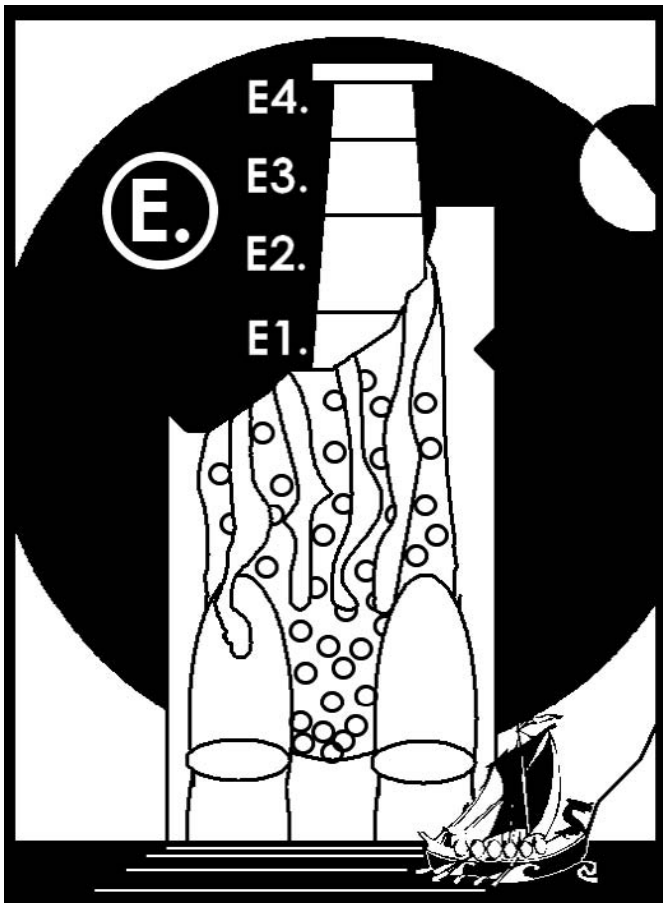
**Lorg Grome:** HD 4+2; HP 22; AC 14; Atk spear 1d6+1;  
**Special** eyebeams 4/day, 3d6 Hp; SV 12.

**Killer Vines (11):** HP 18, 15, 20, 21, 19, 19, 12, 21, 27, 20, 15

**C. Gamma:** The island's population is 60, and their leader is Uumma, a repulsive matriarch (non-combatant, almost completely paralysed). Due to an old blood feud, they are at war with Beta and winning; Uumma and all her children are burning with the anticipation of the coming massacre.

**D. Delta:** The population of Delta is 100; due to its larger territory and rich fauna, it has always been one of the stronger isles, further enhanced by the unfolding war. Currently, they focus their efforts on Beta's destruction, and are neutral towards Gamma. Their leader, Bowosg the Tribe-Killer, is a man of his name, risen above his subjects via merciless violence.

On Delta's land, right in the centre of the primitive settlement, a second brass capsule awaits in half-buried state those who would examine its contents. Bowosg is already working on the matter.



**E. Epsilon:** Epsilon is the home of Dodekabyros. The windowless, tapering tower of the master mage was built on the colossal wreckage of a primordial idol of olive green stone.

The idol, which depicts a disagreeable being of stumpy legs, puffed body and a myriad twisting cilia, dates from before human habitation. Dodekabyros' dwelling is significantly more recent, of a scant 500 years. Unless he is out on an errand, the force-globe can be seen resting on the flat top like a shimmering crystal ball. Since the tower is practically unassailable from the sea, there are no guardians or security measures beyond the magician's ill reputation and the nerve gas stored in the laboratory.

Dodekabyros is a short, hunchbacked man of stunted legs and barrel-shaped trunk. His yellowed, potato-like head is topped by thinning black hair and a stringy beard. His temperament is malevolent and perverted, with a hatred for all things good and wholesome, although with a taste for experiments. If unbidden visitors come to his tower, he chases them off (5:6) or destroys them without warning (1:6). He only receives visitors and students with very good reason; the easiest way to contact him is through his distant suppliers. In addition to his spells, Dodekabyros is familiar with a number of ancient technological processes, including the secrets of creating and moulding life.

**Dodekabyros:** Magic-User 9; AC -3 [22] (bracers AC 1 [18], ring +2, cloak +1, Dexterity); Atk staff 1d6-1; SV 7; Str 6, Dex 15, Con 6, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 7; wand of charm (20 charges), wand of fireballs (10 charges), potion of flying, potion of healing\*2, potion of fire breath (5d4 Hp, 1d4 breathes), potion of cure disease, potion of appearance, scroll (strength, ray of enfeeblement, hold person, confusion).

**Spells (in spellbook, memorised are underscored):**

4/3/3/2/1; 1: charm person, detect magic, identify, light, magic missile\*2, shield, sleep; 2: detect invisibility, ESP, flaming sphere, levitate, mirror image, strength; 3: dispel magic, fireball, fly, lightning bolt, suggestion, wind wall; 4: charm monster, dimension door, fear, minor globe of invulnerability; 5: contact other plane, hold monster, telekinesis.

**E1. The lower entrance of the tower** opens to a series of storerooms preserved food, wine, oil and similar supplies are found next to metal crates of milled minerals, metals, chemicals and other base materials. A large, empty crate conceals a trapdoor to a secret treasure room: 3000 sp, 2500 electrum, 500 gp and 300 gp worth of gems.

**E2. Laboratory:** cloning machines, synthesisers to create and alter life, a homogeniser (able to reduce a person into an even meat paste within a minute) and a few more contraptions. Four glittering chrome canisters contain argent, a nerve gas used for defensive purposes (save or become a zombie controlled by uttered commands + save after 2d3 hours or die as deposits of the silvery gas destroy the lungs from the inside).



**E3. Nympharium:** inhabited by mindless cloned beauties of identical appearance.

**E4. Living quarters** furnished with some taste. Projection screens to spy on proximate or distant lands (equivalent to *clairvoyance/clairaudience*; the device is too heavy and complicated to transport), a chest full of 1100 gp, and various furnishings. From the suite, a short flight of stairs leads up to the upper terrace, used by Dodekabyros as a combination of landing pad and observation deck. A metal ring standing on short legs is used to anchor and recharge the force-globe when it is present.



**The force-globe of Dodekabyros (15000 gp):** This transparent, spherical forcefield can transport up to six persons. Its total action range under normal circumstances is 2000 stadion (200 km), but it can be fuelled up to 3200 if necessary. Its speed is 1200 stadion (120 km) per day; a night's worth of hovering depletes its storage cells by 200 stadion. Characters within the force-globe benefit from the effects of *protection from normal missiles*, and with raised shields (200 std. charge), also *minor globe of invulnerability*. The force-globe does not impede outwards spellcasting or missile fire. It can be refuelled on top of the tower as well as by using standard energy cells/cartridges (1000 std.).

## Debris of the Sea

**1. Shallows:** 7 giant crabs. Stone steps lead up to a cliff with the idol of a humanoid (crab's head and pincers), 200 gp pearl dust in copper bowl.

**Giant Crabs (7):** HD 3; HP 11, 16, 14, 19, 5, 22, 14; AC 18; Atk 2\*claws 1d6; SV 14.

**2. Colossal statues of lizards** towering above the undersea kelp forest. The structures, their backs green with seaweed, are close to collapse.

**3. Two enormous sea turtles** watching a nestful of eggs on a sandbank, very aggressive.

**Giant Sea Turtles (2):** HD 10; HP 54, 32; AC 20; Atk bite 4d6; SV 5.

**4. Drifting ship** laden with a cargo of decomposing fish, olive oil and beeswax. All hands on board are dead, along with

two harpies nailed to the boards with sabres and knives. Half-dead captive manacled in the brig.

**5. A trench on the bottom of the sea** descending into unfathomable depths. Sunken towers on the two shores connected by a slim bridge.

**6. Coastal cave,** old bronze-covered galley manned by 20 mechanical men. The vessel is immobile and the machines are lifeless, encrusted with salt.

**7. Large bronze bell** resting on legs on the bottom of the sea. The inside air is good, seemingly inhabited by four lustful mermaids. The strange bordello is a death-trap and the mermaids are really sea hags masked by illusion. They command 8 sea zombies, and have 300 sp, 450 electrum, a *potion of levitation* and a *scroll (spectral force)*.

**Sea Hags (4):** HD 3; HP 15, 13, 8, 19; AC 13; Atk 2\*claws 1d4+1; Spec death gaze, weakness; SV 14.

**Sea Zombies (8):** HD 4; HP 25, 11, 17, 21, 17, 23, 21, 17; AC as originally/13; Atk weapon or slam 1d8; Spec ½ damage from bludgeoning weapons; SV 13.

**8. Bunches of corroded brass globes** at various depths on undersea terraces; all are filled with water and inhabited by various marine creatures.

**9. Small island with a distended garden,** broken remains of old statuary. A lair of 4 amphisbaena holds 11 crystal eggs, 50 gp each.

**Amphisbaena (4):** HD 5; HP 32, 23, 16, 23; AC 14; Atk 2\*bite 1d6+poison; SV 12.

**10. Schools of fish** swarm around a mostly submerged bronze colossus. The fish not only eat the seaweed on the body, but also polish it clean. Water fowl, less concerned with cleanliness, nest atop the skull-like head.

**11. Tapering, three-sided stone pyramids,** ancient mausolea rise from coastal cliffs. Most have been broken open and looted, even the dead stolen from their rest. At sunfall, the spirits of the departed are wont to return, gazing immobile on the dying sun.

**12. Stone obelisks** emerging from the thick kelp. They follow the path of an ancient road, now covered by the growth.

**13. Bestial, primitive statues** on a coral atoll, hemp ropes and heavy weights around their necks: the exiled gods of a nearby village, ritually bound and stoned each week by the angered residents decades after their downfall.

**14. Old woman** close to death in anchored boat, left here by her son, a fisherman. The crone begs for help and revenge; the son, an unfortunate of hideous appearance, holds her responsible for his joyless life.

**15. 100 m diameter metal dome** in the depths, dotted with circular glass windows emitting beams of light. The dome is an undersea garden with abundant air, but the thick vegetation hides 8 killer vines. In the centre, in a sealed control centre, skeletal remains of the original inhabitants lie overgrown with vines and stalks. One still grasps a platinum wafer (450 gp), the “key card” to deactivate the dome’s life support system. Three glass containers of defoliant, can be dispersed as an acidic mist with attached sprinklers (3d4 Hp, 10 doses each).

**Killer Vines (8):** HD 4; HP 16, 16, 23, 24, 14, 18, 17, 24; AC 15; Atk vine 1d6+entanglement; strangle 2d6/round; SV 9.

**16. Royal purple kelp patch** floating on the surface, its juices like clouds of red ink. This patch is harvested by the inhabitants of a nearby fishing village, who consider it their inalienable property.

*This article contains no Open Game Content other than spell names, magic item names, and terminology derived from game rules.*

*Section 15: Isles on an Emerald Sea IV., Gabor Lux, Copyright 2011*

# RANDOM PERKS AND FLAWS

by Stefan Poag

Who doesn't love random Lists for your fantasy role playing game? Flaws are traits that your character may have that are negative (or liabilities). Perks are traits that are positive. At character creation, you can roll 1d20 (I'm considering making this step optional, i.e.: you can always opt not to roll at all and just skip this step).

Roll the dice to take your chances on the flaws/perks tables:

## Roll 1d20:

1-10 No flaws or perks; 11-14 Roll on Flaws list; 15-18 Roll on Perks list; 19-20 Roll **once** on Flaws and **once** on Perks

## List of Flaws

- 1. Albino:** Character has white skin and hair, red eyes and is sensitive to bright light. In dim light they will see normally, but in bright light, albinos will suffer a -2 to their attacks, a -4 to ranged attacks and a -2 to all other actions requiring hand/eye coordination. In bright sun, unless protective clothes, hats, sunscreen, etc., are worn, the albino will suffer 1 point damage from extreme sunburn per hour.
- 2. Asshole:** Has a -2 CHA. In social situations must make a Wisdom check or is likely to do or say something really inappropriate.
- 3. Astigmatism:** Blurry vision. Character is unable to discern details at any distance and cannot read small print. If

character is a thief, all close-up work (like finding and removing traps) is at -2. In addition, ranged attacks are at -2.

- 4. Bad sense of smell:** This might seem like an advantage when tromping through musty dungeons filled with rotting corpses, but the player with a bad sense of smell might fail to notice that the food he is eating is spoiled, poisoned gas is seeping into the room, a stinky goblin is sneaking up from behind, etc.
- 5. Body Odor:** Really stinky. Gives effective -2 CHA. Frequent bathing can mitigate this (at DM's discretion).
- 6. Bonehead:** Some people are just stubborn boneheads. In negotiations must make a Wisdom check in order to negotiate successfully. Example: Innkeeper tells a bonehead that beds are 6 silver a night. The bonehead must roll a successful Wisdom check or will insist on paying only 3 silver a night despite the fact that this might force him to end up sleeping out in the stables when the disgusted innkeeper refuses to rent the bonehead a bed at any price. Being a bonehead is sometimes advantageous: you get a +2 save against charm spells.
- 7. Brooke Effect (anti-animal magnetism):** Animals just seem to dislike some people. Whenever interacting with animals and a reaction roll is required, roll twice and apply the worst result.

**8. Color Blind:** Imagine not being able to tell the difference between the red potion (healing) and the blue one (poison)?

**9. Gambler:** Whenever a game of chance is taking place in the vicinity of the player character, he must make a wisdom check or start gambling. Every 1-6 wagers he can attempt a second wisdom check to stop gambling, but the gambler flaw will force him to just keep gambling until a successful Wisdom check is made. If no cash is available, the gambler will attempt to borrow, pawn or wager random valuables, etc.



**10. Gimpy:** “Gimpy” flaw means the character has a limp or other problem that slows his movement rate to the next lower category. In situations where the non-gimpy PC will have a movement of 12, the gimpy will have a movement of 9, etc.

**11. Hard of Hearing:** Double chances of being surprised. All verbal communication must take place at 150% normal volume. Most sound cues (like warning shouts, the low growl of a hunting owlbear, the ‘click’ of an arrow trap) other than the loudest will not be heard 50%.

**12. Hyperopia:** ‘Farsighted.’ Distance vision is good, but close-up vision is impaired. If character is a thief, all close-up work (like finding and removing traps) is at -2 (-10%). In addition, non-ranged attacks are at -2.

**13. Myopia:** ‘Nearsighted.’ Anything a short distance away will get blurry. -2 to ranged attacks and ranged attacks at distances of over 100 feet are impossible. The player character may not be able to tell the difference between friend or foe at a distance.

**14. One Eye:** Something ‘put your eye out.’ You will be blind on one side and have a -1 to ranged attacks due to poor depth perception.

**15. Poverty:** This flaw is taken at character creation. The character has 30-180 gps in debts; subtract this immediately from starting wealth. If this means that the character ends up with negative starting wealth, then he has a debt that must be paid ASAP. Interest will be compounded

weekly at 30%. If debt is not paid within one month, Guido will send someone to break your kneecap (see GIMPY flaw!).

**16. Something’s Missing:** Random body part got chopped off/ crushed at some time in the past (or was never there to begin with): Roll 1d10: 1) 1-5 fingers from 1 hand, 2) hand, 3) 1-5 toes from 1 foot, 4) foot (see ‘Gimpy’ flaw; will need cane or crutch to get around), 5) ear (-1 listen checks), 6) nose (see ‘ugly’ flaw plus see ‘Bad Sense of Smell’), 7) genitals, 8) arm (can only use one arm), 9) leg (see ‘Gimpy’ flaw; will need cane or crutch to get around), 10) Bald.

**17. Stutter/Lisp:** In high pressure situations, the character must make a Wisdom Check to speak intelligibly. If a spell caster, the character must make a wisdom check to cast a spell successfully (unless it is a low pressure situation where he can take his time). If the spell caster fails by 4 or less, he retains the spell but is unable to cast it. Otherwise the spell is wasted.

**18. Ugly:** Some people are just ugly. -2 to reaction rolls when dealing with polite company (at DM’s discretion, an ugly PC may actually have an advantage when dealing with orcs, goblins, etc.).

**19. Unlucky Bastard:** Some people are just unlucky. In games of chance, drawing lots for watch, events in which results are determined 100% randomly, etc., the player rolls twice and takes the least good result.

**20. Double Whammy!** Roll **twice** on the table and apply both!

### List of Perks

**1. Animal Magnetism:** Some people just seem to have a talent for dealing with animals. Whenever a dice is rolled to see how an animal reacts to the character, roll twice and pick the more favorable.

**2. Bad to the Bone:** Once per day the player can add +1d6 to the damage he or she inflicts with any melee weapon.

**3. Bargain Hunter:** Some folks just have a nose for good bargains. Up to once per day the character can get a



10% discount on a single purchase from an NPC. The bargain hunter also gets +10% more starting funds.

4. **Dead-Eye (A.K.A "The Davey Crockett.")**: Choose one type of missile weapon. Player gets a +2 to hit with that weapon due to an unusual skill with it.
5. **Fast on your Feet**: +1 to initiative dice.
6. **Favor of the Gods**: Once per day gets to re-roll one dice of his choice. Non-transferable.
7. **Good Lookin'**: This is the opposite of 'ugly.' The character is unusually physically attractive for one of his species. +2 to reaction rolls when dealing with polite company (at DM's discretion, an good lookin' PC may actually be at a disadvantage when dealing with creatures that have different standards of beauty like orcs, goblins, etc.).
8. **Hometown Hero**: Player starts with +4 to his/her fame.
9. **Ice-cubes to Eskimos**: Player gets +10% when selling any item to an NPC. This power can be used once per day.
10. **Intuition**: When rolling for surprise, the player rolls twice and keeps the best result.
11. **Lucky Devil**: Opposite of the 'Unlucky Bastard.' In games of chance, drawing lots for watch, the lotto and other events in which results are determined 100% randomly, the player rolls twice and takes the best result.
12. **Magical Aptitude**: If player is a spell caster, victims of his spells get a -2 saving throw (does not include spell effects from wands, scrolls, etc). Non spell casters with this perk get a +2 to saves versus enemy spells (does not include scrolls, wands, gorgon's breath, etc).
13. **Sharp Memory**: Once per session the player can ask the DM to repeat information revealed previously (like the name of an NPC, location, etc.,) which the players may have forgotten.
14. **Silver Spoon**: This perk is taken at character creation. Roll 3d6 and multiply the result by 10. That amount, in gold pieces, is added to your starting funds.
15. **Silver Tongue**: The gift of gab! +2 on all negotiations that involving speaking.
16. **Sly one**: Once per day, when attempting an explanation or delivering an excuse to an NPC, the player may take a +4 on his or her reaction roll.
17. **Sweetheart**: +2 reaction roll from NPCs of the opposite sex or NPCs with same sex attraction.
18. **Talented**: Determine 1 attribute randomly (STR, INT, WIS, etc.). That attribute gets a permanent +1 at character creation (18 maximum).
19. **Well Trained**: Subtract 2 from one attribute of your choice (STR, INT, WIS, etc.,) and add it to another of your choice (18 maximum).
20. **Double Whammy!** Roll **twice** on the table and apply both!

*OGC disclosure: This article contains no Open Game Content other than terminology derived from game rules.  
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## Prate by Razberry Ranid



# FIRE AND OTHER ELDRITCH ENERGIES:

**Quasi-Natural Forces Originating in Fake Pseudo-Medieval Perspectives,  
and New Ways to Blast Player-Characters with the Aforementioned**

*By Matt Finch*

**O**n the cover of this issue, we have a balrog-looking beastie on the attack against a very competent looking group of adventurers. Flames, as one would expect from a balrog-type monster are all over the place. So even though the magazine doesn't do "theme" issues, it's worth taking a look at fire, one of the great banes – and tools – of the adventuring party. Fire is one of several types of what I think of as "energy" attacks; attacks that draw upon some sort of naturally-occurring, non-physical force. "Naturally occurring" doesn't mean that it's naturally occurring in terms of modern science, however, it means that seen from the pseudo-Medieval perspective of a fantasy world, the alchemists and sages of the fantasy world would see it as being a natural force as opposed to something that even to them is purely supernatural. As you read on, you'll see that I've even included necromantic force as a possibility, although that one's admittedly a bit of a stretch.

Let's take a survey of some of the characteristic nature of various energy sources, and then we'll get to some more interesting applications of them.

## Energy Types

### Fire

As our headliner, fire ought to come first, even though it's often the simplest of the various elements in terms of how it's handled in game terms. Fire does damage to hit points, and also has the potential, if it's a really hot fire, to damage items. A few classic delivery systems for fire are the fireball spell, red dragons, and balrog fire (that's a balor or a type VI demon, depending on exactly when you started playing). There's also burning oil, which is interpreted in different ways in the early editions, but sometimes has an interesting characteristic of continuing to cause damage in successive combat rounds.

### Lightning

Technically, of course, lightning is electricity. But that sounds so pedestrian in this modern age. Electricity is not one of

the four fundamental elements identified by alchemists back in the day (waaaaay back in the day), but with the benefit of hindsight we now know that lightning is not just an interesting form of sky fire. It has a different color, for one thing. You can make it go through a wire, and you can generate it in ways that have nothing to do with sparks or tinder. So it's a nice thing to treat electricity as a unique form of energy that the alchemists could have identified, even if they didn't. It's a fantasy game, so we'll refer to electricity in general as "lightning." The classic delivery systems for lightning are, of course, the lightning bolt, the blue dragon, and the electric eel.

### Cold

Classic delivery systems for "cold energy" are the cold of cold and the breath of a white dragon. Here, we're talking about pure temperature drop, not about a byproduct of coldness such as ice, snow, or frost.

### Acid

Not often thought of as an energy source; nonetheless, one can imagine an alchemist looking at acid and concluding that it does something unique that can't be explained and therefore must have a characteristic energy-type quality to it. The acid "line" that a black dragon spits is the only specifically described form of acid in the original D&D books, although we see it in AD&D with Melf's Acid Arrow. One tendency in Melf's Acid Arrow is particularly interesting – just as with burning oil, the acid from this spell continues to cause damage in successive combat rounds.

### Poison

Although it could be seen as a form of energy (particularly since all the other forms of energy are dragon breath types) I'm leaving poison out of this discussion, because it's the one type of dragon breath that doesn't really fit with the other categories (unless you are establishing the categories only in terms of dragon breath, which I'm not). Poison is such a varied concept in the game that it might as well have its

own article about the various different ways in which it can be used: ingested, contact, gas, etc. It also doesn't seem to fit with the various delivery systems that can be used with the other energies. There is a bit of discussion later on in the article about why poison can be seen as something different from energy.

## Other Energy Types

Now let's add a couple of other energy types that one wouldn't necessarily think of in this way. Necromantic power, molecular disruption, life force, force-fields, light, and wind are all "forces" that we in the modern world don't think of as energy but that can be seen as such through the lens of "medieval flavor" that rightly pervades the internal consistency and game interpretations of D&D. Designing good stuff for the game isn't a matter of being consistent with science; it's a matter of being consistent with the game's quasi-medieval view of science. If you can imagine an alchemist believing it, then use it as an explanation.

### Table of Energy Types

1. Fire
2. Lightning
3. Cold
4. Acid
5. Necromantic Nastiness
6. Molecular Disruption (primarily causing damage, but special effects might run toward disintegration, substance-transformations, oozification, liquefaction, petrification, partial teleportation, or mutations)
7. Bacterial or plant-type Infection (excessive life force running amok)
8. Pure Force (fields, whammo-impacts, and gravitation)
9. Flash-Bang (light and/or sound)
10. Whirlwind

## Mixing, Matching, and Distinguishing Energies

Now that we've taken a quick survey of the "science of energies" as it exists in D&D, we can begin playing with the various interesting things you can do with them. We're going to take a look at the types, characteristics, and delivery systems of energy attacks, lumping them all together. There's a huge risk here; inventing new ways to deliver and interpret

energy attacks runs the risk of making them all identical. If the full spectrum of cold-based attacks can do everything that fire can do, then your game loses lots of flavor because all of a sudden all these attacks become nothing more than ways to affect the numbers on a character sheet. If there are no "characteristic effects" of fire, then fire might as well be cold or lightning. Developing exciting new attacks and methods runs the risk of melding all these things together. There is just as strong an argument for not crossing the lines between these energy sources as there is for borrowing ideas from one to use with the other. Another risk here is that the reader may think I'm trying to create an all-inclusive taxonomy of game effects, essentially defining parts of the game. This is emphatically not the case: my objective here is to build a set of options that can be combined, not to define anything. I draw several examples from the game rules, but that's for the purpose of explaining what I mean rather than trying to nail down any sort of internal consistency within the game rules and work exclusively within those parameters.

## Types of Delivery Systems

### Beam

A beam has an energy-type effect, but it only affects one target. Sometimes a to-hit roll is involved, but sometimes it is like the other classic energy attacks, being adjudicated with a saving throw rather than with a to-hit roll. Sometimes there is both a to-hit roll and a saving throw. The disintegration ray of a beholder is a good example of a beam-type attack.

### Cloud

A cloud is attached to the source, but has a spherical shape. No to-hit roll is made; a saving throw is used to reduce the result, but there will be some result unless the character is magically protected specifically against this type of energy. Everyone in the cloud is affected.

### Cone

A cone shape originates from the source (does not appear at a distance) and may affect everyone in the cone no matter whether you're standing behind someone else or not. In this sense it is similar to a cloud. There is no to-hit roll: once again, it is the saving throw that is the important factor.

### Explosion

An explosion is like a cloud, but it originates at a distant point from the source. A fireball is the classic example of an explosion. As with a cloud, no to-hit roll is used; this is another typical example of the energy attack that causes



either more or less damage depending on the saving throw, but doesn't allow for "no damage" results unless the target is in some way magically protected.

## Gaze

Gaze attacks can usually affect multiple people at once, and offer the choice of fighting blind or risking a saving throw. These attacks never require a to-hit roll, since their defining characteristic is the player's choice of how to avoid meeting the gaze (or going ahead and risking it). Gaze attacks don't seem to be linked to any of the classic "energy-type" attacks, and I think I would stick with that. I include gaze attacks here for the sake of completeness and open options, but gaze attacks seem to me to be much more supernatural than scientific, and the energy attacks are all based on a kind of hinky quasi-science that would (or at least might) make sense to Medieval thinkers.

## Line

A line is basically a cone that doesn't widen out. As a tactical matter, it requires the monster to "set up the shot" more carefully than with the energy attacks that fill wide areas. A line does have one advantage for the attacker, which is that the target can't avoid it by standing behind another person. However, lines can sometimes rebound or be blocked in some way; the characteristic attribute of the lightning bolt spell is that glorious rebounding capability. The protection just doesn't extend to other targets, it's limited to walls and other such things.

## Radius

A radius effect is centered on the source, and surrounds it. An example of this is the immolating fire of the Balrog (or Balor, or Type VI demon).

So we can make a quick random table for the delivery systems of energy-type attacks, excluding the gaze attack because it falls too far outside the characteristic quasi-science of energies, and really looks more like what even an alchemist would label as "supernatural."

### Table of Delivery Systems

1. Beam
2. Cloud
3. Cone
4. Explosion
5. Line
6. Radius

## Effects

Now, what do they do? It's already pretty clear that in the vast majority of energy attacks, the saving throw is paramount. Some of these tend to have to-hit rolls involved, but all of them (with one exception – the Balrog's fire) involve saving throws. Another common feature is that they inflict damage to hit points rather than causing some other sort of "special effect" like paralysis, fear, instant death, blindness, or other such result that falls outside the standard hit point method. It's significant that the major types of energy attacks came from methods that scaled up based on the power of the source: the fireball/lighting/cold spells needed to inflict extra dice of damage based on the caster's level, and dragon breath needed to scale upward with the age of the dragon. Hence, the effect needed to be numerical.

That isn't actually entirely true, however: there is a second way of scaling up the power of an attack based on numbers, and that's to make the saving throw easier or more difficult with a bonus or penalty to the die roll. Interestingly, where this doesn't show up with energy-type attacks, it does show up with poisons. Perhaps this is because the effect of poison is usually save-or-die, so to vary the power of a poison you don't have the option of making it do more or less damage. However, not all poisons are save-or-die, either, not even in the earliest books, where there is a mention of how a saving throw might allow for a poison to do less damage. Nevertheless, in terms of having flavorful distinctions between different types of attacks (poison vs. energy vs. supernatural), we might conclude that poisons are adjudicated with a sliding scale of saving throw difficulty; that supernatural attacks tend to be those where there is a special effect; and that energy attacks are characterized by causing hit point damage on a sliding scale based on the power of the energy source, and conversely do not have bonuses or penalties on the actual saving throws.

So this is where the Game Master runs into an interesting division of possibilities, depending on whether it seems more important to maintain the individual "feel" of these different sorts of attacks, or whether it is more important to create new and varied profiles of energy attacks that might blur the unique natures of poison, supernatural attacks, and energy attacks. There are arguments either way, and ultimately it resides with the Game Master whether to go for "types," or whether to go for variety (which could blend away the flavor of poison threats, as opposed to supernatural attacks, as opposed to energy attacks).

Since this is essentially a judgment call, let's be practical about it for a moment. First, there's no reason to view the

characteristics of these things as being set in stone by the rules unless there is a reason for doing it. Rules are made to be broken – the question is whether it raises or lowers the quality of the game. A particular “feel” to a type of attack raises the quality of the game because players get a sense of internal consistency to this imaginary world. On the other hand, variety is also a way to raise the quality of the game because it offers interesting new threats or tactics. We’re proceeding here from the assumption that you as the Game Master are interested in bringing some degree of variety to energy-type attacks. Perhaps not by blurring all the distinctions, but at least by introducing more variety.

### **Table of Special Effects (with or without hit-point damage as well)**

1. Damage in successive rounds (decreasing)
2. Damage in successive rounds (increasing)
3. Damage to items, or to a specific type of material
4. Damage (permanent or temporary) to an attribute rather than to hit points
5. Possibility of (1) death, (2) reduction in speed, (3) unconsciousness, (4) paralysis, (5) dancing around in pain, or (6) blindness
6. Dropping held items
7. Inevitable death after failed saving throw in a random number of rounds, unless properly rescued (dousing a fire, for example)
8. General saving throw penalties for some period of time
9. Penalties on combat rolls (to-hit and/or damage)
10. None

### **Table of Determining Effects**

1. Special Effect is based on amount of damage taken (a threshold such as “10 points”)
2. Special Effect is based on proximity to source (“if within 10ft of the blast,” for example, even if the blast itself has a larger radius than 10ft)
3. Special Effect is based on the target’s hit dice (e.g., (1) “automatically affects all creatures of 3HD or lower,” or (2) “your hit dice are a bonus on the saving throw against the special effect,” or (3) “does not affect creatures with more than 4HD,” or (4) “a percentage equal

to the target’s hit dice”). You could roll a d4 to see how the hit dice come into play, and then adjust the numbers to fit the “power” of the source.

4. Special Effect is automatic with no saving throw (alternatively, if there is a saving throw against an attack that does normal damage as well as a special effect, failing that saving throw might be required for the special effect to take effect automatically)
5. Special Effect is based on whether the target is wearing armor (armor might offer protection, or it might – in the case of heat, for example – be what causes the extra problem)
6. Special Effect has a flat chance to occur (“1 in 6” or “50% chance”)

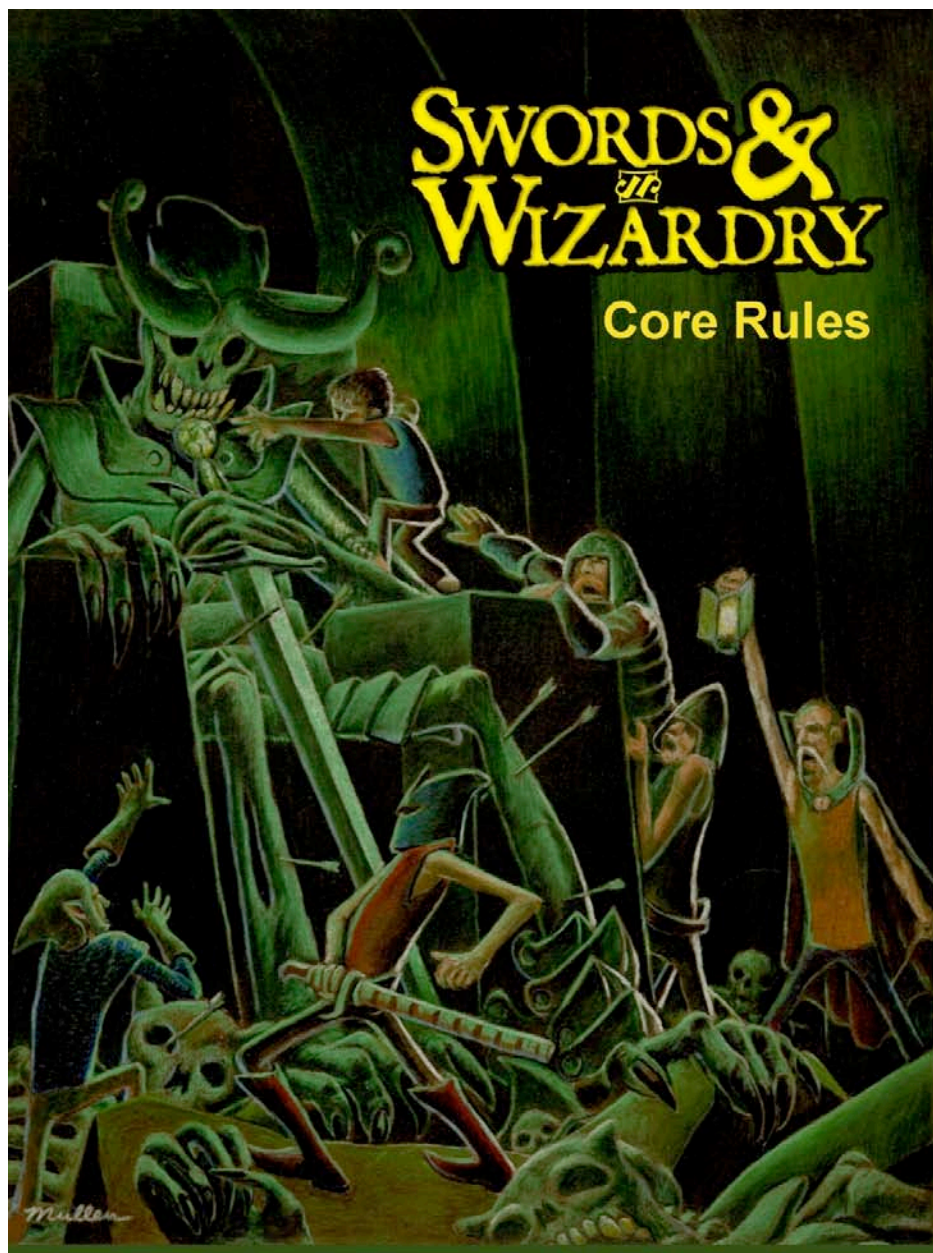
## **Putting the Tables Together**

So, there are four random tables in this article which, taken together, can give you the general profile of an interesting energy attack. You’ll still need to fill in the numbers and probabilities to match the power of whatever source you’re using for the energy – a special fire trap or a monster on the first level of the dungeon isn’t likely to be as strong as one on the tenth level. But the random tables can give you a nice picture of how it operates.

For example, you might roll a 5 on the Energy Types table, getting “Necromantic Nastiness,” a 3 for the Delivery System Table for “Cone,” a 4 on the Table of Special Effects for “Damage to an attribute,” and a 6 on the Determining Effects table for a “flat chance.”

Let’s play with that combination. The source needs to be associated with necromancy, so this is ideal for a necromancer’s spell, the effect of a necromancer’s trap, or an undead monster. Whichever it is, there is a cone-shaped blast (you determine the size and spread) that causes everyone in it to make a saving throw for half damage (and you have to determine how much; usually it is some number of d6). In addition to the damage (or perhaps instead of it), there is a flat chance that anyone in the Necromantic Cone of Nastiness will lose a certain number of points in one of the attributes (constitution, strength, whatever). It’s up to you to determine whether the flat chance is likely (90%) or minimal (10%).

And voila! You’ve generated a very quick and quite unusual energy attack!



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# THE BODY IN THE STREET

*Fiction by Al Krombach*

Musalla looked nervously out of the window of the little restaurant on Barrel Street. The restaurant had a name once, but the sign had long since fallen off the rusty iron chains hanging over the place's front door, and it was the only restaurant on Barrel Street, so people just called it, "the little restaurant on Barrel Street". The owner, whose name was nearly unpronounceable to anyone not of Nizeshi heritage, was notable both for his discretion, and his Loro stew, which was just spicy enough to mask the normally gamey flavor of the oily meat.

The small glass panes of the window had long since been broken out of the rambling pewter frame, and Musalla stared through it distractedly while the mercenary sitting at the table across from him noisily drained another mug of the restaurant's hoppy ale.

There was a body in the street.

It was dressed in the nice, but not too-nice, clothes of a member of the Free Castes, and lying face-down in the muddy ruts. Traffic seemed to move around it naturally, like the water in a stream flowing around a rock, the Thoar-hauled wagons and coolie-hauled carts swerving aside at the last moment in effortless ignorance.

"My money..." rumbled the man across from Musalla. Musalla tore his eyes away from the spectacle of the body to look nervously back at the mercenary. Molok, sometimes called Molok the Bloody-handed (though never to his face), frowned back at him and tapped his fingers along the side of his empty mug. A small object in a velvet bag sat on the table between them.

"Erm, yes," said the merchant, waving one hand at a serving girl for another mug, "As I was saying, my accountant should be here presently with the funds. If you're in a hurry, I could write you out a marker..."

"Gold," said the mercenary, curtly, frowning more deeply.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Musalla, "as I said, here presently."

Molok smiled with broken teeth at the serving girl as she plopped another mug onto the table, and reached out to pat her flank as she retreated with the empty.

"Um, yes" continued the merchant, "while we wait, I wonder if you wouldn't mind sharing the... particulars... of the acquisition with me. It is not uncommon for prospective buyers to inquire as to the, erm, provenance, of such artifacts..."

Molok took a long pull from the mug, then set it back down, fixing his icy stare on the fat merchant, one scarred eyebrow raised high.

"Of course," Musalla stammered, "if you'd rather not, there's no reason you..."

"No," interrupted the mercenary, "that's fine."

"As you wish", said Musalla.

"You are familiar with the symbol of the Serpus Eye?"

"Yes," said Musalla.

"A fortnight ago I met a man, a raving drunkard really, in the Inn of the Seven Sigils."

Musalla wondered briefly what the grizzled mercenary had been doing at an Inn typically frequented by practitioners of the Dark Arts.

"After taking enough whiskey to kill a small Thoar, the man actually became lucid for awhile. Long enough to share his story, at least."

"Go on..."

"He told me that before he had become the body slave of the Lotus Necromancer, he had been an acolyte of the cult of the Morbid Grin."

Musalla paled at the mention of two terrifying names in one sentence. Was the mercenary mad to speak such names aloud?

"As an acolyte, one of his duties was to assist with the excavation of proscribed holy sites suspected of harboring artifacts of use to the cult. To this end, he accompanied a group of cultists into the Toadrian Reserve."

"I thought the Reserve was off limits..."

"Coins crossed palms, merchant, something you are no doubt familiar with, though I confess I am beginning to wonder..."

"Erm, yes, go on, please."

The mercenary went on to recount the lunatic's tale, which apparently involved a lot of mindless digging, and the particulars of what shovels worked best with what sorts of earth, and which picks should cleave through which types of stone and gravel most smoothly, and so on. Musalla's eyes went back to the body in the street, just in time to see a dark shadow crawl liquidly across it as an airship passed overhead far above.

"Wait, what was that last part?" said the merchant, his eyes flashing back to the mercenary.

"I was saying, the man claimed that the still-intact seal of the vault bore the cerulean runes and arcane motif of the Serpus Eye."

"That's impossible," said Musalla, scoffing, "that would mean..."

"That the shrine was a relic of the Mindlords, yes," the mercenary finished for him.

"But the Mindlords never encroached upon the Westlands," said Musalla, his mouth dry and suddenly wanting a mug of his own. He waved at the serving girl again. His eyes flickered down at the velvet bag momentarily.

"The word 'never' smacks of scholarly arrogance, Musalla," said Molok, grinning nastily, "are you a scholar?"

"No, of course not," said the merchant, "merely a businessman..."

"So you say, though I have yet to see any metallic evidence of this..."

"Presently, mercenary, presently! Please, go on with your tale."

"The expedition's master was as dismissive of the seal's alacrity as you are, Musalla, and instructed the acolytes to break it open at once. That is the last thing the body-slave was able to remember clearly, though he seemed quite certain everyone involved killed *one another*, as opposed to some second party doing the butchering. He then wandered for some time, how long he doesn't fully recall, until he was picked up by slavers of the Pedant League and eventually sold to his current master."

"And what, good mercenary, does that have to do with," he reached out and tapped the bag, "this?"

"The mad slave was able to scrawl me a rough map of the Reserve, and the location of the shrine within it."

"Are you saying you went into the Reserve *yourself*, retracing this madman's footsteps, and thusly came into possession of this artifact?"

"That and others, as I have said."

"May I see it again?"

The mercenary shrugged, and Musalla picked up the bag, dumping its contents into one palm, while shielding it from the view of the restaurant's other patrons with the other. A faint green glow briefly lit the tabletop between them, revealing the old gray rings of long-since evaporated condensation. He then put the relic back into its bag and leaned back in his chair with a thoughtful expression.

Outside, a small group of children had grouped around the body. Four boys, two girls, all filthy. They poked at the corpse with sticks for a bit, and then ran off, laughing and shrieking.

"How exactly were you able to bypass the curse of the Serpus Eye?" asked the merchant, suddenly curious.

"I am no weak-minded slave-acolyte, Musalla." The mercenary chuckled. "And my porters were unarmed, and thus easily dispatched when they set upon me."

"So the seal is now broken?"

The mercenary shrugged, and smiled as the serving girl reappeared with two mugs. She deftly slipped away unmolested with the empty as Molok reached out to pat her flank again.

"You realize this puts me in difficult position" said Musala. A faint smile played on his thin lips and a ratlike gleam slowly appeared in his eyes.

"Not if your man arrives with the agreed upon price," said Molok, a note of warning in his deep voice.

"I have a different proposition."

Molok sighed.

"Hear me out, now, friend, as I believe you may be amenable. As a conscientious citizen, it would only be my proper duty to alert the authorities to your recent trespassing into a forbidden locale like the Toadrian Reserve."

Molok put down his mug, glaring at the merchant, who continued on uninterrupted.

"Not to mention failing to report a location that had possibly been tampered with by the infamous *Mindlords*... No, no, my friend, I think the circumstances of this," he patted the bag, "require *special* arrangements."

"And what would those be?" asked the mercenary.

The merchant leaned forward, his eyes sharp and black. "I will take this particular artifact as a... down payment of sorts. Free of charge, of course. You will bring to me the other artifacts in your possession, and we will negotiate the possibility of prices for them, as well as the possibility of future expeditions to the site in question. In return, I offer you my silence regarding your most unwise transgressions. What do you think?"

"I think I've learned a ubiquitous truth about greedy merchants," Molok opened his mouth full of broken teeth, but there was nothing that could be called a grin in it.

"And what is that, my friend?"

"You all think alike."



**F**eadriz the merchant rubbed the heel of one palm nervously as the mercenary sitting across from him drained yet another mug of ale. In the center of the table sat a small velvet bag containing something Feadriz wanted very badly, but his eyes seemed uncontrollably drawn to the street outside through the glassless window beside him.

Out there, in the muddy ruts, two bodies lay face down.

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# OUGH, MY BRAIN HURTS!

## Psionics for Swords & Wizardry

by Robert Lionheart

**A**re psionics an unholy heresy or a valuable aspect of Old School fantasy roleplaying? Do they add interesting options to our game or just munchkin bait? Do psychic energies have a place within the realms of sword & sorcery? Only you can answer these questions for your campaign.

I personally have great love for burnt out desert worlds where every brain is brimming with strange powers. For decades, my players have feared brain-chomping humanoid cephalopods plotting in the deep of the world, freaky invisible emaciated platypus flyers and ethereally pulsating rodents who nibble at stray thoughts, spreading confusion and insanity. These weird beings and their odd mind science help define campaigns where I want to explore worlds outside the traditional fantasy genre. Back in the halcyon days of dime novels, the lines blurred between fantasy and science fiction. Pulp authors like Burroughs, Howard and Lovecraft often blended psionics, sorcery and strange technology in their weird tales. Now you can too!

### Just More Magic?

At their best, psionic powers behave differently than spell casting. I have endeavored to create a psionic system that protects the niche of our beloved clerics and magic-users. Instead of retro-cloning other psionic systems, these house rules offer a new and different method. In fact, these house rules could be used in a campaign without any divine or arcane magic, leaving a world ruled by warriors and mind benders.

But beyond any system mechanics, your most crucial tool to differentiate psionics from magic is how you and your players choose to roleplay the sensory dynamics of mental emanations as opposed to arcane sorcery or divine glories. Roleplay is more than just choosing character actions. Fantastical immersion is greatly enhanced when everyone describes how their character's actions manifest in the game world. So what do we see, hear and feel with your brain blasts?

### Chance Or Choice?

A player chooses whether his character is an elf or a dwarf, but traditionally becoming psionic was a random chance boosted

by high scores in Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. Often this made psychic characters bizarrely unbalanced compared to the rest of the party. While acceptable in some groups, this discrepancy of power has become contentious among most gamers. If you want to add psionics to your setting, I suggest making them a choice that grants power for sacrifice. A player may choose to have his character gifted with psychic potential or not. Those with psychic potential are allowed to gain fabulous powers, but there is a price.

### Psychic Potential

A psychically active mind is a bright beacon. All psionics can instantly recognize the presence of another psionic when in physical contact. Maybe that is why they prefer to bow than shake hands? This brain wave beacon erupts in brilliance when the psychic activates one of his gifts. This effect is immediately visible or otherwise sensed by other psionic minds, but the referee may also decree there is an obvious show of power, perhaps glowing eyes, aura halo or even bolts of static lightning like a Tesla coil. If there are psionic characters in the campaign, there are probably monsters who feed on psychic energies. You can not hide from something that smells your brain!

The radiance of the mind beacon grows as the psychic gains additional powers. Thus they will be detected at greater and greater distances. This aura transcends time and space, bleeding into the ethereal so even extra-planar alien entities may become aware of the psion. Who knows what their intentions will be? The referee is also free to make the presence of multiple psychics increase their communal radiance, maybe even exponentially! So much for hiding from that psionic dragon...

There may be other downsides to psionic potential. The referee may declare that psionic characters cannot wear a helm when using their powers, or perhaps not any metallic armor. Perhaps they suffer strange phobias or mental aberrations which worsen as they become more powerful. Maybe all psychics may have a physical marking, tattoo or other body feature that automatically identifies them. This could lead to persecution, exile or slavery in some realms. Maybe all psions are bald, leading to suspicion of anyone without hair.



## ESP—Extra Sensory Perception

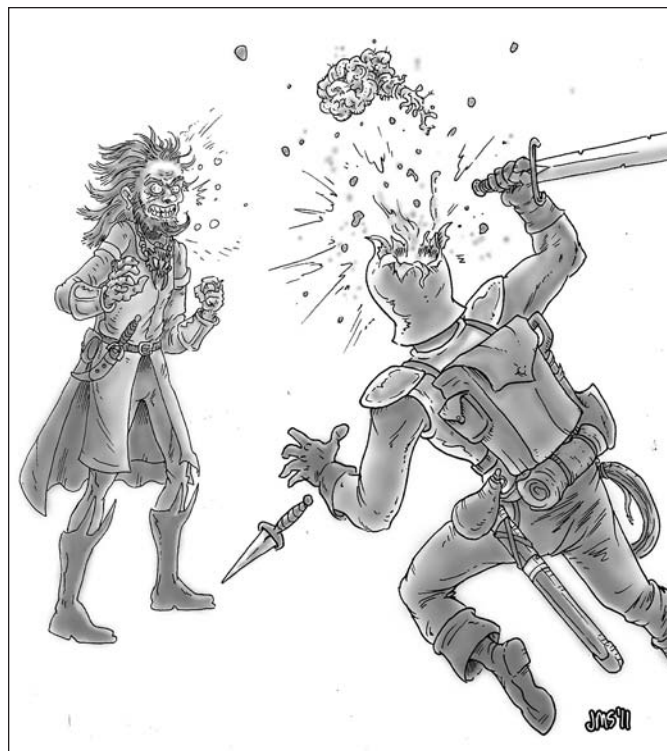
All psychics have ESP. This means they all sense things beyond our normal sight, sound, touch, taste or smell. This “extra sensor” may be their Third Eye or an overgrown pineal gland as H. P. Lovecraft described in *From Beyond*. However, humans experience the world through their basic five senses so feel free to mess with the perceptions of psionic characters. Thus when the psychic is searching for secret doors, tell him that he smells a difference in the stone or he can see the original builder chiseling the hidden passage. Maybe their senses get crisscrossed so they occasionally smell colors, feel sounds and hear tastes. These little details reinforce the “weirdness” of their sixth sense. The referee may choose to have ethereal undead notice living beings with psychic potential and thus ESP may allow psions to be aware of them as well. I see dead people!

## Gaining Psychic Disciplines

Once each level, the character may trade 500 XP x Current Level for one psychic discipline. Thus, at 4<sup>th</sup> level a new power would cost 2000 XP. This XP sacrifice can not take the character below the XP required for his current level. A character who devotes his training to his brain will gain great tools, but lag behind others in his class achievements. At the referee’s discretion, a second discipline may be purchased each level, but at twice the XP price. The referee may also require the character to undergo training from a psychic monastery or mentor before gaining new psionic powers. Perhaps 1000 gold per new disciplines and at least a week of intensive training? What if these covens implant subconscious suggestions into their apprentices during training?

Psionic powers are divided into four categories, disciplines divided among Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. In *Swords & Wizardry*, all ability scores result in a -1/+0/+1 modifier scheme. The referee may decree that in his world, only those characters with at least +0 (or even +1) in the relevant statistic can ever develop certain (or any) psychic gifts. The less stringent the requirements, the more common psionics will be in your campaign. Adjust accordingly based on your vision of your setting.

Each gift category has six powers, ranked from relative weakest to most powerful. I personally limit those with a -1 modifier to disciplines numbered 1 and 2. Those characters with +0 ability bonus could choose from disciplines 1 through 4. Only those with a +1 bonus have a chance to develop the most powerful gifts. Also, the referee may decree that characters must progress up the discipline chart, mastering the lesser powers before ever gaining the greatest of each category. Or powers can be gained randomly.



Remember that this article is a toolkit, not a defined system. Each referee must ponder the scope, frequency and power curve of psionics they feel is best for their particular campaign. I encourage you to twist, tweak, hack and redefine everything until it achieves the ultimate goal of adding more fun to your Old School gaming experience.

DISCIPLINES OF CONSTITUTION		DISCIPLINES OF INTELLIGENCE	
1	Endurance	1	Telepathy
2	Heighten Senses	2	Send Thoughts
3	Exoskeleton	3	Pyrokinesis
4	Reshape	4	Read Minds
5	Equilibrium	5	Telekinesis
6	Psychic Healing	6	Psionic Blast

DISCIPLINES OF WISDOM		DISCIPLINES OF CHARISMA	
1	Detect Psionics	1	Aura of Calm
2	Precognition	2	Empathy
3	Thought Shield	3	Ego Whip
4	Object Reading	4	Mind Thrust
5	Vision	5	Hallucination
6	Astral Walking	6	Hypnosis

## Using Psychic Disciplines

Whenever a character wants to call upon one of his psychic disciplines, he must make a successful saving throw based on the corresponding ability (Vision requires a WIS save).

If the saving throw succeeds, the brain power works. If the dice fail him, the discipline can not be accessed again that day. At the referee's discretion, a critical success may greatly amplify the psionic power while a fumble could result in some painful backlash, stunning or loss of control.

Whether the power works that first time with a failed saving throw depends on the referee and ultimately defines the usefulness of psionics at early levels. Probability states that characters with 15+ saving throw have a 30% chance to use their gift once per day and a 9% chance to use them twice. Meanwhile, a 5+ save results in a 80% chance for one use, 64% for two uses and 51% for three uses. Thus, high level characters will gain far more use out of their disciplines.

Some referees may prefer less randomness. The easiest method is to allow one automatic use of each discipline once per day. This ensures that low level characters will benefit from their spent XP and keeps the high level characters from flooding the game with their powers.

If you want psionics to involve resource allocation, assign Psi-Points to each character. These psi-points can be spent to activate their various psychic gifts or engage in psychic duels. Psi-Points regenerate each day after a lengthy rest, just like a magic-user regains his spell energy. The formula is  $\text{Psi-Points} = \text{Current Level} + \text{total number of known Psionic Disciplines} + \text{the combined modifiers from their Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma scores}$ . Psi-Points may automatically activate a discipline, or the referee can declare that a successful saving throw is still required. This both limits usage and keeps the uncertainty factor.

## Psychic Duels

Two (or more) psionics can choose to engage in a psychic duel. Instead of taking any actions, they focus their mind on destroying the other. Each psionic rolls his Charisma saving throw and if successful, he does damage to his target equal to the number of disciplines he possesses. If the referee chooses, this dueling occurs outside the normal time/space continuum and occurs every round in addition to any actions taken. This is my favorite method. I love the idea of bloody battles taking place simultaneously in the mental ethers and the physical realm. Also, the referee could decree that instead of delivering wounds, the psionic could use his damage points to negate some or all of the incoming damage. Thus if a psychic suffers 4 damage in a duel, but delivered 2 damage, he could instead choose to do no damage and only suffer 2 points. Of course, your head explodes if you lose a psychic duel.

## Meditation

Each day after a lengthy rest, a psionic must quietly meditate for the same amount of time the referee requires for clerics to pray and magic-users to study their spells. If not, the psionic will not be able to access his disciplines that day. The referee may decide that some disciplines do not function instantaneously, but require a turn (or more) of deep meditation. Alternately, the psion may gain a bonus to their saving throw if they spend time meditating before attempting to activate a particular power.

## Definition Of Psychic Disciplines

Like magic spells, the malleability and range of effect of all psychic disciplines depends on the interpretation of the referee. Most durations are either instantaneous or depend on concentration. If you desire concrete durations or exact areas of effect for certain disciplines, base the length on the corresponding ability score. Before granting a psychic gift, talk with your players about how you wish to define their usage and limits. Have great fun with them, but do not let them overpower your campaign. For ease of use, all the psionic disciplines are listed in alphabetical order with their related ability and rank in parentheses.

### Astral Walking (*Wis 6*)

Astral Walking allows a psionic to step between dimensions and reappear in another location. The psychic enters an extra-planar space for a maximum number of rounds equal to his WIS score. Nothing in the material world can affect him during this time because he does not exist there. However, he can not sense what may be occurring in the material world when out of space/time. Each round he can travel up to one mile in any chosen direction, reappearing at his chosen destination or a relatively safe place nearby. He does not sense enemies, but knows whether he would re-emerge into a brick wall or over a chasm and shifts accordingly.

### Aura Of Calm (*Cha 1*)

Aura of Calm can be used by the psion to defuse potent emotions such as fear and rage. It might not stop a rampaging giant, but this discipline will buy the psychic a short reprieve from hungry jackals or outraged merchants. If morale is breaking among henchmen or hirelings, the psionic can restore peace, order and obedience. While active, the psionic is also subject to his own aura and becomes immune to emotion-based attacks such as fear.

### **Detect Psionics** (Wis 1)

The psionic can sense the aura of psychic energies. The range and sensitivity depends on the power of the emanation. The ethereal residue of an Astral Walk or Psionic Blast may linger for hours, rippling hundreds of yards away from the originator. A psychic with a dozen disciplines will appear to be glowing and leave a “brainwave signature” that can be followed, recognized and maybe analyzed. This discipline is the most common ability of psychic monsters to identify their prey and gauge the power of foes. The Thought Shield discipline can protect against this detection ability.

### **Ego Whip** (Cha 3)

The psychic slashes his target with feelings of weakness, insecurity, fear and panic. The target must make a saving throw versus Death or suffer a loss of morale. Wounded creatures are particularly vulnerable to Ego Whip. The referee may also modify the saving throw based on the relative levels of the psionic and his target and the balance of power in the current situation. It is harder to make the dragon feel insecure when he is winning the battle, but easier when he is bleeding profusely.

### **Empathy** (Cha 2)

The psychic can broadcast his emotions and read the emotions of others. It is a powerful tool in social situations, often revealing hidden intentions. Empathy is not telepathy, but instead communicates strong basic feelings such as confusion, curiosity, fear, hatred, hunger, love and pain. Thus, empathy allows some level of understanding between man and beast, maybe even with plants. Perhaps this power grants a bonus to NPC reactions and increases morale among henchmen. Psychics with this gift are capable of tremendous bonds with their mounts and may even develop a reputation as a “Monster Whisperer.” How empathy works with the undead depends on your campaign. Do the dead suffer?

### **Endurance** (Con 1)

The psionic can override any fatigue or exhaustion affecting his body, including the debilitating effects of extreme hunger or thirst. This allows the psychic to run, swim and hold their breath at least twice as long as others with the same Constitution. Additionally, the psionic can block out extreme pain, negating the influence of shock so he can keep acting after normal men would fall into unconsciousness. The referee may grant the psychic a bonus against

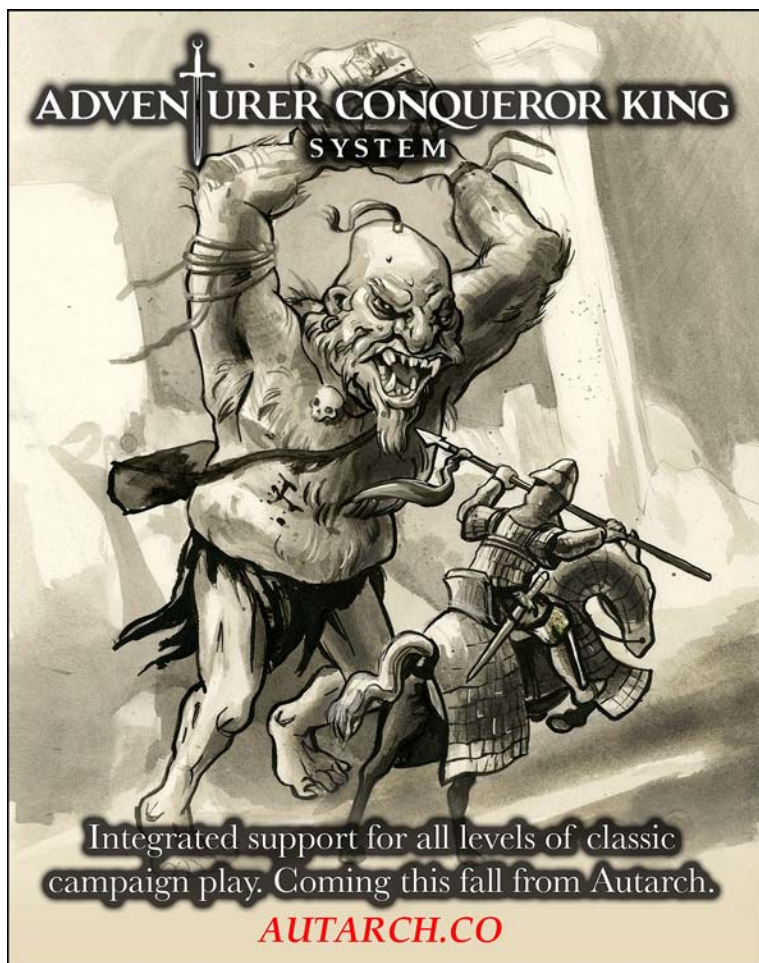
poisons, since this discipline represents mental control over organ functions and metabolism. Endurance may even allow a character to feign death or enter suspended animation.

### **Equilibrium** (Con 5)

The mentalist can cancel the effect of his weight on any surface. Thus, he can walk on water, dance on quicksand or float through the air like a leaf on the wind. The referee may allow the psionic to use this power to modify his body to walk through flame, swim through acid or breathe poison... or just get a bonus on their saving throws. Equilibrium does not grant controlled flight, but the psionic may glide effortlessly, going wherever the winds blow for as long as he maintains concentration.

### **Exoskeleton** (Con 3)

Exoskeleton grants the psychic the ability to dramatically reshape his bone structure into either weapons or armor. As weapon, the psion can reshape his hands into deadly blades of bone sharpened by his psychic aura. The psi-hand does 1D6 damage and may even be able to harm creatures who are only struck by magic weapons. The referee may allow the





psion to add his STR bonus as a damage bonus. As armor, Exoskeleton hardens the entire bone structure, including growing additional plating on the outside of the body which grants the equivalent of wearing chain mail. This transformation requires one turn of intense meditation. At the referee's discretion, psychic magic-users can not cast spells when using Exoskeleton as armor. Whether or not other armor can be worn over an Exoskeleton also depends on the referee.

### **Hallucination** (*Cha 6*)

The psychic can disrupt the sensory organs of a target, causing them to see, hear and even feel something that does not exist. Someone who believes they are on fire will smell the smoke, feel the burn and hear the crackling flames. Unlike a magical illusion, the effect is entirely real for the unfortunate target and continues until disbelieved. The target may receive a saving throw to shake off the mental phantoms, especially those causing physical damage. The overall believability of any hallucination depends on the context of the situation and environment. Saving throws should be modified accordingly.

### **Heighten Senses** (*Con 2*)

Heighten Senses allow the psychic to alter his sensory organs to achieve perceptions and acuity far beyond the human range. These may include night vision, parabolic hearing, ultra-sensitive touch and even heat sensing sight if it exists in your campaign. Each use of Heighten Senses alters one sense organ (eyes, nose, ears, tongue, fingertips). The exact bonus to perception and search rolls is up to the referee.

### **Hypnosis** (*Cha 5*)

Hypnosis plants a hidden thought into the target's head. The more believable the thought, the more likely the target will act on the suggestion. This discipline can be used to make a target forget something real or remember something that never happened. Unlike telepathy, the thought arrives without language as if just popped up naturally. Unlike hallucinations, the target is subject to an implanted concept instead of a sensory illusion. Hypnosis is not mind control, but it can be devastating when used with cunning. Read your Othello for more ideas.

### **Mind Thrust** (*Cha 4*)

Mind Thrust slams the demands of the psychic into the consciousness of the target, possibly supplanting their will-power and identity for a few moments. The target must make a CHA saving throw and if they fail, they will obey any one word command by the psychic. The mind control only lasts for one round. If the saving throw succeeds, the victim is shaken and suffers a penalty to all actions for the

round. Suicidal commands should grant the victim a notable bonus to their saving throw.

### **Object Reading** (*Wis 4*)

Object Reading allows the psionic to learn a key fact about a location, object or person by touching them. The psychic residue communicates the most recent powerful emotion and maybe a glimpse of a dramatic event. Multiple visions may be gained over time, perhaps reaching farther back into the target's past.

### **Precognition** (*Wis 2*)

The clairvoyant can glimpse one possible future. Not the definite future, but the probable outcome of the current course of action. The referee is free to tantalize the player with confusing tidbits ("you plunge your sword into the king's heart!"), but should endeavor to make precognition worthwhile, if only in hindsight. Precognition is perhaps the most challenging power for the referee to adjudicate on the fly. Unlike an augury, this discipline does not give a concrete answer to a character's question. Instead the psychic gains a foreshadowing and perhaps an emotive warning. In my campaign, precognition grants a +2 saving throw bonus versus traps and the psychic is only surprised on a 6.

### **Psionic Blast** (*Int 6*)

The psionic screams blood shattering ruin into his victim's brain and the target suffers 1D6 damage. On a roll of a 6, instead of any damage, the target is completely stunned for one round. The stunned target loses all his actions and ability to defend himself, essentially limited only to moaning and drooling. At the referee's discretion, Psionic Blast can be used to damage or even disintegrate non-living objects.

### **Psychic Healing** (*Con 6*)

Psychic Healing is not instantaneous like magic. The psionic must maintain physical contact with the target for one turn. At the end of the turn, the target regains 1D6 hit points. At the referee's discretion, the psychic may also use this ability to drain poisons out of wounds, fix broken bones, cure insanity and heal scars.

### **Pyrokinesis** (*Int 3*)

A pyrokinetic can cause a flammable object to burst into a roaring blaze, and may also control the burn of an existing fire. At the referee's discretion, the ability to control heat allows the psionic to dramatically lower the temperature of an object as well, freezing water and causing mist to coalesce into fog. How does pyrokinesis affect a fire elemental? Would it allow control, communication or even kinship?

### **Read Minds** (*Int 4*)

Read Minds allows the psionic to “hear” what a living being is currently thinking about. This is not a deep brain probe, but instead transfers flashes of whatever the target is focused upon. If they are deeply worried about something, that topic will be apparent. If the target is a bored guard doing his duty, the mind reader will mostly see meat pies and naked girls, but an assassin planning a murder might be imagining his victim’s face, home or the timing of the kill. Hungry animals think images of their prey while sleeping animals think about food and frolic and maybe dreaming plants tap into the universal mind of the world. If interrogated by a psychic, a knowledgeable victim might get an INT saving throw to reflect their attempt to avoid thinking about whatever their interrogator desires, or even trick them with false images and thoughts.

### **Reshape** (*Con 4*)

The psychic has such control over his body that he can reshape his flesh and bones, becoming somewhat shorter or taller, fatter or thinner and changing his face to resemble another. The psionic can even change race, gender, skin color and hair length. Such transformations take at least one turn (longer for more radical alterations) and last until relaxed back to their original form. Unlike the Polymorph spell, there is no magical aura and the alteration is neither instant nor unlimited in scope. In my campaign, Reshape limits the psychic to humanoid forms with a maximum 50% alteration in their overall height and weight. In play, this allows a human psionic to become a gnome or an ogre. However, if the referee allows the psychic to become a quadruped, avian or other non-humanoid, they must consider what new physical abilities that character would gain.

### **Send Thoughts** (*Int 2*)

The psionic can send a short message into the brain of another living being, even one who is not psychic. He does not need to see the person, just know they are within range. The message will be received in the language sent and “sound like” the psychic’s voice inside that person’s head. The range is not a physical distance, but an emotional one. Beloved friends can be contacted across continents, but strangers need to be within spitting distance. Woe to adventurers with psychic mothers!

### **Telekinesis** (*Int 5*)

Telekinesis (also called TK) is the ability to lift, and maybe manipulate, objects at range with your mind. TK requires significant concentration. The telekinetic “hand” of a

psionic character has a Strength and Dexterity equal to their Intelligence. The range is usually equal to their Intelligence score in yards.

### **Telepathy** (*Int 1*)

Telepathy allows psionic characters to communicate telepathically with each other, like a mental phone network. Telepathy is not mind reading, just brain-to-brain communication, but both minds must be psionic. Perhaps such discussion would be limited to line of sight or by the emotional distance as discussed in Send Thoughts. Maybe such communication would transcend language? In my campaign, you must think in goblin to mentally speak to them. It keeps language skills important.

If ghosts are psychic entities in your campaign, telepathy may be a very mixed blessing. Apparitions can be so needy! Of course, such communication could become ominous as uninvited voices chatter in your head, each whispering terrible things! Imagining hearing the screaming anguish of zombified brains being forced to suffer undeath as their broken bodies shamble toward you. No wonder gibbering insanity is so common among psychics!

### **Thought Shield** (*Wis 3*)

Thought Shield protects the psionic from detection and mind attacks by hiding his brain beacon behind potent mental barriers. Maintaining this fortress of impenetrable willpower requires concentration. A psionic can not use any other disciplines, nor cast spells while the Thought Shield is active. At the referee’s discretion, this gift may grant immunity versus fear, charm and mind affecting magic.

### **Vision** (*Wis 5*)

The gift of Vision is somewhat akin to the Crystal Ball spell. However, the psychic is limited to only viewing those locations previously visited and those individuals they have previously met. Instead of choosing between clairvoyance or clairsaudience, the psion gets a flood of sensory information, one tidbit for each of their six senses. Vision is potent, but does not spoil the surprise of discovering what’s behind that next dungeon door.

## **Psionic Artifacts**

If psionic powers exists in your campaign, what about psychically active items? Traditionally, crystals, geodes, rods, crowns, amulets and tarot cards have been associated with psychic powers. These items could either grant a bonus when using existing disciplines, retain Psi-Points like a battery or maybe grant the use of a new power. Such items would be

deeply imprinted by the creator, possibly even transferring memories and even personality traits to the new owner. Maybe there are foul herbs that can be brewed into potions to enhance psychic talents? Perhaps consuming the brain of a psionic grants the devourer a measure of their power?

## The Psychic: A New Class For S&W

A Psychic class might be an interesting option for your campaign. I envision Psychics as a yogi, martial artist or swami contortionist who achieves physical perfection alongside their supreme mental control. To reflect their mastery of mind over the aches of the body, I have them advance as Fighting Men but gain the base saving throws of a Cleric. This combination makes them very tough, quite lucky and honed for battle. However, if Fighting Men gain multiple attacks or other combat maneuvers in your campaign, the Psychic would not gain these. Just the hit points and “to-hit” bonus.

Which demi-humans could become a Psychic depends on your campaign world. Maybe Psychics are a race of their own, like mutated proto-humans or grey aliens? Maybe they are star-touched members of ancient cult now reborn?

Play with the possibilities of how they can enhance your game setting.


Psionic harmonics have traditionally be disrupted by thin lead, thick stone and wearing iron. As a balancing factor, Psychics are limited to leather armor and wooden shields. They avoid metal weapons, preferring clubs, staves and slings. Fortunately, gold and silver have no negative effects on their powers.

As for magic items, they can not benefit from any artifact only usable by a particular class, except psychic artifacts. I also grant the class a +2 bonus to all saving throws involving psionics.

As a class, the Psychic devotes all his training time to his mental powers and thus accumulates them much faster. Instead of trading XP, the Psychic automatically gains two new psionic disciplines at each level. Unlike other characters, access to powers in each category would not be limited by his ability scores. Since there are a total of 24 disciplines, the Psychic appears to max out at 12th level. However, at 13th level, he attains true rank of a Mind Master.

## Mind Master

Mind Masters, also called Psi-Lords, can activate two different psychic disciplines in one round. They could still fail using a gift, but never fumble again with their powers. Fumble rolls would count as normal failures. Mind Masters will often create monasteries where they gather students and earn tuition fees.

At 20th level or higher, a psionic can choose to ascend to a higher plane as an immortal creature of pure thought. Although not a demigod, the psionic transforms into a part of the conscious of the universe, whatever that might mean in your campaign. 

*OGC Disclosure: The rules described in this article are Open Game Content, and the remainder is Product Identity.*

*Section 15: OUCH, MY BRAIN HURTS!: Psionics for Swords & Wizardry, by Robert Lionheart, copyright 2011.*



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# CATACOMBS OF OPHIR

By John M. Stater

The wicked city of Ophir is known for many dark, dangerous things – the slavers that roam the Tepid Sea raiding coastal settlements, the pervasive cult of the demon prince Lotan, and its infamous assassins just to name three. The catacombs that run beneath the city streets might well be added to this list. Constructed over hundreds of years by a great variety of folk, the catacombs exist in several distinct segments, all of which ultimately connect to the Underworld and permit unsavory, foul things from the depths to enter the world of men. Not surprisingly, the catacombs are often one of the first stops in Ophir for curious adventurers.

A section of the city-state of Ophir is presented in detail in NOD 2, and the locations in that article are sometimes referenced with the designation [Bldg X], with X being the location number in that article. As with most dungeons, there is no natural or artificial light in these passages. Doors, once opened, automatically close on their own in 1d4 turns, with any locks and traps resetting at the same time. Entrances to chambers should be diced randomly on the table below.

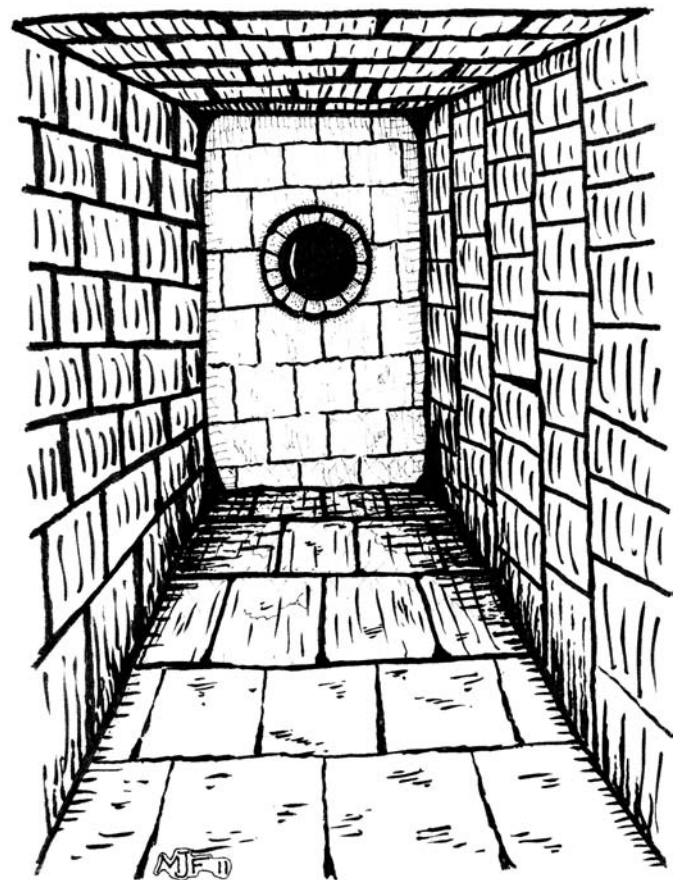
D4	Entrance
1	Iron portcullis, locked, 1 in 6 chance of trap
2	Bronze doors, locked, 2 in 6 chance of trap
3	Blocked with masonry – 3 feet thick
4	No obstacle to entrance, 3 in 6 chance of trap

D4	Trap
1	Pit fall (1d3 x 10 feet, 1 in 6 chance of spikes)
2	Arrow/spear trap, attacks as 5 HD monster, 2d6 damage (save for half damage)
3	Poison gas, save or die
4	Glyph of warding in the form of an explosion of fire, 30-ft radius, 3d6 damage (save for half)

Contents of chambers not numbered on the map can also be randomly determined.

D6	Contents
1	Empty
2	Empty
3	Bodies wrapped in linens and stacked on stone shelves, 1 in 6 chance of monster and treasure

(continued)



The Eye of Moloch

D6	Contents
4	Terracotta boxes (2-ft cubes) contain bones and ashes of deceased, 2 in 6 chance of monster and treasure
5	Marble sarcophagi (1d3) containing mummified remains, 3 in 6 chance of monster and treasure
6	Random monster and corresponding treasure

Roll monsters as Level 3 encounters with the appropriate treasure based on XP value of monster.

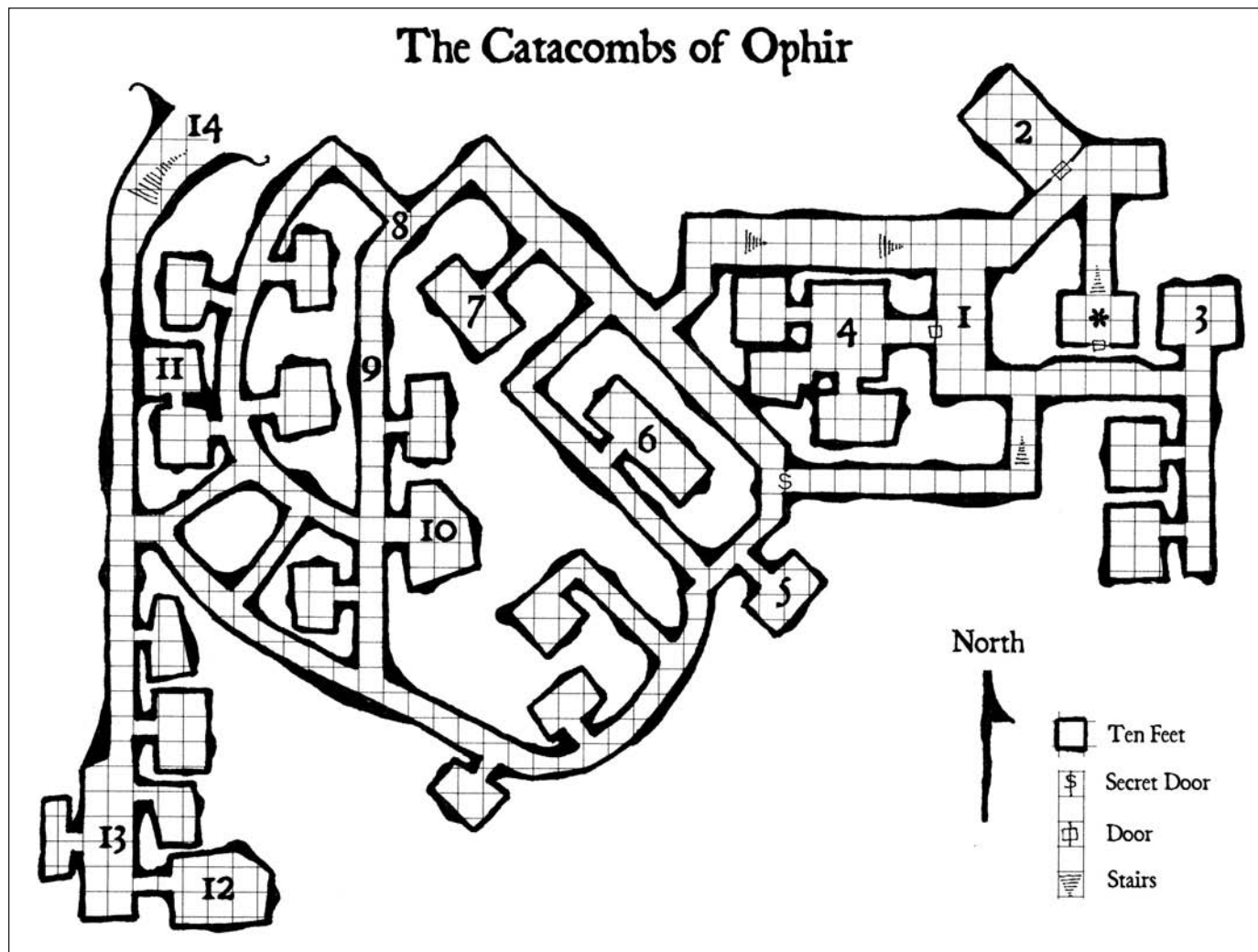
**1. The Eye of Moloch:** After one walks about five feet down this passage (from either end), they might notice a thin beam of light (essentially a laser) extending down the length of the passage. The beam is centered between the walls and the floor and ceiling. Anyone touching the beam suffers 1d6 points of damage minus their armor adjustment (not including their shield). Wooden and leather objects held in the beam for more than 30 seconds burst into flame, and metal held in the beam

for more than 1 minute melt (reducing the effectiveness of the armor by one point). Each round, the beam expands and becomes more deadly (see below).

Round	Size	Damage
2	1 inch	2d6
3	1 foot	3d6
4	3 feet	4d6
5	5 feet	5d6
6	10 feet	6d6

At full intensity, the beam lasts for 2 turns. The beam is apparently emitted from a black sphere embedded in the north wall of the passage. The masonry around the eye looks as though it were filled in at some point after the original construction, and it can be removed, though doing so deactivates it until a magic-user rediscovers the means of its operation.

**2. Baalthazar's Rest:** This is the tomb of the merchant-prince Baalthazar, a cunning old goat who once challenged the prince of Ophir for his throne. The tomb is accessed via a heavy iron door. Intricate patterns have been traced on the floor, walls and ceiling leading to the door in small glass tiles. A skilled magic-user might be able to identify that these patterns are a magical trap (make a saving throw to see if they notice the patterns, but only if they ask about them). Should one attempt to pick the lock on the door, they will be struck with the illusion that all of their equipment is turning into dust and blowing away. If this doesn't stop them from plundering the tomb, the floor of the tomb is scattered with tomb dust (crushed hematite). Those who enter the tomb cause the dust to enter the air, irritating one's eyes, skin and nose (-1 penalty to all d20 rolls for 1 hour). Unless they pass a saving throw, the dust is breathed into their lungs, causing 1 point of Constitution damage each week until the person either dies or has a *cure disease* spell cast upon them.



\* The star marks one entrance to the catacombs, an old stone shed located behind the home of the mason Ibhan [Bldg 25]. The bronze doors on this shed have been forced open so many times that Ibhan no longer attempts to repair or even lock them. What does he care if adventures crawl into the catacombs and never return?

Besides the deadly dust, the tomb contains a marble anthropoid sarcophagus resting against the far wall of the chamber. The sarcophagus holds the wrapped and waxed mummy of Baalthazar. The mummy is actually no more than the head atop a wooden body filled with 150 pounds of gold dust and three rubies worth 1,000 gp each. The rest of the room is bare, save for a locked wooden box containing a collection of sea charts and a treasure map that points to an island in the South Seas.

**3. Smuggler's Hole:** A band of smugglers has made this chamber a hiding place for their booty. A thick oak post is used to bar entrance from a trapdoor in the ceiling (leads into the building 27 in Ophir, the guardhouse), and three smugglers are always kept on guard here. A special knock on the trapdoor signals the smugglers to move the oak post. Chains on the wall indicate that the smuggled goods are sometimes human beings, and currently the smugglers have a young girl, maybe 12 or 13 years old, held in captivity. The smugglers have reversed the lock on the iron grate that bars entrance to the chamber, which was once a tomb for a minor official of Ophir. His bones have been wired together and set above the iron grate, falling down whenever someone moves the grate (by banging on it, attempting to pick the lock). The smugglers serve Karba, a captain of the guard in Ophir. The girl captive is named Nah, and though she is terribly bright and brave, she is also a carrier of typhus (i.e. Typhoid Mary).

**Smugglers:** HD 2; AC 7 [12]; Atk 1 weapon (1d8); Move 12; Save 16; CL/XP 2/30; **Special:** Surprise on roll of 1-3 on 1d6.

**4. Sodium Statuary:** The brick walls of this crypt are lined with wooden shelves holding a dozen small statues (2' tall) made of salt and were apparently carved from life. The back wall of the crypt is filled with a mosaic that depicts the planets scattered across the sky and a stargazer below. Each statue is animated, though they do not initiate hostilities with adventurers. Inside each statue there is a small brass chime shaped like a tube. Each tube is of a different size and plays a different tone. An observant person might notice that the aforementioned planets in the mosaic might be interpreted as musical notes. Playing these notes in order with the brass tubes causes a marble sarcophagus to materialize in the middle of the room. The sarcophagus contains the wrapped body of Ahula, court magician to the current prince of Ophir's father. A secret compartment beneath the body can be opened by pressing on the left eye on the bas-relief that graces the sarcophagus' lid. The compartment contains a vial of pig's blood stoppered with wax run through with silver dust

(worth 2 sp), a moss agate worth 2 gp, a moonstone worth 85 gp, a chipped olivine worth 4 gp, a coral brooch worth 175 gp, a soapstone figurine of Astarte worth 3 gp, a small box containing two pounds of calamus (worth 16 gp) and nine +1 *sling stones*. All of this treasure is wrapped in a wolf pelt worth 8 gp.

**Salt Statue:** HD 1+1; AC 6 [13]; Atk 1 touch (1d4); Move 6; Save 17; CL/XP 2/30; **Special:** Touch drains vital fluids (1d4 damage) and leaves patch of dead skin, immune to magic.

**5. Deadly Eyes:** The walls of this chamber appear to be made of crystal, with a swirling background of maroon and black. Floating behind the crystal walls there are a number of glowing eyes, each one brilliant green in color. The eyes are actually incorporeal and can pass through the crystal walls, which are two feet thick. The eyes can attack up to three creatures at a time, with each hit forcing one to pass a saving throw or lose one level. Every five hit points of damage dealt to the eyes causes one of them to fall to the ground as a spherical emerald worth 250 gp. Should one breach the crystal walls, everyone in the room must pass a saving throw (or open doors check) or be sucked through the hole into a swirling void inhabited by thousands of these eyes. Escape from this void is nearly impossible.

**Emerald Eyes:** HD 5 (25 hp); AC 3 [16]; Atk 3 touches (drain level); Move 9; Save 12; CL/XP 9/1100; **Special:** Drain level, +1 or better weapon to hit, magic resistance (25%).

**6. Bakery:** One can feel an intense heat emanating from these chambers. Each holds a single large brick oven in which several scabrous cadavers are preparing dungeon wafers – slim, grey cakes made from fungus, slimes, jellies and even less savory ingredients. The wafers are a common currency and ration for subterranean folk like kobolds, hobgoblins, orcs and goblins (ogres detest them). There are nine scabrous cadavers in all (three in each chamber), each of them black with soot and wearing a leather apron.

**Scabrous Cadaver:** HD 3; AC 5 [14]; Atk 1 slam (1d6+1); Move 9; Save 14; CL/XP 5/240; **Special:** Once damaged by a weapon (i.e. sword, dagger, axe) or spell, it cannot be damaged from a similar weapon or that particular spell again for 24 hours.

**7. Queen in Salt:** Against a back corner of this chamber there is a thick, irregular pillar of salt. The salt rises from floor to ceiling, and is approximately 4 feet in diameter. Encased in



this pillar of salt there is the body and spirit of an ancient and cruel queen that once ruled the tribesmen of the Wyvern Coast. Her presence can only be detected by the throbbing of her undead heart, a throbbing that fills the room and appears, at first, to come from a heart-shaped plaque set in the middle of the floor. Touching the plaque drains a person of their happiness and warmth, making them either melancholy or quick to anger. This warmth empowers the spirit of the ancient queen, Asherah, bringing her one step closer to erupting from the salt as a specter. In all, the queen must absorb the emotions of three more people to escape her imprisonment, and these emotions can only be won back by defeating the specter. The heart is made of gold, and is worth 100 gp if it can be removed from the floor.

**8. Tricrucian Shrine:** The ceiling at this intersection is carved with a frieze of a strange female figure. The figure has three arms and three legs and holds a three-pronged military fork. The figure represents Tricrucia, a very minor goddess of three-way intersections. A small hole in the floor is for one to burn expensive resins in sacrifice to the goddess. Failure to do so gives one a 2 in 6 chance of a random encounter at each three-way intersection they find.

**9. Riddle Passage:** This long hallway is riddled with traps. Above the entrance to the passage there is a frieze of a sphinx. The first twenty feet of the corridor is trapped with multiple scythes that strike anything more than 3 feet tall. Those walking down the passage suffer 4d6 points of damage (roll a saving throw for half damage). The second stage of the passage is trapped with poisonous gas that seeps silently from tiny holes in the wall and fills the lower 3 feet of the passage in a 10-foot radius. Folk who are still crawling after the first stage of the passage must pass a saving throw or die. The final stage of the passageway, which also stretches 20 feet, is trapped with iron spikes in the ceiling. When a single person has traveled 10 feet into the third stage the spikes, which are 3 feet long, erupt from the ceiling. Any folk more than 5 feet tall suffer 4d6 points of damage (roll saving throw for half damage).

**10. Chamber of Dooms:** Hanging from the ceiling of this chamber there is what appears to be a large, glossy black cocoon that throbs and drips an ichor that smells of rotten peaches on the floor. The puddle of ichor on the floor ripples with the throbbing of the cocoon, and as one gazes into it they believe they see flashes of people and places they know. In fact, the cocoon and the puddle are illusory diversions. As they occupy one's attention, the east and west walls of the crypt slide silently open to allow in four doom maidens, nubile automaton assassins with ebony skin, silver fingers

and eyes of jet. The fingers of the automatons are possessed of a chilling, supernatural cold, inflicting 1d6+1 points of damage with their touch and forcing one to pass a saving throw or have their strength reduced to 3 for 1d6 hours.

Hidden behind the walls is a treasure of 2,000 gp worth of silver ingots (i.e. 2,000 pounds, each ingot weighing 10 pounds).

**Doom Maiden:** HD 4; AC 2 [17]; Atk 1 touch (1d6 + strength damage); Move 12; Save 13; CL/XP 5/240; **Special:** Strength drain, immune to mind effects, poison and disease.

**11. Necromancer's Hidey Hole:** This crypt appears to have been turned over some time ago. Bones and broken funerary jars litter the room. The masonry in one corner of the room is loose, and can be lifted to reveal a small iron trapdoor. The trapdoor is locked and grants access to a small (7 ft x 8 ft x 5 ft) burrow used by the student necromancer Maalil to hide bits and pieces he has discovered in his explorations of the catacombs. One dusty, rose-colored jar contains a dozen dried tongues, a cedar box contains five thumb bones and at least one hundred canine teeth and, hidden in a small hole in the masonry of the wall there is a slim wand of ebony that contains five charges of *detect magic*.

**12. Vault of Starchild:** An entity known as the starchild has found his way into the catacombs and now plots to unleash his alien masters on Ophir. The starchild appears as a humanoid shaped hole in reality filled with alien stars and galaxies. Its presence causes people to slowly go mad, something that is currently happening to the priests of the Temple of Shedû [Building 56 in Ophir], which stands above this crypt. If an adventurer examines the ceiling, they will surely notice a filled in shaft that leads up to the temple. When these bricks are removed, they reveal metal rungs that lead up to the temple.

The starchild has guards treasure. Once the creature is killed, the rent in space-time that it represents begins closing. Should one reach into the rent before it closes (it takes 2 rounds) they suffer 2d6 points of freezing damage, but emerge with an *ioun stone* in their grasp.

**Starchild:** HD 7 (35 hp); AC 2 [17]; Atk 1 eye blast (1d6 + save vs. confusion) or 1 touch (2d6); Move 15; Save 9; CL/XP 13/2300; **Special:** +1 or better weapon to hit, magic resistance (15%), immune to cold, spells (darkness 15-ft radius, insanity 1/day, levitate, slow), touching the creature's form causes 2d6 points of freezing damage.


**Ioun Stone:** This dusty rose prism, when released, orbits around its owner's head. While so doing, it grants them a -1 [+1] bonus to their Armor Class.

**13. Ebon Deluge:** Every hour (assume a 1 in 6 chance when first entered that the time is nigh), this passage is struck with a deluge of inky, black water. The walls of the passage are black and porous. The water appears to come from the north in a crashing wave that carries with it 1d6 inky black sharks with scaled, reptilian hides. Those in the path of the water must pass a saving throw (or make an open doors check) to avoid being swept away by the waters, down the Sombre Stairs [14] and into a slow moving tributary of the River Styx. The trip into the lower river inflicts 4d6 points of damage (roll a saving throw for half damage). Those who are not swept away must still deal with the sharks. The passage is completely filled with the black water for one turn (10 minutes).

**Sharks of Lotan:** HD 3; AC 4 [15]; Atk 1 bite (1d6 + poison); Move 0 (S24); Save 14; CL/XP 5/240; **Special:** Magic resistance (20%), poison (save or additional 1d6 points of damage).

**14. Sombre Stairs:** This wide staircase leads deeper into the underworld, eventually depositing travelers at the shore of lake that feeds into a tributary of the River Styx, one of the three great rivers of the Underworld. The boatman can usually be found on the shore of this lake with his barge, using it to bring the denizens of the Underworld into the catacombs or the denizens of the mortal realms into the Underworld.

Alcoves are dug into the walls of the stairs every fifteen feet. In each alcove there is a black-enameled skeleton holding a bronze torch. These skeletons seem to be the source of a weird, whispered mumbling. Should one hold their ear up to a skeleton's mouth there is a 50% chance they will learn a useful piece of information about a random room in the catacombs, and a 50% chance that a barbed tongue will worm from the skeleton's mouth into the person's ear, causing 2d6 points of damage (roll a saving throw for half damage).

OGC Disclosure: The rules described in this article are Open Game Content, and the remainder is Product Identity. 

# A DUET OF BARPS

## Bards for Swords and Wizardry Complete

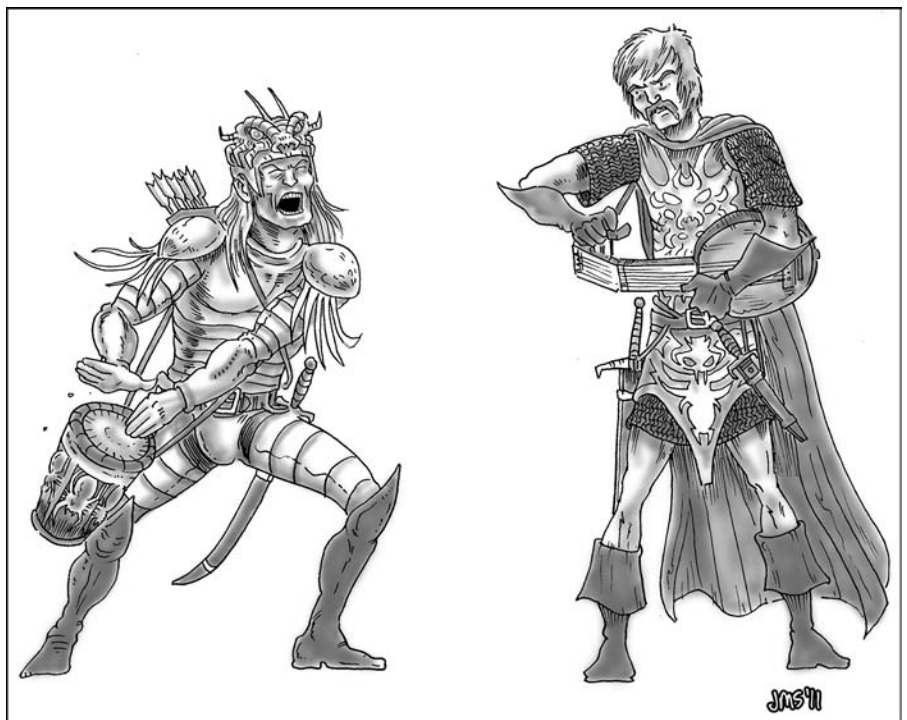
### Tavener's Bard

By Doyle Tavener

In *Swords and Wizardry Complete*, the Bard is a profession that combines elements of the thief, magic-user and fighter.

This is an adaption of the original Bard class, as it appeared in *The Best of the Dragon, Volume 1*, by Doug Schwegman.

In general, without copying any text or using any copyrighted terms, this is a straight adaption of the original Bard, which is probably the class that has most mutated over the long history of *Dungeon & Dragons*. In the eyes of many, the class is overpowered, combining too many abilities with far too much facility. This is extremely evident in the AD&D version of the class, which required attaining multiple levels in



both the Fighter and Thief classes before progress as a bard could begin. Bards were revised again for both 2nd and 3rd editions, mutating into a support specialist, which sought to combine many of the elements of the class in lower doses of power, which often led to the class being a poor second among power gamers.

In this adaption, I have sought only to change what was absolutely necessary not to upset any rules interpretations of S&W Complete. For example, in the original class, wearing chainmail only reduced the Climb Walls and Move Silently Thief skills to zero, but following S&W Complete notes about Multiclassing, I mandated all Thief Skills be reduced to zero while wearing chainmail. There is no mention about casting spells in armor in the original class description, but it seems clear (to me, anyway) that this should be *verboten*. In general, where I have added any material or made a substantial interpretation, I have italicized the text.

This still leaves many elements of the class that don't fit the standard. For example, the *Charm* ability, despite the way it is often treated in subsequent versions, isn't a *Charm Person* spell, but more like the spell *Fascination* from 1<sup>st</sup> edition AD&D. There is no save for the ability; that is subsumed in the adjustment of the *Charm* percentage for higher hit dice, type of being, etc. Likewise, a bard can potentially have more followers than the most charismatic of Paladins, and doesn't have to worry about tracking experience for them, etc. Though this is generally good advice for any rules element of the game, you should take a look at the Bard class and decide for yourself what is right for your campaign. If the followers ability is a bit much, remove it (I will, in my home campaign). If you prefer the *Charm Person* version of the Bard's *Charm*, use that instead (I won't, I like the wonkiness of the original). I like one of the Gyax additions to the class, that of poetic inspiration (+1 to hit and +10% to Morale while chanting), but it would interfere with one of the house rules I intend to use, so it goes 'buh-bye'.

The Bard uses his abilities of communication and persuasion to negotiate his way out of tight spots, but should this fail, he relies on the potent *Bard's Charm* ability to magically influence foes.

- Prime Attribute:** Charisma, 13+ (+5% experience bonus)
- Hit Dice:** 1d6/level (Gains 1 hp/level after 10th.)
- Armor/Shield Permitted:** Leather and chain only. No shield permitted.
- Weapons Permitted:** Any
- Race:** Any race may become a Bard.

## About Bards

**Alignment:** Bards may be any alignment, but most Bards are Neutral. A Bard who becomes Lawful loses all Thief abilities (see below).

**Race:** Half-elves and Humans may become Bards, and can achieve any level in the class. Dwarves, Elves and Halflings may all become bards, but are limited to 8th level of ability. Elves add 5% to their Charm and Lore class abilities. All non-human bards receive the normal bonus due to their race for thieving skills. *Bards, being jack-of-all-trades already, may not be multiclass characters.*

**Combat Abilities:** A Bard can utilize any sort of weapon and uses Table 29: Cleric, Druid, and Monk Attack Tables from the *Swords & Wizardry Complete* rules. Bards make saving throws as a Cleric.

**Magic Items:** Bards may use all items which can be used by Fighters and Thieves, as well as those which can be used by any classes. When using a magical musical instrument, such as Pipes of the Sewers or the Horn of Blasting, the GM may rule that the effects are increased in some way (x1.5 is a good rule of thumb, but the GM should always adjust this for circumstances and the power of the magic item involved).

**Bards and Druids:** Both classes belong to the same overall religious sect, and Bards are required to aid any Druid in need.

**Colleges:** once a Bard becomes second level, he or she is considered a member of the College of the 1st Degree. Afterwards, every three levels, the Bard leaves behind the previous college [leaves the previous college behind] and enters a new college, according to the following chart.

Level	College	Followers
1	None	None
2 - 4	1st Degree	2 x 1st lvl
5 - 7	2nd Degree	1 x 2nd lvl, 2 x 1st lvl
8 - 10	3rd Degree	2 x 1st lvl, 2 x 2nd lvl
11 - 13	4th Degree	1 x 3rd lvl, 2 x 2nd lvl, 3 x 1st lvl
14 - 16	5th Degree	2 x 3rd lvl, 3 x 2nd lvl, 3 x 1st lvl
17 - 19	6th Degree	3 x 4th lvl, 3 x 3rd lvl, 3 x 2nd lvl, 3 x 1st lvl
20+	7th Degree	4 x 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th

A bard may not associate with or aid a bard of a lesser college until reaching the 7th Degree, at which time the bard may freely aid bards of any college. Certain magic instruments may only be used by a Bard of a specific college or higher, with lesser Bards taking damage from attempting to use an inappropriate instrument. Finally, Bards acquire followers based on their college (see below).



**Followers:** Bards do not acquire followers according to the normal rules. Instead, the college that a Bard belongs to determines the amount and level of the Bard's followers involved. When a Bard attempt to recruit followers, roll on the following table for availability:

D100	Result
01 - 30	Bard
31 - 55	Druid
56 - 75	Fighter
76 - 90	Thief
91 - 00	Magic-User

*The Referee determines where and under what circumstances followers become available. Dead followers cannot be replaced. A Bard's followers do not acquire experience, but rise in level according to the college the bard belongs to. Followers do not have to be paid a regular salary or offered shares of treasure gained, but must be equipped and supported by the Bard.*

**Stronghold:** A Bard must be at least 12th level in order to construct a stronghold.

## Class Abilities

**Thief Abilities:** The bard, being a sort of petty thief, gains the skills associated with this profession at a level equal to half of his own, rounded down. A 1st level bard has the skills of a 1st level thief, and gains the abilities of a 2nd level thief once he reaches 4th level. The Bard does *not* gain Backstab Abilities. *In addition, Bards wearing chain mail cannot use thieving skills.*

**Bard's Charm:** This magical ability allows the Bard to fascinate nearby creatures and potentially implant a suggestion in their unknowing mind. The bard may use this ability a number of times equal to his level each day. The Charm percentage, listed on the Bard Advancement Table, is the percentage chance that the Bard can successfully influence all those within hearing. Bards with a high Charisma add 5% to this base for each point over 14.

This base chance is reduced by 5% for every level or hit die of the listener above fourth, and certain creatures, like Monks, undead, and demons, reduce the base chance by 10% per hit die or level, making such creatures extremely hard to affect. The Charm percentage may also be adjusted by such things as the hunger of the target, or whether or not it is angry, which can reduce the percentage by a small amount (start at a 5% reduction, and increase for stronger circumstances). Magical defenses such as Rings of Protection reduce the percentage by 5% per point of protection. Creatures that

do not hear, or that do not perceive sounds as music, may be completely immune to this ability.

If a bard wishes to use the Charm ability, the character must be able to sing and/or play an instrument. Such an attempt always negates any chance of surprise on the part of the bard's party. Every creature within hearing distance (about 60 feet, though circumstances such as intervening walls may reduce this range) may be affected, with the exception of the Bard's own party and allies. If the number rolled on percentile dice is equal to or below the Charm percentage of an audience member, the attempt succeeds.

Any creatures affected do nothing but stay still, listening to the Bard play. This continues as long as the Bard can play and/or sing. If the creature is disturbed in any way, such as by a loud noise, or being attacked, then the effect ends, and the creature may act as normal (and might be enraged at the Bard who so took advantage of it).

Any creatures affected by the Bard's Charm may also be susceptible to a suggestion. If the Bard wishes to, he or she may suggest a course of action which the deeper mind of the creature will attempt to carry out. This should be treated as the 3<sup>rd</sup> level Magic-User spell, Suggestion. Any creature that the bard chooses to target with a suggestion receives a saving throw, which, if successful, allows the creature to realize that the Bard has attempted to influence it, which may result in an attack on the Bard and his allies.

There are other uses to the Bard's Charm which the GM may allow, such as the negation of the harpies' song. Some creatures who love music, such as some Dragons are rumored to do, may consider a Bard to be a great treasure, and demand continuous playing unto exhaustion or even death...

**Bard's Lore:** Because their extensive training in song and poetry and experience in travels, each Bard possesses the Lore ability. This allows the Bard to a) identify magic items and b) recall rumors about specific locations and legendary figures.

Bards, with successful percentile roll which is less than their Lore percentage, can identify magic weapons of all sorts, including bonus to hit and to damage, if any, as well as any extraordinary abilities. Cursed weapons are easily identifiable as such to a Bard with a successful Lore percentile roll. Identification of magic weapons does not require the Bard to utilize the weapon, merely examine it closely.

Bard can also easily identify magic items which may be used by a Fighter or Thief, again with a successful Lore percentile roll. Items which have runes or magical writings may also be identified at the standard percentage score. Likewise, symbols or magic runes may be deciphered with a successful Lore roll. Items which the Bard cannot use, or

which are powerful artifacts or relics, divide the Lore percentage by 2 or more.

With a successful Lore roll, the Bard may recall rumors about a location on the GM’s campaign map (or player’s map, if two separate maps are kept). Information or rumors may also be recalled about historical or legendary figures. This is entirely at the discretion of the GM who decides if there are any rumors available, or even if the Bard knows about a particular location or person.

**Magic-User Spells:** A Bard, beginning at 2nd level, may acquire a spell book and begin to learn Magic-User spells, exactly as a Magic-User does. However, the Bard starts with no spells, and must acquire them from scrolls or captured spell books and the like.

The number of spells which may be cast per day is listed on the Bard Advancement Table. Bards may also read (and cast) Magic-User scrolls. *Bards may not cast spells if they wear armor.*

**Bard’s Tongue:** Being inveterate travelers, a bard may learn as many languages as his or her Intelligence score. *Learning a new spoken language takes 1d3 months when immersed among native speakers, and 1d6 months from a tutor. Learning dead languages takes 1d8 months from a tutor who knows the language, and 2d6 months from a book or other written examples.*

**Alternate rules:** If the Referee is using minimum required ability scores, it is suggested that to qualify for the Bard class, the character must have a Strength of 12, a Dexterity of 12, and a Charisma of 14.

Bard Advancement Table

Level	Experience Points Required for Level	Hit Dice (d6)*	Saving Throw	Number of MU Spells (by level)**							Charm	Lore
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1	0	1	15	0							10%	10%
2	2,000	2	14	1							20%	20%
3	4,000	3	13	1							30%	30%
4	9,000	4	12	2							40%	40%
5	16,000	5	11	3							50%	50%
6	25,000	6	10	3	1						60%	60%
7	50,000	7	9	4	1						70%	70%
8	100,000	8	8	4	2						80%	80%
9	150,000	9	7	4	2						90%	90%
10	200,000	10	6	4	2	1					100%	100%
11	250,000	10+1	5	4	2	1					110%	110%
12	300,000	10+2	4	4	2	2					120%	120%
13	400,000	10+3	4	4	3	2					130%	130%
14	500,000	10+4	4	4	3	2	1				140%	140%
15	600,000	10+5	4	4	3	3	1				150%	150%
16	700,000	10+6	4	4	3	3	2				160%	160%
17	800,000	10+7	4	4	3	3	2				170%	170%
18	900,000	10+8	4	4	3	3	2	1			180%	180%
19	1,000,000	10+9	4	4	4	3	2	1			190%	190%
20	1,100,000	10+10	4	4	4	3	3	2			200%	200%
21	1,200,000	10+11	4	4	4	4	3	2			210%	210%
22	1,300,000	10+12	4	4	4	4	3	3			220%	220%
23	1,400,000	10+13	4	4	4	4	4	3			230%	230%
24	1,500,000	10+14	4	4	4	4	4	4	1		240%	240%
25+	+100,000 per level	+1 per level	4	5	5	4	4	4	2	1	250%	250%

\* Hit points shown for levels after the character no longer gains full hit dice are the total combined number. An 12th level Bard has 10HD plus 2 hit points total, not 10HD plus one hit point gained at 11th level and another 2 hit points gained at 12th.

\*\* Bards continue to gain spells after 25th level according to the same pattern.

## Magical Instruments for Bards

There are a variety of magical harps and other instruments that may only be used by Bards. Most of these require that the Bard belong to a particular Bardic College, or a college of a higher Degree than the minimum. These items cannot be identified by use of the Bard's Lore ability, as they have powerful enchantments on them that can only be identified by using the item, or by a Wish spell. Each instrument adds to the Bard's Charm ability, as noted in the description, in addition, each allows certain spells to be cast through the playing of the instrument. The Referee should note that these spells are cast like other spells, only with the additional requirement that the Bard be actively playing the instrument. The spells are cast at the level of the Bard who cast them. Any spells with a duration require that the Bard play the instrument during the entire duration of the spell, and any disruption to playing (being successfully attacked, failing a saving throw) will end the spell prematurely. All of these instruments are usable by Bards only.

**Harp of the 1st Degree:** +10% to Bard's Charm, *Protection from Evil*, *Shield*, *Continual Light*. Each spell may be cast once per day, plus an additional casting for each Degree of College over the 1st that the bard possesses. A 1st level Bard who touches this harp will take 1d10 points of damage, with no save to avoid.

**Harp of the 2nd Degree:** +20% to Bard's Charm, *Invisibility*, *Strength*, and all spells of the Harp of the 1st Degree. Each spell may be cast once per day, plus an additional casting for each Degree of College over the 2nd that the bard possesses. A Bard of the 1st Degree or less who touches this harp will take 2d10 points of damage, with no save to avoid.

**Lyre of the 3rd Degree:** +30% to Bard's Charm, *Fly*, *Dispel Magic* and all spells of the Harp of the 2nd Degree. Each

spell may be cast once per day, plus an additional casting for each Degree of College over the 3rd that the bard possesses. A Bard of the 2nd Degree or less who touches this harp will take 6d6 points of damage, with no save to avoid.

**Lyre of the 4th Degree:** +40% to Bard's Charm, *Confusion*, *Fear* and all spells of the Harp of the 3rd Degree. Each spell may be cast once per day, plus an additional casting for each Degree of College over the 4th that the bard possesses. In addition, once a day the harp may play a song that heals all who listen of 2d6 points of damage. The Bard does not gain additional castings of this healing spell for higher Degrees of College. A Bard of the 3rd Degree or less who touches this harp will take 6d8 points of damage, with no save to avoid.

**Mandolin of the 5th Degree:** +50% to Bard's Charm, *Telekinesis*, *Conjuration of Elementals*, *Wall of Fire*, *Remove Curse*, and all spells of the Harp of the 4th Degree, except the 2d6 healing song. Each spell may be cast once per day, plus an additional casting for each Degree of College over the 5th that the bard possesses. In addition, once a day the harp may play a song that heals all who listen of 3d6 points of damage. The Bard does not gain additional castings of this healing spell for higher Degrees of College. A Bard of the 4th Degree or less who touches this harp will take 6d10 points of damage, with no save to avoid.

I hope you enjoy using and modding the class for your home campaign. Please drop by one of the boards and let me know how it worked out for you!

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## Tenkar's Bard

*By Erik "Tenkar" Stiene*

**B**ards are a sub-class of Thieves, but they share some abilities with the spell casting classes and have unique abilities that are very much their own. Bards are storytellers, singers and entertainers when they aren't adventuring. They belong to a very loose knit organization that provides training and song exchange between its members.

Bards sing their version of spells, and gain full access to the listed song / spell list upon gaining a level high enough to cast from that list. There may be other songs that are not

on the lists - these will rarely be found in dungeon hoards (DM Discretion). Bards with a Charisma of 15+ gain one extra 1st level song / spell. Bards that are magically silenced or gagged cannot cast / sing their songs / spells. When a Bard cast a Song / Spell while wielding a two-handed instrument (lute, lyre, etc) the Song / Spell is cast at 2 levels higher than the Bard's current level. No weapon can be wielded while playing a two-handed instrument.



**Prime Attribute:** Dexterity and Charisma both 13+ (+5% experience bonus)

**Hit Dice:** 1d6/level (Gains 1hp/level above 9th)

**Armor/Shield Permitted:** Leather, Ringmail, Chainmail, no shield

**Weapons:** Any non-two-handed weapons

**Race:** Human, Half-Elf (max 10), Elf (max 8)

**Fights as:** Thief

**Saves as:** Magic-User

**Experience Points Required for Level as:** Cleric

Abilities:

**Hear Noise:** As Thief same level

**Delicate Tasks:** As Thief same level – Pick Pockets / Slight of Hand only

**Decipher:** From NOD #1 – gained at 1st level – Bards can decipher and interpret legends and secret writings by making an saving throw. This includes unfamiliar languages, codes and incomplete messages. Decipher can not be used to cast spells of other classes.

**Inspiration:** From NOD #1 – gained at 1st level – By playing music, singing or reciting heroic verse, bards can inspire listeners to surpass their normal level of performance, granting allies a +1 bonus to all saving throws for a number of rounds equal to the bard’s level. A bard can do this a number of times per day equal to their level. The bonus imparted increases with the bard’s level, to +2 at sixth level and +3 at twelfth level.

**Legend Lore:** From NOD #1 – gained at 1st level – With a successful saving throw, a bard acquires or remembers some information pertaining to local notables, a legendary item, a noteworthy place or any other relevant bit of information. Acquiring the information may involve speaking to the locals or doing research in a library. This ability cannot reveal the exact powers of a magic item, but may give a hint to its history, general function or activation. The Referee may make the save harder based on the obscurity of the knowledge.

**Heroism:** From NOD #1 – gained at 3rd level, 1 creature +1 creature every other level after 3rd – bonus is +1 hit, +1 save, no bonus HP – 1 min/level – To inspire heroism, the bard must use song, poetry or some sort of oration.

**Fascinate:** From NOD #1 – gained at 4th level – At fourth level, a bard gains the ability to place a single creature into a trance with a performance. The bard can use this ability three times per day, and can maintain the effect for a number of rounds equal to the bard’s level.

When attempting to fascinate, the target makes a saving throw to resist. If the saving throw fails, the creature sits quietly and listens to the bard for the duration of the effect. While fascinated, the creature is considered prone and suffers a –4 penalty to saving throws and armor class. If the creature’s saving throw succeeds, the bard cannot attempt to fascinate that creature again for 24 hours. Any obvious threat to the fascinated creature, such as the casting of a spell, drawing a sword, or aiming of a weapon, automatically breaks the effect.

At fifth level, the bard may attempt to charm (as the spell charm person or monster) a fascinated creature. At eighth level, the bard may attempt to implant a suggestion (as the spell) in a fascinated creature. In each case, the creature receives an additional saving throw to resist the effect. To find the number of creatures the bard can fascinate at once, roll 1d6 per bard level (i.e. a level 4 bard can fascinate 4d6 creatures).

Songs/Spells

Bard Level	Spell Level			
	1	2	3	4
1	1			
2	2			
3	3			
4	3	1		
5	4	2		
6	4	3		
7	4	3	1	
8	4	3	2	
9	4	3	3	
10	4	4	3	1
11	5	4	3	2
12	5	4	4	3
13	5	5	4	4
14	5	5	5	4
15	5	5	5	5

And the proposed spell lists:

(M = M/U Spell, C=Cleric Spell, D=Druid Spell)

- 1st Level Spells/Songs
- 1 – Charm Person (M1)
  - 2 – Detect Magic (M1)
  - 3 – Hold Portal (M1)
  - 4 – Light (M1)
  - 5 – Read Language (M1)
  - 6 – Sleep (M1)

## 2nd Level Spells/Songs

- 1 - Cure Light Wounds (C1)
- 2 - Mirror Image (M2)
- 3 - Phantasmal Force (M2)
- 4 - Hold Person (C2)
- 5 - Detect Evil (C1)
- 6 - Pyrotechnics (M2)

## 3rd Level Spells/Songs

- 1 - Suggestion (M3)
- 2 - Protection From Normal Missiles (M3)
- 3 - Silence 15'R (C2)
- 4 - Protection Against Fire (C3)

5 - Slow (M3)

6 - Obscuring Mist (D2)

## 4th Level Spells/Songs

- 1 - Charm Monster (M4)
- 2 - Confusion (M4)
- 3 - Hold Monster (M5)
- 4 - Neutralize Poison (C4)
- 5 - Clairaudience (M3)

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# LOCKS AND TRAPS AS A "MINI-GAME"

by Jim Pacek

The method that I am sharing in this article is meant to be used for "special" locks or traps within a dungeon, adventure or campaign. The method is too cumbersome to be used every time a group of adventurers needs to open a lock or disable a trap. It does offer an opportunity for a thief, rogue or specialist to shine while other characters are fighting or dealing with other challenges. This method is truly "old school". It is a test of the *player* more than the *character*.

Before I go any further, I must acknowledge that I had the beginnings of this idea when I saw this post (<http://miguel-lito.blogspot.com/2011/04/masterthief.html>) by Michael Moscrip over at The Grumpy Old Troll. Thanks to Michael for giving me permission to reference it and to build it into the system you see here. There had been a lot of discussion on the blogs about lock picking and trap disarming around that time. I want to acknowledge all those great minds out on the blogosphere for starting this ball rolling:

- -C (<http://hackslashmaster.blogspot.com/2011/04/on-roll-all-dice-table-locks.html>)
- Rather Gamey (<http://rathergamey.blogspot.com/2011/04/you-can-pick-your-friends-and-you-can.html>)
- Roger the GS (<http://rolesrules.blogspot.com/2011/04/building-on-locks-and-traps.html>)

- Telecanter's Receding Rules (<http://recedingrules.blogspot.com/2011/04/procedural-lockpicking.html>)
- Zak Smith (<http://dndwithpornstars.blogspot.com/2011/04/making-picking-locks-fun-disarming.html>)

## An Overview

Each lock, puzzle, trick or trap is made up of DICE. You may choose the number and size of the dice if you like. In the game that serves as our inspiration, there are six different choices and four slots for each of those choices. I recommend starting with 4d6 as your lock. If you want to be gentle, start with 4d4 or perhaps 2d4 and 2d6. Tough locks would be 4d8 or even 4d10.

Here's an example lock (4d6):



Each of the dice represents one cylinder in the lock. The order of the numbers on the dice must be determined by the player to open the lock or disable the trap.

## Tracking Time

Each guess that the player makes takes one round of game time, so each row on the tracking sheet equals one round.

The higher the level the character, the longer she can work on a lock before it is “hopelessly jammed.” The last possible guess by character level is shown on the tracking sheet (you start at the top). A character may “unjam” a lock after they have gained a level or a rogue/thief of higher level than the character who jammed the lock may also unjam it. Then the process begins again...

## The Mechanic

Once the GM has decided on the structure of the lock, tell the player the quantity and type of dice that make up the lock. “It’s a 4d6 lock.” Roll the dice that comprise the lock and set those aside, hidden from the player’s view.

The character (not the player) now has a shot at making the life of the player a bit easier. Roll against the character’s rogue/thief/specialist/tinkerer skills (whatever seems appropriate) and if the character is successful, roll on the following chart. You might need to re-roll or restructure your lock and its combination as a result of this table. OPTIONAL: Add the character’s DEX or INT bonus to this roll:

Roll d10	Effect
1-4	Pick a cylinder at random. Eliminate one choice for that cylinder. “Cylinder two is not a 4.”
5-6	Tell the player if there are any “multiples” in the lock. A multiple is when a given number is repeated (e.g. 1 2 4 1). No further details need be given. Don't reveal the number that is a multiple or the number of times it is repeated.
7	Downgrade one cylinder at random by one die type (e.g. d6 becomes d4). Re-roll the die. The player does not know which cylinder has been changed.
8	Downgrade one cylinder one die type (e.g. d6 becomes d4). The player does know which cylinder has been changed. “Cylinder 3 is now a d4.” Re-roll the new die to set its number.
9	For one cylinder at random, tell the player when she is “close” (i.e. $\pm 1$ ) but not what the number is. The player does know the cylinder she is “close” on.
10	Eliminate one number from the combination for the player. “There are no 3’s in this lock.”
11+	Reveal the combination for a random cylinder. “Cylinder one is a 5.” Roll again on this chart. Re-roll if you get this result again.

## The Game

Using the “Masterthief” sheet, mark down the types of each die at the top in the square boxes.

In each set of circles, the player records their guesses for the number in that cylinder of the combination.

After each guess, the GM marks an “X” in the rectangle at the right once for each cylinder that has the correct number in it. If a correct number is guessed, but it is in the wrong cylinder, an “N” is marked. If the player has the benefit of knowing when a given cylinder is “close,” mark that with a “C” in the rectangle.

The player uses logic to determine the combination before she runs out of guesses, based upon the level of her character. If the player runs out of guesses, the lock is “hopelessly jammed” and she will need to gain a level or obtain the services of a higher level rogue/thief/tinker to “unjam” it.

Image source -- [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hausbuch\\_Wolfegg\\_50r\\_Brechwerkzeuge\\_Schliesswerkzeuge.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hausbuch_Wolfegg_50r_Brechwerkzeuge_Schliesswerkzeuge.jpg)

Jim Pacek is an avid gamemaster and blogger. He’s currently running a heavily houseruled Labyrinth Lord campaign. His blog, <http://carjackedseraphim.blogspot.com>, contains some of his crazier ideas as well as recollections about his gaming past. His book, *The Wilderness Alphabet*, was his first foray into the OSR. He and some collaborators are now working on a giant monster book, *The Massive Monograph of Malignant Malefactors*. It will be released into the wild for free via the web very soon.

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# CITY SOURCE: BYZANTIUM

## Idea-Sources for a Fantasy City

by Matt Finch

### Fantasy Cities

There is a long history of gaming in fantasy cities, from the city of Blackmoor to the City-State of the Invincible Overlord, and perhaps in the City of Greyhawk itself. Cities are also a staple feature of swords & sorcery fiction, with R.E. Howard's *The Tower of the Elephant* taking place in Arenjun, the city of thieves, and numerous stories of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser taking place in the City of Lankhmar in Fritz Leiber's *World of Nehwon*. Lankhmar appears to be based mainly on the city of Alexandria, given the mention of swamps and grain fields nearby, although I've also seen various writers claim origins in New York (because of the rats), Los Angeles (because of the smog) and Seville (because of the thieves guild portrayed there in the Cervantes story *Riconete y Cortadillo*).

Regardless of the precise real-world origins of the city of Lankhmar, historical cities are obviously a fertile source of ideas for the construction of fantasy ones. Truth, after all, is often stranger than fiction. And as a source of ideas for sword & sorcery city-designing, Byzantium (later Constantinople and now Istanbul) is one of the best possible cities to investigate, with a history spanning back to 658 BCE and a central role in both trade and politics for over a thousand years (although with many waxings and wanings of its power during that time).

### Early History (Colonization and War)

Byzantium was a colony-city founded by the Ancient Greeks of the city state of Megara in 658 BCE in an expedition led by one Byzas, who gave the city its original name. Just the fact that it was the colony of a city-state is a fascinating thought for fantasy gaming. The Ancient Greeks were seafarers, and during the period from 900 to 700 BCE, which was also the period during which the city-states were becoming the fundamental form of governments, a huge number of these colonies were established. To the west, colonies were established as far as Spain, and to the east as far as Asia Minor (Turkey). Syracuse, in Sicily, was a colony city that became a major cultural center in the Ancient Greek world far before Byzantium's rise to prominence. The colony-cities were founded along two different models: as new, independent

city-states that would have political and religious ties to the founding city (an *apoikia*), or as mercantile outposts designed to extend the reach of the founding city's trade with foreign lands (an *emporion*).

Byzantium was destroyed by the forces of Darius I of Persia, rebuilt by the Spartans in 479 BCE, came under Athenian control during the expansion of the Athenian Empire, rebelled from Athens in 411 BCE with the help of the Megarans, and then fell again to Athens in 409 BCE. It offers a fascinating picture of a colony-city caught in the tides of external wars between empires.

The network of colony-cities that reached outward from the Greek mainland was to become a major factor in politics and wars on the mainland itself; the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta was sparked by a dispute between the city-state of Corinth and one of its colonies (the city of Corcyra, which had become a bitter opponent of its founding city). In a pattern somewhat similar to the domino-effect of the First World War's beginnings, the Corinth-Corcyra dispute spread to draw in the local superpowers of Athens and Sparta together with their allies and colonies. The city-state of Megara, founder of Byzantium, was one of the cities involved at the very beginning of the Peloponnesian war, backing the Corinthian appeal to Sparta for interference. Megara was at this time already being boycotted by Athens and its allies (collectively known as the Delian League), and Byzantium was at that time part of the Athenian empire. In 411 BCE, a force from Megara liberated Byzantium from Athenian rule by assisting a rebellion there, and there was a subsequent naval battle (eight ships against eight) as Athens moved to regain control of the Hellespont.

"... at the same time Byzantium was communicating with them about revolt from Athens. So this Peloponnesian squadron [i.e., part of the Spartan alliance] put out into the open sea (to avoid being seen on its voyage by the Athenians), but was caught in a storm. Clearchus and the majority of the ships made Delos, and then returned to Miletus (Clearchus himself subsequently took his way to the Hellespont

by land to assume his command): but the ten ships under the Megaran general Helixus weathered the storm and reached the Hellespont, then secured the revolt of Byzantium. Thereafter the Athenians at Samos, informed of these developments, sent a naval force to keep guard on the Hellespont, and there was a minor sea-battle off Byzantium, eight ships against eight.” (from *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides, Hammond/Rhodes translation)

Many Game Masters interested in running adventures that involve colonization seem to assume that only the much-later period of British Imperial colonialism exists for this sort of campaign, but the Ancient Greek colonization of the Mediterranean Sea provides a phenomenal basis for a more sword & sorcery version. The race to colonize the Mediterranean Sea and the subsequent colonial politics of the Ancient Greek city-states was much like the European race to colonize, only on a smaller scale and with more participants involved in the competition.



## Strategic Location

The location of these events in the Peloponnesian War are related to the strategic importance of the Sea of Marmara, which joins the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea, with very narrow passages in and out – the Hellespont is the western choke-point, and the Bosphorus is the eastern one. Byzantium is located on the Bosphorus, and thus effectively controls access between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. It was also, because of its location at such a narrow crossing-point between Europe and Turkey, virtually guaranteed to dominate the East-West land route as well. Finally, Byzantium was located on one of the perfect harbors of the Ancient world; the Golden Horn, which was narrow enough to be blocked off by chains to protect ships from attackers. Byzantium is located on a peninsula (the harbor of the Golden horn to the north, the Sea of Marmara to the south, the Bosphorus to the east, and Thracia to the west); the land access to Thracia was presumably blocked by a wall even during the period of the Peloponnesian War, but these fortifications were to become legendary in later centuries as they were built up. Thus, the city was (1) extremely defensible, (2) dominated both the land and sea trading routes between continents, and (3) had a superb harbor to protect merchant traffic from storms and pirates.

Although a fantasy roleplaying game certainly doesn't require that its imaginary cities have realistic factors involved in their geographic locations, these three features of Byzantium's geography explain why the real-world city rose to imperial prominence. If one wants to create a fantasy simulacrum of Byzantium, as Lankhmar is a fantasy simulacrum of Alexandria, the geography of Byzantium might help to establish the city's unique flavor, just as the nearby swamps and grain fields of Lankhmar add to that city's sense of verisimilitude.

## The Rise of Macedonia

The rise of Macedonia (north of Greece) into a world power began with Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Philip united Macedonia and conquered Thrace, which brought him into contact with Byzantium at the extreme eastern edge of Thracia. The city withstood a two-year siege, which Philip eventually abandoned in order to march northward against an incursion by the Scythians. Eventually the city came under the control of Alexander the Great, but regained its independent rule after the Alexandrian empire was carved up by Alexander's successors. In 279 BCE, the Celts (who had invaded and taken Thracia) were at the gates of Byzantium and although the city was not actually taken,

it began paying tribute to the Celts by levying a toll on ships passing through the Bosphorus – which in turn led to a war with the city of Rhodes.

## The Romans Arrive

During the early history of Roman expansion into the region, Byzantium was accorded status as a free city allied with Rome, due to its having supported Rome in the war against Antiochus of Syria between 191 and 188 BCE, and in the Mithridatic Wars between 88 and 65 BCE. In 194 CE, however, Byzantium's skill at handling Roman Imperial politics failed, when it sided with Pescennius Niger in a civil war against the Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus, and was defeated and razed by Severus's forces in the year 196. At this point, Byzantium seems to have fallen off the world stage until the Emperor Constantine rebuilt the city around 324-330 CE.

## Adventuring in Pre-Constantine Byzantium

This period of time from 658 BCE to 196 CE offers Byzantium as a relatively small but thriving walled trade-city at the intersection of three cultures: the barbarians in Thracia, the sea-trading empires of the Ancient Greek city-states, and the vast Persian Empire across the narrow Sea of Marmara. Although the city's core culture was clearly Greek, one can imagine the mix of barbarians, Greeks, Persians, and even Russian and other travelers from the interior of the Black Sea. Its nature as a crossroad of empires and cultures makes Byzantium an excellent theatre for adventuring. Moreover, the islands of the Mediterranean, the "Wine-Dark Sea," offer a huge variety of mythical and fantastic locations for different dungeons, fortifications, and other adventures. There are ships and caravans to be guarded, city politics that might require adventurers (particularly the split between Athenian and Spartan loyalists), not to mention the lures of adventuring in the mysterious empire of Persia.

After 330 CE, the city's setting becomes increasingly imperial, much larger in population, and more decadent, all features of the stereotypical sword & sorcery city, but the earlier period is just as fertile ground for a great campaign.

It is tempting to point out the correlation between the geography of the Judges Guild "Wilderlands of High Fantasy" Campaign and the geography of the Eastern Mediterranean (try turning a map of the Eastern Mediterranean 90 degrees counterclockwise, and then compare it to the Judges Guild map). In the Wilderlands re-imagining of a North-South Mediterranean Sea, Byzantium would be located in the extreme north of the map where the Wine-Dark Sea (the



name having been copied from Homer's poetic description of the Mediterranean) narrows. There is no city located at that narrowing-point, so the Wilderlands do not contain a Byzantium-equivalent. For those looking to find a larger fantasy campaign world in which to insert a fantasy Byzantium, this would be one definite possibility, although the surrounding place-names would also indicate that the north of the Wilderlands map is supposed to be a much colder climate than Byzantium's historical one. Moreover, the Wilderlands maps do not suggest the prominence of that narrow sea-crossing as the crossroads of empires, which is probably the reason no great city was put there in the first place. Nevertheless, the Wilderlands offers one ready-made opportunity to fit a Byzantium-like city into an existing (albeit out of print) fantasy campaign.

## Constantinople – The Imperial Transition

In 320–330CE, the Emperor Constantine rebuilt the city, naming it Constantinople and designating it as the seat of his empire, replacing Rome itself as the capital. The early period of Constantine's rule from Constantinople is interesting, since it shows the stresses of transition. The city was divided into 14 administrative regions, as was Rome, and it had an Imperial senate. However, the senators had a lesser title than the Roman senators, and the city did not have the established bureaucratic and governmental infrastructure of Rome. Turning the city into an imperial capital must have involved tremendous amounts of bribery, land speculation, and probably violence as money poured into the city to make this earth-shaking transformation take place so quickly. In 332 CE, Constantine established the dole of free food to the citizens of the city, as was the custom in Rome. Most likely the supply of food to the booming population of the growing city was becoming a major operation far beyond the city's original capability; maintaining and protecting this flow of supplies would have been of key importance to the Romans as the city expanded.

## Adventuring During the Imperial Transition

Byzantium's transformation from a frequently-conquered, frequently-contested colonial frontier of the Roman Empire into Constantinople, seat of the Imperial capital, offers another set of opportunities to create settings for adventure. For one thing, the Roman Imperium had not truly dominated the region for very long at all, and Constantinople was located very near the frontiers of Roman expansion. Most campaign settings require that the area must earlier have been part of a strange and wealthy culture (the one that build all these

dungeons and ruins), and although the Roman Empire isn't necessarily the model for this "fallen civilization" in fantasy campaigns, it was historically the fallen civilization which pre-dated the Western Medieval period which forms the "standard setting" of fantasy gaming. Using Constantinople as a resource for fantasy gaming shifts this model almost entirely on its head, because during this period in history the Roman Empire is actually expanding, and the areas being taken over are the ruins of the *Persian Empire* (with barbarians also conveniently located nearby). Although adventures follow their own internal logic rather than being scrupulous about history, thinking of those dungeons and ruins as being the wreckage of the Persian Empire can generate lots of interesting ideas that might not crop up if the old civilization doesn't have its own distinct identity. Ideas have to come from somewhere, even if, once they are fully fleshed out into adventures, they have been mutated into the stuff of fantasy with no significant ties to the historical original.

This is also an interesting setting for adventuring because of the beehive activity of the Romans as they transformed and rebuilt the city. A huge quantity of treasure (including statues and other large items) was being moved from Rome to Constantinople as fast as possible. Wilderness adventures including the staple guarding of caravans and ships (and their equally staple caravan-ambushes and piracy) are instantly given lots of depth. You know why the caravans are making these journeys, you know what sorts of goods are being carried, and – perhaps most importantly – you can visualize the people and the places easily.

## After the Transition – Roman Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire

### Timeline to 641:

**326:** Constantine I founds Constantinople.

**330:** Constantinople is made the capital of the Roman Empire.

**335:** Stories, rumors, and charges circulate that Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria had conspired to prevent the corn fleet from sailing to Constantinople; the bishop was banished to Treves by Constantine. The history of this episode is fascinating, since it involved religious politics with the Aryans (in the city that formed the model for Lankhmar, no less!).

**337:** Constantine I dies, and the empire is split between his sons, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius. They immediately put to death many of their relatives (potential political rivals) by accusing them of having poisoned Constantine I. Constantius eventually emerged as the sole survivor of the three, having battled the Persians and then defeating a

rebellion in Rome that put the usurper Magnentius on the Roman throne. By 351, Constantius had effectively re-united the empire under his sole rule.

**342:** Original dedication of the Hagia Sophia, the cathedral of Constantinople

**357:** Imperial library founded.

**359:** First (known) Prefect of the City of Constantinople, Honoratus

**361:** Julian the Apostate becomes emperor after the death of Constantius

**363:** Death of Julian the Apostate while fighting the Sassanid Persians ends the Constantinian Dynasty. Jovian, captain of the guards, is elected by the army to rule, but dies during the actual journey to Constantinople in 364.

**364:** Valentinian I (Flavius Valentinianus) also an army officer, is elected by the army and immediately sends his younger brother Valens to rule the Eastern Empire. Valens rules until 378.

**365:** Procopius bribes two legions passing by Constantinople, proclaims himself Roman emperor, and takes control of Thrace and Bithynia.

**378:** Aqueduct of Constantinople completed

**378:** Gregory Nazianzus is ordained bishop of Constantinople.

**378:** Theodosius I is appointed emperor of the east by Gratian, the successor to Valens in the West.

**380:** Theodosius I and Gratian declare that the patriarchs of Rome and Alexandria hold primacy (especially over the Patriarch of Constantinople), implicitly rejecting Arianism in favor of orthodox Christianity. This is included in the timeline to give some indication of the ferment of religious politics going on at the time, which is also very fertile ground for inventing adventures.

**380:** Theodosius I makes his *Adventus* (a formal entry) into Constantinople.

**384:** Forum of Theodosius I completed

**392:** Theodosius becomes sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire, East and West

**394:** An obelisk, taken from Egypt, is erected near the hippodrome in Constantinople.

**395:** Death of Theodosius I. The Empire is re-divided into East and West again, with Constantinople as the eastern capital of Arcadius (son of Theodosius). The western emperor is Honorius, his brother.

**398:** John Chrysostom becomes archbishop of Constantinople.

**399:** Gainas, leader of the Goths, plunders the countryside near Constantinople. (Orcs, Goths, Ogres, evil centaurs... as you choose). What is even more bizarre is that the Huns under Chief Uldin then attack the Goths, and the Huns send Gainas's head to Constantinople as a gift...

**403:** Synod of the Oak deposes and banishes John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, later recall him, and later banish him again...

**408:** Death of Arcadius. Theodosius II, his son, becomes emperor, but since he is a minor the Prefect Anthemius rules as regent until 414.

**450:** Theodosius II dies. His sister, the Augusta Pulcheria, marries Flavius Valerius Marcianus (Marcian), who thus becomes emperor.

**457:** Marcian dies of gangrene, ending the Theodosian dynasty. He is succeeded by Leo I, "The Thracian," a commoner and soldier who was appointed by the commander of the army. This begins the Leonid Dynasty.

**460 (approx.):** Formation of the Excubitors, a crack military unit of 300 soldiers. This unit increases in political importance for the next 100 years, with the commander eventually being titled Count of the Excubitors (Comes Excubitorum). The leader of the Excubitors was usually a member of the Imperial family and often the heir apparent to the throne; this individual would be an excellent patron and source of missions for an adventuring party, although unless the adventurers were of high social standing he would probably communicate with them through one of his underlings.

**462:** It is said that the Statue of Zeus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is destroyed by fire in this year after having been moved to Constantinople. Interesting fact, here: the statue was gigantic, a wooden frame covered (to create the statue itself) with carved ivory. With wood as the underlying construction, it was flammable. Originally the statue was in the temple of Zeus in Olympia.

**474:** Leo II becomes emperor and also dies in this year, possibly from being poisoned.

**474:** Zeno becomes emperor, through his connection as the son in law of Leo I. He was of barbarian birth.

**475:** Zeno is deposed by the brother in law of Leo I (Basiliscus), and flees the city. The name Basiliscus sounds a lot like "Basilisk," which opens some interesting possibilities, doesn't it?

**476:** Zeno regains control and Basiliscus dies.

**491:** Zeno dies, succeeded by Anastasius I.

**518:** Anastasius I dies, ending the Leonid Dynasty. He is succeeded by Justin I, commander of the imperial bodyguards.

**527:** Death of Justin I. Justinian I (Justinian the Great), his nephew, is crowned emperor.

**531:** Members of the Blue and Green chariot racing factions in Constantinople are imprisoned for murder, which causes the Nika riots of 532.

**532:** A member of the Blue and of the Green faction escape hanging and take refuge in a church, guarded by a huge mob. Justinian commutes their sentences to imprisonment, but the Blue and Green factions demand a full pardon. At the next chariot race, the Blues and Greens are united, with people shouting “Nika,” meaning “Win.” Massive riots break out from the hippodrome, and the palace is essentially besieged for five days. Fires destroy much of the city, including the Hagia Sophia (which was later rebuilt, obviously). The mob declares support for a rival emperor, probably backed in this by several senators who hoped to seize more power. The revolt was put down by a trick: the Blue faction was essentially bribed to leave the Hippodrome, which was the seat of the rebellion, and then Imperial troops stormed in to kill the Green faction. Estimates of the deaths are as high as 30,000.

**537:** Rebuilding of the Hagia Sophia is completed.

**542:** Plague ravages the city, killing at least 100,000.

**550:** Approximate date when the silk trade reaches Constantinople

**558:** The dome of the Hagia Sophia collapses (and rebuilding commences).

**559:** Bulgars invade and raid the countryside, but are driven back near the city itself.

**565:** Death of Justinian the Great; Justin II seizes the throne, supported by the army and the Senate

**573:** Justin II goes insane, Constantinople is ruled by his wife, Sophia

**574:** Tiberius Constantine, commander of the Excubitors and Justin’s adopted son, is declared Caesar and becomes regent.

**578:** Justin II dies and is succeeded by Tiberius Constantine

**580:** An embassy to Constantinople by the Roman Senate; this is the last recorded action by the Western Senate.

**582:** Tiberius Constantine dies and is succeeded by his son-in-law Flavius Mauricius Tiberius.

**583:** Fire sweeps the city.

**585:** The office of Exarch is created to govern the embattled and collapsing provinces of the Byzantine/Roman empire.

One was established in Ravenna (in Italy) and the other in Carthage (Africa). The exarchs had combined military and civil authority, and operated almost independent from the imperial capital. Adventuring in the territories of the Exarchates would place the adventurers into some wild and woolly territories with a good patron to give them missions as the Exarch strives to maintain order after the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

**600:** Mauricius appoints his son Theodosius as co-emperor

**602:** Phocas deposes and executes Mauricius at Chalcedon. Phocas was a tyrant and became unpopular quickly. This action also begins the Byzantine–Sassanid War of 602–628. The Sassanid king, Khosrau, had been put on his throne by Mauricius, and (supposedly) the war was in retaliation for Mauricius’s execution.

**603:** The future Pope Boniface III is appointed papal legate to Constantinople.

**609:** Rebellion led by Heraclius, son of the Exarch of Carthage (Heraclius the Elder), begins in Africa

**610:** Heraclius arrives by ship from Africa at Constantinople, overthrows Phocas and assumes the throne.

**612:** The Holy Sponge is brought to Constantinople from Palestine. Seriously. The holy sponge. Jesus drank from it after it had been dipped in wine, so it was a major relic.

**613:** Constantine III (son of Heraclius) named co-emperor

**619:** The Avars (allies of the Sassanids) attack and besiege the city.

**626:** The siege of the city is broken

**627:** Heraclius invades Persia

**628:** War ends as the Persians sue for peace

**641:** Heraclius dies and is succeeded by his sons Constantine III and Heraklonus, although the empress–dowager Martina, second wife of Heraclius, tries to take control, is not affirmed by the populace, and gives up the attempt. Constantine III dies within three months, supposedly of tuberculosis but also possibly poisoned by Martina. After the death of Constantine III, Heraklonus is deposed by the senate (still in 641). Constantine II (son of Constantine III) is raised to power by the army.

This timeline shows enough of Byzantine history to convey the flavor of the city, and takes it to the point where the Muslim Caliphate has extended its borders virtually up to the city itself. A full timeline of Byzantine history would take up too much space for this article, although readers are encouraged to look at the later historical events as well as these for sources of adventure and campaign ideas.



## Adventure Elements in Roman Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire (after the fall of the Western Roman Empire)

After the Ancient period and moving into the Middle Ages, the best way to use Constantinople as a campaign city is probably not to focus on a particular historical moment in the city's history, but to draw in "key elements" from the entire sweep of the city's Medieval history and jumble them together in whatever way makes the best sense for your campaign. The Key Elements I'm going to describe are:

1. The Walls
2. General City Life
3. The Hippodrome Factions
4. The Imperial Succession
5. The Varangians

### The Walls

Constantinople's Defenses consisted of (in order of approach from the outside) a moat roughly sixty feet across, a six-foot-high parapet fronting on the moat, the Outer Wall (thirty feet high), and the Inner Wall (forty feet high), which was separated from the Outer wall by a sixty-foot-wide terrace. This entire system of defense is called the Theodosian Wall, after the emperor who commissioned their construction. The Wall of Constantine was located much farther back, and after the construction of the Theodosian walls the city spread beyond the Wall of Constantine.

Five drawbridges allowed public traffic to cross the moat and enter through the five corresponding gates, each one of which was protected by heavy surrounding fortifications. The Inner Wall was fifteen feet thick, accessed by ramps made of stone. At intervals of 175 feet stood large towers equipped with siege engines.

To the north and south where these land walls met the sea at the edges of the peninsula, stood fortresses. The southern fortress (at the Sea of Marmara) was the Castle of Seven Towers. The northern fortress was the Blachernae. These fortresses anchored the connection between the Theodosian walls and the sea-wall. The sea-wall was not as formidable as the land walls, and the true defense of the harbor was the sea-chains blocking access, rather than the walls along it. The construction of the sea-wall defense was similar to the thirty-foot-high Outer Wall, but without the second Inner Wall behind it.

### General City Life

This section focuses on a few interesting facts that are relatively unique to Constantinople rather than a general overview of ancient or Medieval cities.

**Residential Complexes:** At least by the fifth century, and probably before, many of the buildings in Constantinople were "oikoi," residential complexes of the wealthy that included more than simply a house, with a courtyard at the center.

"Detailed descriptions exist of a few complexes of this sort. For example, the Constantinopolitan residence of Michael Attaliates is described in a late eleventh-century foundation charter. This had an inner courtyard and was partially three-storied, with a projecting upper storey. A chapel and mill were situated on the ground floor, the latter suggesting access by servants or other employees.

The most detailed description of an upper class residence is the twelfth-century inventory of the 'Palace of Botaneiates'. This seems to have been a complex of buildings set around courtyards, one containing an elaborately decorated church.

Although they provide an impression of elite homes, written sources do not tell us much about low-status housing in Byzantine Constantinople. Nevertheless, it is clear that Early Byzantine (fifth-seventh century) Constantinople contained blocks of 'high-rise' apartments of up to five storeys, like the insulae of Rome and Ostia. There were streets where these were built very close together (a distance of 2-3 m had to be legally enforced), suggesting that there was a pattern of narrow alleys between them, just as in early imperial Rome.

It is also clear that parts of the fifth-century city were densely packed with buildings. Excluding evidence for what may have been imperial residences, we hear of 4388 households in the Notitia Constantinopolis of c. 425. These were largely concentrated within the fourth-century Constantinian wall of the city, suggesting high-density domestic occupation in this area."

Quoted from K.R. Dark (see sources)

Even lower-class areas tended to be clustered around courtyards, often with the entire courtyard "complex" being owned by a single absentee landlord. Most structures were of stone and brick until roughly the 12th century, at which time wooden construction became more common.

If you are planning a campaign based upon Constantinople and want to get more specific information about the pattern of housing types and population concentration, I strongly recommend taking a look at Dark's article, which can be found at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/9647224/DARK-Houses-Streets-and-Shops-in-Byzantine-Constantinople-From-the-5th-to-the-12th-Century-Journal-of-Medieval-History-302004PDF>. The article is a treasure trove of useful detail, and includes a more detailed projected street map than the one included in this article (a map which Dark actually objects to, but it is still fodder for the mill when constructing an imaginary version of the city for gaming purposes).

Another factor in the life of early Constantinople, probably more prominent as one moves back in time to the Roman period, is the relationship of clients and patrons, which was the pervasive social structure in Imperial Rome. Under this system, powerful individuals with influence would help out the less-powerful in exchange for gifts, votes, and other benefits. The relationship is fairly close to the mafia described in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. The client-patron relationship was an exclusive one; multiple patrons would have been a big no-no. This sort of relationship is an invaluable way of directing a group of adventurers toward city adventures.

## The Hippodrome Factions

The rank-and-file population of Constantinople had no formal way of affecting the city's politics; it obviously wasn't a democracy. Much of the city's mob politics revolved around the Hippodrome factions. The influence of these factions reached far beyond the mere support of chariot teams, but before getting into the political side of the factions, it is worth introducing the factions with some information about the Hippodrome itself. The Hippodrome was a huge oval-shaped arena containing the track for the city's chariot races, originally built in 203 but expanded in 324 by Constantine. After the expansion, the arena could accommodate as many as 50,000 people. The central part of the arena, around which the chariots ran, was called the "Spina," and in addition to containing the Imperial seats it was decorated with monuments including the Obelisk of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Serpents' Column, and the Obelisk of Theodosius. The Kathisma (the Imperial Lodge) was also located on the Spina, and had a direct connection to the Imperial palace (allowing a hasty retreat for the Emperor in case of riots).

Gladiatorial combats were forbidden by the Church, so the most popular of Constantinople's sporting events held in the Hippodrome was the chariot racing. There were originally four factions that maintained stables, paid and

trained charioteers, and in all other ways functioned as the infrastructure for fielding the chariot teams. The factions were the Blues (Venetoi), Greens (Prasinoi), Whites (Leukoi) and Reds (Rousioi). Of these, the Blues and Greens were the largest (and eventually the Whites and Reds were dissolved). Originally the factions each had a religious significance in Rome, but this was lessened when they were imported into Christian Constantinople; they represented Water (Blue), Earth (Green), Air (White) and Fire (Red). In a fantasy campaign, of course, the religious or elemental significance of the factions might be restored by the DM, especially if the city is being designed for a polytheistic setting.

These factions were officially recognized as having a political function within the city; they acclaimed a new emperor, and their leaders had access to speak to the emperor. The factions controlled considerable armed manpower in the city, and occasionally clashed with each other. In full-scale riots, they were most likely capable of controlling the city by means of numbers (and the fact that military units could not easily be brought to bear on them in the maze of city streets). The Nika riots of 532 (see timeline) illustrate both the power and the vulnerabilities of the factions against the Imperial government. In Constantinople, after the elimination of the White and Red factions, the Green and Blue factions supported different religious theologies, an echo of the oracular significance of the original factions in Rome.

## The Imperial Succession

It is already clear from the description of the Hippodrome Factions that the Factions played a role in accepting a chosen Emperor through the acclaim at the Hippodrome. Thus, a significant part of the politics of succession involved gaining the support of the faction leaders. Additionally, as in the Roman Empire, the military played a major role in the succession of Emperors. A quick look at the timeline shows how many of the Emperors rose to power through the support of the army. This was not entirely a matter of the military placing one of its own in charge; most of the military leaders who rose to the throne were members of the royal family, but the army played a major role in choosing *which* of them would rise as the Emperor. The principles of succession were not particularly clear; what the timeline does not show is that even within the various imperial dynasties there were often several possible candidates, and the succession often involved street violence, poison, deceit, and shifting alliances. The complexity of politics in the Byzantine Empire is the reason why "Byzantine" has come into use as an adjective for extreme complexity.

## The Varangians

The Varangians were originally a Viking people who organized and settled regions in the Eastern Baltic and Russia. This area was called the Kievan Rus, and had considerable contact with Constantinople, both raiding the city (via the Black Sea) and also as a source of mercenaries for the city. The fabled Varangian Guard was not entirely made up of Varangians, for there is much evidence that Scandinavians also traveled to the city and were recruited into the Guard. The Varangian Guard was formed during the later period of the Byzantine Empire, although Varangian mercenaries are recorded as having served as troops and marines for the Empire as early as 839, with a more significant presence growing in the early 900s. One reason why the Viking soldiers were so attractive to the Byzantine emperors was their unwillingness to break oaths of personal allegiance, which was not exactly a defining characteristic of the rest of the Empire's military. There are a few details worth noting about the Varangian Guard; they served as personal bodyguards for the Emperor in battle as well as in the palace, and had a popular image in the city as "noble barbarians," of a sort. They were definitely known for berserk fighting on the field of battle, and were predominantly armed with long axes. Any use of the Varangian Guard in a gaming context would most likely focus on their fanatical personal loyalty to the Emperor and their reputation as berserkers.

One additional point to be made about the military of the Byzantine Empire is the sheer number and disparate command structures of the different units. This article and the timeline have mentioned three major units: the Varangians, the Praetorian Guard, and the Excubitors (existing at different times and with different responsibilities). The Byzantine military was not a particularly monolithic army; it was made up of various relatively independent units led by nobles who all had different political goals. The divided nature of the military (and in particular the personal political aspirations of their commanders) could be an excellent source of missions for city adventures.

This article serves only as a very basic resource for using Byzantium and Constantinople as source material to be used in a fantasy campaign, but it should address the highlights well enough to introduce some of the ideas and themes that could be employed. Indeed, sometimes the best ideas come from employing on the vague, larger brushstrokes of a historical period or culture, since the DM is free to fill in the details without being constrained by the real-world details.

### Varangian Guardsman

<b>Hit Dice:</b>	2
<b>Armor Class:</b>	5 [14] (chain mail)
<b>Attacks:</b>	two-handed axe (1d8+1)
<b>Saving Throw:</b>	16
<b>Special:</b>	Berserking
<b>Move:</b>	9
<b>Alignment:</b>	Any
<b>Challenge Level/XP:</b>	2/30

The Varangian Guard are elite berserker-troops in service to the Emperor of Byzantium, recruited from the Northern lands and sworn personally to the service of the Emperor. When berserking, they gain a +2 to all attacks, but it takes three full combat rounds before they are able to muster up the battle rage. When in a berserk state, opponents have a +1 to hit against the raging warriors. Virtually all members of the Varangian Guard are six feet or more in height (note: the Varangians were much taller than average, so in a world where the average human is six feet tall, it would make sense to have the Varangians be seven feet in height).

Officers of the Varangian Guard have 4HD and are armed in plate mail.

## Sources

Timelines were generally obtained from internet sources (yes, I know ... so sue me, it's not a scholarly article).

- *Houses, streets and shops in Byzantine Constantinople from the fifth to the twelfth centuries*, by K.R. Dark, Research Centre for Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, The University of Reading, UK.
- *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides, Hammond/Rhodes translation.

## Recommended Fiction

- *Sailing to Sarantium* and *Lord of Emperors*, by Guy Gavriel Kay

*OGL Disclosure: The entire description of the Varangian Guardsman is designated as Open Game Content. The remainder of the article is Product Identity. Section 15: City Source: Byzantium, copyright 2011, Matt Finch*



# New Magic Items

## Borthio's Tinderbox

This item resembles a normal tinderbox containing flint and steel. In some cases it may also contain tinder. When the flint and steel are struck together, a fan of flames ten feet long and five feet wide shoots forth, inflicting 1d6 points of damage to anyone within that area (no saving throw). The person striking flint to steel must make a saving throw to avoid catching his own hands in the flame, or he will suffer 1d3 points of damage and drop the flint and steel. The item may only be used twice in the course of 24 hours. Some weaker versions of the item (possibly ones which are older than normal) will have only a small number of uses left before the flint finally breaks.

## Lantern of Smells

This ordinary-looking lantern is a magic item of minor power, but one that can be extremely useful under certain circumstances. The lantern's light is normal in every respect, except that it makes poison gases and unusual air visible. Some more powerful lanterns have also been made that cast light in a wider radius than normal in addition to revealing the presence of poisonous gas.

## Lantern of Revelation

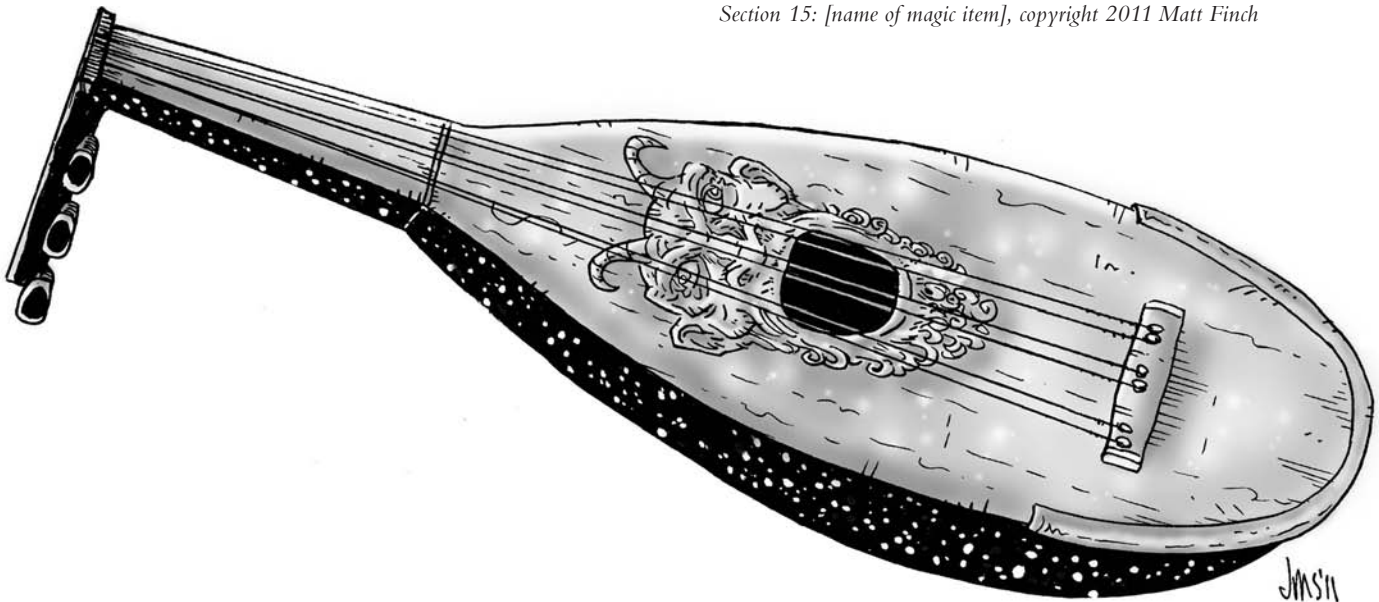
These magic lanterns show invisible objects and beings as if they were normally visible. Most such lanterns make the invisible objects visible to anyone who sees them in the lantern's light. However, older lanterns that are failing in their magical powers will only reveal such objects to the person actually holding the lantern.

## Lute of Annihilation

A chord played upon the lute of annihilation, in coordination with singing the command word causes the following effects: (1) 1d10 hit points of damage to everyone in a cone 90ft long and 30ft wide at the end, (2) All wooden structures in this area will be destroyed, and stone structures (up to 10ft thick) have a 25% chance to be destroyed, (3) everyone in the cone will drop all held items, (4) all vegetation in the cone will die, (5) any musical instrument in the cone will go out of tune, (6) all potions in the cone will become poisonous, (6) everyone in the cone has a 1% chance to be evaporated into nothingness. The lute contains the power to play 1d4 such chords.

*OGL Disclosure: Borthio's Tinderbox, the Lantern of Smells, and the Lantern of Revelation are all designated as Open Game Content. The name "Lute of Annihilation," but not the description, is designated as Product Identity of Jason Sholtis.*

*Section 15: [name of magic item], copyright 2011 Matt Finch*



# DEADLY DISTILLATIONS AND FANTASTIC FERMENTATIONS: ALCHEMICAL IDEAS

by Matt Finch

First off, an article about brewing and alchemy must perforce be dedicated to Lawson and to Jimm Johnson, who provided some excellent home-brewed beer for my Ruins of Mythrus Tower Swords & Wizardry games at North Texas RPGCon this year. I stuck with the Black Wizard Stout (made with coffee), but I hear that the Red Wizard Pumpkin Ale was also a masterpiece of the brewer's art. Many thanks, Lawson and Jimm, and I look forward to tasting next year's concoctions!

On to the real article, which is about alchemy and potions. There's no real-world history of alchemy here, and not even much about alchemy in general; the article started out as nothing more than a list of potions, but the potions gave rise to a couple of other interesting thoughts, and I ended up tossing those into the article as well.

A fundamental question is the nature of alchemy itself. Alchemy in a fantasy world might be purely a natural science, although what is "natural" in a fantasy world would involve innately magical properties of ingredients and bizarre chemical reactions. If alchemy is purely a science in a world of strange physical laws, then it would not necessarily require the alchemist himself to cast spells or channel any sort of magic. Indeed, I think most people see the alchemist in this way; a person who is well versed in the bizarre properties of various ingredients and the methods used to bring out these properties. On the other hand, if alchemy requires magical intervention of some kind in order to activate or awaken magical properties, then the alchemist is effectively a specialized sort of magic-user. This is a fundamental question because it affects the nature of potions. In the first case, where alchemy is a purely "natural" science, potions might not be detectable using a *detect magic* spell. If the game rules being used include an *identify* spell or some other way of determining the properties of a magic item, then it is at least possible that potions might not be subject to the spell's effects.

The author's opinion is that the gaming side of things works best if the potions are not inherently magical, but alchemists are generally able to identify the effects of a potion if they have the time, the equipment, and an up-front payment

from the characters. This creates the situation where lower-level characters might self-test potions to save money, while higher-level characters, for whom potions are less powerful and not as interesting, could just pay an alchemist and get that part of things handled off camera, as it were. It also allows for alchemists to be relatively common, since they could normally be engaged in mundane chemical tasks like producing powerful fertilizers for the flower-gardens of the nobility, skin creams, pain relievers, and various other items found in a real-world drugstore and having no more efficacy than such over-the-counter medicines. If the only real task of an alchemist is to identify potions, it is a bit hard to conceive of it as a full-time job; if identifying potions is merely the highest use of a much more generalized skill, then it creates a lot less of a problem with "willing suspension of disbelief" to find alchemists even in relatively small towns. Of course, the small-town alchemists might not be quite as reliable as a big-city alchemist who has considerable experience with potions. Giving the alchemist a chance to mis-identify potions is an interesting twist, but keep in mind that it would require the Referee to keep an independent track of what potions a character is *really* carrying, which could create burdensome recordkeeping. The author is not a sufficiently organized Referee to keep track of such things, but many Referees would have no trouble with this kind of secret knowledge. The workability of a failure chance on potion identification would depend greatly on the style and skills of the individual Referee.

If, however, the characters are getting their potions identified "off camera" by a paid alchemist, then the major value of a potion is when to use them. In general, the right time for using a potion is fairly clear and uncomplicated. Healing potions are used when a character is low on hit points. A potion of flying would be used when a character needs to fly somewhere. The standard potions, in other words, are useful in the kinds of situations encountered very frequently in an adventure; they have very broad uses that don't require much thinking.

The potions described hereafter are designed to be the occasionally-encountered exceptions to the rule of the broadly-usable, uncomplicated potion. They might be experimental potions, they might be poorly-brewed potions, or they might be masterpieces of the alchemist's art. Regardless of the justification for their existence in the game world, they offer a different decision-making process for the players than normal potions do. Using a potion with multiple effects is a slightly more formidable tactical decision than using a single-purpose potion. This assumes, of course, that the players are aware of all the effects the potion will evoke. Even if they don't, however, it can be lots of fun when a character drinks a potion and has an unexpectedly weird set of results.

**The Elixir of Hairy Malevolence:** Anyone drinking this potion will immediately grow a considerable quantity of hair over the entire surface of the body, and will grow claws and sharp teeth. The character will be able to attack with two claws and a bite for 1d4/1d4/1d8 damage, even if the character does not ordinarily have the ability to make multiple attacks. Moreover, these attacks will all be made with a +1 bonus to hit. Duration: 1d6+6 turns.

**Potion of Harsh Language:** Whomsoever drinks this potion becomes unable to speak without lacing the commentary with unbelievably foul language and cutting insult – invective that is so potent as to cause damage to its target. Each round, the potion-drinker may address a victim with language so harsh that the victim must make a saving throw or suffer 1d4 points of damage. Obviously, it is possible for a character to talk while fighting, so the harsh language may be employed in addition to any other attacks. There is a downside to the potion, however. Anything the character says will cause damage to a specific listener, so once the combat is over the character had better not offer any opinions to the other party members; they might be damaged by the strength of the profanity which involuntarily creeps into the imbiber's speech. Even trying to speak generally to a group, without any specific target, will usually still cause one of the listeners to be affected.

Some variant recipes for the Potion of Harsh Language cause the listener to risk being stunned rather than physically damaged. The victim becomes incapable of performing most actions for a period of 1d4 rounds. Moreover, if the potion-drinker continues to insult a listener who has failed the saving throw, the listener will remain stunned for as long as the tirade continues.

Duration: 1d6+6 turns.

**Potion of Butterflies in the Stomach:** This potion is a bit uncomfortable, but can be quite efficacious. For a period of 6 rounds, the drinker will involuntarily spit out a butterfly to a distance

of 1d8 x10ft. The butterflies are feral, and attack as a 1HD monster for 1d6 points of damage, dying after 1 turn (10 rounds). They do not distinguish between friend or foe, attacking the nearest living creature without regard to whether the creature is a friend or foe of the person who drank the potion. While spitting butterflies, the user cannot speak. Duration: 6 rounds (butterflies dying after 1 turn)

**Essence of Elemental Eructations:** The character may choose to let out a total of 3 tremendous belches, causing structural damage and potentially collapsing loose stones. In a radius of 20ft from the source of the belch, characters and monsters have a 25% chance to drop held items when one of the belches issues forth. At the end of the potion's duration, if all three belches have not been released, the character must let forth one belch in the last round of the potion's duration. The belches will most likely cause a check for wandering monsters if they are employed in a traditional dungeon setting. Duration: 1d6+6 turns.

**Syrup of Dreadful Ambiance:** This potion causes the character to exude an atmosphere of palpable threat. It has the effect of a fear spell on anyone who does not know the character relatively well (i.e., other party members will not be affected, but recent hirelings might). In addition to the generalized fear effect, the character's formidable presence affects enemy morale powerfully enough to allow the character to attack with a benefit of +1 to hit for the duration of the potion's effect. Duration: 1d6+6 turns.

**The Panacea of Positive Thinking:** The character is immune to level draining, disease, and fear. Moreover, when speaking to another person (even an unconscious one) the character can cure 1d2+1 hit points per round during the first full turn of the potion's duration, when the potion's effects are at their strongest.

Duration: 1d6+6 rounds

**Potion of Sublime Motion:** allows a saving throw bonus whenever the saving throw is testing the ability to move one's body out of the way of threats such as dragon's breath, lightning bolts, or falling rocks. A thief affected by such a potion does not become more able to climb, but would gain a saving throw to keep from falling, maintaining his grasp on the surface being scaled. Moreover, the character gains the ability to leap thirty feet either laterally or straight upward.

Duration: 1d6+6 turns

**Potion of Excellent Escape:** This potion simultaneously makes the imbiber invisible, doubles his movement rate, and reduces any damage inflicted by one point per die. However, it also creates a certain sense of paranoia in the person drinking it,

making it impossible for him to attack without a penalty of -4 to hit. At the end of the potion's duration, the imbiber must make a saving throw or emit a loud shriek of relief.

Duration: 1d6+6 turns

**Potion of Homeostasis:** After drinking this potion, the subject falls into a deep catatonia indistinguishable from death. The effects of poison, disease, and other physical processes are halted for the duration of the potion's effect, although they will recommence when the potion wears off. This concoction

## New Monsters

### Rot Pudding

**Hit Dice:** 8  
**Armor Class:** 6 [13]  
**Attacks:** 1 (2d8 + disease)  
**Saving Throw:** 8  
**Special:** Disease, immunities  
**Move:** 6  
**Alignment:** Neutral  
**Challenge Level/XP:** 9/1,100

Rot puddings are nasty subterranean creatures with slug-like bodies made of some viscous substance, looking much like a dark grey jellyfish. These puddings are scavengers in the dark caverns and hallways of underground places. The carrion diet of rot puddings makes them into seething incubators for all kinds of disease, and although they are themselves immune to sickness they are highly contagious host-creatures that can transmit all manner of plagues by the merest touch.

The diseases carried by a rot pudding can be transmitted in various ways during a combat with adventurers. First, if the pudding itself hits a character, the character must make a successful saving throw or be infected. Secondly, if the pudding is hit by a bladed weapon (not a piercing or blunt weapon), the wound will squirt a pus-like substance which will cause the attacker to make a saving throw or contract the disease. There is also a third possibility: if the pudding is burned by a fire larger than a torch, the disease from its surface will temporarily be burned off into a cloud of noxious smoke, which (unless there is some fairly strong source of moving air) will be roughly ten feet in diameter and will drift in a random direction each round at a speed of 1. Anyone in the cloud must make a saving throw or contract the disease. There is one beneficial effect of burning away the surface contagion of a rot pudding, which is that the creature's touch will not cause disease until 3 rounds have passed.

The disease, if a character is infected, has the following effects. The character will immediately be wracked with pains and aches, affected as per a *slow* spell (able to act and move only

is also useful for infiltrating a "dead" character into places, if the timing of its duration is accurately calculated.

Duration: 1d3 +6 days

**Potion of Liquefaction:** Similar to a potion of gaseous form, but the drinker is transformed into a liquid rather than a gas.

Duration: 1d6+6 turns

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at half normal speed). After a period of 24 hours, the character must begin making saving throws once every 6 hours. The first failure of such a saving throw causes the character to fall into a comatose state. The second failed saving throw causes death. A cure disease spell will cure a diseased character, and although a neutralize poison spell will not remove the disease it will grant a +1 on all saving throws. A character who is infected with the disease also become contagious, although the contagion is much less virulent than the concentrated effect of an actual rot pudding. Anyone approaching within ten feet of an infected person has a 50% chance to have to make a saving throw against contagion, and if the saving throw fails, the disease is transmitted in the same form as if it had been contracted from the pudding.

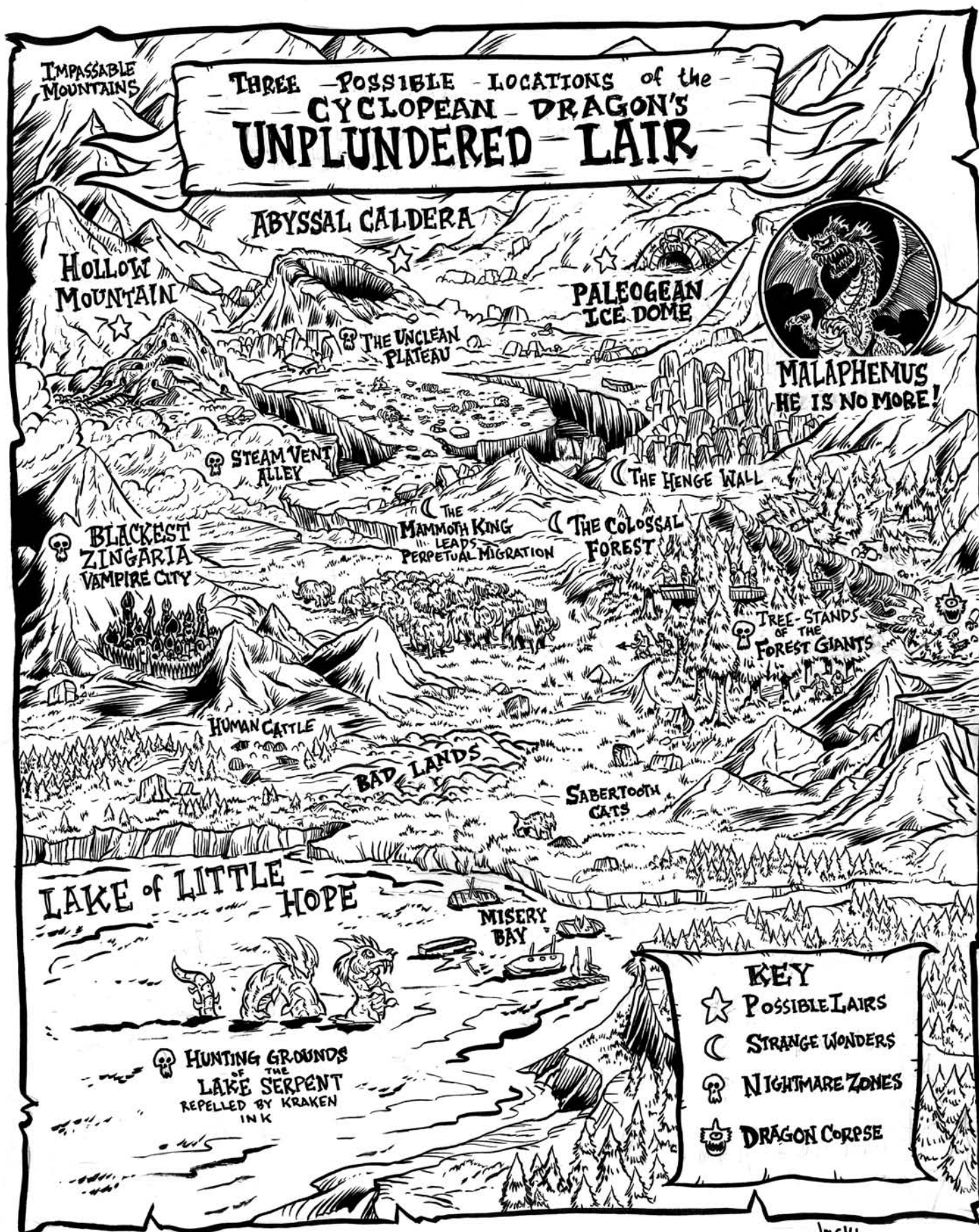
Rot puddings are immune to cold and electricity. A *cause disease* spell will cure one half of any damage that has been inflicted upon the creature.



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