Dispatches from the Raven Crowking V.6: Advice and Options

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Credits

Introduction: Advice for Beginning Judges

Perhaps you are just embarking on your career as a DCC judge. Perhaps you are an old hand. Perhaps you are considering giving the game a try, but you aren't sure if you should. If the game appears daunting, here are some things to keep in mind:

- There are a bunch of tables which actually add to the fun. Weird, but true. I have never seen a critical hit and fumble system that made the game better before this.

- Start with a funnel. You can relax about learning the rules/killing PCs, and the players can relax about PCs dying. In the funnel, they operate several characters until you winnow them down. In my experience, as the death count rises, most players enjoy the squishiness of their characters – while becoming that much more attached to whoever they can keep alive!

- The DCC ruleset is actually minimalist, but so is the official lore. This doesn't mean that you cannot use the lore from any game that you wish....but I would consider, strongly, creating your own vast lore through play. In DCC, players encounter the unknown. There is a lot of emphasis on how little the players know about adventure locations, creatures, and magic items going into the game. The GM (Judge) is encouraged to Make Monsters Mysterious, so that even a lowly goblin might not be recognized by the PCs for what it is. Tools are given to help you in this.T

- The consequence is that, in an adventure, you can include anything you can think of. You do not have to do any complicated math to create monsters, either. There are several blogs with creatures you can use (Appendix M in particular, and my own blog, Raven Crowking's Nest). There are also several products to help you create monsters....and you can easily convert any monsters from other game systems. You will find several creatures in this volume, and a breakdown of how to create monsters can be found in ***Dispatches Volume 5***. It might sound complicated when you are examining the fiddly little bits, but it is pretty

easy. By your third or fourth creature, it will be second nature.

- Some things are left intentionally vague. This is so that you can make rulings, or use the rules you like from other RPGs. If you decide to roll 1d10 + modifiers for initiative, you are not doing it wrong. Page 312 of the ***Dungeon Crawl Classics core rulebook*** contains the most important rule of the game.....The rules bend to you, not the other way around.

- PCs are going to die. Other PCs are going to become incredibly powerful. It is not your job to ameliorate either of these outcomes. The dice will, sooner or later, give that powerful PC a critical hit from a monster that brings him down a peg. Another character will rise to fill the vacuum.

- ***Quest For It*** is the beating heart of DCC. There are no feats, for example, but if a character wants a special ability, you can make learning how to obtain it part of the treasure for one adventure, and then make actually obtaining it part of another adventure. Or you can just let the PC go learn it for a month, but then owe something to the legendary being who taught her. The game includes many ways where player actions and/or desires can drive the storyline of the game - use them!

Consider looking at some of the published adventures, both from ***Goodman Games*** and from third party publishers, to get an idea of how to design for this game. But, even more importantly, go back and read some of the early fantasy works listed in **Appendix N**, and use them as direct inspiration. Make your own stuff! And then share it with the community!

Speaking of which, this is a great community, and you will find people willing to help you with any problems you might encounter! In addition to groups on Facebook and Reddit, there are numerous blogs dedicated to the game (in whole or in part), and the Goodman Games forums are worth checking out!

This volume contains both advice and concrete examples that will, hopefully, make your game better.

Best of luck, and may the Winds of Fate always be at your back!

Rules that Tie the GM's Hands

A while back, I espoused what I thought was a fairly simple concept. Although I know it is not for everyone, I strongly believe that it will make the average GM better.

While I've written longer essays on the concept (for example, see ***Dispatches Volume 1***), it can be embodied in three simple rules:

1. If you don't want something to rely on chance, don't roll for it. I.e., if your game absolutely requires that the PCs succumb to sleeping gas, don't allow a save. Certainly don't allow a save with some penalty under the belief that no player will roll a 20! Likewise, if you absolutely cannot stand by a roll that gives a PC 24 points of damage, don't roll 4d6. Or make the roll "4d6, to a maximum of 20", etc.

2. If there is something that you can't accept occurring, don't make it a possibility. Most of the time, this will mean not making something a consequence of failure if you cannot accept it occurring, so that you don't change events to "force" a PC win.

3. If you do roll for it, abide by the dice.

It is my thought that, if you follow the first two principles, following the third will be easy. There should be no reason to fudge a roll if the result is one you can accept.

Now, my thinking on this concept is that there is an implicit contract between the players and the Game Master that the decisions of the players will matter. And, in order to make those decisions matter, the Game Master will present a world, present options, and allow the results of the players' choices within the options presented to play out.

I believe that this is the second most fundamental contract between the players and the Game Master. The Game Master will not change the scenario so as to thwart the players when they make good decisions. Nor with the Game Master change the scenario to cushion the consequences of poor decisions. I will go further and say that the Game Master should not ameliorate the con-

sequences of good or bad luck, either, as (1) luck has a tendency to ameliorate itself, and (2) total failure does not generally revolve upon a single unlucky roll – the players made decisions that led their characters to this pass. If you let the good things happen when players gamble and win, you should also let the bad things happen when players gamble and lose.

The contract at your table may be different. It may be explicit or implicit that the Game Master will not let you lose. It may be that death is off the table. It may be that the Game Master is going to tell you a story, and that you are only going to make choices that allow you to remain within the framework of that story.

If that is the way you want to play, that's cool. Really. In fact, you can play in all three of these ways and still never fudge a single die roll if you don't want to. Those first two rules support the third rule. Being knocked to 0 hp can mean that you are knocked out, if that is the game you want to run. It can mean that you are just unable to fight. A monster reaching 0 hp can mean that it is slain in a gruesome way, or that it simply runs away.

You can alter these rules to do whatever you want them to do, and you can be honest about what you are doing. That is, in my opinion, the most fundamental implicit contract between the Game Master and the players.

When I am running a game, I will present the world as honestly as possible, within my understanding of how your characters would perceive it. I may roll a die that doesn't matter to indicate uncertainty – which I believe is part of verisimilitude – but if the roll says the monster did 6 hp of damage, I will neither pump it up nor deflate it to make what I want to have happen occur.

In fact, with very few exceptions, I will roll the dice where you can see them. And those exceptions are only where the characters themselves experience uncertainty.

These are not, I would argue, "rules that tie the GM's hands", despite the fact that some seem determined to present them that way. I can't imagine any scenario which I cannot present using these rules. I certainly do not feel that my hands are tied. I have a hard time imagining anyone who has ever gamed with me entertaining a notion that I stand for dis-empowering the GM. I am the GM, far more often than not. I run games that I want to run, in the way that I want to run them.

But neither do I imagine that players have no right to judge my GMing, or my methods. I expect their trust. If the experience is worth playing, then play, and don't get upset when things go against you. I get to judge you, too, and if I find you wanting, you are gone. I have no interest in running games that are not fun for me. If you want to play in my game, you might have to suck it up once in a while.

If you don't want to play in my game, walk. There will be no hard feelings. I get to judge whether or not I want you in my game. You get to judge whether or not you want to be there. I will be as honest as I can about what I am running, and how, to help you make up your mind. I don't want you there if this is a game you won't enjoy.

I cannot fathom how this understanding becomes "rules that tie the GM's hands".

Something that is not for you? Sure, I can see that. Your game won't be for me, but I can see that my game might not be for you. But "rules that tie the GM's hands"? I can see that, if you are just starting, you might not realize that 4d6 damage can result in 24. I can see that, if you are relatively inexperienced, that you might not understand how to create an adventure, and you might feel a need to modify your work as you see the unintended consequences of your design choices.

I can see those things. Folks grow as GMs, same as they grow as players. I have a hard time imagining any GM of even halfway decent calibre, though, who would feel like his hands were tied by not rolling for things he didn't want to leave to chance. It begs the question – just why would you feel your hands were tied? What is it, exactly, that these principles prevent you from doing?

In the ***Dungeon Crawl Classics core rulebook***, Joseph Goodman advises you to roll the dice in the open, and to let the dice fall where they may. I can only echo that advice. It makes the vast majority of games better.

Saving Throw DCs in DCC

Volume 5 of *Dispatches* provides some insight when creating monsters for *Dungeon Crawl Classics*. But how does one set the DC for saves against monster abilities?

For saves, use the "average man" standard, where the average man is a schlub in a 0-level funnel:

> DC 5: The character succeeds 80% of the time.
> DC 10: The character succeeds 55% of the time.
> DC 15: The character succeeds 30% of the time.
> DC 20: The character succeeds 5% of the time.

Assuming that a natural 20 always succeeds, DCs over 20 represent cases where even a more powerful being has a reduced chance of success. A character with a +2 bonus to Fort saves has a 15% chance of making DC 20, but only a 5% chance of making DC 22....the same as the peasant.

In general, if a failed save results in killing the character outright, or removing them from play, a lower save DC is often appropriate.

If a failed save results in a change to the status quo that promotes more interesting play, a higher save DC is often appropriate.

In other words, the DC reflects, in part, whether or not you want the save to succeed or fail more often. If you have a way to telegraph the effect, and the level of danger, a high DC can also increase table tension. If there is a way to avoid having to make the save, or to alter the odds of the roll, so much the better.

Remember that save bonuses in DCC don't inflate like they do in some games - a 10th level warrior has a +6 bonus to Fort saves, and nothing else that high. It is barely possible to get up to +12 with an 18 Stamina, an 18 starting Luck, and the right birth augur. The odds are good that you will never see such a thing fairly rolled. You don't have to make save DCs excessive to make them work.

Expansion 1: What about high spell save DCs?

If you look at the ***Dungeon Crawl Classics core rulebook***, on page 432, you will find:

> As noted previously, "monsters break the rules"—and that applies to men as well. When sending your players to face a magician or warrior, you need not spend the time to create a complicated leveled-up player character according to the class rules. Make it fast and make it interesting!

And, on page 383:

> Spellcasters in particular, whether human or monstrous in nature, should have powers that are unavailable to the players. This does not mean fully defined spells of the same sort learned by the characters. This means a unique power of some kind that would provide a plot hook, leading the player characters to seek out the wizard character and attempt to enlist his services, either as a an ally, hireling, or hostage. On the next page is a table of inspiration, but note that these powers should not be spells. The NPC should be able to use these powers with predictability and accuracy in a way that player characters cannot. It is left up to you to flesh out these ideas, which can apply to any wizard, sorcerer, shaman, witch, warlock, acolyte, priest, cult leader, or other such figure.

In DCC, it is assumed that the rules are designed for defining what Player Characters are (at least in a basic way), but not to limit what Non-Player Characters should be. For the average human spellcaster that the PCs encounter, save DCs are fairly low: DC 11 for the Acolyte, DC 13 for the Friar, and DC 12 for the Magician. A Witch's curse ability requires a higher save – DC 16 – but she also gains normal spells with a +8 to the spell check, which makes these formidable on a level that low-level PCs cannot easily match.

From the foregoing we can glean two important design principles in DCC:

(1) By the time the PCs have attained 3rd level, they are better than almost everyone around them. Page 359 of the core rules puts third level characters at "1 in 1,000". The average spell check for the PCs will be 15, assuming a

roll of 11, +3 bonus for level, and a +1 bonus based off of ability scores. This last bonus is not guaranteed, but it is this writer's experience that players often choose classes which complement their funnel survivor's best statistics. This is not always true…an Elf, for instance, may have a penalty to Intelligence but still cast spells.

(2) PC magic is less predictable than the magic used by many NPCs, but it can be awesomely powerful.

Dungeon Crawl Classics urges the judge to let the dice fall where they may. Rather than being invested in an encounter playing out in a particular way, the game design wants you to invest in what actually happens at the table. If the PCs take out your "Boss Monster" with a natural 20 on a spell check and 5 points of spellburn, that is what is supposed to happen. Likewise, if the Warrior crits and slays the Black Beast of Aaaagh at the top of the first combat round, so be it. Likewise if the Thief backstabs the Emerald Enchanter. Or the Cleric banishes Smaug back to the Lonely Mountain.

You are intended to invest in the process of play rather than any given outcome.

PCs slinging powerful magics might still give the poor judge pause, but there are some things the harried master of games may do. Be careful about using these too much. The idea should not be to make the Wizard, Elf, or Cleric useless, but to provide instances when the player's "go to" tactics aren't optimal. You are trying to create an interesting context to spur creative choices and outcomes. You are not trying to gimp the characters for being too powerful. Remember that, sooner or later, the dice will always go sour on the players. You will crit, or they will fumble. You don't have to set it up so that they lose.

- **High Save Modifiers:** A huge monster may have a +15 Fort save, and a fast monster may have a +15 Reflex save. Used sparingly, and with dice rolled in the open, this can provide a great table moment when the thing saves with a natural roll of "5". But if the monster still fails, let it. Great gaming memories form around such occurrences.

- **Immunities:** Some monsters just cannot be affected by particular types of spells. Some might be immune to magic altogether. Likewise, some monsters might be immune (or partially immune) to critical effects and/

or specific Mighty Deeds.

- **Reduction:** Some locations, and the vicinity of some beings, might lower spell check results (but not necessarily the roll itself, so that spells are not lost), or cause spells to be cast with a reduced die type. This might affect only Cleric or Wizard spells, or it might only affect a certain subset of spells (mind-affecting, fire magic, etc.).

- **Stranger Things:** Some monsters might be even worse. They reflect spells targeting them back at the caster. They absorb the magic energy and become stronger. They steal spells cast in their vicinity from the caster's mind. The rules of magic change around them.

The rules also contain spell duels, and it is inconceivable that these rules were not intended to be used. Even if they were not, many DCC modules contain statted up spellcasters which are certainly capable of making the same kind of high spell checks that the PCs are. Even without those adventures, there is the aforementioned Witch. Both Demons and Dragons can do the same.

Suddenly, it is the PCs facing those incredibly high saves! What to do then?

The best answer is to roll the dice in the open, and let the chips fall where they may. Most spell checks will not be optimal. Once you have hit level 1, 0 hp doesn't mean that you are dead. PCs can spend Luck (and a Halfling will be a major boon here). If the party contains a Wizard, Cleric, or Elf, an attempt at spell dueling may reduce the potency of an enemy spell (or eliminate it altogether).

Ultimately, though, there is a reason that the peasantry fears magic. It can be potent indeed. Rather than reducing that potency, make certain that the players see how magic is feared and respected by the commoners they encounter.

As a last pro tip, if you are having that NPC sling a scorching ray with the force of a nuclear weapon, and there is no good reason not to, target the Thief and tell him what the save DC is. A Thief's ability to use a Luck Die means that she has the best chance of actually making one of those gargantuan saves.

Expansion 2: Applying this to skill checks

It might seem wrong to include "insignificant" DCs (such as DC 5) for skill checks, or even saves, in the game. Don't fall for that argument.

For DCC, skill checks are made with a 1d20 if you are "trained" and 1d10 if you are not. It should be obvious that there is a significant chance of failure for a DC 5 check using 1d10.

In addition, if penalties for armor apply, DC 5 might be something simple for the unarmored wizard, but difficult indeed for the warrior wearing plate-mail. The DC reflects the nature of the task in this case, such as climbing a rough wall or swimming across a relatively modest pool. This in turn helps make the armor you choose to wear into an interesting choice, because there are direct and obvious consequences apart from just how hard you are to hit in combat.

As a saving throw, a DC 5 might represent a small chance of something very, very bad happening to you. For instance, if you were fighting a skeleton and each time it hit you there was a DC 5 Will save to avoid permanently losing 1d24 XP....which would become hp for the monster....that save is significant. Even if it doesn't result in a PC losing a level, the lost XP deficit must be "made up" before the PC can progress any further. If those bonus hp are permanent until used, there is an "in story" reason to inflate the skeleton's hit points, thus making it likely that the PCs will require multiple saves - the undead creature has a pool of extra vitality it has stolen from others.

Dungeon Crawl Classics has a reputation for being deadly, but remember that your goal is neither to kill characters nor to preserve them. It is, instead, to provide the players with an interesting set of choices, within an interesting context, and then following to see where their choices lead them.

As a bonus, when the DC really is 18 or higher, the players know that the shit has hit the fan. Keeping those DCs down means that, when you do not, it has a serious impact at the table.

Consider also an Agility check of DC 1. Characters without a penalty do not even need to roll, as they cannot fail. Those burdened by armor, or with low Agility scores (as a result of Spellburn, perhaps?) do need to roll. The chance of failure might be slim (max 15% if just due to low Agility), but the effects

could be dire.

And what if this was a check that was required on the way into an encounter where a PC Spellburns the hell out of her Wizard or Elf? What was inconsequential before may well become consequential. Conversely, these minor difficulties reaching an encounter area may limit how much Spellburn the player is willing to accrue.

It has been claimed that "the encounter" is the unit of play for role-playing games, but hopefully this example shows how encounters bleed into each other. A DC 5 Strength check, a DC 2 Agility check, and a DC 4 Stamina check leading to the dragon's lair might seem insignificant, but these things are not really four separate encounters. They are part of an organic whole... in this case, a whole that greatly hampers armor-wearers and Spellburners (if they have to leave via the same route).

The Tip of the Iceberg: Treasure in OSR Games

Whether you are converting an adventure from another system, or trying to decide what to throw into your own adventures, it helps to understand why there is just so much treasure in some adventures. There is an idea some hold that in earlier editions of **Dungeons & Dragons**, as well as in **OSR** games (including **Dungeon Crawl Classics**), any treasure included in a scenario was "meant to be found".

This belief skews understanding of classic game play, and may seriously harm the content of your own adventures. A role-playing game, like any other game, has a number of "victory conditions" that one can achieve – for instance, solving the overall adventure, finding any given piece of treasure, and slaying or otherwise defeating any given monster. It seems strange to me to imagine that, in a game, all victory conditions are "intended" to be met. I dislike the 4th Edition concept of, effectively, "wandering treasures" that not only follow the PCs around until they are located, but also happen to consist of whatever the PCs/players are attempting to find. The "plot coupon" if you will.

This is inimical to game play as it was first conceived, and may be inimical to "game play" overall. Victory conditions that you cannot avoid are, in fact, not really victory conditions at all. When the choices that you are allowed to make determine not the outcome, but the route to the predetermined outcome, you are indeed playing something akin to Candyland with a young sibling….just a more complicated Candyland with multiple tracks.

It occurs to me that a good metaphor for a **Dungeons & Dragons** campaign milieu, as it was originally envisioned, is an iceberg. You might spot it while sailing on the high seas, but you are really only seeing the top 10%. The vast majority of the iceberg remains submerged.

In the campaign model where multiple groups of adventurers might scour the same areas in search of adventure, it makes sense to include treasures that might not be found. First off, it gives the latecomers something to look for. Moreover, though, it allows for an experience of a "lucky find". If there are

100 treasures hidden around, and any given group will only find around 20 of them (and I am making those numbers up out of whole cloth), it stands to reason that, if you only place the 20 treasures you expect to be found, the players will instead only discover 4.

This has nothing to do with the GM cackling maniacally into his horned helmet, and everything to do with good campaign management.

Likewise, if Tactic X is always the "right" tactic, then the game quickly becomes boring. To maintain interest, sometimes X is the "right" tactic; sometimes you are better trying Y. If X is often the right way to go, making X a poor choice from time to time prevents complaisance. It also indicates the mass of the iceberg floating below the waves – things are not set up simply to reward a particular set of choices. There is more going on; the world is bigger than the portion you are currently exploring.

On p. 20 of **Folkways** (1906), William Graham Sumner wrote

> There was an element in the most elementary experience which was irrational and defied all expedient methods. One might use the best known means with the greatest care, yet fail of the result. On the other hand, one might get a great result with no effort at all. One might also incur a calamity without any fault of his own. This was the aleatory element in life, the element of risk and loss, good or bad fortune. This element is never absent from the affairs of men.

I not only expect this aleatory element in a fantasy role playing game, I have no interest in one that fails to evoke it. Like an iceberg, much is below the surface. The closer you get to danger, the harder it is to predict exactly what will happen. I am of the opinion that fantasy (novels, films, short stories, or games) is interesting specifically because it can evoke the more primitive, fundamental aspects of our minds....what lies below rationality....and then give it meaning within a framework that our rational minds can comprehend.

I expect a fantasy game to allow me to step outside modern modes of thinking, at least to some degree, and gain a wider appreciation not only of the rational process that created the game, but of the "mythic universe" as well. Likewise, I don't want a game that treats magic like technology; I want a game that treats magic like an extension of a universe that is rife with con-

sciousness and will.

Anything less seems sterile to me.

(And note, that I am talking about fantasy role-playing games here. I have different criteria for science fiction and superhero games. But, whatever the game, "Don't whine at the table" is always among my list of criteria.)

When trying to explain classic campaign models to others, consider the iceberg as a metaphor. There is more than the 10% you get from an "adventure path" -- the setting is richer, more detailed, more dangerous, and more fun.

Some Further Thoughts

Understanding classic **D&D** requires understanding that any area created for the game milieu is to be used multiple times, with multiple groups of players, over weeks, months, and years of play. However, something happened with **Dragonlance** that changed the course of **Dungeons & Dragons** – the introduction of the strong adventure path model.

By way of analogy, classic D&D sought to create the experience of being a character within a fantasy world, whereas the strong adventure path model seeks to create the experience of being protagonists in a fantasy novel. That may seem like a minor distinction, but further thought will show that it is not.

Protagonists in a fantasy novel can expect to survive, or to have meaningful deaths. Characters within a fantasy world cannot.

Protagonists in a fantasy novel are automatically special. Characters within a fantasy world are not necessarily special – only what actually occurs in play determines how special you are. The difference between Conan and an Aesir he kills early in his career are as much a difference of luck as of skill in the "fantasy world" model – at first, Conan is only important because he survives. In the fantasy novel model, Conan is important before he does anything, simply because he is Conan.

A fantasy novel purports to tell a specific story; a fantasy world is a place where things happen, and then people tell stories about them after the fact.

If you have read my essays in **Dispatches Volume 1** about Choice, Context, and Consequence, you should easily see where this is going. In order to ensure that PCs are meaningful protagonists, and in order to ensure that there is a specific story, the GM must mitigate the consequences of player choices. He must ensure that player choices do not take the characters away from the story, by death, by other interests, or even by resolving problems "too early".

Now, I am going to reiterate my mantra: **Play whatever games you like, in whatever way you like**. You don't have to worry about what anyone else thinks. You certainly don't have to worry about what I think.

But I will point this out: **OD&D** and **1st Edition AD&D** were both devised to support the iceberg/fantasy world model. Both experienced explosive growth, and both have a strong following of fans/players to this day. **3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons** attempted to follow this same model, and it is arguable that **3rd Edition** – especially at lower-level play, or using lower-level variants like **E6** – is the only version of the game that rivals (or has ever rivaled) the classic editions.

On the other hand, **2nd Edition AD&D**, despite all of its options, bought very much into the fantasy novel model (which was most evident in its adventures and advice to DMs), and TSR went bankrupt. The unwieldiness of higher-level play in **3rd Edition** likewise brought back a strong "adventure path" mentality (you need prep less if you can guarantee what encounters your players will have) – and removing this unwieldiness was one of the major selling points of **4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons**.

Like **2nd Edition** before it, **4th Edition** seemed to have a strong fantasy novel element…although this might be better described as a "computer game" element in terms of its modules at least, which are composed largely of set-piece combats linked by what may almost be "cut scenes" between fights. Even the skill challenge mechanic, as presented in modules, is largely filler between the main events. **4th Edition** is even more closely balanced than **3rd edition**, meaning that characters are intended to meet certain challenges at specific levels, all within a paradigm where one must level more than once within the same adventure.

4e goes farther than **3e** in terms of mitigating against chance, in terms of codifying treasure parcels, in terms of codifying character balance, and in terms of predictability of combat outcomes. All of these are included, at least

in part, so that the Game Master can determine ahead of time what will happen.

Without this type of predetermination, it is difficult (if not impossible) to ensure that the PCs are the "right level" for each encounter.

Part of this is, of course, the fault of the Delve Format. And, partly, the Delve Format was devised to ensure that encounter funnelling of this nature can easily occur.

If you examine *1e* modules, you will notice that, in most cases, there are multiple paths that the PCs can take, leading to wildly different play experiences. This is enabled, at least in part, by the flatter power curve (and resultant broader-based balance) of the game system.

That broad balance is the key. ***AD&D 1e*** and *2e* adventurers are largely worn down by attrition. Keeping on, or withdrawing, are strategic decisions based largely on resource management....A factor that was mitigated against in *3e* and largely removed from *4e*, and, to a lesser extent, *5e*.

Here's another thing you can consider....in a fantasy world, it is okay for characters to lose equipment due to a rust monster, and that equipment need not be automatically replaced when the creature is slain. There is nothing "necessary" about the character meeting some particular guideline about where he "should be".

In a fantasy world, random encounters happen. However, beginning with late *3e*, WotC began working away from the random encounter. And, if you are going to have a combat system that takes 45 minutes to an hour to resolve such an event, it makes sense to do so. But it does funnel one into a "fantasy novel" where only the encounters that are "supposed to happen" do happen.

(And, yes, obviously people need not play this way. Equally obviously, there are some interesting variants being devised to play in more of an iceberg/fantasy world style than in a fantasy novel/computer game style. Different people play different games in different ways….ultimately, though, sales seem to be based on how the owners market what they've created.)

The problem here is not that "fantasy novel" games are bad. The problem is that the fantasy novel experience is done just as well (or better) at less cost an

effort by fantasy novels, film, and computer games. Fantasy world/iceberg games are done better by….well, tabletop games do them the best. Nothing else is even in the same ball park.

Yes, I do think iceberg games are better…..both for actual play, and for the industry. It is notable that *5th Edition* has stepped back considerably in the direction of the iceberg model. But, if you like something else, don't worry about my opinion.

Wait! What does this have to do with DCC?

Winning isn't about finding all of the treasures in an adventure, or defeating all of the creatures. Setting up a meaningful adventure requires multiple routes where both amazingly good fortune and bad may occur. Yes, a dwarf can sniff out gold and gems (and this does make concealing treasure more difficult), but not everything that the dwarf can smell can (or should) be recovered.

"I can run the same adventure a dozen times and know what will happen each time!" isn't a hallmark of good adventure design. "I've run the same adventure a dozen times, and it's been different each time!" is.

Don't be afraid to include hidden areas. Don't be afraid to include amazing treasures for those lucky enough to find them. Likewise, don't be afraid to include the chance of a hideous death – or worse – which can befall those who are less fortunate. Role-playing games are unique in that the victory conditions aren't always what they seem to be. Even failing utterly, if it is entertaining enough, can be a victory for the players.

I encourage you to let go of the fantasy novel, and embrace the iceberg.

Some House Rules for Dungeon Crawl Classics

1. Masters of Style

A Warrior may choose to master one or more forms of Mighty Deed of Arms at a cost to all others. For each Warrior level, the character may choose one strictly defined type of Deed, such as disarming attacks, trips, or parrying to increase his Armour Class. The Warrior may attempt this Deed with +1d up the dice chain on his Deed Die. However, for all other Deed attempts, his Deed Die is decreased by –1d on the dice chain.

Thus, David the Defender wants to be able to use his shield to protect another at 1st level. His normal Deed Die is 1d3, so his Deed Die to perform this maneuver is 1d4, but he has a mere 1d2 for all other Deed attempts. The next level, his Deed Die would normally improve to 1d4, but instead is reduced to 1d3. His attempts to shield others, though, increase to 1d5. He can choose to have a second special Deed (parrying to defend himself) at 1d4, but that again decreases all Deeds but his signature Deeds to 1d2.

And so on.

Using this rule allows characters to distinguish themselves, so that two Warriors of the same level have different combat styles. It allows each Warrior to do one thing really well, but at a severe cost in versatility. In addition to this rule, Warriors are allowed (nay, encouraged!) to "Quest For It" in order to gain a bonus to specific types of fighting without accepting such drastic penalties for so doing.

NOTE: Any class may be allowed to make a Faustian bargain of this sort, becoming better at one particular thing at the cost of much, much more. If you want your Thief to be better at climbing by taking the same penalty to every other Thief skill, the judge should be willing to talk.

2. Getting Lucky in DCC

In the ***Dungeon Crawl Classics Role-Playing Game***, character Luck is intended to go up and down based upon the circumstances of play. In general, Luck goes up due to rewards given by the judge, and goes down as it is used up by the players to modify rolls. The judge can also penalize Luck, but, because players rely on it, and it is generally lost forever when spent, bonuses tend to outweigh penalties. This is true even in the official published adventures, where Luck penalties tend to be temporary where they exist at all.

The thief and halfling classes, however, regain spent Luck, which means that, if they gain bonuses as do the rest of the PCs, pretty soon their Luck will be absolutely phenomenal. Unless the judge sets a cap, the player can have Luck that reaches well beyond the 18-20 range.

It should be clear that, if Johnny runs a game, and allows the players the opportunity to regain an average of 3 Luck per session, the players will also realize fairly quickly that they should only burn an average of 3 Luck per session. If not, they become very, very unlucky.

So, two characters start with 10 Luck. One is a Thief, the other a Warrior. The first session, both burn and gain 3 Luck. But the Thief's burn Luck comes back, so he has 13 Luck while the Warrior has 10. Next session, the same. The Thief is at 16, and the Warrior at 10. Next session, the same. The Thief is at 19, and the Warrior at 10. Etc.

There are many ways to address this, but if you give the players equal opportunities to increase their character's Luck, and you use the Luck rules as written, you will have to address it eventually. If you don't play favourites, reducing the Thief by 6 is likely to reduce the Warrior as well, and the Warrior can ill afford it.

What to do?

Permanently Burning Luck – The Carrot

In my game, it is now a house rule that a thief who permanently burns a point of Luck automatically gains the maximum roll on his Luck Die.

A halfling who permanently burns a point of Luck gains a +3, rather than a

+2, bonus to the roll.

Luck is Fickle – The Cattle Prod

In my game, it is now a house rule that any character whose permanent Luck is 16+ or 5- at the end of a game session must roll 1d20 and compare the result against his permanent Luck. Permanent Luck is the Luck score that most characters have, and that a thief or halfling can recover Luck to reach.

If the result of the d20 roll is greater than the character's Luck, supernatural forces help the character, granting a point of Luck in game terms. The character gains a point of Luck.

But, if the d20 roll is under the character's Luck, the character loses a point of Luck. Supernatural forces, Karma, or the perversity of the cosmos simply work against him.

If the character rolls exactly his Luck score, there is no change if his Luck is between 8 and 19, but if his Luck is 7 or less, he gains 2 points of Luck. If he Luck is 20, he loses 2 points of Luck.

A character whose Luck is between 6 and 15 at the end of a game session need not roll, but can choose to do so if the player wishes. In any event, only the raw, unmodified die roll is considered.

The Gods are Jealous – An Easier Cattle Prod

Another option is that no mortal creature may have a permanent Luck score of 20 or higher. If your Luck reaches this exalted pinnacle, the Gods of Fate demand instant retribution and redistribution of your Luck. Roll 3d6. The result is your new Luck score.

The Only Way Out is Through or, How it Becomes the Players' Game

There are some GMs whose approach is to sit down with their players and discuss the setting and system before creating a campaign milieu. The idea is that sandbox play engenders a "false choice" where the players are "playing the GM's story", which this sort of Session 0 avoids.

This is interesting, because it seems to suggest that in sandbox games, the players do not get to play the kind of game that they want. It also suggests that building the milieu cooperatively results in a fuller experience than exploration of a milieu. That may be true. Then again, it may not be.

To my mind, no matter what kind of game you are running, player buy-in is mandatory. Which is another way of saying that, given the freedom to do so, players will always follow the threads that they find interesting, and avoid those they could care less about. This does not just mean following threads that the GM intends them to follow, it means determining what they would like, determining what they need to do to get it, and laying down threads of their own.

Conversely, imagine that you sit down with the players before the game is devised, and discuss it with them thoroughly. Taking their input into account, you then set to work on the game milieu. Does this in any way suggest that the game cannot be a sandbox?

Moreover, if the game is intended to be linear, following the "major conflict", isn't it still going to be "playing the GM's story, so to speak" if the GM determines the details and texture of that story? I.e., if the GM writes the actual adventures to be used? This seems to me, therefore, to be a false dilemma.

I would certainly agree that, in any game, what choices players can and do make are entirely contingent on the game milieu. What I think is a false dilemma is the concept that this is any different in a more linear game. This is

because, in part, the sandbox tends to evolve over time into an amalgamation of player and GM desires. Also, whether we sit down ahead of time, or not, it is extremely unlikely that I am going to run a game with Teletubby Space Rangers. Read here for "Teletubby Space Rangers" whatever breaks the game for you.

The odds are pretty good that, whatever we discuss beforehand, if it is something that I am even remotely interested in running, is going to be found in the sandbox anyway. I really don't see this as much of a limitation.

And, while I would agree that sitting down and talking it out guarantees player buy-in ON day one, I don't necessarily agree that it guarantees player buy-in FROM day one.

I have no objection to the group sitting down to determine the basic framework of the game milieu, but if the group also determines the basic thrust of the narrative beforehand, my experience has been that buy-in doesn't last. It is boring to play through a story you've already written, from either side of the screen.

If the game is linear, and the players become less interested in the "major conflict", are then given a choice to get off the rails at that point, or do they play through to the grim death? Is the campaign milieu then still of use to the players and GM? Or is that work then bundled away and forgotten? Much of the value of a persistent milieu arises from its very persistence. The changes wrought on the milieu matter, to a large degree, because they are lasting.

Ultimately, the only way the game ever becomes the players' game is if they "follow through" – if they decide what they want to wrest from the material presented (at whatever stage of creation it is presented in), and then take charge of their own destinies. And, no matter how focused a linear model game may seem, ultimately a linear model limits the degree to which you can make meaningful choices in the game.

Frankly, I do not want to design the world when I sit down as a player. I want to learn about the world. I want to explore something someone else designed, to explore a unique vision. I want to find a way to make my character fit into that unique world, and to subjugate the world to my will. All other things equal, I would rather play in Bob's self-designed campaign milieu than Steve's campaign-milieu-by-committee. That doesn't make Steve wrong; just not for

me.

And I have no interest in being Steve.

In games I run, there are three types of adventures that occur:

(1) Persistent Adventure Locations: Places the players know they can always go to find a little danger, and perhaps a little coin. The Dungeon of Crows is always a place to go, barring any other pressing business. Likewise, any old-school campaign megadungeon, such as the ruins of Castle Grey-hawk, Barrowmaze, or Undermountain. Note that wilderness exploration is the same sort of thing. IMHO, a world cannot have too many persistent adventure locations.

(2) Adventures of Opportunity: A ship founders on the rocks and is de-stroyed. The PCs can attempt to become involved in the salvage, or not, as they desire. The Ghost Tower of Inverness is making its regular appearance – you can explore it now, or wait another century. A caravan is looking for guards on its trip to the Eastern Lands. Princess Zelda was captured by a dragon. A king offers a prize for the most interesting curiosity presented to his court at midsummer. Etc. These are adventures that the players are either interested in, or not, but they don't get to go back to them if they let them slip by. The wise GM gives notice for most long in advance, and only fleshes out his notes on these adventures if the players seem interested.

(3) Player-Driven Adventures: The wizard seeks a new spell. The warrior seeks a weapon-master who can grant him special knowledge. The cleric wants to quest to cure those suffering from disease in order to undo divine disapproval. The players set the basic parameters ("I would like to do this") or even the exacting parameters ("I would like to do this, and I think it might be accomplished by doing that") and the GM runs with it.

Lots of adventures actually combine these types, of course. The wizard seeks a spell, thought to be contained in the Ghost Tower, for example. The war-rior seeks a sword thought to be lost in Undermountain. The Thieves' Carni-val occurs in a persistent city location, but offers unique opportunities for the larcenous at heart. Etc., etc.

Anyway, that's how I do it.

Belshar of the Five Eyes

From where within the strange depths of space and time sprang the strange creatures known as the Brotherhood of Ten Wizards none can say. Each appears swathed in an illusion of being a humanoid figure, whose features are hidden by a dark-shadowed cowl, in which a number of glowing and moving eyes – seemingly upon stalks or tentacles – are all that can be seen. Those who have penetrated even part of this illusion tell of disquieting spider-like beings, although they seem keen to protect the dominion of men and the integrity of worlds.

There are only ten of these beings known, and each has a different number of apparent eyes, from none to nine. The Eyeless Brother and the Brother of the Nine-Eyed Face are said to be the most powerful among them, but Belshar of the Five Eyes may be deemed a worthy patron in his own right. Like his brethren, he seeks out good-hearted wizards and other champions, who he seeks to position to the benefit of his chosen milieu. Many of the Ten enjoy meddling with each other, and Belshar of the Five Eyes is known to have such a relationship with both Mungblesh of the Three Eyes and desert-dwelling Jawag of the Two Eyes (who is perhaps the most normal-appearing of the Ten, although also the shortest).

It is not unknown for each of these three to act as patron for three members of the same party, delighting in setting the sponsored wizards and elves against each other in minor ways for their own amusement.

The ceremony for Belshar of the Five Eyes may take place in any large urban area.

Invoke Patron check results:

12-13: The caster hears the dry, thin voice of his patron, encouraging him to his best endeavour, for no other aid is forthcoming. This encouragement can be used to recall one lost spell to the caster's mind, or to give the caster a +4 bonus on a single die roll, but not both. The bonus must be used within CL minutes or it will be lost.

14-17: Belshar has a moment to spare for the caster, and will psychically give
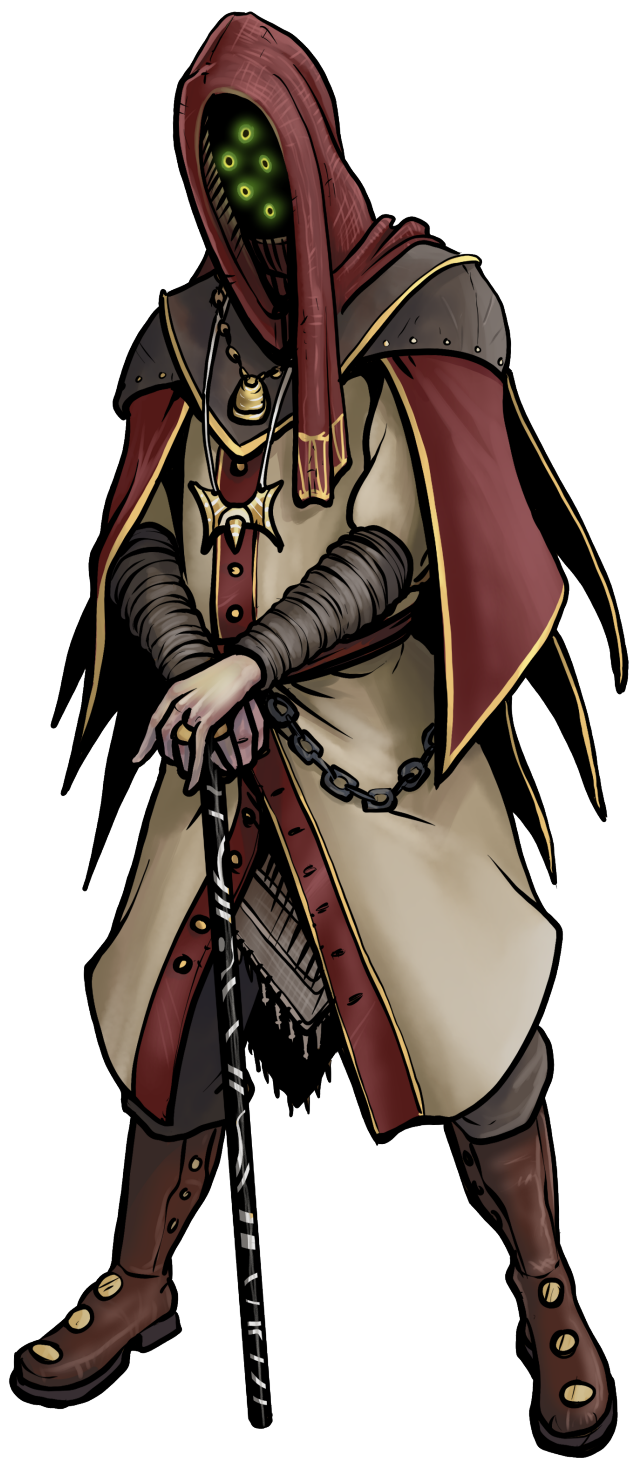
the caster advice regarding his current situation, or a known situation that is upcoming. While Belshar does not have as full a knowledge as the judge, he has broad knowledge about many subjects, and can generally offer some hidden information or excellent advice. The nature of the advice should be determined both by the questions the caster asks, and Belshar's motivations… which sometimes include his own amusement. At the judge's discretion, this advice can give a total bonus of no more than +8, to be split among one or more die rolls related to the advice given. The bonus(es) must be used within CLd6 minutes or they will be lost.

18-19: Belshar grants the caster a single-use magic item, such as a scroll or a potion, to aid him in his current quest. This item is chosen for its usefulness, and can be as powerful as the judge desires. For example, Belshar may offer a scroll that slays all other wizards within a mile radius, or a potion that can shrink the caster to a size needed to enter a maze of rat's tunnels. These are intended to be useful, but may result in amusing circumstances, as the Ten work to entertain themselves as well as to aid the multiverse.

20-23: The Five-Eyed One places some importance on the caster, or on the mission the caster is currently engaged in, and sends strong encouragement and an exhortation for the caster to succeed. This is so encouraging that the caster immediately gains 5d4+CL bonus hit points. All future damage comes from these hit points first, but damage already taken is unaffected. Bonus hit points cannot be healed. At the end of CLd6 x 10 minutes, whatever bonus hit points remain fade away.

24-27: Direct Intervention! Belshar takes control of the caster, and casts a spell through him using his next Action Die. This spell is cast with a +8 bonus on the spell check, and is determined randomly. It does not matter if the spell caster cannot cast the spell, and there is no penalty (corruption or patron taint) to the caster for failure. The spell otherwise acts as though the caster had cast it. Roll 1d5: (1) *choking cloud*, (2) *colour spray*, (3) *enlarge*, (4) *magic missile*, or (5) *magic shield*.

28-29: Direct Intervention! Belshar takes control of the caster, and casts a spell through him using his next Action Die. This spell is cast with a +10 bonus on the spell check, and is determined randomly. It does not matter if the spell caster cannot cast the spell, and there is no penalty (corruption or patron taint) to the caster for failure. The spell otherwise acts as though the caster had cast it. Roll 1d5: (1) *invisibility*, (2) *mirror image*, (3) *monster*

summoning, (4) *spider web*, or (5) *strength*.

30-31: Direct Intervention! Belshar takes control of the caster, and casts a spell through him using his next Action Die. This spell is cast with a +12 bonus on the spell check, and is determined randomly. It does not matter if the spell caster cannot cast the spell, and there is no penalty (corruption or patron taint) to the caster for failure. The spell otherwise acts as though the caster had cast it. Roll 1d5: (1) fly, (2) gust of wind, (3) haste, (4) lightning bolt, or (5) planar step.

32+: Eyes From the Overworld. A thousand thousand glowing eyes emerge from some celestial Overworld or another plane of the multiverse, surrounding the caster and up to CL allies within 100' of the caster, protecting them from all harm and shielding them from all effects within the plane the caster currently inhabits. The eyes transport the caster and his affected allies up to 10 miles through the Overworld, emerging at a place chosen by the caster (or a random location if the caster does not choose). The characters have CL rounds before they are transported to use spells or other means to aid themselves while so protected. Once the characters re-emerge, the eyes fade back to the Overworld.

Patron Taint: Belshar of the Five Eyes

Dealing with Belshar is more annoying than corrupting, and most of the patron taint associated with the Brotherhood of Ten Wizards results from this. Once all patron taints at all levels have been attained, the caster need not roll for patron taint in the future. In addition, the caster gains a +5 bonus on all future rolls to determine corruption.

Roll	Result
1	**Irritation:** So irritating is Belshar's sense of humour that it can become difficult to call upon him. When this is first rolled, the caster must succeed in a DC 10 Will save to cast invoke patron to call upon Belshar. If rolled a second time, the DC raises to 15. If rolled a third time, the DC raises to 20. Ignore all future rolls.
2	**Spying Eyes:** When this patron taint is rolled, a glowing eye appears on a random part of the caster's body, as determined below. Although the eye is not functional for the character, it is an extension of Belshar's eyes, and the patron can observe through them if he so wishes. Once this is rolled five times, ignore all future rolls. To determine eye location, roll 1d6: (1) hand, (2) forehead, (3) chest, (4) back, (5) knee, or (6) foot.

3   **Mission:** Belshar sends the caster on a mission to defend the integrity of the local world or the multiverse. When this is first rolled, the mission requires the caster to travel no more than 1d5 hours, and requires the caster to defeat a minor threat whose Hit Dice are no more than the caster's Caster Level (and are likely to be 1d3 less). When this is rolled a second time, the threat is equal to the caster's Caster Level, and the caster must travel no more than 1d5 days to meet this threat. When this is rolled a third time, the threat is equal to the caster's Caster Level +1d5, and the caster may be required to travel up to 1d5 weeks, or to another plane of existence, to meet it. Once all three threats have been neutralized, ignore future rolls of this taint.

4   **Amusement:** This seems similar to a mission, as of on a role of "3", above, but when the caster encounters the supposed foe, it turns out to be a joke of Belshar's. The danger may be real, but the caster may find himself opposing a friend, discover that the adventure revolves around some horrid pun, or is otherwise designed for the amusement of the Brotherhood of Ten Wizards. This can only be rolled three times, as with "mission", above.

5   **Lecture:** Belshar calls the caster to hear a lecture on some boring subject. The first time this happens, the caster must travel for 1d5 x 10 minutes to attend Belshar, and must succeed in a DC 10 Will save, or he will fall asleep, and must repeat this level of patron taint before proceeding to the next when it is rolled again. The next level of patron taint requires the caster to travel 1d5 hours out of his way, and requires a DC 15 Will save to stay awake. The third (and final) level requires a DC 20 Will save and takes the character 1d5 days out of his way. Although boring, each of these lectures has some relevance to events in the campaign milieu, or to the current adventure, and the caster gains a +4 bonus to a die roll of his choice in the next 24 hours if he manages to stay awake, as it pertains to the point Belshar was belabouring.

6   **Mungblesh and Jawag:** If it is not enough to deal with Belshar's sense of humour, the caster must also deal with the mad comedy of Mungblesh and Jawag. Each time this patron taint is rolled, Belshar's rivals play some dark joke on the caster, which is not intended to be deadly, but will make the caster's life harder in some way. The judge is encouraged to come up with the most twisted jests he can, and play them out against the caster in addition to the normal encounters of a given adventure. This patron taint can only be rolled five times; ignore additional rolls.

Patron Spells: Belshar of the Five Eyes

Belshar grants three unique spells, as follows. These spells are not detailed herein, and must be devised by the judge:

Level 1: Belshar's Unwinking Eye.
Level 2: Belshar's All-Seeing Eye.
Level 3: Belshar's Rays of Burning Sight.

Spellburn: Belshar of the Five Eyes

Belshar does not approve of spellburn, and grants it only reluctantly. When a caster utilizes spellburn, roll 1d4 on the table below, or build off the ideas presented therein to create an event specific to your home campaign.

Roll	Spellburn Result
1	Belshar is repulsed by the idea of spellburn, and does not grant it at this time. Unless the caster has another patron to call upon, he cannot utilize spellburn for the next hour.
2	Belshar reluctantly agrees to grant spellburn, but will grant no more than 5 points. The caster's soul is connected to a benign Overworlder, which drains his energy (manifesting as Strength, Agility, or Stamina loss).
3	Belshar grants the effect of 1d5 points of spellburn without cost. Unless the caster has another patron to call upon, he cannot utilize spellburn for the next 1d5 hours.
4	Belshar grants the effect of 1d5 points of spellburn without cost. Unless the caster has another patron to call upon, he cannot utilize spellburn for the next 1d5 days.

Your Dungeon Crawl Classics Monster Manual

In **Volume 2** of **Dispatches**, I recommended that you compile a unique collection of monsters for your **Dungeon Crawl Classics** game. Hereafter you will find some creatures that you can use. I hope that you have fun with them!

Al-mi'raj

An al-mi'raj appears to be a large rabbit, often with yellowish, blue, or black fur. It has a one-foot-long pearly horn rising from its forehead. Al-mi'raj have a natural ability to sense open spaces within 15 feet of them, as well as a limited ability to teleport. They live in warrens, often built around abandoned burrows, sealed tombs, and other spaces without any obvious entrance or egress. They are not aggressive, unless their warrens are breached. Even then, al-mi'raj tend to flee rather than fight. To many treasure-seekers, al-mi'raj are less of a challenge than an indication that a hidden tomb might exist nearby. Any treasure thus found is incidental, being part of the al-mi'raj lair rather than something intentionally collected by the creatures.

Al-mi'raj can teleport up to a distance of 20 feet as part of their movement each round. They can also do so when attacked, gaining a Reflex (DC equal to attack roll total) to avoid the attack. An al-mi'raj who makes this save may automatically places itself into a position where it gains a +2 bonus to its own attack roll.

Whenever possible, al-mi'raj flee via teleportation, teleporting into any hidden open space within 15 feet. Since al-mi'raj burrows tend to be rabbit-like warrens, there is almost always such a space available. In their lair, however, al-mi'raj stand to fight. In this case, they gain a +2 bonus on their attack rolls anytime they successfully teleport away from an attack.

Attempts to domesticate these creatures have, thus far, been utter failures. Indeed, with their ability to teleport, even managing to keep them captive is nearly impossible.

Al-mi'raj: Init +4; Atk impale +0 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 1d4; MV 20' plus teleport; Act 1d16; SP teleport; SV Fort -2, Ref +8, Will +0; AL N.

That Hideous Heart

It is said that when Percy Bysshe Shelley died, his wife, author Mary Shelley, plucked his heart from the still-burning pyre, and kept it until her own death. If so, his was a lucky heart, for not all are so dearly loved. Some are ripped untimely from the breast of the lovelorn by the actions of cruel lovers, and, while their owners never love again, they are unaware that their hearts have left them to become the bloated un-dead known as hideous hearts.

A hideous heart appears like a monstrous, throbbing heart, swollen to the size of a human head. Pulsing, rope-like veins extend from it, which it uses to pull itself along. It can also use these veins to grasp and strangle, causing its base damage automatically each round. The hideous heart still makes a normal attack roll; if it succeeds, it also does 1d3 points of temporary Stamina damage from strangulation. It is possible for the heart to critically hit a grasped character, with the normal effects. There is a 3 in 6 chance that any melee attack against a hideous heart which misses must be rerolled against any character it is grasping. A grasped character can escape from a hideous heart with an opposed Strength check (the heart has a +5 bonus), but this uses an Action Die.

This creature is stealthy, attacking by surprise on a 3 in 6 chance.

A hideous heart is completely immune to all charms and mind-affecting magic, having long ago given up on its emotions. It radiates cold, and although this does no extra damage it may offer a hint to the heart's weakness: fire- or heat-based attacks do an extra 1d6 against the monster.

Hideous Heart: Init +4; Atk grasping vein +3 melee (1d3); AC 15; HD 4d12; MV 20' and climb 20'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead traits, grasp, strangle, stealthy, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +8; AL C.

Rooster-men

These creatures are humanoid roosters, with clumsy "hands" growing from the joint halfway along their wings. They attack with beaks or leg spurs, both augmented by sharp metal blades supplied by the green dwarves and their un-dead master.

Rooster-men can fly up to 20' in a given round, but must use their Action Die as well as their move to do so. They can only fly for 1 round before landing, but can move at up to a 45 degree angle when flying (thus attaining heights of up to 10' without a rest). A rooster-man who is injured, but not slain, is 50% likely to be unable to fly.

Because their eyes are not forward-facing, rooster-men are difficult to surprise. If a rooster-man would otherwise be surprised, he is allowed a 1 in 5 chance to negate that surprise.

Finally, every rooster-man can crow once per day. Unlike the crowing of a real rooster, which is harmful to the un-dead and other night spirits, the crowing of a rooster-man actually bolsters the un-dead, healing each un-dead creature within 100' to a maximum of 1d5 hit points.

> **Rooster-men:** Init +1; Atk peck or spur -2 melee (1d4-1); AC 11; HD 1d4; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP short flight, difficult to surprise, crow; SV Fort -2, Ref +0, Will -2; AL C.

Kobolds from Dimension Zed

These kobolds come from another dimension, where their silvery skin and bulbous black eyes are the norm. They carry probing instruments which do 1d3 damage initially, but move up the dice chain to a maximum of 1d12 each round during which a given character is hit. The weapons effectively probe the weaknesses of characters, and then exploit them for increased damage. All the weapons of a group are linked; if one increases damage, all do. This does not transfer to other characters, but only to the character hit. The probing weapons lose information after 1 hour, and must start from 1d3 damage again. Although they can be used by non-kobolds, each time such a weapon is used, telepathic feedback forces the wielder to make a DC 10 + damage done Will save or take Personality damage equal to the damage done by the weapon.

These kobolds can also fire a psionic beam that paralyzes an opponent for 1d5 minutes unless a DC 12 Fort save is successful. A creature that makes the saving throw is immune to the beam for 24 hours, and each successful save allows future saves against this effect to be made at a cumulative +2 bonus.

Through mental discipline, kobolds from Dimension Zed are able to walk through mundane walls. It takes 1d3 rounds to walk through a typical wooden wall, or 1d7 rounds to walk through a foot of stone. While a kobold is walking through walls, it is out of phase with this dimension, and is immune to all attacks except magic missiles and force attacks (such as from force manipulation).

Strange flashing and/or moving lights are often seen in the sky, heralding the arrival of these kobolds from Dimension Zed to our own world. While they communicate telepathically with each other with a range of 100', they must physically touch non-kobolds to communicate with them in this way. Kobolds from Dimension Zed do not speak aloud. They have been known to kidnap creatures, bringing them to Dimension Zed in order to dissect or otherwise experiment upon them.

> **Kobold from Dimension Zed:** Init +1; Atk probing instrument -2 melee (1d3 or more) or paralysis ray +1 ranged (paralysis); AC 11; HD 1d4; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 100', walk through walls, probe weapon, paralysis, telepathy 100'; SV Fort -2, Ref +0, Will +6; AL N.

Vargouilles

These hideous creatures appear to be foul-featured heads, which fly on bat-like wings protruding from where a human would have ears. A mass of short, writhing tentacles depends from the area where the neck of a humanoid would meet the head's base. Their skin has a reddish cast and a puckered texture, as though scarred by the fires of Hell.

Vargouilles have the power to mesmerize humanoids with their gaze. Any given vargouille can mesmerize a single humanoid within 100 feet (Will save DC 10 negates), and the target remains mesmerized until the vargouille breaks eye contact. If the vargouille is injured, it must make a Will save equal to 10 + the damage done in order to maintain eye contact.

Once a victim is mesmerized, the creature will wrap its tentacles around the victim's neck, attempting to kiss the victim. A mesmerized creature is unable to resist these attacks, and is kissed automatically; otherwise the vargouille must make an attack roll with a +4 bonus because of its grappling tentacles. A Strength (DC 10) or Agility (DC 15) check can free the victim.

The kiss of a vargouille causes 1 point of temporary Stamina damage. If pressed, a vargouille can also bite for 1d3 damage.

Any victim slain by a vargouille's Stamina damage undergoes a terrible transformation. 1d4 rounds after death, its face begins to redden and pucker, and its features distort into an evil visage. Its ears stretch and transform over the next 1d6 minutes as the head becomes a new vargouille, which struggles to free itself from its old body, pulling ropes of its viscera after it.

The vargouille is vulnerable at this time, although not helpless, and it can attempt to mesmerize a victim if need be (although the target gains a +4 bonus to its save).

Vargouille: Init +0; Atk bite +0 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 2d4; MV fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP mesmerize, grapple, kiss, create spawn; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Walkabout Thing

"That thing, I swear, it looked like a koala," said John. "But no koala's ever been that big, nor had eyes that looked so evil. The whole thing was drenched, like it had been down in the creek. And its jaws – they weren't the jaws of nothing I'd ever seen before. More like a dingo or that marsupial wolf they had in Tasmania once."

John shook, and I passed him my pint. I wasn't sure I believed him till then. Strange things happen in the Outback, sure. Uncanny, more than like. I'd heard stories of 'roos that chased men and ate flesh, come up from the Dreamtime. I'd heard of drop bears, then koala-like critters that waited in trees till some bloke walked under, thinking it was just one of them slow-moving eucalyptus feeders up there. Nothing to worry about, right? But they say the drop bear, he eats meat.

I've never seen any of them things. Australia's got enough critters that can kill you without making up more. But when John cupped the beer with his hands, looked down at it, I felt a shiver down my spine. Because I knew – I knew – that this thing was real. More real to John than the untouched beer in front of him.

"We need to kill that thing," he said. "Simon's dead."

The Walkabout Thing looks like a massive koala with dog-like jaws and a sinister attitude. When it bites, the victim takes 1d3 Strength damage and must succeed in a DC 15 Fort save or 1 point is permanent. It regenerates lost hit points equal to 1 per point of temporary Strength damage, and 5 per point of permanent Strength damage.

Despite being nearly as large as a man, the Walkabout Thing is a cunning predator, gaining a +5 bonus to any stealth check.

> **Walkabout Thing:** Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d5 plus enervation); AC 12; HD 2d8+2; MV 30' or climb 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP enervation (1d3 Strength damage, Fort DC 15 or 1 point is permanent), regeneration by enervation, stealthy; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

Sahuagin: Sea Devils from the Deep

An example of monster conversion

Swimming with the Sharks

The sahuagin were an original creation by Steve Marsh for TSR-Era D&D. They first appeared in ***Supplement II: Blackmoor*** in 1975. Cunning and savage fish-folk, the sahuagin hate everybody. Especially aquatic elves…perhaps by extension all elves. They attack ships. They work well with sharks, which they can command, so perhaps they don't hate everything. The sahuagin are subject to mutation, sometimes having four arms. They are also, apparently, sometimes far more human-like and at other times far more fish- or shark-like in their skeletal structure.

Sahuagin differ from DCC's Deep Ones in their inherent savagery, their relationship to sharks, and their tendency to mutate. So, let's go from there are make them metal!

Scions of the Shark God

Elves have always gained their magical powers by making pacts with supernatural entities – powerful demons, nature spirits, fey lords, and eldritch beings from the dawn of time. Thousands of years ago, on the Isles of Sahua, there was a group of elves whose devotion to the shark-god, Kuawangu. They fed slaves to the sharks in His sacred pools, and in return they gained the bounty and protection of the seas.

Sahua is long gone, brought beneath the waves in a fiery volcanic cataclysm. Some say that there was a schism between the followers of jealous patrons, and that the followers of Kuawangu were transformed to carry their lord's vengeance against all others. Some say that the elves of Sahua turned from the shark-god, and He wreaked the destruction of their islands, elevating the sharks from His sacred pools to rule the watery palaces where proud elven

folk once strode. Whatever the truth may be, Sahua is gone, and the Sahuagin swarm where ancient charts once placed the island chain.

Sahuagin are tall, slender humanoids with green scaled skin, shark-like teeth, and sharp claws. They favour tridents as weapons, but, like elves, avoid the use of iron and steel. This may be an indication of their elven ancestry, or it may be because such metal rusts quickly in the salty brine of their ocean home. Their scales are darker toward their spines, fading to a green-white on their bellies. Only a careful examination can determine the gender of a non-pregnant female sahuagin, or an unaroused male.

> **Sahuagin Warrior:** Init +2; Atk spear +3 melee (1d8+1) or claw +3 melee (1d3) or bite +1 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 2d8+2; MV 25' or swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP control sharks, grapple ships; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5; AL C.

Sahuagin warriors can control up to 2 Hit Dice of sharks each. They are capable of using strong lines of seaweed fibres and animal sinews to grapple ships from below. The sahuagin holding each line adds drag to the ship, slowing it until it is brought to a stop. The sahuagin then board the ship, slaughtering all aboard before sinking the hapless vessel.

Let's Get Dangerous

Already we have a pretty serviceable fish-man monster, but the thing about sahuagin is that they are not all the same. Some sahuagin mutants have four arms, according to even the earliest sources. What if these mutations don't stop with arms? What if they are caused by the same magic which transformed the sahuagin into what they are in the first place?

Sahuagin mutants call themselves "Scions of Kuawangu", and claim that their mutations are the result of the Shark-God's divine bloodline. When rolling up a small band of sahuagin, the judge may use 1d30 to see which are mutated. Alternately, roll 1d10 and use the numbers in parenthesis for whichever sahuagin you decide are mutated.

Die Roll	Mutation
1-20	None
21-24 (1-4)	Additional pair of arms. +1 Action Die, and it is possible to wield a second trident.
25 (5)	Extended fish tail. +20' to swim speed, -5' to land speed.
26 (6)	Larger. Increase HD by 1d8+1. Increase melee attack rolls and damage by +1.
27 (7)	Shark-attuned. Can control double the normal HD of sharks.
28 (8)	Feral bite. Bite damage increases by +1d on the dice chain. Worse, wound continues bleeding for 1 damage each round until staunched (requires 1 minute) or magical healing is applied.
29 (9)	Psionic. Enlarged head and brain. Can make a psychic attack for 1d8 damage within 120'. Will save (DC 1d20 + sahuagin's HD) for half. If this is rolled more than once, increase damage by +1d on the dice chain.
30 (10)	Multiple mutations. Roll 1d3. Ignore future instances of multiple mutations. Or don't, and make a truly terrifying adversary.

For example:

Sahuagin Mutant: Init +2; Atk spear +3 melee (1d8+1) or claw +3 melee (1d3) or bite +1 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 2d8+2; MV 25' or swim 50'; Act 2d20; SP control sharks, grapple ships, four arms; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5; AL C. (Four arms.)

Sahuagin Mutant: Init +2; Atk spear +4 melee (1d8+2) or claw +4 melee (1d3+1) or bite +2 melee (1d6+1); AC 12; HD 3d8+3; MV 25' or swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP control sharks (6 HD), grapple ships, psionic attack (120' range, 1d8 dam, Will DC 13 half); SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5; AL C. (Larger, shark-attuned, psionic.)

Sahuagin Mutant: Init +2; Atk spear +5 melee (1d8+3) or claw +5 melee (1d3+2) or bite +3 melee (1d10); AC 12; HD 4d8+4; MV 25' or swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP control sharks, grapple ships; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5; AL C. (Larger twice, feral bite three times.)

Just Add Sharks

Really, what is the point of including shark-controlling adversaries without including some statistics for sharks? These are only base statistics; the judge can and should modify them to create specific species or creatures.

Shark (Small): Init +5; Atk bite +2 melee (1d5); AC 12; HD 1d8+4; MV Swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP critical hit on 19-20; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0; AL N.

Shark (Medium): Init +4; Atk bite +3 melee (1d7); AC 14; HD 2d8+6; MV Swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP critical hit on 19-20; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +0; AL N.

Shark (Large): Init +2; Atk bite +5 melee (1d12); AC 14; HD 4d8+8; MV Swim 40'; Act 1d20; SP critical hit on 18-20; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N.

Shark (Very Large): Init +0; Atk bite +8 melee (1d16); AC 16; HD 8d8+16; MV Swim 40'; Act 1d24; SP critical hit on 20-24; SV Fort +10, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N.

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