More Niches

[**The Familiar Niche**](http://greatandsmallrpg.blogspot.ca/2015/08/the-familiar-niche.html)

The concept of the magic-user's familiar has a long pedigree in fantasy tales and games.  In an animal fantasy campaign, the Familiar can become a protagonist in her own right.  While she largely plays a support role for a Magic-User, the Familiar is endowed with certain unique abilites of her own that make her a viable character option... especially if the Magic-User in question is an NPC.  
  
This niche is optional, and intended for use in campaigns that feature "real"magic, such as a standard classic fantasy setting, or a modern fantasy setting.  It has no place in "reality-lite" campaigns where the supernatural is a subtle influence if it exists at all.   
  
**The Familiar**  
Magic-Users are notoriously vulnerable at the starts of their adventuring careers, and often call upon arcane forces to protect themselves.  Some spells or rituals allow Magic-Users to call an animal into their service, with whom they share a magical bond that benefits both parties.  These animals, called Familiars, then embark on a life of adventure with their Magic-User partner.  And some learn from their "master," then go on to earn their independence.  
  
**Niche Ability:**  When you take Familiar as your niche, you benefit from a handful of special abilities rooted in your bond to the Magic-User who summoned you.   
  
[](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-4-l0gw2SvNc/Vd5WMO5R-OI/AAAAAAAAASA/tdF6JhX_PEc/s1600/witch-black-cat-1.jpg)Your mystical bond with a Magic-User allows you to add her maximum possible hit points to your own total, giving you both a better chance at survival.  However, if your Magic-User is ever killed, you must permanently subtract these hit points from your own maximum possible total, which may lead to your own death.  
  
Second, you share an empathic link with your Magic-User, and are always aware of her general location within 200 feet.  You may share your perceptions with her, and she with you, giving each of you a form of remote sensing, and you may speak to each other in your native tongues with perfect understanding.  You also benefit from any spells your Magic-User casts on herself.  
  
Third, you gain a bonus Species Trait from your bond: a +1 bonus to any single lore outside your own (reflecting the fact that most Magic-Users are human, and you are thus sharing in their versatility).  If you become the Familiar of an Elf, you instead gain immunity to the touch of ghouls.  If the Magic-User who called you is a member of some other species, you gain a bonus Species Trait from them based on the BM's judgment.  (NOTE: In some settings, such as the Trucewood Vale, it is possible for animal Magic-Users to have longpaw familiars!)   
  
Finally, you receive a +1 bonus on all saving throws so long as you are in service to your Magic-User.  
  
Beyond 0 level, this bond grants you further advantages.   
  
At 1st level, a you become an arcane dabbler.  With a successful lore check, you can activate magical items normally only usable by Magic-Users as though you were a Magic-User of equivalent level.  
  
At 2nd level, you become capable of delivering touch spells from your Magic-User to targets normally beyond her reach, as though you are an extension of her body.  And with a successful Familiar lore check on your part, the activation of this spell no longer depends on the will of your Magic-User.  She can cast another spell before you deliver the one you are carrying, and you are capable of changing the intended target to one of your own choosing.  
  
And at 6th level, you become capable of storing extra spells within your mind, that your Magic-User can call upon as though she had remembered or prepared them for the day. The choice of which spells are stored in this way belongs to your Magic-User.  However, you're also able to activate these spells yourself, with a successful Familiar lore check!  You can store a number of spell levels equal to your Familiar level.  Thus, at 6th level, you could hold six 1st-level spells, three 2nd-level spells, two 3rd-level spells, or any other combination of levels that adds up to your total Familiar level (for instance, four 1st-level spells and one 2nd-level spell).  
  
At 10th level or any time following, after years of loyal service, you have the option of gaining your independence from your Magic-User.  If you part ways amicably, you lose all of the above abilities except the extra hit points, bonus on saves, and arcane dabbling, and gain the spell-casting abilities of a Magic-User equal to half your level.  You may then continue to advance in spell-casting abilities by level as though you were a Magic-User yourself... even being able to summon a Familiar of your very own!  
  
**Other Abilities:**  Add your Familiar level (plus your Familiar niche die result, if applicable) to all lore checks when attempting to intuit the function of magical items, recall or remember ancient mysteries, magic traditions, or cryptic phrases, or to deduce what kind of spell a Magic-User is about to cast by observing her gestures.  
  
**Saving Throw:** Spells  
  
**Threat:** Easy (+9). This increases to Average (+6) at 2nd total level, Tough (+3) at 5th total level, and Challenging (+0) at 8th total level.

[**Scout Niche Errata & Update**](http://greatandsmallrpg.blogspot.ca/2015/08/scout-niche-errata-update.html)

I've never been entirely happy with the Scout niche I designed.  So, I'm revising it.  
  
The following Scout Niche Ability description replaces the one in the Quick Start Characters document.  I will upload a new version of that document in the next few days.  
  
**Niche Ability:** When you select Scout as your niche, you become a consummate explorer and investigator, and a master of interpreting scent messages left by other animals.

Your mastery of scent marks allows you to glean details about the animal(s) who left them behind, even if they are not members of your species.  With an Average Scout lore check, you can easily identify the name of an individual of your species who left the scent behind, as well as their stated intent.  A Tough lore check allows you to identify another species by her lingering scent, and ascertain how long ago she left the scent mark behind.  A Challenging lore check gives you a general, one-word idea about this other-species individual's message (i.e., "mine," "help," "returning," etc.).  With a Formidable lore check, you can translate the individual's name, approximate age, and Size.  And a Heroic result tells you exactly what the scent message says in detail, allowing you to translate it precisely to others.

In addition to all other bonuses (including Scout level and Scout niche die results), you add +2 to all lore checks when attempting to detect traps, find hidden objects, follow a trail, identify subjects by use of your senses , or spring traps.

Finally, you begin the game knowing how to communicate with other species better than your comrades: in addition to your species language, you know an additional 1d5 (+ Scout niche die result) languages of other species in your habitat.

[**The Magic-User Niche**](http://greatandsmallrpg.blogspot.ca/2015/08/the-magic-user-niche.html)

Preparing a playtest session for "Secret Of The Spooky Old Warren," and I will be using pre-generated PCs.  One of the players wants to revive an old snake character of hers from a previous animal campaign I ran, who was a sorcerer  (using 3.5 edition rules).  To facilitate that, I'm introducing the Magic-User as an optional niche for campaigns with a classic fantasy (like the Trucewood Vale setting) or other supernatural angle (like Creepy Crawlies).  I've designed it to be "plug-&-play" with whatever OSR iteration the BM prefers, rather than trying to re-invent the wheel.  
  
**The Magic-User**  
  
Masters of the arcane, Magic-Users channel both the creative and destructive energies of nature to their own ends. Unlike Healers, who tend to be motivated by community support & defense, harmony with nature, and preservation of life, Magic-Users are typically self-interested, relishing the pursuit of knowledge and power for their own sake. This is not to say that Magic-Users are inherently evil, or that Healers are inherently good, only that they use the spiritual forces of nature in different ways.

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| [Source](http://www.animalclipart.net/animal_clipart_images/green_frog_or_toad_wearing_a_wizard_hat_and_casting_a_spell_with_a_magic_wand_0515-0904-0722-5224.html) |

**Niche Ability:** When you select Magic-User as your niche, you gain two special abilities: the power to read the magical writings of longpaws, and the ability to cast spells.

* *Read Magic:* With a successful Magic-User lore check, you can decipher magical inscriptions on objects – such as books, scrolls, weapons, tools, and so on – that have been crafted by humans or other longpaws (such as elves), even if you are otherwise incapable of reading at all. This is the main way you find and learn new spells. Reading the magic script does not normally activate the magic itself, though cursed scrolls may be an exception.
* *Spells:*  You learn, cast, and gain spells in a fashion identical to longpaws, according to whatever set of rules your BM has adapted for the purpose.

**Other Abilities:** Add your Magic-User level (and your Magic-User niche die result, if applicable) to all lore checks when attempting to research, understand, decipher, or recall ancient mysteries, magic traditions, arcane symbols, cryptic phrases, and so on.  
  
**Saving Throw:** Spells  
  
**Threat:** Easy (+9). This increases to Average (+6) at 2nd total level, Tough (+3) at 5th total level, and Challenging (+0) at 8th total level.   
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When it comes to OSR magic, I much prefer the way it's handled in Flatland Games' [*Beyond The Wall and Other Adventures*](http://www.flatlandgames.com/btw/), and that is the system I'm assuming in the further design of Trucewood Vale.  But, I'm keeping things vague enough in the rules themselves that players and BMs can use a more traditional system if they choose.

[**New Niche: The Guardian**](http://greatandsmallrpg.blogspot.ca/2015/04/new-niche-guardian.html)

Here's an optional character niche.  I wound up not including it in the Quick Start rules, but might include it in the final expanded version of the game.  
  
**The Guardian**  
**Description**: Guardians are animals sworn to protect a person, community, place, or object with their lives. Whether they are loyal shepherding dogs, predators defending their claim on a hunting ground, or prey patrolling the edges of their territory on watch for attackers, guardian animals are the noblest and most dedicated of animal warriors. In many ways, they are the knights of the animal world.

[](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-tUSA0Z6It08/VT_3RBsL-HI/AAAAAAAAAKE/7Mj9aLjQEqI/s1600/image_22426.jpg)

**Niche Ability**: When you select Guardian as your niche, you gain three special abilities.

* First, you gain a +2 bonus on all attack and damage rolls against opponents who are a clear and present danger to anyone or anything you have placed under your protection.  This bonus increases to +4 at 8th niche level.
* You are also capable of inspiring your allies when they aid you in defending your charge.  With a successful lore check, you can grant a +1 attack & damage bonus to a number of allies equal to your Guardian level who are in your vicinity and actively defending your charge.
* Conversely, you can attempt to undermine the confidence of attackers or intruders who pose a threat to your charge.  Once per day, with a successful lore check, you can force a number of enemies equal to your Guardian level to make a Tough saving throw vs. paralysis or suffer a -1 penalty on all their attack and damage rolls against you, your allies, and/or your charge for a number of rounds equal to your Guardian level.

**Other Abilities:**  Add your Guardian level to all lore checks involving security arrangements, assessing the strength of foes, tracking those under your protection, and influencing the Attitude of both friends and enemies.   
  
**Saving Throw:** Paralysis  
  
**Threat**: Average (+6). This increases to Tough (+3) at 2nd total level, Challenging (+0) at 5th total level, and Formidable (–3) at 8th total level.