Notes from the Bunker
Fiends!
by Rich Redman

"It will come out no more!"
-- Egg Shen (Victor Wong).

"What, huh?! What will come out no more?!"
-- Jack Burton (Kurt Russell)

-- *Big Trouble in Little China* (20th Century Fox, 1986)

Welcome to my bunker. As one of the designers of the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game*, and a veteran of real-world modern combat (having served as a tank platoon leader in Operation: Desert Storm), I'm in a unique position to offer insights into the game.

This month's topic is designing fiends. The **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game* provides all the information you need to create a whole army of fiends from the blackest pits of the underworld. But a garage full of tools doesn't make you a qualified mechanic -- you need some training and experience too. Therefore, this month's installment of *Notes from the Bunker* is devoted to providing some insight into the design process for such monsters. We'll go through the design process step by step to create a sample fiend. At each decision point, I'll outline the options and explain the reasons for the choices I would make.

Before we get started, crack open your copy of the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game* and turn to the beginning of Chapter Eight: Friends and Foes. Fiends belong to the outsider type, so review the outsider entry carefully.

Which Came First, Hell or the Devil?

Do you even want fiends in your game? According to the fiend entry in Chapter Eight of the **d20 Modern** Core Rulebook, fiends are "otherworldly beings of terrible power . . . physical manifestations of evil and corruption that exist to inflict pain, fuel hatred, or spread despair. They are universally violent, greedy, and perverse. Their greatest pleasure is to tempt mortals to become as depraved as they are." Fiends embody evil as no other creature can -- it pervades their very nature. Thus, introducing fiends into your game demonstrates to your players that evil is a real, universal force in your campaign world, not just a relative concept. Its existence is not open to interpretation or debate. The presence of fiends in your campaign world also tells your players that there are other worlds (at least one -- call it the Pit or whatever you will) from which these creatures crawl. If you want your campaign world to have no dimensional travel or a lot of gray areas in terms of morality, you might want to choose creatures other than fiends to challenge your PCs.

One advantage to using fiends in your campaign is that they cover a wide range of Challenge Ratings (CRs). Thus, you can constantly introduce tougher ones to keep challenging (and tempting) your heroes. Fiends can use a variety of tactics to accomplish their goals. Some are confrontational, constantly engaging your heroes in combat. Others are scheming, working behind the scenes to mastermind evil plots. Still others are insinuative, disguising their appearance and tempting your heroes down darker and

darker paths.

Hatching the Fiend

When I design a new creature, it's usually to fulfill some specific purpose. For example, I recently started a campaign in which I wanted to establish right from the beginning that otherworldly creatures stalk the Earth. I also wanted a chance to roleplay scenes like those from *Resident Evil, Night of the Living Dead,* and *Return of the Dead,* in which the heroes are surrounded by hordes of zombies. So I designed a fiend and gave it the ability to animate the dead -- over and over and over again.

Start with a basic concept for your fiend. If your players have one tactic that they tend to use over and over again, consider making your fiend immune to that tactic. For example, in the campaign above, the heroes quickly learned that zombies don't use ranged weapons. So when my fiend began to reanimate corpses, the heroes started shooting them from behind barriers, then dragging the bodies away to prevent my fiend from animating them again. Clearly I needed either a fiend that could employ additional modes of movement (such as flight or teleportation), or one that can use ranged attacks.

For your campaign, you might want to design a fiend that could thrive only in the modern day -- one that feeds on electricity, for example. For our sample fiend, let's combine those two concepts and create a fiend with ranged electricity attacks. We'll call it a shock fiend.

Care and Feeding

Once you've defined the overall concept, you have to decide how tough the fiend should be. If you want one of these fiends to pose a significant threat to the entire party, its CR should be 2 or 3 points higher than the average party level. If your heroes may have to fight two to four of these fiends at the same time, the CR should equal the party level. If you expect the fiends to outnumber the heroes, the CR should be 1 or 2 points lower than the party level. I envision shock fiends attacking in small groups, so the CR for one such creature should match the average party level -- let's say that's 3. So the goal is CR 3.

Now it's time to choose a size category, since that choice affects both ability scores and Hit Dice. I'd like to keep the fiend Medium-size but place it on the intimidating end of that category -- perhaps 8 feet tall.

Ability Scores

Once you've specified the size, it's time to decide on the fiend's ability scores. If you want it to be a melee fighter, give it a high Strength and a high Constitution. If you want it to be a ranged fighter, it should probably have some special abilities that are usable from a distance. The saving throw DCs for such abilities are usually based on Constitution, Wisdom, or Charisma, so give the fiend high scores in one or more of those abilities. If it's to be a schemer, it needs a high Intelligence and a high Charisma. Table 8-14: Outsiders in the **d20 Modern** game provides some guidelines for physical ability scores based on the creature's size, but these are only guidelines.

We want our shock fiend to eat and manipulate electricity. That ability probably calls for a high Dexterity and a high Constitution, but the other scores can vary from slightly below average to slightly above average. After all, this creature is a soldier in the armies of Hell, not a general. So let's assign its ability scores as follows: Str 13, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 12.

Hit Dice

A creature's Hit Dice affect its hit points, base attack bonus, base save bonuses, and even the save DCs for its special abilities. Since we want it to be a CR 3 monster, I'll give it 3 Hit Dice for now. The Hit Die type for an outsider is a d8, so the shock fiend has 3d8 Hit Dice.

The median value of a d8 is 4.5; multiplying that value by 3 give it an average of 13.5 hit points. A Constitution of 17 grants it +3 hit points per Hit Die, so our shock fiend has 22.5 hit points, rounded down to 22.

Training

An outsider gets a number of skill points equal to 8 + its Int modifier per Hit Die beyond the first. So our shock fiend has (8-1)*2 skill points, or 14. Its relatively high Dexterity score makes it a good candidate for skills such as Hide and Move Silently. So we'll assign the maximum -- 6 ranks (Hit Dice + 3) -- to each of those skills. That leaves 2 points. Listen and Spot make a creature tougher to surprise, so we'll buy one rank in each of those skills.

According to the fiend entry in the rulebook, a fiend is entitled to either Archaic Weapons Proficiency or Simple Weapons Proficiency as a bonus feat. An electrical fiend is probably fairly modern in its outlook, so it should be able to use weapons found in the modern world, albeit simple ones. Thus, Simple Weapons Proficiency seems the best choice.

An outsider also gets one starting feat, plus one feat per 4 Hit Dice after the first. As it stands, our shock fiend gets only one starting feat, but if we raise its Hit Dice to 5 or more, it would get two. Lightning Reflexes and Combat Reflexes seem like natural choices for a fast electrical creature. But its high Dexterity score means it already has a good Reflex save, and if I plan its tactics well, it won't often be in melee to make attacks of opportunity. Looking through the feat list gives me another idea, though -- ray attacks benefit from all the ranged attack feats, including Point Blank Shot. If we give our shock fiend that feat, we can keep its Hit Dice at 3 and make a mental note that its attacks should be rays.

That brings us to special attacks and special qualities. According to the outsiders entry in Chapter Eight of the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game,* an outsider has darkvision with a 60-foot range and cannot be raised from the dead. The fiend entry indicates that it should have a +9 natural armor bonus and telepathy, plus at least one immunity and one resistance. Those are the basics. Let's look at Table 8-21: Fiend Immunities, Resistances, and Damage Reduction and see what we can use. We don't want the shock fiend to be too tough, so we should give it only one immunity, and that should be to electricity. Though my memory of high school physics is hazy, I do recall that when electrical devices heat up, the resistance increases, reducing efficiency. So the shock fiend obviously shouldn't have fire resistance, but we could give it cold resistance 10. Since this creature is supposed to have a fairly low CR, we won't give it damage resistance.

We also need to quantify that idea we came up with earlier as a special ability, and perhaps develop one or two others along the same theme. We could even borrow an ability from the shocker lizard in the **Dungeons & Dragons** game.

We've already decided that the shock fiend can shoot electrical rays at opponents. Rays require ranged touch attacks. Since the fiend is only CR 3, its ray attack shouldn't deal any more than 1d6 points of

electrical damage, and its range should be short (25 feet plus 5 feet per 2 Hit Dice, making the maximum range 30 feet).

Now for a new ability. Let's say the shock fiend emits an electricity draining field at all times. The field extends to a radius of 5 feet per Hit Die -- in this case, 15 feet -- around the creature. Electrical devices within this field simply do not function. Every round that such a device remains within the field, it must make a Fortitude save (using the wielder's Fortitude saving throw bonus) against DC 14 (10 + 1/2 shock fiend's Hit Dice + shock fiend's Constitution modifier) or be completely drained of power. This effect probably shouldn't work through barriers, so let's say that a solid barrier at least 4 inches thick blocks the field.

Now let's take a look at the shocker lizard and see what we can borrow. Since shocker lizards are more powerful in groups, perhaps two or more shock fiends can work together to create a lethal shock whenever they are within are within 30 feet of each other (that is, when their electricity draining fields touch). This effect is centered on any one contributing shock fiend, and its radius is 5 feet per Hit Die of the fiend with the most Hit Dice. The shock deals 1d8 points of electrical damage per shock fiend contributing to it (Reflex DC half). The save DC equals 10 + the number of shock fiends contributing. The drawback is that using this ability suppresses the drainage field of the shock fiend on which the effect is centered for 1d4 rounds.

Weaknesses

We've given the shock fiend a number of advantages; now it's time to choose weaknesses. Since it's an electrical monster, water is likely to harm it. So let's have water damage the creature the same way that acid would damage a human. Thus, a vial of water deals 1d6 points of acid damage to a shock fiend on a direct hit, or 1 point as splash damage, and it scores a critical hit on a natural 20 roll. If we want specific weaknesses for specific fiends, we can roll those randomly using Table 8-26: Sources of Weakness in the **d20 Modern** Roleplaying Game.

Miscellaneous

As I fill out the stat block, I notice some other decisions we should make.

Electricity suggests speed, so we can give the shock fiend a speed of 40 feet, faster than an ordinary human.

The creature should also have a melee attack, just in case. Two claw attacks, each of which deals 1d4 points of damage plus 1d3 points of electrical damage, seem appropriate Grappling a shock fiend can't be a good idea, so every creature in a grapple with one (except other shock fiends) takes 1d3 points of electrical damage per round of grappling.

Although electricity is bound by the same physical laws as rocks are, its very speed makes it seem chaotic. So we'll set its allegiance to chaos.

Design Notes

You might notice that I've been giving a lot of formulas instead of just the basic numbers for skill points, save DCs, and the like. I've done that for two reasons: so that you can see my math, and so that when I want bigger shock fiends, I'll know how to increase their abilities. Keeping a running list of such information keeps you on track and lets you make changes easily.

Summary

Use the following steps to create a new fiend for your campaign.

- Make sure you want a fiend in your game.
- Start with a central concept.
- Determine ability scores and Hit Dice, using Table 8-14: Outsiders in the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game* for guidelines.
- Assign skills and feats.
- Review the basic abilities of outsiders and fiends.
- Roll or choose special abilities from Table 8-21: Fiend Immunities, Resistances, and Damage Reduction. Assign new special abilities as desired.
- Roll or choose weaknesses from Table 8-26: Sources of Weakness. Create new weaknesses if desired.

Testing Your Wings

Next month, we'll create a complete stat block for the shock fiend and use it to discuss advancement and Challenge Ratings.

About the Author

Before Rich Redman came to Wizards of the Coast RPG R&D department, he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast's Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **d20 Modern** *Roleplaying Game,* the **Marvel Super Heroes** *Adventure Game,* and **Dark*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.