

Summer 2009 Issue 10



RPG SNEAK PREVIEW

KOBOLD™

Quarterly

A Magazine of Kobolds & Dragons

Stout and Sturdy: Ed Greenwood's
DWARVEN ALES



Big Trouble: Ecology of the
HILL GIANT

John Wick's

**WICKED
HALFLINGS**

Secrets of the
**GELATINOUS
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Interview with

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Deadly Skill Challenges / Back from the Dead / Clockwork Hounds /
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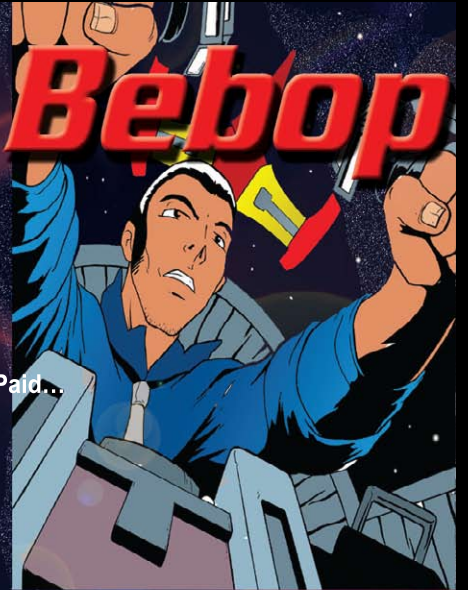
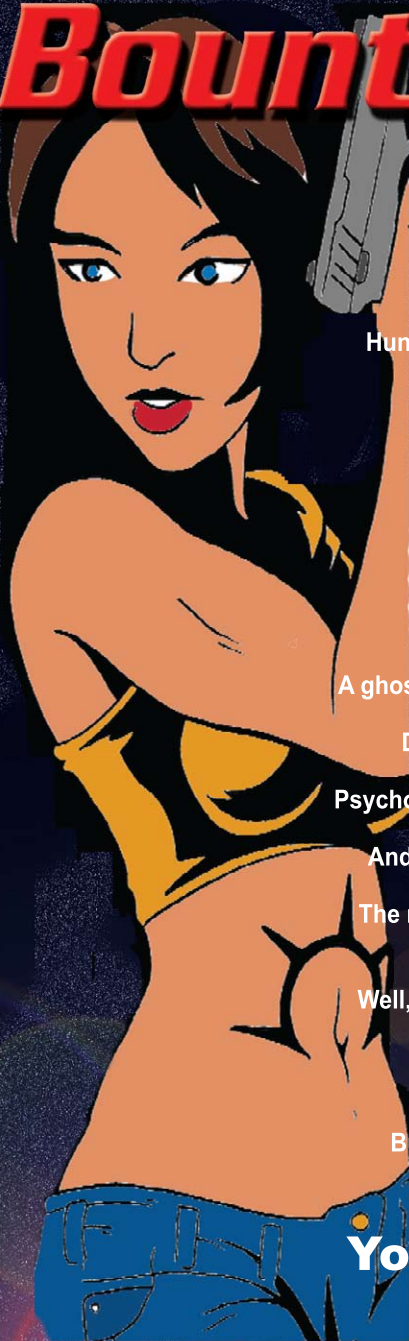
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The sorceress in red and her two feathered friends shine with all the magic that Malcolm McClinton can conjure. This is McClinton's second appearance on our cover.

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Ethical and Unethical Gaming



Dour brain is strong enough to generate a placebo effect that can really help heal your body. Your mind can dream up entire worlds and adventures and characters. Invention and science and story are powerful forces that change the world, and the way we see it.

Roleplaying games connect us to that power, and put it in our hands to amuse and entertain our friends. We have adventures, foiling villains and killing horrible monsters, and we loot the bodies.

Ah, yes. The plundering of tombs and the rifling through packs and purses for a few more gold pieces. Is it really heroic to dig through some dead bandits pockets or to snatch a golden chain from a drow priestess's neck? I used to think so. Conan was very big on snatching loot and making off with it. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser were thieves by profession. So loot is a universal good, right?

I'm not so sure. And I wish treasure were a smaller part of the standard game.

Maybe the group I game with has grown a little older and wiser. There's no "search the bodies" rogue in my regular group. Our favorite pyromaniac gamer moved to the UK. Maybe it's just a lull until we recruit someone more, er, colorful.

Or maybe it's just that too much real-world looting, torturing, killing, and despair makes me appreciate real heroism. I've always found priests and paladins the most interesting classes from a roleplaying perspective. They've got faith, they've got a code, and a cruel DM can make

their lives miserable. And yet, the hard questions of taking the right action aren't all that hard for the devout and the noble, who can lean on their code to make roleplaying choices.

Which is why it's always so interesting to me that those ethical dimensions of character get set aside when the DM describes a locked chest. Even the paladin wants loot, because that holy slayer will help take down demons and protect the civilized world from darkness. It's loot with a cause. Vows of poverty are a minor inconvenience to the PC, easily rationalized away.

Someday I want to write a set of pregenerated PCs for a convention adventure. They would be a warrior maiden paladin like Joan of Arc, an assassin dedicated to the God of Death, a devout priest of some extra-shiney Goodness – all characters with strong codes of conduct. And send them out into a set of increasingly vile tasks: Stealing money from goblin orphans, maybe. Or defending a corrupt merchant-prince. Or kidnapping hostages to secure a treaty. An adventure full of dilemmas, in other words.

I predict that most gaming groups would sail right through without a qualm or hesitation, as long as the goal was defined as good. But the one player who said "Is it right to steal from the tomb of a saint?" --- that's the guy I'd want to invite to my home game.

What about your gaming group: Are they paragons or plunderers at heart? And does it matter, as long as you are enjoying the game?

Wolfgang Baur
Kobold in Chief

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From the Mines

Dispatches and Complaints



Size Matters

Before I renew my subscription, I have a question... The renewal e-mail indicated “expanded 4th Edition content.” Since none of my gaming group has ANY intention of trashing our \$1,000s of dollars of 3.5 stuff and switching to 4E, this is actually a negative for me. What’s going to happen to the 3.5 content? Is the mag getting BIGGER (to account for the expanded 4E coverage), or is the 3.5 coverage shrinking to make room? I would like to know before I “re-up”.

My apologies for raising spectres of the past.

-Kim McGraw

It’s a great question, Kim. KQ is first and foremost a magazine for the world’s most popular roleplaying game, Kobolds & Dragons. We might have that name slightly wrong, but the point is, we do support the editions in current use. The 3.5 content will only shrink if 3.5 subscribers disappear.

And yes, we’ve upped the page count this issue so that the 4E material really doesn’t take away anything. This is a BIG issue at 88 pages – our biggest ever, in fact. As long as gamers see it as valuable and advertisers support it, we’ll fight to retain the larger page count.

No Support in Any Fashion

I got an email today that stated

there will be added content for 4E and for Pathfinder. Incidentally, my subscription ended after Issue #8 and with a recent email stating that there would be expanded coverage of 4E, I have decided not to renew my subscription. I had waited specifically to see if this would be the case. While I am intrigued about further coverage of Pathfinder and, hopefully, 3.5/d20 content, the fact that 4E’s role is expanding in the magazine is enough for me to decide not to renew.

I do understand that I may be acting a little rash, but I told myself that I was not going to support 4E in any fashion. I was also under the impression that KQ was supposed to support 3.5/d20, not 4E. I understand if the vision of the magazine has changed and KQ has to remain a viable product. And if turning some of it’s attention towards 4E makes it a viable product then it has to do what it must to be successful.

In case my tone was not indicative, I bear no ill will toward the magazine and its creator. I would like to thank Wolfgang and all the past contributors of KQ for some wonderful content that I had the pleasure to partake in over these last eight issues. And with their recent arrival to my local bookstore shelves, it will still be possible for me to support KQ without the unquestioning

loyalty a subscription intones. If the bulk of the content looks good in a particular future issue, then I will most certainly pick it up!

I know, in the end, I’m one little voice and some will probably question the whole point of me even writing in the first place. I know I could have gone quietly in the night and no one would have known or cared. I just wanted to express my opinion on the apparent direction of the magazine and thank KQ for the great stuff they have produced over the past eight issues and wish them the best of luck in the future. I’ve tried to do this in the best possible tone and hope I was able to do so.

-Gus Badnell

Thanks for writing, Gus! KQ has never been limited to 3.5/d20 support, and it’s not been our intention to discriminate against 4E content. We’re ecumenical rather than puritanical, and as both a personal and business preference I’d rather offer articles for the widest range possible.

Not adhering to “3E system purity” may well cost us some 3E subscribers, although the majority of the magazine is devoted to OGL, Pathfinder, and system-neutral content. If the OGL/d20 audience goes elsewhere, that will accelerate the trend toward 4E, so in the end I think 3E

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gamers do themselves a disservice by demanding edition purity. But really, it's your choice.

Ultimately, magazines serve their subscribers, and that group of people does change over time. Thanks for supporting us as a subscriber in the early days, Gus, and I hope you do pick us up from the local store often!

The Kuwaiti Newsstand

I saw 2 of your issues (#8 & #9) for the first time at the PX, and I bought both and loved the content. I've read over it multiple times here during downtime on this deployment, plotting and scheming using the material within for new campaigns for my players when I get back.

I went to your website to order a subscription and saw the Adopt-A-Soldier thing. I want to thank you all for providing this for us overseas. It helps to make time go by faster and with a little less stress.

-PFC Joel Sandoval
Camp Arifjan, Kuwait

At KQ, we're always happy to support readers on base, all around the world. Generous readers pay the base subscription, and KOBOLD QUARTERLY covers the postage for all such subscriptions. I'm happy to say, most soldiers who request a subscription get one before the next issue ships; a big thank-you to all KQ readers who have kept the Adopt-A-Soldier program ticking along!

True Gaming

I just wanted to take a moment and tell you how much I am enjoying your wonderful magazine, having Skip Williams back, the Monday Monsters on KQ.com, etc. Before 4E ('For Evil') I had thought to use it, maybe even write articles for it again. Then I actually read it.

I just wanted to thank you for keeping true gaming alive.

-Nicholas Thalasinios

We're happy to have Skip back in these pages and online at Koboldquarterly.com, and I'm glad you're enjoying the magazine. After some

of the hate mail we got because of the 4E content in issue #9, it's nice to hear.

Our WotC Exclusive Awaits!

There are a lot of things I want to say! I was so bummed when Dragon and Dungeon went out of print. I saw a ray of hope, though, in a subscription card for KOBOLD QUARTERLY. I've been a subscriber since the first issue. I cannot put into words what it meant to be able to get your magazine. I was in a really dark place for a long time and nobody there could appreciate the whole fantasy adventure genre like I do. So every issue has been thoroughly analyzed and gone over, read and reread and then read again.

I love the way the magazine is laid out, I like the interviews, the book reviews, and really like the demons and angels you have done, like the backstory and their stats.

I have not played in a long time but I still buy books and collect all things RPG especially the Realms. If I could suggest an article that would be really interesting it would be about the spell plague or what happened to some of the leading characters in FR. Like Elminster or the Seven Sisters. I know WotC keeps a tight lid on this kind of info but they need to loosen up and KOBOLD QUARTERLY an exclusive.

Thanks KOBOLD!!!!

-Lee Badrak
Lompoc, California

We await the call from Hasbro Headquarters and would be delighted to feature a Realms article, with WotC's permission. In the meantime, there's plenty to discuss for fans of settings like Golarion, Zobeck, and others.

Missing Warlocks?

The most recent edition of your magazine promised the following on its cover: "Warlocks & Patrons". However, the article did not seem to appear within the pages of the periodical. Could you please tell me where it was?

I recently purchased KOBOLD QUARTERLY solely for "Warlocks and Patrons."

-Michael Young

The article was cut from the magazine at the last minute for space reasons, but appears in this very issue. We apologize for the oversight, and thus hope to avoid the inevitable curse headed our way.

Is My Time Nigh?

Is there anyway to determine how many issues I have left in my subscription?

-Brandon Kaya

Oddly enough, there isn't. We will send you email reminders when your last issue has shipped, and we send print reminders to our print subscribers.

By their Icon Ye Shall Know Them

First of all, kudos on the Dave Arneson article. With Mr. Arneson's passing, the article was especially timely and a great read.

I'm writing, however, to make a request. If there will continue to be both 3.5 and 4E content in the magazine, could you please design something to clearly identify the edition of these articles both graphically (like a special header on each page) and in the table of contents? I have no interest in 4E, but love the 3.5 parts, and I'd like to be able to tell "at-a-glance" the sections that will not be relevant to me. Finally, how does Pathfinder fit into all of this? Once it's out, will you support *all three* versions? I mean, I know Pathfinder and 3.5 will be very similar, but there will certainly be some differences. So what's the plan?

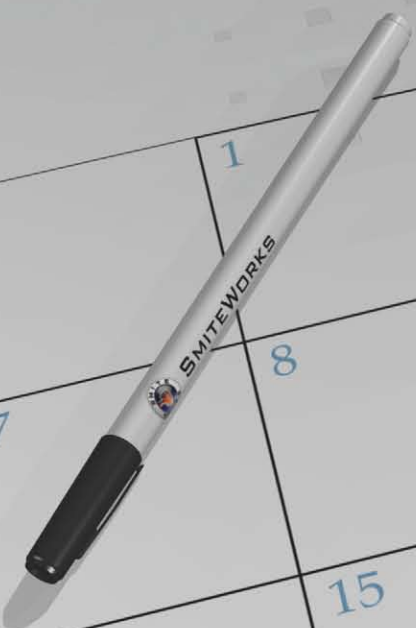
Thanks for continuing to produce a great magazine!

-David

Thanks for asking, David! We've added some icons this time around for ease of use. Thanks for the suggestion!



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			My campaign Sam got the flu		
7	8	9	10	11	12
			My campaign 6 PM Joe's wife can't take the kids		
14	15	16	17	18	19
		Get Fantasy Grounds	Try FG with group	Find some games at fantasygrounds.com	
	21	22	23	24	25
campaign PM	Some space opera @6	My steampunk pitch	Prep for Monday HARP weekly starts at 9	Sam playing another FG game <u>Find a game!!</u>	SW:EX 13-17
	28	29	30	31	
campaign	Take kids to Zoo CoC 6 PM -	Steampunk weekly @6 PM	Make character for Joe's game CoC 6 PM	Joe's dungeon crawl w/ FG at 8	



REVERING NINKASH

By Ed Greenwood
Art by Malcolm McClinton

*Ale! Ale! Let your tankard ne'er dry!
Ale! Ale! A-sober, time passes by!
Ale! Ale! Yet when we do revere
Ninkash, holy Ninkash in her sacred beer
Dead comrades once more draw near,
Past glories arise in our vision clear.
Vigor returns, and lost love burns.
No true dwarf spurns
Ale! More ale! Share the blessed beer!
For Ninkash, Mother Ninkash is here!*

—Ale-Prayer to Ninkash
(sung in unison with full tankards)

Most humans believe all dwarves love ale and customarily consume prodigious amounts of it — at least by human measures. This fact, of course, is not lost on the brewers' guild in Zobeck; long have they catered to the whims of their best customers. In part, this is a matter of dwarven fortitude: dwarves become loose-tongued, uninhibited and swift to shift emotions after consuming only five or six times what would make most humans thoroughly drunk.

Roughly the same greater-than-human capacity governs the dwarven passage from tipsy through roaring drunk: reeling, reckless and somewhat pain-deadened, but still functional, especially at fighting. As much as an entire keg is required for a dwarf to become incoherent and unable to stand or even stay awake. The dwarves call this last condition “gone,” short for “gone to visit Ninkash.”

Our shorter, bearded friends are hardly the first to make the—ahem—arduous pilgrimage to the drunken mother. The Kariv gypsies venerated Ninkash long before the dwarves worshipped her. True, every dwarven family brewed its own ale as a daily drinking staple, making both the mineral-heavy waters of the depths palatable and the pure ice-melt waters of the peaks richer and more sustaining. But back then, only the clergy of Wotan drank during services, solemnly toasting the dwarven dead at midwinter. To this day, dwarves disagree fiercely as to whether they learned



the worship of Ninkash from the Kariv and what role—if any—Ninkash had in the dwarves “moving from under the secure yoke of Wotan,” as some put it. Here we shall not plunge into such disputes but merely impart something of the current creed and rituals of the clergy of Ninkash—and the effects of her magical ales.

Yes, the human rumors are true. The crafting of these ales cannot be revealed here of course. It would be sacrilege to allow these mysteries into the alchemy labs of the uninitiated. More practically, these brews are simply beyond the skill of a journeyman, boasting processes that involve much more than the usual brewing procedures. Casting spells, intoning prayers, adding secret ingredients and immersing both holy objects and clergy in the mash at particular times are just as important to the finished product as are the particular strain of hops used in the brews.

But we can reveal this much: there are magical dwarven ales —Scores of them!—and many vary in powers and efficacy from brew to brew and from brewmaster to

brewmaster. Seven such ales are “standards,” found among all dwarves; these are described at the end of this treatise.

The Goddess Ninkash

Ninkash has a private face and a public face; few non-dwarves ever learn anything of her private side.

The public face of Ninkash is a golden-glowing, oversized plain tankard with a simple handle, unadorned and lidless. It is said to be fashioned all of never-rusting, never-staining steel that floats upright in midair except when pouring out beer or a golden mist, “the favor of the goddess.” This tankard foams with beer as it refills itself, and its metal flows into a broad smile, until something is said or done—such as bloodshed—to displease Ninkash.

Her private aspect is that of a jovial, buxom, chubby dwarf woman clad in flowing robes that constantly shift color: one moment nut-brown, the next gold. Her garments are simple as a tavern maid’s: the goddess appears barefoot, her clothes unbelted and low-cut. Ninkash always smiles. When displeased, her smile is slight and she shakes her head, and when pleased, she beams and extends her arms as if to sweep the observer to her bosom.

The holy symbol of Ninkash resembles a roughly drawn golden “Y” to the uninitiated. Priests insist the unity of two streams of beer flowing together to fall as one reminds the faithful of the goddess’s bosom felt by every dwarf wrapped in her embrace. This holy symbol is known as the “*baerra*” (or munificence).

Ninkash’s avatar has never appeared directly to any dwarf, but her smile appears as a golden, rippling glow above altars and dwarves who sing her praises as they bear her libations. Though unseen, Ninkash can speak or impart directions and visual information as guidance, warning, or instruction.

To laity and clergy alike, she appears primarily in dreams and drunken visions. A dream or vision from the

goddess contains either a golden tankard floating in midair or her holy symbol “drawing itself” in the form of conjoined streams of ale. These rivers of ale spout from gargoyles and gutters, waterfalls plunge from the mountains, or as noisy dream taverns whose hostlers tap multiple kegs to create an abundance of holy ale.

As the matron goddess of beer, Ninkash represents morale and pleasing self and family in small, daily things by kindnesses and shared fellowship, dining and drinking (including hospitality to guests). She is also “the Inner Way,” the cleaving to inward desires and the demands of flesh and kinship, expressing one’s emotions and questioning or testing the laws and authority and clan rules other dwarven deities uphold. Priests of the goddess, quoting a now-forgotten predecessor, claim “Ninkash is not the vote; she is what you bring to the vote. She is not vengeance; she is the fire behind vengeance. She is not clan-loyalty; she is the way by which a loyal dwarf can yet see the needs and wants of a foe and understand the thinking of non-dwarves.”

The Vaer

The priests of Ninkash are collectively “the Vaer” and consist of drin (sing. drina), novices who normally never lead rituals or conduct holy business except as assistants to a full priest; vaerren, full priests (sing. vaera); and kalath, elder priests (sing. kala). The kalath have “felt the touch of the goddess,” meaning she has spoken to them directly in their minds or as a voice emanating from a tankard or altar. Indeed, they are kalath because they dared to respond, and she has in turn answered them.

Within the Vaer, male and female dwarves are equal: either gender may lead rituals or hold any rank or holy office. However, the devout claim that only dwarves may be true members of the Vaer although they do respect and work with “Holy Ones”—those rare few non-dwarves who have “spoken with Ninkash and known her favor.”

Vestments

Nothing in the daily garb of the Vaer distinguishes a drina from a *vaera* or a *kala*; all tend to wear plain brown robes and always carry two tankards. One is a miniature pendant “taster” on a neck chain, while the other is an everyday tankard on a chain or knotted cord at their belts.

Vaer wear loose tabards or surcoats over their robes when leading high rituals. The tabard has a large oval hole for the wearer’s head, hanging from the shoulders unbelted with a plain back panel, and it displays the holy symbol of Ninkash on the front panel in brown dye for drin, in a band of stitched red fabric for *vaerren*, and in a band of cloth-of-gold for kalath.

Accoutrements

Every *vaera* and *kala* of Ninkash will try to procure or make a personal tankard to use for prayer to the goddess. In this, they offer her their tears and the beer they have brewed for lone prayers of confession and requests for guidance.

Most clergy of Ninkash maintain an altar to the goddess: a table or a flat slab of rock shrouded in the tunics of

Gods of the Ironcrags

Most of the gods of the Ironcrag Mountains are fierce and deadly: the war god Mavros, the rune god Wotan, the fire-smith Volund, and the frost maiden St. Grajava all have their followers in the thousands, with public temples and wealthy priesthoods. The worship of Ninkash is very different; it is a rather small group with only small shrines and no large priesthood.

It is a motherly cult, with more female than male priests and with a certain streak of kindness and mercy not found elsewhere in dwarven faith and worship. Yet to malign Ninkash in front of even the most hard-bitten dwarven pikeman is to invite disaster; some humans call her “Dwarf-Mother”, for the dwarves defend her as fiercely as a mother bear defends her cubs. All dwarves of the Ironcrags think of Ninkash as the keeper of the warm and welcoming hearth, and they will fight and die to protect her.

dead Vaer and set with “the Kiss,” a massive tankard at least 2 ft. tall, and smaller tankards. By custom, these smaller tankards number one for each Vaer taking part in a ritual at the altar plus one additional tankard that represents the laity.

Necessary accoutrements for most rituals include a tapped keg of ale; the teira, a hollow mace pierced with holes for the sprinkling of beer; a deep-toned hollow wooden “churn” chime (so-named for its resemblance to a butter-churn, it hangs via a chain from the ceiling or a moveable stand). Most nighttime rituals also involve any number of beer-dipped candles, which foam as they burn.

Holy Offices of the Faith

Holy offices among the Vaer are filled by the guidance of Ninkash. Her approval must be evident, through visions received by laity, and not just by members of the Vaer, and by the will of the local kalath. Such offices include:

- the holy tutor to novices
- *dharlac* (a leader of rituals, tankard confessor and morale booster to the

laity; in some cantons, a revelmaster who throws drinking-parties at the homes of the bereaved and depressed and lonely; spreader of good cheer, rumors, and heartening songs in times of war)

- *orlurr* (chanter, who leads the actual singing or chanting during rituals; this and *vardur* are the only offices often held by drin thanks to their singing skills or strength and fighting skills)
- *vardur* (temple guard, armed “hand of the goddess” for arresting lay dwarves and bringing them before priests for crimes against the faith; Hammerfell is known for having varden who wear enchanted armor and wield magical weapons; tales tell of a flying empty helm that the Vaer of that canton can send forth to spy for them, when it does not guard the altar of Ninkash)
- *uldaerac* (“Old Holy,” or leader of the local temple; the equivalent of a high priest or priestess in many human faiths)

The Creed of Ninkash

A dwarf is not a true dwarf unless that dwarf feels needed. A dwarf is not a true dwarf unless that dwarf faces his fears, wants, and delights. The ales of Ninkash help worshippers set aside the armors of civility, reserve, and secrecy for a time, to let a dwarf see more clearly.

Through the call to the matron goddess and her responses in visions of dream and of altar, Ninkash guides dwarves to survive, to grow stronger, to do what is needful to become greater, to balance their inner calling against the outer hardness every dwarf must build.

While ordinary ale is a road to truth, the holy ale of Ninkash is the road to the Truth.

The Vaer of Ninkash nurture the needs of a dwarf that other deities do not. And like a stool with one leg missing, a dwarf un-nurtured by Ninkash cannot stand, nor support another dwarf.

Typical Rituals

In most dwarven settlements and cantons, similar rituals are performed at the end of every mining shift and may be combined with hot baths for weary miners. For non-miners or in dwarf gatherings or communities not dominated by mining, these rituals are customarily performed in mid-morning (a shortened, “gentle” ritual), at the middle of the working day (also a shortened ritual, but often emphasizing guidance or an exhortation), and at the end of the working day or late evening (a full ritual, often turning into a feast or long drinking-bout).

Travelling priests perform prayer-rituals to the matron goddess on the eve of every canton vote, during preparation for war, at the outset of a migration or merchant expedition or journey and when creating a magical item, building a large mechanism or starting diplomacy with lowlanders.

The Vaer hold their own rituals to recognize and confirm new members, to mark the deaths of priests, and to signal the passage of specific clergy from one rank or office to another.

The annual great ritual of Moonfall marks the end of the alpine growing season. In recent years, Moonfall has grown in most cantons into a two- or three-day-long debauch of drinking, frolicking, and games for both the young and the old.

Daily Holy Duties

The Vaer’s primary duties to the laity all help in the furtherance of morale. This is sometimes misunderstood; Ninkash does not expect her clergy to force dwarves to be “hap-hap-happy” (as one human once put it) all the time, or drunk, or engaged in loud and frivolous revelry or flirtation. Often, quiet talks and a helping hand in the tasks of the day, or just a smile and shoulder-clasp to make a dwarf feel recognized, appreciated and welcome as a member of the community do far more to boost morale than dispensing ale and carousing.

Vaer often advise lay dwarves on



all matters large and small, and are known for two things: absolute secrecy and far more informality than any other dwarven clergy. Their secrecy is complete; one can confess murder and worse crimes to a Vaer, and unless the crime is against the temple itself, the priest will say nothing at all about what was confessed to anyone else, except to the goddess or—only with the permission of the confessing dwarf—to seek advice from a more senior priest. As a result, one speaks to a Vaer of Ninkash as a kindly friend or wiser older colleague, never as a supplicant to a superior.

The clergy of Ninkash see it as their collective duty to advise the dwarves of a community, calming and soothing when necessary but also warning or balancing against other influences—even the clergies of other gods—when needed.

The Holy Ales

Vaer and lay worshippers of Ninkash spend much time brewing ale, storing it and transporting it for ritual use. All of the ale they make, which has had prayers to the matron goddess chanted over it during the brewing, is “holy ale,” but certain ales are made magical by the spells of the Vaer.

All holy ales work on humans, dwarves and all crossbreeds of human and dwarf (such as derro, duergar, half-orcs, and half-elves). However, they are poisonous to fullblood elves, typically causing 4d10 rounds of nausea, confusion, slowed movements and trembling (loss of 1d4 Dex during this time).

The strength of these ales, and the duration of their passing (as opposed to permanent) effects, varies from imbiber to imbiber as well as from brew to brew. Their efficacy declines over time—stale holy ale may not function at all!

The Seven Standards

The seven most widely known magical ales brewed by the Vaer of Ninkash follow:

- *Lavurr* (This potent ale heals 4d4

hp of damage per tankard, to a maximum benefit of 4 tankards per 24 hours: permanent effect.)

- *Tormurr* (This ale neutralizes all known poisons and venoms and halves the effects of acids: permanent effect.)
- *Nablaerho* (This ale causes short-term regeneration and can be imbibed before battle to repair damage as it happens or can be used to replace missing limbs and organs: effects are permanent, but efficacy is passing.)
- *Glaeleg* (This ale enables a dwarf to absorb oxygen from surrounding air and water, at will, so breathing isn't necessary, and the dwarf can move through poisonous gases without taking them in, as long as the dwarf doesn't have to remain within them for long: ineffective on non-dwarves, passing effect.)
- *Halorth* (This group of related ales enables imbibers to withstand even intense heat or cold for short terms, including dragon breath and fiery or icy magic: passing effect.)
- *Forgefriend* (Imbibers take no harm from metal—from edged metal weapons to molten metal ore and hot spattering slag from smelting and forge-work, including metal particles inhaled with steam and smoke. Metals pass through the body of the imbiber, except where prevented by clothing; this is why most dwarven smiths wear gloves when forging but strip to the waist while engaged in such work. Metal shards will pass right through them and fall to the floor, without lodging in the body or doing any harm by their passage: passing effect.)
- *Talorth* (This secret-from-non-dwarves, controversial ale enables a dwarf to “meld” rather than “pass on”; a dying imbiber can choose to enter an item and live on as a speaking, thinking sentience rather than dying utterly. This is the secret of the creation of the Soul Blades of Grisal, for instance: permanent effect.)

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Sneak Preview of the PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME

By Jason Bulmahn

“The monster lunges forward, biting you and locking you in a grapple.”

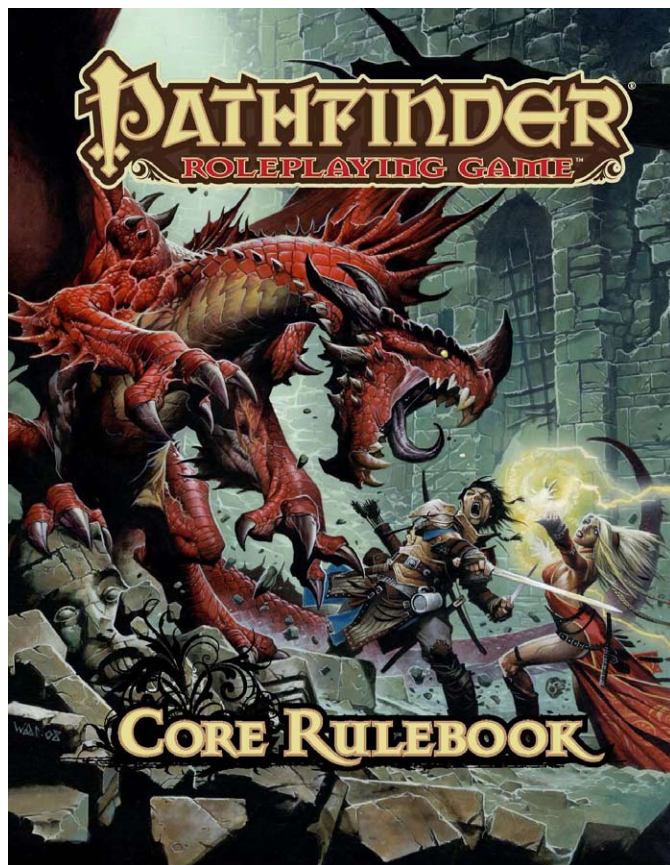
“By the power of my faith, I turn undead.”

“I cast *polymorph*.”

These three sentences alone would cause most GMs to shiver a bit. Nothing sends players and GMs scurrying to the books faster than the complex rules behind these common mechanics. For the past nine years, game groups everywhere have had to struggle with these and other complicated rules. While those rules support the type of game enjoyed by many, they are imperfect cogs in an otherwise fine machine. Fortunately, the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME** gives you all the tools you need to make that machine run like new.

It all started with a simple idea: with the release of a newer edition, some gamers might want to stick with 3.5E. Never before has a game company had the ability to continue supporting an older edition, and it made sense that, while the game was still popular and fun, some improvements could be made. What started out as a few rules updates quickly burgeoned into an entire system overhaul to fix a host of imbalances and trouble spots while still maintaining the core of the game. In March 2008, the first PDF of the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME** was released. Two additional documents that covered most of the larger rules revisions we had in mind followed soon thereafter.

After taking in a copious amount of feedback, the game went to the Beta Playtest stage, which was available as a free PDF. From August 2008 until February 2009, more than 50,000 gamers downloaded this version of the game and many playtesters provided detailed feedback and reports. It was a massive undertaking, with the book broken down into over a dozen sections for consideration and review. A host of ideas was tossed about for inclusion or deletion, and though the playtest proved to be overwhelming at times, it resulted



in solid improvements to the areas that needed them the most.

After six months of extensive review and more internal meetings than I can count, we went to work creating the final game, due out this August. This massive tome weighs in at 576 pages and includes all the rules needed for both players and GMs.

Different than 3.5E

As we began design on the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME**, we set down several guidelines.

The first was compatibility. The new game needed to be compatible with 3.5E rules, so players and GMs could continue to utilize their extensive libraries of 3.5E material.

Next was improvement. The rules needed to take the clunky parts of the 3.5E rules and streamline them, making

them easier and more fun to use.

Finally, *PATHFINDER* needed to innovate and add new areas in the rules to explore (since there are already enough feats and prestige classes to last for hundreds of characters).

With these guidelines in mind, we went to work. The resulting game is easier to use than the previous edition but still familiar. The core mechanics of the game have not changed (you still roll d20s and high is always good), but some of the details have been improved and new features have been added.

For example, barbarians still fly into fits of rage, but now rage is more manageable. A character has a fixed rounds of rage per day instead of a set number of rages. A barbarian player can play to his core concept longer without adding too much power or complexity. In addition, barbarians start gaining rage powers at 2nd level, allowing them to perform different feats of strength and ferocity while raging. This not only added more flavor to the barbarian but also some

much needed versatility -- and no two barbarians will be exactly alike in abilities.

Changes like these occur in most of the core classes, including fighter weapon training, cleric domains, sorcerer bloodlines, and ranger favored terrain. Many of these rules are designed to help balance the classes against one another without ramping up the overall power level. Characters have more options at lower levels — allowing them to continue adventuring for a bit longer but their overall durability is relatively unchanged.

Beyond the core classes, the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME* makes a number of changes to some of the more complicated mechanics in the game. Take grapple for example. Instead of a pair of opposed rolls and a number of other complicated options, grapple now works off one system that requires only a single roll to resolve. Grapple is now part of a unified mechanic that allows characters to perform all sorts of combat maneuvers,

such as bull rush, trip, disarm, and sunder. Each character has a Combat Maneuver Bonus (CMB) that acts as a modifier on an attack roll. The DC for maneuvers is an opponent's Combat Maneuver Defense (CMD), which is similar to a touch AC plus the creature's base attack bonus.

Additional changes range across the rules, from altering a host of all-or-nothing spells that were troublesome to high-level play to complex rules like turn undead. If you are familiar with 3.5E, these rules are easy to learn and incorporate both as a player and as a GM.

Beta Upgrades

Many players and GMs have been using the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME* rules to run their game since the release of the first Alpha Playtest document. While the final rules are very similar to those presented in the Beta Playtest, there are a number of substantial differences.

Many of the classes received a facelift



since the Beta Playtest, the largest of which occurred to the barbarian, druid, monk, paladin, and ranger. Many of these changes were previewed throughout the playtest process and became a part of the game after additional feedback and revision. The barbarian rage mechanics were simplified; instead of a pool of rage points to spend on powers and rounds of rage, barbarians now simply track rounds of rage per day. Druids and rangers saw a substantial revision to the way animal companions work. The rules now allow you to start play with a wide variety of companion types and to keep these companions as you gain in levels, with the animal growing along with you (both figuratively and literally).

Monks got a boost to their combat prowess, making flurry of blows a more reliable form of attack. The monk's stunning fist power is also upgraded; it is now an automatic class feature that allows them to apply various conditions to their foes. Paladins receive a boost to their smite evil ability, allowing them to designate one foe and granting bonuses until that enemy has been dispatched. Paladins also receive a new ability called "mercy," which cures various additional conditions when a paladin uses lay on hands.

Outside the core classes, there have been a number of other changes and improvements to the Beta Playtest version of the rules. Concentration became a function of Spellcraft with the Beta Playtest, but this proved to be a bit unfair to classes that did not make much use out of Intelligence. To remedy this, it was moved into a new type of check called (conveniently enough) a concentration check—this is not a skill, though. Instead, it is a modified caster level check that incorporates a character's spellcasting ability score. This prevents this vital class function from becoming a "skill tax" that all characters with spellcasting ability must invest in just to be proficient at their primary functions.

The final game also adds many

new feats, most of which are aimed at adding options to high-level play, especially for characters focused on melee and ranged combat. Two groups of feats deserve special attention: the Critical feats and the Vital Strike feats. The Critical feats add an effect to a successful critical hit. While the requirements for these feats are high, they allow a fighter to inflict some of the same effects that spellcasters do at higher levels. The Vital Strike feats allow melee characters to move and still deal significant damage with a standard attack action.

One of the biggest areas of contention in the playtest was the system for resolving combat maneuvers. The original system used the opponent's CMB + 15 as the DC to perform a maneuver against him. While this was simple to calculate, it made combat maneuvers too difficult to perform. Yet CMB + 10 was too easy, and anything else seemed arbitrary. The discussion raged on the boards over what to do with this complex problem. In the end, we settled on a system that incorporated elements from a creature's touch AC to make the system balanced and logical.

Prestige classes were another area that saw significant revision. While all 10 of the prestige classes featured in the Core Rulebook were released for playtest during the Beta stage, many received a number of changes due to feedback and criticism. Nowhere is this more true than with the shadowdancer. This class was almost unchanged during the playtest, but the final version has several additional abilities and powers, making it worth taking for more than just a level or two. Check out the full class at the end of this article.

All of the changes to the Beta Playtest are too numerous to list here, but for those who played that version of the game extensively and gave feedback, the final game showcases a lot of that hard work and dedication.

Conversion

There has been a lot of talk about converting existing 3.5E material to

the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME*. While all of Paizo's products will make the switch in August when the final game releases, older products will take only a small amount of effort to work with the new rules. For the most part, these changes are minor—altering skill lists, selecting a few new feats, calculating a creature's CMB and CMD, and making sure to add in new class abilities. Many of the larger changes are to components that require little or no conversion. Simply use the new rules in place of the old. Once you have a character's CMD calculated, trying to grapple that character just requires you to use the new rules to adjudicate the attack. The same goes for all of the spells, feats, and magic items altered by the new system.

To make things even easier, Paizo will release a free PDF that provides simple guidelines for making these conversions. This PDF will include rules for converting a wide variety of elements, from feats and spells to monsters and prestige classes. This guide will include step-by-step instructions for PCs, along with general guidelines for GMs converting other materials, from adventures to sourcebooks.

What's Next

The *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME CORE RULEBOOK* is set to release on August 13, 2009.

The following month sees the release of the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME BESTIARY* that updates a legion of classic monsters from 3.5E and OGL sources, bringing them all together in one large tome. This full-color book includes over 300 monsters with a ton of new art and rules to add to your game. September also sees the release of the *PATHFINDER GM SCREEN* that includes a bunch of handy charts and reference tables to make your game easier to run than ever. In November, Paizo will release the *PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME GEMASTERY GUIDE*, which includes a host of tips and tricks for developing and running your game.

In addition to these core products, the **PATHFINDER ADVENTURE PATH**, **PATHFINDER MODULES**, **PATHFINDER COMPANION**, and **PATHFINDER CHRONICLES** products will support the new rules, giving GMs a wealth of tools and setting information for their games.

At the same time, the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBILITY LICENSE** allows other publishers to produce products using the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME** rules. You will be able to identify these supplements and adventures by a special logo. More than 40 publishers have already signed on to produce new material for this game, including Open Design.

Next year promises to bring even more exciting products to the **PATHFINDER ROLEPLAYING GAME**, including more monsters, more options for players, and a number of new campaign and adventure books.

* * * * *

Shadowdancer

Civilized folk have always feared the night, barring themselves behind doors or comforting themselves with bonfires when the shadows grow long, rightfully wary of the creatures that prowl the darkness. Yet long ago, some learned that the best way to conquer an enemy is to embrace it. These were the first shadowdancers.

Shadowdancers exist in the boundary between light and darkness, where they weave together the shadows to become half-seen artists of deception. Unbound by any specified

morality or traditional code, shadowdancers encompass a wide variety of adventuring types who have seen the value of the dark. Spellcasters use their abilities to safely cast spells from hiding and then move quickly away, while classes devoted to hand-to-hand combat enjoy the ability to attack foes with the element of surprise. Some even take the name of their kind quite literally, becoming eerie and mysterious performers and dancers, though more often the temptation presented by their talents with deception and infiltration causes shadowdancers to turn to lives of thievery.

Role: Shadowdancers adventure for a wide variety of reasons. Many adventuring parties find shadowdancers valuable members of their teams due to their incredible stealth and ability to surprise enemies with lightning-quick attacks where they're least expected. For this reason, their services are often sought out by those groups in need of scouts or spies.

Alignment: Because of their nature as visually duplicitous tricksters, shadowdancers do not fit comfortably into the lawful category, as many use their talents to avoid the eyes of legitimate authority. Yet though they are allies of darkness, shadowdancers are neither inherently evil nor predisposed to good. To them, the darkness is simply the darkness, without any of the usual moral connotations made by the unenlightened.

Hit Die: d8.



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Requirements

To qualify to become a shadowdancer, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Skills: Stealth 5 ranks, Perform (dance) 2 ranks.

Feats: Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility.

Class Skills

The shadowdancer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Acrobatics (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Perception (Wis), Perform (Cha), Sleight of Hand (Dex), and Stealth (Dex).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are features of the shadowdancer prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Shadowdancers are proficient with the club, crossbow (hand, light, or heavy), dagger (any type), dart, mace, morningstar, quarterstaff, rapier, sap, shortbow (normal and composite), and short sword. Shadowdancers are proficient with light armor but not with shields.

Hide in Plain Sight (Su): A shadowdancer can use the Stealth skill even while being observed. As long as she is within 10 feet of some sort of shadow, a shadowdancer can hide herself from view in the open without anything to actually hide behind. She cannot, however, hide in her own shadow.

Evasion (Ex): At 2nd level, a shadowdancer gains evasion. If exposed to any effect that normally allows her to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, she takes no damage with a successful saving throw. The evasion ability can only be used if the shadowdancer is wearing light armor or no armor.

Darkvision (Ex): At 2nd level, a shadowdancer gains darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If she already has darkvision, the range increases by 30 feet.



Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 2nd level, a shadowdancer cannot be caught flat-footed, even if the attacker is invisible. He still loses her Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized. An assassin with this ability can still lose his Dexterity bonus to AC if an opponent successfully uses the feint action against him.

If a shadowdancer already has uncanny dodge from a different class, he automatically gains improved uncanny dodge instead.

Rogue Talent: At 3rd level, and every three levels thereafter, a shadowdancer gains a special ability that allows her to confound her foes. This functions as the rogue talent class feature. A shadowdancer cannot select an individual talent more than once. If a shadowdancer has the advanced talents rogue class feature, she can choose from the advanced talents list instead.

Shadow Illusion (Sp): When a shadowdancer reaches 3rd level, she can create visual illusions. This ability functions as *silent image*, using the shadowdancer's level as the caster level. A shadowdancer can use this ability once per day for every two shadowdancer levels she has attained. The DC for this ability is Charisma-based.

Summon Shadow (Su): At 3rd level, a shadowdancer can summon a shadow, an undead shade. Unlike a normal shadow, this shadow's alignment matches that of the shadowdancer, and the creature cannot create spawn. The summoned shadow receives a +4 bonus on Will saves made to halve the damage from positive channeled energy and the shadow cannot be turned or commanded. This shadow serves as a companion to the shadowdancer and can communicate

intelligibly with the shadowdancer. This shadow has a number of hit points equal to half the shadowdancer's total. The shadow uses the shadowdancer's base attack bonus and base save bonuses. Otherwise, this shadow is identical to the shadow found in the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*.

If a shadow companion is destroyed, or the shadowdancer chooses to dismiss it, the shadowdancer must attempt a DC 15 Fortitude save. If the saving throw fails, the shadowdancer gains one permanent negative level. A successful saving throw avoids this negative level. A destroyed or dismissed shadow companion cannot be replaced for 30 days.

Shadow Call (Sp): At 4th level, a shadowdancer can create creatures and effects out of raw shadow. This ability functions as *shadow conjuration*, using the shadowdancer's level as the caster level. A shadowdancer can use this ability once per day at 4th level, plus one additional time per day for every two levels attained beyond 4th (2/day at 6th level, 3/day at 8th level, and 4/day at 10th level). Upon reaching 10th level, this ability functions as *greater shadow conjuration*. The DC for this ability is Charisma-based.

Shadow Jump (Su): At 4th level, a shadowdancer gains the ability to travel between shadows as if by means of a *dimension door* spell. The limitation is that the magical transport must begin and end in an area with at least some dim light. A shadowdancer can jump up to a total of 40 feet each day in this way; this may be a single jump of 40 feet or four jumps of 10 feet each. Every two levels higher than 4th, the distance a shadowdancer can jump each day doubles (80 feet at 6th, 160 feet at 8th, and 320 feet at 10th). This amount can be split among many jumps, but each one, no matter how small, counts as a 10-foot increment.

Defensive Roll (Ex): Starting at 5th level, once per day, a shadowdancer can attempt to avoid a lethal blow. This

functions as the rogue's advanced talent of the same name.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 5th level and higher, shadowdancer can no longer be flanked. This defense denies a rogue the ability to sneak attack the assassin by flanking him, unless the attacker has at least four more rogue levels than the target has assassin levels.

If a character already has uncanny dodge from another class, the levels from the classes that grant uncanny dodge stack to determine the minimum rogue level required to flank the character.

Slippery Mind (Ex): At 7th level, a shadowdancer becomes resilient to enchantment spells. This functions as the rogue's advanced talent of the same name.

Shadow Power (Sp): At 8th level, a shadowdancer can use raw shadow to damage her foes. This ability functions as *shadow evocation*, using the shadowdancer's level as the caster level. A shadowdancer can use this ability once per day at 8th level, and one additional time per day upon reaching 10th level. The DC for this ability is Charisma-based.

Improved Evasion (Ex): This ability, gained at 10th level, works like evasion (see above). A shadowdancer takes no damage at all on successful saving throws against attacks that allow a Reflex saving throw for half damage. What's more, she takes only half damage even if she fails her saving throw.

Shadow Master (Su): At 10th level, whenever a shadowdancer is in an area of dim light, she gains DR 10/— and a +2 luck bonus on all saving throws. In addition, whenever she successfully scores a critical hit against a foe who is in an area of dim light, that foe is blinded for 1d6 rounds.



Shadowdancer

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+1	+0	Hide in plain sight
2nd	+1	+1	+1	+1	Evasion, darkvision, uncanny dodge
3rd	+2	+1	+2	+1	Rogue talent, shadow illusion, summon shadow
4th	+3	+1	+2	+1	Shadow call, shadow jump 40 ft.
5th	+3	+2	+3	+2	Defensive roll, improved uncanny dodge
6th	+4	+2	+3	+2	Rogue talent, shadow jump 80 ft.
7th	+5	+2	+4	+2	Slippery mind
8th	+6	+3	+4	+3	Shadow jump 160 ft., shadow power
9th	+6	+3	+5	+3	Rogue talent
10th	+7	+3	+5	+3	Improved evasion, shadow jump 320 ft., shadow master

Chaos Magic of the Proteans

By Todd Stewart

Art by Sarah Stone and Paul Davidson

The Great Beyond—the heavens, the hells, the birthplace of the multiverse, and the resting place of souls passed on in Paizo Publishing’s *PATHFINDER CHRONICLES* campaign setting. It is here that the serpentine proteans, children of the Maelstrom and heralds of Chaos, thrive within their ever-changing environment, which drifts like an unpredictable tide. Long the dominant inhabitants of their native plane, the multitude of protean castes and subspecies openly worship and fanatically defend the primacy of pure freedom against the sterile, static corruption of the other planes.

Each racial caste, split into a trio of sub-species, occupies a distinct niche within the Maelstrom’s fluid political framework. The bestial naunet proteans are defenders, threatening to inundate those planes adjacent to the Maelstrom’s shifting borderlands at the slightest provocation. A second caste, the subtle imentesh, are artisans within the Cerulean Void, acting as missionaries and diplomats

beyond its borders and sowing seeds of liberating discord wherever they wander. Finally, the fractious priest kings make up the keketar caste, which communes with the plane itself and a mysterious and dualistic divinity. Split further into innumerable sects, each advances a unique vision and philosophy, yet it all stems from the same ultimate source.

Within their unique environment, influenced by their own enigmatic gods known as the Speakers of the Depths and possessed of a mindset best described as alien, the protean race has developed a variety of magic unlike anything encountered within the mortal realm—or anywhere else. In the case of mundane or magical objects, the imentesh proteans view such artifice as an art form, constantly creating new works for the joy of creation itself as much as to arm themselves and the lesser naunet caste. Similarly, the keketar and their innumerable cabals approach spellcraft and the creation of artifacts in the same fashion. What follows are examples of their work, both terrible and beautiful.

Champions of Chaos

The proteans comprise a paradox in that they champion a thousand different concepts of chaos in a thousand different ways, each preached by one of the keketar choruses. At the same time, they exist in a fractious unification under their caste system and their racial religion, devoid of monolithic theology and hierarchy as it might be. As such, the spells, items, and artifacts presented here have unique links to the curious nature of the proteans themselves. Inserted into another cosmology, they would best serve as replacements or rivals to the chaotic frogfolk (within the Great Wheel perhaps as a lost race of true frogfolk that existed prior to the creation of the Spawning Stone). Alternatively, GMs can simply adapt these concepts to the CN paragon races themselves, or other chaotic races such as demons, eladrin, or others that might exist in a given campaign setting.

For more material on the proteans and their native plane the Maelstrom, see *THE GREAT BEYOND: A GUIDE TO THE MULTIVERSE, AND PATHFINDER ADVENTURE PATH #22: THE END OF ETERNITY*.

Protean Items

Items crafted by the proteans retain an immutable connection to their basic essence and the nature of the Maelstrom, and as such, even if the methods and techniques of their creation become known to a non-native spellcaster, replication of the same items often proves impossible. The precise reason for this difficulty is that keketar proteans are capable of extracting something intangible from their plane itself either through their very beings or their quasi-divine rites, and the lesser imentesh can access it as well through natural sources known as *anarchic fonts* or entropy pools.

Manifesting itself as a glowing, golden liquid with a viscous, syrupy consistency, the liquid is as rare as it is exceedingly unstable and dangerous, capable of causing any number of random effects. (See also *PATHFINDER ADVENTURE PATH #22*.)

M’ssellinith’s Pigments of the Unraveled Axiom

Aura moderate abjuration; **CL** 10th

Slot —; **Price** 50,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lb.

Description

These brilliant pigments, often worn by naunet proteans, are applied as either a powder or paint. They constantly shift

in tone and hue, slowly and randomly changing colors. When applied to a user's body, the pigments provide protections and abilities against law-based effects and enemies. The pigments' magic fades after 24 hours.

The user is protected by the constant effect of a *protection from law* spell, and all spells with either the law descriptor or cast by a lawful caster are reduced by 1d6 caster levels. If an affected spell is reduced to 0 or less, the spell fails to affect the pigment wearer. Lastly, the user gains the use of the frightful presence ability (DC 18) while wearing the pigments, applicable only against lawful enemies.

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *protection from law*, a pinch of dust from a destroyed lawful outsider

Sash of Poisoned Whispers

Aura moderate illusion; **CL** 10th

Slot torso; **Price** 60,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lb.

Description

This sash, composed of a metallic, iridescent fabric with the consistency and feel of silk, provides its wearer with open and surreptitious benefits in social situations—befitting the nature of many imentesh proteans. While imentesh proteans most often wear such sashes, they work for any wearer and provide a +5 bonus to all Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive checks. In situations where coercion is more important than honesty, the sash allows its user to invoke the effects of a *charm person* spell (3/day) and a bardic *mass suggestion* (1/day).

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *charm person*, *mass suggestion*, a drop of dried protean spittle

Sash of the Serpentine Herald

Aura strong conjuration; **CL** 15th

Slot torso; **Price** 100,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lb.

Description

Typically wrapped around their waist or tail, this long, cloth sash displays the symbols and patterns unique to whatever chorus its protean maker



belongs to, slowly shifting colors and other cosmetic features at random. Most often carried by imentesh proteans traveling beyond the borders of the Maelstrom, the *sash of the serpentine herald* allows them to carry a localized pocket of the Cerulean Void along with them, even within the most ordered of planes.

When worn, the sash protects its user from any detrimental planar effects, negating any innate effects of any plane outside of the Maelstrom. The sash also allows its wearer to tap into similar benefits they might possess while inside the Maelstrom itself, enabling them to use any limited use spell-like abilities an additional time per day beyond their normal limit. Finally, the sash's most powerful ability allows its user to cast any arcane or divine spell of 3rd level or lower with a target of

self a number of times equal to their charisma modifier, altering themselves in a way similar to the way they alter their local environment within the Maelstrom.

Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *cloak of chaos*, *shield of the imentesh wanderer*, three drops of manifest chaos matter from an anarchic font, creator must be chaotic.

Protean Spells

Protean magic is, in a word, bizarre. It blurs the line between arcane and divine magic. Typically, the imentesh proteans practice arcane magic, but they have access to spells seemingly out of place for arcane casters; similarly, the quasi-religious pseudo-hierarchy of the keketar choruses frequently practice both styles of magic simultaneously

and develop new spells that bridge the gap between them.

The following spells are presented as learned or reverse engineered by non-protean wizards or clerics or as disseminated by the imentesh themselves like chaotic carrots on chaotic sticks. As with many spells of protean origin, they were designed for their use within the Maelstrom, so their material components reflect methods of bypassing those original restrictions. Additionally, as many of these spells were intentionally distributed by proteans to other races, it remains a distinct possibility that proteans possess methods to suppress or nullify these spells.

Kiss of the First Speaker

School transmutation; **Level** cleric 3, sorcerer/wizard 3

Casting

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, F (a single protean scale)

Effect

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target one creature

Duration 1 round/level



Saving Throw Fortitude negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

Description

The target of this spell is affected as if they were present within a region of wild magic. The effect can be dispelled by the successful casting of either a *break enchantment*, *dispel chaos*, or *mage's disjunction* spell, though anyone attempting to cast these spells on the affected target is also subject to the wild magic until dispelled.

Kiss of the First Speaker, Greater

School transmutation; **Level** cleric 5, sorcerer/wizard 5

Casting

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M/F (a protean scale and a drop of fluid from an anarchic font)

Effect

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target one creature

Duration 1 round/level

Saving Throw Fortitude negates; **Spell Resistance** yes

Description

The target of this spell is affected as with *kiss of the first speaker* with the exception that any spell or spell-like ability the target uses is automatically affected; there is no chance to nullify the wild magic with a caster level check. Additionally, the wild magic effect extends to encompass any others within a radius of 30 ft. from the target, affecting them as per a *kiss of the first speaker*.

Rebuke of the Cerulean Void

School transmutation; **Level** cleric 4, sorcerer/wizard 4

Casting

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, F (a fragment of stone or crystal from the Maelstrom)

Effect

Range close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target one creature

Duration 1 round

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** no

Description

This spell allows the caster to manipulate local probability, forcing

one enemy to re-roll any save, attack roll, or caster level check.

Shield of the Imentesh Wanderer

School abjuration; **Level** cleric 3, sorcerer/wizard 3

Casting

Casting Time 1 minute

Components V, F (a single scale of a living protean of imentesh caste or higher)

Effect

Range personal

Duration 24 hours

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

Description

When proteans wander beyond their native plane of the Maelstrom, they often employ magic to ward themselves from the inherent hazards of foreign planes. *Shield of the imentesh wanderer* protects the caster from natural planar hazards, negating any alignment-based penalties imposed as well as any other detrimental effects of that plane's listed properties.

At the GM's discretion, the spell may not function within the personal domains of gods or unique planar entities such as archfiends or empyreal lords.

Succor within the Storm

School abjuration; **Level** bard 3, cleric 3, druid 3, sorcerer/wizard 3

Casting

Casting Time 1 minute

Components V, S, M (a single drop of blood, willingly given by a protean of imentesh caste or higher)

Effect

Range personal

Target you

Duration 24 hours

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

Description

Often distributed by wandering imentesh proteans to non-protean allies, chaotic mages, and others potentially receptive to their chaotic gospel, *succor within the storm* provides a method of avoiding the shifting flux that permeates the Maelstrom's borderlands. When active, the spell

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suppresses the wild magic trait found in the Maelstrom borderlands (but not deeper within the Cerulean Void), and negates the alignment-based penalties normally present there (or on any other strongly chaos-aligned plane).

Protean Artifacts

Gatestone of the Burning Spiral

In the murky depths of prehistory, only the Maelstrom existed, a perfect realm of constant change and utter, blissful impermanence; this all changed, however, when the proteans discovered the Abyss. For the first time, they brought the rest of the multiverse to the attention of that foul plane's horrible denizens.

In most versions of the tale, the Abyss was found by the proteans of the Chorus of Razored Discord and the Chorus of Malignant Symmetry. Some sources add the Chorus of the Burning Spiral as a third member, who ultimately realized the horrific mistake they had made in creating the Abyss or in cracking open the boundaries between it and the Maelstrom.

The proteans of the Burning Spiral fought the creatures of the Abyss, and before long, the rest of their race joined the struggle, fighting to contain the Abyssal corruption or contamination. Though lessened, the conflict continues to the present and exists between the eldest beings of the Abyss, lying in hiding, and the heretical members of the Choruses of Razored Discord and Malignant Symmetry. The Burning Spiral remains active, though, raging against the Abyss and striking down its ancient enemies and corrupted kindred alike.

Among the objects created by those protean choruses, none carried more impact on the course of history than the so-called *gatestones*, objects of multicolored crystal and raw chaos matter, swirling with an internal constellation of runes in the protean tongue. Used to corrupt the very essence of planar fabric, forcing open the boundaries between planes of existence, the *gatestones* anchored open these tears in reality for exploration,

conquest, and eventually attempts at mutual genocide.

Ultimately, the *gatestones* were destroyed by the keketars of the Chorus of the Burning Spiral, but the largest and most powerful of them left behind a single, massive fragment, still partially functional and corrupted from its original purpose. During its attempted destruction, the many dying keketars of the Chorus of the Burning Spiral imprinted their goals and their suicidal hatred of the Abyss into the gatestone, and the artifact retains those influences along with the lingering taint of its original creators.

This *gatestone*, though cracked and partially melted, retains much of its power and its ever-changing internal appearance; however, its purpose has warped. Powerful, though intelligent and headstrong, it influences anyone holding or touching it and those nearby to advance the aims of the Burning Spiral, hunting down the ancient horrors of the Abyss and its own original creators alike.

Gatestone of the Burning Spiral (Major Artifact)

Aura overwhelming conjuration; **CL** 25th

Slot —; **Price** —; **Weight** 30 lb.

Statistics

Alignment CE; **Ego** 28

Senses blindsense, darkvision 120 ft., and hearing

Int 20, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 18

Communication empathy

Spell-Like Powers at-will *detect evil*, 3/day widened *dimensional lock*, 3/day *dispel evil*, 3/day *destruction*, 1/day *disjunction*

Description

The *gatestone of the burning spiral* retains much of its original, plane-breaching powers and allows its user to rip open planar boundaries at will, mimicking the effects of a *gate* spell with the sole caveat that it cannot be used for transit into or out of a lawful plane. Additionally, any beings called through such tears have a 50% chance of not being under the user's control, and the power cannot be used to call upon any outsider with a lawful

subtype. Furthermore, in line with the imprinted ego of the Chorus of the Burning Spiral, the stone emits a constant *death knell* effect within a radius of 100 ft., affecting any CE outsider.

While exceedingly powerful, the *gatestone* has several dangerous side effects, even beyond its capacity to compel its user to carry out its ancient, suicidal vendettas. The artifact can impose its ego not only on its current owner but, also, on all those within a radius of 100 ft., and as a conflicting corruption between the designs of its creators and its attempted destroyers, the *gatestone* radiates an aura equivalent to a *sympathy* effect for CE outsiders extending to a range of 500 ft.

Destruction

The *gatestone of the burning spiral* immolates, along with everything in a 6-mile radius if plunged into the heart of a dying Qlippoth lord. Alternatively, its power would irreversibly fade with the destruction of the remaining members of the heretical protean choruses who created it: the Chorus of Malignant Symmetry and the Chorus of Razored Discord.

Shard of the Broken Crown

The act of enslavement by *planar binding* is a fate worse than death to a protean and a crime punishable only by death. Such were the conditions that have forever since defined the protean Chorus of Serene Radiance. Centuries ago, a headstrong mortal wizard by the name of Avis Pakthelion successfully summoned and bound the keketar Mek'm'liis, intending to use the protean to destroy his enemies. As an effect of the binding, the keketar's immaterial crown was stripped away and made physically manifest as a morphic crystalline circlet worn by the mage.

Enraged, the keketar could only comply, biding time until his kindred found and released him, and within a month, they did just that. The proteans' act of vengeance ultimately destroyed the wizard's demiplane, killing him, and in the process, what few possessions of his that survived the

carnage were scattered across the planes through dozens of violent planar rifts, including the keketar's stolen crown.

In the centuries since, Mek'm'liis and his kindred have searched for the crown, gradually becoming aware of its splintered status, negotiating whatever price required, or slaughtering as necessary to gain the fragments or even hints of their location. And, related very much to the crown itself, since its loss the entire chorus bears the stigmata of static, uniformly yellow, luminescent eyes that remain regardless of whatever outward form the proteans take.

The shard detailed below is the largest of a dozen or so smaller fragments, each possessing their own less potent powers. The synchronicity between the shards, allows them to merge and augment one another if found and reunited. While their precise locations remain unknown, rumors place at least one smaller fragment in the layer of the Abyss known as the Candleflame Chancre, within the horde of the unique elemental dragon Kelizandi, a lesser archdaemon of Abaddon loyal to the Lord of Wasting.

Shard of the Broken Crown (Lesser Artifact)

Aura strong transmutation; CL 20th

Slot —; **Price** —; **Weight** 2 lbs.

Statistics

Alignment CN; **Ego** 18

Senses hearing, vision 30 ft.

Int 16, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12

Communication empathy

Spell-Like Powers at-will *major creation*, 3/day *chaos hammer*, 1/day *greater dispel magic*

Description

The *shard of the broken crown* circles its wearer's head much like an ioun stone or, more properly, like the shifting metamorphic components of a keketar's crown, constantly changing shape, color, and opacity. The shard provides its wearer with a number of powers normally possessed by a keketar protean.

Once per day, as a standard action, it allows its wearer to change shape into any Small, Medium, or Large animal,

elemental, giant, humanoid, magical beast, monstrous humanoid, ooze, plant, or vermin. Like the Chorus of Serene Radiance, no matter the form, the wearer's eyes glow a solid, luminous yellow, including when in their original form. The wearer can resume their original form as a free action, at which point they gain the effects of a *heal* spell (CL 20).

Like a protean, the wearer's internal organs shift and change shape and position constantly, providing them with a 50% chance to ignore extra damage caused by critical hits and sneak attacks. The wearer recovers from physical blindness or deafness within 1 round by regenerating functional sensory organs.

Once per week, the shard allows its wearer to tap into the unconscious mind of the keketar Mek'm'liis, providing a sympathetic connection that operates like a *contact other plane* spell, re-rolling on an intentional lie.

However, the connection operates in both directions, allowing the keketar to query the unaware wearer's mind in a similar fashion unless they succeed at a Will save (DC 27).

Finally, as a side effect, the wearer of the *shard of the broken crown* gains the chaotic subtype with all benefits and drawbacks it provides. The *shard* habitually attempts to coerce its current wearer to visit the Maelstrom borderlands, seeking to return home.

Destruction

The *shard of the broken crown* (and its other fragments) dissolves at the death of the keketar protean Mek'm'liis, the First of Mute Seers, and the remaining keketars of the Chorus of Serene Radiance or, alternatively, upon the destruction of the souls of every blood descendant of the mortal wizard Avis Pakthelion.



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Swords Against Darkness

Dungeon & Underground Skill Challenges

By Michael Brewer, Quinn Murphy,
and Jonathan Jacobs
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Skill challenges—contests between PCs and NPCs—offer a vital alternative to drawing steel and invoking eldritch forces. They can provide excitement just as fast-paced, harrowing, and unpredictable as any combat encounter. For any edition, their action and stealth may just surprise and entertain even the most jaded veteran in your group.

Rails in the Dark

While exploring abandoned dwarven mines, the characters discover a wretched tribe of particularly aggressive goblins (or whatever monster fits your campaign). Perhaps a recent disease has destroyed their mushroom corp and left the green skins exceptionally hungry, or maybe they just enjoy hunting down intrepid adventurers. Either way, hundreds of mad goblins pursue the PCs through the tight corridors.

Tiny black arrows skitter across the smooth floor and ricochet off the stone walls around you as goblins pursue you through the mines. The goblins' shrieks and howls echo through the halls, growing louder as they close in. Suddenly, the smooth, worked stone gives way to rough cavern walls, which open up into a large room. Five sets of parallel iron beams enter the room from five rough-hewn tunnels, all converging here. The beams have been nailed to cross-timbers using heavy spikes. The tracks leading to three of the branching tunnels also have wooden carts with steel wheels parked atop the beams. The gleeful squeals of approaching goblins grow louder.

The carts are large enough to squeeze six characters into, and three tracks have two carts each (two tunnels have no carts). If the PCs shove off in the carts, use the Rails in the Dark skill challenge; each cart used by the PCs must complete the challenge independently.

The mining cart careens through the darkness, and the wooden support beams whip by just above your head. The cart squeals around sharp corners, throwing you against its sides and

flirting with complete derailment. The tunnel soon straightens and approaches an area lit by a pale blue glow. The cart leaves the tunnel and traverses a bridge over an immense underground lake glowing with phosphorescent lichen.

The view is breathtaking; unfortunately, you are on a collision course with some unwanted company: the goblins are converging on a parallel track.

Setup: The tunnel ends at the lake, but the tracks continue on a rickety bridge – and the goblins' track converges with the PCs track. The PCs must fend off the enemies before they reach the junction. They have three rounds before the carts collide and must use what's available to stave off disaster: basic attacks and primary skills as standard actions, secondary skills as minor actions, and powers.

Level: 5th

Complexity: Special (10 successes within 3 rounds)

Primary Skills: Athletics, Thievery, and basic attacks and powers

Athletics (variable DC)—The PCs may use the hand brake to slow the cart enough to avoid the collision. Every braking attempt has a cumulative 20% chance (to a maximum of 80%) to break the handle; this prevents future braking attempts. Using the brake is a DC 12.

The PCs may also toss a large iron cog from the bottom of the cart onto the enemy track. Throwing the heavy cog onto the track of the enemy cart is a DC 17 check. Failure indicates the cog slips between the cross timbers and is lost. Using Athletics to toss the cog can only be tried once; a success counts as 2 successes as the gear drastically slows the goblins' cart, a failure means the cog is lost entirely.

Thievery (DC 17)—A PC may slow down or disable the goblins' cart using a broken pick or shovel handle from the PC's cart to engage the enemy cart's brake. This skill may be attempted only twice.

Basic Attacks (AC 20)—Enemy carts are considered

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adjacent to the PCs for the purpose of determining range. Any attack that does more than 10 points of damage is considered a success; 3 successes are required to knock a cart off its track.

Powers (variable DC)—If a power could conceivably damage the cart, it creates challenge successes by knocking it off the track. To be considered a success, the PC must hit and deal at least 10 points of damage. An attack with a power results in the following: an at-will power is worth 1 success; an encounter power is worth 2 successes; and a daily power is worth 3 successes if it hits and deals the required damage or 1 success otherwise. The cart has the following defenses: AC 20, Reflex 10, Fortitude 17, and Will 10.

Secondary Skills: Dungeoneering, Insight, Perception

Dungeoneering (DC 20)—The PC remembers stories about levers that switch cars from one track to another. This skill may be attempted once by each character trained in Dungeoneering. A successful check allows the PC to recognize a switch, allowing her (or those she informs) a single attack attempt to engage the switch using a basic attack (AC 15).

Insight (DC 12)—The PC realizes that the PCs could disable the wheels of the opposing carts using the mining tools and large iron cog left in the cart. This skill may be attempted once by every character.

Perception (DC 17)—The PC notices a large lever where the rails cross at a junction. Perhaps it could redirect the enemy carts (see Dungeoneering above). This skill may be attempted once by every character.

Success: *The goblins' cart is moving so*

fast it derails as it reaches the junction, dumping its occupants into the lake. Your cart rapidly gains momentum as the rails slope downward. The tracks enter another tunnel and plunge back into the dark, and the soft glow from the underground lake recedes into the distance.

The PCs have evaded their pursuers without taking a dive into the underground lake. The tracks soon come to an end (and the cart coasts to a stop), and the PCs may proceed with their regularly scheduled adventure.

Failure: *Your efforts failed to prevent the collision. The carts smash into each other, sending all everyone, the carts, and the enemy hurtling into the lake. You plunge into the ice-cold depths of the underground lake. When you surface, you see that the goblins succumbed to the wreck and float lifelessly in the freezing water.*

The PCs survive the collision and find they are near the shallows of the lake and can walk to the rocky shore. However, the event has taken its toll on the PCs, and they each lose half their remaining healing surges. If a PC does not have any healing surges left, he loses half his remaining hp (but retains a minimum of 1). The PCs can easily find a path back up to the tracks and may continue with the adventure.

Wrapping Up

Scaling: This skill challenge can easily scale with the level of the PCs. Higher-level characters encounter tougher opponents, heavier debris, and more complex braking mechanisms. Dungeoneering checks made for knowledge of rail carts should scale with the technology level of the setting. For instance, if the characters hail from the

Free City of Zobeck, the DC would be easy. However, if the characters adventure in a more primitive setting, like the Stone Age, then the DC should be hard or higher.

Descent into the Clockwork Heart

You have conquered the machinations of the sorcerer Morogue and delved deep into the madman's lair. Descending into its heart, you find a grinding pit of stone gears. To cross the grinding gears of the Clockwork Heart your timing and senses must be sharp, for the ground turns and twists and is most unforgiving.

Setup: You must negotiate the clockwork pit by making 8 traversal skill checks while accumulating as few failures as possible.

Traversal—The PCs start their descent at the lip of the pit and must work their way down. The very first check is called a traversal check; traversal checks are group checks that can be made using any traversal skill (see below). At each stage in the challenge, the characters move to a new area in the Clockwork Heart where the group may use one or more navigation skills (see below) before they must make another traversal check.

When a traversal check fails, assign damage as shown in table 1 to the PC who led the group check. He cannot lead for the next traversal skill check.

Navigation—The PCs traverse the pit as a group, but each individual can contribute to each stage. Navigation skills provide bonuses on traversal checks or allow other actions to be taken, but the PCs are limited in how many skills they can use before they must traverse to the next level (see



table 1).

Shifting Gears—After each traversal check, the GM rolls on table 1 to see where the PCs end up. Each location allows the PCs to attempt a limited number of navigation skill checks before they must make another traversal check. Some locations have other special rules or effects.

The terrain of the Clockwork Heart is unforgiving. The PCs might be caught and crushed between gears or fall from great heights. The PCs can fail repeatedly without ending this skill challenge. Because failures are damaging, the Clockwork Heart can hurt or kill a careless party. Each time a character fails a traversal check, he takes damage according to Table 2 in addition to any other consequences; the damage increases as time goes on.

Level: 10th

Complexity: variable (see below)

Traversal Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Dungeoneering, Thievery

Acrobatics (DC 26)—You guide the party through a series of deft maneuvers, gracefully descending to the next plateau and outpacing the treacherous machinery.

Athletics (DC 26)—With raw power and speed, you outpace Morogue’s shifting heart... for a time.

Dungeoneering (DC 26)—You don’t quite understand how this machine works, but you know enough about spelunking and caves to guide your companions through the worst of it. You carefully place rope and adapt your gear to descend safely.

Thievery (DC 26)—The Clockwork Heart is a gigantic trap, and you are good at those. You improvise ways to slow or even halt some of the machinery to help the party descend safely.

Navigation Skills: Arcana, Heal, History; also able to catch your breath

Arcana (DC 24)—You unravel eldritch secrets and guide the party by thinking like the infamous mad wizard

himself. Add +2 to the next traversal DC; if that check succeeds, it counts as two successful traversal checks.

Heal (DC 24)—You patch up one of your party, so you can take advantage of their skills once more. Additionally, you can choose one member of your party to lead the next traversal check, even if that member would otherwise be ineligible.

History (DC 24)—Your knowledge of the Clockwork Heart comes in fits and starts, but each scrap of memory is proving useful. You can choose either a +2 bonus to the next traversal check or have the GM apply a +1 to his next roll on table 1.

Perception (DC 19)—You scout the twisting terrain to see how it would be most advantageous to proceed. You gain a +2 bonus to your next traversal check.

Catch Your Breath (counts as two navigation skill checks)—These treacherous machinations give little time for rest,

Table 1: Stone Gears

Location	Navigation Checks Allowed	Additional Effects	Description
1. Punishing Pinion	0	—	The jagged surface is hard to stand on, but you have more pressing problems—the rolling gear is almost on top of you!
2. Fast Gear	1	—	This small platform is moving at a high speed. No time to think, you have to move or get ground up!
3. Tilted Gear	2	+2 to Athletics or Acrobatic DCs for next traversal check.	This platform is a huge tilted gear. It’s all that you can do to keep from sliding off.
4. Complicated Gear Pattern	2	Add +2d6 damage to a failed traversal checks.	There’s barely room to stand in this complex series of gears and pulleys. You must move very carefully to avoid slipping or being hurt.
5. Slow Gear	3	Add +4d6 damage to a failed traversal check	You are on a slow but powerful section of gears. There’s a bit of time to breath, but if you get caught between these, it will be impossible to get out.
6. Levers (maximum of two times; all subsequent results count as Slow Gear)	—	If PCs make a successful Arcana (hard DC) check, the GM rolls twice on these tables and the party can choose which one they move to.	In the heart of this mechanical chaos, you find a strange control mechanism. If you can figure out what controls what, it could help you pass through the Clockwork Heart.

Table 2: Gear Damage

Failures	Damage
1-2	2d6+5
3-4	2d8+5
5-6	3d8+5
7 or more	3d10+5

but you find a moment to compose yourself before continuing down. All players may spend a healing surge.

Wrapping Up

Once the players have rolled eight traversal checks (success or failure), they have passed through the Clockwork Heart to the next level of the dungeon. They may be required a short rest afterwards. If you want to push the players, you can include a small monster encounter immediately after this taxing journey.

Coming Up For Air

You stare down at the well only to see the water below reflecting your face in the flickering torch light. You take a deep breath and jump down. Plunging into the watery depths, you suddenly realize you are not alone.

This skill challenge is a potential combat zone. The PCs must navigate through a series of flooded underground caverns to reach Beach Cavern, a secluded cave accessible only by water that serves as the anteroom to a black dragon's lair. The supposedly abandoned well is the back door to a network of flooded caves, but in actuality, a small company of sahuagin guards it.

Setup: To reach Beach Cavern, the PCs must swim through a series of pitch-black, flooded natural caves while fending off sahuagin guards.

Time is critical for this skill challenge. Once the characters are underwater, they need to know how long they have been submerged or risk drowning. The GM and players should review the guidelines for underwater combat (Ch. 3, DMG), swimming (Ch. 5, PHB), and drowning (Ch. 9, DMG) before this skill challenge.

Assume the caverns are completely submerged and have no air pockets other than the well entrance and Beach Cavern, their destination. The subterranean Beach Cavern includes a lake where the party will emerge; one or more additional (dry) exits connect Beach Cavern to the black dragon's cave complex. Beach Cavern is not guarded and could serve as a staging ground for further exploration of the cave complex.

Unless noted, any individual skill failure immediately triggers a Stealth check by the party against the passive Perception of the sahuagin sentries. If the sahuagin spot the PCs, please read the combat encounter section below.

Level: 10th

Complexity: Moderate (requires 9 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Athletics, Diplomacy, Dungeoneering, Endurance, Intimidate, Nature, Perception

Athletics (DC 16)—You must swim; otherwise you risk a watery death.

The PCs must use Athletics to swim throughout the cave complex, and each stage requires an Athletics check by each PC to remain swimming: assume calm water unless a higher degree of difficulty is desired. If a PC fails an Athletics check, that character is sinking and may require help from other members of their party. Athlet-

ics checks do not count towards the overall success of the skill challenge until after the PCs learn where Beach Cavern lies.

Once the location is known, each successful Athletics check counts as one success toward the PCs reaching that area. Failure indicates the PCs make no progress toward Beach Cavern as a group, and individual Athletics checks must be made for individuals to remain afloat. These secondary Athletics checks do not count towards the overall success or failure of the skill challenge, but failure to swim may indicate a PC is drowning.

Diplomacy (DC 21)—You discover that the sahuagin sentries also wish to eliminate the dragon.

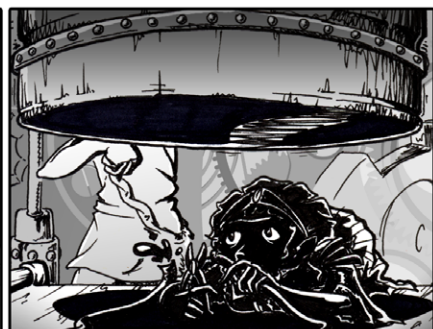
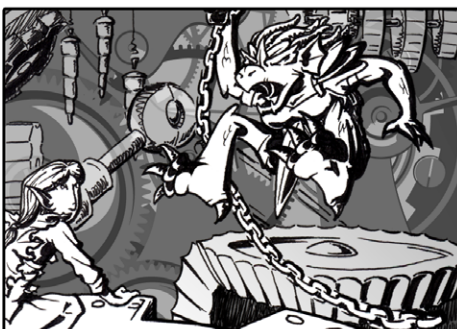
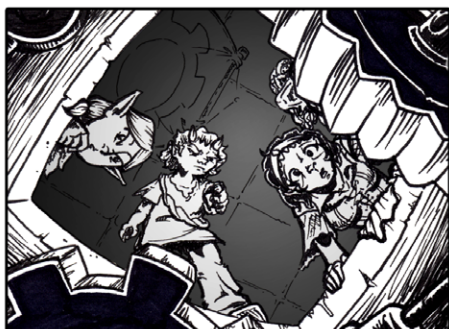
An initial success holds off a sahuagin attack, on the condition that the flooded caverns will become the sahuagin's domain after the dragon is slain. A second Diplomacy success convinces the sahuagin to give you directions to Beach Cavern as well. They will not, however, lead the party to Beach Cavern for fear of being seen aiding the party. No more than two successes from Diplomacy can count toward the overall skill challenge.

Dungeoneering (DC 10)—Your knowledge the underground exploration helps you find your way through the caves.

A success helps guide the party in the right direction and grants the party a +2 situation bonus on Perception and Stealth checks. Only one Dungeoneering check can count towards the overall skill challenge.

Endurance (DC 16)—You only have a few minutes of breath left, so be quick before you run out of air.

The PCs only have 3 minutes before



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they must make regular Endurance skill checks to avoid drowning. Successes do not contribute towards the overall skill challenge, but they do permit the PCs to make additional attempts to discover the location of Beach Cavern.

Intimidate (DC 21)—*The sahuagin are weak and you try to remind them of that.*

A successful Intimidate check forces the sahuagin sentries to lower their weapons and allow your party to pass unharmed. Any attempts to force the sahuagin to lead the party to Beach Cavern will fail, but a second Intimidate check can provide directions. No more than two Intimidate checks can count towards the overall skill challenge. Failure not only indicates the sahuagin's attack, but it also prevents the use of Diplomacy as an alternative.

Nature (DC 10)—*The slow current of water through the caves help you find the way to Beach Cavern.*

A successful Nature check guides the party in the right direction and grants a +2 bonus on any additional Athletics for swimming through the flooded caves. Only one Nature check can count towards the overall skill challenge.

Perception (DC 16)—*Your keen eyes and ears serve you well.*

Once in the water, the PCs may attempt to spot guards or find Beach Cavern. If they succeed at the former, grant a +2 bonus to any future Stealth checks since they know the location of the sentries. Each Perception check, up to a maximum of three, counts towards the overall success of the skill challenge. Three successes are required for Beach Cavern's location to be discovered.

Sahuagin Sentries (3178 xp)

Setup: Roaming throughout the flooded caverns is a small band of sahuagin. As refuge from the wilds of a vast, dangerous underground ocean, these sahuagin have made a deal with the dragon to keep watch for intruders. Fortunately for the PCs, the sahuagin are not the most attentive guards and would rather see the dragon eliminated so these caverns might instead be used as a sahuagin spawning ground. The combat portion of this skill challenge begins after the sahuagin sentries have made a successful Perception check following a party member's failed Stealth checks. Stealth checks are forced only when the party fails another skill check (see above).

After the Sahuagin Sentries are alerted to the PCs' presence.

Through the water, you hear a gurgling shout in Abyssal, followed by an order to halt. As you turn toward the voice, you see a shadowy mob of sahuagin warriors swimming towards you. A huge sahuagin carrying a massive white trident, stops short and shouts "What do we have here?! Tell me, land dwellers, what shall we do with you?"

Roleplay this encounter to give the PCs a chance to use Diplomacy or Intimidation, possibly allowing them to avoid combat entirely (see above). Failure to cow the sahuagin or to convince them that the PCs could be powerful allies results in combat as outlined below. Although the sahuagin

can speak underwater, the PCs may need to improvise to communicate with them effectively.

This encounter includes one sahuagin baron (1); six sahuagin guard (6); three sahuagin raiders (3) and three sahuagin priests (3). In addition, the sahuagin baron carries a magical whalebone Trident of Piercing +3 (Ch. 2, AV).

Tactics: The sahuagin baron rushes forward with his trident to engage the toughest PC. His sahuagin guards support him by concentrating their attacks on the same PC the baron engages. The sahuagin raiders each engage and mark a separate PC, to spread out as many marks as possible across the party. The sahuagin priests attack at range and remain behind the cover of cavern rock formations 10 to 15 squares from the melee.

Success: The heroes find Beach Cavern and have either defeated the sahuagin sentries, gained their assistance, or evaded them.

Failure: Party members who fail to find Beach Cavern either drown in the process or are defeated by the sahuagin sentries. Either way, the sahuagin have been commanded to take any intruder prisoner until the dragon decides if they are worth ransoming. Defeated or drowned PCs will wake to find themselves both alive(!) and in a well-guarded cave that serves as the sahuagin's jail for prisoners. The PCs will have to use soft-skills, such as Diplomacy and Subterfuge to escape, possibly opening up a completely new string of memorable events in their adventure.



10x10 Toon

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‘We Need a Cleric’

A Conversation with Jeff Grubb

By Jeremy L. C. Jones



Who is Jeff Grubb? Well, name a favorite fantasy RPG campaign setting, and you'll likely find his name associated with it. Jeff is a world builder. He was there exploring Krynn/Ansalon while it was still the infant brainchild of Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis. He helped map Ed Greenwood's homebrew setting into the FORGOTTEN REALMS. He donned the tights for MARVEL SUPERHEROES and launched to space with SPELLJAMMER.

Grubb is no one-trick pony. He is also accomplished at renovating and expanding worlds, making the magic happen, and has written novels in the StarCRAFT, WORLD OF WARCRAFT, DRAGONLANCE, and MAGIC: THE GATHERING universes. He's currently working on the GUILD WARS 2 computer game.

A former civil engineer, Grubb compares himself to a building contractor: he is often the guy on the design team who holds everything together. He's the *glue*. The list of his game design and writing accomplishments is quite impressive but doesn't really do him justice. Because, you see, it's not really so much *what* Grubb does as much as *how* he does it.

One of the most striking things about him is his generosity of spirit and his lack of ego during the creative process. His focus is on the project at hand, on the collaboration necessary to make the final product the best it can be.

"Collaboration is important if you want to bring in any skills beyond those that you yourself possess," Grubb says. "That often means balancing your goals and the goals of your collaborators.

I often have found myself in the role of traffic cop, keeping all the plot threads and cultures in one place. People do a better job when they feel invested in the creative process."

"One thing I have gotten good at is reaching into someone else's concepts and pulling out what they really want, where they really want to go and what story they want to tell. It is two parts psychology and two parts basic mind reading."

Since the early 1980s at TSR, Grubb has been doing just that: helping his co-designers do their best work.

"I've got tremendous admiration and respect for Jeff's incomparable talents as a game designer," said Tracy Hickman, novelist and originator of the DRAGONLANCE setting. "Jeff's contributions to DRAGONLANCE can never fully be accounted. The direct and important creations are easily seen but the deeper influences are more profound and less obvious. He was there from the beginning, and as my closest friend and colleague at the time, we often talked shop. I'm sure that the number of times he pushed me in better directions are more numerous than I could recall."

Furthermore, as Hickman pointed out, Grubb possesses

a rare combination of the creative and the technical, fine detail and big picture, passion and pragmatism.

"I always secretly have known that between us, Jeff was just a better game designer," added Hickman. "We both had grand visions and could execute them, but Jeff was the one who could come up with the elegant, unique system to make it function. That was, in part, where his genius lay."

Certainly, Jeff Grubb could walk the guildhalls like a fearsome Guild lord. Instead, he is a bit more like Bobby the Barbarian from the old D&D animated series. Well, sort of... but not really.

"We received a letter at TSR, which proved to us that we did not know the real Jeff Grubb—that he was, in fact, leading a double life," said Margaret Weis, novelist and co-creator of the Dragonlance setting. "This letter was written by a young man who stated that the true Jeff Grubb was nine years old. He knew this because Jeff Grubb rode his school bus."

"Jeff, of course, denied this, but when confronted with the facts, including evidence from the school bus driver, he broke down and admitted that he had lied about his age on his application for employment. He was punished by being made to sit in his cubicle and forced to watch D&D cartoons for 12 hours, after which he came to believe that he was Bobby the Barbarian. It is my understanding that he still suffers from traumatic flashbacks during which he wanders about searching for his unicorn."

When Grubb and I spoke this past spring, he was heading off to finish up work on *Guild Wars 2*. Despite the excitement of his current projects, though, it was hard not to focus on the old days at TSR. Kick back and read on to discover why every world needs a cleric like Jeff Grubb.

Jones: What drew you to D&D in the first place?

Grubb: When I started playing D&D, it was literally the only game of its type in town. I grew up on wargames—S&T, DIPLOMACY, and PANZER BLITZ. First week of college, I went to the

Purdue Wargaming Club, and there was a group of people, playing a game without a game board. I asked what was going on and someone put three d6 in my hand and said, "Roll these—we need a cleric."

I fell into writing novels the same way. We were building new worlds at TSR and had the potential to tell larger stories as part of the process. I seem to have made a habit of walking into the room at the right time.

Jones: You've built so many worlds. Where do you start the process?

Grubb: From a statement, a goal or an image—it depends on why I am building the world. Ed Greenwood's FORGOTTEN REALMS was adapted with a goal—to handle everyone's D&D campaign. It was built for comfort and accessibility. SPELLJAMMER started with a mental image of a knight on the deck of a ship in deep space, and all the pseudo-science derived from that. I built a world for a short story that featured people sailing on top of clouds; that one came from a Winsor McCay cartoon that showed mountain ranges with skyscrapers on them with the note "Man Shall Live on Mountaintops."

Jones: What's at the heart of a good world?

Grubb: Supporting good story. Your world, your setting is a character in your work, as important as one of the protagonists. Your cosmology may be a direct allegory: the seven hills of your evil empire's capital jive with the seven deadly sins. Or it may be mood: the perpetual rain-soaked night streets in a 30s detective novel.

A good world also eases the skids of immersion into the world and creates a level of logic that makes sense. People will accept dragons and ray guns, but once you alter how people interact with each other, your players or readers will declare it unbelievable.

Jones: Do you have a world builder's credo?

Grubb: Don't blow up the moon. OK, that's my shared world credo. If you are working on a universe with a number

of different creators, don't change that universe to the point that their contributions are negated.

By the same token, I also believe that everyone works better when they have a piece of the action. For large projects, such as campaign settings and computer games, you benefit from everyone working from a common base or theme and, then, presenting their ideas based on their own strengths.

When I was young, I always enjoyed those columns in POPULAR SCIENCE or ANALOG that explained how things worked. I see much of what I do in world building to be doing much the same thing.

I see the worlds I work on as having their own separate reality, and we are just explaining that reality using the tools we have on hand: be those tools a novel, a comic book, or an RPG. We see the Realms, or Krynn, or Star Wars through a lens of our own making—even if the lens changes with new rules or new stories, the world is still out there.

Every project is different, and every world is different. You can use some of the same tools again, but trying to do the exact same process never works. Gets boring, too.

Jones: What shape was the DRAGONLANCE setting in when you came on-board?

Grubb: I was the third guy in. Tracy Hickman was the originator, who pitched a three-module series about dragons. Harold Johnson was our boss, who encouraged we shoot it up to 10 (one for each color), then 12. I joined up in part because I was driving Trace to work at the time. Again, there is a strange synchronicity working in my life.

I've contributed a lot of small bits and pieces: the gods, looted wholesale from my home campaign, the original Toril; the technological gnomes, a satire on my profession as a civil engineer; Maquesta and the Perechon; Raistlin's golden skin and hourglass eyes (though his name came from Harold, his voice came from Terry Phillips, and his soul from Margaret).



We were throwing all sorts of ideas into Krynn: the name itself was a corruption of the name of my sister-in-law, Corrine. I was amazed how much stuck.

Jones: Did any of your original Toril carry over to the Toril of the Realms?

Grubb: By original Toril, I assume you mean my personal campaign back from college. It was a classic campaign of the late seventies with everything and the kitchen sink thrown in, including the big, randomly stocked dungeon. In my case, the dungeon was a nexus that linked entrances across the continent with such goofy names as American Pie, Cooper's Rock, and Emerson (on Lake Palmer).

Very little of the original Toril went to the FR Toril because a) there was so much stuff in Ed's FR already, and b) we strip-mined a lot of the original Toril, like the gods, for DRAGONLANCE.

What the FR lacked was a world or planet name. GREYHAWK had Oerth and the Flanaess and DRAGONLANCE had Krynn and Ansalon. So FR became Toril and Faerun. Then it became Abeir-Toril because I wanted it to be the first entry in the CYCLOPEDIA OF THE REALMS.

And now, Abeir was revealed to be another world, phased back into the original Toril? Cool. Didn't see that one coming.

Jones: Did you and Ed Greenwood work well together on FORGOTTEN REALMS?

Grubb: The Realms predate D&D and TSR as a setting for Ed's stories by many years. When he was writing articles for DRAGON, he used it as a base and example. I was the guy who suggested we purchase it and use it as a campaign setting, and in return, I was given the task of transforming his legendary notes into a final product.

When we first worked together, Ed lived (and still lives) in Canada, and he sent packages designed to resist bear attacks. I would get a heavy envelope, remove the envelope pack, remove the brown paper wrapping beneath that, remove the heavy plastic wrapping beneath that, remove the wrapping beneath *that*, and remove a second heavy plastic folder beneath that, where I would find the manuscript and a floppy disk, double-wrapped in plastic and aluminum foil. These were in the days before easy Internet access. Indeed, part of the purchase price of the Realms was a Macintosh for Ed; a few years later, we got him a hard drive as well.

We ran up a lot of phone bills working all through the project. We didn't meet in the flesh until after the project was complete; in fact, the first time we officially met we were assembling the TSR booth at GenCon. He was at one end of a sign we were lifting, I was at the other, and I turned and said, "Oh, by the way, my name's Jeff Grubb." He responded with a straight face, "I'm Ed Greenwood; it seems we've been working together."

Ed was really cool about major changes we implemented to the Realms to accommodate other projects. We redrew the Moonshae Isles. We drained part of the Great Glacier. We set chunks aside for various potential licenses. The entire northern border was so heavily claimed that, when the book department wanted to set down a new town for Bob [Salvatore's] first book, we tucked him in the far northwest corner (if only we had known).

Jones: Were there any ideas that ended up on the cutting room floor that you wish had gone into the final FR?

Grubb: I think we used just about everything that wasn't nailed down and added stuff on top of it. And if we needed anything, Ed would whip something up.

My favorite story on this was the airship. Our manager at the time decided the Realms should have zeppelins. I'm a fan of LTA craft, but I was very dubious. He was adamant, so there was a quick phone call to Ed.

"Oh yes," he responded, "check out DRAGON #124 and you'll find an article of the airships of Halruua." I got to tell the manager that we might be able to fit airships into the Realms after all but just because he wanted them.

Jones: Who came up with the spheres/shells and helms for SPELLJAMMER?

Grubb: SPELLJAMMER started with a pitch at Augie's, a local restaurant in Lake Geneva, where we held a brainstorming session. It began with the statement "D&D in space" but soon crystallized on the single image I mentioned before: a warrior in plate armor standing on the deck of his ship in space. He has to be able to breathe. He can't float away. Everything else, all of our magical science in SPELLJAMMER, comes out of that image.

The crystal spheres come from an old woodcut of a man breaking through the heavens to see the clockwork behind them. We used them because we had things like constellations disappearing in DL, which would have been noticed in another solar system, otherwise. The idea of gravity planes and captive air bubbles made adventuring in space more like fantasy and less like sci-fi; someone coined the phrase along the way "Grubbian Physics" and it stuck. Because after breaking that (very basic) rule of science, I tried to play the rest of it straight.

The best part for me was the ship design. Jim Holloway was assigned as the artist, and I would give him

general art direction like “a squid.” Or a butterfly. Or two ships smushed up together. And he would come up with these weird designs that I would then do the deck plans for. He did about a half-dozen versions of beholder ships, and we decided to use all of them. Since every artist up to that point created their own version of the beholder, it made perfect sense that they had radically different ships.

Jones: Was switching to the Marvel setting from AD&D difficult?

Grubb: MARVEL SUPERHEROES actually grew out of another campaign in college: Project Marvel Comics (PMC). We had finished a major D&D campaign, so I ran this game as a lark. The players were part of the Avengers’ Junior Achievement Branch, based in Purdue University, and included such characters as the Crimson Ram, Big Man on Campus, and Super-Pin, the Pro-Bowler of Steel (this was in the 70s, long before the Mystery Men movie).

At TSR, we were challenged to come up with blue sky ideas—what should we as a company do next. My first suggestion was a cyberpunk dark future game. That was rejected and, cautiously, they asked me what my second choice was; that was PMC.

What many people don’t realize is that a lot of the writing in the original yellow box was by Steve Winter, which is why we have “co-creator” credits. We were on a tight deadline, so I did the mechanics and Steve translated it into Marvel-speak. Steve did a great job on it and doesn’t get enough credit.

I loved Marvel because it allowed me to re-address many of the challenges of D&D and seek different answers: area movement; the universal table, a holdover from my college game; and a spendable experience point system, or Karma. The theme of a comic universe, particularly a Marvel universe, is very different than that of traditional fantasy, and we had a chance to make the mechanics reflect those differences.

Jones: Do you prefer games with extensive rules or games that are looser?

Grubb: Rules are tools. Good rules make the game world sensible and believable.

I enjoy both types from a design aspect, but when I’m gaming, I have a preference for looser rules. While I enjoy thrashing about the min-maxing of a system, I have always been drawn to simpler systems, like CALL OF CTHULHU and MARVEL SUPERHEROES. CALL OF CTHULHU is the “favorite other system” of a lot of designers I know, and it is a very simple approach, and a lot of its more complex rules are simply ignored by the GMs and players.

Jones: Do you still play CALL OF CTHULHU much? It seems to be one of those games that people either love or hate. Anything about it you’d change?

Grubb: I have a regular group with a shifting GM (right now it’s Steve Winter, and before that, it was John Rateliff, a former WotC editor and Tolkien scholar), and we play once, twice a month. I ran a MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS campaign that was fairly epic.

CoC is very popular among the design community—you scratch a designer, you find a cultist.

I think the mechanics of CoC can be tweaked, and we’ve seen a lot of that in six editions without major revision. But usually, if you have to reach for the dice to resolve combat, something has gone horribly, horribly wrong. At best, I would officially incorporate “skimming rules” for the arcane books in place of the current system where it takes five months to learn the secrets of an eldritch tome when you’re an investigator with an expected lifespan of a green banana.

I think one of the reasons people have a love/hate relationship with CoC is that it has a different covenant between player and GM. In D&D, a good GM isn’t going to toss you into an unwinnable situation (well, not more than once). In CoC, it isn’t about the goal as much as the *journey*; Lovecraft had such a nihilistic view of the universe, and any sort of victory

is supposed to be temporary, at best. Further, in CoC, the players are giving up some of their control, in effect telling the GM that it is okay for him to do horrible things, to scare them, in order to make the game more fun.

Jones: You’ve written extensively in multiple editions of D&D—but not 4E. What do you think of 4E?

Grubb: I’ve written for 1E, 2E, and 3E. By the time 3.5E was coming out, I was going out. I’m playing both 3.5E and 4E right now, and while they are different animals, I enjoy them both.

My biggest kvetch with 4E is a marketing one, not a design one. They released everything at once for the core set, which was a LOT for people to wrap their brains around. That’s been a huge challenge.

I’ve played most of my years in first edition AD&D, so I would have to say that was a favorite. But you always love the first game you played, and for me, that would be the original version, those three little books in the woodgrain box.

Jones: It’s a long way from first edition D&D to GUILD WARS. How is writing for computer games different from writing for tabletop?

Grubb: Bigger canvas, more hands, bigger stakes. Computer games (at least the ones I have encountered) are like movies—many very talented



individuals involved with specialized abilities. I am still coming to terms with the size of it all. Tabletop RPGs have a lot more potential for small operations and stronger individual control.

Some of my recent worlds have been for computer game companies, and they have strong limitations on resources. I can create a fire-breathing dragon with just a few words, but translating that into a computer game will take months, so it had *better* be *important*.

Jones: Can you talk about the current work you're doing on the GUILD WARS 2 computer game?

Grubb: No, but I can taunt you by saying that it is looking very good right now.

Jones: What's the relationship between the game and the story, and how have computer games changed this relationship?

Grubb: Each builds upon the other. The mechanics of conflict resolution

help determine the nature of the conflict. Whether computer game or traditional RPG, if your primary mechanic is hitting something (with a sword, a club, or a bullet), then your conflicts will reflect that.

Video games have evolved their own form of storytelling because of the strengths and weaknesses of the format. The storytelling component of a computer game is heavily influenced by physical limitations—everything, and I mean *everything*, you experience on the screen is there because someone bled to put it there.

Jones: What do you mean when you call yourself an “embedded writer”?

Grubb: We have an interesting set-up at ArenaNet in that we have two strong writers who are part of the content design team as opposed to the writing team. Ree Soesbee and I are officially Game Designers, but our responsibility is for the overarching story of the game, the scripts for the cinematics, and the continuity of the world. The writing team, who are responsible

for all the in-game text, consists of a talented team headed up by Bobby Stein. In short, we're continuity cops for the game, helping to discover and then tell the game's story.

As a result of this arrangement, storytelling is deeply engaged with the content and mechanics for the game, each affecting the other. Ree and I are amphibians, operating in both worlds, and driving each side crazy.

Jones: What's next for you?

Grubb: I am currently deeply engaged in GUILD WARS 2 with ArenaNet, am working on an as-yet-unannounced novel, and am writing the occasional article or essay (*Editor: Including one in KQ#9*). I will have an essay in the upcoming FAMILY GAMES: THE BEST 100 edited by Jim Lowder.



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No school like an old school

"Or school's been blown
to pieces!"

by Monte Cook



When I recently announced my new project at Dungeonaday.com, I referred to it on my website as being “old school”—a term that’s been kicked around for years, as far back as the early to mid-nineties. I remember using it to describe the 20th Anniversary module I wrote, *Labyrinth of Madness*.

I wouldn’t presume to give the term a strict definition—much like “munchkin” and “broken,” “old school” is a term people toss around in game discussions as shorthand for whatever it is they think the word means this week. For me, though, “old school” generally refers to anything that harkens back to gaming in the 70s or early 80s when roleplaying first made it big.

So I was surprised to discover there is a group of gamers who have apparently taken the term as their own and given it their own strict definition, and they even seem to take offense when others use it. Even though I started gaming in 1977 and have been working professionally on roleplaying games for more than 20 years, I suddenly found my “old-school cred” being questioned.

The experience caused me to question what “old school” really means to gaming, and it led to the more interesting question—I think, at least—of what “new school” means. After all, if one can define “old school,” then there must be some newer school from which “old school” is distinguished.

Or maybe there isn’t.

After all, when I lived in the American south, my southern friends were surprised to discover that Americans

who lived above the Mason-Dixon Line did not refer to themselves as “Northerners.”

Old School Style

So what is “old school”? There are very likely two schools of thought here (pardon the pun).

The first is that “old school” is defined by play style and experience: In this definition, it’s how the players actually approach the game that matters. It’s the kind of adventure that the DM puts in front of them.

For example, an old-school adventure is more likely to be a traditional explore-the-dungeon-and-get-the-treasure adventure: players look for treasure and overcome whatever challenges present themselves and, often, don’t have goals beyond that. Fun is more important than meaning, and the game is more important than story.

Combat is important in old-school play, but old school doesn’t mean only hack-and-slash; puzzle solving and thoughtful decisions also hold importance. Immersive roleplaying, lengthy in-character discussions with NPCs (or other PCs) and similar activities, however, often take a back seat. “Plot” and “character development” are not terms often used in an old-school game. This isn’t a criticism: in an old-school game, these things are simply secondary to the challenges put in front of the players.

The goal of an old-school game isn’t merely storytelling—according to some, it’s not about storytelling at all. It tells no more a story than a game of chess does. The players are driven to

succeed, which means there’s an actual chance of failure and maybe even a pretty decent one.

Gaming as Meritocracy

There is a very real sense of winning and losing to an old-school gamer. A high-level character is a successful character. If someone has survived to 11th level, it’s because the player has played well and has made smart choices. If that character is also rich or has a nice selection of magic items, it’s because he’s been on many successful adventures and beaten some tough opponents. Note the important distinction here. He’s not wealthy because he’s high level, and he’s not high level because he’s been playing a long time. He’s wealthy and high level because he’s succeeded. He is, in effect, winning the game. Old-school gamers will talk about “beating” a module (and in this case, “module” might mean a published adventure or it might mean a dungeon of the GM’s own creation).

A lot of people today misinterpret the success-driven nature of old-school gaming as meaning it forces the game master and players to have an adversarial or antagonistic relationship. This, however, is probably no more the case in old-school gaming than it is in other kinds of games. In the old days, gamers praised the fairness of a GM—often called a “referee”—and discouraged thinking of the GM as an opponent as much as they do today.

While roleplaying games rose out of miniatures games and, thus, initially stressed tactical play styles, old-school play style isn’t just tactical: it’s also

strategic. In other words, it's not just how you use your character's abilities to overcome a challenge, it's how you approach all the challenges as a whole. Do you press on, even though half the party is hurt? Do you go down to the more dangerous 2nd level of the dungeon or do you stay on the 1st level where you would expect to find lesser threats and rewards? This kind of real decision-making is important in old-school play.

Old-school play sessions focus on exploration and discovery rather than quests. You can have a goal (such as rescuing the prince from the lamia), but this is more an excuse to get the ball rolling and measure success than the thread of some epic fantasy tale as it might be in non-old-school games.

Schools of Mechanics

The second school of thought is that "old school" is defined by game mechanics.

Just what mechanics qualify as old school varies, but usually, original D&D and 1st edition AD&D are accepted old-school games. Today, there are also new games published under the OGL that emulate these games, like OSRIC or Labyrinth Lord. Just as the lengthy background of a character is relatively unimportant to old-school gaming, so are a lengthy list of a character's abilities and stats. In old school play, it's the player—not the character—that is most important.

An old-school character isn't defined by special abilities but by the player's ingenuity. Facing a challenge isn't about combing your character sheet for the right feat or spell but about coming up with an original way of solving the problem. Old-school character creation is often uncomplicated, which is a good thing since the mortality rate is high in most old-school games.

Old-school games, then, are rule-light and burden the GM with few restrictions. Rather than presenting a lot of rules, the GM is expected to be a fair arbiter who needs a lot of leeway and fiat power. There aren't extensive subsets of rules covering various op-

tions. Instead, the GM determines the chance of success or failure of whatever the player states he wants his character to try.

That doesn't mean an old-school rules system is entirely freeform. On the contrary, a strict adherence to the random whim of the dice is important in old-school gaming. If the dice say you miss, you miss. If the dice say a wandering dragon shows up even when half the party is down, so be it. Again, this goes back to the idea that the GM is not there to facilitate the creation of an epic tale but, rather, to provide a milieu for the game with dispassion and detachment. If the dice roll against the PCs, it's because at some point the players made a poor decision or they were simply unlucky and next time should take greater precautions, knowing how fickle the fates can be.

New School

It's interesting that there's no real term or even an attempt at defining what isn't "old school." In theory, it would be "new school," but no one uses that term. And for good reason—it's only distinction would come from what it is not, which isn't much of a definition at all.

Whatever it is, "new school" dawned in the late 80s and early 90s, with an emphasis on story, plot, and character development hardwired into the game products themselves as opposed to such things arising naturally out of game play.

Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl was not a story—but a group's experiences there could very well be. The *Dragonlance* modules were a story, and character development is written right into the modules themselves. There's also a strong aspect of worldbuilding woven in with *Dragonlance* and most of TSR's output thereafter that is not "old school."

Worldbuilding is not an old-school concept in that it consists of long histories, extensive ecologies, and lengthy descriptions of people and places that don't contribute to the game at hand. An old-school GM is probably more

concerned with an interesting room or level idea for his dungeon than he would be in figuring out the etiquette rules for eating in the kingdom of... whatever. (There exists, however, a good argument that I'm wrong in this. Namely, M.A.R. Barker's *Empire of the Petal Throne*, which some might consider to be old school.)

So much of what came in around that time and after is new school. *Ravenloft*, *Planescape*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Vampire the Masquerade*, *Marvel Super Heroes*, *Star Wars*, and so on all fall into this category. It's a category so vast and varied that it almost possesses no meaningful distinction, which is certainly why no one uses the term "new school."

Theoretical Summation

So where does all this get us? It's interesting to see where roleplaying's roots come from and foolish, I think, to dismiss them. There's a tendency for some to pooh-poo the earliest days of the game and think of them as immature, outdated, or overdone. People say it's time that gaming should move on to higher ideals and more complex roleplaying challenges. But many people are still interested in old-school gaming.

Even if you think you've somehow advanced beyond dungeons and other old-school aspects, remember how much fun you had when you did play in that style and don't seek to deny other players—new or old—the same joys. Conversely, it's just as foolish to think all worthwhile innovation stopped immediately after the hobby started. The neophobic outlook that anything new is bad and anything old is good is shortsighted and likely blinded by nostalgia.

Old school and new school are two different types of games and gaming styles, but neither has any kind of innate superiority over the other. In fact, it's quite possible to not just like but love them both.

I'm living proof of that.



Back and Better than Ever

Death is Never the End

By Michael Kortes

Art by Gustav Dore

Player 1: OK, I pay the priest the 5,000 gp. Heck, I throw in 50 gp extra as a tip—a little something for the wife and kids.

Player 2: Yeah, I can't wait to get Sir Averen back. Remind me to mail the caster a decorative fruit basket. OK, let's do this!

GM: Seeing your assent, the priest continues. He completes his recitation of the sacred words with his hand upon Sir Avaron's chest right where the lightning blast struck the fallen warrior. But, the priest pauses, and a deep furrow creases his forehead.

Player 2: *Uh oh.*

Player 1: Quick! I ask the priest, "What happened?"

GM: "I'm not sure," the priest responds. "Your friend will be resurrected, as promised, but I can't help but sense that something is ... different."

Even though it is in many ways a core part of the gaming experience, most players still hate it when their PC dies. This is understandable. Even if the surviving party members manage to revive the deceased character, more often than not the event still feels like a failure or at least a step backwards, particularly when the player considers the associated level loss.

This article provides new options for PCs recently returned to life in order to help players look forward to getting back into the game. If a player's PC comes back with a twist, it might sting a little less — especially if it opens the door to new roleplaying opportunities.

New Feats

The following feats each have "death" as a prerequisite. As such, they are only available to characters who have first died and then subsequently been revived. They are not bonus feats; players select them for their PCs in the usual way, depending on available feat slots acquired through advancement.



Bestial Specter [Death]

An imprint from your time in the spirit world manifests when you wildshape; your animal form is now outlined with a ghostly flickering light.

Prerequisite: death, wildshape ability

Benefit: When you wildshape, your animal form gains 20% concealment, as though under the effect of a *blur* spell.

Death's Door Warrior [Death]

Your crossover to the otherworld has taught you that pain and fear are just the sensations of weakness leaving your body. Rather than panic as the end draws near, your focus and concentration have simply become sharper, your hand more sure. Life is never greater than when it hangs from a precipice.

Prerequisite: death, Diehard, 5 ranks in Concentration

Benefit: Rather than die once your hp reach -10, you continue to fight on normally, just as though your hp were still above zero, until your hp reach -10 plus a number equal to your level. Only then do you die. In addition, whenever your hp are negative, and you are still alive, you may choose to take 10 on a single attack roll or saving throw once per round.

Imageless [Death]

You are back from the dead, yet sometimes it is difficult to be entirely sure. Somehow, your reflection has been lost. Stranger still, those who would scry upon you find nothing. It is as if you weren't truly there at all.

Prerequisite: death

Benefit: You cannot be the subject of a scrying or greater scrying spell, and if in range of a scrying sensor, the sensor cannot detect your image or any sounds that you might make. You are also immune to the spell *nightmare*, as the caster cannot locate you. Your image does not appear in reflective surfaces such as mirrors or pools of water, and if someone sketches or paints your form in a drawing, the image gradually dissipates from the picture over the following day.

Irrepressible Vitality [Death]

Now that you have a second chance at life, the weakness of your flesh no longer limits your life force. Instead, you now power it with sheer resolve, the conviction of your very being.

Prerequisite: death

Benefit: Whenever you calculate your bonus hp for raising a level you may substitute your Charisma score for your Constitution score. Bonus hp gained prior to your death are not recalculated and remain based upon your Constitution score.

Reversal of Fortune [Death]

Returning to life has altered your relationship with the karma of the cosmos by a tiny fraction. When you least expect it, at the last instant, your greatest failures transform into some of your most spectacular successes.

Prerequisite: Death

Benefit: When you roll a natural 1 on a d20 you immediately substitute a 20 for the result. Once used, you may not use this benefit again until a full week has passed. You may not choose when to use this benefit; if available, it applies to the very next natural 1 that you roll.

Spectral Brawler [Death]

Having crossed over to the afterlife and back, your body has attuned itself to the

spirit world.

Prerequisite: death, Improved Unarmed Attack

Benefit: Your unarmed attacks now have the ghost touch property.

Shadow of the Afterlife [Death]

Although you have returned from the dead, not all is the same. Your very shadow now acts as though it were an extension of your will, often detaching itself from your body to perform simple tasks, as you require them.

Prerequisite: Death

Benefit: Once per day per character level, as a free action, you may direct your shadow as though it were a servant controlled by the *unseen servant* spell. Each use has a maximum duration of 10 min.

Special: This ability does not function in perfect or magical darkness where there is no light to cast a shadow. Nor does it work within the effects of a *daylight* spell.

Spell-Adapted [Death]

Having once died from a specific spell, the supernatural forces responsible for your return have enabled you to permanently expunge that particular weakness from your body or mind.

Prerequisite: death (caused by the particular chosen spell)

Benefit: You gain a permanent immunity to the specific spell that previously killed you.

Special: You can take this feat only once.

Spirit World Summoner [Death]

Having been to the afterlife, you are now able to briefly summon animals or beasts with an even closer connection to the beyond.

Prerequisite: ability to cast divine or arcane summoning spells of third level, death

Benefit: On a successful attack, any creature you summon does an extra 1d6 holy or unholy damage, depending on your alignment. If your alignment is neutral, you must choose whether this feat bestows unholy or holy damage at the time the feat is selected.

Weapon Avenger [Death]

You have recovered the weapon that once

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claimed your life force and a piece of your spirit still lies within it. That spirit is rekindled when the weapon rests within your grasp.

Prerequisite: base attack bonus +3, death (caused by a melee weapon), recovery of the weapon that killed you
Benefit: Choose one of the following weapon qualities: flaming, frost, shock, keen, merciful, or thundering. When you grasp the weapon that once slew you in battle, it manifests the chosen quality for two rounds per level per day, as a free action. You may choose which rounds to apply the benefit: the rounds need not be consecutive, but you must indicate your choice before you make your attack roll. You choose the weapon quality at the time you take the feat, and the quality chosen may not be changed.

Death Flaws

Flaws are mechanics that provide a PC with a significant disadvantage in exchange for a bonus feat. Normally, a player can only select flaws for their PC at the time of character creation. Death flaws are unique, however, in that a player may select them after a PC's revival. Moreover, death flaws only grant bonus death feats; players may not use death flaws to obtain other classes of feats such as general feats or fighter bonus feats. Death flaws are only available at the GMs discretion, and a player may only select one flaw each time their PC returns to life.

Blade Stalked [Death]

You escaped death once, but it continues to stalk you. Every sword and every arrow is a chance for death to set right the wrong that is your unnatural existence.

Prerequisite: death (caused by a melee or missile weapon)

Benefit: one bonus death feat of your choice

Penalty: Anytime an opponent scores a critical hit with a melee or missile weapon, the critical confirms automatically.

Grave Held [Death]

Although back from the dead, you retain a sickly pallor as though your return to this world is but a temporary aberration.

Perhaps one foot is still in the grave after all.

Prerequisite: death

Benefit: one bonus death feat of your choice

Penalty: Each time you gain a level, you gain one less hp than you normally would. You also suffer a -2 penalty on saving throws against death magic.

Hesitator [Death]

Having once died causes you to second-guess your instincts rather than trust them. After all, they let you down once before. But while you are now more methodical, it frequently costs you that precious split-second when you are in the heat of the moment.

Prerequisite: death

Benefit: one bonus death feat of your choice

Penalty: You suffer a -4 penalty on initiative. In addition, you also incur a -2 penalty to all Reflex saves.

Necrotic Jealousy [Death]

You have cheated death, and the undead can instinctively sense it. Rather than remain in the grave, you have obtained the second chance that they could not. They feel compelled to balance the scale.

Prerequisite: death

Benefit: one bonus death feat of your choice

Penalty: Any nonintelligent undead that has you in its line of sight gains the benefit of a *rage* spell. The *rage* effect lasts until either you or the undead are destroyed. Any intelligent undead you face, instead, increases the save DC of all of their special abilities whenever they apply them against you: +2 bonus to all special ability DCs. Finally, you suffer a -6 penalty to any Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate checks when interacting with intelligent undead.

Trap Bait [Death]

A trap slew you once, and you cannot escape the feeling that a trap will slay you again. If you were smarter, you would stay home where it is safe, but that is not your calling.

Prerequisite: death (caused by a trap)

Benefit: one bonus death feat of your choice

Penalty: Anytime a trap strikes you

for damage, you suffer double damage. If the trap does not do damage, but instead requires a save, you instead suffer a -4 penalty to your saving throw. If the trap does not deal damage or require a save, this flaw has no effect.

Conclusion

Returning from the dead should be a monumental character experience. Even if a PC were dead for only a short time, it is unlikely that she would return completely unchanged. Perhaps the experience has shaken the PC's outlook on life to the core and he will now begin to rebuild his core values. Whereas one PC might become withdrawn and contemplative, another might become obsessed with the time they have left. Others might find their thoughts consumed with revenge or be beset with well-deserved phobias.

Take the opportunity of an in-game death to redefine your PC: there are few games that allow one such an opportunity.



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Ecology of the Hill Giant

By Richard Pett

Art by Arthur Rackham

O, it is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.

—William Shakespeare,
Measure for Measure (II. ii.)

The earliest tales tell of giants—beings like men but tall and strong. From the oldest religious texts to modern stories, the giant has been with us every oversized step of the way.

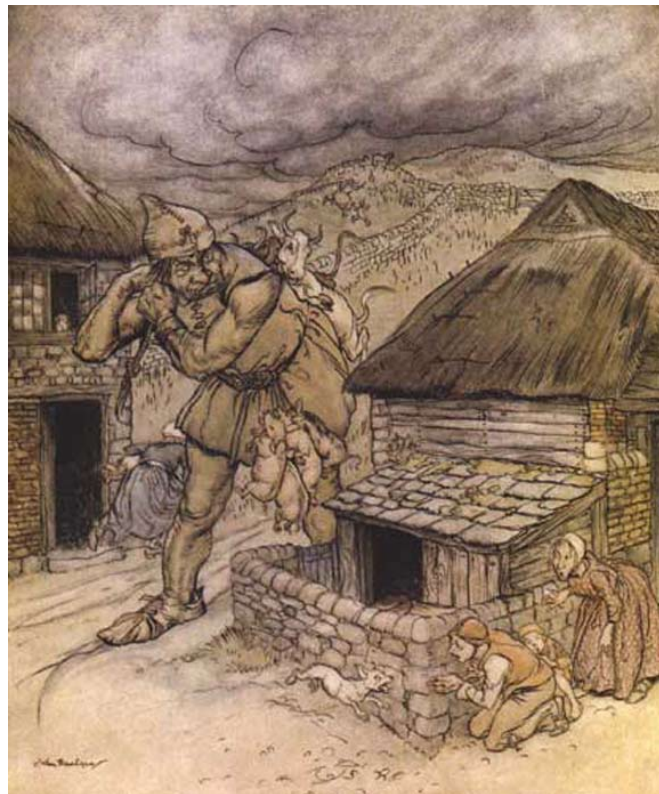
Giants appear in many mythologies; from the Jotun of icy Norse mythology to the Giant Kings of the Incas, they have been the subject of folklore and fairy tales throughout the ages. Giants originated when gods mated with humans, producing monstrous or gigantic offspring with superhuman strength and size; sometimes, giants were gods that walked among men and became heroes. They threw rocks, had one or more heads, and often had a taste for man-flesh. They could be 10 ft. tall like Goemagog or have a 10-mile stride like Bolster.

One thing all giants have in common is their slow wittedness, which perhaps casts hill giants in the truest spirit of the fantasy giants. Consider the tale of the origin of the Wrekin, a hill in Shropshire, England. The story tells that an old Welsh giant was carrying a spadeful of earth, intending to dam the river Severn and drown the people of Shrewsbury. On the road, he met a cobbler who, realizing the giant's evil intention, showed him a sackful of worn shoes, claiming he had worn out the shoes on the journey from Shrewsbury. The giant was so discouraged by the apparent distance that he dumped his massive shovel of earth and went back to Wales. The earth he dumped formed the Wrekin Hill.

This myth, though entertaining, is hardly unique in its portrayal of giants. Countless legendary giants exist and can provide inspiration for many unique adventures.

Physiology

Male hill giants stand around 10 ½ ft. tall; some tribes are barely larger than ogres (at about 9 ft.) while others are 12 feet tall, as large as smallish stone giants. Females tend to be 1 ½ ft. or so smaller than males although both tend to weigh around 1,100 lb. Their skin tone ranges from light tan to a deep ruddy brown, although the color often hides beneath a layer of filth. Their lank hair can be brown or black like their



eyes.

Both hill giant males and females tend to go bald in old age and are prone to being fat. Older females cover their bald pates with animal skins or heavy woolen cloaks to preserve their misguided vanity and keep their heads warm. Females tend to live much longer than males.

Hill giants dress in the badly cured hides of any animal abundant enough and large enough to wear. Because a hill giant body is large, giants dress in whatever gives warmth, and they can be found wearing an astonishing array of patched suits of armor, whole sheep skins, and cow hides (often with heads and legs still attached). Others simply wear stiff, untanned furs ripped from the carcasses of dire animals or monsters. Everything they wear is rotting and alive with lice and maggots. Hill giants seem untroubled by filth.

Psychology and Society

“Fie, foh, and fum”

—William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (III. iv.)

In most hill giant societies, males do practically nothing. Some have even given up the pretense of hunting in favor of sitting around drinking, eating, and bragging. Bragging is an important game and ritual in most hill giant groups. Worth, in males, is judged solely by size: the fattest and largest of the giants rule the roost although tenuous bloodlines are occasionally followed. Male giants make a great show of their hunts, and tribes give these occasions fanciful names although they invariably involve copious drinking, play-fighting, and shows of strength that tend to drive any

potential game away long before it is ever spotted.

Female hill giants, on the other hand, are generally the more skilled, resourceful, and—often—capable in a fight. Though slightly smaller than their male counterparts female statistics match those of their lazy, corpulent, menfolk. Those of good breeding stock—the fatter the better with wide hips and corpulent behinds—are prized above all mates, though skill at brewing ale is also particularly valued in addition to mending, cooking, preserving food, bringing up young, tidying up, repairing lairs, and hunting.

Young hill giants, if they're wise, stay out of the way of the adult males although the eldest son is usually considered an adult from birth and immediately brought into the group. The young daughters exist like cattle at best and, often, end up considerably worse off.

Hill giants are selfish and cunning creatures that survive through raiding and trading. Trading with them can be very dangerous, but also very profitable. Large numbers of dwarves, humans, and gnomes have made their fortunes by tricking stupid tribe leaders into taking pretty trinkets for dull, uncut gemstones, and other valuables. A giant's non-existent Sense Motive skill makes them easy to Bluff, but traders always run the risk that one of the more alert wives has the ear of the tribe leader. On his next visit, the trader may get more than he bargained for, or a giant may simply be bored and decide to hit the trader with his club to see what happens.

Dwarves take a particular chance in trading with hill giants, since giants regard dwarves as a succulent delicacy. Hill giants love to eat dwarf flesh above all other food and may even resort to cooking it to savor the taste and smell more. A giant always pays handsomely for some tasty fresh dwarf meat.

A typical hill giant lair is found anywhere an abundance of hills or mountains exist although many are also found underground in vast caves or

cavern complexes. All lairs are typically forsaken places that need repair and sanitation—or, better, demolition and burning.

Hill giants keep an astonishing array of livestock, pets, and guards—in most cases, the same creature fulfills all three functions. Wolves, particularly dire wolves, form close bonds with particular tribes of giants and are treated like pet dogs; occasionally, they are even given names and allowed to sit below feasting tables and eat scraps. Ogres and orcs often live with hill giants, but the giants typically treat them as naughty children and either beat them senseless for some misdemeanor or lavish affection upon them as “loyal followers.” Some hill giant tribes have even used chained giant lizards as guards; lizard is also a particular delicacy of hill giants. These creatures represent those more commonly found, but hill giants, the women at least, seem to be capable of capturing and eating anything.

Finally, hill giants are prone to falling in with those who wish for their “friendship,” the men at least. Constantly, huge numbers of hill giants find themselves in the service of wicked overlords, cunning drow, and powerful fiends without ever remembering how the situation came about.

A very brief word on clever hill giants...

Female hill giants, who effectively run the show, realize survival depends as much on cunning as on strength, and they often form sisterhoods (usually under the guise of a coven) that encourage women to learn and think. These matriarchal groups protect intelligent young girls, who go on to become wise women if they survive. Hill giant wise women are tutored in a class (favored class druid) and covertly run all their tribe's affairs. Without realizing it, the males become tools in an above average intelligent tribe, and adventurers have reported cunning traps, defense plans, and superior equipment in such lairs.

Hill Giant Feats

The following special attacks often develop from the drunken brawls and play fights in hill giant steadings.

Living Club {General}

You lift a creature and use it as an improvised club.

Prerequisite: giant, Str 25

Benefit: To use this attack, you must first make a successful grapple attempt on a creature at least one size category smaller than you. If you succeed, you establish a hold on your opponent

Hill Giant Lore

Characters with bardic knowledge or ranks in Knowledge (nature) may know about hill giants. With a successful skill check, a character knows all the information up to and including the DC value:

DC Result

- 10 Hill giants have a deserved reputation for stupidity and can be easily outsmarted. Unfortunately, their ability to be outwitted is matched by their short tempers.
- 15 Female hill giants are the true leaders and do all the work, while males sit around playing all day. Females are as tough as males and tend to be crueler and more tenacious.
- 20 Your average hill giant loves a tall tale and is easily fooled. Stories abound of giants swapping bags of uncut gems and other treasure for “magic” bread that makes the eater stronger or invisible gold clothes that are visible only to intelligent people. Some gullible giants happily lie down with their eyes shut to receive a special present of submission.
- 25 Some hill giants can use their foes as living clubs or toss them as if they were boulders.

and can attempt to use this creature as a weapon. Because your opponent is unwilling, using a living club requires a full attack action, and the attack is made at a -4 penalty (this is on top of the -4 penalty for using improvised weapons). On a successful hit, you deliver 2d8 + 1 ½ Str modifier in damage for a Medium living club (2d6 + 1 ½ Str modifier in damage for a Small living club) to both your opponent and to the living club.

Each round the grappled creature may attempt to escape the grapple in the usual manner.

Living Rock [General]

You lift a creature and use it as a thrown weapon.

Prerequisite: giant, Str 25

Benefit: To use this attack, you must first make a successful grapple attempt on a creature at least one size category smaller than you. If you succeed, you establish a hold on your opponent and can attempt to use this creature as an improvised thrown weapon. Because your opponent is unwilling, using a living rock requires a full attack action, and this attack is made at a -4 penalty (this is on top of the -4 penalty for using improvised weapons); the increment is 60 ft. If

the hit is successful, you deliver 2d6 + Str modifier in damage for a Medium living rock (2d4 + Str modifier in damage for a Small living rock) to both your opponent and to the living rock. The creature can resist being thrown if it makes a Str check (DC 10 + your Str modifier).

The thrown creature takes the damage listed above even if you miss.

Death from Above [General]

You deliver a deadly belly flop to prone opponents.

Prerequisite: hill giant

Benefit: To use this attack, either you must be physically above your opponent by at least 10 ft. or your opponent must be lying prone. You hurl yourself onto your opponent as a full attack action in an attempt to crush the creature. If you succeed in this slam attack, you deliver 6d6 damage to your opponent and can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If you miss, you are considered prone.

Fun and Games

Male hill giants have plenty of time on their hands and play any number of games to distract themselves from drinking too much, too early. Each tribe has a selection of games—usually cruel, violent, and dangerous in nature. Of course, any visitor or trader must participate in these tests of skill.

Rugbyalive—This game consists of two teams that must each defend a goal (usually a stone) against the opposing team while trying to score a goal themselves. The ball is invariably some living creature. Hill giants consider dwarves to be the best balls since they put up the biggest fight and provide the most sport. Smashing the ball's skull against the goalstone scores a goal.

Scrum—A mass fight; the last giant standing wins.

Bragging—Bragging contests amongst giants are the stuff of their legends. Sadly, the giants' total lack of Bluff or Perform skills means that it is

generally the most ridiculous brag that wins; the game is often won by a catastrophic fail of the skill check by one of the participants. The bigger the brag the better, and contestants' prowess as a troll juggler, eating seven whole chimera at a sitting, or being king of the whole world are always well received. Traders able to spin incredible yarns using high (or even mediocre) Bluff skills quickly gain a hill giant's respect.

Stag Fight—Played between maturing males, this game involves two giants starting some considerable distance apart, running at each other with heads down, and making a bull rush attack. To add spice to the proceedings, they occasionally play this game on narrow ridges.

Touch Kill—One giant is the Touch Kill (or "It"), and is allowed to have a weapon of his choice. The other giants must get past him by fair means or foul when their names are called and try to reach some prearranged safe point beyond the Touch Kill.

Drinking Games—An uncountable number of giant drinking games exist. Usually, the games revolve around the giants either drinking a whole gallon of alcohol without taking a breath or facing a forfeit. Forfeits tend to be suicidally dangerous affairs.

Rock Games—These usually involve tossing rocks of incredible size. Some local variations allow the opponent to dodge or attempt to catch such rocks, but others insist he stays still until the rock has landed or that the catcher is blindfolded. Throwing rocks at (often living) targets is another common game.

History of the Hill Giant

Wise women have kept up the stories of old; though variations occur from tribe to tribe, the general story of hill giant genesis remains the same.

The Great Womb Hill was born when the world was young, and she was the first hill seen; her sides were steep and laced with virgin scree, her summit wore a white crown of snow, her vales were hidden under countless

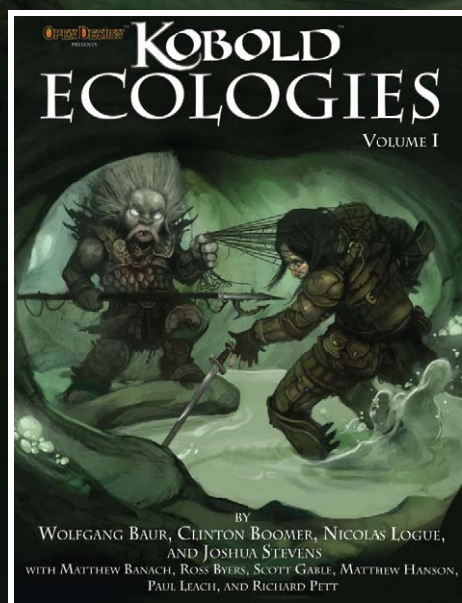


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sheep, and her caverns were filled with dwarves and gold. Every aspect of the hill lived, and soon, the rocks themselves began to walk, these were the first hill giants.

They wandered the hills for many days and talked to all the inhabitants, including the dwarves. The giants were kind hearted and wanted only to help their new friends. Soon, however, the dwarves had the giants digging in the mines and working all day while those dwarves simply grew fat from the proceeds. They fed the giants only the worst cuts of mutton while they gorged themselves on only the choicest meats, wines, and beers, which they traded for with merchants from far away.

A particularly cruel and fat one, Thamris Goodbody, led the dwarves. One day, he brought the giants together and told their leader, a huge and strong hill giant called Tam, that they would have to work harder. You see, Goodbody had heard that, farther away, men made a drink called ambrosia, the nectar of the gods, and

he greatly desired to taste it. However, the ambrosia was expensive, so the giants would have to mine harder and bring up more gold. The giants toiled and toiled and soon the dwarves became so fat they could no longer move without help from their giant friends, who had now become little more than slaves.

The time came when at last the ambrosia was brought to the dwarf king, who Tam himself now carried about (with no gratitude, of course). The dwarf king drank the ambrosia and found it very good, but Tam was thirsty too; he and his followers had nothing to eat or drink for days, and he asked the dwarf king for a little ambrosia for the giants. The dwarf king grew angry and told Tam that far from getting any ambrosia, they would get no food at all for their impertinence, and further, they would have to work even harder as he needed more ambrosia for his dwarves.

Tam grew angry for the first time in his life, and as he did, he saw the truth

of their position, of how the dwarves had pretended to befriend the giants but, instead, treated them like slaves. He saw his starving kin and bellowed in fury, biting the dwarf king's head off and throwing the body at his kin. And as he swallowed the dwarf he could taste the ambrosia, and the wine, and all the fine foods the dwarf had eaten, and it tasted good. He roused his people and they fell upon the dwarves, feasting on their flesh, which they all found good to eat.

For many days, the giants ate and flung the dwarves about like rocks, and soon, they became the rulers of Womb Hill and lived there happily ever after.

Hill Giant Encounters (Sample Hill Giant Tribes)

The Terrible Feudal Lords

Advanced by the influence of a great coven of sorcerers, witches, and druids, this hill giant society has achieved a level of feudalism. The males wear heavy mail armor and dwell in crude castles; they ride dire



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The advertisement features a large, dark grey Dungeon Mat with a grid pattern and white lines. Two Great Victory Widgets markers are shown: a 'WET ERASE DUNGEON MARKER' and a 'WET ERASE MARKER'. To the right, two pre-painted terrain pieces are displayed: one with a fiery, lava-like texture and another with a grey, rocky texture. The background is a light grey with a faint floral pattern.

boars, mammoths, and dire wolves and engage in jousting. The women plot, seduce, and murder to gain power and use the men as tools for their ambitions.

These hill giants are identical to those found in the rulebook except they have access to better equipment (generally favoring plate armor) and can ride and fight mounted. Despite these differences and a few more airs and graces, they are still hill giants and quickly revert to type when angered. **AC** 25, **touch** 8, **flat-footed** 25; **full plate** (+8 armor, -1 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)

Skills Ride +6, Spot +0

Feats (add) Mounted Combat, (remove) Improved Bull Rush

The Dolmen Men

These hill giants have a particular love of working stone (a talent encouraged by the women), and the lands about are full of great stone circles, menhirs, and dolmens. These giants, when bored, have taken to using menhirs as rocks to throw though they are generally too heavy to throw directly and, instead, are tossed like a highland caber. They are again the same as standard hill giants, except they throw rocks a little harder.

Ranged rock +6 (2d10+7); **Increment** 60 ft.

The Lazy Giants of the Long Mountain

A decade ago, the men in this tribe lost patience with the women and killed them all. It wasn't until the last skull was broken that they realized how much the women did for them. The men almost starved before a stroke of luck brought a tribe of ogres into their area. The hill giants have lapsed into using the ogres for everything—as slaves, food, and mates—and the ogres have finally had enough. They have sent one of their kin out into the lands of men to seek help.

A Quartet of Unusual Hill Giants

Zarig Garr (male hill giant rogue 4)—The muscle of the Free City Thieves Guild, Zarig's skin is a patchwork of self-inflicted cuts and scars. He

carries a huge scythe into combat and is renowned for attacking his victims by removing the roof of the building they are sleeping in.

The Sjeumatré Giant Rat (female hill giant wererat rogue 4)—The Giant Rat of Sjeumatré hobbles spastically through the stinking canals beneath the Great City of Triolo. She is always so hungry and lonely in the dark since her chosen prey of young men so seldom visit these days.

The Pressed (male hill giant barbarian 6)—Dare anyone face the Pressed Giant? Boxing impresario Tangle Flasmind offers a prize of 1,000 gp to anyone who can spend 1 min. in the ring with his hill giant and live.

The Towering Queen of Deceit (female hill giant druid 12)—Beneath Thorn Tor she dwells, guiding her children in the dark. The wise woman's followers have grown braver from the harsh winter and hunt in the lands of men. Her pack is beyond counting: dozens or even hundreds of hill giants cursed with lycanthropy, part giant and part wolf.

Obscenity of Hill Giant Half-Breeds

One particularly foul practice that many races of giants engage in is slavery. Having little need for anyone to fetch and carry (since the women do all that sort of thing), male prisoners are killed and eaten (not necessarily in that order). Female prisoners are kept as breeding stock to provide impure fodder both as guards and, if necessary, food. Often the female hill giants are so outraged by this behavior that they slay the female slaves and, occasionally, all the male hill giants.

When humanoids learn of a tribe that practices such unspeakable acts, they generally do not rest until the entire tribe (and often the progeny of the tribe) are put to the sword.

The outcome of this horror is a hill giant half-breed. Theirs is a terrible life: hated and tormented by true giants and often loathed even by their own mothers, many of these unfortunates slip into madness. Some, however, escape and make their way in civilized lands while still others scavenge in or

near hill giant lairs.

Hill Giant Half-Breeds

Creatures suffering gigantism possess giants for fathers but other humanoids for mothers. They exist as their mother's race but with distorted and enlarged features, brutish faces, thin hair, and their father's skin color. They are also prone to deformities and many have twisted spines, bones that rupture through inadequate flesh, or one feature of their father's at his proportion—such as a huge bloated eye or a distended hand or foot.

Creating a Hill Giant Half-Breed

“Hill giant half-breed” is a template that any humanoid (hereafter referred to as the base creature) can have. The template can only be inherited from birth. Mechanically, the creature remains the same as the base creature with the following exceptions:

Size and Type increase size category by one; add augmented subtype
Speed increases by 10 ft. (to a maximum of 40 ft.)

AC +4 natural armor bonus

Special Attacks mixed blood, rock throwing

Special Qualities low-light vision, mixed blood

Str +4, **Dex** -2, **Con** +2, **Int** -2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** -2

Skills Climb, Jump, Listen, and Spot become class skills

Environment temperate hills (if living with hill giants), otherwise any

Organization solitary or cattle (11-40)

Treasure none (if living with hill giants), otherwise standard

Level Adjustment +1; **CR** +1

Rock Throwing (Ex) Hill giant half-breeds retain some of their father's skills at throwing rocks. The character can hurl a rock weighing 20-25 lb. up to 5 range increments. The range increment is 60 ft., and the rocks deal 1d8 damage.

Mixed Blood (Ex) The blood of half-breeds can run thicker with one or the other parent, and this manifests itself in one of three ways. The effect is chosen when the half-breed is created and never changes:



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Blood Rebel (Ex) The blood of both parents has rebelled and left something with a twisted and tragic appearance, which causes repulsion in all who see them. On viewing the hill giant half-breed, any creature within 30 ft. must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or be shaken for 1d3 rounds. With a successful saving throw, no further saves are required to avoid this effect. Characters with this trait gain +4 to Intimidate checks.

Changeling Blooded (Ex) Such a child favors the female parent and can pass in civilized lands as nothing more than an individual of unusual size. The half-breed's features retain some of the father's blood: dark hair, ruddy skin, clumsy hands, and low brow.

Giant Blessed (Ex) This child favors the father's blood with unusually thick and swollen limbs, thick skin, and brutish demeanor. These characters gain an additional +2 Str and -4 Int.

Possible uses for the hill giant half-breed template

PCs

The template provides excellent opportunities for roleplaying. Perhaps, the first adventure pits the other PCs against Count L'aress and his wicked troupe of actors, and the lead male is the half-breed PC.

An Encounter

The PCs travel through a lonely locale when they spot a fleeing figure. What they first mistook for a man is actually a half-breed youth. He begs the PCs for help just as a hunting group of hill giants arrives.

An Adventure

The stealing of villagers must stop, and a robber-baron hires a group of brave adventurers to infiltrate the offenders—a distant tribe of hill giants. He suggests that the PCs may have more success if they allow themselves to be captured and led directly into the hill giant's rotting lair.

An Adventure Path

The initial adventure above is but an aperitif to an ongoing adventure path. The PCs learn that the giants are but an outpost for an entire kingdom: in fact, numerous villages in the mountains are preparing for war with the intention of invading the PC's homeland and enslaving it. Before long, the raids begin, and as they increase in ferocity, it becomes obvious that unless a blow is struck at the heart of the giant's kingdom, the raids will never end. A small group of adventurers, working independently, has the best chance of infiltrating the giants' lands, learning its secrets, and striking a fatal blow by killing its ruler, the Broken King.

Other versions of gigantic half-breeds, including ettin and titan half-breeds, may occasionally be encountered.



Coming Next Issue

No rest for the wicked! The Fall issue of KOBOLD QUARTERLY magazine is fully loaded with tricks and treats.

Werewolves How! by John E. Ling

More furry madness than you can shake wolvesbane at! A full set of rules for making lycanthropes shine in the moonshine.

With a Steady Eye by Stefen Styrsky

A new take on the classic ranger class, with both a 4E or a Pathfinder twist. Defending the borders of civilization with a steady eye.

The Reign of Men by John Wick

Master designer John Wick makes humans interesting with the second of his Wicked Fantasy articles.

We've killed some fatted calves and read the entrails - and our augurs assure us that darker articles lie ahead. Perhaps fiendish new weapons and devilish new traps. Or sheets of parchment wrapped around a mass of bat guano. What can we say? Kobolds are tricky creatures.



Ask the Kobold

Wishes and Werewolves

by Skip Williams



“If wishes were fishes...”

If you have questions for the kobold, send them to tsrsage@aol.com.

Q: It seems that too often in actual play, the *wish* spell simplifies to merely a powerful anyspell, only ever used to mimic existing spell effects. What else can *wish* do?

For example, can *wish* overcome a creature's inherent immunities (by which I mean immunities gained from type, subtype, or non-abilities)? If I use *wish*, could I use a fire spell on a red dragon or a mind-affecting spell on a nonintelligent creature? Could I deal ability drain to an undead creature? If so, for how long will *wish* negate the creature's immunity? Can I have *wish* create a damaging effect that simultaneously negates or bypasses an inherent immunity to that effect? How does *limited wish* compare with *wish* in these cases?

The *wish* spell is included in the game to give players a chance to tweak campaign reality, so it's slightly more to their liking. In keeping with that idea, using it to remove things that interfere with a party's goals is fine.

You can use a *wish* to remove a troublesome special quality from foes. I recommend that the spell affect a maximum of one foe per two caster levels the *wish* has. The *wish* user should have line of sight to all the affected creatures (or be able to touch them). One *wish* can suppress one special quality in the subjects or render the subjects susceptible to one form of attack. Allow a Will or Fortitude save to resist the effect, as appropriate for

the quality being suppressed. Making a red dragon susceptible to fire, for example, would allow a Fortitude save. Making a mindless creature subject to mind-affecting spells would allow a Will save.

If successful, the effects of the *wish* last one day. A *limited wish* would work much the same way, except that it affects only 1 target and its effects last only 1 round or, perhaps, a few rounds (say 1d4 or 1d6 rounds). A *limited wish* also would have a lower saving throw DC than *wish*, thanks to its lower level.

Keep in mind that even when you use *wish* in this way, spells and other attacks still have restrictions that apply. A charm person spell, for example, still only works on creatures with the humanoid type and a magic missile still only works on creatures—though a separate *wish* could change that temporarily.

When players try to use a *wish* this way, be alert for applications that fit the spell description more closely. For example, instead of using a *wish* to make a giant susceptible to charm person, use it to duplicate charm monster. Likewise, *wishing* to suppress a defense and create a harmful effect probably is best handled by duplicating another spell. To burn a red dragon, for example, you ought to *wish* for a flame strike effect—some of that damage is divine and not fire—or to produce a spell with the cold descriptor.

“Here doggy, doggy, doggy...”

Q: I've always had trouble with the idea that contracting lycanthropy is a problem for a player.

It just seems like a reward rather

than a feared curse. A horrible creature bites you, you contract its horrible, nearly incurable disease, and as the result... you get tougher? While there is the penalty of the level adjustment, I just don't know exactly how to apply it fairly or without leading to some of the same issues older editions of the game had with level drain. Players don't like arbitrarily and permanently losing levels from a single battle.

I've managed it, so far, by having lycanthropy no longer be infectious, but that means werewolves and such are now little more than shapechangers. It's simple and is easily finessed into making sense in a given setting, but it loses the fearsome element of "Oh hells, don't let it bite me! I don't wanna become a monster!"

Characters who become lycanthropes are actually supposed to be a little tougher than unaffected characters. It's true, however, that the rules spend more time trying to make lycanthropy work mechanically than they spend guiding GMs through the task of presenting lycanthropy as a soul-wrenching affliction. All too often, contracting lycanthropy turns out to be a nice gift for a player character. It's important to put the sting back in the process.

Apply that level adjustment.

There's no reason to fret about adding a level adjustment. Just add it—for afflicted lycanthropes, that's +2 plus

the added HD from the animal form. (When playing afflicted lycanthropes, the ECL for a wererat is +3, a werewolf is +4, a wereboar is +5, a werebear is +8, and a weretiger is +8.)

For example, Jaquiline is a 5th level human fighter. She has 5 HD from her class levels, no racial hit dice, and no level adjustment. To add a new class level, Jaquiline needs to earn enough XP to become a 6th level character.

Now, if a wererat bites Jaquiline and infects her with lycanthropy, she gains +1 HD from her rat form and a +2 level adjustment (LA) from the lycanthropy for a total of a +3 effective character level (ECL). Despite still having only 5 character levels (5th level fighter), she now earns XP as if she were an 8th level character. So, to add a new class level now that she's an afflicted wererat, Jaquiline must earn enough experience to become a 9th level character. Becoming a lycanthrope effectively moves the goalposts for Jaquiline's next level. That's painful, but becoming a lycanthrope is supposed to hurt at least a little.

Take over during involuntary changes.

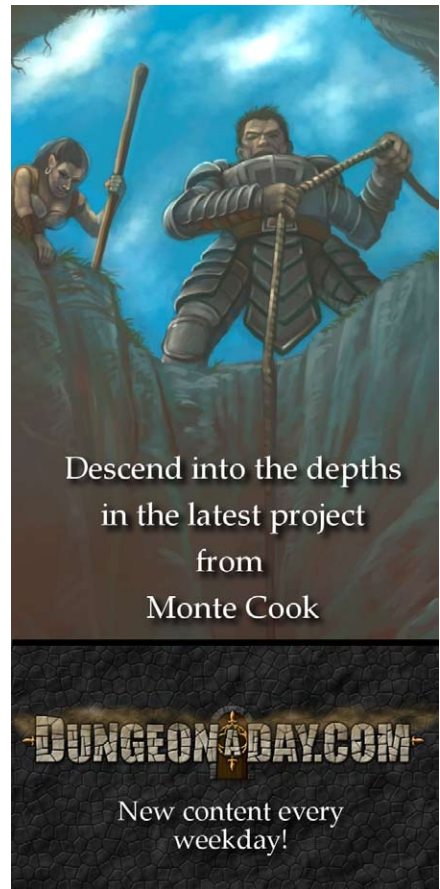
Whenever an afflicted lycanthrope involuntarily changes form, the character becomes an NPC under the GM's control. The rules say the lycanthrope changes alignment to that of the werecreature (i.e. a character changed into a werewolf becomes CE when changing involuntarily). I ignore that. To me an involuntary change turns the character into a raving, homicidal maniac. A werebear is normally LG, but when an afflicted werebear undergoes an involuntary change, it's caught between identities and in great pain; it lashes out at anything within reach. If you can't stomach sending the character on a self-destructive trail of destruction, just assume the character becomes confused, as the spell confusion.

In any case, the afflicted lycanthrope ought to run off into the night at some point—assuming the character survives

whatever triggered the change—slavering, growling, and charging about randomly.

Equipment suffers.

When in the throes of an involuntary change, assume anything worn is damaged; it might be repairable, it might not. For armor, apply the effects of being hastily donned (armor check penalty and AC bonus both get 1 point worse) until it can be repaired. Other items are generally tossed aside but not all at once. A roaming lycanthrope should drop gear all over the countryside: carried items might remain dangling from shards of clothing still wrapped around the character or just buried in the character's fur. If all the PCs in a group combine their efforts, they should be able to recover most of the stuff, though perhaps not without a fight. I'm living proof of that.



Making Players Suffer

As a GM, your job is keeping your players challenged and entertained. To do that well, says I, you need to create a sense of threat and danger for the players, at least from time to time. Most players feel a sense of accomplishment and victory when they overcome a deadly challenge.

Lycanthropy offers you a chance to make players deal with a situation where they're not in control. It's important to play up that aspect of things when someone gets infected. In classic werewolf tales, the afflicted hero isn't even aware anything is wrong at first. Reality dawns on the new werewolf only very slowly, after a series of clues.

A player usually has some idea what's up when a character is at risk. A clever GM distracts the player—remember that the affliction doesn't show until the next full moon—and plays up the idea that the afflicted character has an uncontrollable animal raging inside. In the end, the player must choose: seek a cure or embrace the beast. The former might require a quest or a scavenger hunt or both; the local cleric might not be high enough level to remove the affliction or might take the opportunity to extract a service from the character. The latter will take a few levels and a few skill points, at the very least, with the beast waiting to come out into the moonlight all the while.

As long as you're not overdoing it, you should never flinch from dropping the hammer on a group, especially when you've thought ahead and given the players an out. If the escape hatch you've provided requires some quick thinking and guts, so much the better.

A *wish* can provide a great escape hatch for groups that have run out of options—or just think they've run out of options. When players use *wish* to get their butts out of a sling or to reset things that have gone astray, it's best to let them get away with it.

You should not handle a *wish* punitively unless the players get greedy, cowardly, or otherwise try to evade their responsibility to meet challenges in a heroic manner. Whenever possible, treat a *wish* that has gone awry as a new opportunity to challenge your group.

-Skip Williams

Whispering Enigmas: A Warlock Field Guide

By Mario Podeschi

Art by Ben Hodson and Marc Radle

Warlocks gain access to powerful magics through the signing of pacts with otherworldly beings, granting the ability to curse, curse, and curse some more. No matter the power, from the simplest to the most advanced, their words are more than just taunts and threats—they are the vehicles of a warlock's arcane power. What are the dark secrets a warlock whispers to the stars that so terrifies foes? What fey riddles does a warlock recite to bedazzle opponents? What hellish prayers warlocks intone to bring forth hellfire from their masters?

Warlocks are not alone in their devotion to the mysterious: mystical druids, evil clerics, and mad wizards alike require words of power.

Whispers of the Fey

Arrogant riddlers and mischief-makers, the fey are rarely benign. Their servants beguile foes with strange riddles, clever taunts, and enraging dismissals. Practically uncatchable due to ample teleportation and invisibility, a fey-touched warlock never fails to vex his foe.

What fools these mortals be.
You have offended me for the last time.
Your luck disappears like the froth of the river.
Look out behind you!
Can't catch me!
Let us dance.
Rage and justice, faith and trust; blind you'll be if fight
you must!
Swamps of sadness and lonely mires; lose thyself in
witching fires!
Hero's cheer and pixie's pride: here's another thorn for
your side.
Ere I watch you blindly swinging, axe untouched by
shadows' singing.
Your eyes can't find me. What hope has your sword?

Murmurs of Mad Stars

The alien entities that grant some warlocks their powers represent the greatest terrors of the sentient races. The fear of oblivion, the fear of time's ruthless progression, the fear of absolute aloneness within your own mind—these are the domain of those who lurk Beyond. With powers focused on fear and insanity,



warlocks wield truth like a virulent poison.

The eternal hourglass will again and again be turned,
and you with it.
So small are you—the dust of the dust of the dust of the
universe.
Before I kill you, riddle me this—how will you know
you have died?
Your loved ones soon will mourn you. In time, they will
be grateful to have forgotten you. Such was the depth
of their love.
We shall see that at which dogs howl in the dark and
that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight.
I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to
world to sow death and madness.
Look around and ask yourself—were the gods lazy or
merely cruel?
I take so much from you without knowing your name.
Deeds become lies, lies become history, and history
becomes legend. When I leave this place, I will tell
the poets that you wept.
Eternity laughs at your petty struggles.
I am become Time, destroying all in my path.
You are a boat upon the cruel sea of fate.

The stars stare uncaring at your doom.

I have seen my future, and it continues long past you.

Infernal Insinuations

Devils make bargains to advance the cause of evil in the world. They tempt good creatures to ruin with insidious manipulations and offers of incredible power. When wielding their powers, warlocks stand on the precipice of corruption, speaking words that seem to simultaneously belong to both them and some hellish entity.

The bards will sing of your pain. Suffer.

Let me speed you on your journey to hell.

There is no use in praying—your soul is mine.

Master, please accept my latest sacrifice.

A thousand tortures await you in the abyss—this is but the first.

They will mock you in the afterlife for challenging me.

A wise man would have been afraid long before now.

By all means, struggle—you have such sweet-sounding screams.

I'm afraid my master did not teach me much of mercy.

Choose: my bidding or my wrath.

The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.

I grow impatient with your struggling.

Developing Your Patron

You may have noticed that many of the one-liners above reference the source of a warlock's power. This is because the key to unlocking your warlock's roleplaying potential is to develop the single most distinctive aspect of this class and power: the warlock's patron.

A patron can present itself from either side of the GM's screen. A GM might choose to make a patron into an NPC with an agenda and personality like any other character in her story. Alternatively, the patron can exist solely in the hands of the player. Particularly anarchic gaming groups might

even enjoy handing the patron over to another PC.

The standard relationship between warlock and patron is that of supplicant, where the warlock desires power and strikes a bargain with a more powerful being. The relationship is similar to that between a priest and a god; however, faith is not the currency by which the power is purchased.

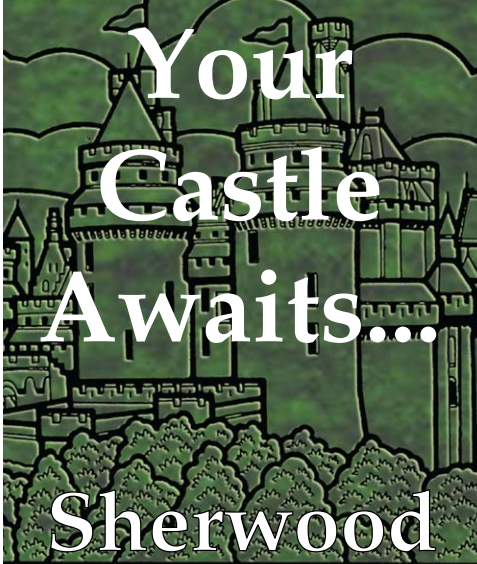
An infernal patron, for example, might offer power as a corrupter. This classic relationship involves a devil pretending to be generous as it nudges an otherwise clean soul toward corruption. When roleplaying a servant of a corrupter, a warlock PC should toy with themes of corruption and redemption, exploring both slippery slopes and ethical tightropes.

A dominator is not so subtle. Rather than toying with its thrall, a dominator expects one thing: obedience. Fey dominators are arrogant mistresses who expect constant praise, while infernal dominators are petty overlords who constantly threaten to revoke their power. Star dominators are perhaps the most terrifying dominators of all, threatening madness or oblivion if their commands go ignored.

Benign Patrons

Not all patrons need to be sinister, though. A love interest provides a fascinating and potentially more benign relationship. Perhaps your eladrin warlock's fey lover was banished to a distant corner of the fey realm, but true love and fey magic provide the strength to seek justice. Perhaps your tiefling warlock is one of nine husbands to the Bitch Queen of Tartarus who will one day fulfill his epic destiny of slaying all his competitors. Or perhaps your lover is lost to the far realm, and you slay your foes with the maddening touch of her loneliness.

A few rare warlocks even call their patron comrade. This type of patron shares your goals and wants the best for your warlock, offering advice and guidance in his adventures. Though your archmage grandfather might be lost to a realm beyond time, he is not





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so far away that he cannot lend you some of his arcane might. Your eladrin half-brother in the Feywild, youngest of all the fey princes, lends you as much of his power as he can muster as you work to repair the damage done to the material plane.

Sometimes, it is the warlock who holds power over a patron. These prisoner patrons offer power because they have no choice, though many dream of one day freeing themselves and betraying their masters. A starry warlock might have pulled a benign spirit from beyond the far realm, dominating it through sheer force of will. A fey warlock might carry the beating heart of a fey queen in his pouch, threatening to destroy it if she does not grant him the might of the Feywild. Infernal warlocks sometimes imprison increasingly powerful devils, attempting bolder and more dangerous thaumaturgy as they advance in power.

Some warlocks are instead possessed by their patrons, carrying them along with them on adventures. An infernal warlock born with a great fiend within him might have magic threatening to destroy his very being, and his powers function not so much by his casting of spell as relaxing his guard. A summoning spell gone wrong may have trapped a star patron within a young wizard, who must seek to contemplate the madness within him lest he be consumed by it. Or perhaps your eladrin fey-bound warlock's twin was never born, and to this day, he continues to play tricks on you when you're not looking.

A step beyond possession is the dual-natured patron. In this relationship, the warlock and the patron compete for space in the same body. A dual-natured infernal pact warlock may be calm, patient, and kind most of the time, but when faced with danger he becomes a hateful and terrifying being who delights in the suffering of his enemies. Dual-natured star warlocks walk through life on the brink of madness, arguing with themselves and jumping at shadows. As they channel their powers in battle, though, these

warlocks become the calm center of their psychological storm, demonstrating power and fearlessness as though it were second nature to them.

Once you've identified your warlock's patron, look for ways to demonstrate the intricate relationship you've developed. Take one of your skills, such as Arcana or Religion, and put it in the hands of your patron. Tell your allies that "Ignatious" or "Oolarth of the Infinite Eyes" has told you how to best combat the lich standing before you. Whisper a sweet good-bye to your distant fey lover after she has telepathically advised you how to survive a blizzard. You can also re-skin some of your powers to express the personality of your relationship, perhaps describing how you seem blasted back by the power you released from your barely contained eldritch energy.

Not all warlocks walk with their power on the surface. In battle, a kind warlock may turn into a cruel, egomaniacal beast through channeling hellish powers. Building a stark contrast between the dark and light sides of your antiheroic warlock can produce a fascinating personality that will add a new level of roleplaying possibilities to your character.



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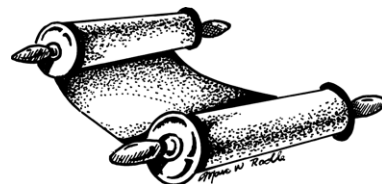
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The Saint Ives Riddle

The fey are legendary for their riddles. Gremio, a halfling fey-bound warlock of some renown, likes to use this riddle (in conjunction with his Insight skill) to evaluate the intelligence of friend and foe alike.

"As I was going to Saint Ives,
I met a man with seven wives,
and each wife had seven sacks,
and in each sack were seven cats,
and each cat had seven kits.
Kits, cats, sacks, wives:
how many were going to Saint Ives?"

—C.B. Williams, "As I Was Going to St. Ives"

This riddle has a great many answers. "One" is the most common answer, as the narrator is the only person who we know beyond a doubt was going to Saint Ives. However, other valid answers include two (if the man he met was going but had left his wives at home), nine (if we count only people), 2752, 2753, 2800, 2801, and 2802 (using various mathematic gymnastics). The number and complexity of answers, as well as the speed in which they are given, allows riddlers like Gremio to evaluate a person's cunning.

Haffuns: Seeming Servants

By John Wick and Jesse Heinig

Art by Daniel Moenster

When Alvin Fix first saw them, his first thought was, “A bow may insult them.” So, he curtsyed instead.

“Alvin Fix,” he told them. “I am alchemist and advisor to King Theodore IV. And I welcome you to his land.”

One of them stepped forward, repeating the action. “Tom Bing,” he said. His hair was covered in dirt, his skin thick with sweat and soil. “I have no title,” the little man said.

“And I am at your service.”

Alvin Fix would soon learn how literal the little man’s words were.

“Haffun” is the human word for “child,” but it translates better as “little one.” When the small creatures first appeared with the uvandir—popping up out of the ground, covered with dust and dirt and the sweat of a desperate chase—the farmwoman who found them said, “You look like haffuns!”

“Then haffuns we are!” Tom Bing said, a smile on his broad face—the first sign of the haffun’s ability to adapt to nearly any situation.

They came up from the ground—digging their way from the other side of the world—running from a horror whose name they never utter. Human scholars have learned that much but little else about the race who adopted the first name they were given. No-one knows what their kind call themselves.

“Haffuns.”

Despite their secrecy, they fit in to human society as if they had been missing forever. How they did it—and what became of them—is our topic this evening. The haffuns and human society. How they arrived, how they adapted and how they made themselves essential.

Little Servants

Two hundred years ago, haffuns arrived with the uvandir. They broke through the wall of an iron mine under the Dragoncoil Mountains, scaring the miners half to death. When greeted by the King’s emissaries, the uvandir and haffuns offered their services to the human king. Alvin Mix took representatives from both races to meet the King, and within minutes Theodore IV was completely enchanted by the haffun ambassador, Tom Bing.



When Bing was offered to stay in the King’s court so His Majesty could learn about this new race, Tom Bing accepted, bringing in servants of his own to cook and clean and maintain the King’s court. The haffuns proved themselves almost magically efficient, providing meals that made the King laugh and moan with pleasure. His clothes and linens were immaculate. The hospitality of the haffuns won him over in a single week and he declared them full citizens of the Kingdom.

Soon enough, every noble in the Kingdom needed haffun servants. Within two years, the number of haffuns serving as cooks, butlers, diplomats and envoys outnumbered the humans serving in the same positions. Of course, this caused some resentment among the human population, but there was little they could do. It seemed the haffuns were bred for this work. Created for it, even. And that got human scholars wondering about the origins of these little servants.

Unfortunately, the haffuns are tight-lipped about their

origins. A few have spoken about “the old times” in hushed whispers, but few details have surfaced. The best information we have comes from a conversation with a drunken haffun conducted by Ruffus Wage, a Scholar of the Tower. The haffun spoke about “the Enemy,” and “the Great Flight.” Fleeing from something horrible, they literally dug through the world. Other haffuns in the tavern quickly shushed their cousin, flashing their kind and gentle smiles at the scholar.

“He’s had too much to drink,” they told him. “Pay no attention to what he says.”

Despite their competence at all matters domestic, not all haffuns serve as butlers and cooks. Their keen skills in style and grace have made them some of the best diplomats in the Kingdom. Serving as seneschals to dukes and earls, it is an exception not to see at least one haffun in a noble’s court. And then there are the haffuns who serve no man. We’ll talk about them later.

Talda: Haffun Seeming

One reason haffuns make such excellent servants is their innate ability to blend into the background.

Unobtrusive.

Unseen.

Invisible.

The haffuns call this talent *talda*: the unassuming art. Human scholars call it haffun seeming. If a haffun remains perfectly quiet and unmoving, others tend not to notice him. He melts into the shadows, becoming almost invisible. This distinctly haffun trait added to their value as servants: a haffun butler remains out of sight until needed, then fades into the background until needed again.

All haffuns show this ability to some degree, although a few dedicate time and effort to refine it to a razor edge.

Yffur: Homeless Haffuns

On the street, of course, there are haffuns who have not found a home in human society. At least, they haven’t found a place in a human home.

On the city streets, however, they have found a place to call their own. Homeless and alone, these “street haffuns” use their skills of stealth and negotiation to become con men, pick pockets, burglars and robbers. The best on the street, in fact. Armed with kinship and a strong sense of organization, haffun street gangs are some of the most ruthless and dangerous in the Kingdom.

Called *yffur* by their own kind (meaning “homeless ones”), the haffun street gangs bind their members with secret oaths of solidarity. Once a member, always a member. These blood oaths are reportedly magical in nature, although no human scholar has ever seen one or can even verify their existence. As far as the other races are concerned, the oaths may as well be myths.

But while the oaths may be myths, the devotion of an *yffur* to his gang is anything but. The violence they undertake to protect both their territory and their members shocked the human legal system. Graphic acts of symbolic violence meant to intimidate and demoralize rival gangs are everywhere. One story tells of a gang found in a warehouse drained of blood without a single mark found on any of the bodies. Criminal code: they didn’t have the blood (courage) to stand against us. Another example: a body found completely mutilated except for his face. “So’s his friends’d recognize him,” any street merchant would tell you.

Extortion and vice is how they earn money. They know what people want, they know what people need and they know how to get it.

The *yffur* are living proof of just how far charm can get you. Learning secret desires. Learning forbidden temptations. Using the knowledge to get you what you need and want.

It’s the haffun way.

Most cultured haffuns refuse to speak of their homeless cousins. If they say anything at all, they usually shake their heads, mumbling something under their breath about lack of virtue, lack

of patience, lack of duty. Then, they smile and pour you another drink. And is the bread warm enough? Cook put some honey in the butter...

Wipla: The Wild Ones

Some haffuns have found homes outside the cities of men. The *wipla* (“wild ones”) are haffuns who have taken up the human profession of “adventurer,” seeking out fame and fortune in the wilds of the world. Most adventuring parties have at least one haffun—if for no other reason, he can turn bark, grass and stream water into a surprisingly tasty meal—and sometimes even more. Their unique skills make a *wipla* the perfect scout or spy. A few have even gone far enough to learn the ways of the sword, spear and shield. And a few—the reckless ones—learn the ways of human magic.

Despite their public disdain for the *wipla*, most haffuns’ eyes grow wide when they hear the tales of their adventurous cousins. I think it is safe to say that all haffuns long for adventure... even if it is within the confines of their hire’s home.

Ghuva: The Giving Curse

One thing not commonly known about the haffuns is what they call *ghuva*. The Curse. Like most haffun secrets, this one is kept close to the vest, but word got out soon enough. The haffuns themselves have done well enough dismissing it as complete bunk, but a few of the King’s subjects have discovered it to be true. Enough to keep the rumor alive. A rumor about a curse put on the haffuns for fleeing their past masters. Or perhaps it was bred into them from the beginning to

Master and Servant

Haffuns never use the word “master,” but “hire.” Haffuns are servants, not slaves, a distinction they make plain and clear. Because haffun servants are in such high demand, they can pick and choose clientele. If a haffun grows dissatisfied with his hire, he leaves. He leaves politely, but he leaves, nonetheless.

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ensure their servitude. Either way, it hangs over the entire race like a knife, ready to fall.

The Curse. *Ghuva*. The Giving Curse.

No haffun can refuse a true plea of aid.

If you ask, and you are truly in need, the haffun must assist you as best he can.

There's just no getting around it. If asked, and the plea is honest, the haffun has no choice. He must give you what you need. If he does not, he grows ill. His skin turns ashen and his breath grows thin. The color leaves his eyes and he struggles even to walk. No-one knows if the Curse can kill a haffun. No haffun has ever gone so far to find out.

If you ask, and your request is true, he will look into your eyes, discover what you need, and give it to you. That's the Haffun Curse.

Haffun Racial Traits (OGL)

+2 to Dexterity and Charisma, -2

Strength: A cultural tradition as working for servants to larger folk endow haffuns with quick, nimble fingers suited to buttoning waistcoats and deftly maneuvering serving trays, and their formal, reserved demeanor conceals an underlying charm and intuitive understanding of social niceties. Small size carries with it a correspondingly compact frame better suited to slipping in and out of kitchens than working at hard labor.

Small: As a Small creature, a haffun gains a +1 size bonus to Armor Class, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, and a +4 size bonus on Hide checks, but he uses smaller weapons than humans use, and his lifting and carrying limits are three-quarters of those of a Medium character.

Cunning Diplomats: Haffuns gain a +2 racial bonus on all Bluff and Diplomacy checks. While haffuns are not flamboyant or commanding, their intuitive understanding of social dynamics means that they always know how to fit into complicated or potentially dangerous social situations.

Alert Servant: Haffuns gain a +2 racial bonus to the Listen skill.

Fearless: Haffuns gain a +4 racial bonus on any saving throw against fear effects, as well as any opposed check made to resist fear or intimidation (such as the Intimidate skill). Despite their small size and habitually docile demeanor, haffuns rarely exhibit fear, even when confronted by larger bullies or predators.

Talda: Haffuns gain a +2 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks. A haffun may purchase the Talda feats (below) for additional bonuses.

The Giving Curse: All Haffuns also suffer from *guhva*, the Giving Curse. This innate compulsion causes haffuns to empathize with other thinking beings, but also allows them to intuit and care for the needs of their friends and allies. See sidebar.

Automatic Languages: Haffuns speak Common as well as their own language, *phutuula*. This language they keep to themselves and do not teach it to others. Haffuns who make deals to perform as servitors for other races tend to pick up those races' languages instead of Common; a haffun who somehow ingratiated himself to orks, for instance, would speak Orcish and *Phutuula*. Bonus Languages: Any; haffuns learn whatever language is useful in the performance of their serving duties.

Favored Class: Rogue. A multiclass haffun's rogue class does not count when determining whether she takes an experience point penalty for multiclassing.

Talda Feats

Talda feats reflect the haffun emphasis on quiet service, unobtrusiveness, and awareness of surroundings. These feats make the haffun excellent valets, and they can have obvious uses in spying and subterfuge; *wipla* turn their *talda* talents into means of infiltrating enemy strongholds, slipping beneath the notice of guards as "common servants," and to

overhear whispered conversations while remaining unobtrusive.

The Silent Servant [Talda]

You have learned to hold stock-still and blend into the background with such precision that you become unobtrusive and overlooked.

Prerequisite: Haffun.

Benefit: So long as you do not move on your turn, your racial Hide bonus increases by +4 (and may reach +6 with additional *talda* feats). You may make a Hide check without need for cover or concealment as long as you do not move from your starting space, and you are adjacent to a wall, tree, or other solid background.

The Whisper Way [Talda]

Your *talda* is sufficiently refined to make small movements while remaining unobtrusive, just as a servant can quietly pick up a discarded letter or unlock a door without drawing attention.

Prerequisites: Haffun, The Silent Servant, Hide 6 ranks, Concentration 3 ranks or Sleight of Hand 3 ranks.

Benefit: You may make one five-foot step per turn. You must remain adjacent to at least one solid background, such as a wall or tree. You



may pick up objects, pocket them, or even toss a held object, although you may not throw a weapon; doing so requires an opposed Sleight of Hand check against Spot by anyone who can see the object, but you can make this check untrained and you add your racial Hide bonus (generally +6, because of the increased bonus from the Silent Servant feat). Success means that the action does not draw attention and you remain hidden. You may also make Disable Device and Open Lock checks without revealing your location, and if you are already hidden, enemies may not make Listen checks to hear you when you use those skills.

Your base racial bonus to Hide, Listen, and Move Silently checks increases to +4, and this bonus applies even when you are not otherwise using talda techniques.

The Invisible Passage [Talda]

Your talda is so refined that you can move unobtrusively about a house—or prison, dungeon, tower, forest, or nearly any other backdrop—even without creeping along a wall.

Prerequisites: Haffun, The Whisper Way, Concentration 6 ranks, Hide 10 ranks.

Benefit: As a full-round action, you may move up to 10' while retaining the benefits of the talda techniques. You must remain within at least 10' of a solid background, such as a wall or tree, but you no longer need to be adjacent to such a surface to use any of your talda bonuses.

Your base racial bonus to Hide, Listen, and Move Silently checks increases to +6, and this bonus applies even when you are not otherwise using talda techniques.

The Ghuva Feast [Talda]

Because you understand what people want and need, you can turn even humble materials into a feast that satisfies senses and stomachs.

Prerequisites: Haffun, The Silent Servant, Profession: Cook 4 ranks.

Benefit: You may use Profession: Cook rather than Survival skill when scrounging for food and water to supply yourself and a party. Additionally, once per day you may prepare a meal that helps to restore vim and vigor. You must have materials on hand to make such a meal (although you can scrounge them with this skill, if you are living off the land in the wilderness), and preparation and consumption takes one full hour. Make a Profession: Cook skill check, DC 10 + 2 per additional person fed. If you succeed, the meal restores 1 hit point per character level of the haffun, removes an additional 1d6 points of nonlethal damage, and grants a +1 morale bonus to skill checks for the next hour. An individual may only benefit from one ghuva feast in a day.

The Giving Curse

The Giving Curse isn't exactly a curse. A haffun can suffer from it, but there is more benefit than harm. It is entirely possible the haffuns "accidentally" let out knowledge of ghuva to the humans.

Accidentally.

It works like this. Every haffun seems to have a limited kind of telepathic or empathic sympathy. They can sense what you need. They look into your eye, concentrate, and then know exactly what will make you happy. It could be as simple as a slice of cherry pie or it could be gaining revenge on the villain who murdered your father. Most of the time, it's the cherry pie.

Desires are as simple. "I want a cold beer," or "I want a hot bath," or "Now that you mention it, I want that cherry pie." If a haffun uses ghuva on you—and determines you need something short-term—he must fulfill the desire by sunset. If he does (and would someone get me that cherry pie already!), you gain a +2 morale bonus on all attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks and skill checks until sunrise the next day. If he gets it to you by sunset, you have the benefit until sunrise.

Short-term goals are always pretty easy to accomplish. The examples above—the bath, the beer, the (now I really want it) cherry pie—are simple desires. They require no real risk. The haffun looks into your eyes and knows what you need. Also, while he's fulfilling it, the haffun cannot perform another ghuva. Only one desire at a time.

As for determining exactly what the desire is... Leave that to the haffun player. For example:

... in the darkest corner of a dungeon, a small band of adventurers hides from the horde of beasts hunting them down. The wizard desperately reads through his book, trying to re-memorize a spell. The cleric prays for the healing the fighter desperately needs. And the ranger—her arm mauled by the minotaur—looks at her bow, no useless. The haffun sits down next to her. Looks into her eyes. Then, he smiles. "Here," he says, and pulls out a crisp, fresh apple from his backpack. First, her own smile peeks through the grit and grime on her face, then it shines like a light in the darkness.

"How did you know?" she asks.

The haffun shrugs and walks away to the fighter...

A haffun may only perform one ghuva per day for every three levels he has. A 1st level haffun can do it once per day. A 6th level haffun can do it twice per day. A 9th level haffun can do it three times per day. And on and on.

And then there's the Curse...

If anyone looks into a haffun's eyes and reveals the thing he needs most, the haffun must fulfill the desire. For as long as he does not, he suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls. He cannot be taxed by more than one desire, but if he is asked to perform, he cannot take on any other ghuva until he accomplishes the one that has been requested of him.



Haffun in 4th Edition

By Scott Gable

So you want to play a Haffun in 4e?

Racial Traits

Average Height 4 ft.

Average Weight 80 lb.

Ability Scores +2 Dexterity, +2

Charisma

Size Small

Speed 6 squares

Vision Normal

Languages Common, Phutuula, choice of one other

Skill Bonus +2 Bluff, +2 Diplomacy

Fearless You gain a +1 racial bonus to all defenses against fear effects. In addition, you gain a +5 racial bonus to Will against Intimidate opposed checks.

Talda You can use your Charisma modifier for Stealth checks instead of your Dexterity modifier.

Giving Curse You can use giving curse as an encounter power.

Giving Curse Racial Power

You look deeply into your companion's eyes and know, without doubt, what is needed.

Encounter

Standard Action

Personal

Effect Looking into another's eyes, you learn what you can do for them or give them by sunset that they would most benefit from. When you fulfill their desire, they gain a +2 power bonus to attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks until sunrise.

Special You can use this power 1 time per day at first level, and you get an additional use per day every 4 levels (i.e. 2 uses at 4th level, 3 uses at 8th level, and so on). Until one desire is fulfilled, you cannot begin to fulfill another's desire.

Reversal As a standard action, if someone adjacent to you looks you in the eyes and demands their true heart's desire, you must fulfill it, receiving a -2 penalty to attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks unless you for as long as you ignore this request. You can only fulfill one desire at a time—and you can't start another until this one is

fulfilled. Being forced to fulfill a desire like this does not take away from your daily uses of the power.

Note The reversal of this power is not common knowledge and requires a Nature check made as a monster knowledge check to know of it.

Talda Feats

Heroic Feats

Silent Servant [Talda]

Prerequisite: haffun, trained in Stealth

Benefit: You can make a Stealth check without superior cover or total concealment, but you must still be adjacent to a wall, tree, or other solid structure. You can remain hidden without cover or concealment until you move or attack, losing the benefit at the end of the action.

Paragon Feats

Ghuva Feast [Talda]

Prerequisite: haffun, trained in Insight

Benefit: When foraging in the wild, you can use Insight in place of Nature. Additionally, once per day, you can prepare a reinvigorating meal. For the duration of the meal, any healing effects restore additional hp equal to

your Charisma modifier. For 1 hour after the meal, all participants receive a +1 bonus to skill checks. Individuals can only benefit from 1 ghuva feast per day.

Invisible Passage [Talda]

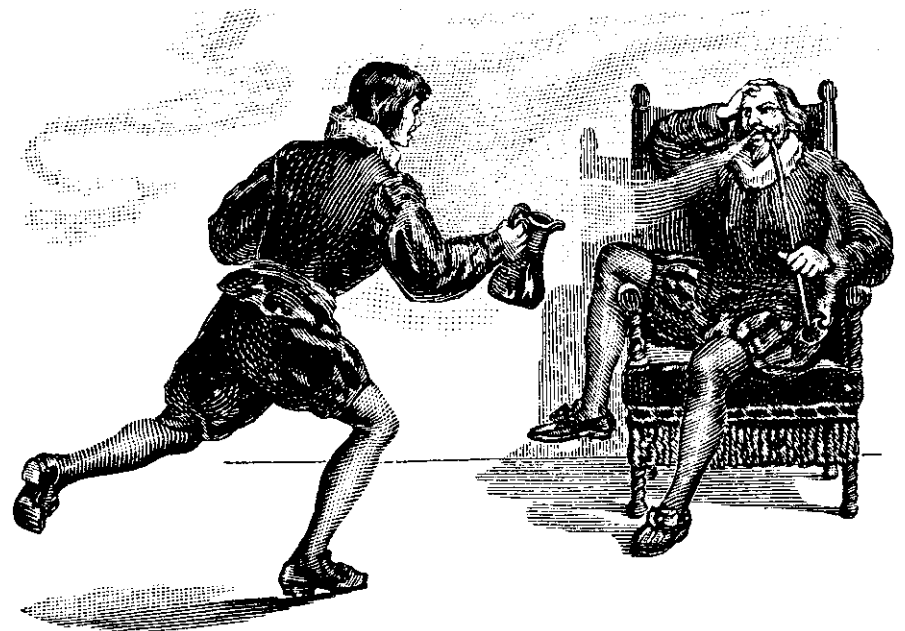
Prerequisite: haffun, Silent Servant feat

Benefit: While you are hidden, opponents cannot detect you with passive Perception checks as long as you remain within 2 squares of a wall, tree, or other solid structure the entire time. They can detect you normally when actively using Perception. You still lose the benefits of hiding when you make an attack or other attention drawing action.

Whisper Way [Talda]

Prerequisite: haffun, Silent Servant feat

Benefit: While hidden, you may move up to your Charisma modifier in squares before requiring a new Stealth check, but you must remain adjacent to a wall, tree, or other solid structure. You may also manipulate small objects while hidden, including while making Thievery checks.



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BOOK REVIEWS

ALL TOMES READ BY CANDLELIGHT

by Cynthia Ward and Neal Hebert



Agents of Artifice

Ari Marmell

Wizards of the Coast, February 2009

Hardcover, \$24.99

346 pages

Review by Neal Hebert

Jace Beleren, planeswalker extraordinaire, hasn't been having a good few months: his best friend Kallist Rel stole his girlfriend, the planeswalking necromancer Lilliana Vess; the nobles of Ravnica are sick of being the target of Jace's confidence scams; and the artificer Tezzeret and the cabal of mercantile planeswalkers—the Infinite Consortium—wants Jace dead.

Combining elements of detective noir, classic revenge stories, and political intrigue, Ari Marmell's debut novel *Agents of Artifice* is a fun read, mostly.

For starters, Jace, Kallist, Lilliana, and Tezzeret are great characters, and the gangsters, mages, and ratmen who populate Ravnica reinforce Marmell's fantasy noir.

Marmell is best when he explores darker territory. The lust Kallist feels when in the presence of Lilliana's summoned desolation angel gave me a new appreciation of the source material, and the concept that summoning spells steal summoned creatures' free will presents both planeswalkers and thoughtful players a moral dilemma.

However, *Agents of Artifice* does have one extremely large misstep. The story of Jace is the story of the novel, ultimately, but Marmell doesn't clue readers in to this until after the first 64 pages of the book. Without spoiling a wonderful plot twist, all I can say is there is a narrative shift that, while lovely, essentially dilutes and stalls the forward motion of the plot.

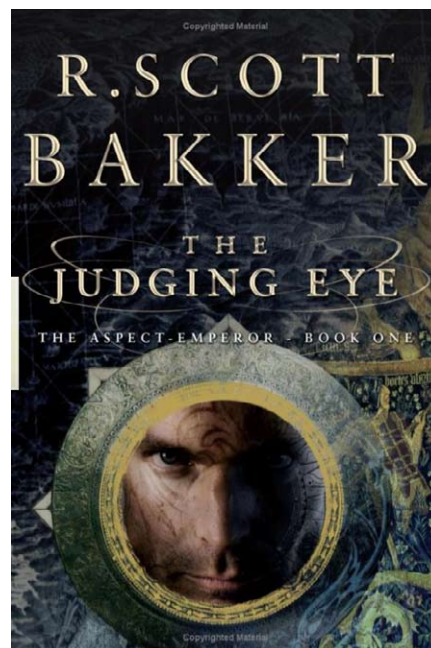
And when I say it stalls the plot, I mean that, after reading the first 64 pages, the next 172 pages are devoted to a sustained flashback of Jace's training and initiation into the Infinite Consortium.

Approximately 47 percent of *Agents of Artifice* is a giant flashback that provides all the backstory and character motivations that make the big reveal possible. This seems a clear sign that Marmell should have either refocused his novel or rethought the plot twist.

In Marmell's defense, this might have seemed necessary because of his excellent twist, but a good twist isn't really all that good when it makes the story around the twist problematic.

Agents of Artifice succeeds most when Marmell concerns himself with the source material least. Though my memory of *Magic: The Gathering* might be fuzzy, I recall it being a simulation of an epic sorcerous duel between planeswalking wizards rather than a dramatization of a fantasy-noir revenge tale.

All things considered, I definitely prefer Marmell's take.



The Judging Eye

R. Scott Bakker

The Overlook Press, February 2009

Hardcover, \$26.99

437 pages

Review by Neal Hebert

Kellhus, Aspect Emperor and Living God of the Three Seas, has assembled the largest army seen in millennia in order to conquer the pit of Golgotterath and thus avert the coming Second Apocalypse. His wife, Empress Esmenet, rules his empire and cares for her half-divine children in the imperial capital of Momemn. And Kellhus' former tutor Drusas Achamian—once the lover of Esmenet, now a school-less wizard who rejected his sorcerous brothers' endless crusade against the Second Apocalypse after learning the falseness of Kellhus' divinity—roams the north with a group of mercenaries and an immortal madman searching for the truth behind the Aspect Emperor.

R. Scott Bakker's *The Judging Eye* is, simply put, a barnburner of a book. Through his diverse cast of characters—slaves, wizards, whores, empresses, and half-mad, half-divine sociopathic children—Bakker manages to build an immense and satisfying world, Earwä, from whole cloth.

The world building and characters on display in *The Judging Eye* set a new benchmark for fantasy. Kellhus, the God-Emperor, is aloof and mysterious; to the captured Prince Sorweel, Kellhus' words evoke both the promise offered by the god of the Christian gospels while suggesting the falseness of snake-oil salvation. Drusas Achamian, former mandate schoolman and wizard, wears tragedy and loss about him like a cloak—but when he finally sings the sorcerous song, he stands as tall as any magician in the fantastic genre. Empress Esmenet and her half-mad god-children come across fully realized and utterly human despite their claims to divinity by proxy.

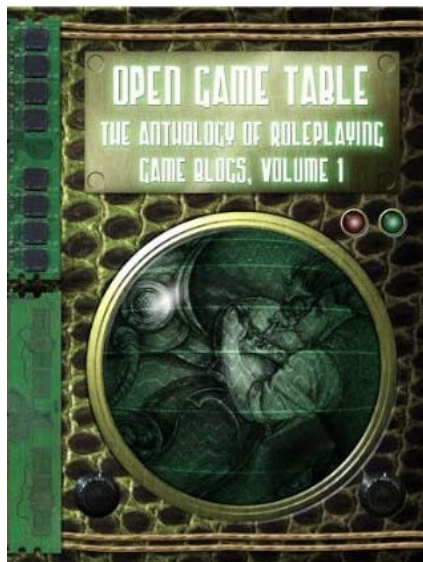
Rounding out the cast are a whore with the sorcerous spark, the high priestess of the cult of the Earth Mother Yatwer, and Achamian's mercenaries, the Skin Eaters. These last are hard-bitten veterans who hunt the scalps of the goblinoid Sranc; their wizard, named Cleric, is an inhuman, immortal, and insane sorcerer whose rare sermons have the quality of a fire-and-brimstone revivalist preacher. *The Judging Eye* is a well-told tale. Its multiple perspectives and plotlines blend into a seamless whole. None of the subplots is boring; all of them add up to a nicely paced, cohesive story.

To top it all off, Bakker's confidence and knowledge of the fantastic genre informs the vivid characters he's created. Bakker's tragic wizards and desperate apprentices are nice instantiations of well-worn fantasy archetypes put to new use; the breakneck flight and running skirmish with hordes of Sranc beneath the Nonman city of Cil-Aujas is a jaw-dropping, wonderful homage to Tolkien's Mines of Moria that had me turning pages frantically.

But there's a catch, despite all of this praise: *The Judging Eye* isn't accessible to all readers. Its story is dark and embraces dark themes—such as rape, murder, the rule of a false messiah, the literal damnation of magic-users that may not sit well with all readers.

Moreover, though *The Judging Eye* is the first book of a new trilogy, it is actually a continuation of Bakker's earlier Prince of Nothing trilogy. A lack of familiarity with Prince of Nothing—the world of Earwä and the events that hit the Three Seas in these earlier books—might impair readers' enjoyment of *The Judging Eye*.

Readers looking for a darker fantasy tale or wanting to try something truly unique will enjoy Bakker—both *The Judging Eye* and the earlier Prince of Nothing trilogy.



Open Game Table: The Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs, Vol. 1

Edited by Jonathan Jacobs

Open Game Table, March 2009

Paperback, \$22.95

129 pages

Review by Neal Hebert

Open Game Table: The Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs is the brainchild of Jonathan Jacobs, writer for the blog The Core Mechanic. Drawing on the accumulated content of over 100 blogs in the RPG Bloggers

Network, Open Game Table collects the RPG blogging community's best blog posts of 2008.

Divided into 10 chapters, *Open Game Table* covers a lot of ground: play styles, monsters, NPCs, campaign design, RPG history, and gamer tools receive their due. The anthology aims wide, and the editor ensures most aspects of gaming receive some mention.

And there's a lot here to like.

Ben Robbins' "Braunstein: The Roots of Roleplaying Games" is a fantastic piece of roleplaying scholarship. The history Robbins brings to light is important to the community as a whole, and a fitting tribute to Dave Arneson's legacy.

"The Stargazer" and "The Blue," both authored by Ian Toltz, are evocative, brimming with flavor and imagination. Both are easily inserted into any fantasy game without hesitation.

Troy Taylor's "Magical Ethics" is an intelligent analysis of how magic influences—and is influenced by—ethics and morality in a fantasy world. It's the kind of thing every obsessive worldbuilder should consider when tinkering with their homebrew.

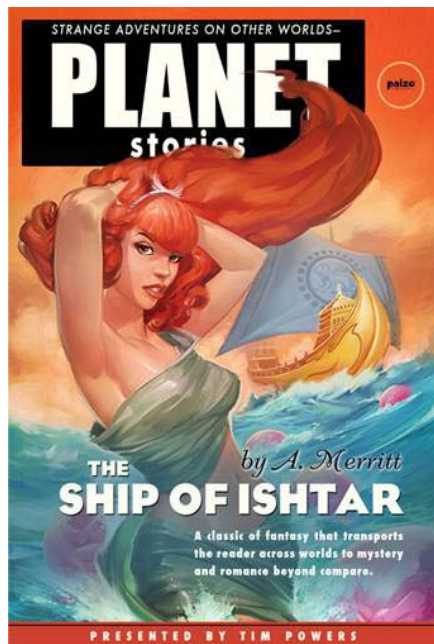
Though these pieces rose to the top, readers will be pleased to find many additional articles worth reading.

Of course, *Open Game Table* is not without flaws: editing and layout problems noticeably detract from the finished product. And, though much of the anthology is quite good, the quality of writing is inconsistent: the things that make good bloggers often don't translate exceptionally well to print.

More strident editing could have mitigated this. Though print writing and blogging embrace different writing conventions, these challenges disappear with enough red ink and revision.

Ultimately, *Open Game Table* raises questions about collections of blog material, and their presentation: should they merely chronicle the best blog posts of a given year, warts and all, or represent them to the wider world in a different medium? Volume one seems

to have embraced the former with great success; volume two will be even better if Jacobs attempts to bring the material up to print standards next year.



The Ship of Ishtar

A. Merritt

Introduction by Tim Powers
Planet Stories/Paizo Publishing, July 2009

Trade Paperback, \$14.99

330 pages

Review by Cynthia Ward

He's pretty obscure nowadays. But in the Pulp Era, A. Merritt ranked up there with Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard as one of pulp's most popular writers. Merritt earned that popularity with fantasies like *The Ship of Ishtar*.

When John Kenton recovers a tiny Babylonian ship, it transports him to

Tim Powers on Merritt

"A. Merritt's *The Ship of Ishtar* is probably the grandest of the old pulp adventures -- full of drama, riotous exotic color, swashbuckling action, and magic. Writers are too self-conscious and sophisticated to write this way anymore, but luckily readers will never be too sophisticated to be spellbound by it."

a full-sized galley, cursed to forever voyage. Half of the ship is the domain of the god Nergal, and the other is the domain of the goddess Ishtar. None may cross the line between their domains, save Kenton. To win the galley's trapped priestess, beautiful Sharane, Kenton fights his way from galley slave at the oars to ship's master, opposing the gods themselves.

This bare bones recitation doesn't begin to suggest the glories of *The Ship of Ishtar*. Merritt's lavish prose is of the sort sometimes denounced as "purple," but this does a disservice to the novel's wonderfully vivid images of ancient splendors, capricious divinities, swashbuckling action, towering heroism, and treacherous villainy. If *The Ship of Ishtar* were adapted to a graphic novel, the artists almost wouldn't need to tap their imaginations; Merritt has already visualized the action, settings, and characters with vibrant fullness.

Interested readers should note, *The Ship of Ishtar* (1924) hasn't a shred of political correctness. For the full story, pick up Paizo Publishing's new release of this novel; most earlier editions present an abridged version of Merritt's tale.



The Sword of Rhiannon

Leigh Brackett

Introduction by Nicola Griffith
Planet Stories/Paizo Publishing, April

2009

Trade Paperback, \$12.99

170 pages

Review by Cynthia Ward

Archaeologist and looter Matthew Carse knows the value of Martian artifacts, so he knows he's got something priceless when a thief brings him the sword of the hated Martian god Rhiannon, the Cursed One.

In the long-lost Tomb of Rhiannon, at the bottom of an ancient sea, treasures are uncovered, including a strange dark device of alien science—a device into which the thief thrusts Carse. But Carse does not die, and instead, he crosses the abyss of time, arriving on a Mars of green hills and milk-white oceans, nearly a million years in its past.

Ancient Mars proves no less treacherous than the world Carse left behind. He soon finds himself a slave, laboring upon the galley of the gorgeous Lady Ywain, the Princess of Sark. Unfortunately, her allies, the sinister and serpentine Dhuvians to whom Rhiannon taught his forbidden lore, are also a threat.

Carse leads a slave rebellion, and the freed oarsmen join the wild Sea Kings of Khondor. But the new allies face a greater threat than even the serpent-men of Caer Dhu. For when Carse plunged through time, the mind of Rhiannon slipped into Carse's, and the dark god has motives of his own.

If you're thinking this Mars-set novel sounds remarkably like fantasy, you haven't missed the mark. *The Sword of Rhiannon* is a work of sword and planet fiction, an adventure subgenre that predated and overlapped the twentieth-century heyday of sword and sorcery,

Nicola Griffith on Leigh Brackett

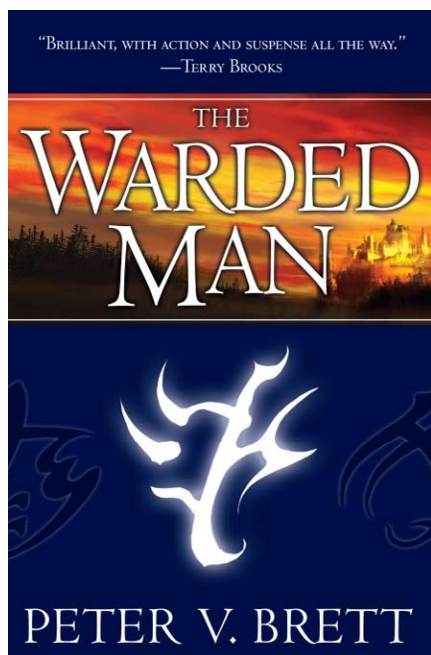
Rhiannon is a hymn to the lost past of a Mars that never was and an elegy for the frontiers that were shrinking every day in the face of sterile data

—From the Introduction to *The Sword of Rhiannon*

and exerted considerable influence upon it. But as modern science banished the Mars of sea bottom canals and the Venus of cloudy jungles, sword and planet books fell out of print and their audience shifted to sword and sorcery and science fiction.

However, the fantastic planets of the sword and planet genre are no less wonderful than the fantastic otherworlds of sword and sorcery. Paizo Publishing knows this, and they're bringing many of the best of these novels back into print, among them Leigh Brackett's classic, *The Sword of Rhiannon*.

If you love fantasy, *The Sword of Rhiannon* has everything you want: high adventure, sinister sorcery, passion, an indomitable hero, a proud heroine, a muscular and graceful prose style, and a dark sensibility ever aware of the transience of the world.



The Warded Man

Peter V. Brett

Ballantine Books/Del Rey, March 2009

Hardcover, \$25.00/Canada \$28.00

416 pages

Review by Cynthia Ward

No one goes out at night unless they want to die.

Hordes of demons rise from the ground to rend man and beast when

night falls; they are savage, unrelenting, and apparently unkillable. The only defense is the wards—the runes they draw or carve upon their cabins and barns, their businesses and city walls. But the slightest error in creating a ward dooms those who huddle behind its slim protection. The demons are winning their centuries-old war on humanity.

When Arlen was 11, the demons burned his village, killing many. He resolves, then, to take the fight to the demons, and after training as an apprentice warder, he battles the demons beside the warriors of the remote city of Krasia. However, when Krasian treachery leaves him to die in the desert, he reforges himself into the Warded Man.

Leesha's only desire was to marry handsome Jared and raise a family, but after she's wronged by love, she learns secret lore, deadly to the demons.

Roger was a normal innkeeper's son until the demons slew his parents and mutilated his hand; now he's a wandering jongleur whose musical talent exerts a strange power over the demons. When he and Leesha join with the Warded Man, their combined abilities may finally turn the tide in the war against the demons.

Peter V. Brett's impressive debut novel, *The Warded Man*, presents a scarily well-realized world (possibly ours, in a "magic returns" future) of constant war with diabolical forces. His magic system is imaginative and carefully thought out. His prose is smooth and his pace swift, drawing readers eagerly through the novel. His characters are sympathetic and interesting, if drawn in rather broad strokes: the non-lead characters tend to be cowards and the women tend to be victims or manipulators (Leesha weeps at nearly any stress).

If you don't mind somewhat two-dimensional characterizations, and you're looking for a dark, high stakes fantasy novel with plenty of bloody action, *The Warded Man* will fill the bill.

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PCs without Backgrounds

By Amber E. Scott

Your GM announces a new campaign, and everyone grabs for their 6-siders and a blank character sheet. “I’m a paladin hunting an evil lich!” someone calls. “I’m a ranger who hates gnolls because a gnoll killed my parents,” your best friend says.

You stare at the blank sheet. Nothing happens.

This is a *good* thing.

A richly detailed character with a fully developed backstory can be a great tool when starting a new campaign. At times, though, that same backstory hinders as much as it helps. No sooner have you put the finishing touches on your orc-hating halfling when another player arrives at the game with a half-orc barbarian ready to go. Scrap your halfling and start over? Reluctantly decide he doesn’t hate orcs *that* much? Stab the half-orc in his sleep and claim you were only doing what your character would have done?

An organized group can hammer out their backstories and roles before the game starts, but that can take the mystery and fun out of learning who your companions are and render the character creation process somewhat sterile. On the other hand, starting new characters with only skeletal backgrounds and fleshing them out as play progresses can be great fun and beneficial to the overall story.

Benefits of Undeveloped Characters

Flexibility. As the game develops, so does your character. When you design a detailed background and share it with the GM, you may have trouble changing your story later. In session one, the GM already dropped hints about how close you are to tracking down your murdered sister’s killers; when you decide in session three that a murdered twin brother would have worked much better, it’s too late to change it. If you instead drop hints that you lost a loved one in the past and later come to the GM with the perfect hook to work into the adventures you’ve been having so far, you can enrich the story for everyone.

Individuality. Nothing’s worse than arriving with your gnoll-hating ranger only to find you’re sharing a table with an orc-hating halfling and a drow-hating elf. By leaving your origins mysterious, you avoid the risk of having characters with too similar backgrounds and motivations.

Value. A campaign’s first session is a vital one, and a stressful one for the GM. Everyone wants to describe their character and assert his or her role in the party. The GM sifts through four or more backstories, hunting for hooks to get a group of hardened adventurers to work together. A player whose backstory is still developing can rationalize any

adventure hook, and it’s easier for them to pass up the limelight until the rest of the characters are settled. Too many undeveloped characters make a GM’s job difficult, but one can be a great help at the start of a campaign.

Integration. Even the best GMs game can deviate from the initial plan. Perhaps your GM envisioned a darkly horrific game, but no one quite settled into it. Now, the game has developed a political high-fantasy style, and the party is eager to negotiate trade relations with the kingdom’s neighbors. That ghoulish tomb defender you spent pages describing at the start of the campaign might feel out of place. A nebulous background allows you to adapt to the campaign’s style and detail a character who fits in with the world.

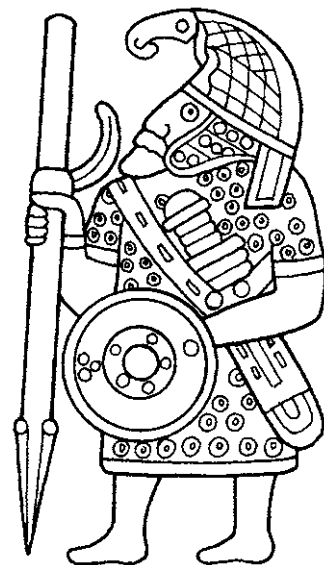
These benefits, of course, only apply if your character does eventually develop a background. Fortunately, it’s easy to create a believable backstory as the game progresses.

4 Tips to a Backstory in Progress

Pay Attention. It sounds simple. Pay attention to the world the GM and your fellow players create. Assume anything the GM mentions is important—if not for the game, then for your character. The uniquely named inn where your party stays the night might be the very same inn where your character killed for the first time when orc raiders attacked. Suppose the GM describes an unusual dagger among the treasure that your party finds. Your character grows excited, then crestfallen, and explains the dagger strongly resembles the one he found buried in his sister’s dead body. But, alas, it’s not the same. Allow the events and items in the game to inspire you.

Reflect. Sometimes you can jump in with an interesting fact about your backstory, but take a moment to reflect on anything major. When an incident inspires you, explain that the backstory that’s been “weighing on my mind ever since we fought that sorceress in the graveyard.” Remember, the point of a backstory-in-progress is to create a flexible and fun background, not to be tied into whatever brainstorm struck you in the heat of the moment.

Ask Permission. Any developments that closely resemble another character’s background key character elements should be discussed out of game. Sure, it might spoil the surprise when you ask if you can be the ranger’s childhood



friend he thought had died in the goblin attack, but causing a rift at the game table would be worse. Ask nicely first, and accept “no” as an answer. In the same vein, ask the GM before announcing any major character developments—he might have plans for the vampire prince that don’t include an escaped consort.

Go Slowly. A major announcement every session is too much. Imagine a TV series where the main character revealed a piece of the major plotline every episode. It’s overwhelming. Try a minor revelation—or none at all—for several sessions in a row before revealing something important.

While a PC without a background can offer great benefit and opportunity, do watch for pitfalls.

Pitfalls of Background-Free Characters

Apathy. When you don’t feel connected to the game world, it’s easy to feel removed from what the party does next. For the first few sessions, you can be a boon to the GM with your willingness to go along with any plan and follow any plot hook, but over time, your lack of motivation makes it hard to contribute to the group. An important part of developing a background is to develop the background, otherwise you run the risk of being the boring cleric who rarely speaks up.

Too Much, Too Fast. You maintain your character’s mystery for a few sessions, and then, unveil a fully developed backstory all at once. You haven’t created a developing backstory at all; you’ve only delayed announcing your backstory for a little while.


Poor Timing. When the perfect idea for the next stage in your character’s development strikes, it’s natural to want to share it immediately. It’s also natural to believe everyone will care as deeply as you do. Take a breath and remember this is a cooperative game; is this the right time for the big reveal? Clues that it’s not include the culmination of a major plot arc, a complicated moment in gameplay, or a major revelation from another player. When

you’ve just slain the dragon queen and the paladin is weeping brokenly that the dragon queen was actually his mother, it’s not the time to jump in with insights into your own parentage.

Character creation is an exciting process, often imbued with some superstition: you might roll special dice, always pick race before class or use ability scores to influence your choices. Next time, consider trying something completely different. Create the character over time instead of all at once and see what develops. You might wind up making unexpected or unusual choices, but it certainly won’t be boring.



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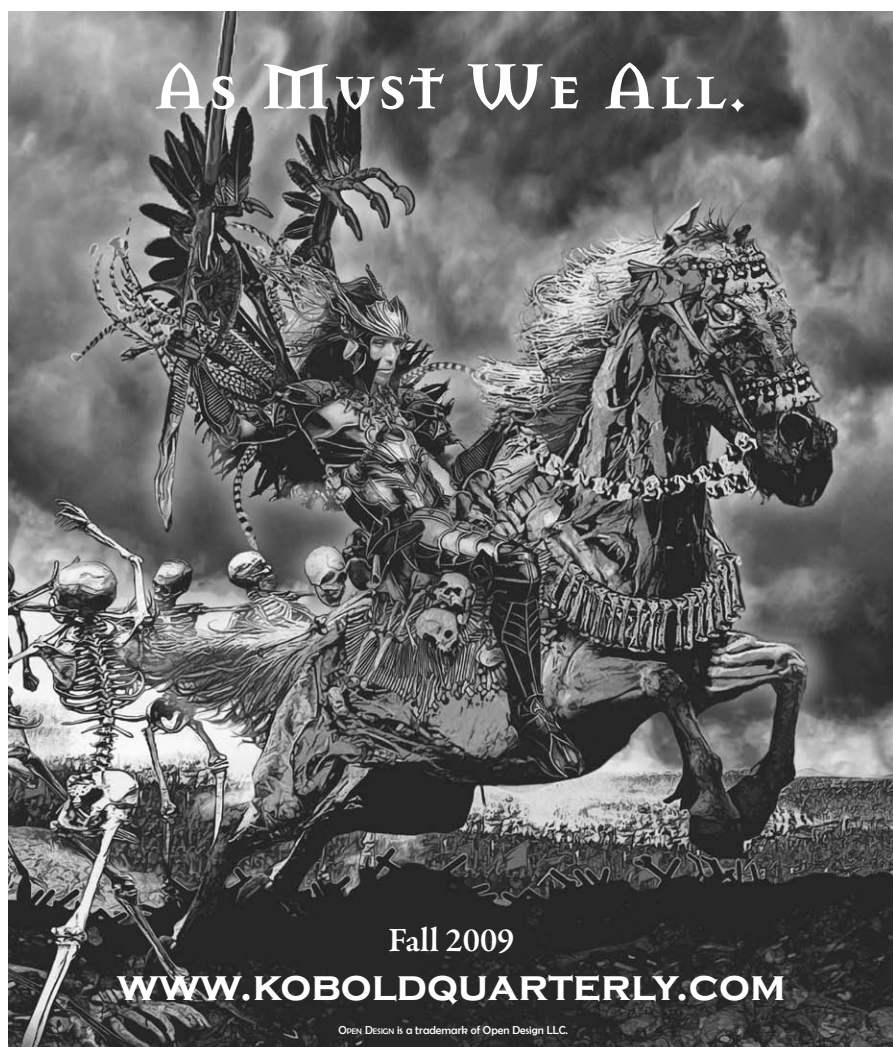
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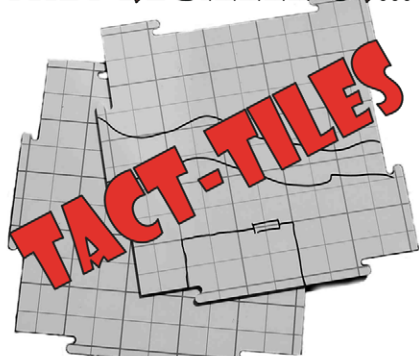


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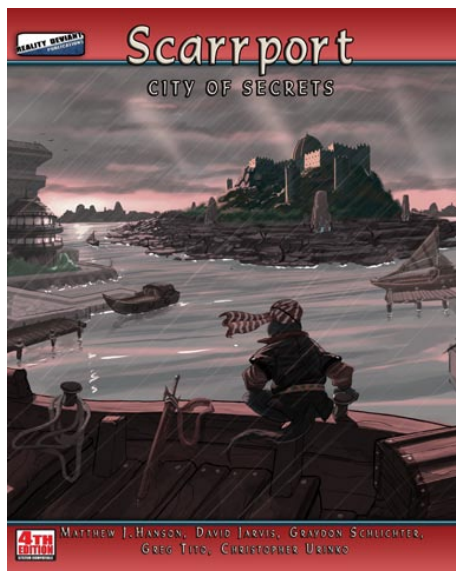
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Podcast Feature

Ticking Hounds and Clockwork Hunters

By Ben McFarland

Art by Christian Hammer

They were once the province of the corrupt aristocracy, running down escaped slaves and tracking prey in hunting expeditions. Those days are gone, but the clockwork hounds still tick and hunt. The Praetors of Zobeck seized them during the revolt that established the Free City, and now, they operate only on the command of the secret police, hunting down persons of interest wanted for more aggressive questioning.

Hounds sometimes operate alone, but usually, they are sent into the streets seeking their quarry as a party of three hounds and two huntsmen. Because they are unsleeping and tireless, few can hide from them for long without magical assistance.

Clockwork huntsmen and hounds are painted matte black with mithril trim, occasionally outfitted with armor or barding for added intimidation. Common folk detest them; all but their keepers and commanders shun them. They represent a link back to Zobeck's darker past and remind all of how it came to its present state.

Clockwork Huntsman

CR 3

N Medium construct

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +5, Spot +5

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14

(+2 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 42 (4d10+20)

Fort +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 40 ft.

Melee +7 longsword (1d8+3) or
+1 slam (1d6+1)

Ranged Net +5 ranged touch (see text)

Special Attacks net cannon

TACTICS

Before Combat Operating on specific instructions, clockwork huntsmen patrol, stand sentry, or remain unmoving as ordered.

During Combat Clockwork huntsmen are unrelenting and single-minded in their missions, focusing on particular targets—priests, spellcasters, or heavily armored intruders, as their controller last directed.

Morale Driven by clockwork and oblivious to injury, clockwork huntsmen attack until destroyed or ordered to stand down.

STATISTICS

Abilities Str 16, Dex 14, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +6

Skills Listen +5, Search +5, Spot +5

Languages none (understands Common)

SQ construct traits, diligent sentinel

Combat Gear masterwork longsword

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Diligent Sentinel (Ex) Clockwork huntsmen are designed to seek prey. They have a +5 competence bonus to Listen, Search, and Spot checks.

Net Cannon (Ex) A mechanism within the clockwork huntsman's chest can fire a net at any target it is aware of once per round as a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity; this is a ranged touch attack. This has a range increment of 10 ft. with a maximum range of 30 ft. and a 30 ft. trailing cable (hardness 3, 10 hp) anchored within the huntsman's chest. It acts in all other ways as a net.

Up to four nets may be fired from the huntsman. It is a full round action to retract and rearm a net that has missed.

This mechanism explodes when a clockwork huntsman is destroyed, venting superheated steam and shrapnel on each creature within 5 ft. of the construct (3d6 damage, Reflex DC 15 for half). A disabled clockwork huntsman weighs 350 lb.

Clockwork Hound

CR 3

N Medium construct

Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +5, Spot +5

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14

(+2 Dex, +4 natural)

hp 42 (4d10+20)

Fort +1, **Ref** +3, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Spd 50 ft.

Melee +6 jaws (1d6+3) or

+1 slam (1d4+1)

Special Attacks whip tongue

TACTICS

Before Combat Operating on specific instructions, clockwork hounds patrol, stand sentry, or remain unmoving as ordered.

During Combat Clockwork hounds are unrelenting and single-minded in their missions, focusing on particular targets—priests, spellcasters, or heavily armored intruders, as their controller last directed.

Morale Driven by clockwork and oblivious to injury, clockwork hounds attack until destroyed or ordered to stand down.

STATISTICS

Abilities Str 16, Dex 14, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +6

Feats Track^B

Skills Listen +5, Search +5, Spot +5, Survival +5

Languages none (understands Common)

SQ construct traits, diligent sentinel, unrelenting tracker

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Diligent Sentinel (Ex) Clockwork hounds are designed to keep guard. They have a +5 competence bonus to Search,

Spot, and Listen checks.

Unrelenting Tracker (Ex) Clockwork hounds are designed to seek prey. They gain scent and the Track feat and a +5 competence bonus to Survival checks.

Whip Tongue (Ex) A mechanism within the clockwork hound's mouth can make either a nonlethal attack (1d3+3 nonlethal damage), a trip attempt, or a disarm attack against any target it is aware of once per round as a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity; this is a ranged touch attack. The tongue has a reach of 15 ft. and is considered a two-handed weapon for the trip or disarm attempt; the creature gains a +10 bonus to either attempt.

This mechanism explodes when a clockwork hound is destroyed, lashing the cable about each creature within 5 ft. of the construct (2d6 damage, Reflex DC 15 for half). A disabled clockwork hound weighs 250 lb.

Clockwork huntsmen and hounds are reinforced constructs demanding

heavy chassis and components costing 3,100 gp and a DC 17 Craft (clockwork) check. The net cannon and the whip tongue consist of 300 gp of parts and alchemical fluids. Both need separate assembly, requiring a DC 25 Craft (alchemy) check and a DC 15 Craft (clockwork) check. Finally, a four-day ritual activates the clockwork, requiring 400 gp in special oils.

Construction: CL 5th; Craft Construct, 5 ranks Craft (alchemy), animate construct II (see Zobeck Gazetteer), mending; Price 3,800 gp; Cost 1,900 gp + 156 XP

Story Seed

One of Zobeck's last aristocratic scions saw the coming upheaval a few days in advance and fled the vengeful mobs of common folk early. Before he left, he sought to conceal the bulk of his

family's fortune somewhere within the city. Stories say he hid the map to this urban treasure within the chassis of one of his clan's most trusted servants: the leader of their clockwork hunters.

Afterward, his less loyal retainers captured the young man and tortured him to extract this story from him. Unfortunately, the Praetors had already seized the House's clockworks, and the exact model with its secret map compartment was lost among the repainted and redeployed servants of the secret police. The tale, however, was passed from one generation of conspirators to the next—if the Praetor Clockwork barracks could be infiltrated, the fabled Clockwork found, and the map ever rediscovered, it might lead to a wealth that could create a new merchant lord, or possibly destroy one.



On the Care and Keeping of Gelatinous Cubes

By Jonathan McAnulty

Art by Ben Hodson

Some men raise dogs. Others train falcons. Some cultivate orchids or stunted trees. It is a select few, however, who nurture and shape gelatinous cubes—and they call themselves “cubists.”

Whether brave or mad, the small, tightknit circle of enthusiasts who breed gelatinous cubes are certainly dedicated. Regardless of alignment or vocation, cubists share a genuine fondness for these odd oozes. They regularly correspond with one another, sharing tips and concerns and advancing their hobby. Anyone looking to join their ranks will quickly find staunch supporters who are happy to see others take up the care and keeping of these transparent geometrical monstrosities.

The Basics of Gelatinous Care

Gelatinous cubes are not hard to raise: they require only living space and food. Cubes are constantly in motion and thrive best in stone corridors that are approximately 10 ft. wide and at least 30 ft. in length (3,000 cubic ft.). The massive bulk of a gelatinous cube requires constant nourishment—a minimum of 50 lb. of organic matter a day to maintain proper health and constant size.

A healthy cube is firm to the touch, giving slightly with small amounts of pressure, and has a glossy sheen at its surface. They grow noticeably with overfeeding, rapidly entering their reproductive cycle. Undernourished or confined cubes rapidly dry out and die, losing mass and vitality while their surface dries and cracks. Cubes that are too constrained or malnourished will eventually die.

PCs wishing to raise a gelatinous cube need place for their cube to live. The minimum upkeep for a cube is 1 cp/HD (or level)/day, which provides sufficient nourishment to maintain the pet’s current size. Undernourished or confined cubes lose 1 hp each day until the cube dies.

A cube needs much more than this minimum to grow. Cubes can be deliberately overfed at the cost of 1 sp/HD (or



level)/day; a week of overfeeding will advance the gelatinous cube by 1 HD (or level). A cube with more than 4 HD (or greater than level 5) has a cumulative 5% chance per extra HD (or level) to experience mitosis within 1d6 days (i.e. a 5 HD cube has a 5% chance and a 7 HD cube has a 15% chance). Mitosis splits a single cube into two smaller cubes (divide the total HD or level in half and give one cube any extra). Make this mitosis check on a weekly basis for cubes. With insufficient space and food, new cubes risk recombining in a form of reverse mitosis.

Advanced Cube Care

All cubists start with the basics and find enjoyment in the simple raising of gelatinous cubes, but passing that stage, any true connoisseur soon discovers that the real joy of breeding cubes is in the art of shaping.

Cubists know many different ways to shape a gelatinous cube. The easiest is to slowly force a cube to mold itself into a rectangular shape by manipulating its living space. Careful use of moveable walls, floors, and ceilings can safely reduce an ooze in either width or height by 1 ft. a week. For every foot in width or height a cube is reduced, it gains an equal amount of cubic space in length. (Changing a cube in this way does not affect the creature’s speed, size, or required nourishment and living space.)

Among certain members of the cubist community, it is quite fashionable to make long, snakelike “cubes.” These cuboids can be quite a surprise when encountered in small crawl spaces.

However, the art of shaping is not limited to the creation

of gelatinous cuboids. Glowing cubes, opaque cubes, giant cubes, dwarf cubes, and even round cubes have all been raised by cubists. Though seasoned adventurers are no doubt acquainted with the gelatinous cube, even the most experienced might be surprised when they encounter one of these variants in a dungeon belonging to a devoted cubist.

Opaque Cubes

Some cubists have discovered they can create colorful oozes by feeding metal-based dyes to their cubes. Such enthusiasts find beauty in these creations and have been known to build vast stone mazes with glass ceilings. Just as lesser men watch bright fish, these hobbyists spend their leisure time watching brightly colored cubes wind slowly through their homes. Evil cubists often enjoy throwing living creatures into their mazes to watch the ensuing feeding.

Fashioning an opaque gelatinous cube is as simple as purchasing the right dyes. Vast amounts of these dyes are required, however, and over time, they must be reapplied. In game terms, it costs 10 gp/HD (or level)/month to maintain a cube's coloration. Opaque cubes may be any color. They lose their transparent nature.

Glowing Cubes

Many cubists enjoy the effect created by the strategic placement of magical lights within their pets. When done correctly, the light appears to float through the air like a willow-the-wisp or fairy light.

In addition to the cost of the magical light—glass globes containing a *continual flame* are the current rage among the trendiest cubists—great care has to be taken in the placement of each light. In game terms, the cubist must make a Knowledge (dungeoneering) check (DC 15) or a Nature check (DC 20) to set a light inside a cube: failure means the light is placed askew, spoiling the effect, and failure by more than 5 points means the gelatinous cube attacks the cubist.

Cubes of Unusual Sizes

Raising huge cubes is not hard, requiring only that the cubes be overfed. Some enthusiasts like to see how long they can maintain their cubes in an oversized state before mitosis eventually occurs. They carefully regulate the diet of their wards, alternately overfeeding and underfeeding the oozes. With constant monitoring, they can keep a cube in an oversized condition indefinitely.

Keeping an oversized cube from undergoing mitosis requires a weekly Knowledge (dungeoneering) check with a DC of 10 + the HD of the

Fun Facts about Gelatinous Cubes

Gelatinous cubes are asexual. They reproduce through mitosis, dividing one creature into two. Additionally, small portions of a cube can be removed and, if tended with care, can be grown into a full cube: this requires a weekly Knowledge (dungeoneering) check (DC 15) or Nature check (DC 20). In the wild, gelatinous cubes will normally grow until they are about 15 ft. across before dividing.

Under the right conditions, two separate cubes will meld into a larger cube. Such unions seldom last long before mitosis occurs.

Gelatinous cubes can strip an entire cow to bare bones in under a minute.

Gelatinous cubes are not rigid cubes. Their forms are malleable and flow around corners. While they are normally encountered in nature as cubes, other shapes have been reported.

Gelatinous cubes can survive in fresh water. When submerged, their paralytic poison is not as effective (victims receive +4 to saving throws), but they are harder to notice, requiring a Spot check (DC 20) or Perception check (DC 30). Gelatinous cubes are too heavy to swim, but they feed and move on the bottom of some lakes. In these environments, they often achieve more massive sizes.

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gelatinous cube or a Nature check with a DC of 15 + the level of the gelatinous cube. Even if this check fails, the weekly chance for mitosis to occur is unchanged. Huge cubes require living spaces of at least 9,000 cubic ft.

Dwarf Cubes

Just as some grow bonsai trees, certain cubists enjoy keeping miniatures of their monsters. Through weekly ministrations involving alchemical salves and careful cuts, a gelatinous cube can be kept as small as 3 ft. across in width and height. Dwarf cube enthusiasts often start their projects from cuttings (the removal of gelatinous material from fully grown oozes). More intelligent enthusiasts also know to trap their cubes in boxes or special rooms before beginning their weekly shaping.

Keeping a smaller cube alive without allowing it to grow in size requires 5 gp a week for the proper chemicals and a Heal check (DC 15) to keep the ooze from dying. Dwarf cubes have between 1 and 3 HD (or levels). The 1 HD cubes are 3 ft. across with a Strength of 6, a -2 attack bonus, and a CR of ½. The 2 HD cubes are 6 ft. across with a strength of 8, a +0 attack bonus and a CR of 1. The 3 HD cubes are 9 ft. across with a +1 attack bonus and a CR of 2. Medium cubes can only engulf Medium or smaller opponents. All other gelatinous cube abilities, including damage, remain the same.

Dwarf cubes range from level 2 to 4. Level 2 cubes are 3 ft. across with a -3 to attacks and defenses, -1 to damage, and 60 less hp. Level 3 cubes are 6 ft. across with a -2 to attacks and defenses, -1 to damage, and 40 less hp. Level 4 cubes are 9 ft. across with a -1 to attacks and defenses and 20 less hp. Medium cubes can only engulf a single Medium or smaller opponent at a time

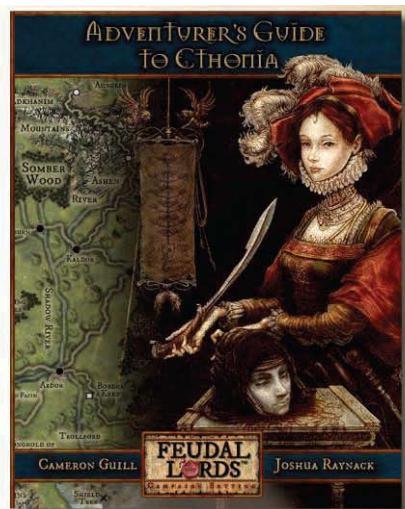
Round Cubes

Only a select few ever reach the pinnacle of cube shaping—a round cube. For one thing, shaping a round cube requires a special container of massive proportions into which a cube must be lured. This metallic sphere, attached to an axle-like arrangement is akin to a giant hamster wheel and allows the trapped ooze the continual movement it requires to flourish. Food for the gelatinous monster is fed into the container through a special hatch. When the cube is properly molded within its spherical home, the container opens to release the rounded creature. Round cubes never retain their new shape for more than a week and those that raise them typically have two or three of the special containers in constant use.

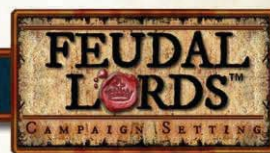
The metal sphere in which the cube is shaped costs 5,000 gp. Luring a gelatinous cube into the sphere requires a DC 20 Handle Animal skill check. It takes 1 month of constant care and feeding for the cube to accept its new shape, and once released, the cube

reverts to its more natural shape within 1d6 days. Cubes cannot gain in size while in the sphere.

Gelatinous spheres have a speed of 60 ft. and are always assumed to be charging. They move in straight lines each round and cannot roll over obstacles higher than half their height.



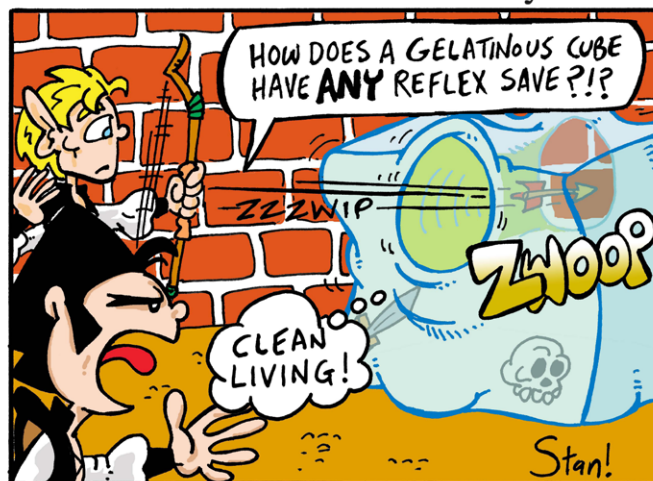
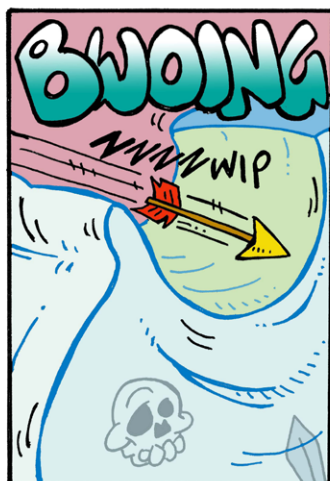
Time has come to lay claim to the throne of Cthonia!



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The Halberd

Chopping Your Way to Gold and Glory

By Brian E. Shefvland

You've just rolled up your character and fleshed it out with abilities, skills, and personality. Your PC's parents hand him a bag of gold and tell him to buy something special for that dragon-slaying adventure he's about to start. He trundles off to town, and while shuffling dazedly through the market, he meets the blacksmith.

This is where you find the weapons and armor needed to hand out grim justice to horrible beasts. You cast your eyes up and down the racks, and an oddly shaped weapon demands your attention. Sitting on the end of a long pole is one of the strangest blades you've ever seen: an axe blade on one end, a spike coming off the top and a curved spike at the back. The blacksmith notices your hesitation and says to you "that's a halberd, young adventurer, and one of the footman's most important weapons..."

A Confused Polearm

Although seemingly gaudy and confused, the halberd is one of the most functional composite weapons of the medieval world. Designed in the early 12th century in central Europe, the halberd was specifically designed to give the foot soldier a cheaply made weapon to take on the medieval battlefield's deadliest foe: the armored cavalry knight. The armored knight was indeed something to be feared. He had height, protection, and mobility. In a charge, the knight's momentum could give even the smallest mace, sword, or axe the ability to cause terrible damage to anyone in his path.

Unfortunately, that was the footman's job: to get in the way of the knight and try to stop him from reaching whatever it was the footman was protecting. However, before the advent of the halberd and its predecessors, most footmen could do little against the knight but stand and die.

The halberd derives – as most polearms do – from the common spear and pike. These latter weapons could indeed reach a mounted knight but depended mostly on the knight's momentum to deal damage and were nearly useless after the knight rode past. Then someone terribly clever attached an axe blade to a spear or a pikestaff. The name 'halberd' is German, derived from the two words 'halm' meaning 'staff', and 'barte' meaning 'axe'. This 'staff-axe' could now be used exactly as its name implied; as a wood axe with a really long handle.

Now the footman could swing with a greater momentum and cut through a knight's heavy armor. More importantly, after the knight's initial charge the halberd could hold its own against the knight's mace, sword, or axe.

The Weapon's Hidden Strength

What makes the halberd unique compared to its polearm cousins is the odd curved blade, or fluke, opposite the axe blade. This allowed the halberdier an advantage over the knight, for this fluke could hook the knight and pull him from his horse. Once dismounted, the advantages of mobility and reach belong to the halberdier. The fluke is narrow and sharp, capable of punching through armor or cutting reins. Combined with the weapon's length and momentum, even a group of brave peasants could hope to fend off a cavalry charge.

To the aspiring dragon slayer, the weapon is no less effective.

Dismounting a dragon rider in aerial combat is a sound strategy.

The weapon's reach helps when fighting in the second ranks of closely grouped adventurers or when attacking a particularly large creature, like a fire giant or dragon.

The spiked point can be set against a charge or used to attack while underwater.

The axe blade and fluke can cut or chop items from a safe distance, such as the supporting lines of a rope bridge while the rest of the party makes a hasty escape.

It can test for uneven footing, set off traps, or support the wounded as a makeshift crutch.

However, the halberd is not useful everywhere. While it is at its best in the open, this weapon is far less effective while pursuing giant ants through their tunnels, for instance. In addition, as a two-handed weapon, it denies the user the use of a free hand, which might otherwise have been holding a lantern, shield, holy symbol, or other useful item. Indeed, no self-respecting rogue or mage would wield such a weapon; they need their hands free for other tasks better suited to their professions.

While the head of the halberd was typically made of iron or steel, the pole was always wooden. If used improperly, the pole could easily break, leaving an adventurer with a useless weapon. Historically, mounted knights would specifically hack at the halberdiers' poles with such regularity that special metal bracings, called *langets*, were added to later halberd designs.

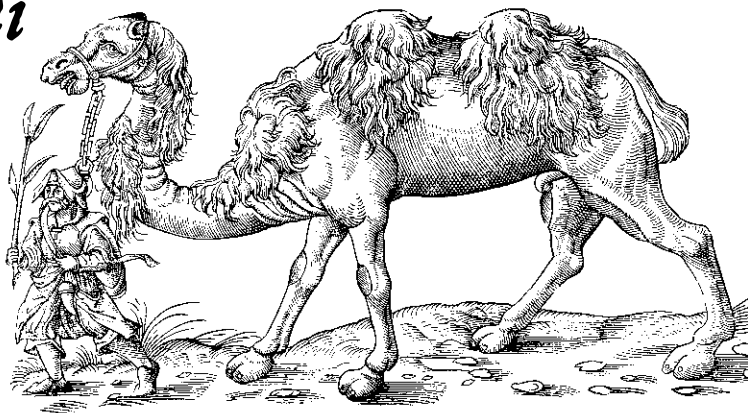
Of course, however, adventurers should use a variety of weapons to suit their needs. Even the best halberdiers keep a sword and dagger strapped to their belts for emergencies. In short, a halberd can be an extremely useful tool for a wide variety of tasks and challenges. It complements any arsenal.



Ruyintan Caravanserai

(or The Sand Dragon Inn)

by David Schwartz
Map by Jonathan Roberts



They say there are two things you can't avoid in Katapesh: heat and intrigue. Travelers wishing to escape the heat can find solace at the Ruyintan Caravanserai. Those who seek to avoid intrigue had best look elsewhere.

Overlooking one of the city's many markets, the Ruyintan Caravanserai caters to the varied tastes of travelers from around the world and beyond. Its name means "Invulnerable"—literally, "Body of Brass"—and thanks to magic known only to the owners, the inn's rooms are always just the right temperature for every patron (except on the rare days when the air inside becomes torrid, and scratching and growls echo from below).

The Ruyintan Caravanserai can serve several purposes in a campaign: a place for the PCs to rest between adventures, a launching point for further adventure, and even the setting for an adventure as the PCs discover the caravanserai's secrets. Although this article places the Ruyintan Caravanserai in the city of Katapesh, the GM can easily place it in any tropical (or even arctic) locale.

Background

Originally built on the outskirts of Katapesh, over the years, the city has gradually enveloped the Ruyintan Caravanserai.

A janni rogue named Saheen runs the caravanserai. Unlike his aloof brethren, Saheen prefers to dwell among mortals. Though the genie makes every effort to meet his guests' needs, he will not stand for insolent behavior from staff

or customers. Saheen shows special attention to those who bring new stories or gossip to his ear. Some whisper that the genie trades in others' secrets to pay off a secret debt of his own.

A formian taskmaster—whom the genie calls Nistar—assists Saheen. Though he poses as a mere secretary, the creature represents the interests of his colony, which lies beneath the building; they are the true owners of the caravanserai. The formians are also interested in news of the outside world, but for very different reasons: they are gathering intelligence for their eventual return to Axis.

Cut off for so long from Axis and the stabilizing influence of queen and colony, these formians have started to lose their way. Initially only an exploration party, their current actions hint at the telltale paranoia and delusion of prolonged formian solitude, and they have developed an uncharacteristically aggressive stance toward Katapesh. Their current agenda is to return to Axis by transplanting their entire small hive to their native plane—along with as much of the city of Katapesh as possible. While they have collected an immense amount of data on Katapesh, they are still at a loss on how to transport the hive. Nistar is currently coordinating efforts to secretly gather any information from guests that might prove useful—such as knowledge of powerful magic or potentially unwitting allies.

The caravanserai employs dozens of workers: porters, grooms, guards, servers, and entertainers. Most of the staff are locals of Osiriani or Kelish blood.

Among them, a handful of lower-caste formians work as guards and menials. Visitors to the Ruyintan vary widely. The endure elements effect that suffuses the inn makes it comfortable for every guest, from Ulfen mercenaries of the far north to efreets from the Plane of Fire.

Outside the Caravanserai

A white-stone wall surrounds the dusty oval that is the caravanserai's yard. The caravanserai building—constructed of the same white stone—has two sections: an annex of stables and enclosed courtyards attached to a towering, rectangular building pierced at three levels with thin windows. The main entrance is through a sally port into a courtyard. At the opposite end, a recessed portico enters directly into the inn.

If the PCs arrive during the day, they might see the stabled animals exercising or a caravan loading or unloading in the yard.

Ground Floor

The caravanserai's walls are of superior masonry with good wooden doors. Columns support arched ceilings that reach a height of 15 ft. to accommodate some of the caravanserai's more unusual customers. Along the walls, brass sconces bearing everburning torches provide illumination.

ic. Main Entrance

A well-worn path leads up to the open gates of the caravanserai's sally port. Two further pairs of wooden gates stand open along the vaulted passage, allowing access to the courtyard beyond.

A pair of guards armed with scimitars flanks the entrance, although they function more as greeters than security. Half a dozen porters also wait along the walls, ready to assist when a caravan arrives. The outer gates close at night, but guards remain on duty in case of late arrivals.

2c. Stables

Along two outer walls, eight recesses with sturdy lattice doors serve as pens for horses, camels, and other pack animals.

Each pen can accommodate up to two Large animals, and the doors are lockable. Grooms employed by the caravanserai feed and water the animals and clean the stalls.

3c. Courtyard

Though surrounded by buildings on all sides, this oblong courtyard is open to the sky, except for an arcade that runs around its perimeter. The floor is a geometric mosaic made from countless colorful tiles.

Saheen or one of his lieutenants greets arriving caravans here. If necessary, large items are stored here for recently arrived or soon-to-leave caravans. At other times, the inn's attendants bring tables out from the common room and entertain the guests beneath the stars.

4c. Sahn

A star-shaped pool sits at the center of this square courtyard. On each wall, shaded by an arcade, is a fountain for drinking and washing.

Often the first stop for new arrivals, here weary travelers can quench their thirst and wash off the dust of the road. An underground aquifer feeds the hawz (or pool) and fountains and is maintained from below by the formians.

5c. Common Room

The common room is swathed with brightly colored fabrics: hanging from walls and ceilings, and draped across low tables surrounded by embroidered pillows that serve as seating. Curtains conceal side rooms in three corners. In

the remaining corner, a stairway spirals upward.

Servers dance nimbly around the tables as they attend to the needs of the customers, while bouncers (one of whom might be a formian) keep an eye on things from the walls. The inn also hosts musicians most evenings.

Most times of the day and night, the common room bustles with activity. Many patrons are with the caravans, from lowly porters to rich merchants, representing the varied nations and races of the Inner Sea region. Others are locals—natives seeking deals with foreign traders or immigrants escaping the dry heat. Beings from the Great Beyond also find the caravanserai hospitable. One should not be surprised to see a genie boasting of his fine gems for trade, or an angel asking discretely about a local church.

The inn serves simple meals: spicy rice and spit meat, flat bread and fresh or dried fruit. Their stock of drinks, however, is far-ranging. Local specialties include thin yoghurt, thick coffee, and fresh fruit juice. They also serve drinks from around Golarion: beer from Osirian, mead from the Lands of the Linnorm Kings, wines from Chelifax and Taldor, even tea from Tian Xia. Saheen claims his cellar has a drink to suit every tongue. The common room also has a number of hookahs for use by patrons.

Two additional stories (not on the map, but above areas 5, 6, and 7) contain rooms for rent.

6c. Side Room

A curtained doorway separates this area from the common room. A single low table sits in the middle between a pair of divans on facing walls.

Closing the curtains provides guests with a modicum of privacy.

7c. Portico

A section of exterior wall on the ground floor is absent. Instead, four columns support the higher stories. At the rear of the exposed room, a single door, flanked by thin windows, allows access into the building.

The “backdoor” provides easy access to the common rooms for locals and guests.

8c. Kitchen

Set off from the common room by a curtain door, a slight haze fills this room—a mix of smoke and steam emitted from spits and griddles, boilers and steamers arrayed along the walls on either side. By the far wall, beneath a geometric mosaic, a staircase leads downward.

At most times, there are inn staff here, tending the fires, preparing food and drinks or passing to and from the shabestan. Despite the haze, the kitchen, as elsewhere, is almost never uncomfortable.

Shabestan

The basement level (or shabestan) is constructed in the same manner as the levels above (including everburning torches). A secret door concealed behind a tapestry (Search DC 25) allows access to the formian colony.

1s. Storage

The basement is a maze of stacked crates and laden shelves, which often reach nearly to the ceiling. There are two doors; one is opposite the staircase, though it can't be reached directly.

The main part of the shabestan stores food and drink, utensils and linens and other such things needed to run a caravanserai. Servers and kitchen staff are often down here retrieving something or taking a break from their duties.

2s. Yakhchal

Beyond a set of heavy doors, several steps descend into this room. Within are racks of bottles and large urns. In one corner, meat hangs from the ceiling. In another corner, baskets of fruits and vegetables are stacked.

This room is used to store perishables and drinks meant to be served cool. Clever architecture keeps the yakhchal perpetually cold (below 40° F). Yet as endure elements pervades the caravanserai, characters in this room suffer no ill effects.

3s. Andarouni

Saheen carries the only key to this room's door, which is both locked and trapped.

As a geode hoards its gems, the plain basement door opens to reveal an opulent suite. Painted onto four sections of the wall are calligraphic representations of each of the elements. In this richly appointed room, pillows and couches surround a low table set with delicate metal dishes. Along the wall from the door, a curtain obscures a bedchamber.

These rooms are Saheen's private sanctum. The janni conducts the majority of his business and socializing in the rooms above; Saheen invites only trusted confidants and companions into the andarouni.

Formian Colony

The formian's base of operations resembles an oversized ant colony, with round chambers connected by tunnels through the packed earth and stone. Formian workers maintain each tunnel to an exacting 5 1/2 ft. in diameter—just round enough for a Large formian to negotiate (though it still must squeeze to bring its attacks to bear). Although the chambers widen out, the ceilings remain low throughout, except where noted.

Caphorite (from Paizo's *Into the Darklands*, pg. 14) provides the formians with shadowy illumination. Assigned workers carry these crystals, though frequently used rooms (such as those described here) will have caphorite nodules embedded in the walls

and ceiling. The majority of tunnels, however, are unlit.

1f. The Hub

The tunnel's walls change from mixed stone and earth to solid stone before ending abruptly at a sudden drop. Light from orange-purple glowing crystals illuminates the building-sized cavern ahead. This tunnel is just one of a dozen or so that pepper the upper two-thirds of the cave's walls.

This natural stone crevice acts as the hub of the formian colony. The room is roughly 60 ft. from its sandy floor to the peak of its roof. Rock dust and sand conceal another 20 ft. of depth, before meeting stone. The formians have widened existing fissures to connect their various tunnels to this chamber. Characters who cannot fly must clamber around the walls (Climb DC 15) to reach the tunnel mouths.

Aware of its strategic importance, the formians have placed a guardian within the hub. Captured while still immature, the brass dragon Marroct has been under formian enchantments for most of her life. The dragon has orders to attack any non-formians who enter the hub. The formians also make use of Marroct's supernatural and spell-like abilities; most notably the brass dragon's unique form of endure elements which is cast over the caravan-serai each day. A contingent of formian workers provides for the dragon's needs (predominantly bringing food and removing waste). Years of living underground have marked the dragon's

brazen hide with streaks of black and green reminiscent of verdigris.

In combat, Marroct uses her sleep-inducing breath as often as possible to cause flying or climbing intruders to fall. She switches to fire breathing if this proves ineffective or against grounded foes. The dragon focuses on flying opponents first, using a combination of spells and physical attacks to ground her foe. Once she has trapped her opponents at the bottom of the chamber, Marroct raises a dust storm by hovering or by using control winds before attacking them from the air.

If released from the formian's enchantment, Marroct attempts to escape, futilely clawing at the walls. In this state, she is indifferent to the PCs, but if her attitude is improved, Marroct will aid them against the formians (assuming they can free her from the stone chamber).

2f. Tunnels

The passage spirals down into the earth (or up to the surface) broken at intervals by side chambers and forking tunnels.

Around a dozen unlit tunnels lead out of the colony's hub, which fork periodically, resulting in a maze of tunnels far too extensive to map here. Some of these tunnels lead deeper into the colony. Others provide egress to places near and far. If the PCs choose a tunnel at random, you can roll or choose where the tunnel leads from the list below.

The portals and spy tunnels might be of particular use to adventurers. However, even if one knows of its existence, finding the correct tunnel in the labyrinthine colony could prove impossible without the aid of the formians or their elaborate maps (kept in the records rooms).

3f. Antechamber

This curved hallway is wider—but its ceiling no higher—than the half-dozen tunnels that split off it. Round stone doors are set at each end.

Connecting the colony's ruling chambers to each other and the main hub, the antechamber is trafficked by

Roll Use

- 1-5 **Quarters:** Although formians neither eat nor sleep, the drones are allotted time to rest and socialize. The residents here are workers and warriors, and pose little direct threat to the PCs except en masse.
- 6-10 **Storage:** This chamber contains mining tools, weapons, trade goods, or even magical items. If the contents are particularly valuable, guards of a sufficient EL are present.
- 11-15 **Ventilation:** The tunnel stretches outwards and upwards, leading to the deserts beyond the city of Katapesh. The opening is partially concealed and large enough for only a single worker to pass through. In addition to providing ventilation, what little waste the colony produces is also disposed of through these openings.
- 16-20 **Spy Tunnel:** The caravan-serai is not the only building accessed by the formian tunnels: they have dug hidden passages beneath several strategic locations within the city. Through these, the formians can enter and exit the city above unobserved.

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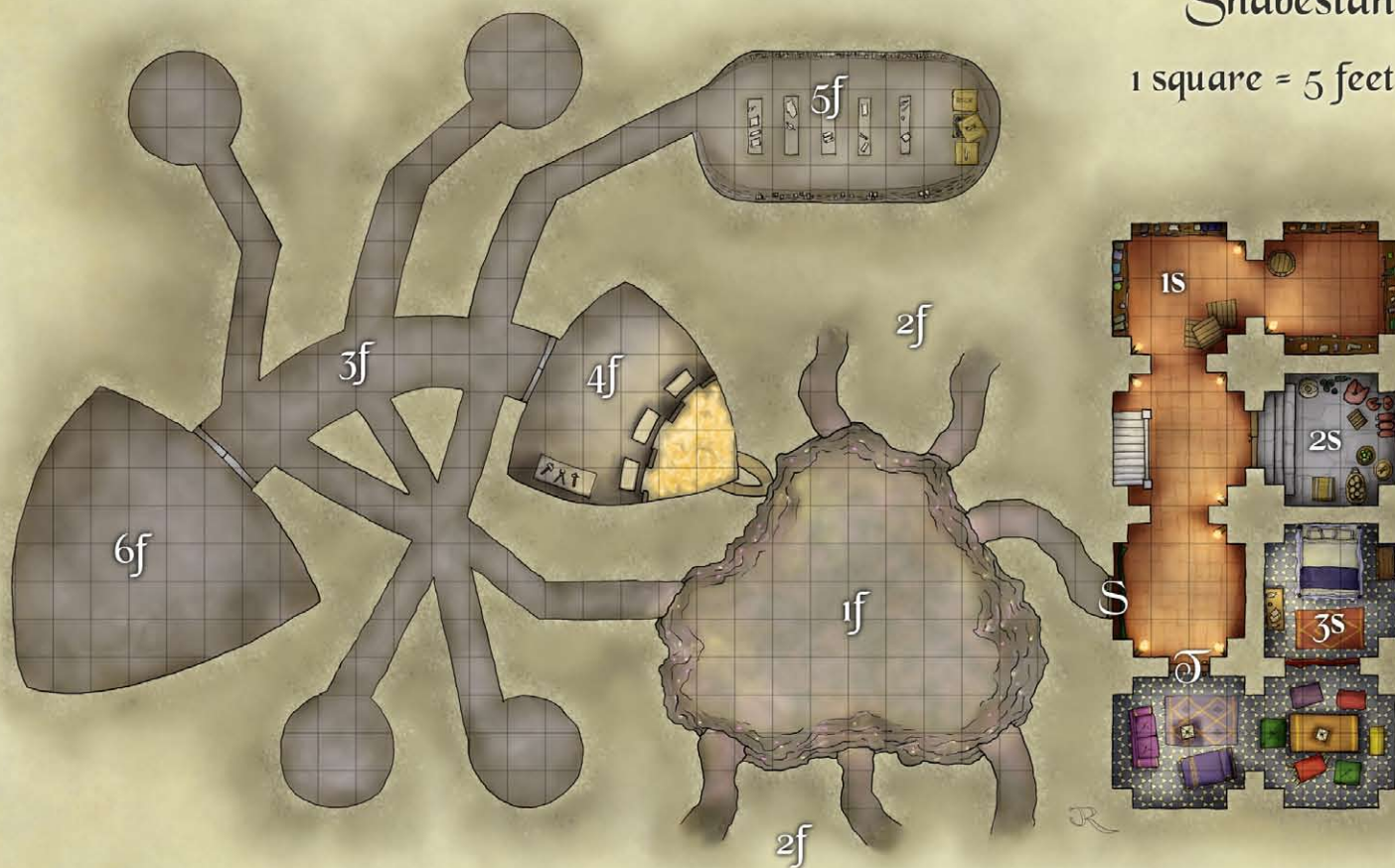
Ruyintan Caravanserai

Ground Floor



Shabestan

1 square = 5 feet



mid-ranked formians attending to their superiors. The unmarked side passages serve as waiting areas or temporary storage. These hollows might contain offerings taken from the world above or weapons from the forge.

4f. Forge

The ceiling arches in this triangular room reaching a peak 15 ft. high. A large stone forge dominates the far corner; flame from its three apertures illuminates the room's contents: a trio of stone anvils and a panoply of metal-working tools.

A group of workers toils at each station overseen by a mid-ranking formian (a warrior, taskmaster, or myrmarch depending on the challenge level you desire).

Other workers bring fuel for the forge, but the flame itself is dragonfire; narrow pipelines run from the forge to the hub, through which Marroct can kindle the furnace when ordered. Two pipes in the ceiling vent the smoke. The formians work mostly bronze and other copper alloys, producing tools from mining equipment to weapons to the elaborate helms worn by high-ranking formians.

5f. Records

Honeycomb niches crammed with brown scrolls line the walls of this chamber. More scrolls and pots of ink sit on low stone benches arrayed in the center of the room. At the rear of the chamber, baskets are loaded with wood shavings and charcoal.

One or more formian taskmasters work here scribing reports from formian agents, while workers fetch and file scrolls. Another group of workers pulps wood with saliva to produce paper, or charcoal and saliva to make ink. Pheromones secreted into the ink identify the subject matter by which the formians sort the documents.

Written in severe, angular Formian script,

the scrolls detail the results of their reconnaissance. Most of this information is mundane: what most Golarion natives consider common knowledge, these alien formians find inordinately interesting. Long scrolls detail everyday humanoid behavior. More useful, but perhaps no more exciting, are records of trade and transport between the various nations surrounding Katapesh. Still, hidden within these trivial details are stolen secrets and insider information, which could be of interest to the PCs. Taken together, the intelligence reveals patterns apparent only to the aloof formians.

6f. Throne Room

The stone doors open in the center of a wall of a rounded triangular room 40 ft. across. The ceiling is tall enough for humans to stand up, but no higher, lending the room a sense of confinement, despite its width. The only furnishings are a few low stone tables.

This spartan chamber is home to the highest caste of formian in the colony; however, there is a marked lack of a queen's influence. From here the leaders of the colony plan and delegate assignments to the lower castes. The GM should adjust the colony's rulers based on the abilities of the PCs. As a low-level encounter, an oligarchy of taskmasters leads this exploratory base. For a mid-level adventure location, one or more myrmarchs oversee the colony, assisted by taskmasters and advanced warriors.



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Elven Lust and the Green Gods

by Wolfgang Baur

Art by Hans Holbein

The Free City of Zobeck is a place of miners, clockworks, and dwarves, true, but long ago it was a city surrounded entirely by the great Margreve Forest — a forest now reduced to the river's northern shore.

But the people of Zobeck have learned that it takes more than saws to kill a forest, and the green gods are still venerated both in the city and in a hundred shrines that litter the roadside and mark the intersection of fields and woods. The elves themselves may almost never visit the land within the city walls, but the market fairs north and south of the city are often the site of itinerant elven evangelists preaching of the Two Green Gods.

Those traditions return each year at the spring equinox and midsummer's eve. The forest branches quiver with lust as the worshippers of Porevit and Yarila, the double god and goddess, walk under dappled leaves and bring the gifts of fertility, growth, and rich harvests that have kept them foremost in the minds of many since centuries before men and dwarves arrived in Zobeck. Savants say the Green Gods are ancient elven divinities who have found new worshippers among men and women. Others say that the gods of field and forest might once have favored the elven nations, but have long since abandoned any favored race and are the wellspring of fertile growth and abundance for all who do them homage.

The Midsummer Festival

"Attending the Summer Rite" has become a polite way of saying half the citizens of Zobeck spend Midsummer rutting like rabbits, while the other half pretends not to notice. Torches and

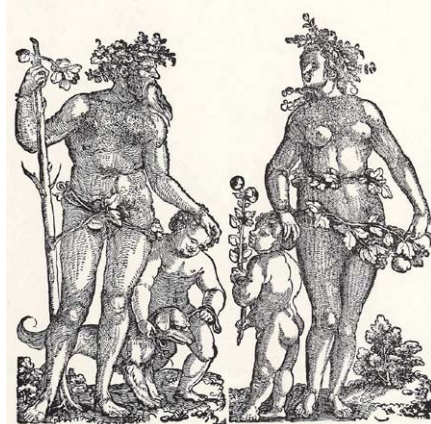
bonfires rule the fairgrounds; lanterns glimmer on every street. Young and old alike celebrate the rites together in company with their spouse, their betrothed or their beloved.

The only men and women who do poorly at Midsummer are the courtesans and lovers for sale; the rites of Porevit and Yarila forbid payment. All others seek out partners and offer them the finest flower or bouquet their purse will afford them, or sometimes a simple garland of braided flowers. Even those who live alone or celibate are often given flowers by their admirers, and the city is said to be watched over by the angels on Midsummer.

Among the young maids and bachelors of the city, the result is often a set of wedding vows in Midwinter and births in the following spring. This carries no shame; children born in the springtime to the brides and grooms of Yarila are considered fortunate and their stars auspicious. Those born precisely on the vernal equinox are always invited to join the priesthood of the two Green Gods, and enter into the druidic mysteries at the age of 10 or 11.

The Dark Side of Yarila

The worship of the Forest Goddess takes a much more serious turn in the harvest time. When the grapes are pressed in the Smolten Hills south of the city, the priestesses of Yarila lead the priests of Porevit into the Margreve Forest. As they march north, each priest of Porevit wears a crown of braided vines, thorns, or corn, according to some hierarchy known only to the priests of the inner mysteries. Their bodies are often smeared with sweet oils and unguents as soon as they pass beyond the Oros Bridge, within sight



of the trees, where the priestesses lavish them with an elaborate feast drawn from the harvest.

While dozens go into the forest each year, inevitably some do not return. Their fate is the subject of much whispered debate: some believe they are transformed into elves, satyrs, gnomes, or other fey creatures bound in service to Yarila and Porevit. Others believe they become guardians of the groves, either as griffons or as treants. Still others believe that one or more are slaughtered, their blood a sacrifice to ensure the spring blossoms, their bodies returning in reincarnated form as the Green Saints. As with many of the deeper mysteries of the gods, the answer seems to elude all arcane and divine investigations.

The majority of the Green Gods' priesthood remains secluded from the end of the harvest until the first green shoots appear in the springtime. Strangely enough, the priests always return from their isolation with a few more menfolk than wandered in. The priestesses claim that the new clergy are fosterlings given to them by maidens who would rather not wed, while others are those of good portents who have chosen druidic worship.

Regardless, these young men introduce themselves in the spring and set to work with the spring planting: turning the soil, slinging manure, and sowing seed blessed by the Green Gods. The faithful learned long ago that nothing good ever comes of asking why these newer priests never sweat or tire. And if some citizens allege that sap flows through their veins instead of blood... Well, men say the strangest things when Ninkash gets the best of them.



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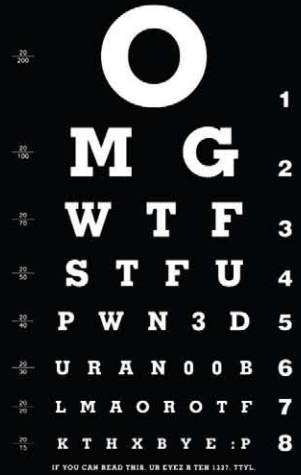
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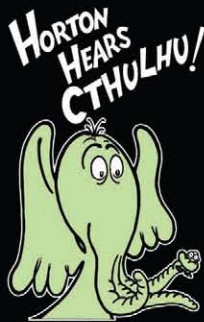
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